

André Bazin's "Ontology of the Photographic Image":
Representation, Desire, and Presence

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a new interpretation of the influential 1945 essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” by French film critic André Bazin. A close textual analysis is performed in which it is shown that Bazin’s essay assesses the comparative value of painting, photography, and cinema in relation to three discrete representational ideals: mimetic depiction (“the obsession with resemblance”), psychological gratification (“the need to defeat time”), and spiritual presence (“aesthetic revelation”). It is argued that Bazin views each ideal as articulating a distinct relationship between human desire and the concept of presence, within which the technology of photography and cinema play a unique role.

The publication history of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in French and English is summarized and a comparison is made of the two extant French versions. A historical overview of interpretations of the essay in English-language film theory is provided, with emphasis on its use in the development of the concept of cinematic realism. Close consideration is given to the essay’s importance for the critique of ideology in film theory, and for the contemporary theory of photographic indexicality. It is argued that English-language interpretations of the essay have overlooked Bazin’s strategy of using three separate criteria to conduct a comparative evaluation of painting, photography, and cinema.

Bazin’s three criteria of mimetic representation, psychological gratification, and spiritual revelation are each considered in detail. Each is characterized as having its own social, cultural, and historical mythology. The “obsession with resemblance” is presented as invoking the epistemological ideals of Cartesian rationalism. It is shown that Bazin demonstrates the mechanical objectivity of photography and cinema to be superior to the inherent subjectivity of painting. The “need to defeat time” concerns photography and cinema’s ability to arouse the beholder’s fundamental desire for the presence of absent things. This is explicated by way of a reading of Sartre’s *L’Imaginaire* and Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*. In “aesthetic revelation,” Bazin is shown to demonstrate that photography and cinema surpass the capacity of painting to reveal spiritual reality. This is explicated by way of a reading of Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.

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I must begin by recognizing the invaluable contributions and support of my two dissertation supervisors, Christopher Faulkner and Mark Salber Phillips. The seeds of the thesis were sown during a graduate seminar offered by Mark in early 2006, for which I wrote a paper addressing the role of historiography in Philip Rosen's interpretation of Bazin. In the close reading of Bazin's texts that I subsequently undertook, it was Chris who served as both a resource and a guide. It hardly needs to be stated, therefore, that many of the ideas presented here originated in the course of dialogue and discussions with Chris and Mark.

I also wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the members of my thesis examination board. It was an honour and a privilege to have as my external examiner the pre-eminent scholar on Bazin's work, Dudley Andrew. The fullness of his insight into Bazin's thought remains unparalleled. I am also appreciative of the contributions of Brian Foss and Marc Furstenau, both of whom provided a number of valuable and helpful suggestions. Thanks are also due to examination board chair Michel Gaulin.

Much of the material in this thesis developed out of conversations with faculty in the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture and elsewhere at Carleton University. I have had many enjoyable talks with Marc Furstenau about the place of indexicality in the history of film theory. My work on Jacques Lacan was inspired by a series of stimulating and pleasant conversations with Barbara Leckie. Many of the ideas concerning the narratology of Freudian case histories were developed during a series of discussions with Barbara Gabriel. Certain ideas concerning the narratology of art history originated in a graduate seminar on visual and material culture led by Ruth Phillips and Frances Slaney, and later benefited from helpful suggestions by Mitchell Frank. The foundations of my knowledge of the work of Martin Heidegger I owe entirely to the insight and acuity of Robert Goheen.

A number of the ideas that appear here were initially presented in partial form in conference and workshop papers. These ideas have therefore benefited immensely from comments and insight offered by various conference participants and interlocutors. I am particularly indebted to the arguments advanced by my fellow participants on the panel on documentary and the evidential at the 2008 conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies: Jaimie Baron, Kristen Fuhs, and Annabelle Honess-Roe. More recently, some of these ideas were reprised in a paper presented at a workshop on historical distance held in the Department of History at King's College, London, in the summer of 2009. I am grateful to the workshop's organizers, Barbara Caine, Mark Phillips, and Julia Thomas, and to the workshop participants for their feedback.

An early version of my discussion of the decay of the photographic artifact was given in a paper at the 2009 conference of the Film Studies Association of Canada, as part

of a panel on theories of digital cinema that I had the privilege to co-convene with Jessica Aldred. For her collaboration on that panel, and for countless other things, Jessica has both my constant admiration and my thanks.

My co-supervisors, Chris Faulkner and Mark Phillips, deserve further thanks for their patience during their fastidious reading of various chapter and manuscript drafts. Murray Leeder also was kind enough to read and provide helpful comments on an early draft of the thesis. Obviously, I alone bear responsibility for any errors that remain.

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PREFACE

This dissertation began with an obsession with indexicality. For a long time I have been fascinated by the way that this concept has made itself at home in film theory. Why is cinema's indexicality so compelling an idea for us? No single explanation, no attempt at definition, however carefully considered, seems adequate. We are told, after all, that indexicality is essentially a semiotic category. But in practice it serves more as a kind of conceptual repository for everything that we find magical about cinema's relationship with the real.

I decided to explore how it might be possible for multiple, seemingly competing ideals to find themselves lodged side by side within the word "indexicality." Inspired in part by the multiplicity of representational ideals at work in Mark Salber Phillips's theory of historical distance, I set out to make a genealogy of the concept of indexicality in film theory, tracing the accumulation of its different definitions and values over time.

Within such a history, the work of André Bazin—and "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" especially—would seem to be a natural starting point, even if "indexicality" was an unknown concept to Bazin. Thanks to Philip Rosen and, before him, Peter Wollen, Bazin's "Ontology" essay has come to be linked inextricably with indexicality, for better or for worse. Bazin and "The Ontology of the Photographic

Image” were therefore destined to enjoy a privileged place within the history of indexicality.

Two timely events led me to develop a far greater interest in Bazin that I had ever intended, and thus to narrow the focus of my work. The first was an opportunity to attend a lecture series on Bazin given by Dudley Andrew in June of 2009 at York University’s Film and Visual Arts Summer Institute. Over the course of a week, Andrew uncovered a richness and systematicity in Bazin’s writing on cinema that is seldom acknowledged in English-language film theory. Many of Andrew’s insights from those lectures are now available in a book, which appeared just as I was finishing the present project.¹

The second event was the publication in the spring of 2009 of Timothy Barnard’s new English translations of thirteen of Bazin’s essays, including “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” There is something about having two competing alternatives to choose from that makes one satisfied with neither. Before the arrival of Barnard’s book, I had been working from a well-worn copy of Hugh Gray’s text. But encountering certain irreconcilable oddities in the two English translations, I soon found myself undertaking, with the help of Christopher Faulkner, a painstaking comparison not just between the two English texts, but also with Bazin’s original French. It was only after close engagement with both the 1945 and 1958 versions of “Ontologie de l’image photographique” that I came to appreciate the true subtlety of the argument that Bazin is

¹ Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

presenting, and how his essay serves as a testament to the many ways that photography and cinema can captivate us.

In this dissertation, I hope to offer an original interpretation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” which has been predicated on a close reading of Bazin’s text. It is an interpretation that views the essay as advocating no single explanation of the essence of photography or cinema, as we have so often been led to believe. Rather, I think that what Bazin is telling us in the “Ontology” is that photography and cinema are important precisely because they can be different things, fulfill different needs, and arouse different kinds of desires. This complexity cannot necessarily be explained through recourse to any single means of understanding—be it semiological, phenomenological, materialist, or otherwise. Photography and cinema continue to do many things for us, and so invite us to approach them by way of many different and diverse paths of understanding. This is what the elusiveness of the idea of “indexicality” is telling us today, and it is, I think, what Bazin is telling us in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”

In the “Ontology,” photography and cinema’s many values coalesce around three principal myths of representation, desire, and presence: the obsession with resemblance, the need to defeat time, and the aesthetics of revelation. Each of these myths embodies its own unique way of thinking about what it means to experience the presence of something, what it means to desire, and what it means to bridge the gap between desire and presence by way of representation. For Bazin, photography and cinema play a unique and privileged role in all three of these myths. In each case, it is the objectivity of

the photographic lens that provides the impetus for thinking about what photography and cinema can do. And in each case, the singularity of photography and cinema's power is demonstrated by way of a direct comparison with painting.

Obviously my own interpretation is only one within a long history of the reception of Bazin's work. The first part of this dissertation is therefore devoted to an extended literature review. After a general introduction to the three myths, I briefly trace the publication history of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in both French and English. In the first chapter, I offer a broad survey of the essay's English-language reception. The second chapter is given over to a more detailed examination of what I take to be the most consequential line of English-language reception of Bazin, from the ideological criticism of *Screen* through to the present-day, reactionary revivals of the "Ontology" in discussions of cinematic indexicality. Of these I take Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified* as exemplary, and offer an extended reading.

The next three chapters elaborate my interpretation of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." They are devoted to explicating each of Bazin's three myths of representation, desire, and presence: the obsession with resemblance, the need to defeat time, and the aesthetics of revelation. For each myth, I review Bazin's position and then attempt to explicate it by way of a range of discourses that seem appropriate. In some cases, these are discourses with which Bazin himself was familiar (as in the case of Sartre's phenomenology); at other times I make less obvious connections, which nevertheless seem to me to be valuable in explicating Bazin's ideas.

One consequence of my having adopted this particular approach is that I do not attempt to address the immediate historical context in which Bazin was writing; nor do I attempt any significant discussion of Bazin's own political or religious commitments. It seemed to me, in reading the "Ontology," that the first task that needed to be accomplished was to establish a plausible explication of the essay in its own right. The larger question of the unique sociological and psychological context that gave rise to the "Ontology" lingers as an important topic for future study.

I conclude the dissertation with some thoughts about how Bazin's three myths can help us to understand the significance of recent debates concerning indexicality, photography, and the digital. In making the case for the continued relevance of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" for film studies, I argue that Bazin's essay is not meant to encourage us to pursue definitions of medium specificity on the basis of technological traits. Rather, it is meant to inspire our wonderment at how photography and cinema can exist at the intersection of multiple, competing ideals of representation, desire, and presence.

INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATION, DESIRE, AND PRESENCE IN “THE ONTOLOGY OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE”

The name “André Bazin” carries more weight than perhaps any other in film studies. From the *politique des auteurs* to the most recent debates about the essence of the photographic image, Bazin has shaped the broadest trends of film-theoretical thought. The longevity of Bazin’s influence is a testament to the richness of his ideas. But the clarity and nuance of those ideas have been obscured by the very dialogues that sustain Bazin’s relevance and interest.

The essay that Bazin viewed as the foundation of his entire theory of cinema is also, not surprisingly, the one that been subjected most thoroughly to these tribulations. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” has, in a way, come to epitomize an entire philosophy of cinema, but it has consequently also suffered a great deal of abuse. Nor has this abuse been perpetrated solely at the hands of Bazin’s many enemies; even the largely sympathetic revival of the “Ontology” within current debates about photographic “indexicality” has not done the essay justice. By and large, English-language commentaries on the “Ontology of the Photographic Image” have failed to capture the essential elements of Bazin’s thought. Instead, we have been given a succession of feeble

caricatures that conform to the shape of whatever debates happen to be underway at the time.

I think that the enduring importance of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”—and especially the recent wave of renewed interest in it—obliges us to reacquaint ourselves with what that essay has to say. In this dissertation, I intend to revisit the “Ontology” in detail, and in so doing to examine and question the many impressive claims that Bazin seems to be making about photography and cinema.

If Bazin’s claims continue to fascinate and provoke us, it is because we usually see them as championing the uniqueness of photography and cinema as representational technologies that enjoy an unparalleled relationship with reality. But to read “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” simply as an adjudication of the value of one kind of representation or another is to miss the point. For Bazin, representation and expression are only ever a means to an end. In the “Ontology,” Bazin shows us that the way we value representation ultimately says something about how we conceive of the world, and about how we understand the terms of our own encounter with that world—whether phenomenologically, epistemologically, emotionally, or in some other way. Regardless of how much or how little faith we choose to place in the capabilities of a photographic image, we are taking for granted the premise that representations are meant to grant us, to a greater or lesser degree of efficacy, the experience of a presence in the place of an absence. In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Bazin interrogates the very foundations of this premise. He shows us that the way we conceive of the act of

representing tells us something about what we hope the quality of our encounter with the world to be, and about what we hope to obtain from that encounter.

“The Ontology of the Photographic Image” questions not only the idea of ‘presence’ achieved through representation, but also the various needs and desires that lead us to seek some kind of presence at all. Just as we rarely question the qualities of presence as such, we seldom ask why we bother to pursue it. In the “Ontology,” Bazin reminds us that we practice representation—and so mediate our relationship with the presence of the world—in particular ways in order to provide an outlet for particular kinds of desire.

Need, sublimation, obsession, satisfaction; resemblance, re-presentation, expression, revelation: these are the basic concepts of Bazin’s inquiry, and they are, ultimately, the concepts in relation to which the value of photography and cinema will be assessed. Bazin’s use of this array of terms hardly suggests a single, fixed attitude toward the relationship between desire, representation, and presence. Rather, it invites us to reflect on the many possible ways that this relationship might be conceived.

When we attend to the intricate play within the “Ontology” of these concepts of desire and presence—as well as those of representation and expression—we discover something surprising: for Bazin, the power of photography and cinema is not meaningful in relation to any one single, coherent ideal. Rather, Bazin celebrates photography and cinema precisely because they resonate with and engage *multiple, competing ideals* of representation and aesthetics, and, in turn, of the desire for presence.

In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Bazin carefully describes the coexistence of *three* specific ideals—we might call them *myths*—of representation, desire, and presence. Each has its own origins and history, and, consequently, its own contingent assumptions about what it means to desire the presence of something, and what it means to attempt to represent, express, or reveal something. What Bazin shows us in the “Ontology” is how the specific properties of photography and cinema and the felicitous moment of their emergence enable them to participate simultaneously in each of these three myths, and so to respond uniquely to the different ideals of representation and expression that those myths embody. It is only by virtue of this resonance with three different myths that the idea of a photographic/cinematic “ontology,” in all its complexity, achieves its true significance.

Three Myths

Si l’histoire des arts plastiques n’est pas seulement celle de leur esthétique mais d’abord de leur psychologie, elle est essentiellement celle de la ressemblance ou, si l’on veut, du réalisme.¹

In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Bazin has interwoven three myths into a complicated, overarching narrative, spanning the history of the “plastic arts” from ancient Egypt to the moment of his own writing. In order to untangle these myths from within this longer narrative, it is necessary to locate and work outward from the essay’s

¹ André Bazin, “Ontologie de l’image photographique,” in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* Vol. 1: Ontologie et langage (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 12; hereafter cited as “*QOC*.”

conceptual centre. This involves, first of all, reminding ourselves that “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” at its core, and in spite of its title, is an essay about painting as much as it is about photography or cinema. The “Ontology,” after all, appeared originally in an anthology called *Problèmes de la peinture*. Even as it develops towards its famous apotheosis of the photographic/cinematic “ontology,” the essay’s way of thinking about photography really originates within the consideration of what is fundamentally, for Bazin, a *problème de la peinture*. The question of the relationship between painting and photography governs the essay’s overall scope, in its organization, and in its main rhetorical strategies.

Originally and essentially, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” recounts the resolution of a problem faced by painting, and photography’s role within that resolution. The “Ontology” describes how the invention of photography liberated Western painting from a “crisis” of identity—specifically, its misguided and improper obsession with the achievement of visual resemblance or likeness. Situating himself at the horizon of photography’s inception, Bazin explores, in all its contingency, the possibility of painting’s liberation from its obsession. The question that we might imagine as both initiating and demarcating the scope and shape of the essay’s inquiry therefore seems to be: *In what, exactly, did painting’s crisis consist, such that photography, in its essence, was so thoroughly capable of freeing it?*

Bazin’s method for tracing the solution to painting’s problem is, in effect, “to subject the plastic arts to psychoanalysis.” We are cued to this procedure in the very first words of the essay (“Une psychanalyse des arts plastiques...”), and we ought not to

dismiss or take lightly the intention that Bazin is expressing here. What Bazin gives us in the “Ontology,” is, in fact, a rather complex allegorical narrative of the plastic arts and their uses—one which loosely but unmistakably adheres to the structure of a Freudian case history. Bazin, with his narration, is fulfilling the role of analyst.

To understand Bazin’s narrative-analysis, as unwieldy as it may be, is to understand the complexity of photography’s/cinema’s relation to painting at the intersection of three different myths of representation, desire, and presence. I intend, in subsequent chapters, to separate out and describe each of these three myths in detail. For the moment, we can begin to locate and isolate the three myths by summarizing Bazin’s basic argument as follows.

On the one hand, painting’s obsessive pursuit of perfect visual resemblance has resulted in a crippling overdetermination of the medium (painting as “*écartelée entre deux aspirations*” [*QQC* 13]). This is true insofar as painting’s essential purpose lies not in resemblance but rather in aesthetic expression, to be achieved by way of the formal means that are proper to painting. On the other hand, painting’s obsession with resemblance originates in a deeper crisis of human psychology; in this respect, the obsessive production of visual likenesses is merely the symptom of the cultural (sociological–psychological) repression of a more basic human need to defeat time.

Three different myths and ideals of representation, desire, and presence are tightly interwoven within this account of painting’s identity crisis. We may separate them out as follows:

1) the *obsession with resemblance*, from which painting will be freed by the invention of photography

2) the more fundamental *need to defeat time* (the mummy complex) sublimated, from the Renaissance onward, within the obsession with resemblance

3) *aesthetic expression* as painting's proper calling, from which it has been distracted by the obsession with resemblance

Each of these three myths (the obsession with resemblance; the basic need to defeat time; the task of aesthetic expression) partakes of its own unique and integral relationship between human desire, an ontological conception of the presence of the world in relation to which desire takes shape, and a mediating ideal of representational practice or expression. For each, Bazin will outline a distinct history of implementation, within which both painting and photography/cinema will play a part. And for each, Bazin will demonstrate the relative competence of painting and photography/cinema.

The movement with which Bazin articulates the photographic/cinematic ontology is, therefore, always a comparative one, in which the unique properties of photography/cinema are revealed “par rapport à la peinture.”² The three myths of

² Bazin uses this same phrase twice in the “Ontology,” once each at the beginning of his discussion of the second and third myths (*QQC* 15, 18). The phrase also appears at the beginning of Bazin’s 1944 essay “À Propos de réalisme”: “C’est la genèse mécanique de la photographie qui lui confère ses propriétés spécifiques par rapport à la peinture” (Bazin, “À Propos de réalisme,” in *Le Cinéma de l’occupation et de la résistance* [Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1975], 90).

representation, desire, and presence supply the criteria for this comparison, with Bazin positioning himself in the role of arbiter. It is through these myths, and the standards to which they hold representational and aesthetic practice, that we come to understand comparatively the value of painting, on the one hand, and photography/cinema, on the other hand. In this way, the three myths and the representational ideals that they embody will constitute the three pillars of the photographic/cinematic “ontology.” The significance of photography/cinema therefore cannot be reduced to any single feature; rather, it lies at the intersection of three mythically articulated ideals of representation, desire, and presence.

My own analysis will proceed by elaborating, for each of the three ideals, first, a mythic history, as Bazin supplies it; second, a comparative evaluation of painting and photography/cinema, as Bazin presents it; and, finally, a consideration of the ideals of desire, presence, representation, and expression that each embodies. Here I will draw not only on Bazin’s own claims, but also those of his contemporaries and others with which Bazin’s thoughts seem to me to resonate. While at times it may be useful to consider the provenance of Bazin’s ideas, it is not my goal at this point to account systematically for Bazin’s thinking by way of an intellectual biography. I am only seeking to explicate the myths of desire and presence as clearly as I can, and this will involve drawing on a range of discourses that seem to me best suited to the task.

This interpretation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” departs from the course taken by nearly all existing English-language commentaries, which appear preoccupied either with tracing the precise lineage of Bazin’s thought or—more

commonly—with mining the essay for its notoriously bold statements about ontology in order to assimilate Bazin’s discussion to some single, determinate framework for understanding photographic and/or cinematic representation. These kinds of interpretations inevitably engage with the “Ontology” in a certain way, for a certain purpose, and in so doing reduce the multiple, competing ideals that Bazin presents in the essay in order to render it useful to a particular argument in a particular context. As I intend to show, existing English-language interpretations have proven remarkably insensitive to Bazin’s interweaving of three distinct myths and ideals of representational and aesthetic practice.

How do we account for this failure to recognize three distinct myths and modes of representation, desire, and presence at work in the “Ontology”? I think it can be attributed to several tendencies, all which are worth exploring here in an attempt to overcome them. The first of these involves inattention to the essay’s French-language provenance and its relevance for the conceptual basis of Bazin’s arguments. The second relates to the history of the essay’s English-language translations; certain insensitivities in those translations—in terms of their treatment of lexical nuance and, more broadly, the contours of the essay’s overall argument—have impeded English-language appreciation of the sophistication of Bazin’s thought. Finally, there is the climate of the reception of the “Ontology,” and of Bazin’s thought generally, in English-language film studies, which for various reasons has tended toward the radical simplification of Bazin’s ideas; it will be useful to explore how existing interpretations have consistently ignored both the way in which the “Ontology” makes its arguments and the complexity of those

arguments. By reviewing the essay's French- and English-language provenance and the history of its English-language reception, I hope to open the way for a new reading.

“Ontologie de l’image photographique”

The first key to understanding the complexity of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” lies in its own provenance. The context of the essay's inception secures its significance as a treatise that is as much about painting as it is about photography or cinema. More importantly, it determines Bazin's basic rhetorical approach to the subject—namely from the position of someone tasked with resolving a *problème de la peinture*.

The “Ontologie de l’image photographique” first appeared in the anthology *Problèmes de la peinture*, edited by Gaston Diehl and published by *Confluences* in 1945 after a long delay caused by a shortage of materials and other practical difficulties experienced during the German Occupation of France.³ The volume, divided into sections by theme and comprising more than seventy individual essays, is remarkably wide-ranging in its scope. Contributors address broad philosophical, humanist, sociological, and aesthetic questions, the history and historiography of art (from markedly contemporary and French perspectives), as well as specific problems of form, technique, and materials. The idea—so central to Bazin's essay—that modern French

³ André Bazin, “Ontologie de l’image photographique,” in *Problèmes de la peinture*, edited by Gaston Diehl (Lyon: Confluences, 1945) (hereafter cited as “PP”). On its publication history, see the avant-propos to *Problèmes de la peinture* and also Dudley Andrew's brief account in the Foreword to the 2004 Edition of *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xiv.

painting marks the resolution of a “problem” or “crisis” of painting is a trope that resurfaces throughout the anthology.

Bazin’s essay is the last of four entries included in the penultimate section of the volume, on “Le domaine de la peinture,” in which the philosophical, aesthetic, and formal concerns proper to painting are shown to extend to various other arts and techniques. The “Ontology” is preceded by “Peinture et vitrail” (Jean-Jacques Gruber), “Peinture et théâtre” (Lucien Coutaud), and “La peinture et l’affiche” (Jean Picart Le Doux). The nonconformity of Bazin’s title within this sequence perhaps already presages his essay’s destiny—to be assimilated to an interpretive tradition that has little if any concern for painting as such.

The “Ontology” next appeared, thirteen years later, as the first essay in the first volume of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma? (Ontologie et Langage)*, published by Les Éditions du Cerf shortly after Bazin’s death in 1958.⁴ For its inclusion in that volume, Bazin made numerous minor alterations to the 1945 text, mainly corrections and cosmetic changes that do not significantly alter the tone or direction of the essay’s argument.⁵ But there are also a couple of much more substantial modifications. At the heart of the essay, Bazin adds a paragraph and note affirming the complicity of photography’s invention in the exacerbation of painting’s identity crisis—thus elaborating on his earlier remark that “film and photography naturally account for the great spiritual and technical crisis in

⁴ On the publication of this work, see the short discussion in Dudley Andrew’s Foreword to the 2004 Edition of *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, xi–xii.

⁵ See Appendix A for an annotated variorum of “Ontologie de l’image photographique.”

modern painting beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century,”⁶ and also reiterating his claim that photography has freed painting from its obsession with resemblance. This seems to me a strange addition given the extent to which it interferes with the otherwise smooth development of Bazin’s discussion of the three myths.

Bazin also considerably modifies the essay’s conclusion, de-emphasizing the importance of painting’s liberation and instead reiterating the great achievement of the photographic aesthetic. Then there is the appending of the enigmatic but often-cited concluding remark that “[d]’autre part le cinéma est un langage,” which is afforded a disproportionate amount of weight by virtue of its inclusion as a section unto itself. In its original 1945 organization, the entire essay consists of only four sections in total—a prologue of sorts, followed by three sections corresponding to each of the three myths. As Timothy Barnard and others have pointed out, Bazin’s 1958 addendum is unmistakably intended as a reference to the conclusion of André Malraux’s “Esquisse d’une psychologie du cinéma” (“Par ailleurs, le cinéma est une industrie.”).⁷ I will say more about the specific reasons for this addition later.

The most stunning change to the 1958 version occurs in one of the essay’s central passages, where Bazin asserts, on the one hand, our obligation to believe in the existence of the represented objects of photography and, on the other hand, the radical change in

⁶ André Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard (Montréal: Caboose Books, 2009), 4 (hereafter cited as “TB”). I will generally quote from the English-language translations of the “Ontology” (with occasional modifications), but when Bazin’s specific choice of words is relevant to the discussion (as is often the case), I will quote the French.

⁷ André Malraux, “Esquisse d’une psychologie du cinéma,” in *Œuvres complètes IV*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), 16. For Barnard’s discussion see TB 253. The addition of this obvious reference to the Malraux essay is also significant because it suggests that Bazin revisited the “Esquisse” during the course of his revisions in 1958. (There are other more striking parallels between Malraux’s essay and Bazin’s, which I will address later.)

the psychology of images that this obligation entails. Consider the original wording of the first two sentences of this passage as it appears in *Problèmes de la peinture*:

Cette genèse automatique de la photographie a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image *ou plus précisément son ontologie*. L'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité, *et par là une existence* absente de toute œuvre picturale. (PP 408–9; emphasis added)

And here are the same sentences as they appear in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*:

Cette genèse automatique de la photographie a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image. L'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité absente de toute œuvre picturale. (QQC 15)

Bazin seems to have deleted from the 1958 version one of the essay's strongest claims concerning the "ontology of the photographic image." In so doing, he has eliminated one of only a couple of direct invocations of the idea of "ontology" which appear in the essay, effectively depriving the essay's title of its propriety.

It would appear as though Bazin had doubts about the nature of the relationship between psychology and ontology as he had originally proposed it. We are left with a formulation in which the most significant thing about the invention of photography no longer concerns its ontology. Rather, it concerns its precipitation of a radical shift in the way we relate to images—a shift toward irrational, obligatory credulousness.

Nevertheless, subsequent readers of the essay, drawn to it in search of the "ontology" that its title still promises, have not hesitated to locate it elsewhere in the text.

“The Ontology of the Photographic Image”

The matter of the translation of “Ontologie de l’image photographique” into English is more complicated than it might first appear. For better or for worse, it is Hugh Gray’s much-maligned translation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” that has been taken up and cited in the vast majority of English-language commentaries on and interpretations of Bazin. But this text has a strange history; there are actually several different versions of it, at least three of which are still actively circulating in print today. I will say a few words here about the context of the original publication of Gray’s text, the substance of the original translation, the different versions, and their subsequent lives.

Hugh Gray’s translation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” first appeared in *Film Quarterly* in the summer of 1960, less than two years after Bazin’s death and the appearance of the first volume of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*⁸ It is not entirely clear what attracted Gray to Bazin, beyond a basic philosophical affinity; William Johnson would claim that it was “a profound metaphysical sympathy for the Catholic, Personalist side of Bazin that led Hugh to translate Bazin at a time when practically nobody here had heard of him.”⁹ Gray was a laicized Dominican priest with training in philosophy, theology, the classics, modern languages, and a range of other subjects.¹⁰ He had been a screenwriter, journalist, and semi-regular contributor to *Hollywood Quarterly* and *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* (predecessors of

⁸ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” translated by Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (summer 1960): 4–9.

⁹ William Johnson, “Hugh Gray: In Memoriam,” *Film Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (spring 1981): 1.

¹⁰ The most thorough biography of Gray seems to be the one provided in *University of California: In Memoriam, 1985*, edited by David Krogh (Oakland: Academic Senate, University of California, 1985), 159–61. According to Johnson, Gray had been working on an autobiography (Johnson, “Hugh Gray,” 1); it has not been published.

Film Quarterly) before receiving a full-time appointment to the faculty of the Theater Arts program at UCLA in 1955. Gray's publications on cinema varied widely in their subject matter, from reflections on the sad state of the film industry to "practical advice" on screenwriting to an interview with Satyajit Ray. But there are also some hints that Gray's interests overlapped with those of Bazin—to be found, for example, in Gray's praise for the documentaries of Robert Flaherty or in a two-part article on location shooting in Rome.¹¹

According to Dudley Andrew, it was Glen Gosling, the Los Angeles editor for the University of California Press, who first encouraged Gray to publish a translation of Bazin's work,¹² but it was in the pages of the Press's new *Film Quarterly*, under the editorship of Ernest Callenbach, that Gray's translation of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" initially appeared; Gray was a member of the journal's advisory editorial board, and would continue to be one until his death in 1981. Having emerged from the ashes of the *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* in 1958, *Film Quarterly* was, from the beginning, conceived in part as an American answer to *Cahiers du cinéma*. The director of the University of California Press at the time, August Frugé, claims to have been a great admirer of *Cahiers*, which he says served as his inspiration in

¹¹ Hugh Gray, "Robert Flaherty and the Naturalistic Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (autumn 1950): 41–8; "The Eternal Problem," *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 6, no. 3 (spring 1952): 354–60; "When In Rome...(Part I)," *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 10, no. 3 (spring 1956): 262–72; "When In Rome...(Part II)," in *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 10, no. 4 (summer 1956): 344–53; "The Growing Edge," *Film Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (winter 1958): 4–7; "Introduction" in *Television and Screen Writing*, edited by Lola Goelet Yoaken (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

¹² See Andrew's Foreword to the 2004 Edition of Volume 1 of *What Is Cinema?*, x.

launching a new *Film Quarterly*.¹³ It was in this newly minted, *Cahiers*-inspired *Film Quarterly* that Gray's translation of the "Ontology" appeared in the summer of 1960, preceded by a Callenbach editorial musing about the possibility of an American "new wave," and accompanied by a promise that a "selection" of Bazin's writings would be published by the University of California Press the following year (the first volume of *What Is Cinema?* did not arrive until July of 1967).¹⁴

Gray's "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" is based entirely on Bazin's 1958 text. It leaves the substance of that text more or less intact, but there are nevertheless a number of alterations that I think have the effect of obscuring the overall shape of Bazin's argument. Most notably, Gray (or possibly one of the editors at *Film Quarterly*) has taken the liberty of significantly—and sometimes seemingly arbitrarily—reworking Bazin's meticulous organization of the essay into paragraphs and sections. This has considerable implications insofar as Bazin's original division of the essay into sections does much to distinguish the three discrete myths of representation, desire, and presence. Two of five major section breaks are retained—sort of—in Gray's translation, being indicated with spaces between paragraphs; but even those two remaining section breaks would disappear in 1967.

Gray is also fairly liberal with his lexical choices, substituting English words *ad hoc* where perhaps Bazin has been more careful to balance both consistency and nuance

¹³ See August Frugé, *A Skeptic Among Scholars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 160–1. Frugé's account is repeated by Brian Henderson in his Introduction to *Film Quarterly: Forty Years—A Selection*, edited by Brian Henderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2–3. See also the history given in Alan Gevinson, "Film Quarterly," in *International Film, Radio, and Television Journals*, edited by Anthony Slide (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 154–8.

¹⁴ Ernest Callenbach, "Editor's Notebook," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (summer 1960): 2–3.

over the course of the essay. To take one of the most significant examples, Gray translates “défouler” (*QQC* 16) as “satisfying,” and so assimilates the meaning of this psychoanalytically inflected term (we might translate it as “un-repressing”) to Bazin’s use of *satisfait*, *satisfaction*, etc. elsewhere in the essay. As I intend to argue, the implications of choices like this for our understanding of Bazin’s meaning in specific contexts are immense, as they likewise are for our understanding of the essay’s overall trajectory.

The version of Gray’s translation that appears in *What Is Cinema?* (published by the University of California Press in 1967) is almost identical to the 1960 text. There are a few very minor alterations, mainly to punctuation, and any traces of Bazin’s original section breaks disappear.¹⁵ This version was quickly revised—apparently for the release of the first paperback edition in 1968—to correct a couple of obvious errors in the translation, both of which had been pointed out in a scathing review by Richard Roud in *Sight and Sound*.¹⁶ Roud takes issue, among other things, with Gray’s translation of “expression limite” (*QQC* 12) as “limited expression” (HG 10) and “accomplissement,” (*QQC* 18) as “accomplishment” (HG 16). Subsequent printings of *What Is Cinema?* have been corrected to read “completest expression” and “fulfillment,” respectively. One additional alteration was made somewhat later (some time after the fifth printing in 1974), with the translation of “un monde que nous ne savions ou ne pouvions voir” (*QQC* 18) being modified from “a world that we neither know nor can know” to “a world that

¹⁵ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) (hereafter cited as “HG”). The different versions of the Gray translation are compared in Appendix B.

¹⁶ Richard Roud, “André Bazin: His Fall and Rise,” *Sight and Sound* 37, no. 2 (spring 1968): 94–5.

we neither know nor can see” (HG 15). The University of California Press re-issued *What Is Cinema?* in 2005, with a new foreword by Dudley Andrew; Gray’s translation of the “Ontology” appears unchanged.

The Gray translation has also enjoyed further reach and attention by way of its inclusion in a number of anthologies. The first English-language anthology to include the “Ontology” (that I am aware of) is the two-volume *The Camera Viewed*, published in 1979 and edited by Peninah R. Petruck;¹⁷ the corrected 1967 version of the Gray translation appears in the second volume on “Photography after World War II,” alongside similarly theoretical essays by Arnheim, Kracauer, Barthes, Szarkowski, and Sontag. The “Ontology” also appeared the following year in Alan Trachtenberg’s *Classic Essays on Photography*. Here the uncorrected 1967 version is included in a final section on “Some Recent Themes and Issues,” along with Benjamin, Kracauer, Barthes, John Berger, and others.¹⁸ Next to *What Is Cinema?* itself, the Trachtenberg volume is the most commonly cited source for the essay in English.

Despite its influence, the “Ontology” has not been widely anthologized in books of film theory. The venerable *Film Theory and Criticism* only started including the “Ontology” with its Fifth Edition, in 1999.¹⁹ The uncorrected 1967 translation appears in the section titled “Film and Reality,” where it is somewhat misleadingly dated “1945”

¹⁷ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” translated by Hugh Gray, in *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography* Volume 2, edited by Peninah R. Petruck (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979).

¹⁸ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” translated by Hugh Gray, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980).

¹⁹ Bazin is nonetheless well represented in earlier editions, by “The Myth of Total Cinema,” “Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” and “Theater and Cinema”; these are retained in the fifth and subsequent editions, while the “Ontology” and “De Sica: Metteur-en-scène” are added.

(i.e. the year of publication of the original French version).²⁰ Most recently, Marc Furstenau has included the corrected 1967 Gray translation, along with “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” in his Routledge anthology *The Film Theory Reader*. Bazin’s essays are accompanied by Daniel Morgan’s recent article “Rethinking Bazin.”²¹

In 2009, Timothy Barnard produced a new translation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” as part of a volume also titled *What Is Cinema?* published by Barnard’s Caboose Books of Montréal. Without explicitly mentioning the Gray translation or any specific shortcomings that may or may not have come to be associated with it, Barnard offers his edition as “the first accurate and reliable English translation of these essays to appear,” aimed at “correcting two generations of misconceptions about Bazin’s ideas.”²² Barnard’s translation of the “Ontology” reinstates its 1958 paragraph and section structure, a move which in itself is immensely helpful. The substance of the text, however, hews more or less to Gray’s, and one is led to wonder about the extent to which the Gray text provided a foundation for the new translation. More importantly, with scarcely an acknowledgement of the existence of the 1945 version of the “Ontology,” Barnard fails, like Gray before him, to take seriously the essay’s origins and therefore the fact that “problems of painting” largely govern both its ambitions and its rhetoric. It remains to be seen whether Barnard’s translation (which is not available in

²⁰ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” translated by Hugh Gray, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, Fifth Edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Interestingly this first inclusion of the “Ontology” coincides with a reversal of the order of the first two sections of the anthology; beginning with the Fifth Edition, the “Film and Reality” section appears *after* the section on “Film Language.”

²¹ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” translated by Hugh Gray, in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, edited by Marc Furstenau (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

²² Barnard, “Publisher’s Foreword,” in *What Is Cinema?* by André Bazin, translated by Timothy Barnard (Montréal: Caboose Books, 2009), vii.

the United States or the United Kingdom due to copyright restrictions) will have a significant impact on English-language reception of the “Ontology.”

1. A HISTORY OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE RECEPTION

There is a great deal to be learned from the way that “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” has come to be understood and interpreted. I am concerned here not so much with the overall influence of André Bazin within English-language film studies, but with the reception of the “Ontology” specifically. However, the latter is not necessarily easily discernible from the former. After all, the influence of the “Ontology” arguably runs quite deep, given, on the one hand, the foundational role that it plays within Bazin’s larger system of thought, and, on the other hand, the extent to which Bazin’s “ontological realism” has helped to shape some of the most basic assumptions of film criticism and theory. We also need to appreciate the extent to which the ideas that circulated in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s—and the *politique des auteurs* especially—are understood as having shaped the institutional development of English-language film criticism and theory. As we have already seen in the case of *Film Quarterly*, *Cahiers* provided a model for legitimate criticism of Hollywood films as serious art—a model in which the basic methodology involves the study of *mise-en-scène* as the privileged site of authorial creativity. And it is well known that it was Bazin’s ideas to which the contributors to *Cahiers* themselves looked for inspiration. This genealogy (Bazin–*Cahiers*–English-language *auteur* theory) comprises a central part of

the now-standard origin myth recounted in intellectual histories of Anglo-American film criticism and theory.¹ What I am concerned with here, however, is the specific ways in which “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” has been received in English-language film studies, both in its own right and to the extent that it is presented explicitly as providing the foundation for Bazin’s “ontological realism.”

The history of this reception might be summarized as follows. The first real English-language engagement with Bazin begins after the publication of *What Is Cinema?* in 1967. In early reviews, Bazin’s criticism is treated as a novelty to be understood mainly in relation to existing English-language film criticism and film culture. By the mid-1970s, Bazin’s work is well enough known that it has come to stand more or less for an entire “realist” theory of cinema. This use of Bazin to exemplify a

¹ On Bazin’s influence on *Cahiers* and the *politique des auteurs*, see, e.g., John Caughie, ed., *Theories of Authorship* (London: BFI, 1981), 37; Jim Hillier’s Introduction to *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, edited by Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 10; Ginette Vincendeau, “Introduction: Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia,” in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, edited by Peter Graham (London: BFI, 2009), 2–4. Both Caughie and Vincendeau argue that the *Cahiers* critics depoliticized Bazin’s methods; Vincendeau, for example, states that “[f]rom their mentor’s theories on realism and the ontology of the filmic image they retained the moral, even mystical concerns, but stripped away Bazin’s political militancy (Vincendeau, “Introduction,” 3). For Bazin’s own reservations concerning the *politique des auteurs* see André Bazin, “De la politique des auteurs,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 70 (April 1957): 2–11.

On the role of *Cahiers* in opening the way for the serious study of American cinema and the development of an English-language *auteur* theory (by way of the critics of *Movie* in Britain and Andrew Sarris in the United States) see, e.g., Thomas Elsaesser, “Two Decades in Another Country: Hollywood and the Cinéphiles,” in *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe*, edited by C. W. E. Bigsby (London: Elek Books, 1975), 199–216; Caughie, *Theories of Authorship*, 9–13; Hillier, “Introduction,” 1, 10; Vincendeau, “Introduction,” 4–5, 9. Elsaesser draws a direct link between Bazin and Anglo-American criticism, quoting the “Ontology” (while mis-stating its title and publication history) to demonstrate how the phenomenological and existentialist underpinnings of Bazin’s theory provided a mandate for the serious study of Hollywood film; Elsaesser suggests that “[t]he American cinema found itself culturally upgraded, and rather than presenting it as a specifically popular art with a corresponding analysis of popular aesthetics, Bazin in fact explained and interpreted it by a recourse to Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and French Catholicism” (Elsaesser, “Two Decades,” 204).

For a good example of how the entire Bazin–*Cahiers*–*auteur* theory narrative has been woven into a longer history of film criticism, see David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 43–53.

major trend in film-theoretical thought is first apparent in the work of Brian Henderson and others in *Film Quarterly* and soon after in the work of writers associated with the British journal *Screen*; these English-language commentaries are indebted to existing patterns of interpretation in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (both pre- and post-1968), *Positif*, and, later, *Cinéthique*. The straightforward association of Bazin with realism later achieves widespread acceptance by way of its adoption into most standard surveys of film theory. Relatively few writers attempt to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the “Ontology,” either by tracing Bazin’s intellectual influences or contesting the logic of the essay’s arguments. But the “Ontology” does receive considerable notice outside of film studies proper, being taken up in prolonged philosophical debates about photography and aesthetics in the pages of journals such as *Critical Inquiry*. Most recently, Bazin’s ideas have been revived within film studies (and elsewhere) in the context of timely discussions of evolving photographic technology.

I think it will be useful to provide a brief overview of this history of the interpretation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” as well as a more detailed analysis of what I see as the two most pivotal moments within this history of interpretation—namely the critique of ideology in the pages of *Screen* and the recent discourse on cinematic “indexicality” and digital technology. These two moments are exemplary insofar as they each engage the “Ontology” in a certain way, for a certain purpose, and in so doing reduce the multiple, competing ideals that Bazin presents in the essay in order to render it useful to a particular film-theoretical agenda in a specific historical context. But before we consider the significance of “The Ontology of the

Photographic Image” at these two particular moments in the history of film studies, let us begin with a more general overview of the essay’s reception history.

“Déjà dans l’œuf”: French-Language Precedents

The way that “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” first came to be understood in Anglo-American criticism owed something to the way it was received in France. The best-known French reviews of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*—Eric Rohmer’s article in the *Cahiers* special number on Bazin and Gérard Gozlan’s two-part condemnation of Bazin and the New Wave in *Positif*—both promote certain basic assumptions about the “Ontology” and clearly establish the essay as the foundation of Bazin’s entire “system” of thought. In this latter respect especially, Rohmer and Gozlan set the precedent for subsequent English-language interpretation.²

Eric Rohmer’s overview of the first volume of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* in the January 1959 issue of *Cahiers* (dedicated entirely to Bazin) is an important text for a number of reasons.³ As the first major attempt to consider *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* as a distinct and discrete body of work, it inaugurates and advocates an entire reading strategy for Bazin’s theory of cinema—one which would be subsequently picked up on and disseminated by English-language commentators. Rohmer argues that *Qu’est-ce que le*

² There are actually two different premises that are established in Rohmer and perpetuated in English-language criticism. The first is the consistency and coherence of Bazin’s thought from essay to essay (in a sense, this is the application of the principles of the *politique des auteurs* to the work of one of its critics). The second concerns the specific content of the argument that Bazin is advancing—photographic ontology as being the basis for cinematic realism. But because the historical development of Bazin’s ideas itself seems to recapitulate the structural relation of ontology to the aesthetics of realism, the question of the validity of the idea of ontological realism often seems inextricable from that of the systematicity of Bazin’s arguments.

³ Eric Rohmer, “La ‘Somme’ d’André Bazin,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 91 (January 1959): 36–45.

cinéma? offers not a random assortment of ideas, but rather a single, coherent argument about the relationship between cinema and reality—one which is initially and most clearly established in the “Ontology.”

In situating the “Ontology” as the foundation for the theory of cinema that follows it, Rohmer may simply be affirming Bazin’s own intention. Here is what Bazin says in the *Avant-Propos* to the first volume of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*:

Cette première série est donc composée d’études brèves ou longues, anciennes ou récentes, groupées autour du thème critique suivant : les fondements ontologiques de l’art cinématographique ou si l’on veut, en termes moins philosophiques : le cinéma comme art de la réalité. Nous partirons, comme il se doit, de l’image photographique, élément primitif de la synthèse finale, pour en arriver à esquisser, sinon une théorie du langage cinématographique fondée sur l’hypothèse de son réalisme ontogénétique, du moins une analyse qui ne lui soit point contradictoire.⁴

Strangely, Rohmer does not make any reference to Bazin’s remarks in the *Avant-Propos*, proceeding instead to assemble evidence and build a convincing case on his own.

Rohmer begins by writing:

Il est certain que l’œuvre de Bazin tout entière tourne autour de la même idée, l’affirmation de l’«objectivité» cinématographique, mais c’est un peu de la même manière que toute la géométrie tourne autour des propriétés de la ligne droite.⁵

He then demonstrates this by quoting at length from a number of essays, all of which he claims to be indicative of Bazin’s commitment to the principles introduced in the “Ontology.” Rohmer then follows up these quotations with a paraphrase of the “Ontology” itself:

⁴ André Bazin, *Avant-Propos to Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 1: *Ontologie et langage*, 9. This penultimate paragraph of the *Avant-Propos* and that which follows (offering a preview of the second volume) are omitted entirely from Éditions du Cerf’s 1975 “Édition définitive” of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*.

⁵ Rohmer, “La ‘Somme’ d’André Bazin,” 37.

On voit par ces quelques citations comment Bazin est conduit à nous découvrir tout un monde de rapports nouveaux entre l'œuvre d'art et la nature. Le cinéma abolit la distance traditionnelle entre la réalité et sa représentation. Le modèle est intégré à l'œuvre, en quelque manière il est l'œuvre.⁶

Rohmer, with this initial assessment, furnishes a specific reading strategy for Bazin's work in which the "Ontology" provides the key to all that follows it. It is this same strategy that Hugh Gray will pass on to English-language readers in his introduction to *What Is Cinema?*—Gray quotes Rohmer at length, and so affirms Rohmer's systematic connection between the place of the "Ontology" at the beginning of the collection and the idea that "the whole body of Bazin's work is based on one central idea, an affirmation of the objectivity of the cinema..."⁷

Gérard Gozlan's two-part article on Bazin and the New Wave in *Positif* plays a similarly foundational role. On the one hand, it establishes a template for future Marxist criticism of Bazin in its performance of the work of "demystification"; on the other hand, it falls in line with Rohmer in accepting the "Ontology" as the unifying ground for all of Bazin's thought as a complete "system."⁸

Gozlan's repeated calls for a "demystification" of Bazin's "system" reflect *Positif's* political commitments at the time (Michel Ciment identifies Gozlan and other members of the editorial staff as "early oppositional Communists");⁹ in so doing they also lay the groundwork for the kind of criticism of Bazin's work that would become

⁶ Rohmer, "La 'Somme' d'André Bazin," 40.

⁷ Hugh Gray, Introduction to *What Is Cinema?*, 5.

⁸ Gérard Gozlan, "Les délices de l'ambiguïté (Éloge d'André Bazin)," *Positif* 46 (June 1962): 39–69; and "Éloge d'André Bazin (suite et fin)," *Positif* 47 (July 1962): 16–60.

⁹ Michel Ciment, "For Your Pleasure: A Brief Overview of Fifty Years of *Positif*," in *Positif Fifty Years: Selections from the French Film Journal*, translated by Kenneth Larose (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 9–10.

commonplace in both French and Anglo-American criticism after 1968. Gozlan begins with a sustained attack on Bazin's article on *Las Hurdes* (not an entirely surprising strategy, given *Positif's* position as champion of Buñuel¹⁰); he then characterizes that article as exemplifying a broader pattern whereby Bazin's thought serves to "mystify" the bourgeois myths of objectivity and truth.

Nevertheless, Gozlan's condemnation of Bazin relies on the acceptance of the idea that Bazin's thought constitutes a "system" devoted to the principle of cinematic objectivity established in the "Ontology." In this respect Gozlan's position is similar to Rohmer's. Gozlan writes: "Dès l'analyse du fait ontologique de l'image photographique et de l'invention du cinéma, le système de Bazin existe déjà dans l'œuf. Il va en sortir en brisant la coquille, mais il existe tout entier."¹¹ He will return to this idea sixty pages later, at the conclusion of the second part of the article:

On peut pourtant résumer ainsi le système: il part de l'ontologie, du fait cinématographique, comme en mettant de côté pour les commodités de l'étude Histoire, Economie, Politique, Technique, Société, etc.; puis, formulant qu'une Esthétique conséquente du cinéma contient toute la réalité, il faut dériver de l'ontologie les autres secteurs d'abord soustraits et jamais remis en situation.¹²

In this way, both Rohmer and Gozlan establish as a truism the foundational role of the "Ontology" in relation to the entirety of Bazin's thought as a coherent system.

¹⁰ See Ciment, "For Your Pleasure," 10.

¹¹ Gérard Gozlan, "Les délices de l'ambiguïté," 52.

¹² Gozlan, "Éloge d'André Bazin (suite et fin)," 59.

“Brain-Crushing Difficult Criticism”: Early English-Language Reception

English-language commentaries on Bazin are rare before 1967. Perhaps the first person to write extensively about Bazin in English was Richard Roud, who reviewed *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* in a 1959 article in *Sight and Sound*.¹³ Roud situates Bazin in the context of the history of French film criticism, showing that Bazin worked against a tradition that associated film art with the techniques of montage. Roud sees “the re-evaluation of *montage*,” grounded in a “consideration of the ontology of the cinema,” as Bazin’s “most important contribution to film aesthetics.”¹⁴ This locating of the significance of Bazin’s work in his contestation of the primacy of montage is echoed in a 1963 article by Charles Barr on CinemaScope, which appeared in *Film Quarterly*. Quoting from the “Ontology” (in French) and labelling Bazin the “Gernsheim of the cinema,” Barr, like Roud, identifies the significance of Bazin as lying in his rejection of montage as the basis of film art (Barr is, of course, addressing the challenges to editing conventions posed by widescreen cinematography).¹⁵

The initial English-language publication of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in *Film Quarterly* in 1960 does not seem to have attracted much attention. The journal did print a short reply by Ian Jarvie, who takes issue with various aspects of Bazin’s argument, and most notably with the idea that photography can ever be

¹³ Richard Roud, “Face to Face: André Bazin,” *Sight and Sound* 28, no. 3–4 (summer–autumn 1959): 176–9.

¹⁴ Roud, “Face to Face,” 177; emphasis original.

¹⁵ Charles Barr, “CinemaScope: Before and After,” *Film Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (summer 1963): 7.

“objective.”¹⁶ Some years later, Jarvie would redeploy elements of this critique in the course of a discussion of Stanley Cavell’s *The World Viewed*.¹⁷

Attention to Bazin in Anglo-American film scholarship picks up after the publication of *What Is Cinema?* in 1967. Hugh Gray’s translation received a modest number of reviews in film journals and the mainstream press. Some of these reviews—most notably Peter Harcourt’s in *Cinema Journal* and Pauline Kael’s in the *New York Times Book Review*—used the book’s publication mainly as an opportunity to reflect on the place of theory and criticism in relation to film culture—and to express Anglo-American envy of French cinephilia. Kael’s waggish reference to Bazin’s work as “brain-crushingly difficult criticism” betrays a scepticism about the market for French-style erudition in American film culture.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ian Jarvie, “Bazin’s Ontology,” *Film Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (autumn 1960): 60–1.

¹⁷ Ian Jarvie, *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, Ontology, Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987). Jarvie is puzzled by Cavell’s having been influenced at all by Bazin, and expresses “utter incredulity that [Bazin] is taken so seriously.” Especially distressing for Jarvie is Bazin’s apparent claim of the “identity of the subject and the object, a photograph of someone *is* that someone.” This leads Jarvie to wonder: “Can he really have thought this through?” Jarvie’s reading of Bazin is worth mentioning because, like a number of commentators, he reduces the Bazinian claim of ontological “identity” to something that derives from the fact of visual resemblance alone: “Bazin’s doctrine relies on a notion of the real appearance of things” (Jarvie, *Philosophy of the Film*, 97–100; emphasis original). I will say more about Stanley Cavell shortly.

¹⁸ Peter Harcourt, “What, Indeed, Is Cinema?” *Cinema Journal* 8, no. 1 (autumn 1968): 22–8; Pauline Kael, “Behind the New Wave,” *The New York Times Book Review*, 10 September 1967, 1, 64. Kael’s front-page review was accompanied by photos of Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Alain Resnais. The *Times* published another review, written by Roger Jellinek, a couple of weeks later; Jellinek’s review, unlike Kael’s, actually engages with the theoretical elements of Bazin’s work, offering an admirable (if brief) account of the psychological underpinnings of the Bazinian ontology; see Jellinek, “What Cinema Is” (review), *New York Times*, 22 September 1967, 45. *What Is Cinema?* was not reviewed by *Film Culture*, *Film Comment*, or *Film Quarterly*; a short, tepid review appeared in *Film* (“What Is Cinema?” [review], *Film* 50 [winter 1967–8]: 43–4).

Annette Michelson, in her review of *What Is Cinema?* for *Artforum*, follows Roud and Barr in situating Bazin in opposition to montage theorists such as Eisenstein.¹⁹ Michelson also takes issue with what she views as Bazin's "prescriptive perpetuation of a realism rooted in the Baroque style"; for Michelson, Bazinian realism is limited to the achievement of visual likeness—what she terms the "burden of illusionism"—which Bazin has made an "attempt to legislate...as 'ontologically' cinematic." Ultimately, though, Michelson's main complaint is with what she sees as Bazin's refusal to acknowledge the possibility of a cinematic modernism.²⁰

Michelson also questions Hugh Gray's selection of essays, claiming that, with his preference for Bazin's more theoretical work, Gray has eliminated "the topical and the ideological" from Bazin's writing.²¹ In calling Gray's own competence into question, Michelson is joined by Richard Roud, who uses his review in *Sight and Sound* to lambaste Gray's "sloppy scholarship." Roud is hardly restrained in his criticism, stating that "this book is a disgrace. A disgrace to Bazin, a disgrace to his translator, a disgrace to the publishers, a disgrace, *quoi!*"²² Although various subsequent commentators would find fault with aspects of Gray's translation, none would approach Roud's outrage.

¹⁹ Annette Michelson, review of *What Is Cinema?* by André Bazin, *Artforum* 6, no. 10 (summer 1968): 67–70.

²⁰ Michelson, "What Is Cinema?" 69–70.

²¹ Michelson, "What Is Cinema?" 68.

²² Roud, "André Bazin: His Rise and Fall," 94, 95.

“Object Dogma”: Bazin, Ontology, and Realism

References to Bazin and quotations from “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” proliferate in English film theory and criticism beginning in the early 1970s. Certain broad trends in the way the “Ontology” is used and interpreted become apparent. At the risk of over-simplifying things, we might draw an initial distinction between, on the one hand, writing that makes a significant attempt to understand and interrogate Bazin’s thought, and, on the other hand, writing that establishes a relationship between Bazin’s ontology and the idea of cinematic “realism” generally without necessarily interrogating the essence of Bazin’s claims. The latter is far more common than the former. Here relatively simplistic notions of Bazinian realism are both compared to other kinds of realism (Kracauer’s, mainly) and contrasted with other major, opposing theoretical schools—namely the “formative” tendency epitomized by Eisenstein’s theory of montage. Work in this vein usually seeks to establish Bazin’s position without investigating it in any significant way. The purpose may either be descriptive, as with most broad surveys of film theory, or prescriptive, most often with Bazin’s approach being characterized as a naïve view that must be rejected.

Some of the earliest discussions of Bazinian realism appeared, perhaps not surprisingly, in the pages of *Film Quarterly*. The best known is probably Brian Henderson’s “Two Types of Film Theory,” published in the *Quarterly* in the spring of 1971, alongside a lengthy survey of “Recent Film Writing” by editor Ernest Callenbach in which several new works are considered by way of comparison with Bazin, who,

Callenbach confesses, “seems to me the most important film thinker of our times.”²³ In Henderson’s article, Bazin and Eisenstein are offered as exemplary of the “two types” of “principal film theories”—of “partial theories” of the image’s relation to reality and theories of the “part–whole relation” of films, respectively.²⁴ Quoting abundantly and somewhat indiscriminately from the Gray translation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Henderson concludes that “Bazin’s is a one-stage film theory. Bazin begins with the real but, unlike Eisenstein, does not go beyond it; he never breaks with the real in the name of art.”²⁵ One of the most interesting insights in “Two Types of Film Theory,” however, comes in a parenthetical remark that hints at an awareness of one of the founding tensions of the “Ontology”: “Bazin hedges his doctrine here by casting the discussion in terms of the *psychology* of photography, how we react to it rather than (strictly) the nature of its image; but Bazin does not stay within these bounds—the essay’s title is finally controlling.”²⁶ With this arbitrary verdict, Henderson dismisses the psychological underpinnings of the entire “Ontology.”

Another, less well-known article that appeared in *Film Quarterly* at around the same time makes a similar example of Bazin, but for very different reasons. In a piece

²³ Brian Henderson, “Two Types of Film Theory,” *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (spring 1971): 33–42; Ernest Callenbach, “Recent Film Writing: A Survey,” *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (spring 1971): 11–32. At the time Callenbach was overseeing the publication of the second volume of *What Is Cinema?*, which was to be released later that year. Henderson’s article was reprinted in the Bill Nichols anthology *Movies and Methods*, where Nichols lauds it as “the first significant reevaluation of the theories of Eisenstein and Bazin, in English, in many years” (see Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* Volume I [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], 388).

²⁴ Henderson, “Two Types of Film Theory,” 33. In an earlier article on Godard’s cinematography (“Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style”), Henderson draws the basic distinction between Eisenstein and Bazin, but does so in the more familiar terms of exemplary film practice (“montage” versus “long take”), identifying the Bazin–Eisenstein distinction as already being a “commonplace.” See Brian Henderson, “Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style,” *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (winter 1970–1): 5.

²⁵ Henderson, “Two Types of Film Theory,” 39.

²⁶ Henderson, “Two Types of Film Theory,” 36; emphasis original.

about Jean-Luc Godard that is indebted to Gérard Gozlan's polemic against Bazin in *Positif*, James Roy MacBean equates Bazin with "bourgeois ideology" and "a mystical-religious (Catholic) framework of transcendence."²⁷ MacBean's position on Bazin is perhaps notable insofar as it is developed through recourse to Gozlan's critique, rather than by means of association with the more contemporary work at *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*, which he does not seem to acknowledge.²⁸ *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers* were, of course, the main inspiration for the critique of ideology practised at around the same time by the writers associated with *Screen*. *Screen*'s editorial position in the early 1970s and the place of Bazin within it have played a major role in shaping subsequent reception of the "Ontology." I will be taking up the problem of *Screen* and its legacy separately in the next chapter.

Subsequent surveys of both "realist" theory and of film theory more generally follow Henderson's lead in treating Bazin as exemplary of a realism grounded in the technological properties of the cinematic medium. And, like Henderson, they rely on a simplified understanding of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in order to do so. What distinguishes one survey from the next tends to lie in the specific way they characterize the overall significance or shortcomings of realism, or in the precise way realism is differentiated from other major strands of film theory (such as Eisenstein's

²⁷ James Roy MacBean, "'See You at Mao': Godard's Revolutionary *British Sounds*," *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (winter 1970–1): 16, 17.

²⁸ Similarly, when MacBean expanded his argument into an entire book aimed at ushering in a "post-Bazin" era of film theory and criticism," he did so with only oblique, derogatory references to the influential work at the journal *Screen* to which his own anti-Bazinian critique of ideology bore a certain resemblance (James Roy MacBean, *Film and Revolution* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975], 1). MacBean's swipes at *Screen* drew a reply from Sam Rohdie, the former editor of *Screen*, who had ushered in that journal's new editorial policy in 1971; see Sam Rohdie, "Notes from a Pedant," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 1976): 155–62.

theory of montage). V. F. Perkins, for example, situates the “object dogma” of Bazin and Kracauer against the “image dogma” of orthodox, montage-based views of film art. Perkins mixes long passages from Kracauer with his own translations of Bazin in order to present a combined “view” in which “respect for reality becomes a criterion.”²⁹ For Perkins, this “object dogma” is little better than “image dogma” insofar as “[e]ach of these positions presupposes a philosophy, a temperament, a vision—terrain which the theorist should leave open for the film-maker to explore and present.”³⁰ The approach of Andrew Tudor is similar. In his *Theories of Film*, Tudor quotes the “Ontology” in order to suggest that Bazin relies on a claim about medium specificity in order to justify “a non-social aesthetic of the real.”³¹

Dudley Andrew’s *The Major Film Theories* is consistent with these works in showing Bazinian realism to be grounded in the technological properties of the medium (cinema “comes to us automatically through a photo-chemical process”³²). But Andrew offers a much more sympathetic reading of Bazin, not to mention a more nuanced understanding of the claims laid out in the “Ontology.” Andrew makes an important distinction between “two absolutely important properties” which emerge from the various metaphors that Bazin offers in the “Ontology”—showing that the “tracings” of the cinema are both “genetically linked to the reality they mirror” and “already comprehensible.” In drawing this distinction, Andrew identifies two very different kinds

²⁹ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 31.

³⁰ Perkins, *Film as Film*, 39.

³¹ Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), 77–8. I will say a bit more about Tudor’s reading of the “Ontology” in the next chapter.

³² Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 169.

of relationship between image and reality—a physical link between image and object, on the one hand, and the presentation of a visual likeness of real space, on the other hand. Andrew also recognizes that the importance of the “Ontology” ultimately lies in human psychology: “realism has to do not with the accuracy of the reproduction but with the spectator’s belief about the origin of the reproduction.”³³

Of the two kinds of relationships between image and reality that Andrew identifies, most subsequent summaries of the Bazinian “realist” position emphasize the appearance of visual likeness rather than the physical link (this trend has begun to reverse itself, however, in the recent discourse on cinematic indexicality).³⁴ Likewise, these summaries consistently emphasize issues of technological specificity while downplaying the psychological aspects of Bazin’s ontological realism.³⁵

A notable exception to the film-theoretical tendency to reduce the Bazinian “Ontology” to a claim of visual resemblance appears in a couple of influential works of documentary theory. Writing at a time when the Rodney King trial was making a mockery of the supposedly evidentiary value of film and video images, Bill Nichols and

³³ Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, 138.

³⁴ For the equation of Bazinian realism with spatial likeness, see, e.g. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 96; Christopher Williams, ed., *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 54; and Jacques Aumont et al., *Aesthetics of Film*, translated by Richard Neupert (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 13. Christian Metz, whose phenomenologically inflected work is often identified as being heavily indebted to the Bazinian ontology (even as he aspires to develop a semiotics of film language) likewise seems concerned mainly with its implications for visual likeness; see Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, translated by Michael Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 8, 14.

³⁵ One exception is Robert Stam’s *Film and Theory*, which states Bazin’s position as follows: “The cinema instantiates a deeply rooted desire to replace the world by its double.” But in claiming that there is a “deeply rooted desire” for mimetic doubling, this statement largely misses Bazin’s point that the greatest human need is, in fact, for the presence of something more than a mere representation. See Robert Stam, *Film and Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 74. Another important work that recognizes the role of psychology in Bazin’s “Ontology” is Philip Rosen’s *Change Mummified*, which I address in the next chapter.

Michael Renov each draw on “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” to express the peculiar (and sometimes exasperating) tension between the *physical authenticity* of film and video recordings and the potentially limited *documentary* value of such recordings.

In separate works, both Nichols and Renov quote the exact same three sentences from Gray’s translation:

Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. (HG 14; emphasis original)

With their emphasis on this passage, both Nichols and Renov recognize the manifold nature of the relationship between image and model that Bazin is presenting. The physical bond between image and object exists independently of the photograph’s rendering of visual information. In reflecting contemporary anxieties, both Nichols and Renov extend this tension between authenticity and visual evidence beyond the frame of the individual image, in order to point to the many different means by which an image’s seemingly self-evident truths can be undermined.³⁶

³⁶ See Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 151; and Michael Renov, “Toward a Poetics of Documentary,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22–3. Also curiously relevant here is the 1992 Society for Cinema Studies resolution expressing “outrage” at the Rodney King verdict—a verdict that the signatories of the resolution argue “contradicts powerful visual evidence.” For the text of the SCS resolution and commentary on it, see John Hess, Chuch Kleinhans, and Julia Lesage, “After Cosby/After the L. A. Rebellion: The Politics of Transnational Culture in the Post Cold War Era,” *Jump Cut* 37 (1992): 2–4, 43. A fascinating discussion of the King case, which “precipitated a shift in the value of motion picture evidence,” appears in Louis-Georges Schwartz, *Mechanical Witness: A History of Motion Picture Evidence in U. S. Courts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Schwartz’s book itself “started as an inquiry into the juridical protocols of interpretation that allowed the jury to participate in such a

“Under a Glass Bell”: Close Readings

Given the prominent place afforded to Bazin within English-language film theory, surprisingly few commentators have tried to engage closely with the logic of Bazin’s ideas. Yet there have been plenty of instances of those ideas being rejected outright. A few people have tried to make sense of Bazin’s concepts, either by situating them in their historical context or relating them to seemingly foreign discourses such as Marxism and psychoanalysis. Recently, there has been a steady effort to rehabilitate and revitalize the place of Bazin’s thought in film studies.

One of the first detailed studies of Bazin’s thought was surprisingly unsympathetic. In the 1972 article “The Structure of Bazin’s Thought,” Brian Henderson tries to undermine the presumed philosophical consistency between “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and Bazin’s later film criticism. We have seen how Eric Rohmer and Gérard Gozlan both promote the idea of a Bazin’s thought as a coherent “system,” and how Hugh Gray affirms this claim in his introduction to *What Is Cinema?* It is these claims of coherence that are called into question in Henderson’s article. Recognizing that contemporary film studies was prone to rejecting Bazin’s ideas without subjecting them to any real analysis, Henderson makes the reasonable point that “in the hurry beyond Bazin it has not been clearly established who Bazin was.”³⁷ He proceeds to advance the argument that “Bazin’s ontological work and his historical work appear virtually as

‘misreading’” (Schwartz, *Mechanical Witness*, 8); Schwartz takes issue with the SCS resolution, accusing film scholars of fundamentally misunderstanding the way that motion pictures are used in juridical contexts (Schwartz, *Mechanical Witness*, 7–8).

³⁷ Brian Henderson, “The Structure of Bazin’s Thought,” *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (summer 1972): 18. This article appeared shortly after the publication of the second volume of *What Is Cinema?*.

separate and opposed systems operating within the same body of thought.”³⁸ Whereas the early “ontology” essays are “timeless...pure aesthetic theory,” Bazin’s critical-historical work “constitutes a single history of cinema, 1920–1957.” This opposition is, for Henderson, the “central feature of Bazin’s work.”³⁹

Henderson’s argument drew a rebuttal from Hugh Gray, who protests that Bazin’s work is “without contradiction.”⁴⁰ The unity of Bazin’s thought is likewise defended in a 1973 article in *Film Comment* by Dudley Andrew. Taking Eric Rohmer’s argument in *Cahiers* as his starting point, Andrew surveys Bazin’s approach to Robert Flaherty and neo-realism to affirm that “[t]he whole of Bazin’s film theory can be derived from his faith in the mysterious otherness of external reality.”⁴¹

Henderson would resurrect this claim of two opposed systems in Bazinian thought in response to the publication of Andrew’s intellectual biography *André Bazin*. For its part, Andrew’s book is a singular achievement, insofar as it has remained, for more than three decades, the only monograph devoted to Bazin.⁴² In addition to providing a colourful biographical sketch, *André Bazin* traces the intellectual and cultural roots of Bazin’s thought, exploring in considerable depth the influence of Leenhardt, Malraux, Sartre, and Mounier. In so doing, it expands on the reading of “The Ontology of the

³⁸ Henderson, “The Structure of Bazin’s Thought,” 19.

³⁹ Henderson, “The Structure of Bazin’s Thought,” 20, 21.

⁴⁰ Hugh Gray, “On Interpreting Bazin,” *Film Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (spring 1973): 59. Henderson replies in turn that “contradictions in Bazin are both a key to his work as it stands and a key to post-Bazinian developments as well” (Henderson, “Reply,” *Film Quarterly* 26, no. 3 [spring 1973]: 60). The disagreement between Gray and Henderson is, I think, above all symptomatic of the irreconcilability of two different strategies of textual interpretation and the place afforded (or not) by them to the unifying force of authorial intention.

⁴¹ Dudley Andrew, “Critics: André Bazin,” *Film Comment* 9, no. 2 (March–April 1973): 64. Andrew is responding to Marxist criticism of Bazin (which I will address in the next chapter).

⁴² Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Photographic Image” that Andrew gives in *The Major Film Theories* by elaborating on the key insight that “[i]n a psychological sense, realism...has to do not with the accuracy of the reproduction but with the spectator’s belief about its origin.”⁴³

Henderson, in a 1979 article, takes Andrew to task (along with Truffaut and Rohmer) for indulging in certain “myths” about Bazin that do little to demonstrate the continuing relevance or value of Bazin’s thought.⁴⁴ Henderson reiterates his insistence on the “disunity of Bazin’s corpus” versus the “ultimate” status attributed to “Rohmer’s unity thesis” that “Bazin had one idea, which was so pure that even applications and extensions do not dilute it.” Henderson quips that “there are two ways not to read Bazin. One is not to read him, the other is to read every piece as an emanation of his ontology, and to dismiss it on that ground” (he accuses the journal *Screen* of the latter strategy).⁴⁵

Subsequent theoretical interest in the intricacies of Bazin’s thought has been sporadic. There have been a couple of special journal issues devoted to Bazin, the most significant of which is a 1987 issue of *Wide Angle* guest-edited by Dudley Andrew. The issue includes an early version of Philip Rosen’s now well-known argument concerning Bazin and historicity; a lengthy piece by Pamela Falkenberg that forges links between Bazin, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction; a short reflection on Bazin’s work by Jean Narboni; a personal recollection of Bazin’s time at *L’Ecran Français* by Jean-Charles

⁴³ Andrew, *André Bazin*, 76.

⁴⁴ Brian Henderson, “Bazin Defended Against His Devotees,” *Film Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (summer 1979): 26–37. A similar complaint about Andrew’s “embalming” of Bazin’s “legacy under a glass bell” appears in Jonathan Rosenbaum’s review of *André Bazin* by Dudley Andrew, *Sight and Sound* 48, no. 1 (1978): 62–3.

⁴⁵ Henderson, “Bazin Defended,” 29, 30.

Tacchella; and an attempt by John Belton to recuperate Bazin's ideas for contemporary film studies by showing points of continuity and common interest.⁴⁶

There have been further calls for the redemption of Bazin within film studies over the last ten years. A 1999 article by Peter Matthews in *Sight and Sound* offers a standard overview of Bazin's legacy and ideas, and calls for his work to be "rehabilitated" as an antidote to "a compulsive scepticism and a jaded cynicism that have become the orthodoxies of our age."⁴⁷ The 2003 anthology *Rites of Realism* is "inspired by" and "pays tribute to" Bazin insofar as it "subscribes to the epistemological promise of referential images" which render knowable an "existing reality."⁴⁸ A 2007 issue of *Film International* was similarly committed to re-energizing film studies' engagement with Bazin; for guest editor Jeffrey Crouse, this re-engagement was intended as a corrective to the apparently irredeemable legacy of 1970s film theory (from which Laura Mulvey is singled out as the leader of "the post-Bazin killjoys"⁴⁹).

The most thoughtful contribution to that issue of *Film International* is a piece by William Rothman devoted to examining connections between the Bazinian ontology and Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*; Rothman attempts to show the extent to which

⁴⁶ See Dudley Andrew, "Preface," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 4–6; Philip Rosen, "History of Image, Image of History: Subject and Ontology in Bazin," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 7–34; Pamela Falkenberg, "'The Text! The Text!': André Bazin's Mummy Complex, Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 35–55; Jean Narboni, "André Bazin's Style," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 56–60; Jean-Charles Tacchella, "André Bazin from 1945–1950: The Time of Struggles and Consecration," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 61–73; and John Belton, "Bazin Is Dead! Long Live Bazin," *Wide Angle* 9, no. 4 (winter 1987–8): 74–81.

⁴⁷ Peter Matthews, "Divining the Real," *Sight and Sound* 9, no. 8 (August 1999): 25.

⁴⁸ Ivone Margulies, "Bodies Too Much," in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, edited by Ivone Margulies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 1, 2.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Crouse, "Because We Need Him Now: Re-enchanting Film Studies through Bazin," *Film International* 30 (2007): 11.

Cavell's views concerning the relationship between photographs and their models are "all but indistinguishable from Bazin's..."⁵⁰ Above all, though, Rothman's article seems to be a paean to "Rethinking Bazin," an essay by Daniel Morgan that originally appeared in *Critical Inquiry* in 2006. In that text, Morgan sets out to challenge some of the more basic assumptions about the Bazinian ontology—such as its assimilability to Peircean indexicality (the "index argument"), the presumed determining role of ontology in relation to realism, and the presumed "commitment" of the Bazinian ontology to the "reproduction" of reality.⁵¹ In the degree of nuance with which it treats Bazin's text, Morgan's article rivals the rigorousness of *Change Mummified*, the work to which Morgan's "index argument" seems in part to be responding.

"Spurious Metaphysical Trappings": Philosophy, Aesthetics, Photography Theory

Rothman's invocation of Stanley Cavell reminds us that some of the most engaging and fruitful discussions of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" have occurred not within film studies proper, but rather under the auspices of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of aesthetics. Indeed, Cavell was hardly alone in taking Bazin's views seriously as the seeds of a legitimate philosophical position; Bazin's "Ontology" has been at the centre of a three-decades-long philosophical tug-of-war that has played out in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* and, later, *The Journal of Aesthetics and*

⁵⁰ William Rothman, "Bazin as a Cavellian Realist," *Film International* 30 (2007): 55.

⁵¹ Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (spring 2006): 443–481. I will address the problem of "indexicality" in the next chapter.

Art Criticism. Some of the greatest insights into Bazin's essay have arisen from these discussions.

Stanley Cavell was arguably the first "philosopher" to take Bazin seriously. Cavell's *The World Viewed* is widely understood as being heavily indebted to "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," even though direct references to Bazin's text are fairly limited.⁵² Bazin's discussion of the automated nature of the photographic process—and the freedom from the subjectivity of the artist that it offers—serves as the basis not just for Cavell's notion of "automatism," but also for Cavell's consideration of its broader epistemological and metaphysical implications: "photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it."⁵³ With his characterization of film as "a way of establishing our connection with the world" free of "our fantasies" and thus giving us the world in a way that may "seem more natural than reality," Cavell is echoing not just Bazin's remarks about subjectivity as an epistemological burden, but his larger claim concerning photography as a means of revelation that is superior to natural perception—a claim that is usually missed in film-theoretical accounts of Bazin.⁵⁴

The "Ontology" is subsequently invoked by Rudolph Arnheim who, in a 1974 article in the inaugural issue of *Critical Inquiry*, stages a retreat from his earlier, well-

⁵² Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁵³ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 23.

⁵⁴ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 102. Malcolm Turvey, in his book *Doubting Vision*, traces the history of film theory in which "cinema's most significant property...is that it can reveal the true nature of reality to viewers." He calls this the "revelationist" tradition, and associates it primarily with Epstein, Vertov, Balázs, and Kracauer. Bazin receives only a brief mention, in which he is associated with "realist" film theory. See Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9–10.

known position on “film as art.”⁵⁵ Here Arnheim instead celebrates photography as “a faithful instrument whose reach need not extend farther than the way of life it reflects.”⁵⁶ Arnheim, quoting the “Ontology,” shows the importance of spectator knowledge and expectations concerning the mechanical origins of photographic images. Arnheim’s argument is challenged by Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, who, completely ignoring Arnheim’s emphasis on viewer attitude, claim that he overstates the implications of automation for photographic specificity. They quote the “Ontology” in order to argue against Arnheim’s position that there is far too much artistic intervention in photography for images to be considered automatically generated.⁵⁷

Snyder and Allen’s argument is directly challenged, in turn, by Kendall L. Walton. In the much-cited article “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” Walton starts out by quoting and scrutinizing the “Ontology” at length in order to arrive at what he presents as the more moderate view that photography “deserves to be called a supremely realistic medium...Photographs are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them.”⁵⁸ Walton gives lengthy and serious consideration to Bazin’s apparent claims of ontological identity between image and object, only to conclude that “there is

⁵⁵ Rudolph Arnheim, “On the Nature of Photography,” *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (September 1974): 149–61. In the history of film theory, Arnheim is best known for claiming that film’s status as art—its ability to overcome its strictly mechanical, representational properties—derives from the creative exploitation of the medium’s mimetic restrictions (the two-dimensionality of the image; etc.). See Rudolph Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 3 and *passim*.

⁵⁶ Arnheim, “On the Nature of Photography,” 160.

⁵⁷ Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, “Photography, Vision, and Representation,” *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (autumn 1975): 143–69.

⁵⁸ Kendall L. Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (December 1984): 251; emphasis original.

no readily apparent nonliteral reading of them [i.e. Bazin's claims] on which they are even plausible."⁵⁹

Walton's article has led to a number of replies. Gregory Currie answers Walton in *Image and Mind*, using the Bazinian claim of ontological identity to establish an extreme view against which to argue (Currie complains that "[t]here is too much in Bazin that is confused or simply wrong for his work to constitute the basis of a theoretical renewal").⁶⁰ Quotations from the "Ontology" are offered up as bait in a recent response to Walton by Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin.⁶¹ And Noël Carroll, the film-theorist-cum-philosopher, chides Walton and others for even taking Bazin's "obscure" ideas seriously (here Carroll selectively quotes various scandalous tidbits from the "Ontology"—"it is the model," etc.—to show what he means).⁶² Carroll directs Walton (and his readers) to his own extended criticism of Bazin's "Ontology" in *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*. In that work, Bazin and other practitioners of "classical film theory" (notably Arnheim and Perkins) are subjected to Carroll's "philosophical analysis";⁶³ Carroll wants to show that classical film theory is preoccupied with determining the essence of cinema only in order to establish criteria for aesthetic judgement (here his argument mirrors Andrew Tudor's). In Bazin's case, the mechanical

⁵⁹ Walton, "Transparent Pictures," 250.

⁶⁰ Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xxiii.

⁶¹ Jonathan Cohen and Aaron Meskin, "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62, no. 2 (spring 2004): 197–210.

⁶² Noël Carroll, "Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image," in *Philosophy and Film*, edited by Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas E. Wartenberg (New York: Routledge, 1995); Carroll similarly uses Bazinian claim of ontological identity to exemplify an "extreme form" of film theory's "obsession" with realism in "The Power of Movies," *Daedalus* 114, no. 4 (fall 1985): 79.

⁶³ Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 5.

basis of cinematic objectivity justifies his demand that films adhere to a realist aesthetic (which Carroll equates with “spatial realism”⁶⁴). Carroll challenges this view first by questioning the validity of the claim of objectivity: “at best, the sort of objectivity that Bazin attributes to cinema can differ only in degree rather than in kind from a similar type of objectivity to be found in all representational media.”⁶⁵ Carroll then dismisses the emphasis that Bazin places on the psychology of photographic images and their origins in the mummy complex, arguing that the origins of an artistic medium do not necessarily prescribe the limits of its practical use. He therefore concludes: “Bazin attempted to defend the accomplishments of spatial realism with a theory redolent with spurious metaphysical trappings...a thinly veiled brief in favor of a certain style of film.”⁶⁶

Carroll’s criticism of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” itself provoked a couple of interesting responses. David Brubaker takes on Carroll in order to “defend Bazin’s basic premise that there is a special type of objectivity associated with photography because photographs are automatically made in an exclusive sense,” doing so by attempting to locate a minimum threshold of “creative intervention.”⁶⁷ Brubaker’s article is noteworthy because, unlike most film-theoretical commentaries, it challenges aspects of Gray’s translation in the course of its argument (although it is not clear to me how Brubaker’s claims are actually served by his retranslation of certain passages).

⁶⁴ Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, 170, 171.

⁶⁵ Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, 155.

⁶⁶ Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, 171.

⁶⁷ David Brubaker, “André Bazin on Automatically Made Images,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 1 (winter 1993): 59, 62–3.

A subsequent article by Jonathan Friday picks up on both Brubaker's critique of Carroll and his complaints about Gray's translation. Friday's main concern with Carroll's reading of Bazin lies in "his failure to take note of the psychological orientation of the argument."⁶⁸ Friday provides a careful gloss of Bazin's description of the mummy complex and the obsession with resemblance, but, despite his professed attention to the "psychological perspective" of the "Ontology," he fails to recognize the different modes of desire that are in play, identifying instead a single, common "need for identity-substitutes."⁶⁹ Friday, having undertaken this defense of Bazin against Carroll, nevertheless concludes by dismissing the plausibility of Bazin's psychological explanation for the invention of photography, labelling it a "doubtful hypothesis."⁷⁰

Friday's article is also noteworthy for its apparent circumvention of Hugh Gray's text. Friday provides new translations of certain key passages of the "Ontology," supplying the original (1958) French text in endnotes. Of particular interest for our purposes is his decision to translate "défouler" (rendered as "satisfying" in Gray) as "bringing back to consciousness." In his initial explication of this passage, Friday states that "photographs remind us of our deep primordial need for a representational preservation of objects and persons from the influence of time." But he nevertheless retains the essence of Gray's translation with his overall interpretation of the passage's significance—first, by failing to recognize the distinct nature of the need that is brought "back to consciousness" and, second, by concluding that the photograph "more

⁶⁸ Jonathan Friday, "André Bazin's Ontology of Photographic and Film Imagery," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 4 (autumn 2005): 345.

⁶⁹ Friday, "André Bazin's Ontology," 339, 344.

⁷⁰ Friday, "André Bazin's Ontology," 348.

adequately *satisfies*...our need for identity-substitutes.”⁷¹ In light of this failure to gain new insight from a rereading of the French text, Friday’s gesture of criticizing the Gray translation comes across as little more than a rhetorical ploy.

From Cavell through to the most recent essays in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, there has therefore been a long history of sophisticated engagement with “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” under the auspices of the philosophy of aesthetics. But this has not necessarily translated into a more nuanced understanding of the place of Bazin in art history or photography studies. This is especially evident in the way that Bazin is situated within historical narratives of photography theory. These are narratives that willingly assign a place to Bazin, but one in which the “Ontology” is caricatured as a simplistic, naïve-realist approach to photographic representation. This perhaps says more about requirements of narrative simplicity in intellectual historiography than it does about deficiencies in photography theory’s understanding of Bazin; nonetheless, it is worth looking at how the “Ontology” is treated in these histories.

References to Bazin in photography theory are invariably brief. At times Bazin’s thought is reduced to nothing more than a pithy quotation,⁷² but more often Bazin is introduced as part of a lineage that includes Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes.⁷³ Beyond this—and the ubiquitous claim of Bazin’s exemplifying a “realist” perspective—there is

⁷¹ Friday, “André Bazin’s Ontology,” 344; emphasis added.

⁷² See, e.g., Douglas Crimp, “The Museum’s Old/The Library’s New Subject,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, edited by Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 3; Barbara E. Savedoff, *Transforming Images: How Photography Complicates the Picture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 40.

⁷³ Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*—indebted as it may be to the “Ontology”—clearly exerts far greater influence over contemporary photography theory than does Bazin’s essay. I will return to the relationship between the “Ontology” and *Camera Lucida* in a later chapter.

actually little consistency in the characterization of the “Ontology” in histories of photography theory. Patrick Maynard situates Bazin’s “famous essay” at the beginning of an intellectual trajectory that includes Cavell, Sontag, and Barthes, while placing emphasis on its claims of ontological identity.⁷⁴ Derrick Price and Liz Wells introduce the “Ontology” in a similar intellectual context, while claiming that it “emphasised the truth-to-appearances characteristics of the photographic.”⁷⁵ Sabine T. Kriebel links Bazin with Barthes and Sontag, but as a contemporary rather than a progenitor.⁷⁶ Kriebel quotes extensively from the “Ontology” to illustrate its concern with “the psychological aspects” of photography but also to indicate Bazin’s concern with photography’s “objective access to the real.”⁷⁷ Geoffrey Batchen frames the “Ontology” somewhat differently, aligning it with the politically conservative “modernist formalism” of Clement Greenberg. Batchen quotes at length from the “Ontology” to illustrate Bazin’s commitment to the “true realism” achieved by photography. Batchen reminds us that, for Bazin, it is this “realism” that distinguishes photography from all the other arts, most notably painting.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 10, 13. Maynard also takes up the “Ontology” in an earlier essay, remarking that Bazin “was the first to distinguish photographic objectivity from its alleged accuracy”; see Maynard, “The Secular Icon: Photography and the Function of Images,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 2 (winter 1983): 157.

⁷⁵ Derrick Price and Liz Wells, “Thinking about Photography,” in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 1997), 39.

⁷⁶ Kriebel introduces Bazin as just “another writer in search of photography’s essence in the 1960s”; Sabine T. Kriebel, “Theories of Photography: A Short History,” in *Photography Theory*, edited by James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 17. See also the association of Bazin with Barthes and Sontag in Jan Baetens et al., “The Art Seminar,” in *Photography Theory*, 171–2.

⁷⁷ Kriebel, “Theories of Photography,” 17–18.

⁷⁸ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 12–14.

Photography as “Dungeon”: The “Ontology,” Power, and Gender

Bazin’s claims about the power of photographic images have also helped to frame debates about representation and gender, with the “Ontology” being used in several contexts to suggest the implications of representational practices that negotiate the bounds of gendered embodiment, subjectivity, and agency.⁷⁹ Ingrid Zechmeister, for example, explores the implications of foetal ultrasound imagery for the rendering of the foetus as a subject distinct from the mother. Zechmeister quotes the “Ontology” to suggest that the connoted visual realism of the foetal image renders ultrasound complicit in “creating a new myth: the foetus as image” (and thus as distinct subject).⁸⁰ Elsewhere, Terri Kapsalis brings Bazin’s mummy complex to bear on the representation of women’s bodies in gynaecology textbooks. Kapsalis shows how these textbooks rely on an implicit set of representational conventions to regulate the propriety of both the medical gaze (as scientific-versus-pornographic) and its objects (as pathological-versus-normal). Kapsalis uses the “Ontology” to comment on this regulative matrix, wherein a loose association between objectification and death (figured mainly as pathology) necessarily

⁷⁹ The use of the “Ontology” to demonstrate the power of photographic images is arguably at odds with the strategy adopted by much of feminist film theory in the 1970s and 1980s, which largely subscribed to the practice of ideological demystification as practiced in *Screen*; there, meaning originates not in reality but in signification. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, notes that the “historical importance of semiology was to affirm the existence of coding rules and thus of a socially constructed reality there where a transcendental reality, nature (Bazin’s “ontology of the image”), had been supposed to manifest itself” (de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984], 30). Still, there is a shared recognition of the complicity of representations (and their deployment) in the maintenance of patriarchy.

⁸⁰ Ingrid Zechmeister, “Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Technology in Antenatal Care and the Implications for Women’s Reproductive Freedom,” *Health Care Analysis* 9 (2001): 392.

codes gynaecological photographs (as opposed to the life-likeness of drawings) in order to foreclose pornographic readings.⁸¹

Surely the most high-profile implication of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in the politics of representation and gender comes from its citation in the 1986 Final Report of the U.S. Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography and subsequent commentary.⁸² Carol S. Vance has characterized the report as “an extended rumination about visual images and their power,” in which “the panel of commissioners tenaciously clung to and aggressively advanced implicit theories of visual representation” in order to effect the Commission’s “imaginative attack on sexual pleasure and desire.”⁸³ “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” plays a supporting role in this attack when it is used to frame a chapter entitled “The Use of Performers in Commercial Pornography,” which elaborates the victimization of the (female) subjects of “pornographic” photographs and films. The chapter’s preamble opens with the following extract from Gray’s translation: “The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making....The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it” (HG 13–14).⁸⁴ The preamble continues as follows:

⁸¹ Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 93.

⁸² The Meese Report, as it is known, was the outcome of a series of hearings initiated by Reagan appointee Edwin Meese to investigate the social and legal effects of pornography. For an account of the role of visual images in the proceedings of the Commission itself see Carol S. Vance, “The Pleasure of Looking: The Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography versus Visual Images,” in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, edited by Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990).

⁸³ Vance, “The Pleasure of Looking,” 38.

⁸⁴ Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, *Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography: Final Report* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), 839. A footnote cites

The leap from “picture making” to photography was an event of profound cultural significance; it was, in Bazin's view “the most important event in the history of plastic arts.” It was, as well, the single most important event in the history of pornography: images of the human body could be captured and preserved in exact, vivid detail. As with every other visible activity, sex could now, by the miraculous power of the camera, be “freed from the conditions of time and space.”⁸⁵

The chapter concludes with a call for “special safeguards” against the participation of “every adult” in pornography, “[o]therwise she may find that photography’s freedom from time and space, so heartily welcomed by Bazin, has become her dungeon.”⁸⁶ The Report therefore uses Bazin to make a truly awesome claim: the agency and identity of the photographed individual are effectively bound to—and by—the resulting photographic artifact.⁸⁷

Amazingly, subsequent commentaries on the Meese Report and its use of Bazin barely explore the implications of the imprisoning photographic subject-identity that the Report invokes. Linda Williams begins a discussion of Meese by reprinting the same extract from the “Ontology” and remarking how it epitomizes an ideal conception of

Trachtenberg's *Classic Essays on Photography* as the source of the “Ontology.” This particular quotation elides (among other things) a couple of key passages in which Bazin introduces doubts about the ontological identity of image and model, suggesting it is a matter of irrational faith and not ontology. In Gray, these passages are translated as follows: “In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced...” and “despite the promptings of our critical intelligence [a very faithful drawing] will never have the irrational power to bear away our faith” (HG 13–14).

⁸⁵ *Final Report*, 839. This parsing of the quoted passage appears to weaken (or simply misunderstand) the claim of ontological identity, reducing the Bazinian relationship of image and model to a question of precise duplication of visual likeness—“images of the human body could be captured and preserved in exact, vivid detail.” But the commissioners’ faith in the total identity of the image is unmistakably restored by the chapter’s conclusion.

⁸⁶ *Final Report*, 899.

⁸⁷ The utopian/dystopian ambivalence suggested by the juxtaposition of Bazin’s “freedom” with Meese’s “dungeon” resonates with broader tendencies in the understanding of the power of representation. See a somewhat related discussion in Gertrud Koch, “Mimesis and *Bilderverbot*,” *Screen* 34, no. 3 (autumn 1993): 215–6. Bazin’s mummy complex figures briefly in Koch’s argument.

photography that resonates not just with the Meese commissioners but also “in popular consciousness.”⁸⁸ But Williams quickly diverges from Meese’s primary concern with the subjectivity of performers, focusing instead on the psychology of audiences. Here she also takes her cue from Bazin—not from the “Ontology,” though, but rather from the spectatorial anxiety that Bazin expresses in “Marginal Notes on *Eroticism in the Cinema*” and elsewhere.⁸⁹

Lauren Berlant also calls attention to the use of Bazin in the Meese Report. In a critical account of what she calls the “infantilizing confluence of media, citizenship, and sex,” Berlant reprints the Bazin quotation, along with a lengthy extract from Meese. Like Williams’s, though, Berlant’s concern is with the way in which the discourse around pornographic representation regulates spectatorial subjectivity.⁹⁰

By focusing on spectatorship rather than performance, Williams and Berlant miss the deeper consequences of the Meese Report’s use of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”—both for our understanding of Bazin and for our understanding of the politics of gender. These are consequences that become immediately apparent when we consider the strange ways that Meese’s use of Bazin intersects, on the one hand, with a particular set of feminist discourses that privilege an essential relationship between female subjectivity and embodiment (the “classical association of femininity with

⁸⁸ Linda Williams, “Power, Pleasure, and Perversion: Sadomasochistic Film Pornography,” *Representations* 27 (summer 1989): 37; this reference to “popular consciousness” is inexplicably missing from the longer version of the essay that appears as a chapter in Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁸⁹ Williams, *Hard Core*, 185–9.

⁹⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material),” *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 2 (summer 1995): 390–1.

materiality”⁹¹), and, on the other hand, with the more general idea of the body as a site of power relations, which has been absolutely central to identity politics from Foucault to Butler.⁹² The Bazinian claim of the ontological identity of image and model—as it is construed and mobilized in contexts like the Meese Report—has profound implications for the way we think about the intersection of cultural notions of embodiment, gender, subjectivity, and power within the psychology of the photographic artifact.

⁹¹ See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1994), 31. In film studies, the relationship between gendered subjectivity and embodiment has received ample treatment, but almost entirely in the examination of the relationship between the spectator and the screen. In her landmark essay on gender, cinema, and masquerade, Mary Ann Doane shows how the feminism of Cixous, Irigaray, and others determines the woman’s relation to her own body as one of proximity and “overwhelming presence-to-itself,” to the extent that “[f]emale specificity is thus theorized in terms of spatial proximity.” She quotes Cixous as saying: “More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body” (originally: “*En corps: plus que l’homme invité aux réussites sociales, à la sublimation, les femmes sont corps*”). Doane goes on to argue that this produces a relationship of “over-identification” between female spectators and images of women (Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23, no. 3–4 [September–October 1982]: 78–9; Hélène Cixous, “La Rire de la Méduse,” in *La Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* [Paris: Editions Galilée, 2010], 57; translated as “The Laugh of the Medusa,” translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Courtivron [New York: Schocken Books, 181], 257).

Could this same set of discourses not apply also to the relationship between the photographed woman and her own image? And is there not already an uncanny isomorphism between “presence-to-itself” of Cixous’s “les femmes sont corps” and Bazin’s “elle est le modèle”? If there is, it should not surprise us, given that both Cixous and Bazin are expressing the anteriority of self-presence in relation to the by-products of sublimation—for Cixous, the “réussites sociales” of men; for Bazin (as I will argue in a later chapter) the obsession with resemblance. If we were to consider these two ideas in tandem—the woman’s relationship of self-presence to her own body, and the identity of the photographic image with the photographed body—how might we characterize the metonymic relay of identification that determines the woman’s relationship to her own photographic image?

⁹² See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 25–31; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Volume I, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 151–2; Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 154; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1999), 176ff; and Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

Summary

I have attempted to provide a very broad survey of English-language reception of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” both in the history of film theory and elsewhere. In the course of this survey, we have seen how the “Ontology” has served as the ground for an entire theory of cinematic realism, and, in some cases, for an entire theory of cinema. But we have also seen that this realism is most often characterized in terms of visual resemblance or “spatial realism” rather than a material connection between image and object (or some other kind of relation). And we have seen how the psychological underpinnings of Bazin’s essay are often wilfully overlooked or ignored. These patterns of reception say something about the specific contexts in which the “Ontology” has been received. In the next chapter, I want to focus on how “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” has been interpreted and construed at two key moments in the history of film theory in order to serve two distinct but related theoretical arguments.

2. IDEOLOGY AND THE INDEX

I would now like to examine two particular, related moments within the history of reception of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in order to offer a sense of how Bazin’s arguments have been construed so as to advance specific film-theoretical agendas. The first of these is the well-known rejection of Bazin as part of the post-1968 politicization of French and (later) British film criticism, as epitomized in the work of *Cinéthique*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, and *Screen*. Here “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” is considered exemplary of a naïve realism to be attacked in service to the critique of bourgeois ideology. In the course of this critique, the “Ontology” is reviled for making the claim that photography and cinema can provide the illusion of a transparent representation of the world through the perfection of visual likeness.

The second moment—one which I think is closely related to the first—is the recent return to questions of medium specificity and ontology as part of the widespread discourse on cinematic “indexicality.” Here the restoration of a definition of cinematic specificity grounded in the representation of reality suggests a self-conscious moderation of the hard-line anti-realism of 1970s theory. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” is revived and redeemed as part of the project of (re-)defining the specificity of photography/cinema as opposed to that of digital imaging technologies. But this revival

also entails a shift in the way that the “Ontology” is understood. In new interpretations of the “Ontology,” the question of visual resemblance is shown to be relatively inconsequential, whereas new emphasis is placed on Bazin’s apparent claims of a direct material connection between the image and the object—a connection which supposedly results from the unique process by which photographic/cinematic images are produced. In this way, the “Ontology” is interpreted so as to suggest a fundamental, material distinction between digital images and traditional film/cinema technology.

Each of these two moments in film theory therefore engages “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in a certain way, for a certain purpose, and in so doing reduces the multiple, competing ideals that Bazin presents in the essay in order to render it useful to a particular film-theoretical agenda in a specific historical context. I will proceed here with a consideration of how the each of these two moments employs the “Ontology,” beginning with a discussion of the 1970s critique of ideology before turning to the new discourse on cinematic indexicality. I will conclude with a detailed reading of Philip Rosen’s *Change Mummified*, a text which is exemplary in its recuperation of the “Ontology” in establishing a new discourse on indexicality and cinematic referentiality.

The Rejection of Bazin in the 1970s Critique of Ideology

If we can speak of a shared understanding of film studies as both an intellectual and an institutional enterprise, and one with a reasonably coherent history, no single moment stands out more than the undertaking of a radical critique of ideology in French and British film theory and criticism of the early 1970s. More so than the *auteur*

criticism that it helped to displace, the rapid ascension of the critique of ideology supplies a founding mythology for intellectual film studies. Some reference to this moment is inevitably part of any attempt to account historically either for film studies as an academic institution or for “film theory” as a discourse.

The persistent legacy of the 1970s critique of ideology—its enduring mark on the shape of film studies as discourse and as institution—can perhaps be traced to the seemingly firm sense of purpose, grounded in a self-consciously historical narrative, which characterized the project from the beginning. This narrative was governed by the rhetoric of the “epistemological break” and a corresponding polemic in relation to what was viewed as the dominant film-theoretical tradition. The vilification of the ontology and aesthetics of André Bazin was integral to this polemic, and the banishment of Bazin from serious study in English-language film theory was its legacy.

I therefore want to consider here how Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image” came to be characterized in the course of this polemic. Above all, Bazin’s criticism was shown to be complicit in bourgeois ideology, on account of its apparent claim that photography and cinema provide the illusion of a transparent representation of the world through the perfection of visual likeness. I will proceed here first by saying something about the origins and nature of the 1970s critique of ideology before showing how Bazin and the “Ontology” came to be used within it.

The way in which a radical “critique of ideology” became a central concern after 1968 is the stuff of film-theoretical legend. There is something to be said for the remarkable consistency of various subsequent accounts of this phenomenon; each

retelling affirms the idea of a radical “epistemological break” initiated first in the writings of *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1969 and then in *Screen* beginning in 1971, and each agrees on the basic theoretical principles of the subsequent body of work.¹ The active production of this narrative was an ongoing labour from the outset, and in a sense it still continues today. What is remarkable is the consistency and the coherence of this rhetoric of a “radical break” beginning from the very moment of its inception.²

The impetus for this break with the past is almost always described not as resulting from some logic of dialectics or debate internal to the history of film theory, but rather as compelled by external socio-political factors, namely the events of May 1968.³

¹ The narrative turns up in virtually every account of the history of film theory and/or the institutionalization of film studies, but is perhaps developed most thoroughly in Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978) and Colin MacCabe, “Class of '68: Elements of an Intellectual Autobiography 1967–81,” in *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985). These two accounts actually complement each other quite nicely insofar as Harvey concentrates on events in France and at *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*, while MacCabe mainly describes the subsequent revolution at SEFT and in the pages of *Screen*. Later English-language works of note include D. N. Rodowick’s remarkable *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and Judith Mayne’s equally compelling *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993). My own understanding of the terms of 1970s theory and its peculiar history is especially indebted to Rodowick’s account.

² The notion of the “epistemological break” (*coupure épistémologique*) comes from Althusser but it resonates with similar concepts in Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault (see Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster [London: Verso, 2005], 249, 257). The question of what exactly this break might entail in both film theory and film practice was the subject of much debate in the pages of *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*; see e.g. part two of Comolli and Narboni’s “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” which consists mainly of a polemic against the positions advanced in *Cinéthique* (*Cahiers du cinéma* no. 217 [November 1969], reprinted in a translation by Susan Bennett in *Screen* 12, no. 2 [summer 1971]:145–55). An insightful consideration of the rhetoric of the “epistemological break” as it appeared in *Cinéthique*, *Cahiers*, and elsewhere is offered in Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 70–1 and passim.

³ On the events of May 1968 as impetus see, for example, MacCabe, “Class of '68,” and the extensive history that is offered in Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*. Judith Mayne advocates a less simple explanation, refusing to accept the idea that the events of 1968 were solely responsible for the shift in film theory. Mayne remarks that “[c]iting May '68 has become a reflex, and too often such narratives of the development of a field make it seem as if there is an easy, direct link between politics and intellectual life. In fact the connections are more tenuous and therefore less amenable to easy cause-and-effect explanations” (Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 6). She goes on to show the role played by the evolving

These events are said to have demanded a radical shift in the politics and methodology of film theory and criticism, a shift which was given coherence by way of an Althusserian rhetoric of epistemological distancing and rupture from all that had come before. This rhetoric was perhaps epitomized in the Comolli and Narboni editorial in *Cahiers du cinéma* in October 1969, which positioned itself against a “tradition of frivolous and evanescent writing on the cinema” and its “basically empirical method”⁴ (I will return in a moment to the question of how Comolli and Narboni tried to sever *Cahiers*’s ties with its own past by calling specifically for a rejection of Bazin and a pursuit of dialectical materialism in the vein of Eisenstein).

The “epistemological break” advocated by *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers* in France in 1969 was mirrored eighteen months later in Britain when the BFI-funded Society for Education in Film and Television abruptly revised its mandate and the editorial policy for its journal *Screen*. This change of direction was signalled initially in a manifesto of sorts by editor Sam Rohdie, which contested the dominance of “*auteur* theory” for espousing “an extreme romantic aesthetic of individual creativity.”⁵ This manifesto, which appeared in the spring of 1971, was followed by the publication, in translation, of various

nature of French film culture in the 1960s, social and political developments outside of France, particularly in the United States, and broader changes in the intellectual climate of the 1960s.

⁴ Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni, “Cinéma/idéologie/critique,” *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 216 (October 1969): 11–15; reprinted as “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” translated by Susan Bennett, *Screen* 12, no. 1 (spring 1971): 27–36.

⁵ See Sam Rohdie, “Education and Criticism: Notes on Work To Be Done,” *Screen* 12, no. 1 (spring 1971): 9–13. Rohdie’s editorial in the same issue insists that the change in editorial direction would be “less a sharp break with the past than a reconsideration of the methods and assumptions which informed that past,” but nevertheless goes on to acknowledge that “[t]he operation of self-reflection and self-criticism and the very fact of a *Screen* editorial defining a policy and making a demand for theory and practice related to it in themselves represent a significant departure.” See Rohdie, “Editorial,” *Screen* 12, no. 1 (spring 1971): 4. See also Roger Watkins, “Chairman’s Foreword,” *Screen* 12, no. 1 (spring 1971): 7–8. For a retrospective account of this “political rupture” see Colin MacCabe, “Class of ’68,” 5.

editorials and other material from both *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers* (beginning in that same issue with Comolli and Narboni's "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism"). For years, the rhetoric of the break was tirelessly renewed in *Screen* with similar pronouncements against ideological complicity on the part of film theory and criticism.⁶

Even after the fervour of polemical ideological criticism waned in the late 1970s, the pervasiveness of the *narrative* of the "epistemological break" was nevertheless sustained with remarkable consistency and coherence in English-language film studies—complete with the coining of the term "1970s theory" as convenient shorthand with which to circumscribe the accomplishments of the era. Indeed, perhaps more so than in any other humanities discipline, an idiosyncratic propensity for self-conscious historiography remains a dominant feature within the rhetoric of theoretical work in film studies. And so the mythic coherence of 1970s theory, founded as it was on the staging of this socio-politically compelled rupture, has had amazing resilience and has been retained in nearly all subsequent accounts of film theory.

The political and methodological commitments of 1970s theory are therefore well rehearsed and well known. I will provide only the most cursory of summaries here. Politically, 1970s theory was explicitly committed to the Marxist critique of mainstream cinema's perpetuation of bourgeois ideology; methodologically, it was governed by the practice of close formal explication of cinematic texts, in accordance with principles

⁶ As when, a full two years after the 1971 editorial proclaiming the shift in *Screen*'s mandate, Stephen Heath introduced a special number on the work of Christian Metz by insisting that the issue's authors were unanimous in arguing that "there is a crucial and urgent necessity to finish with the flow of (ideologically complicit) drivel that currently and massively passes as 'film-criticism'" (Stephen Heath, "Introduction: Questions of Emphasis," *Screen* 14, no. 1–2 [spring–summer 1973]: 9).

derived from a theoretical triumvirate consisting of (certain received versions of) Althusserian Marxism, Saussurean-Barthesian-Metzian structural linguistics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁷ The way forward for film theory and criticism, as prescribed in the editorials of *Screen* and elsewhere, was thus to be located in the intersection of a distinct political commitment, a unique weft of theoretical concepts (Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis), and an engagement in the practice of close textual analysis.⁸

Inherent in this mandate was the assumption of a qualitative and analytical distinction between the ideological complicity of classical, realist films and the revolutionary potential of avant-garde, materialist, or modernist film practice, as laid out most famously in the 1969 *Cahiers* editorial by Comolli and Narboni, and elaborated subsequently in the pages of *Screen* by Peter Wollen, Colin MacCabe, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey, and countless others. What is at stake in the basic distinction between ideologically complicit and avant-garde film practice is the interpellation of spectators as

⁷ Among the many accounts of this specific combination of theories, see, e.g., MacCabe, "Class of '68," 3; and Philip Rosen, "'Screen' and the Marxist Project in Film Criticism," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 2, no. 3 (August 1977): 273–87. See also Ben Brewster et al., "Editorial," *Screen* 16, no. 2 (summer 1975): 4–6; and Stephen Heath, "On Screen, In Frame: Film and Ideology," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (August 1976): 251–265; Althusser and Lacan are not mentioned by name in Heath's overview, but are acknowledged in a note as sources of the ideas he presents.

⁸ Classic examples of the putting into practice of this marriage of theory and rigorous textual analysis include the 1970 *Cahiers* collective text on John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* (translated in *Screen* in 1972) and Stephen Heath's exhaustive, two-part analysis of *Touch of Evil*, which appeared in *Screen* in the spring and summer of 1975. The first instalment of Heath's text was preceded by a Ben Brewster editorial situating Heath's work in the post-1968 *Cahiers* "tradition." Both the *Cahiers* piece and Heath's are self-consciously presented as templates for a methodology of close analysis (hence the sub-title of Heath's article: "Terms of Analysis"). See The Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, "« Young Mr. Lincoln » de John Ford," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 223 (August 1970): 29–47; "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," translated by Helen Lackner and Diana Matias, *Screen* 13, no. 3 (autumn 1972): 4–44; Ben Brewster, "Editorial," *Screen* 16, no. 1 (spring 1975): 5–6; Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part I," *Screen* 16, no. 1 (spring 1975): 7–77; and "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part II," *Screen* 16, no. 2 (summer 1975): 91–113. See also the insightful commentary on both of these analyses in David Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 84–7, 93–4.

subjects within the dominant ideology. This Althusser-inspired idea of both film texts and cinematic institutions (e.g., the darkened auditorium) as interpellating subjects within ideology was complemented by a vaguely Lacanian understanding of a lacking, desiring subject-spectator who is inherently susceptible to the ideological lure offered by those texts. If mainstream films were shown to exploit this position of the spectator in the perpetuation of the dominant ideology, then, conversely, the radical form of avant-garde cinema was thought to demand or provoke a correspondingly radical spectatorial response.

On the basis of this distinction, it has been said that 1970s theory was the first to theorize systematically the subjectivity of film spectators.⁹ This is not to say that the Althusserian-Lacanian theory of spectatorship is not inherently problematic. D. N. Rodowick has perhaps offered the most exhaustive criticism of the logic by which spectatorial subjectivity is shown to be entirely the product of the film's formal system.¹⁰ But even as attacks on the Althusserian-Lacanian model continue to accumulate,¹¹ there is nevertheless a widely acknowledged sense of debt to 1970s theory for what is seen as

⁹ MacCabe, for example, remarks that "the use of linguistics as a model to study these systems [of signification] led to enormous gains at the level of the specificity of the analyses, but more important was the attempt to link questions of signification to questions of subjectivity" (MacCabe, "Class of '68," 6). See also the extensive accounts in Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism* and Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*.

¹⁰ Rodowick has suggested that this originated from a misreading, predominantly by the members of *Tel Quel*, of the way in which the Lacanian subject is constituted in relation to language, and in particular the mistaken assumption that the subject is constituted *entirely* by language; see *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 209.

¹¹ For one of the more notorious examples of this, see David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). For an early example of a sustained criticism of the *Screen* theory of spectatorship, see Andrew Britton, "The Ideology of Screen," *Movie* 26 (winter 1978–9): 2–28. Britton's piece is preceded by an editorial calling for a challenge to *Screen*'s "avant-garde intellectual 'terrorism'." See Ian Cameron, "Editorial," *Movie* 26 (winter 1978–9): 1.

its role in opening up and shifting the focus of film-theoretical work to address the question of spectatorial subjectivity.¹² We can remark, in passing, a major assumption that is contained within this view, namely that film theory prior to the 1970s—including that of Bazin—failed entirely to address questions of spectatorship or subjectivity.¹³

With all this in mind, we can now examine the role played by a rejection of Bazin within the constitution of the 1970s critique of ideology. We have seen how the rhetoric of the “epistemological break” both in French and English-language criticism necessitated the refusal of a certain film-theoretical legacy. The immediate and thorough “repudiation” of the work of André Bazin especially has been well noted.¹⁴ What I am especially concerned with here are the implications of this refusal for strategies of interpretation of Bazin’s “Ontology” in particular—both in its own right, and to the extent that the “Ontology” was thought of as subtending Bazin’s realist aesthetic of the cinema. I will proceed here by first saying something about how the rejection of Bazinian realism helped to organize the new directions that were to be sought at *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers*, before considering in a bit more detail the way that the Bazinian ontology surfaced in the pages of *Screen*.

¹² See especially the ambivalence that characterizes Mayne’s *Cinema and Spectatorship* and Rodowick’s *Crisis of Political Modernism*. Rodowick begins his Preface to the Second Edition, written in 1994, with the observation that “[t]oday I find that the 1970s, or what I call the era of political modernism, is often treated with an equal mixture of pride and embarrassment” (*The Crisis of Political Modernism*, vii).

¹³ It is this assumption which Philip Rosen will challenge in his redemptive reading of Bazin in *Change Mummified* (see below).

¹⁴ See e.g. Dudley Andrew’s discussions in *André Bazin*, 104, n. 15, and in the Forewords to the 2004 Editions of *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, xxi–xxii and Volume 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xx–xxii.

Cinéthique and *Cahiers*

Sylvia Harvey has compellingly shown how the arguments that appeared in both *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1969, framed as a general rejection of the complicity of film criticism in the perpetuation of bourgeois ideology, need to be understood as a direct rejection of André Bazin's realist aesthetic and of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" specifically. Harvey describes how, after 1968, both *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers* engaged in

a confrontation with what was regarded as the existing, dominant, idealist tradition in film aesthetics, which stemmed in France from the writings of André Bazin, and which revolved around the question of realism, or, as *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* referred to it, around the 'impression of reality' produced in the cinema.¹⁵

This is evident enough in the *Cahiers* editorial by Comolli and Narboni, which contains the following allusion to Bazin:

Clearly, the cinema 'reproduces' reality: this is what a camera and film stock are for—so says the ideology. But the tools and techniques of film-making are a part of 'reality' themselves, and furthermore 'reality' is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology. Seen in this light, the classic theory of cinema that the camera is an impartial instrument which grasps, or rather is impregnated by, the world in its 'concrete reality' is an eminently reactionary one. What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology. Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself.¹⁶

In this way the "classic theory of cinema" (surely a thinly veiled "Ontology of the Photographic Image") is shown itself to be ideologically complicit along with the realist cinema that it venerates. Comolli and Narboni do eventually name Bazin himself as the theorist responsible for the "first steps" of material engagement with films (making him

¹⁵ Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, 106.

¹⁶ Comolli and Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," 30.

the only theorist so named), but one whose work must be surpassed and overcome on the way to “a specific method of apprehending rigorously defined objects, in direct reference to the method of dialectical materialism” of which Eisenstein is the finest exemplar.¹⁷ This rejection of Bazin was, of course, all the more virulent given Bazin’s own intimate involvement in the founding of *Cahiers*; with the publication of the Comolli/Narboni editorial, the magazine had, as Dudley Andrew describes it, “turned on Bazin like Brutus on Caesar.”¹⁸

Harvey shows a similar attack on Bazin as having occurred in the pages of *Cinéthique*. This is exemplified in Jean-Paul Fargier’s “Parenthesis or Indirect Route,” which, like the Comolli/Narboni editorials, would eventually be translated and reprinted in *Screen* following the shift in that journal’s editorial direction in early 1971. Harvey suggests that it is the Bazinian “Ontology” which is targeted in Fargier’s description of the unique ideological function of cinema. According to Fargier, in addition to the function of reproducing “existing ideologies,” it is also the function of cinema to supply “the impression of reality.” It is worth quoting his description of this ideological function:

It PRODUCES its own ideology: THE IMPRESSION OF REALITY. There is nothing on the screen, only reflections and shadows, and yet the first idea that the audience gets is that reality is there, as it really is....The first thing people do is deny the existence of the screen: it opens like a *window*, it ‘is’ *transparent*. This illusion is the very substance of the specific ideology secreted by the cinema.¹⁹

¹⁷ Comolli and Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” 35.

¹⁸ Andrew, Foreword the 2004 Edition, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 2, xx.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Fargier, “Parenthesis or Indirect Route,” *Screen* 12, no 2 (summer 1971): 136–7; emphasis original.

Harvey maintains that this constitutes an explicit polemic against Bazin, telling us that Fargier's description of his imagined cinema audience's misrecognition only "begins to make more sense in the context of an examination of the aesthetic of realism developed by Bazin; it becomes more comprehensible as a response to what were regarded as the potentially reactionary implications of that realist aesthetic."²⁰ Harvey then recalls the value assigned to "objectivity" and "credibility" in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," suggesting that it is precisely the lure of epistemological assurance offered by these two ideals which will be targeted by the materialist critique of ideology:

The key notions for *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* are 'objectivity' and 'credibility' since both are used in Bazin's work to support the notion that the cinema shows us things as they are, that it presents reality 'automatically' with the minimum of distortion or interference from the unknown hand, eyes and brain that are situated behind the camera.²¹

In this way, Harvey tacitly accepts the validity of the interpretation of the "Ontology" that grounds the criticisms of both *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique*, namely that it claims photography/cinema provide a transparent window on reality. Harvey further justifies this interpretation, arguing that "Bazin's aesthetics are rooted within the mimetic theory of art," within which

the proper goal of the film image, like that of Renaissance and post-Renaissance painting right up to the time of the Cubists, is the production of the most perfect illusion of reality which is taken to be unproblematically 'given'. The photographic image, like a mirror, is seen to reflect the world without distortion.²²

This is a telling bit of interpretive work on Harvey's part. Clarifying a point that is perhaps not immediately clear in the original editorials, Harvey locates the grounds of

²⁰ Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, 106–7.

²¹ Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, 107.

²² Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, 107.

Fargier's and Comolli and Narboni's ideological critique squarely within the problematic of mimetic representation, and more specifically that of illusionistic visual likeness (I think this is already evident in Fargier's evocative use of the Bazinian metaphor of the "window," which Harvey herself does not remark on). By reading the "Ontology" in a way that emphasizes the correlation and continuity between the mimetic ideals of photography/cinema and realist painting, Harvey makes a case for Bazin's susceptibility to attack on the basis of his valorizing cinema's promise of natural, unmediated, or transparent visual representation.²³

Screen

This kind of criticism of Bazin will also surface repeatedly in the English-language theory that dominates the pages of *Screen* from 1971 onward. As we have seen, this direction was set in advance with *Screen*'s translation and reprinting of key editorials from *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique*, but it would soon be taken up in original work by Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, Peter Wollen, and others. For contributors to *Screen* such as MacCabe especially, the concern was often as much with the general idea of "realism," irrespective of medium, as it was with the notion of a specifically cinematic ontology which naturalized the impression of transparency or illusion. I think it will be useful to consider briefly the place of Bazin within the broader critique of "realism" in *Screen*

²³ The critique of the naturalism of Renaissance perspective (for which the "window" is the predominant metaphor) was central to the work of apparatus theorists such as Baudry and, later, to that of Stephen Heath on narrative space. I will eventually return to this specific problem when I consider Bazin's own discussion of perspective in the "Ontology."

before examining a couple of contributions that discuss “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” specifically.

Much of the work of *Screen* in the mid-1970s was concerned with a broad critique of the notion of “realism” as it applied to both cinema and literature. Frequently this critique was complemented by calls for principles of Brechtian distanciation to be adopted by a revolutionary cinema.²⁴ But not all of the critiques of realism appearing in *Screen* are necessarily accompanied by calls for a countercinema (Brechtian or otherwise); at times the spectre of realism is raised simply to be attacked as a tool of bourgeois ideology. Drawing on the principles which informed the Althusserian critique of ideology in general, the primary strategy in such instances involves the unmasking of realism’s status as a self-naturalizing, self-effacing, and contingent construction.

On more than one occasion, Bazin was shown to be a conspirator in this procedure of self-effacement, with his championing of a realist aesthetic being taken for ideological complicity. The widely accepted characterization of Bazin as an apologist for realism apparently made gratuitous Bazin-criticism into a fruitful endeavour in its own right. An early example of this occurs in Christopher Williams’s “Bazin on Neo-Realism,” which appeared in a special number of *Screen* on Rossellini.²⁵ The article contributes little if anything to our understanding of Rossellini, and ostensibly serves no purpose other than to quote heavily from a number of Bazin’s essays on neo-realism at

²⁴ As in the case of one of the better known essays by Colin MacCabe, namely “Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses,” *Screen* 15, no. 2 (summer 1974): 7–27.

²⁵ Christopher Williams, “Bazin on Neo-Realism,” *Screen* 14, no. 4 (winter 1973–4): 61–68.

length in order “to question their contradictions and gaps.”²⁶ After seven long pages of this exercise, Williams arrives at the conclusion that

the brutal probability about his writings on neo-realism is that like so much writing done in the heat of a movement or the flush of a fashion they provide more insights into what may well be a perennial or recurrent way of looking at the cinema than knowledge about it. Only a historical/ideological reading could generate much meaning from them now.²⁷

The form of the question thus pre-determined the response: Bazin’s realist aesthetic has been revealed in its historical contingency, and therefore lacks theoretical value except insofar as it can be studied as an artifact of the dominant ideology.

This procedure is taken a step further in one of Colin MacCabe’s better-known essays, “Theory and Film,” which strongly resonates with the rhetoric of *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique* in placing Bazin firmly on the wrong side of a decisive “epistemological break.”²⁸ For MacCabe, realism is, independently of medium, associated with the dialogic process by which the multifaceted components of reality are invisibly smoothed into a single, non-contradictory system, thus masking reality’s inherently contradictory nature. In MacCabe’s argument, Bazin comes to exemplify the position of “realist theorists,” a position which is itself complicit with the self-effacing gesture of aesthetic realist practice. For MacCabe, this complicity is epitomized in the passage from Bazin’s essay on *Bicycle Thieves* which culminates in the ironic declaration of “no more cinema.” In quoting that passage at length, MacCabe summarizes Bazin’s position as follows: “The revelation of reality is the prime task of the cinema and all aesthetic devices are simply

²⁶ Williams, “Bazin on Neo-Realism,” 61.

²⁷ Williams, “Bazin on Neo-Realism,” 67.

²⁸ Colin MacCabe, “Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure,” *Screen* 17, no. 3 (autumn 1976): 7–27.

there to unmake themselves so that we too can experience, as the artist experienced before us, that moment at which reality presents itself as whole.”²⁹ This neatly establishes an unambiguous position in relation to which MacCabe can posit a radical alternative: “Against this traditional analysis, I argue that film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather that film is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the position allowed to subject and object) produces a certain reality.”³⁰ This is a pseudo-reality which masks the contradictions of the real: “It is contradiction that Bazin wishes at all costs to conceal and [it is] coherence that furnishes him with his crucial emphasis.”³¹ While MacCabe is here dealing mainly with realism at the level of narrative (and thus arguably independent of medium), it is worth noting the way in which, with its system of metaphors of transparency and concealment couched within the overall strategy of unmasking the duplicity of the “impression of reality,” his argument in essence follows the basic outline of the earlier ideological criticism of mimetic representation in *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique*.

And so it is as part of this general anti-realist milieu that the name “Bazin” circulated in the pages of *Screen*. This is also the milieu in which the “Ontology” essay specifically came to be considered. In an article by Andrew Tudor, for example, the Bazinian ontology is defined only in order to delegitimize it as a suitable foundation for a realist aesthetic. Tudor interrogates the “Ontology” as part of his larger unmasking of

²⁹ MacCabe, “Theory and Film,” 11.

³⁰ MacCabe, “Theory and Film,” 11.

³¹ MacCabe, “Theory and Film,” 13.

“The Many Mythologies of Realism;”³² in this respect, Tudor’s concern is less with the composition of the “Ontology” per se as with its legitimacy as the ground for a theory of realism. Indeed, this endeavour appears under the auspices of a *Screen* special number “on problems of realism in the cinema.” The issue begins with an editorial which surveys the terrain of both realist theory and practice: “Most theoretical writing on the cinema has adopted a ‘realist’ perspective...It is one of the strategies of the practice of realism in the cinema to make what appears on the screen self-evident and natural, a ‘truth’.” Against this tradition, Tudor’s article is heralded as “demystifying the notion of realism by questioning its descriptive relevance and pointing out the relativism of the term: there are many realisms and these realisms are themselves artistic conventions.”³³ Tudor’s work is therefore actually twofold: to undermine the Bazinian realist aesthetic by questioning the logic of its grounding in the basic properties of photography; and, to further de-legitimize it by showing the existence of multiple, competing notions of realism.

Tudor begins by pointing out that Bazin’s aesthetics is akin to Siegfried Kracauer’s insofar as it “depends for its cogency on an analysis of the nature of photography.”³⁴ It is this dependency that Tudor sets out to challenge. He locates the origins of the Bazinian aesthetic within the “Ontology” essay, revealing that “the effective kernel of the argument is that the essence of film is photography, [and] photography’s principle [sic] characteristic is that it impassively reveals the world, and so

³² Andrew Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” *Screen* 13, no. 1 (spring 1972): 27–35.

³³ Sam Rohdie, “Editorial,” *Screen* 13, no. 1 (spring 1972): 2, 3.

³⁴ Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” 29.

film will *fulfil its true nature* by doing likewise.”³⁵ Among the “endless traps and blind-alleys in this argument,”³⁶ Tudor isolates three problems for further consideration, with his response to each superceding the one before it in a kind of kettle logic. First, Tudor views the attempt to ground aesthetics in ontology as a disingenuous manoeuvre intended to skirt the inevitable problem of subjectivity which is inherent to aesthetic judgement: “To justify realism by reference to ‘essences’ is simply to push the subjective assessment one step back and so claim it as being independent of personal response.”³⁷ The authority of aesthetic judgement is deferred through recourse to ontological essence. Second, Tudor denies that photography reveals reality at all, and points out the extent to which human intervention plays a part in photographic recording.³⁸ Finally, apparently restating his first point, Tudor insists that there is not even “the possibility of an objective basis for assessing aesthetic value,” be it derived from the essence of photography or anything else.³⁹

All of these arguments are thus brought to bear in Tudor’s critique of the Bazinian realist aesthetic. And yet it is not just Bazinian realism that is in question here, but rather

³⁵ Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” 29; emphasis original.

³⁶ Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” 29.

³⁷ Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” 29.

³⁸ The relationship between these two points is more thoughtfully elaborated in Tudor’s *Theories of Film*, where the observation is made that the Bazinian definition of essence—in which the realist aesthetic is grounded—is ripe for contestation: “What is the ‘essence’ of film to one man may well be the residue to another.” Tudor suggests that both Bazin and Kracauer “wish to found all aesthetic judgements on the central characteristics of the medium *as they perceive them*” (Tudor, *Theories of Film*, 78, 79; emphasis original). *Theories of Film* is also notable for Tudor’s effort to grapple with what he sees as the “dubious distinction between the two sorts of realism” that Bazin establishes in the “Ontology,” and which Tudor views as resurfacing throughout Bazin’s writings as an irreconcilable contradiction. Tudor calls one a “pure” realism of absolute identity and the other a “spatial” realism, with the latter increasingly dominating Bazin’s writings (*Theories of Film*, 99–104). I will deal with the issue of true versus ersatz (or aesthetic versus psychological) realism as it is presented in the “Ontology” in due course.

³⁹ Tudor, “The Many Mythologies of Realism,” 30.

realisms of all stripes. Tudor goes on to show the Soviets and the German expressionists to be equally guilty of presenting relative notions of realism as timeless and absolute. Similarly to Williams, then, Tudor dismisses realism not so much by showing how it is ideologically complicit in masking reality, but by showing its absolute relativity; if Bazin and the Soviets can each claim their realism as the true one, then clearly neither is.

Wollen, Ontology, and Materialism

Perhaps the most intriguing and extensive use of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in the pages of *Screen* is made in Peter Wollen’s important essay “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film.”⁴⁰ Here Wollen construes the Bazinian ontology in a certain way in order to arbitrate between two competing tendencies in modernist cinema, namely the “post-Brechtian aesthetic” of Godard, Straub, Oshima, et al., on the one hand, and the “ontological materialism” of Snow, Sharits, et al., on the other hand, while at the same time sufficiently distancing each from the idealism inherent to the Bazinian position *and* maintaining a place for semiology within modernism.⁴¹ In so doing, Wollen follows earlier work in France and at *Screen* in narrowly construing the Bazinian ontology by assimilating its ideals to those of visual likeness.

At the risk of greatly simplifying the problem that Wollen sets out to address, we can say that what is at issue, essentially, is whether genuinely modernist cinema ought to convey any content, meaning, or signification other than the non-signifying materiality of the medium itself (light, film grain, etc.). Wollen unmistakably favours a modernist

⁴⁰ Peter Wollen, “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” *Screen* 17, no. 1 (spring 1976): 7–23.

⁴¹ See the excellent discussion in Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 147ff.

cinema that retains the capacity for ideological critique through the representation of social reality—a practice of which Brecht would be the figurehead and Godard the finest exemplar. It is a defense of this preferred practice—which Rodowick terms “semiotic modernism”⁴²—at which Wollen will arrive only after having navigated between the Scylla of Bazinian ontological idealism and the Charybdis of Greenbergian ontological materialism.

I am mainly concerned here with the role that “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” plays in all of this. For Wollen, indeed, the “Ontology” seems to function, despite the deference with which it is treated, neither as a viable argument nor as a position with which to engage directly. Rather, it serves as an absolute limit-case—a zero-degree position—in relation to which he can elaborate the terms of contention which distinguish the “two avant-gardes” (Greenbergian modernism will supply the opposite extreme). This necessitates Wollen’s reading of the “Ontology” in a certain way in order to make its terms sufficiently amenable to the modernist/materialist debate. I will focus here on a couple of main points.

First, Wollen presents the greatest consequence of the photographic process, as Bazin describes it, as being its capacity for the production of convincing visual likenesses on the model of human perception. This is perhaps an odd conclusion for Wollen to have arrived at, given that he begins his essay with a lengthy and, I think, somewhat admiring survey of the various analogies by which Bazin implies the very ontological identity of

⁴² Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 159.

image and model.⁴³ But Wollen's exploration of these analogies culminates in the decidedly underwhelming assertion that "Bazin saw *the destiny of the cinema* as the *recreation* of the world in its own direct *image*."⁴⁴ Alluding to the narrative of technological development that Bazin outlines in "The Myth of Total Cinema," Wollen claims that, for Bazin, the ultimate goal of photographic technology is the production of visual likenesses, of "corresponding...to the ubiquitous crispness of natural perception."⁴⁵

Wollen equates this ideal with a desire for the total eradication of any trace of language (i.e., of cultural systems of signification). He thus describes "Bazin's vision of cinema, a cinema whose essence was elsewhere, in the pro-filmic event, and which, because of the automatism of photographic registration, could efface language and render it transparent much more successfully than any other medium."⁴⁶ Obviously Wollen is already looking ahead to his need to address the problem of signification and film language in modernist cinema, but I think it is worth noting, in passing, how this

⁴³ Wollen points to the photograph of the shroud of Turin that accompanies the "Ontology" in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* before describing the essay's "numerous analogies, well-known by now, between photography and the moulding of a death-mask, the preservation of a fly in amber, mummification." Wollen eventually describes how Bazin would "assert that the ontology of the photographic image was inseparable from the ontology of its model, even that it was identical to it. By natural optical and photochemical processes, the being of the pro-filmic event (the objects within the camera's field of vision) was transferred to the being of the film itself, the image sequence registered and subsequently projected" (Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," 7–8).

⁴⁴ Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," 8; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," 8. As we shall see, the narrative of technological development toward perfect visual illusion plays only a small role within Bazin's broader understanding of the importance of photography/cinema and its "ontology." Wollen himself was well aware that the "Ontology" points to something greater than a mere relationship of visual resemblance between image and object. His catalogue of analogies in "'Ontology' and 'Materialism'" (the mould, death mask, etc.) is more or less the same one he gives in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* to show the assimilability of the Bazinian ontology to Peircean indexicality. In *Signs and Meaning*, Wollen goes on to state unequivocally that "[r]ealism, for Bazin, had little to do with mimesis...It was the existential bond between fact and image, world and film, which counted for most in Bazin's aesthetic, rather than any quality of similitude or resemblance" (see Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972], 125, 132–4). We will come back to Wollen's discussion of cinematic indexicality shortly.

⁴⁶ Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," 8.

assessment introduces a telling ambivalence into Wollen's characterization of the Bazinian ideal. This is an ambivalence between, on the one hand, a Bazinian ideal, already laid out, in which pure cinema is the *absence* of language to the extent that it is identical with natural perception—a direct revelation of reality unmediated by signification—and, on the other hand, one in which the ideal is the total *transparency* of language (the self-effacement of the realist aesthetic, along the lines, perhaps, of the Barthesian “message without a code,”⁴⁷ and as epitomized in Bazin's own ironic declaration of “no more cinema” in the essay on *Bicycle Thieves*). But let us set this problem aside in order to deal with what I see as the second main issue arising from Wollen's use of the “Ontology.”⁴⁸

This is the question of what, exactly, the “essence” of cinema is for Bazin and how it relates to the practices of modernism. Wollen's main concern is to arbitrate between two competing programs for cinematic modernism, namely “ontological materialism” and “semiotic modernism.” Each of these relies to some degree on a foregrounding of the “materials” of filmmaking, and so, in Wollen's view, each bears some relation to the Bazinian project of determining the essential properties of photography/cinema, even as the desired outcome for modernism is essentially the opposite of what Bazin envisaged:

From ‘What is cinema?’ to ‘the ontology of film’: we have passed from an ontology basing itself on the possibility, inherent in the photo-chemical process, of reproducing natural objects and events without human intervention, to the

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *Image–Music–Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 17.

⁴⁸ A sustained criticism of Wollen's treatment of semiotics, signification, and language pervades Rodowick's account of the essay; see especially *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 159–75 passim.

conscious exploration of the full range of properties of the photo-chemical process, and other processes involved in film-making, in the interest of combatting, or at least setting up an alternative to, the cinema of reproduction or representation, mimesis or illusion.⁴⁹

Implicit within this passage is the understanding that Bazin and the modernists share a common concern with—and understanding of—the material properties and processes which essentially define the medium, even as they sought radically different ends. The Bazinian ontology—taken as the ground for photographic/cinematic specificity—is therefore identified with some material aspect of the medium and with a corresponding set of physical processes. Wollen scarcely substantiates this in relation to Bazin’s own text. Instead he speaks on Bazin’s behalf as follows: “By natural optical and photo-chemical processes, the being of the pro-filmic event...was transferred to the being of the film itself...”⁵⁰ I will reserve comment on this statement except to suggest that Bazin’s claim for the specificity of photography/cinema in fact points elsewhere. As Wollen proceeds with his discussion of Paul Sharits, Jean-Marie Straub, etc., the catalogue of what might constitute the essential “material substrate” of cinema proliferates, eventually including film grain, sprocket holes, etc. In this way, the delineation of specificity in the Bazinian “Ontology” implicitly comes to be assimilated to the obsession with physical materiality and process most strongly associated with ontological modernism.

Wollen’s essay therefore demonstrates how easily the complexity of the “Ontology” can be overlooked in order to suit the demands of a localized argument. In

⁴⁹ Wollen, “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” 11; notice again how “mimesis” and “illusion” serve as the ideals to be challenged. Wollen also recognizes that this entails an apparent shift from idealism to materialism; see “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” 12.

⁵⁰ Wollen, “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” 7.

the case of Wollen, on the one hand, the Bazinian representational ideal is reduced to the production of perfectly illusionistic visual likenesses, and, on the other hand, the essence of photography/cinema is reduced to a material fact, namely the nature of the photo-chemical process. These moves are necessary in order for Wollen to arbitrate the merits of various modes of cinematic modernism which are nevertheless antithetical to the Bazinian ideal.

More broadly, Wollen's reading conforms to the way in which the Bazinian representational ideal has been construed as part of the critique of ideology in France and England after 1968. In keeping with the principle of the "epistemological break," this movement initiated a polemic against what was viewed as the dominant film-theoretical tradition; in keeping with the principle of demystification, modes of illusionistic representation were shown to be self-effacing perpetuations of the dominant ideology. Within this framework, Bazin's "Ontology" epitomized the reactionary celebration of cinema's illusionistic deceit, inscribing the ideological function within itself in offering the promise of a transparent window opening out onto reality.

The Redemption of Bazin in the New Theories of Cinematic Indexicality

If cinematic medium specificity was of interest for 1970s film theory, it was only to the extent that it might say something about cinema's complicity in the perpetuation of bourgeois ideology, or, conversely, the possibility of a radical countercinema modelled after the principles of aesthetic modernism. It is in an entirely different light that specificity has returned as a primary concern in recent mainstream film theory. Here, the

inquiry into photographic/cinematic specificity is part of an explicit attempt to reckon with the implications of the proliferation of new “digital” imaging technologies. This kind of inquiry has greatly expanded in recent years, to the extent that it is arguably the most dominant trend to have occupied film theory in a generation. A detailed account of the emergence of these film-versus-digital photography debates is beyond the scope of my work here; I am principally concerned with the place within them of the concept of “indexicality”—a concept which in this context is effectively inseparable from a certain understanding of Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” even as it has now also come to be inseparable from anxiety concerning digital technology. Bazin’s “Ontology” has therefore been central to the recent reckoning of the difference between traditional and digital imaging technologies. This has in turn helped to precipitate a restoration of Bazin’s reputation within mainstream film theory.

What we are concerned with, then, is the way in which “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” has come to play a part in the new discourse on indexicality. I will proceed first with some general remarks on the very concept of photographic/cinematic “indexicality” and the place of the “Ontology” in its development. I will then say something about the contemporary intellectual context within which the recent discourse on indexicality has emerged, focusing on the tenor of this discourse, its self-conscious situation within the history of film theory, and on what this means for the reception of Bazin. Finally, I will offer a detailed analysis of Philip Rosen’s reading of Bazin in *Change Mummified*. I think Rosen’s work is exemplary of the way in which new reading strategies for the Bazinian “Ontology” have coincided with a renewed interest in

indexicality—and with a renewed concern with cinema’s relation to the real in general—in light of the advent of digital technology.

The Concept of Indexicality: A Short History

The idea of “indexicality” is largely taken for granted in recent film theory. Within this recent work, the concept is most often implicated in attempts to differentiate between so-called “traditional” and “digital” imaging techniques. Indeed, this ongoing project of differentiation often comes down to the isolation of indexicality as the unique property of traditional photographic/cinematic images; “indexicality” therefore supplies both the kernel of cinematic medium specificity and the marker of pure difference between film and digital images. Let us examine how this difference is usually established.

Engagement with the term “indexicality” varies from attempts at rigorous definition to casual allusions, and no theorist ever seems to use it in exactly the same way. But I think there is nevertheless a minimum, standard set of inferred meanings that have come to be associated with it. “Indexicality” is almost always used to describe an identifiable, medium-essential trait of analogue photographic/cinematic representations, one which results from a specific technological process, and which affords representations a privileged relationship with reality. The process in question is that by which the photographic/cinematographic apparatus automatically generates an image or likeness of a real, time-bound object on film. By virtue of this process itself, the resulting photographic image is described as enjoying a privileged link to, or even shared identity

with, the object it represents—the image is, in other words, “indexical.” This special relationship or bond between image and object implicitly serves, in turn, as a guarantee of the past reality of the represented object. Defined in this way, indexicality is understood as resulting from the means by which the image is produced—photochemical registration—and not a positively identifiable feature of the resulting visual representation, which is nevertheless affected by it; it is common to speak of a given photograph or film as “indexical” or “not indexical” on the basis of knowledge of the means by which it was produced. Notice the way in which the definition therefore offers a reassuringly clear distinction between the statuses of photographic objects, despite the intangibility of the trait in question; this is telling given the extent to which recent concern with indexicality is bound up with anxious attempts to differentiate between traditional and digital image technologies.

This meaning and use of the term “indexicality” in film theory are the result of a very strange genealogy that I do not think has been sufficiently explored. We should begin by distinguishing between the origins of the word itself and those of the specific, idiosyncratic meanings it has acquired in film theory. The term was imported into mainstream film theory in 1970 by Peter Wollen in the now-canonical work *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. Wollen cannily views C. S. Peirce’s tripartite distinction between iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs as a useful means of understanding the properties of cinema as a representational medium which benefits from a complex, triply manifest relationship to reality. Wollen uses the Peircean triad to suggest cinema’s unique aesthetic ability in relation to other media, and furthermore to suggest the

qualitative differences between various specific modes of cinematic textuality that exploit the symbolic, iconic, and indexical properties of cinema to varying degrees with varying effects.

I will not weigh in on the contentious issue of whether the complexity of Peirce's "semeiotic" has been done sufficient justice in Wollen or in film studies generally; to do so would take us too far afield.⁵¹ But for our purposes it is absolutely essential to understand that Wollen's argument does not rely on Peirce alone; rather, Wollen's case for cinema's indexicality ultimately derives from the yoking of the Peircean semeiotic to aspects of Bazin's "Ontology of the Photographic Image."⁵² It is only by supplying a series of Bazinian analogies that Wollen comes to articulate fully his view of cinematic indexicality. Wollen writes:

Bazin's starting point is an ontology of the photographic image. His conclusions are remarkably close to those of Peirce. Time and again Bazin speaks of photography in terms of a mould, a death mask, a Veronica, the Holy Shroud of Turin, a relic, an imprint... Thus Bazin repeatedly stresses the existential bond

⁵¹ Although see the thorough treatment of this problem in Martin Lefebvre and Marc Furstenau, "Digital Editing and Montage: The Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond," *Cinémas* 13, no. 1–2 (2002): 69–107, especially 90ff. Conversely, Daniel Morgan makes the claim that the equation of Bazin's "Ontology" with the Peircean "indexical" is equally unfair to Bazin; see Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 447–9. See also a similar argument in Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," *Differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 32–3; and Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 34–8. The latter article, which expresses skepticism about the idea of radical difference between traditional and digital images, begins with the following unmistakable allusion to the "Ontology": "If Freud had subjected one of the West's central ideologies—historical progress—to psychoanalysis, he might have discovered the primary psychic operation of displacement operating behind our constant impetus toward ever-greater perfection" (Gunning, "What's the Point," 23).

Perhaps the single most concerted effort to relate the Peircean index to photography is Philippe Dubois, *L'Acte photographique et autres essais* (Paris: Editions Labor, 1990). On the other hand, one recent book-length study of connections between Peirce and cinema sidesteps the film-theoretical usage of the term "indexicality" entirely; Johannes Ehrat makes only a single, passing reference to the "index"—in relation to "various elaborate methods...used to denote the actual existence of the real" in documentary practice. See Ehrat, *Cinema and Semiotic: Peirce and Film Aesthetics, Narration, and Representation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 131.

⁵² Barthes and Metz also play a part; see Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 124–5.

between sign and object which, for Peirce, was the determining characteristic of the indexical sign. But whereas Peirce made his observation in order to found a logic, Bazin wished to found an aesthetic.⁵³

Wollen then quotes the Gray translation of the “Ontology”: “Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty.”⁵⁴ We should not underestimate the role played in Wollen’s argument by this invocation of a series of Bazinian analogies. In fact, Lefebvre and Furstenau have suggested that at least part of the appeal of the concept of indexicality for film studies resides in the fact that it was “often understood as a mere semiotic variation on Bazin’s ‘ontological’ claim.”⁵⁵ From the outset, cinematic indexicality is not a purely Peircean concept; it has always been coloured by way of its assimilation to a certain understanding of the Bazinian ideal.

We should also pause here for a moment to reflect on the specific use to which Wollen has put “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” namely in making the claim of an “existential bond” between image and object.⁵⁶ It is, after all, a very different role than the one that Wollen will assign to the “Ontology” in his later article on semiotic modernism; we have already seen that—despite the invocation of a virtually identical set of analogies (the death mask, etc.)—Wollen will, in the modernism article, effectively reduce the Bazinian “Ontology” not to indexicality, but rather to the ideal of perfect visual resemblance. And so, in Wollen’s two different applications of the “Ontology,”

⁵³ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 125–6.

⁵⁴ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 126.

⁵⁵ Lefebvre and Furstenau, “Digital Editing and Montage,” 94.

⁵⁶ The phrase “existential bond” appears twice in Wollen’s discussion of the “Ontology”; see *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 125, 132.

we get a clear sense of the divergent ways in which the essay might be mobilized. In fact, Wollen's two readings reveal the fundamental difference between the way the "Ontology" tended to be read in the critique of ideology (as espousing a mimetic ideal) and how it will come to be read in the discourse on indexicality (as claiming the uniqueness of photography's material bond with its object, independently of visual resemblance).

If Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* helped to naturalize the concept of the Peircean "index" within the language of film studies, this naturalization has only increased in the intervening years. Recent discussions of indexicality do not always invoke Wollen or Peirce directly; rather, they tend to marry something like Wollen's basic description to various disparate ruminations on the supposedly special relation between photography, time, and reality. The most recent accounts have especially privileged the work of cultural theorists such as Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag,⁵⁷ in addition to reclaiming older ideas about cinematic realism from within the more direct intellectual lineage of "film theory" proper—most notably from Bazin; it is common to find quotations from "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" mustered alongside those from Barthes, Sontag, Wollen, and/or Peirce as part of some meditation on the nature of "indexicality."⁵⁸ Increasingly, recent film-theoretical work has also tended to

⁵⁷ Namely Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), and Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977).

⁵⁸ See, e.g. Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 54ff; see also the various admixtures of Bazin, Barthes, Sontag, and Peirce that fill the pages of a recent special issue of *Differences* entitled "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," guest-edited by Mary Ann Doane (see Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," *Differences* 18, no. 1 [2007]: 1–6; Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," *Differences* 18, no. 1 [2007]: 128–52; and Peter Geimer, "Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm," translated by Kata Gellen, *Differences*

draw heavily (and often uncritically) on discussions of digital technology from outside of film and/or cultural studies proper, and especially from a highly influential cycle of provocative works on “new media” published by The MIT Press.⁵⁹

18, no. 1 [2007]: 7–28). Doane’s earlier, influential work *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* also includes an attempt to recuperate Bazin as part of a discussion of cinematic “indexicality”; see Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 25. I will have occasion to discuss certain important affinities between Bazin and Barthes at a later juncture.

⁵⁹ See especially William Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-photographic Era* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); and Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

Mitchell’s *Reconfigured Eye* posits a radical difference between traditional and digital photography in terms of epistemological value (“visual truth”), doing so in a way that establishes a kind of historical narrative of crisis and loss (the “post-photographic era”) that self-consciously mirrors that of “postmodern” epistemological skepticism (*Visual Truth*, 8). Juxtaposing detailed technical discussion of digital imaging software with insights about traditional photography from cultural theory and popular discourse, Mitchell argues that digital photography “actually differs as profoundly from a traditional photograph as does a photograph from painting” and that “the difference is grounded in fundamental physical characteristics that have logical and cultural consequences” (*Visual Truth*, 4). Mitchell draws on Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image” (and other sources, including Barthes and Sontag) to demonstrate what is at stake in the shift to digital (*Visual Truth*, 17, 24, 28)—namely the loss of an unmediated (and therefore “objective”) means of image generation, on the one hand, and of a material connection between image and referent, on the other hand.

Manovich’s *The Language of New Media* has been widely quoted in film theory as an authoritative account of the fundamental differences between traditional and digital photography (it is even excerpted in the Seventh Edition of *Film Theory and Criticism*; see Lev Manovich, “From *The Language of New Media*,” in *Film Theory and Criticism* Seventh Edition, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009]). Manovich attempts to chronicle the contemporary emergence of computer-based images, focusing on their specific “semiotic codes, modes of address, and audience reception patterns” (*Language of New Media*, 7). As with Mitchell’s, there is a distinct historiographical contour to Manovich’s account, with an emphasis on rupture and discontinuity that is modelled on Thomas Kuhn’s “research paradigms” and, to a lesser extent, certain accounts of film history (*Language of New Media*, 7). In distinguishing between traditional and digital images, Manovich remarks a continuity of visual appearance (representational convention) that masks a change in both the physical (material) composition and “logic” of digital images (*Language of New Media*, 180). Digital images are “qualitatively different” insofar as they are “not indexically related to the existing world” (*Language of New Media*, 184). Without ever actually defining or explaining indexicality, Manovich proclaims that “cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting” (*Language of New Media*, 295).

Mark B. N. Hansen’s *New Philosophy for New Media* incorporates the basic findings of Manovich, expanding on them in order to provide “an account of how the body is modified through interactions facilitated by digital technology” in which images “lose their material specificity” (Tim Lenoir, Foreword to *New Philosophy for New Media*, xx, xxi). Hansen argues that “digitization requires us to reconceive the correlation between the user’s body and the image in an even more profound manner” (*New Philosophy for New Media*, 10). For an arguably more nuanced approach to media historiography, see

But employment of the term “indexicality” within film theory perhaps also represents an attempt to grapple with an already powerful popular-cultural concept—the basic, commonsensical belief in the reality of objects represented in photographs. As we have already seen, this is a belief with significant implications in realms such as identity politics, law, journalism, etc. Indeed, anxiety around a perceived fundamental distinction between traditional and digital photography has become a common trope within popular media discussions of photographic technology.⁶⁰ However, the existence of this link between the film-theoretical and the popular-cultural value of photographs has been somewhat obscured or ignored in theoretical writing.

With all this in mind, I would like to consider a couple of the predominant rhetorical characteristics of the recent work on indexicality, before proceeding with a more detailed discussion of how a renewed engagement with Bazin’s “Ontology” is integral to this work, as exemplified by Philip Rosen’s *Change Mummified*. These rhetorical characteristics have mainly to do with the self-consciousness of this discourse in relation to its historical moment of emergence. This is the case both in relation to contemporary cultural and technological developments, and in relation to the history of film theory itself.

Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, translated by Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ For but one recent example of this see Carter Dougherty, “Polaroid Lovers Try to Revive Its Instant Film,” *New York Times*, 25 May 2009 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/26/technology/26polaroid.html>).

Indexicality, Bazin, and the Rhetoric of Contemporary Film Theory

Much like the work of film theory after 1968, the recent discourse on indexicality is presented as having been compelled by developments external to film studies proper. The need to grapple with questions of medium specificity generally—and indexicality in particular—seemingly does not arise from within the natural development of film theory, but rather is instigated by a set of wider social, cultural, and especially technological changes and the profound rupture that they perhaps herald within the history of representational technology. D. N. Rodowick, for example, claims that “[t]he renewed interest of film theory in indexicality is characteristic of how, in the era of digital simulation, we are becoming resensitized to the powers of photography and cinema, especially since this experience is now practically lost—it is already *historical*.”⁶¹ Mary Ann Doane introduces a special issue of *Differences* on indexicality by claiming that “[c]ultural production today seems to be haunted by anxieties surrounding the status of representation...With the advent of digital media, photography, in particular, has seemingly lost its credibility as a trace of the real.” Doane therefore proposes “to reexamine the very concept of indexicality and its role in mass culture and modernity, to interrogate the ‘desire for referentiality’ associated with technological media...”⁶² In a similar vein, Laura Mulvey writes:

In common with other film theory today, this book is heavily marked by the image of, and the questions raised by, the photographic index. While technology never simply determines, it cannot but affect the context in which ideas are formed. *Inevitably, the arrival of digital technology has given a new significance*

⁶¹ D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 74; emphasis original.

⁶² Doane, “Indexicality: Trace and Sign,” 1.

*to the representation of reality and precipitated a return to the semiotic theory of the index.*⁶³

These authors all suggest that the theoretical concern with indexicality is motivated by a certain technological development, namely the moment of the succession of indexical photography by non-indexical, digital technology.

The intersection of, on the one hand, a marked theoretical intervention at a particular moment and thus from a particular point of view, and, on the other hand, a technological history construed in this way—i.e. specifically as the loss of a particular, identifiable trait called indexicality and the privileged relationship between representation and reality that it supposedly guarantees—itself has the potential to produce a unique narratological formation. This is the film-theoretical narrative of loss and mourning—of film theory’s having arrived on the scene in time to bear witness to indexicality’s last gasp.

The significance of this narrative is better understood in relation to the longer history of post-1968 film theory that I have already outlined. Erika Balsom has compellingly shown that, in its contemporary anxiety concerning the loss of indexicality, film theory has cast aside not only the ideals of 1970s film theory, but also the relationship of detachment between critic and object that the critique of ideology mandated. For Balsom, what is fundamentally at issue is the problem of cinephilia—the film critic’s own desiring relation to cinema. Balsom shows how, following the mandate imposed most forcefully by Christian Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier*, 1970s theory undertook a “a certain disavowal” of the love of cinema that had previously driven

⁶³ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 9; emphasis added.

theoretical inquiry, and instead construed cinema as a “bad object” in order to carry out the anti-realist critique of ideological mystification. Balsom proceeds to demonstrate, however, that recent work on indexicality has succeeded in throwing off the Metzian injunction. In the era of anxiety around digitization, cinema has been redeemed, albeit as an imminently “lost object.”⁶⁴

Concomitant with this redemption, Balsom diagnoses a corresponding trend in the rhetoric of contemporary theory, showing that “film theory today is witness to a re-entry of the critic’s desire into discourse.”⁶⁵ The “re-entry of the critic’s desire” within recent work on indexicality has surely been marked, above all, by a self-conscious turn away

⁶⁴ See Erika Balsom, “From Bad Object to Lost Object: The Desires of Film Theory,” *Spectator* 27: Supplement (2007): 13–18. Balsom frames her discussion around Christian Metz’s conception of the relationship between theorist and cinema as “love object.” However, the “bad object” / “lost object” pair which so effectively articulates the unspoken film-theoretical narrative (and, in so doing, points the way to a possible narratology of the recent history of film theory) actually references the psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein, which heavily informs Metz’s discussion but which Balsom does not engage directly in her own essay. See especially Klein, “A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States,” in *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis 1921–1945* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1948), 282–310; the relevant passage from Metz on the cinema as the critic’s “good object” / “bad object” appears in Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” translated by Ben Brewster, *Screen* 16, no. 2 (summer 1975): 17–27. The founding psychoanalytic discourse on the narrative of loss, on which Klein draws, is Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia”; for Freud’s summary of the narrative of loss see Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 14, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 248–9; for a very brief narratological analysis see Jennifer Radden, “Love and Loss in Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*,” in *The Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Michael Philip Levine (London: Routledge, 2000), 213–4. Psychoanalysis, of course, did not invent the narrative of loss. See, e.g., Meyer Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). The question of “plot design and structure” is central to Abrams’s study of the widespread philosophical and literary “secularization of inherent theological [i.e., Christian] ideas and ways of thinking” in the nineteenth century (*Natural Supernaturalism*, 11).

⁶⁵ Balsom, “From Bad Object to Lost Object,” 15. This “re-entry of the critic’s desire” is, I think, also inseparable from the increasing tendency to assimilate Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* to the discourse on indexicality. In this way, film-theoretical discourse recapitulates the well-documented turn in Barthes’s own thought from rigid structuralism to sentimental autobiography (on the ‘Barthesian turn’ see, e.g., Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, translated by Gregory Elliott [London: Verso, 2007], 9–11; and Geoffrey Batchen, “*Camera Lucida*: Another Little History of Photography,” in *The Meaning of Photography*, edited by Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson [Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2008], 76–77). I will return to the question of Barthes’s own desire in a later chapter.

from the theoretical ideals of the 1970s.⁶⁶ This self-conscious foregrounding of both personal investment and theoretical revision is perhaps best exemplified in Laura Mulvey's 2006 book *Death 24x a Second*, which opens with a candid personal reflection on the evolution of Mulvey's own relationship with cinema. Mulvey remains, of course, best known for her landmark 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which in its politics, its methods, and its conclusions was firmly rooted in the anti-realist critique of ideology, by showing how the gender-binarized structures of narcissism and scopophilia that organize narrative cinema have made "a mockery of empirical objectivity."⁶⁷ It is from a highly self-conscious position in the shadow of her own work that Mulvey turns to a consideration of cinematic indexicality. She offers a compelling series of reflections on her own ways of seeing and thinking about cinema "then" and "now" in order to situate her current views by juxtaposing them explicitly with her work in *Screen*. This series of juxtapositions culminates as follows:

Then, I was absorbed in Hollywood cinema, turning to the avant-garde as its binary opposite. Now, I think that the aesthetics of cinema have a greater

⁶⁶ A similarly self-conscious turn within the theory of photography is diagnosed by Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson, who pronounce a "the passing of the 'October moment' and thus implicitly a reevaluation of our scholarly formation." They reflect on this passing as follows:

When we entered the professional ranks of the academy, we took up our inherent task of ushering photographic indexicality from promise to myth, of explaining how photography always pointed, both fore and aft of the camera, to its own discursive constructions. But for us recent events have cast the relevance and timeliness of this critical project into doubt.

This account is particularly interesting because of its remarkably self-conscious attempt at intellectual historiography (as reflected especially in the articulation of "three moments," as acknowledged in the title of the piece); see Kelsey and Stimson, "Introduction: Photography's Double Index (A Short History in Three Parts)," in *The Meaning of Photography*, edited by Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2008), xi. The title also invites comparison with Walter Benjamin's own intellectual history of photography (Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," translated by Stanley Mitchell, *Screen* 13, no. 1 [spring 1972]: 5–26).

⁶⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (autumn 1975): 10.

coherence across its historic body in the face of new media technologies and the new ways of watching films that they have generated.⁶⁸

She will then summarize:

These contrasts between ‘then’ and ‘now’ are not intended to indicate a detachment from the past but rather to emphasize that my engagement with the cinema of the past has been changed by passing time...In this sense, this book is about a changed perspective, the way that my perception of cinema has changed between ‘then’ and ‘now’ and the way that, *within the context of the present*, the representation of time has taken on new significance.⁶⁹

Mulvey goes on to explore this representation of time, beginning with the recognition that “[t]he cinema (like photography) has a privileged relation to time, preserving the moment at which the image is registered, inscribing *an unprecedented reality* into its representation of the past.”⁷⁰ In this way, Mulvey’s turn to indexicality (a turn within which Bazin will figure prominently) is framed, on the one hand, as an engagement with the issues of the present, and, on the other hand, as a distancing from the film-theoretical concerns of the past.

And so, in the work of Mulvey and others, the tradition of anti-realism established by 1970s theory is self-consciously set aside. Meanwhile, the work of film theorists inimical to 1970s theory, and that of Bazin especially, is reclaimed and revived. It is in this strange context that Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” once constituted as radical other for the anti-realist agenda of 1970s theory, resurfaces as part of a kind of “return of the repressed” in contemporary film studies.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 7.

⁶⁹ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 7–8; emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 8; emphasis added.

⁷¹ The trope of the “return of the repressed” appears in Balsom, “From Bad Object to Lost Object,” 15.

Subjectivity and Historicity in Philip Rosen's Reading of the "Ontology"

Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified* is arguably the work that has served as the vanguard of the new discourse on indexicality.⁷² As part of a project to explore connections between film theory, film practice and the epistemology of historical representation, Rosen offers a self-consciously sympathetic and detailed reading of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." Rosen downplays Bazin's claims about visual resemblance in the "Ontology," instead emphasizing his concern with indexicality and a corresponding spectatorial desire for the preservation of the past. With its recuperative reading of Bazin and its affirmation of the referential ambition of cinema—secured by the exploration of cinema's privileged relationship with the epistemological goals of historiography—Rosen's work places itself in direct dialogue with the "Bazin-bashing" tendencies of the 1970s critique of ideology.

However, *Change Mummified* also provides us with an instructive example of how even a highly sophisticated and insightful reading of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" can lack sensitivity to some of the essay's most basic claims. Rosen reduces the play of desire and presence in the "Ontology" to a single epistemological premise, epitomized by the historiographical ideal of the "indexical trace." A closer look at the tactics involved in Rosen's reading will therefore prove informative for our own consideration of the "Ontology." I will begin by outlining the conception of historical consciousness that is developed in *Change Mummified* and its self-conscious situation in relation to existing film theory. I will then summarize Rosen's

⁷² Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)—hereafter cited in the text as "CM."

discussion of the “Ontology,” focusing on his treatment of indexicality and the nature of spectatorial desire.

Cinema and Modern Historicity

Most broadly, *Change Mummified* tries to bring certain ideas about ‘history’ to bear on cinema and, by extension, on film theory. Rosen introduces this project by advocating “the need to think about how the category of history penetrates the representational and discursive modes that have characterized the history of filmic textuality,” (*CM* xxiii) and thus the need to draw attention to the “overlaps, intersections, and parallels between the conceptual architecture of modern historicity and the modern, mass-disseminated indexical media of photography and film” (*CM* 134–5). Rosen’s main assertion concerns cinema’s complicity within a certain “modern historicity”—i.e., a particular sociocultural configuration of the relationship between historical consciousness and historical reality. The privileged figure of this commonality between cinema and “modern historicity” is a representational ideal that Rosen labels the “indexical trace.” Indeed, we shall see the extent to which Rosen conceives of the indexical trace in such a way that it resonates not just with a certain interpretation of Bazin but also with what Rosen apprehends to be the epistemological and sociocultural ideals of modern historicity.

For its part, “modern historicity” is a specific, culturally dominant mode of historical consciousness, the basic characteristics of which Rosen will revisit and reaffirm throughout *Change Mummified*. For our purposes we can think of this modern historicity

as the convergence of a set of assumptions concerning the nature of temporality, a broad sociocultural desire deriving from those assumptions, and a corresponding set of epistemologically oriented discursive practices. Specifically, modern historicity originates in “two related temporal assumptions,” namely that “the present is always already different in some respect from the past” and that “reality is definitionally temporalized, in the sense that it always involves change or at least the consistent potential for change” (*CM* 6). Temporality as such is therefore conceived as “a threateningly dynamic force, a threat registered especially in the high valuation placed on stabilizing relations between present and past” (*CM* xi). For Rosen, this valuation is reformulated as an epistemological or cognitive objective, namely “the desire to preserve or restore, to make the historical past present” (*CM* 58). However, this epistemological objective inherent in modern historicity faces its practical limit in the ineluctable reality of temporal change, so that it is always “pegged to an impossible object” (*CM* 132). This futile project of seeking to transcend time by means of the epistemological mastery of the past is crystallized for Rosen in Bazin’s paradoxical definition of cinema as “change mummified” (*CM* 31).⁷³ For our purposes it is important to emphasize two points here: first, that, in Rosen’s account, the threatening nature of temporality is mitigated mainly by gathering knowledge about the past in order to render it immediate and present; and second, the desire to attain the immediacy and totality of knowledge about the past is

⁷³ In making “change mummified” shorthand for the paradoxical ideal that underlies all of modern historicity, Rosen seems to be missing (or wilfully bypassing) the far more elementary point that Bazin is making with his coining of the term; in describing cinema as “la momie du changement” (*QQC* 16), Bazin is simply pointing out a basic difference between cinema and photography (i.e. the embalming of duration vs. an instant).

always sincere and absolute, despite the acknowledged impossibility of the achievement of this goal.

As its name suggests, “modern historicity” emerges from within particular historical conditions which have given rise symptomatically to its particular figurations of subjectivity, time-consciousness, etc. Likewise cinema itself—both film practice and the writing of theorists such as Bazin—ought to be understood as an historically contingent sociocultural phenomenon.⁷⁴ Rosen’s overall project is construed within a decidedly materialist framework, and so it is perhaps not surprising that he isolates “capitalist modernity” as the basic historical condition within which the ideals of modern historicity are able to emerge. Likewise, for Rosen, the logic of capitalism constitutes “the broadest underpinning of any consideration of overlaps between cinema and historicity” (*CM* 141). Historicizing modern historicity in this way, Rosen downplays the importance of broader epistemological and philosophical shifts. Modern historical

⁷⁴ The general character of Rosen’s move here should be familiar to anyone acquainted with the tacit imperative of virtually all recent cultural theory (and, for that matter, post-1968 film studies) to ‘always historicize!’ It should be noted that Rosen presents the idea of historicizing dominant historiography as a recent innovation, largely attributable to continental structuralism. Lévi-Strauss’s critique of Sartre in *The Savage Mind* serves as founding discourse: “[i]n the decades since the publication of *The Savage Mind*, a deliberate and critical distance from supposedly dominant or workaday conceptions of historiography has become common in the academic humanities.” Other heroes in this narrative include Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Hayden White (*Change Mummified*, xiv. The “slogan” “always historicize!” appears in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981], 9).

Rosen’s articulation of the status of what he calls dominant historicity suffers from the same sorts of contradictions that can arise in any attempt to identify a discourse as structurally ‘dominant’, in that it is characterized as ‘merely’ partial or limited in scope (both synchronically and diachronically/historically) but as structurally totalizing nonetheless, to the extent that competing practices and discourses are occluded from Rosen’s discussion. On the one hand, Rosen tries, by way of the familiar tactic of isolating historical conditions of possibility, to render dominant historicity as a historically contingent discursive formation. On the other hand, on the basis of the utter pervasiveness of the material conditions of Western capitalism, Rosen ascribes modern historicity an overwhelming and persistent sociocultural resonance, arguably to the exclusion of countervailing notions of historical consciousness both within historiographic practice and more generally. See related remarks on the “paradox” of describing dominant institutions in Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 62–3.

consciousness originates instead in the manifestation of time-consciousness in material processes of economic and industrial modernization.⁷⁵ Modern capitalism demands an increased awareness of time, and so any manifestation of “time awareness” generally is viewed as “inseparable from capitalism” (CM 95).⁷⁶

The first half of *Change Mummified* is dedicated to showing how, on the one hand, this modern historicity pervades popular sociocultural attitudes and how, on the other hand, it has become embodied within the practices and ideals of professional historiography. Rosen’s reading of Bazin, situated in this context, is intended to show how Bazin’s theory of cinema shares with culture generally and historiography

⁷⁵ Rosen’s approach here is therefore unusual, if not exceptional. In countless intellectual histories, the emerging historical self-consciousness of modernity is invariably tied to increasing epistemological self-consciousness in Western philosophy. Consider the way in which Foucault places Kant “at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history.” For Foucault, modern philosophy originates with Kant because he conceives of Enlightenment as *Ausgang*, that is, as a departure from (religious) tradition and from deference to its timeless authority. That Kant is aware in his *Critiques* of not only what he is writing and why but *why he is writing it at that particular moment* is for Foucault exemplary of “the attitude of modernity” (see Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow [New York: Pantheon, 1984], 38). Jürgen Habermas, for reasons peculiar to his own philosophical enterprise, privileges Hegel’s modernity rather than Kant’s. Still, we find the recognition of an intersection between epistemology and history in Habermas’s discussion of Hegel’s “modern lexicon”: “Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*” (Jürgen Habermas, “Lecture I: Modernity’s Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance,” in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by Frederick Lawrence [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990], 7; emphasis original). In light of Rosen’s own approach, it is worth remarking that orthodox historical materialism posits a deterministic philosophy of history that is itself perhaps symptomatic of or complicit in modern historical consciousness (see, e.g. Louis O. Mink, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” in *Historical Understanding*, edited by Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987], 191).

⁷⁶ This time-awareness is first specifically manifest, beginning in the nineteenth century, between “two extremes of time-discipline,” namely the planetary (co-ordinated standard time zones, etc.) and the individual (scheduling and wages, the separation of work and leisure time, etc.; CM 94–6). Modern historical consciousness, modern historiographic practice, and sociocultural ideals of time and temporality, including that of the indexical trace, all follow from a time consciousness initiated in this way by processes of economic and industrial rationalization (CM 92). Rosen’s approach here seems to lean heavily on a well-known cycle of works exploring the everyday experience of time and space in capitalist modernity; see, e.g., Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

specifically a common genealogy in modern historicity. In order to understand the way in which Rosen interprets “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” it is worth considering Rosen’s characterization of the theory and practice of modern historiography.

For Rosen, modern historiography is constituted as a fundamentally epistemological configuration, in which anxiety about temporality is manifest as a desire for the immediacy and totality of knowledge about the past. Consequently, historiographical practice “always purports to be referential. That is, the construction that is history is necessarily to be read against some standard of the real....My point is only that any attempt to conceptualize historicity in theory or practice must explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the referential ambition of any historiography” (*CM* 7). This ambition gives rise to the ideal of scientific rigour that governs the pursuit of historical knowledge, and which is epitomized, ideally, in Leopold von Ranke’s “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” and, methodologically, in the “relatively unquestioned” mandate that “the historical account must be constructed with reference to critically authenticated sources” (*CM* 112). Rosen alludes to a familiar narrative of the professionalization of Western historiography, recalling how “historical consciousness became part and parcel of the dominant scientific epistemologies of the West, and for a time claimed the status of a master discipline” (*CM* 100–1).⁷⁷ By privileging the received ideals of a certain

⁷⁷ Peter Novick has given a more nuanced account of the reception of the Rankean ideal and the professionalization of American historiography. See Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 26–31. Novick claims that Ranke’s influence has been based on an “almost total misunderstanding” of Ranke’s thought (Novick’s account here is indebted to Georg G. Iggers, “The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought,” *History and Theory* 2, no. 1 [1962]: 17–40). Rosen acknowledges—but does not engage with—the debate over interpretations of Ranke and the vast implications thereof (*CM* 109, n. 22).

professionalized historiographic method, which he claims to be tied to a broader sociocultural ideal of modern historicity, Rosen strictly limits our understanding of what it might mean to engage with the past as history. To the exclusion of any other real or possible conception of historical consciousness, Rosen presents history within a strictly positivist and epistemological framework, wherein any individual or collective investment or reward lies in the sincere pursuit of complete, factual knowledge about the past. In hewing to the dominance of the positivist ideal in this way, Rosen forecloses the possibility of locating the place of “historicity” in Bazin in any way other than in relation to that ideal.

If we are going to bring historical consciousness to bear on “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” we owe it to Bazin to do so in a way that multiplies the possible ways of understanding that consciousness, rather than reducing them to any single ideal, however dominant. In this respect we might take as exemplary the work of Mark Salber Phillips, which has served as a powerful corrective to the kinds of dominant narratives of professional historiography on which Rosen relies. If these narratives have largely and tacitly assumed historiography to be oriented toward the cognitive apprehension of the past in the present, Phillips shows that cognition has, in practice, been only one of a range of goals that have motivated engagement with the historical past. Introducing a robust yet pliable heuristic, Phillips suggests that all historical representation combines formal, ideological, cognitive, and affective modes of engagement to a greater or lesser extent. What is more, each of these modes also involves the construction of some desired degree of *distance* which always plays off the real temporal distance of the events in question,

and which perhaps might serve variously to exacerbate or disavow the perceived effect of that distance. And so in the realms of the formal, ideological, cognitive, and affective, any given historical representation might attempt to lend a sense of immediacy to a given moment of the past, or it might, for any number of reasons, attempt to achieve some sense of distance, however near or far. The various possible combinations of modes (formal, ideological, cognitive, and affective), and the ability of each to participate in the construction of historical distance—however near or far—in turn suggests a staggering array of modes of historical consciousness, and possible uses to which historical representation might be put, beyond the cognitive immediacy that is the stated ideal of Rosen’s “modern historicity.” It is with this awareness of the possibility of the co-existence of multiple, competing relationships between representation, desire, and presence that we ought to be approaching Bazin’s argument in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The “historical distance” model is introduced in Mark Salber Phillips, “Distance and Historical Representation,” *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 123–141. For the purposes of illustrating Phillips’s point that total cognitive access constitutes only one possible goal of historical representation, we might consider Ann Rigney’s claim that a “*principle of imperfection*” constitutes one of the “structural and distinctive features” of all historical representation. Rigney’s discussion will resonate, I think, with our eventual consideration of one of the functions of photography in Bazin’s “Ontology.” For Rigney, it is precisely the *non-achievement* of total historical representation that fulfills subjective desire. Rigney shows that imperfect representation itself produces an “aesthetic effect” that she equates with the “sublime” experienced in the “confrontation with something unmasterable” (Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001], 7–8, 115). What is more, this sublime aesthetic is so compelling that it “*may also be simulated* for rhetorical and ideological effect” (*Imperfect Histories*, 10; emphasis added). In other words, historians might deliberately and falsely present certain aspects of the historical past as inaccessible, to the extent that the reader’s experience of this inaccessibility is a desirable end in itself. We can concede that Rigney’s model shares with Rosen’s the basic premise that the past comprises some ultimate object, which resists and eludes procedures of representational rationalization, but Rigney’s model departs fundamentally from Rosen’s in its positing of the past’s unattainability as being rewarding in itself for the subject.

Historicity and Film Theory

We have seen how Rosen's stated objective in *Change Mummified* is to bring historiographical concepts to bear on film theory and practice. But Rosen has a second goal in mind, insofar as this project is also framed as a reckoning with the anti-realism of "1970s film theory." *Change Mummified* therefore also participates—along with other recent film scholarship on indexicality—in a kind of self-conscious dialogue with the 1970s critique of ideology.⁷⁹ Rosen shows how a "principally antirealist conception of representation and textuality" (CM 8) in 1970s film theory led it to ignore the widespread popular understanding of films as indexical documents with historically identifiable referents, and consequently to ignore—insofar as this idea of the document resonates, in turn, with certain historiographical ideals—cinema's implication in historicity. Rosen thus remarks that 1970s film theory developed a "theoretical blind spot around history" (CM 40). For Rosen, the culturally accepted notion of film as bearing a causal relation to its past referent has been unfairly excised from post-1970s theorizations of cinema.

This attitude of self-conscious reflection on the history of film theory extends to Rosen's recuperation of Bazin. Bazin's theory of cinema is offered as a key example of cinema's privileged relation to the broader sociocultural ideal of modern historicity as Rosen conceives it; but the return to Bazin also serves as a redemptive measure intended to correct the tendency of 1970s film theory to downplay this privileged relation between

⁷⁹ Rosen, like Mulvey and Rodowick, is arguably heavily invested in this dialogue. See Rosen, "'Screen' and the Marxist Project in Film Criticism" and "The Concept of Ideology and Contemporary Film Criticism: A Study of the Journal *Screen* in the Context of the Marxist Theoretical Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1978). The very idea of film theory having a history is central to Rosen's own anthology of works of "1970s film theory," *Narrative Apparatus Ideology*. See the discussion of film theory as "a tradition of thought with its own history" in the Preface to that anthology (Rosen, ed., *Narrative Apparatus Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], vii).

cinema and history. Rosen points out the extent to which a “rejection of Bazin” was central to the crafting of a particular narrative of the development of disciplinary film studies, and describes his own work as “a reconsideration or nuancing of film theory’s opposition to Bazin, which was institutionalized in the 1970s” (CM 6). Rosen’s invocation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in *Change Mummified* is therefore an overdetermined one, and Bazin has once again become caught in the middle of a larger fight. With this in mind, let us look at Rosen’s reading of the “Ontology.”⁸⁰

From Visual Likeness to Indexicality

If Rosen is attempting to draw connections between film, film theory, and the ideals of modern historicity, his approach to Bazin will likewise reflect this ambition. Rosen argues that “Bazin’s thought is entwined with historical thinking in profound and exemplary ways,” such that it “leads back to the cultural privilege of historicity and hence historiography” (CM 6, 41). Specifically, Rosen identifies in Bazin’s theory of cinema something called a “preservative obsession.” This obsession, Rosen claims, “is a variant on a broad range of Western cultural, intellectual, and social practices founded on the centrality of time and that coalesced during the nineteenth century.” It is therefore a concern with *time* that “places Bazin’s thought squarely within the epistemology and culture of modern historicity” (CM 136, 137). As Rosen will attempt to demonstrate, this concern with time in Bazin is to be located in his treatment of cinematic indexicality.

⁸⁰ Rosen’s reading of Bazin does not deal with “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” exclusively, but instead tacitly synthesizes ideas from a variety of Bazin’s better-known essays. For our purposes, however, I will be concentrating on what Rosen has to say about the “Ontology,” the essay on which he draws most heavily in the course of his discussion.

Rosen's discussion of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" therefore shows the importance of "indexicality" for Bazin while also conspicuously downplaying the relative importance of visual resemblance. In this way, Rosen alludes to (but does not directly invoke) the concern of 1970s film theory with spatial realism. Offering a lengthy consideration of Bazin's discussion of perspective as a means of spatial representation, Rosen suggests that there is some disingenuousness in Bazin's invocation of perspectival conventions for realistically depicting space. He shows us how the "Ontology" encourages us to "displace consideration of the special appeal of cinematic 'realism' from *spatial similarity* or dissimilarity between image and world to issues of *temporality*" (CM 16).⁸¹

If visual resemblance is the crux of Bazin's entire theory of realism for 1970s film theory, for Rosen resemblance is simply a red herring. Cinema's relationship with temporality is manifest, Rosen shows us, not in the appearance of the image itself but rather in our knowledge of the way it is made. The fact that the cinema image is "mechanically produced" gives it a "special credibility" which both "lends *its* credibility...to the spatial configuration of the image" and represents a new kind of credibility in its own right (CM 18; emphasis original). Following Peter Wollen, Rosen suggests that this "new kind of credibility" means that "Bazin's view of the image answers to the description of an indexical sign in the semiotic typology of Charles Sanders Peirce." The cinematic image is, furthermore, in Peircean terms, a "genuine

⁸¹ Emphasis added. It should be noted that Rosen refers almost exclusively to "cinema" (as opposed to photography) throughout his discussion.

index,” which is to say that its referent is “an existence whose presence is required in the formation of the sign” (*CM* 18).

Rosen’s reading of the “Ontology” therefore makes a basic distinction between spatial resemblance and credibility deriving from the way that images are produced. In making this important distinction, Rosen recognizes that there are at least two separate ideals at play in Bazin’s essay. But Rosen’s way of arriving at this distinction is at odds with Bazin’s own discussion. Rosen seems to render spatial realism and the credibility of the image directly comparable, as competing representational ideals, despite the fact that one apparently designates a class of sign (visual resemblances) and the other a relation between the means by which an image is produced (mechanical automation) and a corresponding spectatorial attitude (special credibility). The confusion appears to arise from Rosen’s eagerness to assimilate this “special credibility of the automatically produced image” to “indexicality” (*CM* 18–19). With a great deal of help from Peter Wollen, Rosen equates Bazin’s discussion to the Peircean semeiotic; visual resemblance is to special credibility as iconicity is to indexicality.⁸²

In an important move, Rosen then proceeds to link indexicality to the realm of the temporal and the historical by coining the term “indexical trace” to describe the fact of the cinematic referent’s existence in a necessary relation of pastness relative to the image itself (*CM* 20). This “indexical trace,” developed in the course of Rosen’s reading of the “Ontology,” will become Rosen’s privileged figure linking the practice of cinema with

⁸² Recall that the reduction of the Bazinian ontology to semiotics is contested in Daniel Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin,” 447–9; and Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 32–3; and Gunning, “What’s the Point,” 34–8.

modern historicity. In fact, the credibility and prestige of the “indexical trace” only emerges in Rosen’s argument by way of its association with the epistemological ideals of professional historiography. This occurs when Rosen attributes the properties of indexicality to Leopold von Ranke’s “critically authenticated sources,” identifying such sources as “a species of indexical signs,” which “signify the actuality of the past to the historian (and by relay to his or her reader) because they are produced by the actuality of the past, which is the historian’s object of study” *CM* 112). These historical indices also share the corollary formulation that is present in the cinematic index, insofar as they, too, require a subjective investment in order to be meaningful. In this way, Rosen produces and labels the abstracted category of the “indexical trace” from the putatively shared features of a specific historiographical ideal and a specific theorization of cinema. This reading of “indexicality” into Bazin’s “Ontology of the Photographic Image” therefore suggests Rosen’s willingness to sacrifice close reading of Bazin’s text in favour of a development of the larger ideals of the “indexical trace” and “modern historicity” more generally, while still providing it with the appearance of being grounded in a theory of cinema.

Given the centrality of “indexicality” and the “indexical trace” to Rosen’s argument in *Change Mummified*, it is surprising how little he does to ground them convincingly in Bazin’s own text. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case—Rosen’s reading of Bazin’s “Ontology” comes across merely as an excuse for raising the spectre of indexicality in a way that makes it meaningful in relation to a certain conception of spectatorial subjectivity and historicity. Relying on Wollen to make the connection

between Bazin and indexicality, Rosen leads us quickly through a review of the Peircean semeiotic and eventually arrives at the category of the “indexical trace”—a category conceived, as we have seen, as an ideal that holds sway over both modern historiography and the sociocultural practice of cinema.

Spectatorship

Despite this questionable discussion of the “indexical trace,” *Change Mummified* is valuable and instructive to the extent that it draws attention to the question of spectator desire. Rosen’s justification for this lies in what he sees as the phenomenological underpinnings of Bazin’s work: “the claim to coherence of Bazin’s project is often said to begin from its stance as a phenomenological theory of film” (CM 9); Rosen is apparently thinking here of Dudley Andrew’s intellectual biography of Bazin (there in fact seem to be a number of important aspects of Rosen’s reading of the “Ontology” that are indebted to Andrew’s work). But the point that Rosen is making here has less to do with the specifics of any particular phenomenological approach than with what Rosen views as the “common territory” of all phenomenology: insofar as “the *activity* of the subject” constitutes “the central premise of all phenomenologies,” Bazin’s main concern is with “the processes by which human subjectivity approaches the objective” (CM 10, 11; emphasis original).

Rosen elaborates several key issues concerning spectatorial investment. He makes the important observation that the spectator must enjoy some prior knowledge

about indexicality in order to benefit from it (CM 20–1).⁸³ Rosen then proceeds to explore at length the implications of this knowledge, showing that the image’s status as indexical trace will hold value for “a subject obsessively predisposed to invest belief in such an image” (CM 21). This obsession, Rosen claims, lies at the heart of Bazin’s “mummy complex,” and its “need for some fantastic defeat against time,” which Rosen interprets as being, for Bazin, an ahistorical and ultimately insatiable “founding obsession” (CM 21). He shows that “[a]t the level of spectatorship, it is from the desire to counter threats to its own existence, its own being, that the spectator is drawn to investing an unprecedented credibility in the image” (CM 23). The history of this obsession is itself mirrored in the history of the “progressive succession” of “representational technologies” (CM 22) which—due to the fact of the ineluctable nature of time itself—can never achieve perfection in their quest to satisfy the preservative obsession.

With all this in mind, Rosen concludes that “what is usually regarded as Bazin’s ontology describes a subjective intentionality for automatically produced images based on a preservative obsession.” For Rosen, therefore, it is ultimately the subject’s attitude toward *temporality* that constitutes the heart of Bazin’s theory of cinema (CM 27). Here Rosen, following Andrew, recognizes that the key to “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” lies not in ontology but rather in psychology. Rosen will repeatedly return, in various contexts, throughout *Change Mummified*, to this central claim—i.e. that the core

⁸³ Recall that this point was first made by Dudley Andrew, who remarks that “[i]n a psychological sense, realism...has to do not with the accuracy of the reproduction but with the spectator’s belief about its origin” (*André Bazin*, 76).

of Bazin's theory of cinema lies in the relationship between the indexical trace and the subject's preservative obsession in relation to temporality.

Rosen's most compelling argument therefore lies in his repeated emphasis on the importance of spectatorial attitude in Bazin's discussion. Bazin's primary concern is no longer identified as being with realism or medium specificity but with the nature of subjectivity itself. As we have seen, this move is grounded in Rosen's basic claim that Bazin's film theory is primarily a phenomenological one. While I do not think that Rosen adequately justifies his adoption of this particular assumption, there is nevertheless value in the assertion that "any reading of Bazin on the image should begin from Bazin's view of the subject" (*CM* 10). In any consideration of the "Ontology" essay especially—pervaded as it is with allusions to need (*besoin*), obsession, and satisfaction—it seems like an obvious and necessary starting point to show that Bazin's theory of photography and/or cinema is inseparable from some corresponding notion of subjectivity, regardless of whether we accept that Bazin's main approach is necessarily phenomenological.

This insistence on the centrality of subjectivity in Bazin is, of course, also important to Rosen's own project of redeeming Bazin from his rejection by 1970s film theory—in which the theorization of spectatorial subjectivity figured as a foremost concern. Rosen himself recognizes that the idea of "a subjective investment in the image precisely as 'objectivity' ...is a premise that can help maintain the complex interest of his work even after 1970s film theory" (*CM* 14).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ In shifting the emphasis in Bazin from medium to spectator, Rosen's work raises the incredibly complex question of the relative priority of—and the nature of the relationship between—theories of spectatorial subjectivity and those of textuality, apparatus, cinematic institutions, etc. within any given theory of 'film';

Unsatisfiability

A second, related point concerns Rosen's recognition of the *impossibility* of the goal of total presence of the past—the fact that desire is “pegged to an impossible object” (CM 132). In pointing out the practical limit on desire imposed by the nature of time itself, Rosen is surely attempting restitution for the proliferation of bald claims concerning satisfaction and adequacy (“it is the object”; “no more cinema”; etc.) that have been repeated in countless interpretations of Bazin. Against these claims, Rosen interprets the relationship between desire and time in Bazin as follows:

On the one hand, automatically produced images fundamentally appeal to a desire that the concrete be preserved, stopped in time as reality. This desire leads to the special attraction and epistemological possibilities of cinema, insofar as it can move the subject toward opening itself to a revelatory experience of reality. But on the other hand, reality itself evolves in time, and is even perceived in the flow of time, which means that reality in some sense goes against that which motivates the desire to engage it. (CM 28)

By conceiving of the problem in this way, Rosen grounds the condition of *unsatisfiability* in the gap between a certain desire and the practical limits of “reality itself.” The *bona fide* desire to stop time is met with the ineluctability of temporal reality, resulting in a condition of impossibility of the fulfillment of the desire; nonsatisfaction-as-outcome is therefore characterized as an unfortunate fact resulting from the confrontation of *bona fide* desire and the logically prior reality of the nature of time. I think that this formulation ought to be understood as a consequence of Rosen's attempt to link cinema to the epistemological goals of a certain kind of historicity. For the moment, it is worth pointing out an alternative possibility: that nonsatisfaction might itself constitute a prior

for discussions of this problem see, e.g., D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, especially remarks in the Preface to the 2nd Edition, and Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*.

condition-to-be-met, deriving from the nature of subjectivity and desire as such; and that it is this nature of desire which might itself govern the selection of the photograph *as* object; I intend eventually to show that there is good reason to believe that Bazin views the value of photography to lie precisely in its ability to solicit this experience of nonsatisfaction.⁸⁵

Limits of Rosen's Reading

Change Mummified offers a compelling model for any attempt to bring broader social and cultural ideals to bear on "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." However, Rosen reduces the meaning of the "Ontology" in a way that makes it reconcilable with a single, dominant ideal of modern historicity, and so forecloses the possibility of locating multiple, competing ideals at work within Bazin's text. This foreclosure seems to me to be evident in Rosen's tactics in reading the "Ontology." A brief consideration of these tactics, will therefore, I think, help to inform our own consideration of the essay.

First, in what might be considered only a minor oversight, Rosen ignores the main rhetorical procedure by which Bazin articulates the specificity of photography/cinema—namely, direct, point-by-point comparison with painting. Everything that Bazin has to say about photography/cinema is established differentially by way of a discussion of the relative value of painting. That Rosen overlooks this is especially odd in light of the fact that he concludes *Change Mummified* by identifying an uncannily similar procedure

⁸⁵ See also the discussion of Ann Rigney's "principle of imperfection," above.

underway in recent theorizations of digital technology. Rosen shows how, in accounts of digital media, “the indexical becomes the opposing term, against which the digital may be defined and which it surpasses” (CM 302). The very idea of directly comparing media obviously has major implications for the way they come to be defined and understood. And it can often reveal deeper motives behind defining medium specificity at all. Rosen is acutely aware of this in his discussion of the digital, but he misses it entirely in Bazin.⁸⁶

Second, Rosen seemingly underestimates the complexity of Bazin’s historical narrative in the “Ontology.” Rather than treating the complex history presented in the “Ontology” in isolation, Rosen opts to weave together points from several of Bazin’s ‘historical’ essays (“The Myth of Total Cinema,” “Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” etc.). What results is a single Bazinian narrative that is linear, developmental, and teleological, originating in a “founding obsession” and taking the shape of gradual technological progress toward a *single ideal*:

This subjective project—or subjective progression—finds *increasingly intensive satisfactions in a long-term, progressive succession* of representational technologies. Bazin jumps from the mummies and sculpture to Renaissance painting, the camera obscura, photography, and cinema. But the trope of the mummy complex thereby generalizes the subjective project that grounds that sketch all the way back to the foundation of the plastic arts and image culture. (CM 22; emphasis added)

This simplification of the Bazinian narrative has major consequences; for it is precisely in the complexity of Bazin’s historical account that we can trace the emergence of the multiplicity of modes of subjective desire and corresponding ideals of representational

⁸⁶ I was surprised to discover in the Afterword to *Change Mummified* a description of the “Ontology” as “an essay centrally concerned with how photography surpasses painting” (CM 356). Painting is scarcely mentioned in the chapter on Bazin.

practice that make his account of photographic/cinematic specificity in the “Ontology” so compelling.

If Rosen’s presentation of a single, simple narrative is partly a consequence of his combined reading of several of Bazin’s history-themed essays, it can perhaps be ultimately attributed to Rosen’s concern with the single ideal of modern historicity—manifest in Bazin, Rosen claims, as the ahistorical “preservative obsession.” In reducing the desire in the “Ontology” to this single “obsession,” Rosen overlooks the heterogeneity of representational and spectatorial ideals that Bazin is arbitrating.

In Rosen’s account, therefore, we find a total homogenization of the representational ideals and the stakes of spectatorial investment, where Bazin has presented us with there distinct ideals of desire and presence. This is most tellingly demonstrated in Rosen’s principal claim, re-iterated throughout, that there is a single “preservative obsession,” the fulfillment of which is the shared goal of every innovation in representational practice. But “preservative obsession” conflates what, for Bazin, are two mutually exclusive concepts. As I intend to show, Bazin employs “obsession” in the “Ontology” in a very limited sense, to refer to the post-Renaissance demand for illusionistic likenesses (epitomized by perspective, its “original sin”), which on the surface has little to do with the mummy complex whose goal is “preservation.” In Bazin, the “obsession” with visual likeness constitutes a totally different representational ideal than the need to defeat time. Rosen misses this distinction when he claims that “[c]rucially ‘likeness’ is not given epistemological or cognitive value in itself, but rather is being invoked as a support for fundamental needs of the subject vis-à-vis time” (*CM*

22). Rosen, himself time-obsessed, cannot entertain the idea of spatial likeness enjoying an autonomous role in the Bazinian narrative. Everything is reduced to time in service to Rosen's broader project of linking cinema and historicity:

Bazin's subject of cinema—which is, in the end, the human itself—is therefore obsessed with preservation, with the remains of pastness that can bring it into perception in the present. This is the basis for the privilege of the indexical trace in his film theory...the Bazinian preservative obsession is a variant on a broad range of Western cultural, intellectual, and social practices founded on the centrality of time and that coalesced during the nineteenth century. (CM 136)

While we can be certain that the need to defeat time is a central concern for Bazin, it is by no means the only one. Likewise, even if we have accepted the long-standing idea that the Bazinian ontology is coextensive with indexicality, we should not assume that Bazin conceives of the relationship between time, desire, and representations in a way that is assimilable to the epistemological ambitions of modern professionalized historiography as Rosen describes them. Rosen's reading constitutes a double reduction of Bazin's characterization of photography/cinema, when Bazin's entire point is to show the extent to which the cultural value of photography/cinema lies in its response to multiple, competing ideals. For Bazin, the photographic/cinematic image resonates with *several different kinds of representational ideals and spectatorial investments*, each with its own potential for satisfaction in the media of painting and/or photography/cinema. And, as we shall see, the most sacred of all of these ideals for Bazin has nothing to do with time at all; this is photography's capacity for aesthetic revelation, in which time is forsaken entirely as the sublimity of Nature herself is unveiled before the viewer. The power of this revelation surpasses even the need to defeat time.

In this brief discussion I have tried to demonstrate how Rosen's approach to Bazin is determined by his desire to link cinema with historical consciousness. Rosen makes a valuable contribution by showing how the question of spectatorial investment is in fact central to the "Ontology." By reducing this investment to a "preservative obsession" that is symptomatic of "modern historicity," however, Rosen ultimately overlooks the play of multiple, competing ideals of desire and presence that determine the relationship between painting and photography/cinema.

3. THE OBSESSION WITH RESEMBLANCE

The underlying premise of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” is the investigation of a *problème de la peinture*. It is not surprising, therefore, that an “obsession with resemblance” furnishes the first of Bazin’s three myths of representation, desire, and presence. Along with the need to defeat time and the pursuit of aesthetic expression, the obsession with resemblance forms the basis of Bazin’s comparison of painting with photography and cinema, and thus determines their unique properties.

It is the obsession with resemblance that initially accounts for the crisis of painting that Bazin has set out to investigate. Bazin shows us how, under the sway of this obsession, artistic representation becomes concerned primarily with “creating an ideal universe in the image of reality endowed with an independent temporal destiny” (TB 4). The main goal of art becomes not just to represent, but to represent in a certain way—by means of a perfect visual resemblance or illusion of the world as it appears before us. This is the representational ideal that we have already seen described as “spatial realism,” but it might be better to call it “perceptual realism”—since it seeks the correspondence of the spectator’s experience of manufactured representations with that of the unmediated vision of real, three-dimensional space.¹ These representations are supposed to serve, in

¹ The term “perceptual realism” turns up in a couple of different contexts in recent film theory, describing more or less the same ideal. It is used by Stephen Prince to describe a regulative ideal for digital images

turn, as faithful documentary records that may exist and circulate independently of the people and objects that they depict. This ideal evokes not just an artistic practice but also an entire epistemological system, in which the task of representation, understood in its broadest sense, is that of a faithful and comprehensive doubling of the sensible world within the descriptive realm of thought and language. Painting's obsession is therefore (as is always the case for Bazin) only the corollary of a broader cultural or philosophical attitude—or, in Bazin's terms, of a collective "psychology."

Bazin's myth of the obsession with resemblance rests on a clearly defined historical narrative, beginning with the invention of scientific perspective and culminating in photography's liberation of painting from the clutches of its obsession. Bazin accounts for this liberation by way of a comparative evaluation of the abilities of painting and photography/cinema to depict visual likeness, in which the latter decisively supercedes the former. Importantly, this evaluation also leads Bazin to develop a definition of photographic/cinematic specificity, which he shows to reside in the mechanical means by which images are produced and the resulting objectivity of those images. This definition of photographic/cinematic specificity will, in fact, determine photography's value in relation to all three myths of representation, desire, and presence. I will proceed here by summarizing Bazin's discussion of the obsession with

which is distinct from both referential realism and (implicitly) photorealism; see Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory," *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (spring 1996): 27–37. Gregory Currie coins it independently to refer to "the idea that the experience of film watching approximates the normal experience of perceiving the real world," as exemplified by Bazin's veneration of long-take and deep-focus cinematography; see Currie, "Film, Reality, and Illusion," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 326. The term is also used in Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin."

resemblance, then turning to the question of medium specificity as Bazin defines it. I will conclude with a consideration of the broader representational and epistemological ideals that this myth seems to embody.

Genesis and Development: A Myth of Origin and Progress

For Bazin, the obsession with visual resemblance originates and takes shape within what we are clearly supposed to apprehend as a specific historical and cultural context. Of the three myths of representation, desire, and presence, it is the obsession with resemblance whose origins Bazin identifies within something most closely approximating ‘historical reality’—having been inaugurated, Bazin claims, by the “original sin” of the invention of perspective (TB 6). Bazin further locates and authenticates the era of the obsession with resemblance through the invocation of an array of proper names—da Vinci, Louis XIV, Le Brun. He also situates it within a real chronology, singling out the fifteenth century as the precise moment when art ceases to depend on its magical relation to objects. But with the invocation of Louis XIV, Charles Le Brun, and, indirectly, Blaise Pascal, the obsession with resemblance seems to owe as much to seventeenth century France as to fifteenth-century Italy. Likewise, Bazin’s identification of the “invention” of perspective itself conflates a series of related developments—by Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Alberti, and countless other artists and thinkers from the Quattrocento onward—into the single technique of “perspective.”²

² Here Bazin’s mention of Le Brun is actually quite canny. On Le Brun’s antagonistic role in France’s “golden age of the perspective treatise,” see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art* (New Haven: Yale

Bazin therefore seems to be collapsing about two hundred years of European philosophy, politics, culture, and art history—spanning roughly the fifteenth to seventeenth century—into a single mythic, originary moment.

Bazin's situation of the obsession with resemblance in this way also necessarily links it to narratives of Western intellectual history, and to the Age of Reason specifically. The mention of Le Brun is surely meant to raise the spectre of Descartes, and, indeed, Bazin's description of the obsession with resemblance places it squarely under the sign of Cartesian rationalism.³ For Bazin—as it would be for Horkheimer and Adorno and, later, Foucault—this is the 'episteme' in which representation ceases to be valued for its magical properties or for its inherent connection to the objects it depicts. Instead, representations are intended to substitute themselves fully for the knowable world of objects by means of a convincing visual doubling or mirroring. This doubling, and a corresponding psychological satisfaction with the mere likenesses of things in and of themselves, constitute the "resemblance complex" in its essence.⁴

University Press, 1990), 124–8; and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, translated by W. J. Strachan (Cambridge, UK: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977), 71–8. On Le Brun's indebtedness to Alberti's *Della Pittura*, see Stephanie Ross, "Painting the Passions: Charles LeBrun's *Conférence sur l'expression*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 1 (January–March 1984): 26.

³ The connection between Le Brun and Descartes is well known. It has been most thoroughly explored in the chapter "Descartes et Le Brun" in Louis Hourticq, *De Poussin à Watteau, ou des origines de l'école parisienne de peinture* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1921). For a criticism of Hourticq, see Ross, "Painting the Passions," 35–6. Ross nevertheless affirms the idea that Le Brun "took most of his philosophy straight from Descartes" (Ross, "Painting the Passions," 26); see also a more recent account of the influence of Cartesian dualism on Le Brun's physiognomy in B. R. Tilghman, "Charles Le Brun: Theory, Philosophy, and Irony," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32, no. 2 (April 1992): 127ff.

⁴ Even though Bazin works to establish the invention of perspective as the origin of the obsession with resemblance, he nevertheless seems to hint at a precursor to this attitude toward representation already at work within the Egyptian practice of supplementing mummies with terra cotta statues in order to provide further insurance against the loss of the original—"to save being through the appearance of being" (TB 3). But the complex only fully takes shape within the epistemological principles exemplified by perspective.

Bazin describes the obsession with resemblance as playing out as a straightforward narrative of progressive, teleological development of representational technique culminating in the invention of photography and cinema. In so doing, he draws on narratological principles and historical elements from both art history and modern intellectual history. Bazin tells us that painting's development toward greater visual realism involves two mutually sustaining forces: continuous technical improvements in artistic practice, on the one hand, and a correspondingly increasing psychological desire for realism, on the other hand. The "need for illusion," Bazin writes, "grew rapidly the more it was met" (TB 5). Only the invention of photography will break this cycle of psychological demand and technical improvements in painting, insofar as the documentary value of the photographic/cinematic image is secured, as we shall see, by something greater than its visual realism—namely its inherent objectivity.

Baroque painting represents the culmination or final stage of painting's continual development toward greater illusionistic likeness, but it is ultimately unsatisfactory on two counts: it cannot depict movement, and it lacks the guarantee of objectivity. Photography and cinema, in satisfying these requirements, pick up where the development of painting leaves off. As Bazin puts it, in a key passage which he substantially reworked for the 1958 version:

Intentionally or not, the Hugh Gray translation seems to pick up on and emphasize the fundamental change in attitude that is implied by the inclusion of the terra cotta statues along with mummies (as opposed to relying on the mummies themselves to defeat time). Gray's translation both inserts a new paragraph at the beginning of the discussion of the statues ("Other forms of insurance were therefore sought...") and removes a later paragraph break so that this discussion runs together with Bazin's subsequent remarks about Louis XIV and Lebrun (HG 9–10). The effect is to suggest a sort of continuity between the decision to include statues and the invention of perspective.

Painting had been vainly struggling to present us with an illusion. This illusion was enough to create art, while the discovery of photography and cinema satisfied once and for all, in its very essence, the obsession with resemblance-oriented realism.” (TB 6)⁵

The important thing to emphasize here is that photography and cinema partake along with painting in a single myth—that of continuous, teleological development toward the achievement of satisfactory visual likeness.

Bazin’s central narrative picks up on a couple of stunning tropes that recur throughout *Les Problèmes de la peinture*—that of a persistent “crisis” of painting, and that of the “liberation” (or “freedom from slavery”) that is invariably shown to be heralded by the arrival of modern French artists such as Matisse and Cézanne. The exact shape of the narrative varies from contributor to contributor, but the overall premise remains remarkably consistent. Obviously, given the immediate historical context in which Diehl’s anthology was being assembled (i.e., 1943–44 France), one cannot help but apprehend these kinds of narratives—in which the twin figures of “crisis” and “liberation” recur with uncanny regularity—as the allegorical manifestation of an insurgent French patriotism.

⁵ I have modified Barnard’s translation slightly. The 1945 version of Bazin’s text reads as follows:

Car la peinture s’efforçait au fond en vain de nous illusionner. Notre satisfaction venait seulement de l’absence de procédés plus perfectionnés; tandis que la photographie et le cinéma sont des découvertes qui *résolvent* définitivement et dans son essence même le *problème* du réalisme” (PP 407–8; emphasis added).

The 1958 version reads as follows:

Car la peinture s’efforçait au fond en vain de nous faire illusion et cette illusion suffisait à l’art, tandis que la photographie et le cinéma sont des découvertes qui *satisfont* définitivement et dans son essence même l’*obsession* du réalisme. (QQC 14; emphasis added)

Even as it resonates with this predominant sentiment in *Problèmes de la peinture*, the specific contour of Bazin's narrative—in which, on the one hand, painting's capacity for visual illusion stalls in the Baroque and, on the other hand, photography and cinema take over where Baroque leaves off—is in fact most heavily indebted to the one given by André Malraux in his “Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma.” In the “Ontology,” Bazin quotes Malraux as saying that “cinema is only the most advanced form of visual realism, a principle which first appeared in the Renaissance and then found its ultimate expression in Baroque painting” (TB 4).⁶ Timothy Barnard has cast doubt on the accuracy of this quotation,⁷ but the problem of misquotation seems insignificant in light of the more striking similarities between Malraux's overall narrative and Bazin's.

The most remarkable and essential similarity lies in the rhetorical strategy of beginning with a narrative about the misguided development of painting in order to frame a discussion of photography and cinema (Malraux's essay is of course more concerned with cinema than photography). Like Bazin, Malraux observes in Western painting a continual development toward perfect visual resemblance. Here is Malraux's own account of the obsession with resemblance, in which he considers the problem from the point of view of an uneducated gallery visitor:

Un homme insensible à la peinture en tant qu'art, s'il visite aujourd'hui un musée, se sent en face d'une suite d'efforts, assez semblables à ceux des sciences, pour

⁶ Bazin (supposedly quoting Malraux) claims that visual resemblance finds its “expression limite” in the Baroque (QQC 12). The ambiguity that I think is suggested by this phrase is nicely captured in the modification of Gray's translation from “limited expression” to “completest expression” (HG 10); see my discussion of alterations to the Hugh Gray translation in the Introduction.

⁷ “Translator's Notes,” in *What Is Cinema?* 251–6. Barnard also remarks upon Malraux's radically different views concerning the essence of cinema, an essence which Malraux of course locates in the practice of editing.

représenter les choses. Un Rubens est pour lui plus « ressemblant », plus convaincant qu'un Giotto; un Botticelli plus qu'un Cimabue. Il voit dans la peinture un moyen de recréer l'univers conformément au témoignage de ses sens. Or, du xiii^e siècle aux maîtres baroques, la peinture n'a cessé de perfectionner ses moyens de représentation. Et la peinture européenne fut, des primitifs aux baroques, *à la fois* ce que nous aimons en elle et un effort pour représenter des êtres et des choses, — scènes de fiction en particulier, — de la façon la plus évocatrice et la plus persuasive.⁸

And, like Bazin, Malraux views photography and cinema as liberating painting from the task of illusionistic representation and allowing the latter to return to its proper pursuit of aesthetic expression:

Au milieu du XIX^e siècle, alors que naît la photographie, la peinture occidentale commence à dédaigner deux domaines qui jusque-là lui avaient appartenu : la représentation des sentiments et la fiction. Elle redevient plastique pure, et redécouvre l'art des deux dimensions.⁹

In Malraux's account, therefore, we find the basic elements that comprise Bazin's historical narrative of the obsession with resemblance more or less in its entirety: the ongoing pursuit of convincing visual likeness by scientific means beginning in the Renaissance and culminating in the Baroque, and the liberation of painting from this pursuit by the invention of photography.

Of course, Malraux's and Bazin's account of continually improving visual resemblance mirrors a familiar, contemporary trope of art-historical narratology—that of unidirectional, teleological evolution or progress toward the achievement of what

⁸ Malraux, "Esquisse," 6; emphasis original.

⁹ Malraux, "Esquisse," 7.

Norman Bryson will call the “Essential Copy.”¹⁰ This way of describing the development of artistic form has roots in Aristotle’s account of the evolution of tragedy and resurfaces during the Renaissance in the work of writers such as Vasari. But the chronological articulation of the developmental sequence becomes especially prevalent in academic art history beginning in the nineteenth century, with Alois Riegl being its most influential proponent; in the theory of art history, as elsewhere, Darwinian evolutionary biology is invariably cited as introducing a compelling model for historiographical explanation of formal development.¹¹

¹⁰ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 13. It might be said that this same narrative also serves as the basis for Bazin’s own “Myth of Total Cinema.”

¹¹ For good overviews of principles of art-historical narratology and of the idea of progress specifically, see Meyer Schapiro, “Style,” in *Aesthetics Today*, edited by Morris Philipson (Cleveland: Meridian, 1961); and W. Eugene Kleinbauer, “Introduction: Determinants of Art Historical Investigation,” in *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Writings on the Visual Arts*, edited by W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), especially 18–23. For a discussion of the place of Malraux in art-historical debates about the nature of artistic development, see E. H. Gombrich, “Malraux’s Philosophy of Art in Historical Perspective,” in *Malraux: Life and Work*, edited by Martine de Courcel (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) and also Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 24. For the place of Darwinian evolutionary biology in the history of the “idea of progress” generally, see, e.g., J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: Dover, 1960). For Aristotle’s discussion of the “development of tragedy” (*Poet.* V.1449a37: *αἱ τῆς τραγωδίας μεταβάσεις*) see especially *Poetics* IV.1449a7–30 and helpful commentary in Carnes Lord, “Aristotle’s History of Poetry,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974): 195–229.

For comparative purposes, it is worth pointing out that the other major philosophy of art-historical change that gains currency in the nineteenth century is one that involves periodic repetition rather than linear progress, with the most famous proponent being Heinrich Wölfflin; see Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, translated by Kathrin Simon (London: Collins, 1984); and *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, translated by M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950). Wölfflin views all of art history as being governed by a non-hierarchical, periodic alternation between the classic and the baroque (see *Principles of Art History*, 14, 231–2) and dismisses outright the “clumsy notion of the imitation of nature, as though it were merely a homogenous process of increasing perfection” (*Principles*, 13).

The broader influence of these competing art-historical narratives on the shape of debates concerning *film*-historical explanation is immense, but seldom acknowledged; for a notable exception see David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Despite the resonance of Bazin's narrative with similar contemporary histories emphasizing linear, unidirectional progress, the "Ontology" does deviate from most art-historical accounts in the way it describes the determination of change. Recall that Bazin locates the impetus for artistic development in the psychological needs of spectators—namely their insatiable demand for greater realism. This is a markedly different explanation than is suggested, for example, by something like Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, which locates a developmental drive that is immanent to artistic practice.¹²

Bazin's account is also somewhat odd in granting its developmental narrative a precise point of origin in the invention of perspectival technique. In this respect it differs narratologically from both Malraux's version and from most contemporary art-historical accounts; developmental sequences are seldom shown to have been spontaneously initiated in this way, much less by virtue of a single technical innovation.¹³ Nevertheless, certain aspects of Bazin's account do seem to gain credibility in light of the argument that would later be made by E. H. Gombrich, who traces self-consciousness concerning the "idea of progress," beginning in the Quattrocento, in part to the measurable improvement in skill seemingly enabled by technical innovations such as perspective.¹⁴

¹² See, e.g., Kleinbauer, "Introduction," 21.

¹³ Malraux locates the origin of the concern with depicting spatial depth in the thirteenth-century work of sculptors such as Giotto; see Malraux, "Esquisse," 6. This point is developed more fully in Malraux, "Psychologie des Renaissances," in *Œuvres complètes IV*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), originally published in *Verve* 2 (spring 1938). In that essay, Malraux finds the rejection of abstraction and symbol in the Christian humanism and sculptural ambition of Giotto, telling us that "la peinture italienne, qui devait changer le cours de tout l'art occidentale est née de l'intrusion des sculpteurs dans le monde des deux dimensions" (Malraux, "Psychologie des Renaissances," 930).

¹⁴ According to Gombrich (in the essay "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and Its Consequences"), the rediscovery of Roman texts on aesthetic development invited historical self-awareness and provided a "new institutional framework for art" rooted in self-improvement; importantly, for the

The Obsession with Resemblance: Painting Versus Photography/Cinema

Within the framework of Bazin's historical narrative of the obsession with resemblance lies a comparative assessment of the inherent abilities of painting, photography, and cinema in fulfilling the task of documentary representation by means of visual likeness. For Bazin (as for Malraux), photography and cinema clearly and decisively supercede painting.¹⁵ On the one hand, painting is increasingly capable of achieving illusionistic likeness, but only insofar as this constitutes a deviation from painting's own proper function. On the other hand, photography and cinema, by virtue of their objective processes of creation, fully meet the requirements of this demand for illusion "in its essence."

Painting is not ideally suited to the task of visual resemblance for three reasons. The first has to do simply with its inability to reproduce movement. The second relates to painting's comparatively limited efficacy in satisfying the needs of spectatorial psychology. The third concerns neither the problem of spectatorship nor that of representation as such, but rather what Bazin sees as the aesthetic impropriety of painting's undertaking such resemblance at all. Let us examine this last concern first.

According to Bazin, painting's effort to achieve visual likeness, rooted in the invention of perspective and culminating in the Baroque, comes at the expense of

Quattrocento artists, technical innovation, such as the invention of perspective, served as the ideal measure of this. As Gombrich puts it: "the stronger the admixture of science and art, the more justifiable was the claim to progress"; see Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and Its Consequences," in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 3, 8.

¹⁵ For Malraux, however, more so than for Bazin, painting's liberation is not complete until the arrival of cinema. Malraux still sees photography as suffering from the same limits as painting (see Malraux, "Esquisse," 7–8).

painting's attention to the aesthetic purpose that is inherent to it. No matter how effective painting is at rendering visual likenesses, this ability is at odds with its proper function of aesthetic expression. In order to show this, Bazin draws a fundamental, qualitative distinction between two different kinds of "realism"—"two essentially different phenomena, between which objective criticism must be able to distinguish if it is to understand painting's development" (TB 5). One kind of realism is inherent to painting as an expressive medium, whereas the other has been forced upon it from without. The first of these is *aesthetic realism*, defined as the "primordial concern for spiritual reality, expressed through the independent means at painting's disposal," or as "the expression of spiritual realities in which the model was translated by the symbolism of form" (TB 5). The second is a *pseudo-realism* manifest as *visual resemblance*, imposed on painting beginning with the invention of perspective.

Bazin describes this second kind of realism as corresponding to "simply a psychological desire to replace the outside world with its double" and "an entirely psychological need, inherently non-aesthetic" (TB 5). This "obsession" with likeness, when contrasted with the more essential aesthetic function of painting, is a false realism concerned only with the superficial world of appearances. Nevertheless, this false realism hounds painting as a "constant preoccupation" beginning in the fifteenth century (TB 5). Based on this description of painting's pursuit of visual likeness as a "preoccupation," we may now understand the first of the two senses in which Bazin speaks of an "obsession" with likeness. Here it is painting itself that is obsessed, which is

to say (in the etymologically faithful sense of the word *obsession*) distracted or detoured from its proper destiny as aesthetic expression achieved by means of the formal qualities proper to it.

Both the idea that resemblance is a distraction for painting and the claim that photography liberates painting come from Malraux. Malraux views the pursuit within which “les recherches de la peinture occidentale tendaient à créer un monde à trois dimensions” as utterly singular in the history of art, and not to be found in any artistic practice outside of modern Western Europe.¹⁶ Likewise, we have already seen how Malraux views the invention of photography as enabling painting to “rediscover art in two dimensions.”¹⁷ Peter Galassi argues that the idea that photography somehow enabled abstract painting or modernism has long since been “discredited”;¹⁸ nevertheless, the belief seems to have been widely held among artists and art historians alike at the time Malraux and Bazin were writing. Aaron Scharf’s study of the relationship between art and photography considers the issue in some detail. Scharf hears a “resounding cry of emancipation from the tyranny of imitation” and quotes Whistler, Munch, van Gogh, Kandinsky, and Breton, among others, to demonstrate the extent to which painters

¹⁶ André Malraux, “Esquisse,” 5. Malraux develops this idea further elsewhere; see *The Voices of Silence*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (St. Albans: Granada, 1974), 591–601. Malraux calls “the idea that plastic art aims primarily at nature-imitation” an “illusion” to be “dispelled” if we are to understand the “diversity” of “modern art” (*Voices of Silence*, 591). Interestingly, the English translation even suggests that we might be “obsessed” by this “idea” (*Voices of Silence*, 591). Malraux’s text, however, reads as follows: “Encore cette diversité nous arrête-t-elle surtout si nous ne sommes pas délivrés de l’idée que l’art plastique veut d’abord représenter” (Malraux, *Les Voix du silence*, in *Œuvres complètes IV*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié [Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004], 842; emphasis added).

¹⁷ Malraux, “Esquisse,” 7.

¹⁸ Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981), 12.

themselves tended to credit photography's invention with having liberated painting from this "tyranny."¹⁹ One of the more widely circulated of these artists' testimonials seems to be the following, attributed to Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, from a 1907 "artistic credo" of the German expressionist group *Die Brücke*:

Today photography takes over exact representation. Thus painting, relieved from this task, gains its former freedom of action. The instinctive intensification of the form in the visual experience is transposed onto the plane canvas. The technical tool of perspective becomes a means of composition. The complete transformation of the experience into artistic activity creates the work of art.²⁰

In Kirchner, we find both elements of the liberation as they appear in Malraux and Bazin, namely, the impropriety of painting's concern with "exact representation" and the role of photography in "relieving" painting from this task. It ought to be noted that this formulation really only gained currency during the proliferation of certain art movements in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Scharf draws attention to this apparently belated recognition of painting's liberation, remarking that "[t]he conviction that art was a matter more of imagination than optics was quiescent during most of the nineteenth century," and showing that it arose only in the context of post-impressionism, and became increasingly widespread in the first half of the twentieth century, by which time chronophotography and cinema had already begun to exert their own influence.

¹⁹ Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 249–54.

²⁰ This longer quotation from Kirchner actually appears in Dietrich Scheunemann, "The Double, the Décor, and the Framing Device: Once More on Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*," in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, edited by Dietrich Scheunemann (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 140. Truncated versions appear in Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 253, and also in Heinrich Schwarz, "Art and Photography: Forerunners and Influences," *Magazine of Art* 42, no. 7 (November 1949): 252.

Nonetheless, the impropriety of painting's concern with resemblance furnishes the first of three arguments in Bazin's claim for the superiority of photography/cinema. The second argument has to do not with the nature of painting, but rather involves a direct comparison of the technical ability of each medium to achieve visual resemblance. As it turns out, painting and photography/cinema both fulfill this task reasonably well, but neither can fully satisfy the need for resemblance on the basis of visual likeness alone.

Painting, owing to the invention of perspective, is sufficiently competent at the task of illusionistic representation. Bazin tells us: "Perspective made it possible for artists to create the illusion of three-dimensional space in which objects could be placed the way they would if we perceived them directly" (TB 5). Painting may be competent at resemblance, but it is not so competent that we cease to desire something better. Painting's success actually serves only to foment the psychological desire for greater resemblance—recall Bazin's claim that the "need for illusion...grew rapidly the more it was met" (TB 5). And so painting, having assumed a task that is inessential to it, paradoxically condemns itself, by virtue of its own modest success, to its own futile obsession, its own "vain struggle" with that task.

If the invention of perspective made painting capable of convincing visual illusion, painting nonetheless faces an ultimate technical limitation, namely its inability to represent movement; the "tortured immobility of Baroque art" constitutes the most advanced attempt to depict movement through the "dramatic expression of the moment" (TB 5), but it does not approach the ability of photography in this respect (or more

accurately cinema, as indicated by Bazin's quotation of Malraux). Painting's limited ability to represent movement certainly suggests one reason for the comparative strength of photography—or rather cinema—in representing illusionistic likeness.

Because cinema is able to depict movement, it supercedes painting's technical ability to offer convincing images. Implicit in this claim on behalf of cinema lies a more basic assumption—that, independently of the problem of movement, photography and cinema are, in fact, capable of producing visual likenesses at least on par with those of perspectival painting. It is this capacity that is *seemingly* responsible for photography/cinema's liberation of painting from the obsession with resemblance.

Amazingly, however, photography and cinema's capability in this respect goes almost completely unspoken in Bazin's discussion. The only hints Bazin provides lie in two parenthetical remarks. The first of these, added in 1958, notes that da Vinci's camera obscura “prefigures” that of Niepce (TB 5). Bazin is referring not to similarities in pictorial convention but rather to the “already mechanical” process by which perspectival images are produced. But I think we can infer two further assumptions to be imbricated within this association: first, of a continuity in the optical systems involved; and second, of a corresponding continuity of the representational conventions of the resulting images.²¹ Insofar as the photographic camera is, for Bazin, a technological descendant of

²¹ Anne Friedberg makes a similar assumption on the basis of Bazin's statement, claiming that “Bazin's passage offers a symptomatic account—often repeated by historians and theorists of photography and moving-image media—of the headlong teleology between the camera obscura and the cinematic camera” (Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006], 73). See below for further remarks on Friedberg's (and others') challenges to this assumption, and for more on Friedberg's own position on the relationship between the camera obscura and cinema.

the camera obscura, photographic images presumably share its pictorial conventions for the illusionistic representation of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional image. In establishing continuity between both technological and pictorial aspects of the camera obscura and photography, Bazin is repeating (or at least alluding to) what are in effect commonplace assumptions.

There is, after all, widespread acceptance of the related notions that, on the one hand, the photographic camera is descended from the camera obscura, and, on the other hand, the photographic image adheres to the conventions (and ideological implications) of perspective. But as Bazin's own ambiguity suggests, there are really multiple issues in play here—technological development and progress (the invention of the camera obscura and photographic camera); representational ideals (the pursuit of illusionism or realism); the iconographic conventions of representational practice (perspective as means of depicting three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface); ideological effects (subject-positioning of the spectator); and so on. It is worth remarking, however, that in every instance the relationship between perspective, the camera obscura, photography, and/or cinema is inevitably articulated and contested in historiographical terms of continuity, progress, teleology, change, discontinuity, rupture, etc.²² Strictly in terms of technology and pictorial convention, at least, there continues to be overwhelming support

²² This historiographical tendency is perhaps a reflection of the methodological predilections of art history and Foucauldian archaeology, both of which have tended to inform recent discussions of perspective.

for the idea of fundamental continuity from perspective through to photography by way of the camera obscura.²³

Bazin's second parenthetical remark consists of the comment that "for a long time, photography was inferior to painting in recreating colour" (TB 6). This is the closest thing we get in Bazin's discussion of the obsession with resemblance to a direct

²³ Writing on the subject in 1938, William J. Ivens, Jr. notes that photography is "a form of picturemaking that is not only precisely duplicable but one in which geometrical perspective is so inherent that today the camera is used as a surveying and measuring instrument as well as a tool for the making of precisely duplicable pictures of unique characteristics that transcend notation in terms of convention..." (William J. Ivens, Jr., *On the Rationalization of Sight* [New York: Da Capo, 1973], 12). This notion of continuity between perspective and photography continues to have currency in more recent work. Peter Galassi argues that "[t]he ultimate origins of photography—both technical and aesthetic—lie in the fifteenth-century invention of linear perspective...photography is nothing more than a means for automatically producing pictures in perfect perspective" (Galassi, *Before Photography*, 12; Galassi draws on an earlier Heinrich Schwarz essay tracing a continuous succession of technical developments from the camera obscura to the photographic camera; see Schwarz, "Art and Photography," 252–7). W. J. T. Mitchell also draws a link between the proliferation of photographic images and the naturalization of perspectival convention (Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986], 37). Michael Kubovy suggests that "[w]e, in the late twentieth century, take photography for granted as the prototypical physical embodiment of picture taking, and perspective as its mathematical model (Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 17). One of the better-known challenges to this assumption of continuity between the camera obscura and still photography is Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); see especially page 26. Anne Friedberg offers a detailed account and critique of Crary's historiography in *The Virtual Window*, 65–71. Friedberg herself has shown how the incorporation of perspectival images into motion pictures (as opposed to still photography) complicates matters. Against straightforward claims of perspectival–photographic continuity, Friedberg argues: "The complex relation between perspective and the moving image necessitates a more refined account of the viewer's position in space in relation to a fixed frame with either static, moving, multiply layered, obliquely angled, abstract, sequential, or multiple-framed images" (*The Virtual Window*, 2). Note, however, that both Crary's and Friedberg's accounts mainly concern the positioning of the spectator and not the pictorial conventions of the representational image as such.

The assumption that perspectival convention has been incorporated into motion picture images serves as the foundation of much of cinematic apparatus theory (see my discussion of perspective and ideology later in the chapter). David Bordwell has attempted, somewhat unsuccessfully, to challenge cinematic apparatus theory on its assumption that cinematic images are dependent on perspectival convention. Bordwell undertakes a lengthy and spirited defense of "scientific perspective's claims to superior accuracy" before going on to show, nevertheless, that apparatus theory's claim that the motion picture camera repeats the perspectival schema is "utterly unwarranted." See Bordwell, *Narration and the Fiction Film* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 107 and *passim*.

comparison between the conventions of painting and photography.²⁴ Insofar as Bazin makes a point of drawing our attention to the difference between photography's ability to render colour and painting's, I think we are being led to infer the existence of more fundamental similarities in representational convention.

Outside of these two parenthetical comments, I can find no justification anywhere in Bazin's discussion for the idea that photographs and cinema even provide convincing two-dimensional likenesses in accordance with any specific standard of perceptual realism. This may appear as a glaring omission on Bazin's part, but it is a telling one. For, as Bazin will proceed to inform us, the convincingness of the two-dimensional illusion is not, in itself, responsible for photography/cinema's ability to satisfy the obsession with resemblance. "The solution," Bazin says, "lay not in the resulting work but rather in its genesis" (TB 6). Here we arrive at the final point of comparison in Bazin's evaluation of the ability of painting and photography/cinema to satisfy the demand for visual likeness. This concerns the very nature of the psychological need on which the increasing demand for greater realism is based. Photography/cinema's superiority in the production of likenesses lies not in technical skill in the achievement of resemblance but in another quality entirely—the objectivity of the photographic image, an objectivity which is guaranteed by its mechanical means of production. It is only on the basis of this objectivity that "the discovery of photography and cinema satisfied once and for all, in its very essence, the obsession with resemblance-oriented realism" (TB 6;

²⁴ Photography's capacity for visual likeness (or lack thereof) will, however, come up again in Bazin's discussion of the need to defeat time, in the next section of his essay.

translation modified). The photographically produced likeness fully satisfies the demand for accurate visual depiction not because of the technical superiority of that depiction but because of the medium's inherent objectivity.

In drawing this connection between the mechanical means of production and the accuracy or reliability of the resulting image, Bazin is repeating one of the more widely held epistemological assumptions concerning photography's powerful capacity for visual depiction. For Bazin, however, the quality of "objectivity" that he locates in the photographic/cinematic process will come to play a much larger and more complex role than simply underwriting photography's documentary value. Even though he raises the spectre of objectivity in specific relation to the problem of resemblance, Bazin in fact foresees much wider implications of this objectivity for the value of photography and the nature of its relationship with painting.

The specific discussion of the way that photography meets the demand for resemblance in its essence leads Bazin toward a general characterization of photographic/cinematic specificity as residing in the objectivity of the image. It is this characterization of medium specificity that, in turn, establishes the place of photography/cinema in relation to all three myths of representation, desire, and presence. After all, as we will see, photography's objectivity will provoke the "un-repression" of the basic psychological need to defeat time. And objectivity provides the basis of Bazin's claims concerning photography/cinema's powers of aesthetic expression. Because it supplies the ground for Bazin's entire claim concerning

photographic/cinematic specificity, objectivity secures photography's privileged role in relation to all three myths of representation, desire, and presence. It is therefore worth pausing at this point to examine Bazin's claim concerning objectivity in greater detail.

Objectivity as Ground for Photographic/Cinematic Specificity

For Bazin, photography/cinema's inherent objectivity is guaranteed by the mechanical process of image generation and thus determines its specificity. The essence of this mechanical process is, in turn, metonymically encapsulated in one particular, privileged component of the photographic apparatus, namely the lens (*objectif*). In this way, objectivity, as the sole basis for Bazin's determination of photographic/cinematic specificity, is explicitly defined against the inherent subjectivity of painting. On these points it is worth quoting Bazin at length:

...the discovery of photography and cinema satisfied for once and for all, in its very essence, the obsession with resemblance-oriented realism. No matter how skilful the painter, his work was always seriously compromised by its inevitable subjectivity. Because of this human presence, a doubt about the image persisted....photography completely satisfies our appetite for illusion by means of a process of mechanical reproduction in which there is no human agency at work. The solution lay not in the resulting work but rather in its genesis...

...Photography's originality compared to painting thus lies in its objective nature...the lenses of the photographic eye are called, precisely, *objectifs*. For the first time, the only thing to come between an object and its representation is another object. For the first time, an image of the outside world takes shape automatically, without creative human intervention, following a strict determinism...All art is founded upon human agency, but in photography alone can we celebrate its absence. (TB 6–7)²⁵

²⁵ Again, I have modified the translation. Between the two long passages which I quote here there appears a paragraph, added in 1958, concerning the nineteenth-century crisis of painting. I think it is not especially relevant to the surrounding argument and unnecessarily interrupts the flow of Bazin's discussion of the

We may recapitulate Bazin's claim as follows: photography/cinema's specificity "compared to painting" resides in its inherent objectivity, which is a consequence of its mechanical means of production, as epitomized by the photographic lens (*objectif*).²⁶

In privileging the mechanical apparatus and its role in image production, Bazin both echoes and anticipates a number of similar discourses concerning photographic specificity. Indeed, by the time of Bazin's writing, the link between mechanical image generation, documentary accuracy, and photography's medium specificity was commonplace. But I think there is also something to be said about Bazin's explicit invocation of the language of objectivity and subjectivity, which implicates the photographic process within a rather specific epistemological configuration, and so

objectivity of photography/cinema. One important point that the passage does introduce is the notion of popular sentiment, within which the resemblance complex comes to be associated with photography (cf. Malraux's device of the gallery visitor).

²⁶ The French language supplies a useful distinction that does not appear in English—between *lentille* (the individual piece of glass) and *objectif* (the complete lens assembly as a configuration of multiple individual *lentilles*). Clearly, for Bazin, at least some of the weight of establishing the inherent objectivity (*objectivité essentielle*) of photography/cinema is borne by this point of lexical felicitousness ("le groupe de lentilles qui constitue l'oeil photographique substitué à l'oeil humain s'appelle-t-il précisément « l'objectif » [*QQC* 15]). But it seems to me that the etymology of *objectif* serves to confound the issue considerably. As Daston and Galison point out, Descartes uses the terms "objective" and "subjective" in precisely the opposite senses than those adopted in the nineteenth century by followers of Kant (Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* [New York: Zone Books, 2007], 29–31). This observation is confirmed by any comprehensive French-language dictionary; *Le Grand Robert*, for example, dates the first usage of the adjective *objectif* to Descartes in 1642, defining it as "Qui constitue un concept, une pure représentation de l'esprit, n'est qu'un *objet* de l'esprit." (emphasis original). This entry is followed by an advisory on usage: "Ce sens doit être soigneusement distingué du suivant, introduit en philosophie par Kant et répandue en France au début du XIX^e siècle," and then the following definition, dated to 1801: "Qui existe hors de l'esprit, comme un *objet* indépendant de l'esprit" (emphasis original). See also the discussion in John Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 136–7. All of this is interesting in relation to Bazin because the substantive use of *objectif* to mean "lens," (from *verre objectif*) dates to 1666, i.e. well before *objectif* took on its current meaning. I am not aware of any evidence that Descartes himself saw a connection between "lenses" and "objective reality" as he defined it. In his work on lenses, Descartes generally uses the terms *verre* and *lunette*; see especially Discourses IX and X of "La Dioptrique" (René Descartes, "La Dioptrique," in *Œuvres de Descartes* Volume 6: Discours de la méthode et essais, edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery [Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1965].)

distinguishes Bazin's discussion from earlier, vaguer references to mechanical reproduction and accuracy. It is worth considering the kind of language that those earlier discussions tend to employ, in order to appreciate the originality of Bazin's own approach.

The broader cultural ideal of the mechanically generated photograph as satisfying the need for a reliable document certainly had currency at the time of Bazin's writing (although interestingly, Bazin's own remark that after painting's liberation "the people" had come to identify the resemblance complex with photography [TB 7] was only added to the essay in 1958). Bazin's formulation resonates strikingly, for example, with the entry, authored by André Vigneau, on "Les besoins collectifs et la photographie" in the 1936 *Encyclopédie Française*. Likening photography to the mechanical process of the printing-press, Vigneau writes:

ici la garantie de véracité n'est pas illusoire [i.e. versus the printing-press] mais devient une garantie d'authenticité absolue. Grâce à l'authenticité de ce qu'elle enregistre, *la photographie satisfait à ce besoin de « voir pour croire »*, si caractéristique de notre époque.²⁷

Vigneau's account is unusual because it celebrates the credibility of the *visual* record supplied by photography in opposition to the illusory claim to truthfulness that he implies is associated with the mechanical printing press, which can only faithfully reproduce printed words. But what is important for our purposes is Vigneau's claim that photography's ability to provide an authentic visual record satisfies a specifically contemporary social need for evidential certainty (this concern with social need as such is

²⁷ André Vigneau, "Les besoins collectifs et la photographie," in the *Encyclopédie Française* Volume 16 (1936), 16.170-7; emphasis added.

perhaps in keeping with the overall social vision of the encyclopedia; this entry appears within a larger section on “Les besoins collectifs et sociaux,” itself within the part of the two-volume *Arts et littératures dans la société contemporaine* dedicated entirely to “L’usager.”²⁸ In light of this orientation of the 1936 *Encyclopédie Française* it is interesting to remark the centrality of social “need” as a concern within Bazin’s own writing).

Vigneau’s claim participates in a long tradition that celebrates the accuracy or authenticity or the photographic likeness without necessarily invoking the objective/subjective distinction as Bazin does. Nonetheless, there exists a temptation to assimilate this abundance of more broadly or vaguely framed discussions of photographic accuracy into the more loaded framework of objectivity/subjectivity. Here I am thinking in particular of Alan Trachtenberg’s *Classic Essays on Photography*, which seems systematically determined to demonstrate claims of photographic “objectivity” (duly conceived in opposition to a fundamental human “subjectivity”) within the array of nineteenth-century writings that it anthologizes. In his introduction to the writings of Niepce, Daguerre, and Arago, for example, Trachtenberg states that “[b]y the early 1800s, Europeans were attempting to create the most convincing illusory pictures *without the interference of man’s subjective hand.*”²⁹ This sort of language seems decidedly at odds with that found in the essays themselves. Even though the discourse of objectivity

²⁸ This part on “L’Usager” is the second of three parts total on “Arts et littératures dans la société contemporaine” distributed over two full volumes of the *Encyclopédie* (XVI and XVII). The first part concerns “L’ouvrier, ses matériaux, ses techniques” and the third “Le dialogue entre l’ouvrier et l’usager.”

²⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 3; emphasis added.

existed at the time of these writings, it makes no appearance as such within them, much less in relation to photography.

For Niepce, Daguerre, and Arago, the concern seems to be mainly with the faithfulness of images to nature as a consequence of the automated process. Niepce states that “the invention which I made and to which I gave the name ‘heliography’ consists in the automatic reproduction, by the action of light, with their gradations of tones from black to white, of the images obtained in the camera obscura.”³⁰ And Daguerre concludes that “the daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself.”³¹ Arago’s report, for its part, seems especially concerned with documentary efficiency, i.e. with the quality of the images produced given the minimal effort involved.³² And yet despite their absence from the primary texts, claims concerning the expression of a desire for and/or the achievement of *objectivity* as such (again, conceived in reciprocal relation to human subjectivity) are made throughout Trachtenberg’s commentary—not just on behalf of these three authors, but an array of nineteenth-century writers whose work is included in the anthology.³³

³⁰ Joseph Nicéphore Niepce, “Memoire on the Heliograph,” in *Classic Essays*, 5.

³¹ Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, “Daguerreotype,” in *Classic Essays*, 13.

³² Dominique François Arago, “Report,” in *Classic Essays*, 15–22.

³³ Trachtenberg on Fox Talbot, for example: “These images were made by a tool that seemed to leave man’s fallible mind and hand out of most of the creative process.” Trachtenberg explicitly employs the terms “objective” and/or “objectivity” in his introductions to essays by Lady Eastlake, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Henry Peach Robinson; needless to say, the words appear nowhere in the essays themselves (see Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays*, 27, 40, 71, 91). Admittedly, the language of Eastlake especially does seem to come remarkably close to making the objective/subjective distinction; in her 1857 account, Eastlake speaks of photography as presenting “unerring records” of historical fact, with photography’s “legitimate stand” taken in “[h]er business” of “giv[ing] evidence of facts as minutely and impartially as, to

In contrast, Bazin's own deliberate invocation of the pair of terms "objectivity" and "subjectivity" suggests a carefully considered—and epistemologically or philosophically charged—framework for thinking about the value of the photographic process. Bazin is unambiguous in his language as he differentiates between the "objectivity" of the photographic process and the "subjectivity" inherent in painting; recall especially his privileging of the lens (*objectif*), which stands metonymically for the entire mechanical process. We ought to consider Bazin's recourse to this terminology within the broader context of its emergence.

The appearance of "objectivity" as a regulative epistemological ideal beginning in the nineteenth century is well documented. For our purposes, we might concern ourselves with the specific relationship, as Bazin sees it, between objectivity and automated processes of image production; indeed, within the history of the discourse of objectivity, the invention of photography certainly enjoys a privileged place. Here Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's comprehensive study of the principles governing the production of images for scientific atlases is useful. Daston and Galison claim to trace the emergence of the new "epistemic virtue" of objectivity in all its heterogeneity; "mechanical objectivity," as they call it, comprises but one important facet of the emergence of a larger epistemological ideal.

our shame, only an unreasoning machine can give" (note also her gendering of photography as feminine, perhaps after the French *la photographie*; see Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, "Photography," in *Classic Essays*, 65–6). Tractenberg's interpretation of the nineteenth-century material in this way arguably situates it so that it seems to anticipate and provide continuity with later entries, many of which do explicitly invoke objectivity, including, of course, the Hugh Gray translation of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." The effect is to deprive essays such as Bazin's of their originality.

Taking somewhat for granted the historical, cultural, and philosophical conditions of its emergence as such, Daston and Galison proceed by showing how objectivity comes to be defined entirely as the negation of some corresponding idea of fallible subjectivity, one which always “presupposes an individualized, unified self organized around the will.”³⁴ This will-based definition of subjectivity, for its part, can be seen as emerging from the broader shift from philosophy to epistemology following Kant.³⁵ Any definition of objectivity therefore must take the form of a negation of subjectivity. “To be objective,” Daston and Galison claim, “is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving.”³⁶

Daston and Galison document the accumulation of three successive modes of objectivity over the course of the nineteenth century. Each of these modes suggests not only a certain set of preferred practices and attitudes—a privileged way of both conceiving and restraining subjectivity in the production of visual representations—but also a privileged ontological order. The first of these modes they label “truth to nature.” The practitioner of science exercises reason and thoughtful selection in order to generate typical, representative examples of natural objects. The second mode, “mechanical objectivity,” calls for further restraint on the scientist-practitioner. The exercise of reason

³⁴ *Objectivity*, 33. On objectivity’s being defined in negative terms, see also Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 3.

³⁵ While recognizing the pivotal role of the Kantian critiques, Daston and Galison describe their consequences not as a metaphysical transition from philosophy to epistemology but rather simply a shift in “epistemic virtue.” For the more radical view of a shift from philosophy to epistemology (and later to linguistics), however, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

³⁶ *Objectivity*, 17.

is superseded by the new ideal of images generated by means of “automated transfer.” This mode privileges the representation of individual objects and states in all their contingency, and regardless of their ability to serve as typical or exemplary of a broader phenomenon. The third mode, “trained judgement,” reinstates the role of scientific judgement and interpretation in order to highlight relations among objects.³⁷

In addition to these ideals of objectivity, all of which come to bear on the production of knowledge and representations in the field of vision, Daston and Galison acknowledge the emergence in the late nineteenth century of what they term “structural objectivity,” the epistemological-philosophical, behaviourist, and psychological attempt to isolate, predict, and normalize patterns of language and thought; the work of logicians and philosophers of language from Frege to Carnap is exemplary of this ideal.³⁸

On the basis of Bazin’s own descriptions of the subjective–objective relationship, it would seem to be at least partly assimilable to the regulative ideal which Daston and Galison have labelled “mechanical objectivity.” The way in which the authors come to characterize this ideal is therefore revealing. For Daston and Galison, mechanical objectivity, gaining prominence from the mid–nineteenth century onward, poses a challenge to the earlier acceptance of the intervention of a reasoning artist and/or scientist in the production of images. The pursuit of mechanical objectivity instead becomes “the insistent drive to repress the willful intervention of the artist-author, and to put in its stead a set of procedures that would, as it were, move nature to the page through a strict

³⁷ *Objectivity*, 371.

³⁸ *Objectivity*, 253–307.

protocol, if not automatically.”³⁹ Daston and Galison go on to demonstrate how scientists’ desires to showcase the automatic means by which evidence is gathered and displayed is so powerful that automatic images are privileged even at the expense of visual accuracy and documentary value.

What is more, they show how the mechanical ideal privileges not just a particular set of methods for manufacturing images, but also an ethical system. Mechanical objectivity embodies an ethics of restraint which must be imposed on the will of the scientific self. It also suggests a particular work ethic, insofar as machines are viewed as ideally disciplined, alert, and patient; they remark that “it was a nineteenth-century commonplace that machines were paragons of certain human virtues.”⁴⁰ In some respects, then, the way that Bazin and others apotheosize photographic technology can be seen as the manifestation of a desire for a certain kind of impossible-ideal epistemological (non-)subjectivity (I will return to this point shortly).

With all this in mind, it is interesting to note the place that Daston and Galison assign to the invention of photography within their history. On the one hand, they fully acknowledge that machines such as the photographic camera quickly became exemplary of the ideal of mechanical objectivity, serving as “both a literal and a guiding ideal.”⁴¹ They show how “[o]ne type of mechanical image, the photograph, became the emblem for all aspects of noninterventionist objectivity.”⁴² On the other hand, they stubbornly

³⁹ *Objectivity*, 121.

⁴⁰ *Objectivity*, 122–4.

⁴¹ *Objectivity*, 138.

⁴² *Objectivity*, 187.

refuse to accept (even in the absence of a better explanation) the idea of any significant correlation between the invention of photography and the emergence of the ideal as such. Rather, they argue that “the shift from depiction that celebrated intervention to one that disdained it did not come about *because* of photography.”⁴³ They insist on this repeatedly, going on to state, for example, that “[p]hotography did not create this drive to mechanical objectivity; rather, photography joined this upheaval in the ethics and epistemology of the image.”⁴⁴

Daston and Galison therefore refuse to correlate the emergence of mechanical objectivity with the invention and widespread acceptance of photographic technology. This refusal appears even stranger in light of the justification that they provide. As far as I can tell, the only reason they give for their position is the simple observation that not all photographs are inherently objective, insofar as the ability has always existed to retouch and manipulate them.⁴⁵ This does not seem like an adequate explanation given the shape of their overall argument. Rather, it appears to be a bizarre confusion of, on the one hand, the role of photographic technology in *embodying and sustaining* a certain *discursively produced cultural/epistemological ideal* and, on the other hand,

⁴³ *Objectivity*, 138; emphasis original.

⁴⁴ *Objectivity*, 161.

⁴⁵ *Objectivity*, 125. It is perhaps worth quoting the explanation in full:

Before proceeding to the broader category of automatic image production, we must address the form of automatic reproduction of the mid-nineteenth century that looms so large in retrospect: photography. Was the rush for objectivity simply due to a fascination with the new medium? Tempting as this simple explanation may be, the evidence militates against it. Far from being the unmoved prime mover in the history of objectivity, the photographic image did not fall whole into the status of objective sight; on the contrary, the photograph was also criticized, transformed, cut, pasted, touched up, and enhanced. From the very first, the relationship of scientific objectivity to photography was anything but a simple determinism. Not all objective images were photographs; nor were all photographs considered *ipso facto* objective. (*Objectivity*, 125)

photography's actual ability to fulfill that ideal—a confusion which undermines the authors' entire project of documenting the history of a set of epistemological ideals which is itself discursively sustained. Surely any such project must accept the elementary distinction between the supposedly real capabilities of a representational process (with the measurement of those capabilities only being possible in relation to some contingent and abstract representational ideal, whether it be governed by "objectivity" or not) and the sorts of ideals that that process may inspire and sustain within discourse and cultural practice. Nor would such an acceptance fall prey to simple technological determinism (as might be the authors' underlying anxiety). The continued, passionate (irrational?) valorization, well into the twenty-first century, of the "authenticity" of film-based photography surely serves as a reminder of this.

It is therefore something like the fulfillment of the ideal of "mechanical objectivity" that serves as the ground for Bazin's claims concerning photographic/cinematic specificity. Bazin does not arrive at his definition of specificity by means of an isolated consideration of the properties of photography or cinema; rather, he derives it from a determination of what differentiates photography from painting. Even as it seems to find its justification in the mechanical nature of the photographic/cinematic process as epitomized by the lens, the objectivity of photography/cinema is determined comparatively in relation to the subjectivity of painting. In this way, the comparative work that Bazin performs in differentiating photography/cinema from painting echoes the way in which the broader epistemological

ideal of mechanical objectivity is defined negatively in relation to the notion of human subjectivity.

Bazin's Photo-Cinematic Specificity

For Bazin, therefore, photographic/cinematic specificity is determined entirely in relation to painting. With this in mind, it is worth saying something about the idea of medium specificity within Bazin's argument—both as an overall strategy, and in terms of the immediate consequences of this strategy for Bazin's conception of the relationship between painting, photography, and cinema.

First of all, it needs to be said that Bazin's concern with specificity is hardly unique. Questions of medium specificity arise in most contemporary discussions of art, and are absolutely central to those concerning photography and cinema. Nor is it surprising that critics and theorists of photography and cinema feel especially compelled to address specificity. This has to do with two related anxieties. The first concerns the historical belatedness of photography and cinema in relation to existing representational and aesthetic practices. The second has to do with the dubious status of photography and cinema as modes of artistic expression. The delineation of photographic or cinematic specificity actually assuages a double problem with which the theorist is presented, i.e., justifying the rightful existence of the object of study as art, and, in so doing, legitimizing her/his own position as critic or theorist.⁴⁶ But despite this common cause among

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, 261 and passim. The relationship between medium specificity, theory, and disciplinary identity is a source of ongoing anxiety in

photography and film theorists, the grounds on which the specificities of photography and cinema are defined vary widely. Cinematic specificity, especially, has been established in an astonishing variety of ways.

In addition to this broad need to legitimize photography and cinema as artforms, Bazin's own work on specificity should also be understood within the immediate context within which it takes shape. Recall that Bazin's concern with photography/cinema essentially emerges from a consideration of "problems of painting"; this, above all, helps to explain why Bazin circumscribes photographic specificity in a way that maximizes photography's differences in relation to painting while minimizing any difference between photography and cinema.

In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," photographic/cinematic specificity comes to be defined differentially in relation to painting. Bazin draws an essential and necessary distinction between painting and photography on the basis of photography's mechanical origins. We tend to take the validity of this kind of basic differentiation between photography and painting for granted, but I think we ought to bear in mind that

film studies. See, e.g., the collection of articles commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 1 (fall 2009); and discussion in Marc Furstenau, "Introduction: Film Theory: A History of Debates," in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, edited by Marc Furstenau (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 4–5.

In terms of more general discussion of the contingency of any attempt to define medium specificity, the work of W. J. T. Mitchell on the history of the relationship between words and images is exemplary. In his important text *Iconology*, Mitchell attempts not to define or essentialize "images," but rather to show how their definition, variable over time, has been symptomatic of broader cultural and ideological concerns. Mitchell locates these definitions "in relation to the human interests that give them urgency in particular situations." Specificity is not "essential" or "inherent," Mitchell writes; rather, he shows that "there are always a number of differences in effect in a culture which allow it to sort out the distinctive qualities of its ensemble of signs and symbols." Attempts to specify and differentiate between media are "riddled with all the antithetical values the culture wants to embrace or repudiate." See Mitchell, *Iconology*, 1, 49, and *passim*.

it is by no means inevitable. After all, the physical and representational properties of the photographic/cinematic image arguably share some fundamental continuity with those of illusionistic painting—the two-dimensional rendering of three-dimensional space in accordance with the conventions of linear perspective, etc. Even Bazin’s own equation of the photographic likeness with the perspectively rendered painting (which “prefigures” it) suggests as much. And yet Bazin’s strategy of isolating one component of the photographic apparatus—the lens—as the ground of specificity establishes decisively their irrevocable difference.

Conversely, Bazin’s privileging of the lens requires the tacit disavowal of any major distinction between photography and cinema. Surely we cannot deny certain elementary differences between still photography and motion pictures—from the material properties of the representational object (photographic paper versus celluloid), to representational convention (a single segment of temporal duration mapped as a single two-dimensional image, in the case of photography, versus multiple such segments presented in succession to create the illusion of real duration, in the case of cinema) to spectatorial experience (the embodied encounter with a tangible, enduring material artifact versus the intangibility and fleetingness of cinematic projection). And yet Bazin, with his privileging of the lens and, by extension, the mechanical means of gathering and registering light, has circumscribed the specificity of photography in a way that

maximizes its differentiation from painting while minimizing the difference between photography and cinema.⁴⁷

I am certainly not claiming that Bazin's description totally eradicates all difference between cinema and still photography. However, I think it is fair to say that for Bazin cinema shares the photographic ontology, and this ontology, in turn, determines the essence of cinematic practice. This is apparent both from Bazin's discussions of cinema within "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and his later writings on cinema. It seems to me that, for Bazin, the photographic ontology entirely subtends—or serves architectonically as a foundation for—that of cinema, which in practice nevertheless comes to supercede and transcend it. Given the rhetoric of dialectics, synthesis, contradiction, and paradox that is common throughout Bazin's writings on cinema, it seems appropriate to describe this movement as something like that of the Hegelian *aufhebung* (sublation / abolition / preservation / transcendence).⁴⁸

I think that the discussion of cinema within "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," while remarkably limited, supports this interpretation.⁴⁹ But the idea of an ontological architectonic, in which the photography subtends and determines the essence of cinematic practice, is borne out more fully in Bazin's later writing; indeed, it seems

⁴⁷ Conversely, accounts that exacerbate the difference between photography and cinema tend to place emphasis on the radically different nature of the spectatorial encounter with the image. Much has also been made of the distinction drawn by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*; see also the recent discussion in Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second*.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., B. C. Birchall, "Hegel's Notion of *Aufheben*," *Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (1981): 75–103; and Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 283–5.

⁴⁹ In contrast, Dudley Andrew's discussion in "The Ontology of a Fetish," *Film Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (summer 2008): 62–66, draws attention to the points of differentiation between photography and cinema within "The Ontology of the Photographic Image."

that the sequential development of Bazin's own theoretical corpus itself recapitulates this relationship between photography and cinema. We should therefore take seriously Bazin's decision to include "Ontologie de l'image photographique" as the first essay in a book the title of which is nothing other than *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*⁵⁰ The "Ontology" essay subtends the writing on cinema which follows, just as the photographic ontology subtends cinematic practice. On this point it is worth returning to Bazin's own justification of this inclusion in his *Avant-Propos* to the first volume of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*:

Cette première série est donc composée d'études brèves ou longues, anciennes ou récentes, groupées autour du thème critique suivant : les fondements ontologiques de l'art cinématographique ou si l'on veut, en termes moins philosophiques : le cinéma comme art de la réalité. *Nous partirons, comme il se doit, de l'image photographique, élément primitif de la synthèse finale, pour en arriver à esquisser, sinon une théorie du langage cinématographique fondée sur l'hypothèse de son réalisme ontogénétique, du moins une analyse qui ne lui soit point contradictoire.*⁵¹

Viewing the photo-cinema relation as an architectonic–dialectic one also sheds some light on the logic of Bazin's Malraux-inspired 1958 addendum to the conclusion of the "Ontology" essay: "D'autre part le cinéma est un langage" (*QQC* 19).⁵² This addition

⁵⁰ In this respect there is a notable parallel with Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), which also begins with an essay on photography (one in which the pursuit of the question of photography's medium specificity is the main concern!). Kracauer is forthright in asserting the nature of the relationship between photography and cinema: "The nature of photography survives in that of the film" (*Theory of Film*, 27).

⁵¹ Bazin, *Avant-Propos to Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 1: *Ontologie et langage*, 9; emphasis added. As mentioned earlier, this penultimate paragraph of the *Avant-Propos* and that which follows are omitted entirely from the 1975 "Édition définitive" of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*

⁵² Gray and Barnard both translate "*langage*" simply as "language," and in so doing ignore the significance of the *langue/langage* distinction, which turns out to be rather important in light of later developments in film theory and in structuralism more generally. On the basic importance of the distinction, see, for example, Roy Harris, "Translator's Introduction" in *Course in General Linguistics*, by Ferdinand de Saussure, translated by Roy Harris (Chicago: Open Court, 1983), xiii–xiv. Metz would of course later take

seems explicitly designed to allow the essays which will follow in *What Is Cinema?* to supplement the claims made in the “Ontology” without negating them. I suspect Bazin may also have intended it to resonate directly with the argument laid out in the “Evolution of Film Language”—also drawn directly from Malraux—that it is editing which transforms cinema into a language:

Quant au montage, issu principalement comme on le sait des chefs-d’œuvre de Griffith, André Malraux en écrivait dans la *Psychologie du cinéma* qu’il constituait la naissance du film comme l’art : ce qui le distingue vraiment de la simple photographie animée, en fait, enfin, un langage.⁵³

At any rate, we now have a sense of how, for Bazin, mechanical objectivity determines photographic/cinematic specificity, and thus determines the role that photography and cinema will play within the three myths of representation, desire, and presence. As I suggested at the outset, each of Bazin’s three myths contains its own set of assumptions about what it means to desire the presence of something and what it means to attempt to *represent* something; it is the trait of objectivity that governs photography/cinema’s place within each of these myths. With this in mind, we can now

up the problem of the *langue/langage* distinction in direct relation to cinema; see Christian Metz, “The Cinema: Language or Language System?” in *Film Language*.

⁵³ Bazin, “L’Évolution du langage cinématographique,” in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 1: Ontologie et langage, 132. Barnard’s translation perhaps makes the complementary nature of the two passages more explicit: “With editing, film finally became a language” (Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 88). Recall, however, that within this “evolution,” as Bazin describes it, the practice of language-like montage is merely the first stage of cinema’s evolution. Reaching its peak at the end of the silent era, it would be superceded first by the classicism of analytical editing, which flourished until 1938–9, and finally by the long take of neorealism (of which Murnau, Flaherty, and Renoir were the “prophets”). Bazin demonstrates how each of these three stages embodies a spectatorial psychology and a metaphysics, with each subsequent development drawing paradoxically closer to the ontogenetic essence of cinema. Montage creates an abstract reality, a mere shadow or interpretation of the filmed reality; classical analytical editing leaves filmed reality intact, adding nothing to it, but surveying and commenting on it from a subjective point of view which fixes its meaning; with neorealism, the spectator is confronted with the full ambiguity of reality. See Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language,” 88ff.

say something about the interplay between desire, satisfaction, and presence as they emerge in the course of Bazin's elaboration of the myth of the obsession with resemblance, and also consider the ideals of representation—as a mediation between desire and presence—that the myth entails.

Desire and the Obsession with Resemblance

I have suggested that each of Bazin's three myths entails its own understanding of desire in relation to presence. In the obsession with resemblance, we are speaking of a desire both to produce and to experience visual likenesses which are capable of substituting themselves completely for the world. This desire is satisfied by the objective means of image production guaranteed by photography/cinema. But it is essential to remember that the orientation of desire in this way is, for Bazin, merely the sublimation of the older and more basic desire to defeat time (“elle ne pouvait que sublimer à l'usage d'une pensée logique ce besoin incoercible d'exorciser le temps” [*QQC* 12]). If what we seem to desire is perfect visual resemblance, this desire is fundamentally misguided; our collective psychology has found itself detoured onto the wrong track. Here we encounter the second sense in which Bazin speaks of the pursuit of resemblance as an “obsession,” in the literal sense of being besieged. Recall that, in the first sense, this obsession describes the development of painting itself, which has been distracted or detoured from its proper destiny as aesthetic expression achieved by means of the formal qualities proper to it. But our collective conscious desire has also become obsessed, to

the extent that it has seemingly abandoned the more basic need to defeat time—of which this obsession is itself the symptom.

Bazin is clear in establishing the kind of object toward which this desire is oriented, as with his statement that it is “simply a psychological desire to replace the outside world with its double” (TB 5) (“un désir tout psychologique de remplacer le monde extérieur par son double” [*QQC* 13]). If this desire originated in the basic need to defeat time as a desire for the perpetuation of the world of objects as such—against and in spite of the flow of time—here it manifests itself as nothing more than the desire for representations which substitute themselves fully for that world. The time-bound world is forsaken in favour of Pascal’s “vain” mirror-world of representations, which exist heterogeneously and in complete autonomy from the physical and temporal fabric of reality. The presence of representations substitutes itself for the presence of things.

Bazin also clearly indicates both the circumstances under which this obsession is perpetuated and those in which it may be satisfied entirely. On the one hand, this desire is sustained reciprocally along with the development of painting toward perfect visual likeness: “Ce besoin d’illusion s’accroissant rapidement de sa propre satisfaction” (*QQC* 13).⁵⁴ Advancements in the techniques of visual likeness seem only to foment the desire for even greater likeness. On the other hand, there is in fact a set of conditions in which this desire may be totally satisfied. These conditions are realized by the fact of photography/cinema’s mechanical objectivity. On the basis of this objectivity,

⁵⁴ This sentence is translated in Gray as follows: “The satisfaction of this appetite for illusion merely served to increase it” (HG 11). Barnard translates it as follows: “This need for illusion, which grew rapidly the more it was met” (TB 5).

photography and cinema “satisfont définitivement et dans son essence même l’obsession du réalisme” (*QQC* 14). Bazin is emphatic on this point, which he reiterates later in the same paragraph when he speaks of “la satisfaction complète de notre appétit d’illusion par une reproduction mécanique dont l’homme est exclu” (*QQC* 14).

In making the claim that photographic/cinematic observation totally satisfies this particular psychological need, Bazin is echoing similar contemporary claims. Recall, for example, that this point is formulated in an almost identical way in the *Encyclopédie Française* (“Grâce à l’authenticité de ce qu’elle enregistre, la photographie satisfait à ce besoin de « voir pour croire », si caractéristique de notre époque”). Likewise, we have already seen how Bazin’s characterization of the mechanical nature of the photographic apparatus as supplying “objectivity” resonates with nineteenth-century epistemological ideals of scientific discipline. The nature of desire in the obsession with resemblance, as Bazin describes it, would therefore seem to reflect widespread contemporary cultural and epistemological concerns, within which the ideal of objectivity figures centrally. But we also need to remember that, for Bazin, the invention of photography/cinema represents the culmination of a longer trend that begins not in the nineteenth century, but rather with the invention of perspective and the sublimation of the need to defeat time within a “pensée logique.” I therefore think that, despite being clothed in the more contemporary language of mechanical objectivity, Bazin’s discussion ultimately locates the essence of the obsession with resemblance within Cartesian rationality.

There is ample evidence within the “Ontology” to support this view. There is, of course, Bazin’s reference to Charles Le Brun, the well-known disciple of Descartes. But there is also the precise way in which Bazin characterizes the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to satisfy completely the need for illusion. Specifically, Bazin identifies the satisfaction of desire with the eradication of a persistent “doubt.” It is this persistence of doubt that leads Bazin to diagnose the ultimate limitations of painting: “Si habile que fût le peintre, son œuvre était toujours hypothéquée par une subjectivité inévitable. Un doute subsistait sur l’image à cause de la présence de l’homme” (*QQC* 14). In two important ways, this statement resonates strikingly with the principles of Cartesian metaphysics, and the central place of “doubt” as such within that metaphysics. First, it establishes doubt not just as something to be avoided, but rather as a condition existing prior to any attempt at representation (“Un doute subsistait...”). Second, it establishes the representing subject as the origin of that doubt (“...à cause de la présence de l’homme”). Both of these elements are central to the concept of doubt in Descartes. As it is formulated both in the *Meditations* and the *Discourse on Method*, doubt is something that Descartes elects to confront from the outset, and therefore a concept around which his entire metaphysics pivots.⁵⁵ Photography and cinema satisfy “for once

⁵⁵ See, e.g. René Descartes, “Discours de le méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences,” in *Œuvres de Descartes* Volume 6: Discours de la méthode et essais, edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1965), 31–4. See also discussions and examples in Michael Williams, “Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt,” in *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Daniel Garber, “Science and Certainty in Descartes,” in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, edited by Michael Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); John M. Morris, ed., *Descartes Dictionary* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 45; and Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, 51–2. Williams, for example, distinguishes Cartesian doubt from classical skepticism precisely in terms of the existence of

and for all” the obsession with resemblance insofar as they provide a model of representation in which the doubt that inaugurates Cartesian rationality is eradicated entirely.

Because mechanical objectivity serves to guarantee the veracity of representations and to eliminate the founding doubt of Cartesian rationality, a sort of equilibrium-state is achieved between desire and its object. Both technical development toward more perfect resemblance and the perpetuation of desire in relation to this development are short-circuited or neutralized. We are therefore invited to imagine a conception of desire in which its total satisfaction is not only possible but also really achievable; desire operates within a closed economy. This has a couple of important implications.

The first concerns the place of God within Descartes’s metaphysics, and more specifically the implications that seem to arise from Bazin’s suggestion that an eradication of doubt is realized by the invention of photography/cinema. If Cartesian cosmology involves, as Nancy L. Maull puts it, the “geometrization of nature” and the rendering of the universe as fully knowable to the rational subject,⁵⁶ the place of God is nevertheless secured within this universe precisely by the fact of the subject’s inaugural doubt. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes tells us:

...I reflected that I doubted, and that consequently my being was not perfect, because I saw clearly that it was a greater perfection to know than to doubt; thus I

Cartesian doubt as an initial condition of philosophical inquiry: “whereas skepticism creeps up on the classical skeptic, as the result of his persistent inability to bring disputes to a definite conclusion, skepticism for Descartes is a theoretical problem that he *chooses* to confront. From the outset, skepticism is under his control...” (Williams, “Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt,” 120; emphasis original).

⁵⁶ Nancy L. Maull, “Cartesian Optics and the Geometrization of Nature,” in *Descartes: Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics*, edited by Stephen Gaukroger (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980). I will return to this idea shortly.

decided to find out how I had learned to think of something more perfect than I was; and I clearly perceived that it must be from some nature which was in effect more perfect.⁵⁷

Pursuing the origins of this “idea of a being more perfect than mine,” Descartes will eventually conclude: “if there were certain other bodies in the world, or else certain intelligences or other natures, which were not completely perfect, their being must depend on God’s power, so that they could not subsist without Him for a single moment.”⁵⁸ For Descartes, therefore, the seeming imperfection that manifests itself as the condition of doubt in fact serves as an assurance of the existence of God. As Ferdinand Alqu   has put it, “[p]our prouver Dieu, Descartes revient donc au doute, ce qui justifierait la formule : *dubito, ergo Deus est.*”⁵⁹ If the necessity of God arises from the gap between perfection and imperfection articulated by the existence of doubt, and the need for doubt is eradicated by the invention of photography and cinema, then Bazin might be seen as suggesting that, by virtue of this invention, we no longer have any need of the idea of God.

This leads us to a second point. The implications of photography/cinema’s eradication of the gap between perfection and imperfection might have greater consequences were it not for the fact that, for Bazin, the obsession with resemblance, and, implicitly, the entire project of Cartesian rationalism, is only the sublimation of a greater,

⁵⁷ Ren   Descartes, “Discourse on the Method for Rightly Directing One’s Reason and Searching for Truth in the Sciences,” in *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, translated by Paul J. Olscamp (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 28–9.

⁵⁸ Descartes, “Discourse on the Method,” 29.

⁵⁹ Ren   Descartes, “Discours de la m  thode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la v  rit   dans les sciences,” in *Œuvres philosophiques de Descartes* Volume 1, edited by Ferdinand Alqu   (Paris:  ditions Garnier Fr eres, 1963), 605 n. 2.

more basic need to defeat time. With the satisfaction of the obsession with resemblance, we are invited to imagine a conception of desire in which total satisfaction is both possible and achievable. And yet this satiable desire for resemblance contrasts strikingly with the “incoercible” need to defeat time, which has been sublimated throughout the obsession with resemblance but which will re-emerge in its essence in response to the invention of photography/cinema, i.e. *at the very moment when the need for resemblance is satisfied*. We will have an opportunity to explore this problem further when we consider Bazin’s conception of desire and presence in relation to the need to defeat time. In the meantime, though, let us examine further the kind of representation and the kind of experience of presence that is suggested by ideals of the obsession with resemblance.

For Bazin, perspective is the technique that lies at the origin of the resemblance complex (its “original sin”). The representational ideals associated with perspective are therefore essentially those of the obsession with resemblance, which will ultimately be fulfilled only by photography/cinema. In this sense, photography/cinema constitute the ultimate realization of those ideals which find their first expression in the invention of perspective; it is precisely this continuity of purpose that Bazin seems to be affirming with his addition, in 1958, of the remark that Leonardo’s camera obscura prefigures Niepce’s. We should therefore accept the assumption (as I indicated earlier, it goes more or less unspoken in Bazin) that photography/cinema share with perspective (and the camera obscura) a set of basic strategies and ideals for the production of visual likenesses. A look at the representational and epistemological ideals associated with

perspective, as they are implied both in Bazin and more generally in art-historical and cultural theory, will therefore offer a useful framework within which to explore the ideals of representation and presence within the obsession with resemblance.

Above all, these are ideals that resonate with the epistemology and metaphysics of Cartesian rationalism. We have already seen how Bazin's formulation of desire in relation to the obsession with resemblance combines the contemporary language of mechanical objectivity with more fundamentally Cartesian principles of certainty and doubt. Likewise, perspective itself is widely accepted to prefigure Cartesian metaphysics. A long tradition of commentary from Erwin Panofsky to Martin Jay has associated the representational ideals of perspective with those of Descartes;⁶⁰ as Lyle Massey tells us, "[i]t is generally taken for granted that perspective somehow stands paradigmatically for Descartes's rationalism—for his search for ontological and epistemological certainty."⁶¹ Massey and others have called the validity of this association into question;⁶² however, my goal here is not weigh the merits of linking Descartes to perspective; rather I intend to accept this correlation only to the extent that Bazin's own text seems to call for it. Indeed, I think that the "Ontology" makes Bazin's understanding of this correlation abundantly clear. If the relationship between Descartes and perspective is succinctly captured in the invocation of Le Brun—who, as we have

⁶⁰ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, translated by Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); 69–70.

⁶¹ Lyle Massey, "Anamorphosis through Descartes or Perspective Gone Awry," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (winter 1997): 1148.

⁶² See also, e.g., Dalia Judovitz, "Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes," in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, edited by David Michael Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

seen, was both a follower of Descartes and a theorist of perspective—it certainly plays out more fully in Bazin’s own characterization of the representational ideals of the obsession with resemblance.

Mirror and Window: Ideals of Representation and Presence

The representational ideal of perspective is founded on the aspiration to produce a visual semblance of the world as though it were perceived directly. Nowhere is this more evident than in Leon Battista Alberti’s *De Pictura*, the treatise that is widely regarded as the first attempt to codify the techniques of perspective that had been employed in practice since Brunelleschi. In an often-quoted passage, Alberti states that “on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen.”⁶³ Alberti, with the metaphor of the window, makes clear the goal of “perceptual realism.” And yet, as Martin Kemp points out, this founding principle of visual resemblance goes unspoken throughout much of perspectival theory. Kemp nonetheless affirms the basic assumption that “geometrical procedures provided an appropriate means for the representation of three-dimensional objects on a flat surface in such a way that the projection presented essentially the same visual arrangement to the eye as that presented by the original

⁶³ “Principio in superficie pingenda quam amplum libeat quadrangulum rectorum angulorum inscribo, quod quidem mihi pro aperta finestra est ex qua historia contueatur”; see Leon Battista Alberti, “De Pictura,” in *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, edited and translated by Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 54–5.

objects.”⁶⁴ If the criterion of perceptual realism goes unspoken in most theorizations of perspective, it is front and centre in Bazin—not just in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” but throughout his writing on cinema. After all, it is on Alberti’s metaphor of the “open window” that Bazin is said to have modelled his own claims concerning spatial realism in the cinema;⁶⁵ indeed, his employment of this metaphor certainly suggests that Bazin was familiar with the principles of *De Pictura*. In the “Ontology,” Bazin identifies the invention of perspective as the “decisive event” which “permettait à l’artiste de donner l’illusion d’un espace à trois dimensions où les objets puissent se situer *comme dans notre perception directe*” (*QQC* 12; emphasis added). Here Bazin may again be echoing Malraux, who tells us that the innocent gallery visitor “voit dans la peinture un moyen de recréer l’univers conformément au témoignage de ses sens.”⁶⁶ At any rate, for both Malraux and Bazin, perspectival painting is clearly intended to model itself on direct visual perception.

Alberti seeks the accurate depiction of the visible surface of the world. He begins his treatise by defining an individual point in space as the most basic, indivisible sign

⁶⁴ Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 165.

⁶⁵ Bazin speaks of the film frame as “open window” in “The Technique of *Citizen Kane*,” in *Bazin at Work: Major Reviews and Essays of the Forties and Fifties*, translated by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, edited by Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 235; the window metaphor also appears in Bazin, “Théâtre et cinéma,” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 2: Le Cinéma et les autres artes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1959), 101. For commentary on Bazin’s use of the metaphor, see, e.g., Aumont et al., *Aesthetics of Film*, 13. Interestingly, Aumont et al. do not cite any specific examples, but the English translator has added a note pointing readers to Bazin’s book on Jean Renoir (cf. Aumont et al., *L’Esthétique du film* [Paris: Éditions Fernand Nathan, 1983], 15). In *Jean Renoir*, however, Bazin celebrates Renoir’s having “successfully rid [cinema] of the equivocal analogies with painting and the theater,” and tells us that Renoir “understands that the screen is not a simple rectangle but rather the homothetic surface of the viewfinder of his camera. It is the very opposite of a frame. The screen is a mask whose function is no less to hide reality than it is to reveal it” (Bazin, *Jean Renoir* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973], 87).

⁶⁶ Malraux, “Esquisse,” 6.

(with lines simply consisting of a row of points, etc.), and a sign in turn as “anything which exists on a surface so that it is visible to the eye.” He goes on to assert: “No one will deny that things which are not visible do not concern the painter, for he strives to represent only the things that are seen.”⁶⁷ This basic aspiration of painting is confirmed in the second part of the treatise, where Alberti hits upon the formulation that will stand as a metaphor not just for art but for all of scientific enquiry in the age of rationalism. Evoking the “tale of Narcissus” which, Alberti says, “fits our purpose perfectly,” he asks, “What is a painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?” (“Quid est enim alium pingere quam arte superficiem illam fontis amplecti?”).⁶⁸ As Cecil Grayson reiterates, for Alberti, the painter “holds a mirror up to Nature.”⁶⁹ It is no less than this very mirroring that Bazin, quoting Pascal, decries in the opening pages of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” as “la création d’un univers idéal à l’image du réel et doué d’un destin temporel autonome” (*QQC* 12).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Alberti, “De Pictura,” 37.

⁶⁸ Alberti, “De Pictura,” 62–3.

⁶⁹ Cecil Grayson, “Notes to *De Pictura*” in Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, 114. On the metaphor of the mirror in Western philosophy in the age of rationalism, see Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*; Rorty tells us that “[w]ithout the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself” (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 12). On the metaphor of the mirror in aesthetic theory, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), especially 30–5.

⁷⁰ Pascal’s formulation is as follows: “Quelle vanité que la peinture, qui attire l’admiration par la ressemblance des choses dont on n’admire pas les originaux!” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, edited by Philippe Sellier [Paris: Mercure de France, 1976], 49). Pascal’s anxiety echoes that of St. Augustine, which in turn resonates with that of Plato. See Jacques Derrida’s explication of Plato’s condemnation of poetry in the *Republic* in “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), especially 186–7; see also Martin Jay’s short but helpful discussion of the “mimetic paradox” in Jay, “Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe,” in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, edited by Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 38–40.

If the perspectival image aspires to the likeness of direct perception, as indicated by the metaphor of the window, it is also intended ideally to *substitute itself* for our visual experience of reality, as suggested by the metaphor of the mirror. No matter how convincing the likeness, the materiality of the painted picture stands in a relation of utter heterogeneity to that of the world it depicts, becoming an object of value and contemplation in its own right. The presence of the representation duplicates and supplants the presence of the world. This relationship of heterogeneity between painted image and reality is seldom taken up in discussions of perspective or painting in general. And yet it is absolutely central for Bazin, who will use it to differentiate between the representational ideals of the obsession with resemblance and of the need to defeat time. For it is this “strange vanity,” this satisfaction with the mere likenesses of things in and of themselves, which surely constitutes Bazin’s obsession with resemblance in its essence; indeed, for Bazin’s purposes in describing this obsession, Pascal’s mirror seems to be a more appropriate metaphor than Alberti’s window.

Ontology and Epistemology

Insofar as it epitomizes the ideals of desire and presence that characterize the entire myth of the obsession with resemblance, the representational ideal of perspective is heavily overdetermined in Bazin’s account. But there has also been immense value assigned to perspective in art-historical, scientific, and cultural theory generally. I cannot

offer a complete history of this overdetermination here.⁷¹ But it is worth surveying some of the main concerns that have accumulated around perspective—many of which I think are relevant to Bazin’s account. These include perspective’s employment of scientific or mathematical principles, the mechanical nature of the process, its concern with the depiction of the visible surface of things in space, and the positioning of the spectator in relation to that space. Taken together, these concerns suggest the framework of an entire epistemological ideal, and possibly an entire metaphysics.

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of perspectival representation is the employment of mathematical principles in the production of art. This is not surprising given that a commitment to mathematics lies at the heart of Alberti’s *De Pictura*.⁷²

Alberti’s text opens with the following assertion:

In writing about painting in these short books, we will, to make our discourse clearer, first take from mathematicians those things which seem relevant to the subject. When we have learned these, we will go on, to the best of our ability, to explain the art of painting from the basic principles of nature.⁷³

Louis Hourticq begins his chapter on Le Brun by describing the goals of the Académie Royale in markedly similar terms: “ils discutaient pour élaborer une doctrine de leur art qui eût la certitude de la science et pût se démontrer comme les vérités mathématiques.”⁷⁴

This colonization of art by science is concomitant with the detachment of the field of

⁷¹ For an overview of the ideals to which perspective has been assimilated, see, e.g., Kim H. Veltman, “Literature on Perspective: A Select Bibliography (1971–1984),” *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 21 (1986): 185–207; see also Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, 26.

⁷² See, e.g., Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 21; John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 121.

⁷³ Alberti, “De Pictura,” 37.

⁷⁴ Hourticq, *De Poussin à Watteau*, 42.

representation from the presence of the world. Horkheimer and Adorno explain this process as follows:

With advancing enlightenment, only authentic works of art have been able to avoid the mere imitation of what already is...art as integral replication has pledged itself to positivist science, even in its specific techniques. It becomes, indeed, the world over again, an ideological doubling, a compliant reproduction. The separation of sign and image is inescapable.⁷⁵

Horkheimer and Adorno view enlightenment as an ongoing, dialectical process. But Martin Kemp has suggested that the Western European marriage of science and the technique of painting, which persisted through to the nineteenth century, is unprecedented in the history of art.⁷⁶ In this respect, Kemp's remarks resonate with those we have already discovered in Malraux's "Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma." Recall that Malraux begins his essay by pointing out the exceptional nature of artistic practice in Western Europe from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, speaking of "une suite d'efforts, assez semblables à ceux des sciences, pour *représenter* les choses."⁷⁷ The adoption of scientific ideals by artistic practice in Western Europe is thus identified as both contingent and singular. In this singularity we find the basis for Bazin's identification of the "obsession" with resemblance—the insistence that art has been temporarily besieged by a new technique and a new sense of purpose.

The adherence to scientific and mathematical principles is so central to perspectival technique that it has become commonplace to consider, as Bazin does,

⁷⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 13.

⁷⁶ Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 1.

⁷⁷ Malraux, "Esquisse," 6; emphasis original.

perspective as a “mechanical system.” W. J. T. Mitchell, for example, speaking of the invention of perspective, claims that “the effect of this invention was nothing less than to convince an entire civilization that it possessed an infallible method of representation, a system for the automatic and mechanical production of truths about both the material and mental worlds.”⁷⁸ We can understand this tendency to view perspective as “mechanical” in a couple of ways. First, more literally, it reflects the development of real technological implements to aid in the construction of perspectival compositions. Martin Kemp explains in detail the role of “perspective machines” beginning with Alberti’s *velum* (the dyed threads strung in a grid between the painter and the object). The invention of similar mechanical devices by Leonardo, Dürer, etc.—culminating in the related development of the portable camera obscura—is of course well documented.⁷⁹

But it is also common to speak of perspective as a mechanical system in a more abstract sense—as a set of rigid techniques designed to standardize the process of picture-making and thus minimize the possibility of artist error. This is the sense one gets from commentators on perspective such as White, Kemp, etc., but nowhere is it more vivid than in the account of William M. Ivins, Jr. Writing in the mid-1930s, in a language that surely suggests the contemporary influence of Anglo-American logical positivism, Ivins sees Alberti as providing “a basis for the hitherto missing grammar or rules for securing both logical relations within the system of symbols employed and a reciprocal, or two-way, metrical correspondence between the pictorial representations of objects and the

⁷⁸ Mitchell, *Iconology*, 37.

⁷⁹ See Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 167ff.

shapes of those objects as located in space.”⁸⁰ Ivins in fact draws a correlation between the contemporary invention of woodcuts—as a system of mechanical reproduction—and that of perspective.⁸¹

Of course, we need to be wary of the potential for anachronism that lies in the tendency of such commentators to impose the label “mechanical” onto the principles and techniques of perspective. Calling perspective “mechanical” arguably makes it more easily assimilable to a place within teleological histories of photographic technology. In fact, in Bazin’s own argument, this assertion of continuity turns out to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is necessary for Bazin to show the ideals at work in perspective in order to demonstrate that the objectivity of photography/cinema fully supplants it and relieves it of its purpose. On the other hand, calling perspective “already mechanical” undermines Bazin’s critical assertion that what makes photography/cinema uniquely objective is the mechanical means by which the image is generated. The very threshold of the mechanical on which photographic/cinematic specificity relies—and along with it the entire photographic/cinematic “ontology”—is therefore subject to deconstruction at Bazin’s own hand.

At any rate, we can see how perspective is assigned a foundational place in the history of art insofar it seeks the union of art and science. But what is the desired outcome of this union? Alberti’s goal is to depict the world as though it were seen in accordance with the laws of optical geometry. This goal in turn suggests a pair of related

⁸⁰ Ivins, *On the Rationalization of Sight*, 10.

⁸¹ Ivins, *On the Rationalization of Sight*, 9.

assumptions which seem to affirm the relationship between the ideal of perspective and Cartesian metaphysics. The first assumption is an ontological one, namely that the world can and should be understood in fundamentally geometrical terms; the universe consists of nothing except three-dimensional Euclidean space populated by geometrical bodies, a “purely spatial extension.”⁸² Descartes himself speaks, in the *Discourse on Method*, of beginning his search for truths with the “object of the geometers—which I conceived as a continuous body, or a space indefinitely extended in length, breadth, and height or depth, which was divisible into various parts, could have different shapes and sizes, and could be moved or transposed in any way.”⁸³ The Cartesian reduction of knowledge to information about geometrical extension therefore finds a precursor in Alberti’s insistence that painting concern itself only with the representation of the visible surface of things as perceived from a single vantage point.⁸⁴ White and others have suggested the way in which space itself comes to be privileged within this mode of representation: “space now contains the objects by which formerly it was created”; this is “an approximation to an infinite, mathematically homogeneous space.”⁸⁵

This ontological assumption in turn entails an epistemological one—that everything about the world is ultimately knowable by way of our direct perception of the geometrical extension of space and the bodies that populate it. As Nancy L. Maull indicates, “[f]or Descartes, needless to say, the only intelligible and true information to be

⁸² See Thomas G. Pavel, “The Subject of Modern Discourse,” in *A New History of French Literature*, edited by Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 285.

⁸³ Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” 30.

⁸⁴ On this point see, e.g., Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 66.

⁸⁵ White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 123–4.

had about bodies is geometrical...The only access we have to the actual configuration of bodies is perceptual.”⁸⁶ Likewise, the fact that perspectival technique seeks to create two-dimensional likenesses on the model of natural vision suggests a privileging of the realm of the visual—both in terms of knowledge acquired through vision and the visual representation of that knowledge. But in so doing it also raises a number of much larger problems related to, on the one hand, the reliability of vision and visual images as ways of apprehending the world, and, on the other hand, the naturalization of pictorial convention.⁸⁷ Here it is worth noting Descartes’s own well-known ambivalence concerning both the reliability of vision and the artificiality of representational conventions. Descartes famously begins his essay on optics by acknowledging that “[a]ll the management of our lives depends on the senses, and since that of sight is the most comprehensive and noblest of these, there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to augment its power are among the most useful that there can be.”⁸⁸ And yet, as Margaret J. Osler has observed at length, much of Descartes’s consideration of visual perception is devoted to showing “that what we perceive is unlike the objects that cause our

⁸⁶ Maull, “Cartesian Optics,” 27.

⁸⁷ The broad terms of the images as nature/convention debate are excellently framed in W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology*; see especially 37–46 and 53–94. I will refrain from engaging with this problem here, but it is worth pointing out in passing the sorts of passionate debates that it has fuelled, from Panofsky’s assertion that perspective constitutes a “symbolic form” to Gombrich’s famous ambivalence on the subject. See Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*; and Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*. I will only observe at this point that it seems quite obvious that the naturalization of perspectival convention is at least in partly responsible for the overwhelming cultural consensus concerning the “power” of photography—a power which has been effectively conflated or subsumed with that of what we call indexicality (and this is, I think, partly where the genius of Bazin’s own essay lies, with its careful distinction between the various myths which in combination determine the value of the photographic/cinematic “ontology”).

⁸⁸ René Descartes, “Optics,” in *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, 65.

perceptions.”⁸⁹ Perspective itself figures into Descartes’s discussion precisely in order to show that perfect resemblance is not a necessary criterion of either visual perception or artificial representation such as painting; crafting an analogy based on the anamorphosis inherent to perspectival technique (circles appearing as ovals, etc.), Descartes tells us that “often, in order to be more perfect as images and to represent an object better, they must not resemble it.”⁹⁰ Regardless of what we think of Descartes’s own characterization of perspective or of subsequent debates concerning its correspondence to natural perception, it is important to recognize that this correspondence nevertheless serves as the regulative ideal toward which Bazin’s obsession with resemblance is consistently oriented.

Likewise, with its figuration of spatial extension from which the spectator is absent, but over which she/he is nonetheless able to exert mastery, control, and ownership, perspective seems to offer a compelling metaphor for Cartesian dualism. As Jonathan Crary and others have implied, perspective offers the viewing subject a sense of epistemological mastery, in which everything is arranged before us, knowable, in its proper place within the unifying order of space itself.⁹¹ That this also imparts a sense of commodification and ownership is captured in John Berger’s much-quoted remark that

⁸⁹ Margaret J. Osler, “Descartes’s Optics: Light, the Eye, and Visual Perception,” in *A Companion to Descartes*, edited by Janet Broughton and John Carriero (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 128. See also Jay’s discussion of Descartes in *Downcast Eyes*, 69–82.

⁹⁰ Descartes, “Optics,” 90.

⁹¹ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 55–6. Within this unity of space we find the coincidence of Cartesian rationalism with both a certain moral order and a certain aesthetics. Michael Baxandall has suggested that perspective may be interpreted “as an analogical emblem of moral certainty” or “as an eschatological glimpse of beatitude” (Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Second Edition [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], 108). And Hourticq, in his discussion of Le Brun, shows the union of “la vérité absolue” and “la beauté souveraine” in principles of compositional unity seeking to depict “les choses bien ordonnées” (Hourticq, *De Poussin à Watteau*, 58–9).

“if one studies European oil painting as a whole, and if one leaves aside its own claims for itself, its model is not so much a framed window open on to the world as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited.”⁹²

The metaphysical implications of perspective’s metaphorical relation between spectator, representation, and world have been taken up in numerous commentaries, from Panofsky on. Panofsky notes that perspective constitutes the “triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolidation and systematization of the external world, as an extension of the domain of the self.”⁹³ The mode of presence evoked here seems to resonate with Foucault’s famous discussion of the absence of man from the table of classical thought: “the personage for whom the representation exists, and who represents himself within it, recognizing himself therein as an image or reflection...he is never to be found in the table himself.”⁹⁴

⁹² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 109.

⁹³ Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 67–8. Martin Jay labels the monocular orientation of perspective as supplying “a visual practice in which the living bodies of both the painter and the viewer were bracketed, at least tendentially, in favor of an eternalized eye above temporal duration.” See Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 55–6; on this point see also Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, 94–6.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970), 303. I suspect this passage toward the end of *The Order of Things* is intended to resonate with Foucault’s earlier discussion of *Las Meninas* as a representation of classical representation (“it is not possible for the pure felicity of the image ever to present in a full light both the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented”; *The Order of Things*, 16). And I do not think it is entirely coincidental that a seventeenth-century portrait of a king stands as the privileged example of an entire mode of representation for both Foucault (Velasquez) and Bazin (Le Brun). On Descartes’s place within Foucault’s classical episteme, see Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 79. Incidentally, *Las Meninas* gets special treatment in Martin Kemp’s *The Science of Art*. Kemp concludes:

No painting was ever more concerned with ‘looking’—on the part of the painter, the figures in the painting and the spectator. Velasquez’s art is a special kind of window on the world—or a perceptual mirror of nature—or perhaps even more literally in this instance his personal door to the subtle delights of natural vision and painted illusion. (Kemp, *The Science of Art*, 108)

A series of more recent commentaries, drawing heavily on the work of Jacques Lacan, has attempted to show that the spectator's fixed external viewpoint provides a powerful metaphor not for the ideal position of Cartesian subjectivity, but rather for the ideological mechanism of capturing subjects within a position of illusory mastery.⁹⁵ Importantly, this premise also serves as the foundation of cinematic apparatus theory, which involves, in part, a more or less direct critique of the Bazinian "impression of reality."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Lacan consistently characterizes psychoanalysis as undertaking a refutation of the Cartesian *cogito*. At the start of his early essay on the "mirror stage," for example, Lacan writes that "the experience [that] psychoanalysis provides...sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*" (Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 75. On the role of the field of vision see also Lacan, "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981). Notable subsequent work on visual representation in a Lacanian vein includes Bryson, *Vision and Painting* and Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

⁹⁶ Recall first that apparatus theory locates cinematic specificity in the medium's "spectator-effects." These effects accumulate throughout the entire cinematic process, from the perspective-derived representational conventions of the two-dimensional photographic image, to those that take shape in the relation between shots (suture, etc.), to those imposed by the embodied spectatorial conditions of theatrical exhibition. They culminate in the spectator's compulsion, through the field of vision, to primary identification with a "transcendental subject whose place is taken by the camera which constitutes and rules the objects in this 'world'" and "the active center and origin of meaning," thus securing the "apodicticity of the ego." All of this is rooted (however problematically) in the Lacanian narrative of the constitution of the seemingly complete and non-contradictory identity of the imaginary through the gaze, in the form of "an *imaginary* relation of the individual to the world" (see Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus," translated by Alan Williams, in *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 [winter 1974–75]: 40–45 [originally published in *Cinéthique* in 1970]; and similar remarks in Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier." The issue is also taken up in exhaustive detail in Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* 17, no. 1 [autumn 1976]: 68–112. Neither Baudry nor Heath mention Bazin by name, but it is fair to say that it is Bazin's characterization of two-dimensional screen space modelled on visual perception that they have in mind when they speak of the idealized "impression of reality" given by perspective and the camera obscura. For a lengthy discussion of perspective, the camera obscura, and cinematic apparatus theory, see Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, 74–8. On spectator effects as the basis of cinematic specificity in apparatus theory, see discussions of Baudry's Althusserian "differential specificity of cinematic inscription" and Heath's specification on the basis of "its forms of address to a subject" in Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 92–3, 180–1, and similar discussions in Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 281, and Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, 20).

The illusory process by which the spectator finds her/his own existence assured by means of the mastery of the space of representation is also a central figuration in Heidegger's critique of Cartesian metaphysics. In "The Age of the World Picture," Heidegger tells us:

objectifying of whatever is, is accomplished in a setting-before, a representing, that aims at bringing each particular being before it in such a way that man who calculates can be sure, and that means certain, of that being. We first arrive at science as research when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation.⁹⁷

Heidegger is not speaking simply about the mimetic production of representations in a way that leaves the presence of the world autonomous and intact. Rather, for Heidegger, the process by which we represent the world to ourselves determines the nature of its presence as such. Cartesian metaphysics, therefore, renders the disposition of the entire world *as* picture, enframed and ready-at-hand in service to the instrumental reason of the subject as *cogito*.

Conclusion

In critiques of the Cartesian representational system such as Lacan's and Heidegger's, we find echoes of Bazin's own uneasiness with the obsession with resemblance. This kind of uneasiness is neither new nor original (it is at least as old as Plato). After all, the ambition to produce a perfect visual likeness—a mirror of the

⁹⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 127.

world—inevitably raises the question of what is being obscured in the process. For Bazin, the invention of photography/cinema provides an opportunity to find out.

By way of a comparison of painting and photography/cinema's efficacy in responding to the pursuit of visual likeness, Bazin suggests a number of ways in which this obsession with resemblance only ever achieves pseudo-realism, destined to be surpassed. He shows that, having abandoned the pursuit of resemblance, painting is able to resume its rightful task of aesthetic expression by means of the form that is proper to it. Bazin then shows that photography and cinema short-circuit the drive toward ever-greater visual illusion, because the objectivity of the lens satisfies in its essence the obsession that underwrites the need for illusion. In supplying a representation that is free of the subjectivity of the representer, photography/cinema would seem to eradicate the very doubt that inaugurates rational thought, thus offering the subject an apparent position of ultimate mastery that has no need of God.

For Bazin, however, photography/cinema's satisfaction of the demand for perfect resemblance only serves to unleash another kind of desire. This is the need to defeat time, which has long been sublimated to the very logic of rational thought that fuels the obsession with resemblance. It is a need, Bazin tells us, "to substitute for the object something more than an approximation" (TB 8). It is a consideration of photography/cinema's response to this need that lies at the heart of Bazin's "Ontology."

4. THE NEED TO DEFEAT TIME

Genesis and Development: A Myth of Sublimation and Redemption

Bazin's history of the obsession with resemblance, indebted as it is to Malraux's "Esquisse," could easily exist unto itself as an intact and autonomous narrative. And yet, for Bazin, this story forms only the middle part of a longer and more fundamental myth of human need and artistic development. Within this longer framing narrative, the obsession with resemblance and the practice of illusionistic representation are only symptoms of the sublimation of a basic human need to defeat time. This need, long repressed, will re-emerge in its essence only in response to the invention of photography/cinema. In shaping this other narrative, Bazin combines aspects of a Freudian case history with elements of contemporary art-historical narratology. Before addressing the representational ideals it embodies, we should consider how the myth of the need to defeat time incorporates elements of these two frameworks.

Let us begin by tracing the narrative as Bazin presents it. For Bazin, the Egyptian practice of mummification serves as the earliest and most privileged example of a basic human need to defeat time ("ce besoin incoercible d'exorciser le temps" [*QQC* 12]), and so assumes the narratological burden of an originary or founding instance (I will return to the question of Egypt as 'origin' shortly). But Bazin also shows how the existence of this

basic need has been “sublimated” in the course of the pursuit of a rationalistic representational practice which constitutes the obsession with resemblance. The seeds of this pursuit are already to be found in Egypt, where terra cotta statues are placed in tombs, but only as a contingency in the event of the disappearance of the embalmed corpse.

The invention of perspective heralds the beginning of the true obsession with resemblance, when the need to defeat time becomes fully sublimated (“elle ne pouvait que sublimer à l’usage d’une pensée logique ce besoin incoercible d’exorciser le temps” [QQC 12]). In the course of this obsession, the development of western painting finds itself “torn between two aspirations” (TB 5), namely aesthetic expression and visual resemblance. In this way, a collective psychological sublimation has in effect led to painting’s crisis of identity. Throughout Bazin’s account, the fate of artistic and representational practice is always intertwined with the contingencies of a collective human psychology; their narratives are inseparable.

It is the invention of photography that ends the perpetuation of the cycle of sublimation that constitutes the obsession with resemblance. In so doing, it also unleashes a radical development in the psychology of the image. By virtue of the demand of irrational credulousness in the image—placed on us by photography/cinema’s automatic means of genesis—the basic need to defeat time is “unrepressed” and humans are once again able to experience a longing not simply for an illusionistic likeness, but for the presence of the object itself: “Only the photographic lens gives us an image of the

object that is capable of unrepressing, out of the depths of our unconscious, our need to substitute for the object something more than an approximation” (TB 8; translation modified). Because it has put an end to the repression of this need, Bazin speaks of photography as having “radically transformed the psychology of the image” (TB 7).¹ In short, the basic need to defeat time, openly expressed in the Egyptian practice of mummification, comes to be repressed and then, with the invention of photography/cinema, once again unrepressed. Only photography and cinema allow the need to defeat time to be experienced once again in its essence.

« défourer », du fond de notre inconscient..

To recognize that Bazin is speaking of photography/cinema’s “unrepression” of this basic need requires us to depart radically from existing English translations of a crucial passage in Bazin’s text, and thus from an entire interpretive tradition within English-language film studies—one in which the verb “« défourer »” (*QQC* 16)² has been understood to mean “satisfying” (as in Hugh Gray’s translation; Barnard translates it as “relieving”). I think that there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that “« défourer »” ought to be translated instead as “unrepressing,” and that it should therefore be understood as indicating not the *satisfaction* of a basic need but rather the *re-surfacing* of that need in its essence. Such an understanding would have major implications in terms

¹ In the French: “bouleversé radicalement” (*QQC* 15). *Bouleverser* on its own means to shatter, overwhelm, distress; the revolutionary force it suggests (intensified further here by the adverb *radicalement*) gets lost in its translation as “transform.”

² The scare quotes are Bazin’s.

of both the overall narrative that Bazin is presenting in the “Ontology” and the nature of the relationship that Bazin establishes between ontology and psychology within the myth of the need to defeat time.

Défouler is inseparable from psychoanalysis; the term, virtually extinct since the seventeenth century, was reintroduced in the 1940s precisely in order to describe *what psychoanalysis does*. Strangely, though, Bazin’s employment of the word seems to pre-date by several years the earliest documented instances of this (or any other) modern use of *défouler*. The Robert *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, for example, notes: “Le sens de «fouler aux pieds, maltraiter» est totalement sorti d’usage après 1611, sauf attestation avec la mention «vieux» dans quelques dictionnaires des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Le mot a été repris (1950) comme terme de psychanalyse signifiant «libérer une tendance habituellement refoulée», pour servir d’antonyme à *refouler*. Il s’est bien répandu dans l’usage courant, surtout à la forme pronomiale *se défouler*”³ (*Refoulement* is, of course, the standard French translation of Freud’s *Verdrängung*—repression⁴). Modern use of the substantive *défoulement* precedes that of the verb *défouler*, but even the earliest documented appearance of *défoulement* is still later than Bazin’s own usage. Both the Robert *Dictionnaire historique* and the *Trésor de la langue française* trace the first employment of *défoulement* to 1946—when it appears in a description of

³ Alain Rey, ed., *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1992), 567.

⁴ See e.g. André Bourguignon et al, *Traduire Freud* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 325; and Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967), 392–6.

psychoanalysis in the *Traité du caractère* by Emmanuel Mounier.⁵ Mounier was, of course, the founder/director of *Esprit* and a mentor to Bazin.⁶

It is not a question of whether Bazin deserves credit for initiating this psychoanalytic use of *défouler*, but rather of simply accepting that this is indeed the sense in which he is using it. This is clear enough from both the overall narrative of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and the immediate grammatical and semantic context in which the word appears. While the direct object of *défouler* is, of course, “need” (“besoin”), its modification by the locative expression “out of the depths of our unconscious” (“«défouler», du fond de notre inconscient” [QQC 16]⁷) would seem grammatically to preclude *défouler*’s meaning anything like “satisfy,” while pointing strongly toward its meaning something like “un-repress.”⁸

This interpretation does assume, of course, that Bazin was at least familiar with the concepts of repression and the unconscious. He was certainly aware of the language of analysis, even if he was, as Dudley Andrew claims, somewhat skeptical of its usefulness. According to Andrew’s biography, Bazin underwent psychiatric treatment

⁵ In the *Traité du caractère* Mounier writes, “La psychanalyse essaya de remanier à la conscience claire le noyau du refoulement et de le faire admettre comme tel par le sujet du refoulement pour le délivrer de ce poison intérieur. L’expérience des analystes montre que la cure de défoulement, si elle peut affirmer des succès certains, est loin d’être généralement infaillible” (Emmanuel Mounier, “Traité du caractère,” in *Œuvres* Volume 2 [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961], 439).

⁶ On the relationship between Mounier and Bazin see Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin*, 33–7, and Hugh Gray’s Introduction to *What Is Cinema?* Volume 2, by André Bazin, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 3–5.

⁷ Unlike *défouler*, use of *inconscient* did not originate in a strictly Freudian-psychoanalytic context. Although it provides the standard French translation of *das Unbewußte* (see Bourguignon, *Traduire Freud*, 268), the first appearance of the substantive *l’inconscient* dates to the mid-nineteenth century.

⁸ Hugh Gray’s translation circumvents the problem by replacing the locative expression “du fond de notre inconscient” with the adjective “deep” (“capable of satisfying the deep need man has...” [HG 14]). Timothy Barnard reaches a compromise by translating *défouler* as “relieving” (TB 8).

twice during the war, including a year of analysis that began in 1943, in which he sought unsuccessfully to cure his speech problem. Andrew tells us that these experiences only served to make Bazin forever wary of psychology and psychiatry.⁹

Bazin does occasionally flaunt his familiarity with psychoanalytic language in his articles.¹⁰ The concept of repression itself (*refoulement*) first plays a central role in Bazin's work in 1943. In the essay "For a Realist Esthetic," we find an astonishing passage which not only mobilizes the idea of repression of a collective need—a concept so central to the "Ontology"—but which also offers its own striking (and, for Bazin, rare) evocation of the proximate historical causes of this repression:

Dans notre civilisation mécanicienne où l'homme est dévoré par la technicité de son métier, normalisé par les contraintes politiques et sociales, le cinéma, avant tout soucieux artistique, est là *pour répondre à d'imprescriptibles besoins psychiques collectifs refoulés*.¹¹

In our mechanical civilization, in which man is devoured by the technical aspects of his work and standardized by political and social constraints, the function of cinema, above even its artistic function, is to respond to repressed, insatiable collective psychic needs.¹²

In light of this, it seems highly unlikely to me that Bazin intends *déjouer* in the "Ontology" to mean anything other than "unrepression," which is surely quite distinct

⁹ See Andrew, *André Bazin*, 41, 59–60.

¹⁰ See, e.g., "Le mythe de M. Verdoux," in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 3: Cinéma et sociologie (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 92 and passim. It is worth mentioning, however, that no such references appear in Bazin's 1947 article on *Verdoux*; see Bazin, "Défense de *Monsieur Verdoux*," *Les Temps Modernes* 27 (December 1947): 1114–22.

¹¹ André Bazin, "Pour une esthétique réaliste," in *Le Cinéma de l'occupation et de la résistance* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1975), 50; emphasis added.

¹² André Bazin, "For a Realist Esthetic," in *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance: The Birth of a Critical Esthetic*, translated by Stanley Hochman (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981), 36; I have modified the translation considerably. Hochman translates "répondre à" as "to satisfy"—marking yet another troublesome instance of an English-language translation of Bazin substituting "satisfy" for a different word entirely.

and exclusive from “satisfaction.” Gray’s translation of it as “satisfying” can only be explained as an anachronistic application of the more general sense that the term later took on (i.e. *se défouler*—usually translated as “to blow off steam”). I also suspect that Gray may have been swayed by the preponderance of strong assertions concerning “satisfaction” that appear elsewhere in the “Ontology”—namely in relation to the obsession with resemblance.

Narratology of the Case History

Bazin’s use of *défouler* forms the basis of my reading of the overall narrative of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” as approximating that of Freudian case history. To be clear, I do not wish to push the precision of this analogy too far; after all, Bazin was no psychoanalyst and what we are dealing with here is not the history of an individual patient but rather a history of art and of collective psychology—one which spans several millennia. One could argue that this concern with collective psychology is more evocative of Mounier’s personalism than Freud’s metapsychology.¹³ But, as we shall soon see, Freud’s own work also draws parallels between the history of civilizations and that of individuals. In giving the narrative form of a case history to collective history, Bazin is picking up on a tendency that is already present in Freud.

With that in mind, let us consider the features of the “Ontology” that lend support to its interpretation as a Freudian case history. To begin with, there are the various obvious cues in Bazin’s vocabulary—the liberal use throughout of terms like “complex,”

¹³ See, e.g., Emmanuel Mounier, *Qu’est-ce que le personalisme?* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1946).

“sublimate,” “need,” etc., in addition to the crucial usage of “*défouler*.” On the basis of vocabulary alone, it is clear that Bazin had something approximating a psychoanalytic narrative in mind. The problem of vocabulary seems trivial, however, in comparison to the more basic question of Bazin’s overall rhetorical and narratological strategies. Here the resonances with the fundamental work of the case history are unmistakable. When Bazin says he wants to perform “a psychoanalysis of the plastic arts,” he is looking to account for these arts in a certain way and by means of a certain rhetorical procedure. Bazin is not simply offering a comparative evaluation of the psychological implications of painting and photography/cinema. Rather, he is suggesting that their relationship can be explained by a certain kind of troubled history, and he is proposing to lead us through an investigation of this history in order to produce just such an explanation.

The clinical goals of psychoanalysis are well known. But the parallels we are dealing with in the “Ontology” relate mainly to only one aspect of psychoanalysis—namely, to the shape of narrative that is employed in service of those clinical goals (as opposed, obviously, to aspects of clinical practice!). We are therefore approaching the idea of the case history from a narratological perspective. Jonathan Culler has succinctly described the basic narratological premise of the case history as follows: “Freud’s narratives lead to the revelation of a decisive event which, when placed in the true sequence of events, can be seen as the cause of the patient’s present situation.”¹⁴ Culler is here synthesizing the findings of Steven Marcus and Peter Brooks, whose work

¹⁴ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 179.

explores such aspects of the case history in detail. Marcus and Brooks each bring the tools of literary and narratological analysis to bear on individual Freudian case histories (Dora and the Wolf Man, respectively). While each adopts a slightly different approach, I think two key elements emerge from the findings of both. Marcus and Brooks both conclusively demonstrate the fundamentally *aetiological structure* of the case history as narrative, on the one hand, and an *imperative of clear narration* on the other hand.¹⁵

The case history therefore combines the basic work of aetiology with an overt rhetoric of clear narration. This in turn accounts for a couple of the main narrative tropes of the case history. First, there is the tendency to adopt an initial narrative point of view that corresponds to a state of confoundment. This confoundment is rooted in two basic, related problems that must be solved in the course of the narrative: the probability of symptoms' being overdetermined (i.e. having multiple causes) and the concomitant fact of repression, i.e. the unavailability of key information. Case histories therefore tend to involve the conspicuous staging of confoundment and concealment, on the one hand, and disentanglement and elucidation, on the other hand. Similarly, case histories tend to interweave multiple temporalities of narration within the plot of the case history itself (Brooks, for example, locates four such temporalities: the history of the neurosis, the etiology of the neurosis, the history of the treatment, and the reporting of the case history).¹⁶

¹⁵ Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Science* 5 (1976): 389–442; Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 272.

I think that just such a combination of the rhetoric of aetiology and that of narrative disentanglement is present in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” That Bazin’s work is fundamentally aetiological is self-evident—but this does not mean that we should take this work for granted. I remarked at the outset that Bazin’s entire project in the “Ontology” seems to emerge from the posing of a question of causes, namely: *In what, exactly, did painting’s crisis consist, such that photography, in its essence, was so thoroughly capable of freeing it?* To answer this question, Bazin must first locate the cause of the obsession with resemblance and thus account for painting’s overdetermination. Only then can he identify the role of photography/cinema in liberating painting from its crisis.

A rhetoric of disentanglement is therefore also central to the “Ontology.” On the one hand, Bazin seems to weave a frustratingly complex combination of histories together. On the other hand, he shows the importance of their disentanglement to the understanding of the relationship between painting and photography/cinema. I am thinking of Bazin’s use of specific rhetorical gestures, such as the following admonishment to readers concerning the fact of painting’s overdetermination: “But the fact remains that we are in the presence of two essentially different phenomena, between which objective criticism must be able to distinguish if it is to understand painting’s development” (TB 5). Bazin dwells on this problem of overdetermination and on the imperative of disentanglement for three paragraphs, effectively re-stating the idea that the “dispute over realism in art derives from this misunderstanding, from the confusion

between the aesthetic and the psychological” (TB 6). In belabouring this point, Bazin both insists on the complexity of the aetiology while seducing us with the promise of its clarification. With the use of such gestures, Bazin presents the relationship between the history of collective psychological need and that of representational practice as a single “case history,” emplotted as a movement from an originary free expression of the need to defeat time through its repression within the obsession with resemblance and on toward its eventual unrepression.¹⁷

Case History as Art History

The writing of a case history is above all an aetiological endeavour. The problem of the *origin of desire*—however arbitrary or contingent its determination—is therefore essential to the coherence of the resulting narrative. With respect to this origin, Brooks, for example, notes that “it is the historicity of this fictionally originated desire [...] that emerges as the plot of analysis and its exposition in the case history.”¹⁸ For Bazin, it is the practice of ancient Egyptians which stands at the origin of his narrative of a seemingly transhistorical, transcultural human “need.” Why has Bazin chosen Egypt?

Antonia Lant has claimed that Bazin’s discussion of mummification reflects an ongoing

¹⁷ What seems to be conspicuously lacking from Bazin’s “case history” is some sort of reference to a “primal scene” which enacts the delayed action of trauma (*Nachträglichkeit*), although it is interesting to note Bazin’s description of the invention of perspective as “original sin,” insofar as original sin shares with the primal scene the tropes of the acquisition of illicit knowledge, loss of innocence, etc. But it seems to me that the invention of perspective occurs too late in the narrative sequence to fulfill the proper role of the primal scene; if anything, perspective is the delayed effect of the initial trauma. See the very helpful discussion in Friedrich-Wilhelm Eickhoff, “On *Nachträglichkeit*: The Modernity of an Old Concept,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87, no. 6 (December 2006): 1453–69. I say more about the importance of “original sin” for Bazin in the next chapter.

¹⁸ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 279.

correspondence between cinema (and its predecessors) and nineteenth-century “Egyptomania.”¹⁹ But I think that, given the original context of Bazin’s discussion, it is more appropriate to view his use of Egypt in a different way—as evoking the originary position of Egyptian art within contemporary Eurocentric art-historical narratives. In this way, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” is intended both to engage conspicuously with and to depart from a certain dominant art-historical discourse, even as it adopts the rhetoric of psychoanalysis.

There are obvious parallels between the nineteenth-century development of psychoanalytic technique and that of art history. Consider the epistemological and methodological foundations of modern art-historical practice. Donald Preziosi, for example, has shown that art history is foremost a project of cultural identity-formation, in which the ideals of the present are affirmed by means of the historically self-conscious articulation of narratives of continuity and change. Preziosi thus situates art history as “one of a network of interrelated institutions and professions whose overall function has been to fabricate a historical past that could be placed under systematic observation for use in the present.”²⁰ He writes:

From its beginnings, and in concert with its allied professions, art history worked to make the past synoptically visible so that it might function in and upon the present; so that the present might be seen as the demonstrable *product* of a particular past; and so that the past so staged might be framed as an *object of*

¹⁹ Antonia Lant, “The Curse of the Pharaoh, or How Cinema Contracted Egyptomania,” *October* 59 (winter 1992): 86–112.

²⁰ Donald Preziosi, “Art History: Making the Visible Legible,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

historical desire: figured as that from which the modern citizen might desire descent.²¹

For Preziosi, art objects achieve the “status of historical documents,” enjoying evidentiary value in accordance with “the assumption that changes in artistic *form* signal changes in individual or collective *mentality* or *intention*.”²² This evidentiary model requires the accrual, from the nineteenth century onward, of a “centralized *data mass*,” and “the assembly of material evidence for the construction of historical narratives of social, cultural, or cognitive development.”²³ Within the art-historical model, therefore, positive art-historical data serve an evidentiary function in the construction of narratives of formal (and, by extension, social, cultural, etc.) continuity and change—narratives which in turn articulate and account for the desires of the present.

It is with respect to this project that Egypt comes to stand in a privileged position at the origins of western art-historical development. In contrast with Renaissance-era narratives of art history, wherein Greece is viewed as the birthplace of European artistic ideals and practices,²⁴ art-historical narratives written in the early twentieth century tend to begin with the art and architecture of ancient Egypt. This is not to say that Egypt furnishes the *chronologically* earliest examples of artistic practice within these texts. Rather, Egypt serves *narratively* as the origin of a continuous line of artistic development; this accounts for the marginal status afforded to so-called pre-historic or

²¹ Preziosi, “Art History,” 18; emphasis original.

²² Preziosi, “Art History,” 14–15; emphasis original.

²³ Preziosi, “Art History,” 16–17; emphasis original.

²⁴ See, e.g., Donald Preziosi, “Art as History,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21–30.

primitive art, which is treated as lying decidedly outside of the narrative of the western art-historical tradition (similarly, in the “Ontology,” Bazin makes only passing mention of artworks found in “prehistoric caves”—art which presumably would have preceded the Egyptian practices chronologically but which Bazin mentions only afterward, thus preserving the priority of Egypt within the causal sequence of his own plot).

It is the art and architecture of Egypt which, from the nineteenth century onward, lie at the origin of the western art-historical narrative as such. Consider, for example, the following account, which we find at the beginning of the chapter on “L’art égyptien” in the two-volume *L’art: des origines à nos jours*, published in 1932:

Les manuels généraux d’histoire de l’art font une place de plus en plus grande à l’étude de l’art égyptien. Cela prouve que les historiens ont reconnu le rôle capital joué par celui-ci dans le développement de l’art de l’humanité. La production artistique de l’Ancienne Égypte n’a pas un caractère tellement spécial qu’on doive la tenir à l’écart et l’étudier séparément, en quelque sorte en vase clos. Les découvertes du XIX^e siècle et du premier tiers du XX^e permettent d’affirmer que la géographie du grand fleuve de l’art ne peut plus se comprendre sans la connaissance de ses sources.²⁵

Although *L’art: des origines à nos jours* includes a very short introductory chapter on “l’art aux temps préhistoriques et protohistoriques,” this “prehistoric” art has no place within the overall narrative; it is Egyptian art which is here identified decisively as the originary moment in a continuous art-historical development encompassing the subsequent accomplishments of all of “humanity.” A couple of other things are worth remarking in this passage. First, note how this account itself begins with a self-conscious—and somewhat tautological—reflection on the place of Egyptian art within

²⁵ Léon Deshairs, ed., *L’art des origines à nos jours*, Volume 1 (Paris: Libraire Larousse, 1932), 7.

art-historical study. Then there is the conspicuous insistence that Egyptian art ought not to be studied in isolation, “en vase clos.” Instead, Egypt is imagined as the source of the “great river” of art history—a figuration surely intended to evoke the mythic geography of Egypt itself, but one which also serves to remind us of Bazin’s own metaphor of the “river of time.”

The dependence of art-historical narration on the availability of primary data (Preziosi’s “data mass”) perhaps helps us to account for the pride of place awarded to Egypt within the standard narratives of western artistic development beginning in the nineteenth century. The 1932 text cited above acknowledges that recent “discoveries” should be credited with securing the place of Egyptian art at the source of the “great river of art.” As James Stevens Curl and others have shown, the modern scientific and cultural fascination with Egypt may be traced to the Napoleonic campaign of 1798 and the associated *Commission des sciences et arts d’Égypte* led by Baron Dominique Vivant Denon, and the subsequent publication of the twenty-three-volume *Description de l’Égypte* between 1809 and 1829. Ongoing archaeological, cultural, and aesthetic interest (including Egyptian-themed pavilions at the 1889 and 1900 Paris expositions) kept Egypt within the popular imagination until the discovery of the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun in 1922, which led to a subsequent resurgence and popularization of an Egyptian aesthetic exemplified by the art déco movement.²⁶ What Curl’s account shows above all is the relationship between the discovery of primary archaeological material and

²⁶ See James Steven Curl, *Egyptomania: The Egyptian Revival: a Recurring Theme in the History of Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 116–8, 206, 211, and passim.

the shaping of popular imagination; but Preziosi's discussion of the "data mass" also invites us to consider a similar relationship between the availability of such evidence and the possible shape of art-historical narratives. Indeed, Helen Whitehouse has suggested that Egypt enjoyed a privileged place within such narratives on the basis of this availability of evidence; "Egypt" is able to stand for all ancient cultures simply by virtue of the "clear and usable material record" it provides.²⁷ For Whitehouse, this places Egypt in a position of historical primacy: "Egypt is everyone's past," she says.²⁸

The Egyptian Freud

If, as Whitehouse tells us, "Egypt is everyone's past," it shouldn't surprise us that the idea of "Egypt" plays a founding role in the thought of Sigmund Freud. In Freud's life and in his work, Egypt operates in ways that resonate with nineteenth-century art-historical and scientific Egyptomania, and prefigure Bazin's own case history of the plastic arts.

It is well known that Freud was fond of archaeological metaphors,²⁹ and that these metaphors find their "object correlative"³⁰ in Freud's personal collection of

²⁷ Helen Whitehouse, "Egyptomanias," *American Journal of Archaeology* 101, no. 1 (January 1997): 160.

²⁸ The repetition of this claim bookends her article; see Whitehouse, "Egyptomanias," 158, 161.

²⁹ See, e.g., Marcus, "Freud and Dora," 404, n. 9; Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 271. See also Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, Volume 3 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 341; and Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life in Our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 171. The matter is treated most extensively in Suzanne Cassirer Bernfield, "Freud and Archaeology," *American Imago* 8, no. 2 (June 1951): 107–28; and Donald Kuspit, "A Mighty Metaphor: The Analogy of Archaeology and Psychoanalysis," in *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection of Antiquities*, edited by Lynn Gamwell and Richard Wells (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1989).

archaeological books and antiquities. This passion for antiquities, and the assortment of artifacts which Freud “lovingly amassed” and displayed prominently throughout his office, has been well documented by his biographers.³¹ But the undeniable prevalence of *Egyptian*-themed books, drawings, and sculpture in Freud’s collection has received little notice. In one of the few studies of the place of Egypt in Freud’s thought, Joan Raphael-Leff points out that of the approximately twenty-three hundred objects in Freud’s collection, six hundred were Egyptian; of the thirty-five statues that enjoyed pride of place on Freud’s desk at the time of his death, twenty-two of them depicted figures from Egyptian mythology.³² Given Freud’s obvious fondness for Egyptian artifacts, Raphael-Leff suggests that there is “a significant discrepancy between copious tangible proof of his cathexis of Egypt and the dearth of theoretical abstraction of this interest.”³³

Egypt does, however, figure into Freud’s writing in at least a couple of different contexts, each overdetermined in its own way. The first occurs in Freud’s recollection, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, of one of his own childhood dreams—highly significant

³⁰ Kenneth Reinhard, “The Freudian Things: Construction and the Archaeological Metaphor,” in *Excavations and their Objects: Freud’s Collection of Antiquity*, edited by Stephen Barker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 58.

³¹ Gay, *Freud*, 170–3; see also Jones, *Sigmund Freud*, 340–1; Bernfield, “Freud and Archaeology,” 109–10; Janine Burke, *The Sphinx on the Table: Sigmund Freud’s Art Collection and the Development of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Walker and Company, 2006); and Lynn Gamwell, “A Collector Analyses Collecting: Sigmund Freud on the Passion to Possess,” in *Excavations and their Objects*, 1–12; a partial catalogue appears in Lynn Gamwell and Richard Wells, eds., *Sigmund Freud and Art*.

³² Joan Raphael-Leff, “If Oedipus Was an Egyptian,” *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 17 (1990): 312, 315.

³³ Raphael-Leff therefore argues that “traumatic events in his early childhood contributed to [a] delimiting Graeco-Roman filter, and that accessibility to the ‘dark continent’ was hampered by resistances his own self-analysis could not penetrate” (Raphael-Leff, “If Oedipus Was an Egyptian,” 313, 333). In other words, if Egyptian mythology seems not to hold overt theoretical interest for Freud, it is precisely because it is traumatically inseparable from his own origins.

for its being both “the only dream he remembered from his own childhood,”³⁴ and also, by his own account, “a first impression of the inevitability of death.”³⁵ Here is Freud’s memory of the dream:

It was a very vivid one, and in it I saw *my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful, sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) people with birds’ beaks and laid upon the bed*. I awoke in tears and screaming, and interrupted my parents’ sleep. The strangely draped and unnaturally tall figures with birds’ beaks were derived from the illustrations in Philippon’s Bible. I fancy they must have been gods with falcons’ heads from an ancient Egyptian funerary relief.³⁶

In this way, images of Egyptian funerary rites in Freud’s childhood copy of the Old Testament both initiate and supply the iconography for his own anxieties concerning death—that is to say, for his own “mummy complex.”³⁷

Egypt also figures centrally in one of Freud’s last works, *Moses and Monotheism*. That text is exceptional for a couple of reasons. To begin with, it concerns not individual psychopathology but rather the history of a people (the Jews). Freud’s work had long sought parallels between the history of civilization and that of individuals; Ernest Jones has shown that Freud’s concern was above all with “the past, whether of the individual or of mankind as a whole...From the beginning of his psychological investigations he was

³⁴ Mary Bergstein, “Freud’s Uncanny Egypt: Prolegomena,” *American Imago* 66, no. 2 (summer 2009): 196.

³⁵ See Eva M. Rosenfeld, “Dream and Vision: Some Remarks on Freud’s Egyptian Bird Dream,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 37 (1956): 103.

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 5, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 583; emphasis original.

³⁷ The illustrations in the Philippon Bible and the book’s place in Freud’s life are discussed in some detail in Rosenfeld, “Dream and Vision,” 99–104; and Bergstein, “Freud’s Uncanny Egypt,” 194–207. Egyptian bird imagery is also referenced in Freud’s interpretation of a memory of Leonardo da Vinci. See Freud, “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 11, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 88–9, 93–4.

given to linking his unravelling of individual development with studies of the historical past.”³⁸ But in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud explicitly uses the genesis of individual human neuroses as an “analogy” for longer history. Recalling in detail the aetiology of neurotic illness (“Early trauma—defence—latency—outbreak of neurotic illness—partial return of the repressed”), Freud asks his reader “to take the step of supposing that something occurred in the life of the human species similar to what occurs in the life of individuals.”³⁹ In this way, Freud establishes the narratology of the case history as applicable at both the level of the individual and entire civilizations.⁴⁰

It is within this framework that Freud will advance the two central claims of *Moses and Monotheism*: that Moses was an Egyptian, and that the concept of monotheism was itself borrowed from Egypt. Freud will return to each of these two arguments constantly throughout the work, even as he apologizes for their potential impact in “depriv[ing] a people of the man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons.”⁴¹ Edward Said’s reading of *Moses and Monotheism* argues that Freud’s claims here introduce a complex historical relationship between “Self” and “Other” that troubles “the very elements of identity itself.”⁴² In claiming that Moses was an Egyptian,

³⁸ Jones, *Sigmund Freud*, 339.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, “Moses and Monotheism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 23, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 80.

⁴⁰ It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that *Moses and Monotheism* serves in part as a key reference work within the recent proliferation of theories of national trauma. Cathy Caruth, whose work plays a foundational role in trauma theory, employs a reading of *Moses and Monotheism* to initiate thought about national history in psychoanalytic terms; see Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma: Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 10–24.

⁴¹ Freud, “Moses and Monotheism,” 7.

⁴² Edward W. Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2003), 28.

Freud both locates the origins of Jewish identity in Egypt and ambiguously identifies Egypt as (non-)European site of (non-)origin.

It is in relation to these strange uses of Egypt in the work of Sigmund Freud that we can consider Bazin's own psychoanalytic case history of the plastic arts. We cannot deny that Bazin's narrative resonates—however unwittingly—with the key concerns that we have found in Freud. In making Egyptian funerary practice epitomize the expression of anxiety concerning death, and in placing Egypt at the origin of a narrative of European civilization, Bazin seems to have achieved the condensation of two of the great significances attributed to Egypt in Freud's own thought.

Putting Egypt before Europe

Edward Said's comments on *Moses and Monotheism* remind us that the narrative trope of the European subject's rediscovery of origins in the sands of Egypt—mobilized in both art history and psychoanalysis—cannot be apprehended outside of the framework of Eurocentrism and the politics of the colonial encounter. The violence of imperial conquest underlies the European captivation with Egypt and inspires these narratives. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have observed that the “interweaving of archaeology and psychoanalysis touches on a nineteenth century motif in which the voyage into the origins of the orient becomes a voyage into the interior colonies of the ‘self.’”⁴³ It is,

⁴³ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 151. Shohat and Stam are also concerned with the gendering of this axis, as exemplified in Freud's work on hysteria.

therefore, squarely on the orientalizing axis of Self/Other that this convergence of art history and psychoanalysis is situated.

Europe's fascination with Egypt's past is an expression of the orientalist attitude in its essence. For Said, this attitude appears in the colonial encounter as an annexation of both geography and history. Said shows us how nineteenth-century French Egyptomania enacts this appropriation of history: "Napoleon and his scholarly experts were there...to put Egypt before Europe, in a sense to stage its antiquity..."⁴⁴ In the *Description de l'Égypte*, orientalism adopts scientific pretense:

In "doing" Egypt the scholars were also grappling directly with a kind of unadulterated cultural, geographical, and historical significance. Egypt was the focal point of the relationships between Africa and Asia, between Europe and the East, between memory and actuality....Because Egypt was saturated with meaning for the arts, sciences, and government, its role was to be the stage on which actions of a world-historical importance would take place. By taking Egypt, then, a modern power would naturally demonstrate its strength and justify history; Egypt's own destiny was to be annexed, to Europe, preferably.⁴⁵

Inherent to this mode of historical enquiry and narration is a fundamentally ambivalent attitude toward their objects of knowledge. Homi K. Bhabha has shown how the colonized subject is posited as radically "Other" but nevertheless situated in a relationship of essential own-ness or proper-ness and thus fundamental continuity with the 'modern' self.⁴⁶ This continuity, despite being fraught with ambivalence, is manifest in historical terms in the articulation of narrative causality so central to both art history and psychoanalysis. Understanding that it is, above all, orientalism which

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 118.

⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 84–5.

⁴⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 103–7. For Bhabha, this ambivalence is modelled on the Freudian fetish.

determines this ambivalent relationship, I think we are compelled to acknowledge the extent to which Bazin's ideas about the psychology of images are themselves elaborated in accordance with a decidedly Eurocentric epistemological narrative.

The Need to Defeat Time: Painting Versus Photography/Cinema

In the myth of the need to defeat time, what photography/cinema grants, by virtue of the objectivity of the automated means of generation, is above all a radical change in the "psychology of the image." The implications of photographic/cinematic objectivity are thus extended beyond the quality of visual resemblance, and, indeed, beyond any inherent characteristics of the representation proper. The entire nature of the relationship between desire, presence, and representation is transformed. What is now at stake is our own ability to experience, on the basis of our encounter with the photographic/cinematic image, an irrational faith in the reality of a represented object that is seemingly able to defy the constraints of temporality.

In this respect, Bazin is drawing a sharp and differentially determined distinction between the obsession with resemblance and the need to defeat time. The former is grounded in rationalism—in the "pensée logique" epitomized by the invention of perspective. The latter, conversely, *seems* to abandon this rationalism in favour of an irrational credulousness. What is more, photography/cinema's ability to summon this irrational credulousness owes nothing to its ability to satisfy the ideal of resemblance.

And yet it is still the “objectivity” of photography/cinema that is ultimately responsible for its role with respect to these two different ideals. It is responsible for photography/cinema’s “complete satisfaction” of the “need for illusion,” and thus for the end of the obsession with resemblance. But it is also paradoxically responsible for inviting us to experience an *irrational* credulousness and faith—not in the representational accuracy of the image, but in the very presence of the represented object. Again, this is why Bazin states: “Cette genèse automatique a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l’image” (*QQC* 15).⁴⁷

Painting is utterly incomparable with photography/cinema in this respect. If painting and other modes of illusionistic representation are capable of engaging with and perpetuating the ideal of resemblance, they have no mandate whatsoever with respect to the need to defeat time; painting lacks objectivity and therefore cannot partake of the profound psychological transformation that this objectivity instigates. Again, Bazin here draws a clear distinction between the representational ideal of the obsession with resemblance and that of the need to defeat time, stating that “la peinture n’est plus du même coup qu’une technique inférieure de la ressemblance, un ersatz des procédés de reproduction” (*QQC* 16);⁴⁸ painting can offer only “un décalque approximatif” (*QQC* 16). With the change in psychology brought about by photography/cinema, the value of representations ceases to be a question of the reliability of the image as documentary

⁴⁷ The 1945 version continues: “ou plus précisément son ontologie.” Bazin’s deletion of this strongly suggests that what is ultimately important is psychological attitude, independent of the supposed properties (or “ontologies”) of representations (see discussion below).

⁴⁸ The phrase “de la ressemblance” has been added in the 1958 version. This addition helps to clarify the distinction between the desire for resemblance and that of the defeat of time.

record; what is important is our need to believe irrationally that the photographic image enjoys a certain relationship with objects themselves. Thus Bazin writes “Le dessin le plus fidèle peut nous donner plus de renseignements sur le modèle, il ne possédera jamais, en dépit de notre esprit critique, le pouvoir irrationnel de la photographie qui emporte notre croyance” (*QQC* 16).

Desire, Presence, and the Need to Defeat Time

The passage at the heart of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in which Bazin discusses the un-repression of the need to defeat time is among the most famous and most contested in film theory:

The photographic image is the object itself, freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it...it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model... (HG 14; emphasis original)

These words have been cited countless times to make all manner of claims about the privileged relationship between photography and reality, and nearly as often to fuel polemics against the Bazinian realism that it is thought to epitomize. And yet this passage is anything but a decisive statement on photographic/cinematic ontology. Bazin offers no assertion about ontology that is not also couched in hesitation and doubt. His position here is one of fundamental ambivalence. From this point of view, it becomes possible to read Bazin’s bold ontological statements as constituting a kind of rhetorical gesture—an ethopoetic staging of the sort of attitude that we are “obliged” to adopt when our own unconscious needs are confronted by the mechanical objectivity of

photography/cinema. Regardless of whether the ontology that Bazin describes really “is,” what he is claiming above all is a testament to the power of human need, and a demonstration of the irrational credulousness that this need might provoke. If the values and ideals of representation are inseparable from the nature of desire, this is nowhere more apparent than in Bazin’s discussion of the need to defeat time.

I am convinced that what Bazin says about the “ontology of the photographic image” cannot be considered independently of the equivocating language of irrational credulousness within which it is framed. Nevertheless, let us begin by taking at face value the ontological claims that Bazin seems to be making in relation to the need to defeat time. After all, the very form that these claims take says something about the nature of the need that they serve. We can then return to the problem of doubt and irrational credulousness.

There are, I think, three key points that need to be considered here. First, I will outline the sort of experience of presence that photography/cinema promises, namely the re-presentation of objects in time and space. Next, I will consider the supposed identity between the image and the model that serves as the basis for this promise. Finally, I will explore the way in which this claim of ontological identity is grounded in the tangible qualities of the photograph itself, as Bazin conceives them. Let us proceed now to consider each of these in turn.

Presence in Time and Space

In Bazin's account, photography/cinema seems to enjoy some degree of ontological identity with the model. But this identity is only valuable insofar as, on account of our basic need to defeat time, we desire to believe in the presence before us of the model. In accordance with this desire, we are not seeking simply to be reminded of the model, as might be accomplished by visual resemblance; only the promise of the presence of the object itself responds to the need to defeat time.

This is the presence before us of the object within both space and time ("rendu présent dans le temps et dans l'espace" [*QQC* 15]). The promise of photographic presence therefore suggests both a certain ontological order and a certain mode of experiencing that order. Ontologically, we are dealing here with a spatio-temporally delimited world that is populated with finite and identifiable objects or beings. It is a world of objects in relation to which it is possible to be immediately present and therefore to experience the sensation of presence as such. In the "Ontology," Bazin has little to say about the quality of this experience. But he does address the issue in greater depth in the second part of his two-part article "Theatre and Cinema," which appeared in *Esprit* in the summer of 1951. There Bazin will outline his "notion of presence," describing it in this way:

La présence se définit naturellement par rapport au temps et à l'espace. «Etre en présence» de quelqu'un, c'est reconnaître qu'il est notre contemporain et constater qu'il se tient dans la zone d'accès naturelle de nos sens.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Bazin, "Théâtre et Cinéma (Suite)," *Esprit* 180–1 (July–August 1951): 233.

Here Bazin is offering us a close paraphrase of Henri Gouhier's "classical definition"⁵⁰ of presence in *L'Essence du théâtre*. Gouhier describes presence as follows: "Dans représentation, il y a présence et présent : ce double rapport à l'existence et au temps constitue l'essence du théâtre."⁵¹ Distinguishing between theatre and other forms of representation, Gouhier likens presence as "existence" to the presence of an emperor, whereas non-theatrical representations (poetry, cinema, etc.) are akin to the presence of an ambassador who speaks on the king's behalf.⁵² As for presence as time, Gouhier says that in theatre "toute existence est actuelle...ils vivent en même temps, sinon dans le même temps..."⁵³ It is most likely Gouhier's double definition of presence that Bazin had in mind while crafting the formula that appears in the "Ontology": "rendu présent dans le temps et dans l'espace."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 186.

⁵¹ Bazin's dependence on Gouhier's definition of presence is somewhat ironic, given that it is Gouhier's denial of cinema's ability to render presence to which Bazin is responding in "Theatre and Cinema." Gouhier writes: "Entre ce qui est représenté sur l'écran et ce qui est rendu présent sur la scène apparaît l'abîme métaphysique qui sépare la reproduction de l'acte lui-même, l'image de l'homme avec sa possibilité d'être indéfiniment répétée et l'homme dans une minute unique de sa vie...Le cinéma ne nous parlera jamais que par images interposées : l'âme du théâtre, *c'est d'avoir un corps*." (Henri Gouhier, *L'Essence du théâtre* [Brussels: Éditions de Kogge, 1943], 29–30; emphasis added).

⁵² The analogy of the ambassador is an odd but telling one, since it both opens up and annuls the gap between two very different senses of "representation": representation as *darstellen* (re-presentation as "portrait") and representation as *vertreten* (speaking for, speaking on behalf of, advancing the interests of—representation as "proxy"). Gouhier's ambassador analogy implies that non-theatrical representations are of the latter kind. The *darstellen/vertreten* distinction and its implications are compellingly analyzed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who uses a passage from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* to explicate the difference, which she accuses both Deleuze and Foucault of overlooking. See Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 255–66.

⁵³ Gouhier, *L'Essence du théâtre*, 22.

⁵⁴ Bazin was familiar with *L'Essence du théâtre* at the time he wrote the "Ontology." Recall that, later in the essay, he cites the distinction that Gouhier makes in that work between dramatic and aesthetic "categories."

In a more basic sense, this formula perhaps also serves as a reminder of Bazin's indebtedness to the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre.⁵⁵ Recall the way in which Bazin's definition links Gouhier's distinction between spatial and temporal presence to sensory experience: "«Etre en présence» de quelqu'un, c'est reconnaître qu'il est notre contemporain et constater qu'il se tient dans la zone d'accès naturelle de nos sens." Likewise, in Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, the experience of presence, like that of absence, is always determined "only on the grounds of sensory intuition."⁵⁶ What *L'Imaginaire* does not really address, however—and what is so crucial for Bazin—is a conceptualization of how, above all, it is *time* that regulates the play of presence and absence of objects and provokes our desire.

Implicit in Bazin's account is a notion of time as a linear and unidirectional sequence of moments, moving ineluctably forward (thus he speaks of a "fleuve de la durée" [*QQC* 11]). Normally, objects and beings are bound to exist and endure in space at a given moment, but also to expire after some nominal amount of time—to disappear within this flow of time conceived as a linear sequence, such that they are inaccessible (absent) to beings existing and present in subsequent moments. When Bazin speaks of objects "rendu présent dans le temps et dans l'espace," we are therefore reminded not so

⁵⁵ On Bazin's indebtedness to Sartre see Andrew, *André Bazin*, 20 and passim; and especially Andrew, "Ontology of a Fetish." Andrew tells us that Bazin heavily annotated his copy of *L'Imaginaire*.

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, translated by Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), 13. I will have more to say about *L'Imaginaire* shortly.

much of Sartre, but of his contemporary Martin Heidegger, and specifically Heidegger's discussion of how we come to experience time as presence.⁵⁷

Heidegger tells us that in our metaphysically determined experience of presence we apprehend objects as beings that exist ready at hand before us in the current moment. Presence therefore involves both the experience of objects "ready at hand" and an experience of time as "now."⁵⁸ Bazin's conception of temporality seemingly corresponds to the metaphysical conception of the present as "now"—a conception that contains within it an assumed differentiation between the present and the no-longer-now and the not-yet-now, i.e. a relative past and future and a corresponding notion of their absence.⁵⁹ In this view, therefore, "time appears as a succession ofnows...each of which, barely

⁵⁷ Sartre's indebtedness to Heidegger is well known, as is the challenge to Sartre's reading of Heidegger posed by Jean Beaufret and Heidegger himself beginning in 1945, and culminating in the 1947 "Letter on Humanism." See, e.g., Anson Rabinach, "Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* as Text and Event," *New German Critique* 62 (spring–summer 1994): 26ff; and Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Heidegger's philosophy, as well as his controversial political affiliations, were the subject of ongoing debate in Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* in 1946–7—roughly the timeframe of Bazin's contributions on *Citizen Kane* and *Monsieur Verdoux* in the same journal. A brief attempt to draw a connection between the "ontological" in Bazin and Heidegger appears in Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 185–7.

⁵⁸ Heidegger outlines a certain metaphysical conception of the privileged nature of the *present*—namely a present in which "Beings are grasped in their Being as 'presence' (*Anwesenheit*), meaning that they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time—the '*Present*' (*Gegenwart*). Conceived in this way, presence is given to our experience as "that which endures and persists, near and available, exposed to vision or given by hand, a present in the form of *Vorhandenheit* [presence-at-hand]." According to Derrida's interpretation, there are therefore two aspects to the idea of "the present." The first is "what is 'now' (*das Jetztige*)," i.e. "a phase in the stream of time." The second is "relation with the 'objective' (*zum Gegenständigen*)...as something objective (*das Objective*), an object is related to a representing subject." Most of Derrida's extremely helpful explication of Heidegger's notion of "presence" occurs in a long note on the problem of translating various German words for "presence" in Heidegger's "The Anaximander Fragment"; it is characteristic of Derrida that some of his most substantial insights appear at the margins of his discussion. See Jacques Derrida, "*Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time*," in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 31, 32, 33, n. 6.

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), 10.

named, already disappears into the 'ago' and is already being pursued by the 'soon'."⁶⁰

This is the measurable, calculable time of chronometry and clocks, the everyday experience of time as a series of *presents*. And so Heidegger writes: "Time is thus an unfolding whose stages stand in a relation of earlier and later to one another...determined in terms of a now which, however, is still itself arbitrary."⁶¹ The need to defeat time, as Bazin conceives it, is predicated on this everyday experience of chronometric time as a series of individual now-moments existing relative to an inaccessible (or absent) past and future.

For Bazin, the promise of the confounding of this temporal order—the defeat of time—arises when objects and beings are no longer subject to disappearance along with particular now-moments in the flow of time. With photography/cinema, a particular moment of space and time may be embalmed and preserved, along with the beings and objects which populate it, in order to be made accessible to—and experienced *as present* in—some other moment. Objects are not freed from time entirely so much as captured and held indefinitely along with the moment to which they belong ("enrobé dans son instant comme, dans l'ambre, le corps intact des insectes d'une ère révolue" [*QQC* 16]). Nor, Bazin claims, do they re-enter the flow of time at some other moment; they remain outside/alongside the flow of time, mummified. Thus Bazin says of the photographic image: "c'est la présence troublante de vies arrêtées dans leur durée, libérées de leur

⁶⁰ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 11.

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, translated by William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 5E. For Heidegger, this conception of time is distinct from (even as it is nevertheless enabled by) the essentially fourfold nature of time, inseparable from Being in the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*); see Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 19.

destin, non par les prestiges de l'art, mais par la vertu d'une mécanique impassible; car la photographie ne crée pas, comme l'art, de l'éternité, elle embaume le temps, elle le soustrait seulement à sa propre corruption" (*QQC* 16). Cinema, of course, embalms not single moments but little segments of the flow of time itself ("Pour la première fois, l'image des choses est aussi celle de leur durée et comme la momie du changement" [*QQC* 16]).

With this process of capturing and preserving a given now-moment (and the set of objects that populate it) and making it available to us in the present, we are able to experience past moments and objects as present—at hand—before us. This is why Bazin says: "nous sommes obligés de croire à l'existence de l'objet représenté, effectivement *re-présenté*, c'est-à-dire *rendu présent* dans le temps et dans l'espace" (*QQC* 15–16; emphasis added). Here a slight modification in the 1958 version is telling. The 1945 version speaks of "l'objet représenté, effectivement *représenté*" (*PP* 409; emphasis added); Bazin's addition of a hyphen emphasizes the difference between representation and re-presentation, and so clarifies the fact that the value of the photograph lies not in its status as substitutive representation but in its ability to supply us with objects and beings *as present* in time and space, seemingly in violation of a certain ontological and temporal order.

Presence and Ontology

If photography/cinema is able to make temporally past objects present before us, it is because the tangible materiality of the image both partakes in the identity of the photographed object and endures through time. The original model or template for this relationship is the material endurance of the mummified corpse; now photography/cinema, on the basis of its automatic means of generation by way of the lens, has provided us with the opportunity to conceive once again of this kind of endurance through time and presence in space. Bazin's claims here are frustratingly succinct, largely unsubstantiated, and, I think, wholly original. He tells us: "La photographie bénéficie d'un transfert de réalité de la chose sur sa reproduction" (*QQC* 16). He goes on to assert (famously) that the image "procède par sa genèse de l'ontologie du modèle : elle est le modèle" (*QQC* 16). The value of the photograph here derives not from any aspect of its status as representation or likeness but rather from its material contiguity with the original object. This view echoes a similar claim that Bazin had already made in the essay "À Propos de réalisme," which appeared in *Information Universitaire* in April 1944—right around the time he would have been finalizing the original version of the "Ontology." In the earlier essay, Bazin writes: "Pour la première fois le réalisme de l'image atteint à l'objectivité intégrale et fait de la photographie une sorte d'équivalent ontologique du modèle."⁶² As in the "Ontology," the photograph's privileged ontological relationship derives from the fact of its objectivity, but beyond this assertion Bazin has little else to say about the matter.

⁶² Bazin, "À Propos de réalisme," 90.

However, Bazin does expand on this idea of ontological identity in the article on “Theatre and Cinema.” Looking to dispel the notion that the “presence of the actor” is what primarily distinguishes theatre from cinema, Bazin shows how the “notion of presence” applies also to cinema. Bazin revisits and expands on some of the main ideas from the “Ontology,” and in so doing clarifies and affirms the distinction between resemblance, the defeat of time, and aesthetic expression. Consider the following passage, which I quote here both for the strong distinction it makes between the pursuit of resemblance and photography as a “kind of identity,” and for the vivid way in which it characterizes that identity:

Jusqu’à l’apparition de la photographie puis du cinéma, les arts plastiques, surtout dans le portrait, étaient les seuls intermédiaires possibles entre la présence concrète et l’absence. La justification en était la *ressemblance*, qui excite l’imagination et aide la mémoire. Mais la photographie est tout autre chose. Non point l’image d’un objet ou d’un être, mais bien plus exactement sa *trace*. Sa genèse automatique la distingue radicalement des autres techniques de reproduction. Le photographe procède, par l’intermédiaire de l’objectif, à un véritable prise d’empreinte lumineuse : à un moulage. Comme tel il emporte avec lui plus que la ressemblance, une sorte d’identité (la carte du même nom n’est concevable que dans l’ère de la photographie et des empreintes digitales).⁶³

While this characterization of the photograph as trace, imprint, or cast perhaps suggests an attenuation of the strong language of the “Ontology” (where “it is the model”), Bazin’s discussion of presence here nevertheless appears to re-affirm the basic claim in the “Ontology” of some kind of ontological continuity between image and model.

⁶³ André Bazin, “Théâtre et Cinéma (Suite),” 233; emphasis original. It is not from the “Ontology,” but rather from the latter part of *this* passage in the essay on theatre and cinema, that Gilles Deleuze will quote in his own work on cinema—along with the following: “Le cinéma réalise l’étrange paradoxe de se mouler sur le temps de l’objet et de prendre par surcroît l’empreinte de sa durée” (Bazin, “Théâtre et Cinéma (Suite),” 233). See Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 24.

It seems to me that Bazin's claim concerning the ontological identity of photograph and model has little precedence. But Bazin, in imagining this relationship in this way, clearly has a certain model in mind. It is surely the integrity of the mummified corpse which serves as the paradigm of ontological identity. Recall that it is the Egyptian practice of mummification which stands at the "origin" of the myth of the need to defeat time—the myth that will culminate in the invention of photography/cinema and the unrepression of this need. The mummy, of course, is materially continuous with itself over time, and so enjoys a degree of identity that is perhaps not quite achieved by the photograph, since the latter exists by virtue of a "transfer" of reality.

The example of mummification is telling in another way, beyond simply articulating the *form* of the problem as one of the ontological and material continuity of beings and objects. It also reveals something about what it is that we desire the identity of, and thus suggests the privileged *content* of photography—namely mortal humans. We see this privileging of human subjects already in the 1944 essay on realism, when Bazin follows his claim of ontological equivalence with the following remark: "C'est pourquoi le corps humain, objet privilégié de tous les arts plastiques est presque nécessairement obscène ou pornographique à l'écran."⁶⁴ And we see it again in the essay on "Theatre and Cinema," where the portrait is named as the privileged subject of resemblance in the

⁶⁴ Bazin, "À Propos de réalisme," 90.

plastic arts, and where it is, after all, the question of the presence of the actor that initiates the discussion.⁶⁵

This privileging of the body is dramatically mobilized in the 1958 version of the “Ontologie” in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* where the central passage on the need to defeat time is accompanied, on the facing page, by a full-page reproduction of the famous negative image of the Shroud of Turin by Enrie. The image is given little contextualization, insofar as Bazin makes no reference to it whatsoever in the main body of the text. Indeed, this image, while visually overwhelming, seemingly only serves to illustrate a point made in a footnote to the passage on the “transfer of reality,” remarking that “Il faudrait introduire ici une psychologie de la relique et du «souvenir» qui bénéficierait également d’un transfert de réalité procédant du complexe de la momie. Signalons seulement que le Saint Suaire de Turin réalise la synthèse de la relique et de la photographie”⁶⁶ (*QQC* 16). But the Shroud’s ability to illustrate singularly the integral

⁶⁵ There is also the following passage, which appears as part of the discussion of the “notion of presence” in 1951 version of the “Theatre and Cinema” essay but which is deleted from the version included in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*:

D’où l’apparition d’un spectacle aussi contradictoire que le film d’une exécution capitale. L’émotion toute particulière qui nous étreint devant un tel document (et le fait presque toujours interdire par la censure), c’est qu’il a quelque chose à la fois d’affolant et de sacrilège, car il intéresse l’instant le plus significatif de notre expérience du temps: celui de la mort. On recommence de tuer cet homme. Le spectateur le plus ignare ne peut rester insensible à cette obscénité métaphysique. (Bazin, “Théâtre et Cinéma (Suite),” 233)

And so for Bazin, as it will for the authors of the Meese report, the degradation of the filmed body corresponds to the degradation of the real one.

⁶⁶ In the 1945 version of the text, this note appears a couple of paragraphs later, in the context of a discussion of temporality rather than ontological identity. In this original note, the second sentence reads: “Signalons seulement que le Saint Suaire de Turin *est un document absolument unique puisqu’il réalise la synthèse de la relique et de la photographie*” (*PP* 409; emphasis added).

relationship between the preservation of the body, the transfer of reality, and the requirement of faith renders it a powerful argument unto itself.⁶⁷

Presence, Ontology, and the Photographic Artifact

What photography/cinema therefore seems to give us is the appearance before us of specific beings or objects *as present*, having been preserved along with a particular now-moment, constructed as such within a relative temporal sequence, by virtue of the transfer of ontological identity from model to photograph. In this way, photography/cinema promises to confound a certain temporal order in its re-presentation of past now-moments before us in the present. But this promise gives rise to a kind of paradox. In Heidegger's discussion of the now-moments of clock time, he shows us that our awareness of presence is always an *effect* of an awareness of the flow of time and temporal duration. Heidegger therefore demonstrates that *change* is responsible for our

⁶⁷ Given Bazin's privileging of the body in his articulation of the need to defeat time and the quality of photographic presence, it is interesting to note its resonance with the scenario that serves to introduce a section on "Le rôle de l'art dans la vie de l'individu" in the 1936 *Encyclopédie Française*. The section, written by André Maurois, begins with an allegorical scene intended to account for the origin of the need for art as the "Encadrement du réel." Here is the scene:

Imaginez une maison dans laquelle un homme vient de mourir subitement. Les femmes poussent des cris. La vue de ce cadavre, étendu dans une posture affreuse, ravive à chaque regard un sentiment d'horreur. On évoque des images du passé; on s'agit; on s'embrasse. La douleur irait à l'hystérie si les rites n'intervenaient pour ramener l'ordre. D'abord le mort [sic] est étendu sur son lit dans une attitude calme et noble, celle même de la statue qui au moyen âge eût orné son tombeau. Le cadavre devient œuvre d'art.

In this view, art emerges as a means of channelling individual passion into social ritual: "Besoins sociaux et besoins individuels sont longtemps difficiles à distinguer parce que l'un des besoins les plus pressants de l'individu, quand il éprouve une émotion forte, est de faire entrer cette émotion dans un cadre social. D'où un premier rôle de l'art" (André Maurois, "Le rôle de l'art dans la vie de l'individu," *Encyclopédie Française*, Volume 16 [1936], 16.80-2).

everyday awareness of the flow of time as a series of now-moments. He describes the effect of change in this way: “Time is initially encountered in those entities which are changeable; change is in time.”⁶⁸ Our experience of time as a series of now-moments depends on our experience of change. The psychological value of the photographic/cinematic image, likewise, depends on our awareness of this play of temporality within which a given now-moment has been captured and made available to us.⁶⁹

Even as it seeks the defeat of time, photography/cinema must therefore always paradoxically re-instate this awareness of time as change, without which the special quality of photographic presence would be meaningless. It must conjure awareness of temporal flow, even as it seeks to defeat it. It is therefore necessary that the relationship between past and present moments—the fact of temporal difference as such—be indicated within the materiality of the photographic object that serves as bridge between presence and absence. Let us therefore consider the problematic way in which Bazin treats the materiality of photography/cinema.

The unique ability of photography/cinema to respond to the need to defeat time resides in the nature of its ontological relationship with the model. Thanks to a “transfer of reality,” we are invited to think of the presence in time and space of the photograph as

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 3E–4E.

⁶⁹ In *Change Mummified*, of course, Rosen conceives of the awareness of time as similarly dependent on the awareness of change, albeit for different reasons. That Bazin himself thinks of time in terms of change is obviously suggested by his characterization of cinema as “la momie du changement” (*QQC* 16). However, I do not think that Bazin ever really explores the broader implications of this in relation to the need to defeat time.

the presence of the model itself. Bazin therefore must assign an implicit value—it is never clearly stated in the “Ontology”—to the endurance of the photographic/cinematic artifact itself through time from the moment of its capture, by way of the lens, to the moment of the beholder’s encounter with it. Consider the necessity of material contiguity through time that is implied by the two paradigmatic responses to the need to defeat time that Bazin names in the “Ontology”—the Egyptian mummy and the Shroud of Turin. Even if it is not crucial to the obsession with resemblance or to aesthetic revelation, the question of the ontological identity of the materiality of the photographic/cinematic object is central to the myth of the need to defeat time.

We therefore need to draw a distinction, which is not especially clear in Bazin, between the various physical aspects of the photographic process. We have already seen the importance Bazin assigns to the lens, which serves as guarantor of objectivity and thus determines photographic/cinematic specificity in relation to painting. Conversely, the process by which the image is fixed—photochemical registration—does not actually factor into Bazin’s definition of photographic/cinematic specificity. Nor does a lens alone necessarily entail recording or storage—the camera obscura has a lens, but its image does not endure.

Despite the importance of material endurance and contiguity for the need to defeat time, Bazin’s discussion of the photographic/cinematic artifact has remarkably little to say about the qualities of recording, storage, and materiality.⁷⁰ If Bazin does give us

⁷⁰ Bazin may be seeking judiciously to evade the problem of the wide range of photographic processes and materials and/or the radical differences between the materiality of—and the phenomenology of the

some sense of the role of materiality here, it is not in reference to the problem of material endurance. Rather, it comes in the form of a celebration of photography's potentially limited documentary ability. This contemplation of documentary weakness is seemingly intended to show that the value of photography/cinema in the need to defeat time has little to do with what is depicted by means of visual likeness on the surface of the image, and everything to do with the fact of its presence before us as a physical artifact (this discussion also undermines—quite intentionally, I think—the earlier claim that photography/cinema “completely satisfies” the obsession with resemblance; it lends support to Bazin's argument here that photography/cinema has “radically transformed the psychology of the image”—so much so that resemblance no longer even matters). But let us consider carefully the context in which Bazin introduces both the idea of the weakness of resemblance and its apparently positive value:

L'objectif seul nous donne de l'objet un image capable de «défouler», du fond de notre inconscient, ce besoin de substituer à l'objet *mieux qu'un décalque approximatif*: cet objet lui-même, mais libéré des contingences temporelles. *L'image peut être floue, déformée, décolorée, sans valeur documentaire*, elle procède par sa genèse de l'ontologie du modèle: elle est le modèle. *D'ou le charme des photographies d'albums. Ces ombres grises ou sépia, fantomatiques, presque illisibles*, ce ne sont plus les traditionnels portraits de famille, c'est la présence troublante de vies arrêtées dans leur durée, libérées de leur destin, non par les prestiges de l'art, mais par la vertu d'une mécanique impassible... (QQC 16; emphasis added)

spectatorial encounter with—photography and cinema. But this evasion invites us to consider what Bazin would have thought of digital photography. I will return to this question later.

The weakness of visual resemblance not only does not hinder the power of photography in relation to the need to defeat time—it actually enhances this power.⁷¹ When Bazin speaks of the “charm” of photo albums, we ought to take him literally. The qualities that he lists—various ways in which photographs may deviate from ideal resemblance (defined negatively, of course, in relation to a certain inherited normative ideal of perceptual realism)—are responsible for charming us: they cast a spell, compel our belief, supply the grounds for our credulousness. This is true to the extent that these various attributes—registered visually in the photographic image and so made legible to us—each testify to the endurance of the photograph through time, and so invoke the chronometric consciousness necessary to the power of the photographic/cinematic image in relation to the need to defeat time.⁷²

⁷¹ In this respect Bazin’s discussion of the psychology of the experience of presence is very different in the “Theatre and Cinema” article. There he implies the importance of spatial realism in establishing total credibility:

Doesn’t the artificial proximity created by the camera’s enlargement of the image win back for us what we lost by not witnessing the event directly? It is as if, in the time-space parameter that defines presence, film gives back to us only a weakened and diminished duration—but not one reduced to zero—while increasing the spatial factor to re-establish the equilibrium of the psychological equation. (Bazin, “Theatre and Cinema,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 186)

Bazin is actually making a very powerful statement here about the complementarity of visual resemblance and photographic ontology in relation to the beholder’s experience of photographic/cinematic presence.

⁷² There is implicitly a fine balance that must be achieved between the charm of flaws in the system of resemblance and the horizon of total illegibility. Thus Bazin speaks of “[c]es ombres grises ou sépia, fantomatiques, presque illisibles” (*QQC* 16; emphasis added).

The Fetish of the Flaw

There are arguably a number of ways in which both material endurance and temporal change can be made legible. Each moment in the overall history of any given photographic artifact suggests its own corresponding signature—its own way of marking time on the surface of the image. Bazin’s catalogue of flaws (“floue, déformée, décolorée,” etc.) suggests a number of these, and it is worth exploring them in detail. What we will discover is that Bazin’s seemingly random list of flaws actually maps out a complete provenance of the image as material artifact, from the moment of recording to that of the beholder’s encounter. Let us trace this provenance.⁷³

We can start with the scene of recording, the moment when the contingent event is captured by the lens and fixed on the surface of the film. Present at this scene is an apparatus which is relatively fixed or mobile within real space, and inevitably governed by a set of practical limitations. Soft focus, motion blur, lens flares, dirty lenses, impaired camera mobility, debris in the apparatus, jammed film—any of these can serve as unintentional reminders of the material presence of the camera and therefore of the singularity of the moment of the event and its recording. Great effect (or “charm”) can

⁷³ Of course what is at issue is not the existence of an *actual* material continuity of the photographic object between the scene of recording and that of exhibition. Rather, what is important is the imagining of such continuity and the ideal it represents. It is therefore worth noting the cultural value that has accrued around, for example, Polaroid instant photography, which not only embodies this ideal but does so insofar as it invites the beholder to participate in and serve as witness to the entire process of recording and duration—or, as a 1972 *Life* magazine article puts it, “lets you take color pictures that develop themselves before your eyes” (Sean Callahan, “Dr. Land’s Magic Camera,” *Life*, October 1972, 42–8). In the production of a single unique image, Polaroid instant film (unlike films requiring development by way of a positive/negative process) harkens back to the origins of photography in the Daguerreotype. For a “cultural history” of Polaroid photography, see Peter Buse, “Photography Degree Zero: Cultural History of the Polaroid Image,” *New Formations* 62 (autumn 2007): 29–44.

also be found in seemingly mundane factors like the technological limitations of a specific type of film, which through the process of its subsequent obsolescence can cultivate its own aesthetic fascination, which in turn retroactively situates the image's recording in a specific historical moment or location. This obsolescence accounts, for example, for Bazin's fascination with the "ombres grises ou sépia" of the family album. Here photographic charm is strangely inseparable from—and dependent on—the beholder's knowledge of the fact of ongoing technological development with respect to the pursuit of visual resemblance.⁷⁴

Other marks bear witness to the moment of recording in a different way: by calling attention to the fallibility of the camera's human operator, whose presence during recording is ideally conceived as that of an unobtrusive shepherd to the otherwise automated process. But the operator's failure in this respect—registered in imperfections of the visual likeness such as soft focus, motion blur in still photographs, etc. (Bazin's "floue, déformée") can actually help to connote the contingency of the moment—i.e. the inability of the camera operator to re-stage or re-photograph the event recorded due to its singularity and unrepeatability.⁷⁵ The implications of this are tremendous. It is no longer

⁷⁴ The ongoing nature of this pursuit is of course taken up by Bazin in "The Myth of Total Cinema." The development that Bazin describes there is clearly that of techniques of resemblance (as opposed to that of the realist aesthetic—which is addressed in "Evolution of Film Language"). Bazin writes: "Mais ce qui frappe le plus dans l'imagination dont témoignent les chercheurs à l'égard de l'idée cinématographique, c'est qu'ils envisagent d'emblée la restitution d'une illusion intégrale de la réalité comprenant le son, la couleur, et le relief" (André Bazin, "Le Mythe de cinéma total et les origines du cinématographe," *Critique* no. 6 [November 1946]: 555).

⁷⁵ Bela Balázs likewise celebrated the "tangible being-present" of the camera operator as witness, which lends a "peculiar tension" to documentary film. For Balázs, this evidence of the operator's presence would take the form of the interruption or failure of the image (Bela Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, translated by Edith Bone [New York: Dover, 1970], 171).

just the visual legibility of the image (its pursuit of resemblance) that is being compromised with the introduction of these flaws, but the very ideals of automation and objectivity from which photography/cinema derive their power with respect to both the ideal of resemblance and the need to defeat time.⁷⁶

Once the event has been recorded and made into a legible, materially contiguous artifact, that artifact remains and endures indefinitely through time. Evidence of this endurance itself can also accumulate on the legible surface of the image—as with the fading colour of a photographic print (Bazin’s “décolorée”)—and serve as a testament to its longevity. In cinema, this effect is no less powerful, being manifest not just in chromatic desaturation but also in the form of scratches, missing bits of film—which are legible, of course, only as an *absence*—and various other reminders of the materiality of film *as* film; a lifetime of encounters with the machinery of projection cumulatively

⁷⁶ Obviously, in the field of resemblance, the moment of recording is marked temporally not just by the contingencies of technological limitation and the fallibility of the operator. Temporal contingency and change will also be identified within the ‘content’ of the photograph itself, depending of course on the nature of the content: clothing fashions, automobiles, etc. help to ‘date’ a photograph to the extent that the beholder is aware of the economy of change to which the visual appearance of these objects is subject (here the economy of photographic value is inseparable from the cycle of renewal necessary to capitalism and consumer culture). And of course there is the most privileged object of photographic/cinematic representation—the mortal human. Again, here, the value of the photograph lies in our own ability to interpret and make sense of the chronology that is implied by the photograph’s legible contents. Thus Paul Valéry can write: “an infant was scarcely born—a few days old—he was brought before a lens; decades later the man he grew into might stand amazed and affected before the photograph of this baby whose future he has used up” (Paul Valéry, “The Centenary of Photography,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg [New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980], 194). The importance of legible change to the value of photography suggests a reciprocal relationship between the psychology of the image and the nature and range of its privileged contents, which always exemplify temporal contingency as such. The economy of photographic value is this: every photograph is an investment or a wager on the future transformation or disappearance of the visible surface of the objects being depicted. The limiting force within this economy is that this transformation cannot be so radical that the contents cease to have any meaning whatsoever for some future beholder.

marks the surface of every reel of film like a palimpsest, and in this way each reel always bears witness to its own unique provenance.

Finally, this provenance continues through to—and culminates in—the moment of the spectator's own material engagement with the image; creases and fingerprints mark the surface of the photograph, or a reel of film breaks or catches fire in the projector—each of these lived encounters adds its own mark to the image's legible history of decay, to be experienced in a future encounter as further testimony to material longevity.

The “charm” of flaws written into the photographic/cinematic system of resemblance, therefore, lies in convincing us of the material continuity and temporal endurance of the photographic/cinematic artifact, even, occasionally, at the expense of the ideals of automation and objectivity that secure the ontological relationship to begin with. I think that Bazin is treading a fine line here. The flaws that he introduces serve effectively to show the radical dissimilarity between the psychology of the need to defeat time and that of the obsession with resemblance. But more importantly, Bazin also implicitly relies on these flaws to conjure the idea of the photographic/cinematic image as something that has materially endured through time to appear before us as a “troubling presence.” The paradox of the photograph's power in relation to the need to defeat time lies in the dependence of awareness of time on awareness of change. Insofar as the power of photography in defeating time depends on the beholder's awareness of change, *change itself* must always somehow be registered in the photograph. This is accomplished, in part, through the photograph's continuation of the very process of

“time’s own decay” from which it supposedly offers immunity. The object may be removed from the river of time, but it is only to be placed into another—albeit, perhaps, one that is more slowly moving. Photography does not defeat but only defers the corruption of time.

The charm of decay therefore reveals the paradoxical essence of the need to defeat time, as it has been unrepressed in the invention of photography/cinema. This paradox lies in the fact that the need to defeat time can only be completely and impossibly fulfilled by the erasure of time consciousness itself. And so rather than being capable of any sort of satisfaction, the need to defeat time must actually always operate within a kind of self-limiting economy, ensuring its own perpetuation. Within this economy, the tether to the past that photography/cinema represents is valuable only because the link it offers is tenuous and always subject to decay and potential failure. Photography/cinema, rather than satisfying anything, will always only antagonize us by reminding us of the decay of time even as it promises to thwart it. In deferring—but not halting—the corruption of time, photography/cinema fuels the desire to believe in the possibility of time’s defeat. The charm of the photograph’s material decay is therefore as follows: it taunts us with the promise of a past re-presented while nevertheless reminding us that the past is at imminent and certain risk of being lost again. Without this reminder, the value of photography—and for that matter, the value of anything that seems to lure us to the threshold of an unmediated access to the presence of the past—is lost.

This idea that photography simultaneously offers both absence and the lure of presence resonates strongly with Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*. One of the founding assumptions of *L'Imaginaire* is precisely the fact that images supply, above all, the experience of absence; in so doing, they do not assuage but rather provoke a desire for presence. This is true insofar as an image gives its object as a "nothing":

...if the image of a dead loved one appears to me abruptly, there is no need for a 'reduction' to feel the ache in my heart: it is part of the image, it is a direct consequence of the fact that the image gives its object as a nothingness of being.⁷⁷

Sartre elaborates on this idea in his extended discussion of the image of Pierre: "My image of him is a certain manner of not touching him, not seeing him, a way he has of *not being* of such a distance, in such a position." The image of Pierre "gives its object as not being...the picture is nothing but a way for Pierre to appear to me as absent."⁷⁸

Importantly, this is so despite the fact that the very purpose of the image always remains "to make present the face of Pierre, who is not there."⁷⁹ In this way, Sartre establishes the economy of the image as one of "irrational synthesis" in which "the object is posited as absent, but the impression is present."⁸⁰ This is a claim Sartre will return to continuously, until he eventually concludes that "an image is not purely and simply *the world denied*, but is always *the world denied from a certain point of view*, precisely that which allows the positing of an absence or the nonexistence of the object presentified

⁷⁷ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 13. Sartre's discussion incorporates all kinds of images; Sartre's "image family" consists of a spectrum that includes mental representations, photographs, and caricatures; they are "three stages of the same process" (Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 17–18).

⁷⁸ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 14, 24; emphasis original.

⁷⁹ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 18.

⁸⁰ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 23.

[sic] ‘as imaged’.”⁸¹ Likewise, in Bazin, through the registration of decay on the surface of the image, photography can offer both absence and the promise of presence. In this way, photography does not extinguish or satisfy the need to defeat time; it fuels it. It gives us our desire in its essence.

From Ontology to Desire

This is why I have reservations about the tendency to read literally Bazin’s statements concerning photographic/cinematic ontology and the re-presentation of objects. Bazin’s discussion of the ontology of the photographic image in relation to the need to defeat time is not an argument for the satisfaction of the need to defeat time, but rather *ethopoeia*—a rhetorical staging of the *belief in the possibility of satisfaction* with which photography/cinema charms us. This is evident if we consider the pervasive rhetoric of obligation and of the compulsion of belief that frames the entire discussion of photographic/cinematic presence.

We can begin by recalling that in all three myths of representation, desire, and presence it is the objectivity of photography/cinema that is responsible for its specific properties compared to painting. What does objectivity determine in the myth of the need to defeat time? Objectivity does not determine ontology, much less any quality of presence. Rather, Bazin simply states that objectivity *compels us to believe* that the photographic image “is the model” itself. Let us read closely Bazin’s discussion of

⁸¹ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 184–5; emphasis original.

photographic/cinematic re-presentation, in order to see that it is entirely framed by a discussion of how objectivity compels an irrational belief in this presence:

Cette genèse automatique a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image. L'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité absente de toute œuvre picturale. Quelles que soient les objections de notre esprit critique nous sommes obligés de croire à l'existence de l'objet représenté, effectivement re-présenté, c'est-à-dire rendu présente dans le temps et dans l'espace. La photographie bénéficie d'un transfert de réalité de la chose sur sa reproduction. Le dessin le plus fidèle peut nous donner plus de renseignements sur le modèle, il ne possédera jamais, en dépit de notre esprit critique, le pouvoir irrationnel de la photographie qui emporte notre croyance. (QQC 15–16; emphasis added)

Photography does not give us the object itself; rather it taunts us with the obligation to believe, irrationally, in the presence of the object itself. Furthermore, this belief—if it exists at all—is always only experienced negatively (it is *ir-rational*) and relationally (against the “objections of our critical faculties”). It therefore can never be experienced as a total state, but rather only in the form of double consciousness; it always exists in tension with our “esprit critique,” and so is always held in check by a process of rational disavowal. We are invited to flirt with the possibility of irrational belief from within the confines of a persistent rational doubt—the return of the repressed is not total.

The idea that objectivity determines not ontology but psychology is reintroduced in the next paragraph, in a passage with which we are already familiar:

L'objectif seul nous donne de l'objet une image capable de «défouler», du fond de notre inconscient, ce besoin de substituer à l'objet mieux qu'un décalque approximatif: cet objet lui-même, mais libéré des contingences temporelles. (QQC 16; emphasis added)

Once again, Bazin first reminds us of the governing role of photographic objectivity (guaranteed by the lens), and then proceeds to show that what this objectivity gives us is the unrepression of a need for the presence of the object itself. In the myth of the need to defeat time, photographic/cinematic objectivity does not give us a specific ontological relationship between the image and reality, but rather the desire to believe in this relationship as such. This irrational belief revives the need to defeat time in its essence.

This interpretation seems to be substantiated by Bazin's remarkable 1958 revision of the introduction to the passage on the need to defeat time. Here are the first two sentences of the passage as they appear in the 1945 version:

Cette genèse automatique de la photographie a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image *ou plus précisément son ontologie*. L'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité, *et par là une existence absente de toute œuvre picturale*. (PP 408–9; emphasis added)

And here is how they read in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*:

Cette genèse automatique de la photographie a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image. L'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité absente de toute œuvre picturale. (QQC 15)

Bazin has expunged his initial thesis that photography/cinema's automatic means of image production has transformed the ontology of the image.⁸² Once we are aware of

⁸² Bazin similarly deletes one instance of the word "ontologique[s]" from his discussion of "The Notion of Presence" in the article on "Theatre and Cinema." Although the implications are perhaps not as great as they are in the "Ontology," it is still a fairly intriguing revision. The 1951 version reads as follows: "Le XIX^e siècle, avec ses techniques objectives de reproduction, ciné et phonographiques, a fait apparaître une nouvelle catégorie d'images; leur rapports *ontologiques* avec la réalité dont elles procèdent demanderaient à l'être rigoureusement définis" (Bazin, "Théâtre et Cinéma [Suite]," 233). The version appearing in Volume 2 of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* in 1959 reads as follows: "Le XIX^e siècle, avec ses techniques objectives de reproduction, visuelles et sonores, a fait apparaître une nouvelle catégorie d'images; leur rapports avec la réalité dont elles procèdent demanderaient à l'être rigoureusement définis" (Bazin, "Théâtre et Cinéma," in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* Volume 2, 91. Another reference to "ontologie" later in

this act of deletion, how can we still take literally everything Bazin proceeds to say about the image being a transfer of reality, being the model itself, and so on? The whole discussion of the photographic/cinematic ontology is reduced to a fantasmatic staging of the play of desire that is triggered within our collective psychology when the fact of photography/cinema's automatic means of genesis forces us to confront our own repressed need to defeat time.⁸³

the same paragraph remains intact : "C'est également au niveau de l'ontologie que l'efficacité du cinéma prend sa source" (Bazin, "Théâtre et Cinéma [Suite]," 234).

⁸³ For Bazin, the spectator's ambivalent attitude toward photography/cinema is explained by way of the history of collective psychology as it is presented in the myth of the need to defeat time. But we should remember that the trope of the film spectator's double attitude—of simultaneous credulousness and incredulousness when confronted with the photographic/cinematic image—is common in the history of theorizations of the spectator, even if explanations of the psychological underpinnings of this double attitude vary considerably.

In an early example, Hugo Münsterberg relies on a psychological explanation to account for the spectator's mind entering "a peculiar complex state" when confronted with cinema's convincing illusion of spatial depth (see extended discussion in Münsterberg, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, edited by Allan Langdale [New York: Routledge, 2002], 69–71). But surely the best-known account is Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier," in which Metz, drawing heavily on the work of Octave Mannoni, likens the spectator's double attitude to that of the strategy of fetishistic disavowal in response to castration anxiety, as described by Freud. See Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," 67–75. Freud's own discussion appears in "Fetishism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 21, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961). Ben Singer, in a detailed and thoughtful critique of Metz, points out "a number of significant incongruities" between Metz's characterization of fetishism and Freud's, most notably the absence of a traumatic unveiling of lack which might account for cinema's status as fetish object; see Singer, "Film, Photography, and Fetish: The Analyses of Christian Metz," *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 4 (summer 1988): 4–22. Tom Gunning's "Aesthetic of Astonishment" is somewhat indebted to Metz's work, but raises doubts about the ahistorical nature of Metz's claims. Gunning instead works to situate early cinema spectators' "vacillation between belief and incredulity" in a particular historical and cultural context. Gunning shows that a pervasive culture of rationalism in the nineteenth century set the stage for a visual culture predicated on spectators' "obsessive desire to test the limits of an intellectual disavowal." See Tom Gunning, "The Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, edited by Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 119.

Desire and the Need to Defeat Time

It is worth reflecting briefly on this play of desire that is implied by Bazin's discussion of the way that photography/cinema interacts with the need to defeat time. We have seen how desire is not satisfied by the photographic image, but rather only perpetuated and aggravated. In this respect, Bazin's argument again seems indebted to Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*. The play of presence and absence that Sartre describes as being invoked by the image both entails a certain theory of desire, and a certain role for images therein. For Sartre, as it will be for Lacan, desire is something that can never fully be quenched.

For Sartre, the basic function of images is to respond—however unsatisfactorily—to a desire for the presence of objects. In series of remarks that resonates strongly with the Freudian idea of hallucinatory images and a corresponding “experience of satisfaction,” Sartre tells us that “most affective states are accompanied by images, the image representing for the desire what is desired [sic].”⁸⁴ Sartre will then proceed, in a remarkable passage, to formulate the relationship between desire and the image as one of self-perpetuating non-satisfaction: “constituting an irreal object is a way of deceiving desires momentarily *in order to exacerbate them*.”⁸⁵ He likens this to “the

⁸⁴ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 72. Freud's early discussion of the hallucination of mnemonic images appears in “Project for a Scientific Psychology,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 1, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 319, 322; see also Freud's discussion of hallucinated images of lost objects and reality-testing in “Negation,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 19, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 237–8.

⁸⁵ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 126; emphasis added. One is reminded of Derrida's supplement, or, more precisely, the *pharmakon*, which is both poison and remedy; see Jacques Derrida, “Plato's Pharmacy,” in

effect that sea water has on thirst” and characterizes it as “a way of *playing* at satisfaction...the desire, in the imaging act, nourishes itself.”⁸⁶ In this way, Sartre claims, desire is “made precise” and “concentrated.”⁸⁷ Images, in giving us absent objects in their absence, both channel and provoke desire.

Sartre’s characterization of desire in this way seems to anticipate Lacan. Recall that Lacanian subjectivity is fundamentally distinct from that commonly attributed to Freud insofar as (among other things) the desire of the Lacanian subject is ultimately insatiable, and capable only of being metonymically deferred *ad infinitum*.⁸⁸ In this respect, the problems introduced by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—a text marginalized in most mainstream interpretations of Freud’s thought—are foundational for the work of Lacan and his followers.

In Lacan (as in Freud), it is the general nature of the origin of desire which determines the form that it will take. Lacanian desire originates in a “primal lack,” and assumes the form of a quest for a return to origin, eventually finding its symbolic articulation through and in relation to a variety of substitutive objects.⁸⁹ The origin itself, which serves both the initial and final object of desire, is ultimately inaccessible and

Dissemination, translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), especially 95–117.

⁸⁶ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 126; emphasis original.

⁸⁷ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 139.

⁸⁸ The figure of metonymy is discussed in Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, translated by David Macey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 195–6.

⁸⁹ For Lacan’s account of the origin of desire see, e.g., Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus” and “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

indeterminate insofar as it is subject to primal repression.⁹⁰ Anything that desire takes as its object will always be only a substitute for what is always-already a non-existent original object.

Desire is given its provisional outlet with the subject's ascension into the symbolic order, the world of representations,⁹¹ which is responsible for the articulation of temporality and the duration of objects in time, and likewise for the articulation of the play of presence and absence.⁹² With the mastery of language, the subject "raises his desire to a second power" and renders it as "its own object to itself."⁹³ Lacan, throughout

⁹⁰ Jane Gallop has remarked that "[w]hat Lacan calls desire is precisely the result of this primary repression and yields up a nostalgia beyond *nostos*, beyond the drive to return, a desire constitutively unsatisfied and unsatisfiable because its 'object' simply cannot ever be defined" (Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985], 151). And Serge Leclaire notes that "[t]here is above all the retrospective illusion of a lost first object, inducing a state of lack wherein the movement of desire is originated" (Serge Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*, translated by Peggy Kamuf [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 51).

⁹¹ The subject's relationship with the symbolic ensures the fundamental decentring of the subject even as it serves to orient the experience of desire. The symbolic order is the field of cultural representation in its entirety, including not just arbitrary language (so central to Lacan's explication, grounded as it is largely in Saussurean semiology) but all systems of representation. That visual representations, including photography and cinema, are to be included in the realm of the symbolic is made unambiguous by Lacan himself, in his famous apologue on the film-machine in his second seminar, where he assures us that "the most complicated machines are made only with words." See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomascelli (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 47.

⁹² On both counts it can be contrasted with the imaginary, the field of ego relations, where narcissistic identification is instantaneous, fleeting, and not subject to temporal articulation. Lacan writes: "On the imaginary level, the objects only ever appear to man within relations which fade. He recognizes his unity in them, but uniquely from without. And in as much as he recognizes his unity in an object, he feels himself to be in disarray in relation to the latter" (See Lacan, *Seminar Book II*, 169, 255, 323.). The whole idea of cinema as inviting an "imaginary relation" with the spectator—so central to the work of Metz, Baudry, etc.—requires wilful ignorance of Lacan's insistence that the symbolic order comprises all forms of representation which name and grant duration to objects.

⁹³ Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 262. Elsewhere Lacan writes that desire "always becomes manifest at the joint of speech, where it makes its appearance, its sudden emergence, its surge forwards," and that it "emerges just as it becomes embodied in speech, it emerges with symbolism" (Lacan, *Seminar Book II*, 234).

his career, will repeatedly invoke Freud's story of his nephew's *Fort//Da!* game with the cotton reel as an example of this provisional mastery.⁹⁴

Having been raised to a "second power," desire operates metonymically in relation to an indefinite sequence of objects. Serge Leclaire describes the role played by objects in relation to the play of desire: "Any object whatsoever can, in principle, trigger the movement of desire"; such an object functions as "the term around which the cycle of desire develops,"⁹⁵ or "as a sort of *indifferent* pivot around which is reflected the cycle of desire."⁹⁶ Desire therefore does not exist by virtue of any finite object but rather by way of a certain kind of economic relationship within which any object in principle may become caught.

Lacan himself effectively summarizes the symbolic articulation of desire in this way: "you mark the six sides of a die, you roll the die—from this rolling die emerges desire."⁹⁷ I think that this compelling analogy of the marking and casting of the die perfectly encapsulates what is, for our purposes, an essential point: that the field and terms of the experience of desire, and its ability to be perpetuated within these terms, is

⁹⁴ See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 18, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 14–16. In Freud's view, the game is a compensation for the "renunciation of instinctual satisfaction"; this compensation entails the child's taking an active role in the "staging" of the disappointment of absence within the realm of masterable objects. See also Lacan's discussion in "The Unconscious and Repetition," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 62–3.

⁹⁵ Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing*, 54.

⁹⁶ Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing*, 56; emphasis original.

⁹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar Book II*, 234.

concomitant with the seeking of its mastery in relation to some contingently determined object.

The point of this admittedly simplistic gloss of Lacanian subjectivity has been to give further credence to the premises—expressed in Sartre and in Bazin—that desire is both self-perpetuating and unsatisfiable, and that it finds its essential outlet in the play of presence and absence of time-bound objects. With this in mind, we are in a better position to understand what exactly, in Bazin’s account, is being unrepressed with the invention of the photographic/cinematic image. The power of photography/cinema resides precisely with its ability to aggravate so very effectively our “incoercible” need to defeat time (*QQC* 12). Photography does not simply function as an object of desire, but rather provides us with a field within which to experience time consciousness as such and the desire that it provokes, while also reminding us of the impossibility of time’s defeat. It confronts us with the shape of desire in its essence.

The Winter Garden Photograph

No one has demonstrated this essential value of photography in relation to desire more elegantly than Roland Barthes. In his contemplation of the Winter Garden photograph in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes shows us how it is not simply the fact that “the referent adheres”⁹⁸ but rather the experience of photography’s material decay which unleashes the play of presence and absence within which desire may emerge. It is worth

⁹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

briefly recalling Barthes's tale of his encounter with the Winter Garden photograph, which seems to me to be the purest expression of the need to defeat time.⁹⁹

It is well known that *Camera Lucida* is a culmination of sorts of Barthes's gradual shift away from the rigid structuralism of his early work.¹⁰⁰ Barthes recapitulates this movement in the diptychous structure of *Camera Lucida*—with its second half presented as a “recantation” of the first.¹⁰¹ The first half of *Camera Lucida* is at least somewhat grounded in Barthes's earlier semiological work, even as it seems to give itself over to problems of affect and sentiment.¹⁰² But the second half picks up on a distinct trend underway in Barthes's later work, in *Roland Barthes* and *A Lover's Discourse*

⁹⁹ Colin MacCabe and others have addressed the “striking” similarities between *Camera Lucida* and “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” MacCabe finds it “absolutely extraordinary” and “simply unbelievable” that *Camera Lucida* does not cite the “Ontology.” Both MacCabe and Adam Lowenstein have explored the various similarities and differences between the two essays at length. See Colin MacCabe, “Barthes and Bazin: The Ontology of the Image,” in *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), especially 73–5; and Adam Lowenstein, “The Surrealism of the Photographic Image: Bazin, Barthes, and the Digital Sweet Hereafter,” *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (spring 1997): 54–82.

¹⁰⁰ On this trajectory see, e.g., Batchen, “*Camera Lucida*,” 76–7; and Steven Ungar, “Introduction: Double Figure,” in *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 60.

¹⁰² This is true insofar as what remains at issue is, precisely, the status of the signifier—namely, its conspicuous transparency: “Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see” (*Camera Lucida*, 6). Barthes tells us that the photographic referent is given to us fully, and it is this referent in all its plenitude with which we are inclined to engage affectively (Barthes on photography books: “Myself, I saw only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body”; *Camera Lucida*, 7). But we should not mistake the argument that the signifier is transparent for an abandonment of semiology. After all, this claim in the first half of *Camera Lucida* is simply a renewal of Barthes's earlier assertion that the photographic message is a “message without a code” (Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” 17; see also “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image–Music–Text*, translated by Stephen Heath [New York: Hill and Wang, 1977]). And the discussion of *studium* and *punctum* merely augments Barthes's earlier analytical classifications and taxonomies of things to be encountered in the field of the signified (e.g., denotation versus connotation; see Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith [New York: Hill and Wang, 1973], 89–94; and “Rhetoric of the Image.”). But the question of what defines or distinguishes *studium* and *punctum*, which seems to have fascinated countless commentators, is moot because Barthes will only proceed to surpass it, along with the concomitant satisfaction with the represented content of the photographic image, in the second half of *Camera Lucida*.

especially.¹⁰³ In those texts Barthes is far less concerned with systems of textual meaning than with the contour of his own desire. This is, furthermore, a desire that is conceived in a certain way—as forever stymied. Both D. A. Miller and Peter Buse have noticed that the later Barthes finds his only satisfaction in the experience of non-satisfaction; for Buse, *A Lover's Discourse* shows us that “what desire wants is *not* satisfaction, but more desire...what [Barthes] wants is to want immediate gratification but not to get it...”¹⁰⁴ This observation is easily confirmed by the grim list of “figures” that Barthes has deemed worthy of inquiry in *A Lover's Discourse*: absence, agony, alone, anxiety, crying, demons, embarrassment, exile...

What makes *A Lover's Discourse* fascinating is that Barthes always approaches his own melancholy *as* discourse, and therefore with a certain knowing detachment. His frequent, canny references to both Freud and Lacan ensure that Barthes and his reader alike can see the factitiousness of the romantic plots that he contrives for himself, even as he succumbs to them.¹⁰⁵ And so, for example, when he seems to be aggrieved because

¹⁰³ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ Buse, “Photography Degree Zero,” 33; emphasis original. Miller writes: “To notice that on the sleeve of his writing hand the author of *A Lover's Discourse* wears a broken heart is also to acknowledge how well it suits him” (D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Barthes* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992], 51). Barthes himself has remarked that the lover “assumes suffering and unhappiness as a kind of value...the feeling of love is defined precisely like that: because suffering is inevitable.” See Barthes, “The Greatest Cryptographer of Contemporary Myths Talks about Love,” in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, translated by Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 294–5.

¹⁰⁵ The extent to which *A Lover's Discourse* is underwritten by a careful reading of Freud and Lacan has been made clear with the recent publication of the seminars on which the book is based (Roland Barthes, *Le Discours Amoureux: Séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1974–1976*, edited by Claude Coste [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007]). In the seminars, explications of Freud and Lacan far outnumber those of any other author. Editor Claude Coste has traced Barthes's growing interest in psychoanalysis and has indicated the sources on which Barthes likely drew, including then-unpublished seminars of Lacan (see Claude Coste, Preface to *Le Discours Amoureux*, 29, 39–40). For Barthes's own comments on the role of

the person he loves is “wily,” we realize along with him that this is just the transposition of a structural condition of desire—i.e., its perennial non-fulfillment—into an apropos “character trait” of the loved one.¹⁰⁶

In *Camera Lucida*, the nature of love and desire remains essentially the same. But Barthes deprives us of the Lacanian metalanguage through which the structural condition of desire’s non-fulfillment is knowingly foregrounded. In *Camera Lucida*, scholarly detachment is occluded by the pure expression of grief. This expression of grief arises in the encounter with the Winter Garden photograph, which confronts Barthes with the corrupting force of time. To understand the *apparent* singularity of the Winter Garden photo is to understand both the nature of desire and why photography is so capable of unleashing it.

Recall that the Winter Garden photograph is not encountered in isolation, but embedded within a narrative of sorts—Barthes seeking to re-find his mother while looking through a box of old photos. Barthes sets out the criterion that the sought-after object must meet—or, rather, fail to meet—in advance: “Now one November evening shortly after my mother’s death, I was going through some photographs. *I had no hope of*

psychoanalytic theory in *A Lover’s Discourse* see Barthes, “A Lover’s Discourse,” in *The Grain of the Voice*, 287–8.

¹⁰⁶ Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, 35. This discussion appears under the figure of “atopos,” Barthes’s consideration of the impulse to classify and attribute originality to the loved object. We might ask whether Barthes’s recourse to the metalanguage of psychoanalysis in *A Lover’s Discourse* really constitutes a genuine detachment from the symbolic play of his own desire. Is this not simply a further vain attempt to exert mastery over desire by raising it to a third power, that of scholarly discourse?

'finding' her."¹⁰⁷ Having cast the die, having framed his goal as an impossibility, Barthes proceeds to 'invent' a series of provisional failures:

I never recognized her except in fragments, which is to say that I missed her *being*, and that therefore I missed her altogether...I recognized her differently, not essentially...Photography therefore compelled me to perform a painful labor; straining toward the essence of her identity, I was struggling among images partially true, and therefore totally false.¹⁰⁸

But Barthes continues—not because he has failed, but perhaps because he has met with the wrong kind of failure. It is in this context of this “painful labor” that Barthes arrives at the Winter Garden photograph:

There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I had loved. And I found it.

The photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together...

...the Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*.¹⁰⁹

Barthes, on the brink of resignation, finds his mother “utopically” in the Winter Garden photograph, that is to say, he finds her through an act of discovery that has the quality of a perfection cancelled out—negated.¹¹⁰ This in turn enables Barthes to register “both my

¹⁰⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 63; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 65–6; emphasis original.

¹⁰⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 67, 71; emphasis original.

¹¹⁰ The French is “utopiquement” (Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* [Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile, Gallimard, Le Seuil, 1980], 110). Etymology-obsessed Barthes would surely have been aware of the implications of this choice of word. On the relationship between “negation” and “perfection” within the concept of “utopia” see, e.g., Richard Helgerson, “Inventing Noplace, or the Power of Negative Thinking,” *Genre* 15, no. 1 (spring 1982): 101–21. See also the short discussion in James Romm, “More’s Strategy of Naming in the Utopia,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, no. 2 (summer 1991): 178.

mother's being and my grief at her death.”¹¹¹ For Barthes, the purest expression of his love—here, as elsewhere—comes in the total grief of withdrawal and absence. It is above all the desire for *this* experience—the *jouissance* of the pure experience of irrevocable loss as such—that Barthes seeks, and which he will find in the presence of the Winter Garden photograph.¹¹²

Barthes both reveals and remains silent about the unique quality of the Winter Garden photograph that distinguishes it, not just from the other photographs of his mother, but from every other photograph he discusses in *Camera Lucida*. Does this quality not lie precisely in the Winter Garden photo's existence as a material artifact that registers its temporal endurance in the tangibility of form? The Winter Garden photograph is the only photo in *Camera Lucida* for which Barthes will describe its characteristics as a physical object. He tells us that the “photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together...” (“La photographie était très ancienne. Cartonnée, les coins mâchés, d’un sépia pâli, elle montrait à peine deux jeunes enfants...”¹¹³). This description resoundingly defies Barthes's claim in the first half of the book that “a photograph is always invisible: it is

¹¹¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70.

¹¹² I speak advisedly of *jouissance*, a concept which defies translation. See Richard Howard, “A Note on the Text,” in *The Pleasure of the Text*, by Roland Barthes, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975); and the Preface to Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹¹³ Barthes, *La chambre claire*, 106. Recall Bazin: “L’image peut être floue, déformée, décolorée, sans valeur documentaire, elle procède par sa genèse de l’ontologie du modèle: elle est le modèle. D’où le charme des photographies d’albums. Ces ombres grises ou sépia, fantomatiques, presque illisibles...” (*QQC* 16).

not it that we see... I saw only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body.”¹¹⁴ Only the Winter Garden photograph makes itself visible to Barthes as an object that registers the decay of time. Only the Winter Garden photo, therefore, can confront Barthes with the denial of presence as such, and thus unleash the grief that constitutes the purest expression of his love. This surely also accounts for why Barthes refuses to show it to us (“for you, no wound”);¹¹⁵ every other photograph in *Camera Lucida* exists as an image, a resemblance, a sign, fully reproducible; the Winter Garden photograph alone is an object.

It is not clear whether Barthes really has chosen this photograph as unselfconsciously as he claims (he writes as though it is the Winter Garden photo that chooses him—charms him). Regardless, Barthes will proceed to define all of photography on the basis of his encounter with the Winter Garden photograph. This is a definition that locates the essence of photography not in pleasure and presence but in grief and absence:

Something like the essence of the Photograph floated in this particular picture. I therefore decided to ‘derive’ all Photography (its ‘nature’) from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me...I had understood that henceforth I must interrogate the evidence of Photography, not from the viewpoint of pleasure, but in relation to what we romantically call love and death.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6, 7. In the first half of *Camera Lucida*, it is principally the “form of expression” that Barthes disavows (principles of photographic composition, etc.); whereas here it is actually the “substance of expression” that charms Barthes, but which he nevertheless does not acknowledge (the physical material of the image). If, for Barthes, the form of expression is unspeakable, then the substance of expression is unthinkable. The distinction between the “form” and “substance” of both the expression plane (signifier) and the content plane (signified) is, of course, Hjelmslev’s, but Barthes discusses it in *Elements of Semiology*, 39–41. See Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, translated by Francis J. Whitfield (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 47–60.

¹¹⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73.

This essence Barthes will define in part by affirming the “that-has-been,” the necessary reality of the depicted object.¹¹⁷ It is in the course of exploring the implications of the “that-has-been” that Barthes draws closest to Bazin: “no painted portrait, supposing that it seemed ‘true’ to me, could compel me to believe its referent had really existed.”¹¹⁸

After a lengthy reflection on this relationship, Barthes will arrive at what, for our purposes, are two important conclusions. The first concerns the photograph’s essential relationship to the idea of time: “the important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time.”¹¹⁹ Above all, and *independently of representation*, photography bears witness to the irrevocability of time: “At the limit, there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience *this vertigo of time defeated*.”¹²⁰ The “pure representation” of time itself is therefore the “new *punctum*” of photography.¹²¹ Second, Barthes confronts the realization that photography does not offer presence, but rather the grief-inducing withdrawal of something that nevertheless once was: “The image, says phenomenology, is an object-as-nothing. Now, in the Photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it...The photograph has become a bizarre

¹¹⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76–7.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 77.

¹¹⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88–9.

¹²⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96–7; emphasis added (“A la limite, point n’est besoin de me représenter un corps pour que j’éprouve ce vertige du temps écrasé”; Barthes, *Chambre claire*, 151). Contrast this with Barthes’s claim in the first half of the book: “I saw only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body” (*Camera Lucida*, 7).

¹²¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 97.

medium, a new form of hallucination.”¹²² With this reference to “phenomenology,”

Barthes is almost certainly thinking of *L’Imaginaire*, the book to which *Camera Lucida* is an “homage.” Consider again the following passage from Sartre, which we encountered earlier:

...if the image of a dead loved one appears to me abruptly, there is no need for a ‘reduction’ to feel the ache in my heart: it is part of the image, it is a direct consequence of the fact that the image gives its object as a nothingness of being.¹²³

Here we find the basis not just of Barthes’s indebtedness to Sartre, but also Bazin’s.

Taking into account Sartre’s description of the relationship between images-as-absence and desire, and seeing the way in which Barthes uses the Winter Garden photograph to initiate the experience of grief, we are able to gain a more complete insight into the need to defeat time that is unrepressed by photography. Bazin and Barthes will adapt Sartre’s basic phenomenological formulation in order to articulate the play of desire specifically along the axis of time. In this way, the materiality of the photographic image comes into play as the tangible manifestation of time’s decay.

Conclusion

The obsession with resemblance, with its promise of satisfaction to be found in the mirror world of representations, therefore gives way, with the invention of photography/cinema, to the re-emergence of the incoercible need to defeat time. We are now in a position to see how Bazin has articulated the relationship between these two

¹²² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115; emphasis original.

¹²³ Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 13.

modes of desire and presence through a strict (if only implicit) series of differentially determined ideals. We can therefore set these ideals in dialectical relation to one another, as follows:

painting	photography
rationality	irrationality
epistemology	desire
mirroring, representation	presence–absence
heterogeneity	the same
superficiality	authenticity
objectivity, science	faith, belief
satisfaction with illusion	need for thing itself, however unachievable
repression	unrepression
signified/document	signifier/material
the eternal/outside time	time embalmed

But the power of photography/cinema does not end with the obsession with resemblance being succeeded by the need to defeat time. There remains a third and final myth to be fulfilled, and a higher calling for photography/cinema to answer.

5. AESTHETIC REVELATION

Genesis and Development

Bazin shows us that the myths of the obsession with resemblance and the need to defeat time each begin with a distinct moment. The obsession with resemblance originates in the invention of perspective, and so coincides with the emergence of European rationalism. The need to defeat time finds its mythic origin in the Egyptian practice of mummification, and so corresponds with the place assigned to Egypt within western narratives of art-historical development. But when it comes to the history of aesthetic expression, Bazin offers no such indication of where or why it originates. Instead, we are introduced to the idea of aesthetic expression *in medias res*, at the moment of its being neglected due to painting's obsession with resemblance. Only after the invention of photography/cinema is painting able to resume its pursuit of aesthetic expression—a pursuit which, for Bazin, culminates in the work of Cézanne. And yet photography/cinema also participates in and transforms aesthetic expression, which finds its fullest achievement in an unmediated “revelation of the real.” In photography/cinema, Nature is able to reveal herself directly.

The fact that Bazin does not pinpoint a single origin of aesthetic expression says something about the essence of this expression. Also important are Bazin's comments

about painting's role in the achievement of expression. He insists that painting's deviation from total commitment to this expression constitutes both an improper use of painting and the non-fulfillment of the "need" for aesthetic expression. Bazin seems to be suggesting, on the one hand, that the capacity for such expression is inherent to art, and that this inherence holds *independently of and prior to the vicissitudes of human psychological need*. On the other hand, Bazin is also suggesting that there is some sort of organic correlation between the imperative of aesthetic expression and the formal means available to painting as a medium. And so the proper role of painting is "l'expression des réalités spirituelles où le modèle se trouve transcendé par le symbolisme des formes" (QQC 13).

The proper relationship between expression, painting, and form seems to be governed by some sort of primary imperative, which exists independently of the real history of the use of painting based on the whims of human psychological need. There is, therefore, always a gap (however great or small) between the aesthetic ideal to be fulfilled and humans' varying ability in the history of artistic practice to recognize and pursue this ideal. This gap is most obviously manifest in the way in which Bazin draws the sharp distinction between the pseudo-realism of the obsession with visual resemblance and the "true realism, which is a *need* to express the meaning of the world in its concrete aspects and in its essence" (TB 6; emphasis added). In making this distinction, Bazin is establishing aesthetic expression as an inherent possibility of painting—a possibility which exists independently of human psychological need.

Nevertheless, this expression is itself governed by a “need” of its own. Given the centrality of the idea of psychological “need” (*besoin*) in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” it is remarkable that Bazin also uses the term here to describe the imperative of aesthetic expression. After all, Bazin’s entire explanation of the crisis of painting is grounded in his drawing a clear distinction between the psychological origins of the obsession with resemblance (“un désir tout psychologique” [QQC 13]) and the (presumably) non-psychological (non)origin of the aesthetic ideal. Yet the fulfillment of this latter ideal, which exists independently of the concerns of humans, is itself also characterized as a need.

Where does this need come from, if it does not originate within human desire? Quite simply, in Nature herself—outside of the vicissitudes of the history of human psychology. If the myths of the obsession with resemblance and the need to defeat time reflect the way in which representational practice is bound up with collective psychology, the principles of aesthetic expression and the proper use of form have a destiny that originates outside of—and prior to—any human history. At its ideal limit, aesthetic expression is coextensive with Nature herself; in Bazin’s terms, the ideal aesthetic image *participates* in the revelation of Nature. Humans, in their deployment of art, are tasked with the role of a kind of shepherd or midwife to this process. The only history of aesthetic expression is that of humans’ ability or inability to realize and assume their proper role.

In characterizing art as a compulsion toward the “expression of spiritual realities” by way of the “symbolism of form,” Bazin is outlining an aesthetics that is undeniably similar to the one given by Wassily Kandinsky in his 1912 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. For Kandinsky, art is governed by a principle of “inner necessity,” which determines the purpose of art as the expression of “inner sound” (*innerer Klang*) or “inner feeling” by way of suitable formal means. Most commentary on Kandinsky (and expressionism generally) has, of course, tended to associate this “inner feeling” with the intuition or the soul of the artist.¹ In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, however, Kandinsky describes this feeling mainly as something immanent to objects in the world (even if it is the job of an artist to identify and convey it). Consider Kandinsky’s characterization of the work of Matisse:

He paints ‘pictures’, and in these ‘pictures’ endeavors to render the divine. To attain this end he requires nothing but the subject to be painted (human being or whatever it may be) and means that belong to painting alone, color and form.”²

And here is Kandinsky on Cézanne: “He painted things as he painted human beings because he was endowed with the gift of *divining the internal life in everything*”³ (this statement perhaps reminds us also of Roger Fry’s often-quoted aphorism that Cézanne paints “the ‘treeness’ of the tree”).⁴ With this reference to the “internal life” of things, Kandinsky is making the common (and perhaps even banal) distinction between the mere

¹ Wolf-Deiter Dube, for example, relates Kandinsky’s work to that of his expressionist contemporaries in the following way: “The artist’s will is directed by his instinct, by the feeling an experience arouses in him, though in Kandinsky’s case his consciousness retained more control.” See Dube, *The Expressionists*, translated by Mary Whittall (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 111.

² Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Wittenborn, 1947), 36.

³ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 36; emphasis added.

⁴ Roger Fry, “The Post-Impressionists,” in *A Roger Fry Reader*, edited by Christopher Reed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 82.

surface—the mere appearance—of things and their inner essence or spirit.⁵ In celebrating Cézanne’s and Matisse’s ability to locate and express this inner essence, Kandinsky is likewise making an important claim about what, exactly, it is the task of art to represent. Kandinsky celebrates these two artists precisely because they offer not simply visual likenesses of things, but rather the expression of what Bazin will call their “spiritual reality.” Kandinsky, in differentiating between the “purposeless of copying” and a “desire to make the object express itself,”⁶ suggests the basis of Bazin’s distinction between painting’s obsession with resemblance and its capacity for aesthetic expression—between pseudo-realism and true realism.⁷

Painting, Form, and Aesthetic Expression

Kandinsky’s account will likewise suggest the justification for Bazin’s distinction between painting and photography/cinema with regard to aesthetic expression. Let us

⁵ The surface may nevertheless be understood as a necessary means of expressing the spirit, as when Baudelaire, in his essay on “The Painter of Modern Life,” tells us: “La corrélation perpétuelle de ce qu’on appelle *l’âme* avec ce qu’on appelle *le corps* explique très-bien comment tout ce qui est matériel ou effluve du spirituel représente et représentera toujours le spirituel d’où il dérive” (Charles Baudelaire, “Le peintre de la vie moderne,” in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Marcel Raymond (Lausanne: La Guilde de Livre, 1967), 246; emphasis original. There is obviously a long tradition, beginning perhaps with Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which “the body is seen as giving physical expression to the soul”; see, e.g., Andrew Louth, “The Body in Western Catholic Christianity,” in *Religion and the Body*, edited by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 112.

⁶ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 36.

⁷ It is not ultimately a question of whether Bazin was familiar with Kandinsky’s exact arguments in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (which was not translated into French until 1949). However, it is worth pointing out that Kandinsky lived in Paris from 1934 until his death in 1944, and, during that time, published a number of articles in French art magazines such as *Cahiers d’art* and *XX^e Siècle*. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo remark: “During the Paris years Kandinsky often refashioned ideas he had ventured earlier, with the adaptation reflecting a more certain mood and the lyric capabilities of the French language.” See Lindsay and Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art Volume Two (1922–1943)* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1982), 780.

begin by recalling what Bazin says about painting in order to see how it resonates with Kandinsky's discussion of painterly form. Bazin shows us that painting, when employed properly, is inherently capable of achieving aesthetic expression by means of the judicious use of form. This is, furthermore, the only task that painting ought to be undertaking. The problem that serves as the basis of the entire "Ontology" essay is, after all, the fact that painting is incapable of fulfilling the ideal of expression while it is also obsessed with resemblance. When photography/cinema frees painting from its obsession, painting is able to return to the pursuit of aesthetic expression. In Bazin's assessment, therefore, painting is only truly capable of pursuing one ambition at a time. So long as it is waylaid by the obsession with resemblance, painting cannot fully devote itself to aesthetic expression.

Bazin offers us a clear sense of what this aesthetic expression entails, and where it has been implemented in practice. For Bazin, painting's proper destiny is first realized in the art of the impressionists, whose work Bazin celebrates for its refusal of visual likeness, a refusal which he insists on in spite of impressionism's "scientific pretexts" (TB 10). In 1958, Bazin adds a mention of Cézanne, in whose work, he says, "la forme reprendra possession de la toile" (*QQC* 19; Bazin's choice of Cézanne again echoes Kandinsky). This inclusion of an exemplary proper name here is likely intended to compensate for Bazin's truncation of the original concluding passage of the essay, in which he discusses this "re-possession of the canvas" at length. It will be useful to quote the excised passage from Bazin's 1945 text in its entirety:

La couleur ne pouvait d'ailleurs dévorer la forme qu'autant que celle-ci n'avait plus d'importance imitative. Et quand cette forme elle-même reprendra possession de la toile, ce ne sera plus selon la géométrie illusionniste de la perspective. A travers les écoles les plus opposées, les volontés les plus contradictoires, un phénomène a pu se faire jour dans l'abandon de la troisième dimension : la recherche d'une expression non plus imitative, mais symbolique, essentielle de l'objet. Par delà l'hérésie baroque, l'image mécanique, en obligeant la peinture à conquérir les domaines où elle n'entraîne pas en concurrence avec elle, la ramène à ses traditions universelles. (PP 411)

It is fitting that Bazin conclude the 1945 version in this way, i.e., with a decisive resolution of the *problème de la peinture* and painting's return to the task of the symbolic expression of the object and a restoration of a "universal tradition." For our purposes it is also worth noting that Bazin views this as form's "repossession of the canvas." To speak of an act of repossession in this way seems to me to indicate that Bazin, like Kandinsky, does not consider the original impetus for expression to lie with the artist; the artist, rather, serves only as a medium for—or shepherd of—this process, the "necessity" of which originates elsewhere.

For Bazin, painting's ability to achieve the aesthetic expression of spiritual reality relies, above all, on the artist's employment of a symbolism of form that is proper to painting. It is precisely this painterly symbolism that Kandinsky sets out to describe in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. For Kandinsky, the artist is tasked with the judicious use of form in order to bring about the "external expression of inner meaning."⁸ How does this occur? Form, of course, can be used both abstractly and in the depiction of the

⁸ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 47.

“organic form” of a “concrete object”—that is to say, its visual appearance.⁹ It may also deliver some combination of both. Thus Kandinsky describes the twofold process of “idealization” and “stylization” by which the artist may “beautify the organic form, to make it ideal” with the intention of “baring or uncovering inner harmony. The organic form here no longer serves as direct object but is only an element of the divine language.”¹⁰ In this way, Kandinsky advocates the modification of the visual appearance of things in order to express their inner meaning rather than simply their concrete form. This is echoed in Bazin’s characterization of “true realism” in painting as the need “d’exprimer la signification à la fois concrète et essentielle du monde” (*QQC* 13; emphasis added).

Kandinsky’s description of this use of form therefore places considerable emphasis on the painter’s ability to exploit the means that are inherent to the medium. Kandinsky tells us that each art possesses “methods peculiarly its own,” and that painting is still almost exclusively dependent on natural forms and phenomena. Its business is now to test its strength and means, to know itself...and then to use its powers in a truly painterly way, to a creative end...Everyone who immerses himself in the hidden internal treasures of his art is an enviable co-worker on the spiritual pyramid which will reach to heaven.¹¹

Kandinsky will proceed to catalogue the “physical sensations” and “psychological effect[s]” of various forms and colours, which may be employed to “produce a

⁹ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 48. The term “concrete” is *apparently* employed here in exactly the opposite sense to that in which it is used in English translations of Kandinsky’s later writing—where it is his preferred term for abstract or non-figurative art; see, e.g., Kandinsky, “The Value of a Concrete Work,” in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art Volume Two (1922–1943)*, edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1982).

¹⁰ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 48.

¹¹ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 39–40.

correspondent spiritual vibration.”¹² Both Kandinsky and Bazin therefore see the painter as obliged to school herself/himself in the formal possibilities of the medium (its “hidden internal treasures”) and use them to convey to the beholder, via the completed artwork, the spiritual reality of objects.¹³

Painting Versus Photography/Cinema: From Expression to Revelation

Bazin sees the invention of photography/cinema as liberating painting from the obsession with resemblance and thus allowing painting to return to the proper pursuit of aesthetic expression. On this point Kandinsky likely would have concurred.¹⁴ But Bazin’s larger point is that photography/cinema is capable of this expression in its own right. What is more, photography/cinema transforms the means of the achievement of this expression, and in so doing brings it closer to its ideal. In the myth of aesthetic expression, as elsewhere, Bazin articulates photography/cinema’s capabilities by means of direct comparison with those of painting, determining them on the basis of the

¹² Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 43–4.

¹³ Kandinsky’s and Bazin’s conviction here—that painting ought to restrict itself to the exploration of the specific formal means available to it—prefigures the principle of aesthetic modernism that will find its greatest advocate in Clement Greenberg. For Greenberg, each artistic medium ought to “narrow its area of competence” and so “make its possession of this area all the more secure.” Each medium does this by exploring its practical limits in order to make them into “positive factors,” thus “demonstrating that the kind of experience [each medium] provided was valuable in its own right and not to be attained from any other kind of activity.” And so, for example, painting ought to turn the flatness of the canvas into a positive attribute, rather than attempting in vain to depict three-dimensional space, which is the proper domain of sculpture. Greenberg’s entire premise is founded on the “self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant,” whom he names as “the first real Modernist.” See Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 5–6. Recall that, in *Film as Art*, Rudolph Arnheim similarly claims that film’s limitations constitute the basis of its specificity.

¹⁴ Aaron Scharf certainly implies this in his overview of artists’ responses to the invention of photography. He quotes Kandinsky on idealization and stylization and on the “purposeless of copying” versus a “desire to make the object express itself.” See Scharf, *Art and Photography*, 253.

specificity of photography/cinema's objectivity. In this fashion, Bazin shows photography/cinema's capacity for aesthetic expression to exceed that of painting in two ways: in its direct revelation of Nature, and in this revelation being continuous with that of Nature herself.

Once again, Bazin's claims strongly resonate with the way that aesthetic expression is characterized in Kandinsky. It will therefore be helpful to say something more about the "inner necessity" that Kandinsky sees as the essence of art. Kandinsky initially describes the "inner necessity" of art as comprising three elements: the artist's own personal expression; the expression of the spirit of the age; and "the cause of art."¹⁵ Of these three elements, the first two are fleeting, and subject to change in different times and places, whereas the third alone is "that of quintessential art—[and] will remain forever."¹⁶ This distinction is crucial. The first two elements Kandinsky will characterize as being "of a subjective nature," and on this basis will distinguish them from "pure and eternal art...the objective element which becomes comprehensible with the help of the subjective." Kandinsky explains:

The inevitable desire for expression of the *objective* is the impulse here defined as 'internal necessity' ...the inner spirit of art uses the external form of any particular period as a stepping-stone to further development...

...In short, the effect of internal necessity and the development of art is an ever advancing expression of the eternal and objective in terms of the historical and subjective.¹⁷

¹⁵ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 52.

¹⁶ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 52.

¹⁷ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 53; emphasis original.

The painter's use of the symbolism of form is therefore only ever a provisional, contingent, and "subjective" means to an end. We are dependent on the artist's judicious use of form in order to bring about the expression of the "eternal and objective." That Kandinsky views this means of expression as a kind of compromise is suggested by his remark that "divine language...needs human expression because it is directed from man to man."¹⁸ What is more, Kandinsky frames the pursuit of this expression in developmental terms, as a continual movement from the subjective to the objective.

It is in light of Kandinsky's characterization of the inner necessity of art—framed as it is in the language of subjectivity and objectivity—that we may understand the basis of the first of Bazin's claims concerning the aesthetic of photography/cinema in relation to painting. In painting, aesthetic expression requires the mediating role of the artist in judiciously deploying the symbolism of form. But the automatic genesis of photography/cinema is unmediated by the subjectivity of human intervention. Relying only on "l'impassibilité de l'objectif," photography/cinema permits Nature to reveal herself directly—objectively:¹⁹ "Les virtualités esthétiques de la photographie résident dans la révélation du réel...Sur la photographie, image naturelle d'un monde que nous ne savions ou ne pouvions voir, la nature enfin fait plus que d'imiter l'art : elle imite l'artiste" (*QQC* 18).

Aesthetic expression yields to *aesthetic revelation* when we are no longer dependent on the mediating subjectivity of an artist. In photography/cinema, thanks to

¹⁸ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 48.

¹⁹ I will address the issue of the implicit gendering of Nature in the "Ontology" shortly.

the objectivity of the lens, Nature is permitted to act on her own behalf, showing herself directly in the photograph—she “imitates the artist.” In this way, photography/cinema offers a purer experience of Nature than we achieve not just in the aesthetic expression of painting, but also through our own direct perception. This is true insofar as the photograph strips away the prejudices not just of the artist, but also of the beholder, leaving Nature to reveal herself in all her purity. The experience of the presence of photography/cinema is more complete even than that of reality itself (I will say more about this in a moment).

In addition to this objective process of revelation, photography/cinema surpasses painting in a second way. This has to do with the continuity of the image with Nature herself. Bazin writes:

L'univers esthétique du peintre est hétérogène à l'univers qui l'entoure. Le cadre enclave un microcosme substantiellement et essentiellement différent. L'existence de l'objet photographié participe au contraire de l'existence du modèle comme une empreinte digitale. Par là, elle s'ajoute réellement à la création naturelle au lieu de lui en substituer une autre. (*QQC* 18)

Photography/cinema not only gives the direct revelation of Nature unmediated by the artist, but also gives it in the form of continuity with Nature, such that the photograph “participates in the existence of the model.” Nature presences, and presences also in the photograph.

Photography/cinema therefore surpasses painting in its capacity for aesthetic expression, even as it frees painting to pursue this expression on its own. But photography/cinema arguably trumps painting in yet another way. Bazin never makes

the point explicitly, but he seems to indicate that photography/cinema is capable of aesthetic revelation even as it also satisfies the obsession with resemblance and engages with the need to defeat time. Contrast this with painting, which, as we have seen, is utterly incapable of pursuing more than a single task at a time (hence its being “torn between two ambitions” and the need for its liberation from the complex of resemblance). Photography/cinema therefore not only surpasses painting with respect to all three representational and aesthetic ideals, but is also capable of fulfilling all three of these ideals *simultaneously*. It is for this reason that Bazin concludes that “[p]hotography is thus manifestly the most important event in the history of the visual arts” (TB 10).

Photographic/Cinematic Revelation

What is given to us in this unmediated revelation-unveiling before us of Nature herself? Let us consider the kind of presence that aesthetic revelation promises. This is a mode of presence that is distinct from the one promised in relation to the need to defeat time, wherein awareness of presence is always an *effect* of an awareness of time and temporal duration. Even as it seeks the defeat of time, re-presentation in time and space always paradoxically reinstates an awareness of time as such, without which the quality of presence would be meaningless. Specific time-bound beings or objects appear *as present* in a now-moment constructed as such within a relative temporal sequence. Conversely, the presence of aesthetic revelation relies on no such relation to a past or a

future; it is simply *pure presence* revealing/unveiling itself.²⁰ With the presence of revelation understood in this way, there are a couple of issues to be considered. What becomes capable of being revealed, and what is to be gained from the experience of this revelation? Let us deal with the former question first.

Bazin makes it clear that the scope of photography/cinema's aesthetic revelation is twofold. Revelation grants not only the presence of the exterior world, but a certain kind of self-presence of the photographic artist her/himself. Bazin articulates each of these aspects of presence in turn. First, telling us that "[p]hotography's aesthetic potential resides in the way it reveals reality" (TB 9), Bazin offers as examples of this revelation a "reflection on a rain-swept sidewalk" and a "child's gesture" (TB 9).²¹ These examples are deceptively simple. Each connotes contingency and ephemerality without necessarily invoking a temporality that is properly historical.²² Our experience is simply that of the pure presence of the becoming-of-the-world in the photograph.

It is not just the phenomenological presence of objects as such that is revealed in this way, but also a spiritual reality. And it is in the revelation of this spiritual reality that the aesthetic power of photography/cinema resides. This is what Bazin is getting at when

²⁰ The distinction I am suggesting here is essentially the one that is implied in my earlier discussion of 'the present' in the need to defeat time—the Heideggerean distinction between pure "presencing" (of Being) and "something present" (the presence of beings before us in space and chronological time). The analogy should not be pushed too far, but Bazin's aesthetic revelation might be thought of as loosely corresponding to the former, and the need to defeat time to the latter. See the helpful discussion of this distinction in Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 22–7.

²¹ Interestingly, Bazin has revised this passage. The examples he provides in the 1945 version are "[c]e chardon à contre-jour, ce reflet dans le trottoir mouillé, ce frémissement des feuilles de bouleau" (*PP* 410; i.e., "this back-lit thistle, this reflection in the rain-swept sidewalk, this rustle of birch-leaves").

²² In this respect the 1958 substitution of the "child's gesture" is perhaps questionable; only the anonymity of the child—and the emphasis of the gesture as such—arguably save the example from reminding us of the need to defeat time and its inextricability from the problem of human mortality.

he states: “Les catégories de la ressemblance qui spécifient l’image photographique, déterminent donc aussi son esthétique par rapport à la peinture” (*QQC* 18). Here Bazin is drawing an analogy with the relationship between “dramatic categories” and “aesthetic categories” that is established in Gouhier’s *L’Essence du théâtre*.²³ But he is also suggesting a principle of photographic/cinematic aesthetics essentially modelled on Kandinsky’s (and Baudelaire’s) view of painting—a view in which the external surface of things serves also to reveal the internal and the spiritual. Bazin therefore remarks that “la perfection de l’imitation ne s’identifie pas avec la beauté ; elle constitue seulement une matière première dans laquelle le fait artistique vient s’inscrire” (*QQC* 18). What exactly is entailed by the revelation of spiritual reality in this way is a point to which we will return shortly. For the moment it is worth noting that, because photography/cinema reveals Nature objectively, there is no need of the expressive possibilities of the symbolism of form (idealization and stylization). The “primary material” of photographic/cinematic resemblance is sufficient to grant aesthetic revelation.

The second thing that photography/cinema reveals is the hallucinatory self-presence of the artist. This is suggested mainly by Bazin’s discussion of surrealism. Bazin writes: “Photography was thus a privileged technology for surrealist practice because it produces an image which participates in nature [“participant de la nature” (*QQC* 18)]: a photograph is a real hallucination” (TB 9–10; translation modified). Bazin clearly has in mind the surrealist goal of the automatic revelation of the truth of the

²³ The aesthetic is enabled by—but does not necessarily follow from—the dramatic. Thus melodrama and vaudeville are dramatic but not aesthetic. See Gouhier, *L’Essence du théâtre*, 157–9.

artist's own unconscious through artistic practice. This is, at first glance, a very troubling notion, since it seemingly defies the very principle of objectivity on which the specificity of photography/cinema is based, and in so doing to defy the kind of aesthetics that this objectivity entails. Recall Bazin's earlier assertion:

The photographer's personality is at work only in the selection, orientation and pedagogical approach to the phenomenon: as evident as this personality may be in the final product, it is not present in the same way as the painter's. All art is founded upon human agency, but in photography alone can we celebrate its absence. (TB 7)

With his admission of surrealist photography as a kind of aesthetic revelation, Bazin seems to be walking a fine line. Given photography's supposedly fundamental objectivity, how do we accept the idea that not only the revelation of Nature, but also the surrealist revelation of the artist, is considered a proper aesthetic pursuit? The answer lies in the way that Bazin has conceived of photographic aesthetics—surrealism included—in conspicuous opposition to a certain competing ideal of aesthetic expression.

The aesthetic ideal which Bazin is implicitly rejecting here is something like the one that is *usually* attributed to Kandinsky (however problematically)—one in which artistic practice is conceived, in the final instance, as the expression of the artist's own emotion or intuition.²⁴ This is an ideal that is most commonly associated with the

²⁴ I have tried to show in my reading of Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* that Kandinsky does not view the artist's expression in this way, as an end in itself, but rather as oriented toward the revelation of the spiritual reality of objects.

aesthetic theory of writers such as Collingwood and Croce.²⁵ Collingwood, for example, tells us:

The artist's business is to express emotions; and the only emotions he can express are those which he feels, namely, his own....It is a labour in which he invites the community to participate; for their function as audience is not passively to accept his work, but to do it over again for themselves.²⁶

According to this ideal, what the artwork partakes in, and what the beholder is invited to share, is, above all, the conscious experience of the artist. Likewise, the only claim to knowledge that art makes is that of knowledge of the individual.²⁷

We need to recognize, as Bazin does, that surrealism does not participate in this tradition, but in fact has been conceived as radical refusal of it. After all, what the automatism of surrealist technique hopes to achieve is a spontaneous revelation of the artist's unconscious self—one which necessarily circumvents the interference of artistic consciousness through the application of quasi-scientific techniques. For surrealism, the artist's unconscious is as 'other' as the outside world; Charles S. Gauss has gone so far as to characterize "[t]he place of the artist" in surrealism being that of "an impartial investigator."²⁸

²⁵ See, e.g., John Hospers, "The Croce-Collingwood Theory of Art," *Philosophy* 31, no. 119 (October 1956): 291–308; and Gordon Graham, "Expressivism: Croce and Collingwood," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Second Edition, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2005), 133–45.

²⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 314–5.

²⁷ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 288–9.

²⁸ Charles E. Gauss, "The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2, no. 8 (autumn 1943): 39.

By focusing on the role of the artist prescribed by surrealist technique, Bazin is diverting our attention from other "photography as art" arguments in which photography's potential for creative expression is shown to outstrip its capacity for mere mechanical reproduction. The complex ways in which the "photography as art" debates played out in nineteenth-century France has been examined in depth in, e.g., Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980). Freund's work seems to

This essential disinterestedness of the artist is fundamental to the entire premise of surrealism. Recall André Breton's definition of surrealism as "[p]sychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought...in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."²⁹ The inspiration for this practice lies, however problematically, in Freudian psychoanalysis,³⁰ which of course aspires to the legitimacy of science in its own way. Like the practice of psychoanalysis itself, the spontaneous automatism of surrealist art supposedly allows unconscious thought to emerge prior to its being clouded by the logic of consciousness. We are obviously free to believe this or not. For our purposes, though, it suffices to mention that Bazin himself seems to have bought into the possibility of surrealist automatism; Dudley Andrew recounts that for a time in 1943 Bazin was a "fanatic surrealist" and "an energetic practitioner of automatic writing...scribbling madly in an effort to catch the flow of his unconscious."³¹

In surrealist photography, the automatism of the photographic apparatus aligns with the automatism of the artist. Rosalind Krauss has remarked that photography might seem to be an "unlikely" medium in which to depict the unconscious thoughts of the

have had considerable influence on that of her contemporary Walter Benjamin; see, e.g., Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), 673, 676–8.

²⁹ André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

³⁰ See, e.g., Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 10.

³¹ Andrew, *André Bazin*, 58–9. The implications of Bazin's relationship with surrealism are explored in depth in Lowenstein, "The Surrealism of the Photographic Image."

artist;³² to this unlikelihood is added an inherent “confusion” over what, exactly, constitutes legitimately surrealist technique.³³ Krauss nevertheless identifies at least a couple of different ways in which the surrealists mobilized photography. She cites the spontaneity of the camera-less procedure by which Man Ray produced his rayographs, which “seemed like...precipitates from the unconscious.”³⁴ And she points to Breton’s “magique-circonstancielle,” in which “an emissary from the external world [i.e., a photographed object or fragment] carries a message informing the recipient of his own desire,” in the same way that a dream serves as the fulfillment of a wish.³⁵ Both of the procedures that Krauss describes rely on the automation of the photographic apparatus to permit the spontaneous rendering of objects. In this way, they are akin to the procedure of automatic writing whereby words are recorded prior to their articulation as sensible language. And so the surrealist photograph reveals the truth of the artist her/himself as a “real hallucination” in which conscious thought has played no part.

Surrealist photography therefore actually serves as a fitting example of Bazin’s aesthetic of photographic revelation, one in which we may celebrate the absence of any “human agency.” It is fitting in another way, too. Recall that the direct revelation of Nature is in no way dependent on an awareness of time; the beholder simply experiences the pure presence of the becoming-of-the-world. That surrealism seeks the revelation of the unconscious is perfectly in accordance with this aim, since, as Freud famously

³² Rosalind Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism,” in *L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, edited by Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 15.

³³ Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism,” 24.

³⁴ Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism,” 25.

³⁵ Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism,” 35.

demonstrated, the unconscious does not have a history. Its contents are not governed by the chronological ordering of temporality as such. The surrealist revelation of the unconscious, like that of Nature, is simply one of pure presencing.

Thus we can understand the aesthetic revelation of photography/cinema as a double revelation constituting a double presence. Rather than being given a work of art which is “a substantially and essentially different microcosm” (TB 9), we are given Nature herself. And rather than being given “the full presence of an intuitive consciousness,”³⁶ we are given the truth of the unconscious.

The Artist as Medium

In Bazin’s view, therefore, the aesthetic value of photography lies in Nature’s revealing herself directly, with the consciousness of the artist functioning only as an unobtrusive shepherd to this process. Because Bazin develops this idea of the artist by way of a comparison with painting, he seems to imply that this aesthetics—in which we openly “celebrate” the “absence” of human agency—arises spontaneously with the invention of photography/cinema. And, indeed, as a principle of aesthetics, the non-intervention of the artist does seem entirely novel to us. But this is the case only insofar as we have grown accustomed to thinking of the work of art primarily as a vehicle for the expression of artistic intuition, along the lines of the aesthetic theory advocated by Collingwood and Croce. However, when we take into account the longer history of

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 73.

western aesthetics, we can see that the kind of relationship that Bazin is proposing between truth, the artist, and the spectator is hardly without precedent. To take but one example, Bazin's model is somewhat akin to the Greek idea of the poet as merely an "unconscious bearer of the word of the oracle, the muse or the gods"—nothing more than a "mouthpiece."³⁷ It is this conception of the role of the artist that is described in Plato's *Ion*, and which gives rise to the notion of the *furor poeticus*: in a fit of madness, the artist channels the message of the gods themselves.³⁸

Even if it is the competing ideal of the emotive, expressive artist that seems most familiar to us, the ideal of the *furor poeticus* is not unknown in twentieth-century theories of aesthetics. One notable example lies in the "impersonal theory of poetry" that T. S. Eliot presents in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot rejects calls for the veneration of artistic originality, proposing instead that "the progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." In a state of artistic maturity, the poet will ideally become "a more finely perfected *medium*."³⁹ Most revealing for our purposes is the principal analogy by which Eliot conceives of the artist's ideal role. Eliot tells us that, in the achievement of what he calls the poet's "depersonalization," "art may be said to approach the condition of science."⁴⁰ Eliot likens the poet to a sliver of platinum, which, when "introduced into a chamber

³⁷ Milton C. Nahm, "The Philosophy of Aesthetic Expression," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13, no. 4 (June 1955): 463.

³⁸ See, e.g., E. N. Tigerstedt, "*Furor Poeticus*: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, no. 2 (April–June 1970): 163–78.

³⁹ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950), 7; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 7.

containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide,” results in the creation of sulphurous acid. “This combination takes place,” Eliot tells us, “only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself remains unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged.”⁴¹ Even if what Eliot envisions as being revealed by the impersonal artist is not so much the presence of the natural world as the “ideal order” of aesthetic tradition, Eliot’s likening of artistic practice to a kind of science suggests an important precursor to—and a fitting metaphor for—Bazin’s celebration of the artist’s limited role in photographic/cinematic revelation.

But Bazin’s aesthetics of photographic revelation perhaps finds its closest counterpart in Martin Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Like Bazin, Heidegger ascribes immense value to the work of art as a site of revelation, while prescribing a limited role for the creative artist. Jean-Marie Schaeffer summarizes the “privileged place” of the work of art in Heidegger as follows: “it is a place that has the ability to reveal Being, to name the Being of beings.”⁴² And Heidegger himself tells us: “The artwork opens up in its own way the Being of Beings...Art is truth setting itself to work.”⁴³ What is worth noting for our purposes is how little the creativity of the artist factors into Heidegger’s conception of art. According to Heidegger, “we are able to characterize creation as follows: to create is to let something emerge as a thing that has been brought forth. The work’s becoming a work is a way in which truth becomes and

⁴¹ Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 7.

⁴² Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, translated by Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 247.

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 165.

happens.”⁴⁴ Later Heidegger characterizes the role of the artist in a way that explicitly denies the attribution of credit for the creative act:

The emergence of createdness from the work does not mean that the work is to give the impression of having been made by a great artist. The point is not that the created being be certified as the performance of a capable person, so that the producer is thereby brought to public notice. It is not the *N. N. fecit* that is to be made known. Rather, the simple *factum est* is to be held forth into the open region by the work: namely this, that unconcealment of a being has happened here, and that as this happening it happens here for the first time; or, that such a work *is* at all rather than is not.⁴⁵

In shifting the description of the creative task from the active to the passive voice (from “so-and-so made this” to “this was made”), Heidegger suggests that the identity of the agent doing the making is inconsequential, while showing us that it is nevertheless necessary to think of the work of art as having-been-made. The artist is essential to the process, but her/his identity—and, by extension, the sovereignty of her/his subjectivity—is not.

For Heidegger, then, both the idea of art and the principles of its creation exist prior to the will of any one individual (instead, “it is the work that makes the creators possible in their essence”).⁴⁶ Likewise, we might say that, for Bazin, the potential for photographic revelation exists prior to and independently of any single photographic act.⁴⁷ Recall that Bazin speaks of a “need” that is properly aesthetic. Unlike the obsession with resemblance or the need to defeat time, however, the ideal of aesthetic

⁴⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 185.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 190; emphasis original.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 196.

⁴⁷ For Heidegger, obviously, the work of art might be a painting, poetry, or even architecture (his main examples in the “Work of Art” essay are a van Gogh painting, a Hölderlin poem, and a Greek temple). For Bazin, it is the invention of photography alone that invites this conception of the role of the artist.

expression does not emerge from within the vicissitudes of collective psychology.

Rather, the possibility of aesthetic revelation exists independently of any human history, and the proper place of the photographic artist is simply to serve as an unobtrusive medium for this process.⁴⁸

The Experience of Presence

What does it mean for a beholder to partake in this revelation? Recall that, under the sway of the obsession with resemblance, the admiration of a materially heterogeneous visual likeness becomes an end in itself. In response to the need to defeat time, the photographic/cinematic image offers a desire to believe in the object itself “re-presented in time and space.” Photographic revelation seems to offer another mode of experience

⁴⁸ For Bazin, this limited role for the photographic artist obviously does not preclude the celebration of directorial authorship in the cinema (we should not confuse the extent of the prescribed creative role of the artist with that of the critical status accorded to the artist). What is more, in the case of cinema the technical and aesthetic challenges of film language—which exist in a dialectical relation with the basic revelatory nature of the photographic medium—actually grant the director-artist a higher degree of agency and responsibility than in photography. But, insofar as Bazin will consistently champion a cinematic aesthetic that “respects” photography’s basic ability to reveal reality, the cinema director-as-artist will still be thought of ideally as an unobtrusive “medium” for this revelation.

The role of the photographic artist that is laid out in the “Ontology” therefore provides the basis for the qualities that Bazin admires most in cinema directors such as De Sica and Wyler. The film directors Bazin favours most are those who, in a kind of noble sacrifice, invest the greatest amount of self-effacing labour in service to the disingenuous simplicity—the “style without style,” the “no more cinema”—of the realist aesthetic. Thus Bazin will admire the care with which Wyler’s cinematographer Gregg Toland selects lenses for *The Best Years of Our Lives* (selections whereby Wyler “denied himself some of the resources of *mise en scène* in order to better respect reality”), and speak of the scenario of *Bicycle Thieves* as “diabolically clever in its construction,” telling us that “[f]ew films have been more carefully put together, more pondered over, more meticulously elaborated, but by all this labor De Sica tends to give the illusion of chance, to result in giving dramatic necessity the character of something contingent.” See Bazin, “William Wyler, the Jansenist of *Mise en Scène*,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 57–8; “Bicycle Thief,” in *What Is Cinema?* Volume 2, translated by Hugh Gray, 51, 60; and “De Sica: *Metteur en Scène*,” in *What Is Cinema?* Volume 2, translated by Hugh Gray, 68. Bazin’s well-informed views on what defines authorship are laid out in Bazin, “De la politique des auteurs,” translated as “On the *politique des auteurs*,” in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, edited by Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

entirely. Nor is it one in which conventional frameworks of aesthetic experience hold sway. Bazin has nothing to say about questions of beauty, taste, or judgement. Rather, the beholder is simply invited to experience the bliss of a virginal (“vierge” [QQC 18]) Nature having unveiled herself before him.

Let us therefore consider this idea of revelation as such. To begin, Bazin’s characterization of photography as “revelation” is hardly unique. It bears a strong resemblance, for example, to the entry on “Un art de révélation” which appears in the *Encyclopédie Française* as part of a contribution by Louis Chéronnet entitled “Les tendances actuelles de la photographie.” Here, interestingly, photography’s revelatory role is located at the culmination of a history of photographic practice. Revelation is posited as the proper and “pure” destiny of photography, but one re-found only after a prolonged period of experimentation with montage techniques, etc.⁴⁹ “Le vrai sens de la photographie,” Chéronnet writes, “est la révélation.” He continues:

[la photographie] est le seul phénomène optique qui puisse permettre la substitution à notre regard d’une vision étrangère [...] Ici nous avons devant nous la matérialisation d’un regard, mécanique c’est entendu, mais qui nous est complètement étranger. Et des recoupements possibles entre les effets de ce regard et notre optique individuelle surgit le miracle. On pourrait dire que la photo redécouvre pour nous la monde et sa beauté, et nous redonne les yeux d’enfant ou de primitif, en tous cas des yeux naïfs et fervents, rafraîchis par une vision inconnue.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In this respect Chéronnet’s history is similar in shape to the one that Bazin will develop in “The Evolution of Film Language.”

⁵⁰ Louis Chéronnet, “Les tendances actuelles de la photographie,” in the *Encyclopédie Française*, Volume 17 (1936), 17.22-2–17.22-3. Chéronnet also contributed an article titled “Le droit à l’imaginaire” to *Problèmes de la peinture*.

Bazin's thinking clearly reflects certain contemporary sentiments about the value of photography; in Chéronnet, we in fact find most of the key components of Bazin's description of the aesthetic of photographic/cinematic revelation.

But recall that Bazin characterizes aesthetic expression not simply as that of the presence of the world, but of "des réalités spirituelles" (*QQC* 13). In order to explore the fullest implications of this, it may be helpful to situate Bazin's characterization of photographic aesthetics within a longer history of the rhetoric of revelation. Indeed, the idea of revelation of a "spiritual reality" suggests not just phenomenological experience but an entire theological metaphysics. It is only here that we get a real sense of what is to be valued in the experience of revelation as presence.

Jacques Derrida's discussion of the experience of presence in Jean-Jacques Rousseau perhaps holds some insight for our consideration of the quality of spiritual revelation that Bazin has in mind. Derrida shows us that Rousseau equates "pure presence" or "self-presence" with the *jouissance* of nearness to God. This is explicitly contrasted with the practice of arbitrary/conventional representation, which always corresponds to the loss of presence, even as this practice paradoxically attempts to restore it. In this way, Derrida establishes a certain qualitative distinction between the spiritual experience of presence as such and the experience of representation.

Derrida begins by identifying "four significations" of the experience of "pure presence" in Rousseau, as follows: it is "*accorded* to God"; it requires movement, life, delight in time, but time conceived "*without intervals*, without difference, without

discontinuity”; it is experienced as “an *inarticulate speech*” (e.g. song); and this experience is lived “already as a supplement, as a *compensation*” between us and God himself.⁵¹ Derrida goes on to show that, for Rousseau, presence is always equated with pleasure (*jouissance*):

The present is always the present of a pleasure; and pleasure is always a receiving of presence. What dislocates presence introduces differance and delay, spacing between desire and pleasure. Articulated language, knowledge and work, the anxious research of learning, are nothing but the spacing between two pleasures.⁵²

Later, Derrida notes that “the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of pure presence is that of a certain flow, Presence being born.”⁵³ Here we get a sense of the non-temporal character of this presence, as a continuous emergence, unveiling, or birth.

Derrida proceeds to consider the theological implications of this equation of pleasure and presence: “Experience is always the relationship with a plentitude, whether it be sensory simplicity or the infinite presence of God.” This is, Derrida claims, the “onto-theological idea of sensibility or experience,” within which

absence and the sign always seem to make an apparent, provisional, and derivative notch in the system of first and last presence. They are thought as accidents and not as conditions of the desired presence. The sign is always a sign of the Fall. Absence always relates to distancing from God.⁵⁴

In Derrida’s reading of Rousseau, not surprisingly, the articulation of language is commensurate with the Fall, sin, and the absence of God. This sets up a firm qualitative distinction between signification and presence; presence is always only “the presence of

⁵¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 250; emphasis original.

⁵² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 280.

⁵³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 310.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 283.

the signified,” and this is the presence on which the “value of truth” is predicated.⁵⁵ Thus, Derrida continues, “In all the orders, the possibility of the representer befalls represented presence as evil befalls good, or history befalls origin. The signifier-representer is the catastrophe.”⁵⁶ Derrida’s concern is always with the double articulation of arbitrary, alphabetical writing systems. But we are nonetheless reminded here of Bazin’s own characterization of the invention of perspective as “original sin,” and perhaps more importantly of the qualitative distinction that is implicit in Bazin’s passage on aesthetic revelation—a distinction between the purity implicit in the privileged examples of revelation (natural phenomena; the child’s gesture) and the “crasse spirituelle” of the veiling habits and prejudices of perception.

Revelation and Desire

It is precisely this distinction between the purity of Nature’s presence and the filth of our own perception that gives desire a space within which to operate. What is more, Bazin has conceptualized this desire through the articulation of a specific metaphor—that of the revelation-disrobing of a virginal Nature. We need to apprehend Bazin’s highly evocative allegory within the context of a couple of related, powerful traditions—one in which the relationship between desire and presence is articulated through the gendering and eroticization of the epistemological axis of subject/object, and one in which this gendering is accompanied by a notion of revelation conceived as the play of

⁵⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 286.

⁵⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 296.

veiling/unveiling. A brief exploration of these traditions will help us to understand the play of desire in Bazin's myth of aesthetic revelation.

The allegorical use of the unveiled woman's body is obviously heavily overdetermined. We are concerned here mainly with the woman's body as an allegory of Nature, in which it is rendered as the object of a knowing or masterful gaze. In its more recent incarnations, the trope of revelation-unveiling of the woman's body has a decidedly epistemological ambit—that of “Nature unveiling herself before Science.” Ludmilla Jordanova has explored this problem of “the gendered character of natural knowledge” in detail.⁵⁷ In her chapter devoted to the exploration of metaphors of veiling and revelation, Jordanova considers the “the veiling/unveiling of women's bodies as vehicles for thinking about knowledge.”⁵⁸ She demonstrates the obvious privileging of “unimpeded vision” implied by such metaphors, within which knowledge is inseparable from mastery and possession.⁵⁹ Jordanova points out the “powerful moral ambivalence” inherent in the metaphor of unveiling, wherein the virtue of sexual modesty is challenged by the desire for mastery and knowledge.⁶⁰ While Jordanova restricts her study to the use of the figure of the unveiled woman in modern scientific discourse, she does make the

⁵⁷ Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 2. Also of interest here is Louis Montrose, “The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery,” *Representations* 33 (winter 1991): 1–41. The trope of virginity figures heavily in Montrose's argument; see especially Montrose, “The Work of Gender,” 7–8, 12, 30. On the sculpture *Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science* by Louis-Ernest Barrias (1899), see Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 244. The sculpture, according to Daston and Galison, “blends the ancient trope of the veil of Isis, interpreted as nature's desire to hide her secrets, with the modern fantasy of (female) nature willingly revealing herself to the (male) scientist, without violence or artifice.”

⁵⁸ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 89.

⁵⁹ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 90, 93.

⁶⁰ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 89.

important point that this metaphor may be ideologically inflected in different ways, both as a whole and with respect to each of its individual aspects—the act of looking, the concealed object, and the veil itself.⁶¹ There is, therefore, a potential variability and instability to the value assigned to each of these elements of the metaphor, in addition to the inherent “moral ambivalence” of the overall allegory.

In Bazin’s aesthetic of revelation, it is not scientific knowledge that is at stake, but rather a revelation of Nature that inspires our love. It is therefore not within the epistemological ambit of the accrual of scientific knowledge that we are to understand the figure of the unveiled, virginal Nature in Bazin. On the contrary, the unveiling of Nature represents a kind of *unknowing*—an unknowing that provides restitution for original sin and the Fall.

Bazin’s figuration of Nature in this way—as a woman’s body that both grants an unknowing and the promise of proximity to God—surely finds its paradigm in the Song of Songs, or rather in a certain exegetical tradition that the Song has inspired. This is a tradition in which the virginal Bride of the Song is doubly figured in terms of both her association with Nature and her nearness to God, even as she is rendered as both subject and object of a mutual sexual desire. As many commentators have noted, this kind of reading of the Song of Songs is typically found in “mariological” exegesis, in which the Bride is also understood as the Blessed Virgin, who in turn serves as the incarnation of

⁶¹ Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 91.

God.⁶² By way of the Song's pervasive association of the Bride/Virgin with garden imagery—and especially with the *hortus conclusus*, the locked garden—she is doubly coded in terms of both her chastity and her proximity to Nature, while nevertheless being depicted as a willing participant in sexual courtship.

For our purposes, it is worth noting that this association of the virginal Bride with the *hortus conclusus* has been given an added dimension in a recent reading by Francis Landy, who views the Bride-as-garden as offering the promise of return to an Edenic paradise: “What the song does is very simply to substitute the Beloved for the garden of Eden...The metaphor bridges our world and the original world; between the incompatible terms there is the mediation of the Beloved, who both belongs to our world and is the other.”⁶³ By way of a close, comparative reading of the Song of Songs and Genesis, Landy makes the case for the garden/Bride of the Song as offering the promise of restitution for original sin and the Fall. It is for this reason that Landy will conclude that “*knowledge* in the Song is an unknowing.”⁶⁴ And so ultimately, as Kenneth Helphand will point out, “it is through the female that the man and woman reenter paradise.”⁶⁵

⁶² See, e.g., Kenneth I. Helphand, “‘My Garden, My Sister, My Bride’: The Garden of the ‘Song of Songs,’” in *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space*, edited by Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia, and Bonj Szczygiel (London: Routledge, 2005), 255–7; and E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Songs of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 151–77. See also Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1981), 154–6. For an overview of the various ways in which gender has been understood to operate within the Song of Songs, see David Carr, “Gender and the Shaping of Desire in the Song of Songs and Its Interpretation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no 2 (summer 2000): 233–248.

⁶³ Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 205.

⁶⁴ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 216; emphasis original.

⁶⁵ Helphand, “‘My Garden, My Sister, My Bride,’” 257.

One can only wonder at the apparent guilelessness with which the erotic charge of the Song of Songs has been assimilated to the figure of the Blessed Virgin-as-Nature. Perhaps the text itself already invites this sort of reading. Consider the following typical passage, which combines the idyllic iconography of woman-as-Nature with a frank intimation of sexual conquest:

How pretty you are, how beautiful;
 how complete the delights of your love.
 You are as graceful as a palm tree,
 and your breasts are clusters of dates.
 I will climb the palm tree
 and pick its fruit.⁶⁶

Whether it is justified by the text or not, a certain exegetical imperative has obliged commentators to discover, in passages such as this one, the apparent reconciliation of the sexual with the chaste, the carnal with the spiritual.⁶⁷ For our purposes, we simply need to note that, in this respect, the exigencies of allegorical interpretation have led to the establishment of a very powerful precedent. The reconciliation of the erotic and the chaste in exegeses of the Song of Songs provides an important and influential paradigm for vernacular literature: one which permits and sanctions the coding of the body of the Bride/Virgin—doubly figured as incarnation of both Nature and God—as an object of sexual desire.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Song of Songs 7:6–8 TEV.

⁶⁷ The tricky subject matter of the Song has not discouraged its exegesis. E. Ann Matter makes the remarkable point that, on the contrary, “the Song of Songs was the most frequently interpreted book of medieval Christianity,” even though “it offers no divine law, moral precepts, or sacred history.” See Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 6.

⁶⁸ On the influence of Song of Songs exegesis, and mariological exegesis especially, on vernacular poetry, see, e.g., E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 178–200.

In Bazin's account, the way in which this strange, doubly figured desire—desire both eroticized and chaste—finds its space is through its combination with the metaphor of the veil. This use of the veil has the important consequence of limiting the play of the erotic to the act of looking, while preserving the essential chastity of the allegorical object. To see how this is so, we might take into account John Lechte's discussion of the tropes of gender and veiling in the work of Rousseau. Lechte shows that, in Rousseau, nudity is associated with the purity and innocence of nature, while veiling itself is associated with corruption. Lechte argues that "to the extent that what lies behind the veil becomes an issue, it is a question of pointing to the *innocence* of the nude body."⁶⁹ Absolute nudity is seen as "providing direct access to the truly *innocent* body itself: the body of nature."⁷⁰ Conversely, Lechte shows that it is the veil (broadly associated with 'culture') which introduces impurity: "the nude body (not veiled) alone is pure, innocent, and authentic, whereas the veil which hides it becomes a source of trouble and disquiet."⁷¹

Desire is given its space when the figure of the veil is combined with the promise of paradisiacal return by way of the naked body of the chaste woman. Desire is articulated—narrativized—in the thinking of the veil and the promise of unveiling that it anticipates, whereas, in a state of pure nudity, the ability to give space to desire in this way is foreclosed; there exists only the condition of shamelessness that precedes the

⁶⁹ John Lechte, "Woman and the Veil – or Rousseau's Fictive Body," *French Studies* 39, no. 4 (1985): 424; emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Lechte, "Woman and the Veil," 429; emphasis original.

⁷¹ Lechte, "Woman and the Veil," 429–30.

Fall.⁷² Again, it is worth noting that the act of looking, the object of the gaze, and the veil itself each have a particular valence within the overall economy of desire and presence that is suggested here. There is nothing inherently problematic about either the act of looking or the nudity of the (gendered) object proper, while the veil itself comes to assume negative value.⁷³

I mention all of this in order to suggest that a similar allocation of value is apparent in Bazin's own discussion. We have already seen how Bazin draws a stark qualitative distinction between, on the one hand, the object "rendre vierge" (recall how his privileged examples—the "child's gesture," etc.—each connote the innocence of the world to be uncovered) and, on the other hand, the "crasse spirituelle dont l'enrobait ma perception" (*QQC* 18). We can easily see how this qualitative disequilibrium comes to be organized in accordance with an economics of the erotic gaze—a gaze which figures,

⁷² On the Augustinian notion of the discovery of nakedness as concomitant with the discovery of desire, see Arthur C. Danto, "The Naked Truth," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, edited by Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 281. Cf. a similar formula in Barthes's view of striptease: "Woman is desexualized at the very moment when she is stripped naked...The end of the striptease is then no longer to drag into the light a hidden depth, but to signify, through the shedding of an incongruous and artificial clothing, nakedness as a *natural* vesture of woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of flesh" (Roland Barthes, "Striptease," in *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers [New York: Hill and Wang, 1972], 84–5; emphasis original). Cf. also Walter Benjamin: "in veiless nakedness the essentially beautiful has withdrawn, and in the naked body of the human being are attained a being beyond all beauty—the sublime—and a work beyond all creations—that of the creator" (Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," translated by Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913–1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge, MA: Bellknap, 1996], 351).

⁷³ For an alternative conception of the relative value of the look, veil, and object, consider, for example, Lacan's (characteristically Lacanian) interpretation of Heidegger: "when we are open to hearing the way in which Martin Heidegger uncovers for us in the word *alethes* the play of truth, we merely rediscover a secret to which truth has always initiated her lovers, and through which they have learned that it is in hiding that she offers herself to them *most truly*" (Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," in *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink [New York: W. W. Norton, 2006], 15; emphasis original). In Heidegger, of course, concealment is as essential to truth as unconcealment, and (unlike in Bazin) truth is inherently self-concealing.

inaugurates, and channels the impetus of a desire that in Bazin's account goes otherwise unspoken.

In Bazin's figuration, the veil is composed of the filth of habit, of prejudice, and of desire itself, in which the object becomes enshrouded in the course of the act of looking. The desire for revelation would therefore seem only to increase the more we look, insofar as it is our desire and our act of looking which themselves veil the object. The more we look, the more we veil, and the more our desire is frustrated. And yet, strangely, Bazin shows us that the act of looking is not inherently reprehensible; it finds its vindication in the "impassive lens" (TB 9). The camera allows us to look upon Nature herself without a veil being interposed, and without a corresponding accrual of desire.

This gives us, in the final instance, the ability "to return to the state of primeval innocence by restoring man's harmony with the whole of creation."⁷⁴ For Bazin, only the objectivity of the photographic/cinematic lens grants us this harmony and enables this return. This is what he means when he tells us: "seule l'impassibilité de l'objectif, en dépouillant l'objet des habitudes et des préjugés, de toute la crasse spirituelle dont l'enrobait ma perception, pouvait le rendre vierge à mon attention et partant à mon amour" (*QQC* 18).

⁷⁴ Saint Bonaventure, "Major Life of St. Francis," translated by Benen Fahy, in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, edited by Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 688. The attribution of Franciscan qualities to Bazin is a commonplace; see, e.g., François Truffaut, "Il faisait bon vivre," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 91 (January 1959): 26; and commentary in Hugh Gray's Introduction to *What Is Cinema?* Volume 2, 1–2. Bazin himself says the following about De Sica and reality: "she circles about him like the birds around Saint Francis. Others put her in a cage or teach her to talk, but De Sica talks with her and it is the true language of reality that we hear, the word that cannot be denied, that only love can utter" (Bazin, "De Sica: Metteur en Scène," 69).

Conclusion

We can recognize obvious parallels here with the obsession with resemblance, wherein the absence of human subjectivity is a condition of epistemological certainty. Bazin's desire to rid his experience of Nature of his own "crasse spirituelle" would seem like a classic example of epistemological doubt. We have even seen how the gendered metaphor of unveiling has come to be associated with a particular epistemological tradition—through the trope of "Nature unveiling herself before Science." Structurally, Bazin's aesthetic of revelation might seem homologous not just to his own myth of the obsession with resemblance, but to an entire tradition of scientifically grounded epistemology. But even if the form of the pursuit is similar, the goal is not. For it is not knowledge or truth that Bazin seeks here, but the ability to love. If what the photographic lens enables here is love, then this is surely not the same mode of desire that we have seen in the cold rationalism of the obsession with resemblance or, indeed, in the broader ambition of scientific knowledge.

We may therefore think of the aesthetic of revelation as the mirror image of the obsession with resemblance. In the obsession with resemblance, what is pursued is the removal of doubt as a condition for absolute, dispassionate knowledge of the world. With the eradication of epistemological doubt and the achievement of total objectivity, the world in its entirety may be rendered as representation, and there is no longer any need of God. In the aesthetic of revelation, however, perspective is the "original sin," and a sign "is always a sign of the Fall." To remove from our vision the burden of

knowledge is to free us from desire and thus enable our love; this is true insofar as the signified of the photographic revelation of Nature is, precisely, the presence of God.

CONCLUSION

Bazin and the Digital Image

In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” André Bazin shows us how photography and cinema expand our understanding of what it means to seek an encounter with the world. The myths of the obsession with resemblance, the need to defeat time, and the aesthetic of revelation provide a framework within which to grasp what might be at stake within such an encounter. For Bazin, the unique value of photography and cinema therefore lies in their resonance with all three of these myths. If “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” deserves to enjoy continued relevance for film studies, I think that this relevance ought to emerge not through attempts to reduce the significance of photography or cinema to any single trait, but rather in a wonderment at how photography and cinema can exist at the intersection of multiple, competing ideals of representation, desire, and presence.

To get a sense of how this reading of the “Ontology” might benefit film studies, we might begin by revisiting the recent debates about digital images and photographic indexicality. As we have seen, a certain interpretation of “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” already provides the very foundation for film theory’s understanding of the idea of “indexicality.” And it is this idea of indexicality that is most

often used to circumscribe the essential difference between so-called analogue and digital photography or cinema. A new understanding of Bazin's "Ontology" is therefore likely to have implications for the way that we think about debates concerning the medium specificity of digital imaging technology. Likewise, the problem of the relationship between analogue and digital images might actually help us to identify some of the more contentious points within Bazin's own argument.

It seems to me that there are at least three lessons to be derived from our reading of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" that can be brought to bear on recent debates about the digital.¹ The first lesson is a simple one, and it concerns the way in which aspects of photographic technology and its processes are taken to epitomize medium specificity. We have seen how analogue and digital images tend to be defined by drawing the distinction between them in a certain way—namely by attributing the status of indexicality to the photochemically generated analogue image. Intangible as this "indexicality" is, its presence comes to be hypostasized in the materiality of the "indexical" image, as the tangible product of a specific photochemical process. Medium specificity is therefore bound up with a particular technological process and with the material outcome of that process.

I strongly suspect that Bazin's own definition of photography would not have recognized the basis of this distinction between analogue and digital images. After all, for Bazin, it is the *lens* that is the technological manifestation of everything that is unique

¹ To be clear, I am not especially interested in entering the debate about the relationship between analogue and digital images. Rather, my main concern is to suggest what a careful reading of Bazin's essay can teach us about the nature of such debates.

about photography and cinema. We saw how, for Bazin, photography/cinema's specificity "compared to painting" resides in its inherent objectivity, which is a consequence of its mechanical means of production, as epitomized by the photographic lens. Lenses are, of course, still integral to digital photography. Even if it has become fashionable to liken digital images to painting or animation,² such an association would never be tenable in Bazin's view. It is therefore disingenuous to use "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" to claim that digital images are somehow less inherently photographic than images captured on film; such a claim seems to go against the core of Bazin's argument. The first lesson from Bazin, therefore, is that we must open ourselves to seeing the ways in which digital images exercise a continued commitment to the achievement of certain ideals that Bazin associated with the specificity of photography—namely those suggested by the obsession with resemblance and the aesthetic of revelation.

Bazin's essential privileging of the lens is complicated, however, by his account of how photography is implicated in the myth of the need to defeat time. It is certainly the lens that provides the basis for photography/cinema's unique place within both the obsession with resemblance and the aesthetic of revelation. But we have seen how the need to defeat time relies paradoxically not only on the role of the lens in producing the photographic likeness, but also on the legible decay of that likeness as a tangible, material artifact.

² Lev Manovich pursues both of these analogies; see, e.g., Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 302, 304.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that it is Bazin's statements concerning the need to defeat time that are most prone to being appropriated within the discourse of photographic/cinematic indexicality. In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," the material properties of the photographic artifact fuel a desire to believe irrationally in the identity of image and model. And in the debates about digital images, it is the absence of such a photochemically produced artifact that invites the notion of a discontinuity between traditional and digital photography—and the lack of indexicality of the digital image. On the basis of Bazin's own description of the need to defeat time, we may find ourselves compelled to acknowledge that photographic specificity does not reside only in the objectivity of the lens, as Bazin claims, but also in the photochemical means by which the image is fixed.

Where exactly would the crux of this specificity lie? And how would it determine the difference between analogue and digital photography, in Bazin's view? Surely the effect of photons upon a charge-coupled device and the subsequent relay of patterns of electrical charge to create an image on my computer monitor are as rigorously determined (to use Bazin's phrase) as the action of light upon silver particles in photographic paper. The difference cannot lie in the lack of a rigorous determinism in the creation of the image. What is missing from the image that appears on my computer screen is the tangible decay of a coherent photographic artifact that endures through time, of the sort that gives Barthes's Winter Garden Photograph the unique ability to unleash his desire in its essence. In a world of infinitely reproducible digital images which are not subject to material decay, the economy of archival inadequacy that defines the charm

of the analogue photograph disappears. This essential value of the tangible, material artifact seems to exist as a blind spot in Bazin's account of the myth of the need to defeat time.

Does the greatest difference between analogue and digital photography therefore lie in the materiality of the artifact, which is, precisely, the blind spot of Bazin's own conception of the value of photography? Ultimately, I do not think this is the case. To make this claim would be simply to substitute one definition of materially determined medium specificity for another. This may be expedient, but I think it is ultimately unsatisfactory. What is more, I think it goes against the spirit of Bazin's own argument, even if Bazin himself appears to depend on it. This brings us to a second lesson. Bazin may be complicit in identifying specific technological components such as the lens as the ground for determining medium specificity. But, as I have tried at length to show, what really matter for Bazin are the *representational ideals* that those components come to embody, however contingently.

Whether it is the lens or the material tangibility of the photographic artifact that we take to be the 'real' seat of photographic specificity, this is only true insofar as each epitomizes a certain ideal, and thus actualizes certain kinds of desires. This is exactly what Bazin would later argue about cinema in "The Myth of Total Cinema," where he tells us:

Basing ourselves on the technological discoveries that made cinema possible gives us a very poor account indeed of its discovery. Rather, an approximate and complicated elaboration of the idea almost always precedes the industrial discovery, which alone enables the idea's practical application.³

³ André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 14.

Bazin goes on to imply that those technological components that we take to be quiddities of cinema as such (i.e., instantaneousness, dry emulsion, flexible base) are in fact radically contingent. Cinema might have become itself in any number of other ways. It is only the vicissitudes of scientific invention that have led it to take on the form in which we currently know it. What really count for Bazin are the ideals—the *myths*—that drive invention and artistic practice.⁴ Viewed in this light, the claim that digital photography is not really photography (or digital cinema not really cinema) because it lacks some specific physical component is untenable, if not downright silly. In Bazin's view, even the lens itself, common to both analogue and digital photography, must be thought of simply as the contingent technological realization of a pre-existing ideal.

The final and surely the most important lesson I think that we ought to derive from “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” therefore concerns our reasons for inquiring into medium specificity at all. I began by suggesting that, in the “Ontology,” André Bazin questions the terms of our encounter with the world, and what we hope to gain from this encounter. It is an investigation into the specific properties of a certain medium of representation—namely photography and cinema, which are always understood comparatively in relation to painting—that enables him to achieve this. The technological attributes of photography/cinema, conceived in a certain way, therefore provide the occasion to think about what it means to be present, what it means to desire, and what it means to represent.

⁴ Bazin's outlook in the “Ontology” and in “The Myth of Cinema” therefore seems totally at odds with his later Sartre-inspired claim that cinema's “existence precedes its essence” (see Bazin, “For an Impure Cinema: In Defence of Adaptation,” in *What Is Cinema?* translated by Timothy Barnard, 133).

In this respect, there are obvious parallels to be drawn between “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and the shape of current debates about digital images and the loss of indexicality. Do we not find in these debates a similar meditation—however unspoken—on the value of representation, desire, and presence, motivated by the pretence of some arbitrary technological trait or process? Certainly in the discourse on digital images, as in Bazin, we find the consolidation of a set of desired values in the thought of a single, differentially determined technological property. In both cases, the representational technology that enables this kind of thinking really only serves as a means to an end. We must therefore recognize the value of technological properties—and of the very way we circumscribe medium specificity—as being necessarily variable, in accordance with the nature of the multiple, competing ideals of representation, desire, and presence that they may come to embody.

In staging debates about the properties of representational technology, we are therefore furnishing ourselves with an opportunity to reflect on the uses of representation, and thus on the many ways in which we conceive of our encounter with the world and with each other, and what we hope to gain from them. This is the real lesson to be learned from the debates about the loss of indexicality, and it is on these sorts of questions that we ought to be focusing our energies.

APPENDIX A: “ONTOLOGIE DE L’IMAGE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE”

VARIORUM

Introduction

This transcription is intended to highlight differences between the 1945 and 1958 versions of the “Ontology,” to trace some of Bazin’s lexical choices over the course of the essay, and to compare two English translations of the 1958 text. The basis for the text given here is the 1945 version that appears in *Problèmes de la peinture*. All of Bazin’s 1958 additions are included within [square] brackets. Passages revised in—or deleted from—the 1958 reworking are shown within <angle> brackets, with details given in notes at the bottom of the page.

I have provided brief commentary and cross-references for a number of the essay’s key words and phrases (paragraphs and sentences are numbered/lettered for ease of reference; in the notes, “▶” denotes a cross-reference). I have also indicated some of Gray’s and Barnard’s choices in editing and translation, particularly where they seem to be especially relevant and/or strange. Gray has significantly revised Bazin’s division of the text into sections and paragraphs; I have tried to make note of all of his modifications.

The original locations of Bazin’s own footnotes within the text are given with {bracketed} numbers. The content of the notes themselves appears, for purposes of clarity, at the end of the text.

List of Abbreviations

- PP** “Ontologie de l’image photographique.” In *Les Problèmes de la peinture*, edited by Gaston Diehl. Lyon: Confluences, 1945.
- QQC** “Ontologie de l’image photographique.” In *Qu’est ce que le cinéma?* Volume 1. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1958.
- HG** “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.” In *What is Cinema?* edited and translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- TB** “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What is Cinema?* edited and translated by Timothy Barnard. Montreal: Caboose, 2009.

ONTOLOGIE DE L'IMAGE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE[{1}]

1.1 "Une psychanalyse des arts plastiques pourrait considerer la pratique de l'embaumement comme un fait fondamental de leur genèse. ^bA l'origine de la peinture et de la sculpture, <nous trouvons> le [«]complexe[»] de la momie. ^c<La religion d'Osiris, tout entière tendue contre la mort,> faisait dépendre la survie de la pérennité matérielle du corps. ^dElle satisfaisait par là à un besoin fondamental de la psychologie humaine : la défense contre le temps<,> La mort n'est que la victoire du temps. ^eFixer artificiellement les apparences charnelles de l'être<,> c'est l'arracher au fleuve <de la durée, c'est l'arrimer> à la vie. ^fIl était naturel de sauver ces apparences dans la réalité même du mort, dans sa chair et dans ses os. ^gLa première statue

1.1a *arts plastiques* HG plastic arts TB visual arts

genèse HG creation TB birth

b nous trouvons QQC elle trouverait (presumably with "Une psychanalyse")

[«]complexe[»] de la momie ► n. {6} HG mummy complex TB 'mummy complex'

c La religion d'Osiris...contre le mort, QQC La religion égyptienne dirigée tout entière contre la mort

d satisfaisait ► 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7d, 2.7g, n. {2} HG satisfied TB satisfied (cf. « déjouer » ► 3.3b)

besoin (Bazin employs this term in reference to three phenomena. First there is the "fundamental psychological need" for a *défense contre le temps* ► 1.2a, 1.2e, 3.3b. There is also the *besoin d'illusion* ► 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, n. {2}. In Bazin's narrative, the latter should be understood as a symptom of the repression of the former. In both cases, the economy of desire is such that perpetuation of the need is commensurate with its satisfaction. Finally, there is a distinct, properly aesthetic need "to give significant expression to the world" ► 2.6b)

besoin...humaine HG a basic psychological need in man TB one of human psychology's most fundamental needs

temps, [sic] QQC temps.

La mort...du temps HG for death is but the victory of time TB Death is nothing more than the victory of time.

e de l'être, QQC de l'être

durée ► 3.3e

de la durée, c'est l'arrimer QQC de la durée : l'arrimer

Fixer artificiellement...l'arrimer à la vie HG To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life. TB To make fast bodily appearance is to snatch it from the course of time, to stow it in the hold of life. (The evocative image of a 'river' of time [*fleuve de la durée*] is lost in both translations.)

égyptienne, c'est la momie de l'homme tanné et pétrifié dans le natron.
^hMais les pyramides et le labyrinthe des couloirs n'étaient pas une garantie suffisante contre la violation éventuelle du sépulcre; il fallait encore prendre d'autres assurances contre le hasard, multiplier les chances de sauvegarde. ⁱAussi plaçait-on près du sarcophage, <parmi> le froment destiné à la nourriture du mort, <ces> statuettes de terre cuite, sortes de momies de rechange, capables de se substituer au corps si celui-ci venait à être détruit. ^jAinsi se révèle[,] dans l'origines religieuses de la statuaire, sa fonction primordiale : <conserver> l'être par l'apparence. ^k<On pourrait du reste retrouver les modalités de ce complexe dans toutes les civilisations primitifs. ^lL'ours d'argile> criblé de flèches <dans la caverne préhistorique n'est qu'un substitut magique identifié au fauve vivant.>

- 1.2 ^aIl est entendu que l'évolution parallèle de l'art et de la civilisation a dégagé les arts plastiques de ces fonctions magiques (Louis XIV ne se fait pas embaumer : il se contente de son portrait par Lebrun)<, m>ais elle ne pouvait que sublimer à l'usage d'une pensée logique ce besoin incoercible d'exorciser le temps. ^bOn ne croit plus à l'identité

-
- h* ...la violation éventuelle du sépulcre; (HG supplies a full stop and begins a new paragraph here, deleting the paragraph break that occurs four sentences later. The effect is to highlight the moment of the shift from 'preservation' to 'representation' in Bazin's account.)
- i* parmi *QQC* avec
ces statuettes *QQC* des statuettes
- j* conserver *QQC* sauver
[sauver] l'être par l'apparence **HG** the preservation of life by a representation of life **TB** to save being through the appearance of being
- k* On pourrait...L'ours d'argile *QQC* Et sans doute peut-on tenir pour un autre aspect du même projet, considéré dans sa modalité active, l'ours d'argile
- l* dans la caverne...au fauve vivant. *QQC* dans la caverne préhistorique, substitut magique, identifié au fauve vivant, pour l'efficacité de la chasse.
- 1.2 (HG omits the paragraph break between 1.1 and 1.2)
- a* Lebrun), mais *QQC* Lebrun). Mais
sublimé ► 2.3b
besoin ► 1.1d, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, 2.6b, 3.3b, *n.* {2}
elle ne pouvait...d'exorciser le temps **HG** Civilization cannot, however, entirely cast out the boggy of time. It can only sublimate our concern with it to the level of rational thinking. **TB** This parallel course, however, could only sublimate to rational thought the irrepressible need to exorcise time.

ontologique du modèle et du portrait, mais on admet que celui-ci nous aide à nous souvenir de celui-là, et donc à le sauver d'une seconde mort spirituelle. ^cLa fabrication de l'image c'est même libérée de tout utilitarisme anthropocentrique. ^dIl ne s'agit plus de la survie de l'homme, mais plus généralement de la création d'un univers idéal à l'image du réel et doué d'un destin temporel autonome. ^e« Quelle vanité que la peinture » si l'on ne décèle pas sous <cette> admiration absurde le besoin primitif d'avoir raison du temps par la pérennité de la <forme.> ^f<L'histoire des arts plastiques n'est pas seulement celle de leur esthétique, mais d'abord celle de leur psychologie, et par là elle est essentiellement celle de la ressemblance, ou, si l'on veut, du réalisme.>

* * *

- 2.1 ^aLa photographie et le cinéma situés <sans> ces perspectives sociologiques <expliquent> tout naturellement la grande crise spirituelle et technique de la peinture moderne, qui prend naissance vers le milieu du siècle dernier.

b l'identité ontologique (ontologie ► 3.2a, 3.3c)

d destin temporel autonome **HG** its own temporal destiny **TB** an independent temporal destiny

e Quelle vanité que la peinture (cf. 4.5βa)

cette admiration **QQC** notre admiration

besoin ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, 2.6b, 3.3b, n. {2}

la forme. **QQC** la forme !

si l'on ne décèle...de la forme **HG** if under our fond admiration for its works we do not discern man's primitive need to have the last word in the argument with death by means of the form that endures. **TB** if we do not see, beneath our absurd admiration, a primitive need to vanquish time through the immortality of form!

f L'histoire...du réalisme **QQC** Si l'histoire des arts plastiques n'est pas seulement celle de leur esthétique mais d'abord de leur psychologie, elle est essentiellement celle de la ressemblance ou, si l'on veut, du réalisme.

2.1 (**HG** deletes the section break between 1.2 and 2.1 and all subsequent section breaks)

a sans **QQC** dans

expliquent **QQC** expliqueraient

2.2 (**HG** omits the paragraph break between 2.1 and 2.2)

- 2.2 ^aDans son article de <Verve>, André Malraux écrivait que « le cinéma <n'était> que l'aspect le plus évolué du réalisme plastique<, > dont le principe <était> apparu avec la Renaissance, et <avait trouvé> son <expression-limite> dans la peinture baroque ».
- 2.3 ^aIl est vrai que la peinture universelle avait réalisé <des équilibres divers mais également éloignés du réalisme des formes. ^bLe complexe de ressemblance, tout entier sublimé dans le fait artistique, s'identifiait totalement à lui. ^cAu XV^e siècle,> le peinture occidental a commencé de se détourner du seul souci [primordial] de la réalité spirituelle exprimée par des moyens autonomes, pour en combiner l'expression avec l'imitation plus ou moins complète du monde extérieur. ^dL'événement décisif fut [sans doute] <l'introduction de la première technique scientifique,> et en quelque sorte[,] déjà mécanique : la perspective [(la chambre noire de Vinci préfigurait celle de Niepce)]. ^e<Elle> permettait à l'artiste de donner l'illusion

-
- a* *Verve* **QQC** « Verve »
n'était **QQC** n'est
réalisme plastique **HG** plastic realism **TB** visual realism
plastique, **QQC** plastique
était **QQC** est
avait trouvé **QQC** a trouvé
expression-limite **QQC** expression limite
- 2.3b* *complexe de ressemblance* ► 2.7βd
sublimé ► 1.2a
des équilibres divers... Au XV^e siècle **QQC** des équilibres divers entre le symbolisme et le réalisme des formes, mais au XV^e siècle
- c* *exprimée par des moyens autonomes* **HG** expressed in the form proper to it **TB** expressed through the independent means at painting's disposal
...*du monde extérieur.* (**HG** begins a new paragraph here)
- d* l'introduction de la première technique scientifique, et **QQC** l'invention du premier système scientifique et,
mécanique ► 2.7g, 3.3e, 4.4b, 4.5g
- e* Elle **QQC** Il
illusion ► 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.6b, 2.7c, 2.7g, 4.5e

d'un espace à trois dimensions où les objets pussent se situer comme dans notre perception directe.

- 2.4 ^aDésormais<, > la peinture <sera> écartelée entre deux aspirations : l'une proprement esthétique <:> l'expression des réalités spirituelles<, > où le modèle se trouve transcendé par le symbolisme des formes<,> l'autre qui n'est qu'un désir tout psychologique de remplacer le monde extérieur par son double. ^bCe besoin d'illusion s'accroissant rapidement de sa propre satisfaction, dévora peu à peu <la peinture>. ^cCependant la perspective n'ayant résolu que le problème des formes non celui du mouvement, le réalisme devait se prolonger naturellement par une recherche de l'expression dramatique dans l'instant, sorte de quatrième dimension psychique capable de suggérer la vie dans l'immobilité torturée de l'art baroque. [{2}]
- 2.5 ^aCertes, les grands artistes ont toujours réalisé la synthèse de ces deux tendances : ils les ont hiérarchisées, dominant <le réalisme> et <le> résorbant dans l'art. ^bMais il demeure que nous sommes en présence de deux <réalités> essentiellement différentes qu'un critique objective doit savoir dissocier pour comprendre l'évolution picturale. ^cLe

comme...perception directe **HG** as our eyes in reality see them **TB** the way they would [be placed] if we perceived them directly

2.4a Désormais, la peinture **QQC** Désormais la peinture sera **QQC** fut

écartelée...aspirations **HG** torn between two ambitions **TB** torn between two aspirations

esthétique : l'expression **QQC** esthétique — l'expression

spirituelles, où **QQC** spirituelles où

des formes; l'autre **QQC** des formes —, l'autre

un désir tout psychologique **HG** the other [ambition], purely psychological **TB** simply a psychological desire

b *besoin d'illusion...satisfaction* (*besoin* ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.5c, 2.5d, 2.6b, 3.3b, n. {2}; *illusion* ► 2.3e, 2.5c, 2.6b, 2.7c, 2.7g, 4.5e; *besoin d'illusion* ► 2.5c; *satisfaction* ► 1.1d, 2.6b, 2.7d, 2.7g, n. {2}) **HG** The satisfaction of this appetite for illusion merely served to increase it **TB** This need for illusion, which grew rapidly the more it was met

la peinture **QQC** les arts plastiques

2.5a le réalisme et le **QQC** la réalité et la

b réalités **QQC** phénomènes

besoin d'illusion n'a pas cessé depuis le XVI^e siècle de travailler intérieurement la peinture. ^dBesoin tout mental, inesthétique en lui-même, dont on ne saurait trouver l'origine que dans la mentalité <collective>, mais besoin efficace dont <le champ magnétique> a profondément désorganisé l'équilibre des arts plastiques.

- 2.6 ^aLa querelle du réalisme dans l'art <n'a pas d'autre origine. ^bTout le mal vient de> ce malentendu, de <cette> confusion entre l'esthétique et le psychologique, entre le véritable réalisme qui est besoin d'exprimer la signification à la fois concrète et essentielle du monde, et le pseudo-réalisme du trompe-l'œil (ou du trompe-l'esprit) qui se satisfait de l'illusion des formes. [3] ^cC'est pourquoi l'art médiéval, par exemple, <ne semble pas avoir souffert> de ce conflit; à la fois violement réaliste et hautement spirituel, il ignorait ce drame que les possibilités techniques <nouvelles> sont venues révéler. ^dLa perspective fut le péché originel de la peinture [occidentale].

c *besoin d'illusion* (*besoin* ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5d, 2.6b, 3.3b, *n.* {2}; *illusion* ► 2.3e, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7c, 2.7g, 4.5e; *besoin d'illusion* ► 2.4b)

d *Besoin...lui-même* (*besoin* ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.6b, 3.3b, *n.* {2}) **HG** a purely mental need, of itself nonaesthetic **TB** an entirely psychological need, inherently non-aesthetic

collective *QQC* magique

le champ magnétique *QQC* l'attraction

2.6*b* n'a pas...vient de *QQC* procède de

cette *QQC* la

besoin (the properly aesthetic need discussed here is quite distinct from the need for illusion and need to defeat time ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, 3.3b, *n.* {2})

satisfait ► 1.1d, 2.4b, 2.7d, 2.7g, *n.* {2}

illusion ► 2.3e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.7c, 2.7g, 4.5e

entre le véritable réalisme...l'illusion des formes **HG** between true realism, the need that is to give significant expression to the world both concretely and in its essence, and the pseudorealism of a deception aimed at fooling the eye (or for that matter the mind); a pseudorealism content in other words with illusory appearances **TB** between true realism, which is a need to express the meaning of the world in its concrete aspects and in its essence, and the pseudo-realism of *trompe-l'oeil* (or *trompe l'esprit*), which is content with the illusion of form

c ne semble...souffert *QQC* ne paraît pas souffrir

nouvelles *QQC* del.

2.6*d* *la peinture [occidentale]* ► 4.5b

[* * *]

2.7 ^aNiepce et Lumière en furent les rédempteurs. ^bLa photographie, en achevant le baroque, a libéré les arts plastiques de leur obsession avec la ressemblance. ^cCar la peinture s'efforçait au fond en vain de nous <illusionner. ^dNotre satisfaction venait seulement de l'absence de procédés plus perfectionnés {2};> tandis que la photographie et le cinéma sont des découvertes qui <résolvent> définitivement et dans son essence même <le problème> du réalisme. ^eSi habile que <fut> le peintre, son œuvre était toujours hypothétiquée par une subjectivité inévitable. ^fUn doute subsistait sur l'image à cause de la présence de l'homme. ^gAussi bien le phénomène essentiel dans le passage de la peinture baroque à la photographie ne réside-t-il pas dans le simple perfectionnement matériel (la photographie restera longtemps inférieure à la peinture dans l'imitation des couleurs), mais dans un fait psychologique : la satisfaction complète de notre appétit d'illusion par

-
- 2.7b *obsession* (Occurring only once in *PP*, *obsession* appears three times in *QQC*, where Bazin substitutes it for both *problème* and *tentation* ► 2.7d n., 4.5b n.)
- a libéré...de la ressemblance* HG freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness TB freed the visual arts from their obsession with resemblance
- c *illusionner* ► 2.3e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.6b, 2.7g, 4.5e
- d *satisfaction* ► 1.1d, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7g, n. {2}
- nous illusionner...perfectionnés; *QQC* nous faire illusion et cette illusion suffisait à l'art, [*cette illusion...l'art*] HG this illusion was reckoned sufficient unto art TB This illusion was enough to create art
- résolvent *QQC* satisfont (*satisfaction* ► 1.1d, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7d, 2.7g, n. {2})
- le problème *QQC* l'obsession (*l'obsession avec la ressemblance* ► 2.7b; *l'obsession réaliste* ► 4.5bn.; note also the replacement of *problème*, a word which would have resonated with the title of *PP*)
- tandis que la photographie et le cinéma sont des découvertes qui [satisfont]définitivement et dans son essence même [l'obsession] du réalisme* HG Photography and the cinema on the other hand are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and its very essence, our obsession with realism TB while the discovery of photography and cinema satisfied once and for all, in their very essence [*sic*], the obsession with realism
- ...du réalisme. (HG begins a new paragraph here)
- e fut *QQC* fût
- f *Un doute...de l'homme* HG The fact that a human hand intervened cast a shadow of doubt over the image TB Because of this human presence, a doubt about the image persisted
- g *illusion* ► 2.3e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.6b, 2.7c, 4.5e

une reproduction mécanique dont l'homme est exclu. ^hLa solution n'était pas dans le résultat mais dans la genèse[{4}].

2.7β [^aC'est pourquoi le conflit du style et de la ressemblance est un phénomène relativement moderne et dont on ne trouverait guère de traces avant l'invention de la plaque sensible. ^bOn voit bien que l'objectivité fascinante de Chardin n'est point celle du photographie. ^cC'est au XIX^e siècle que commence véritablement la crise du réalisme dont Picasso est aujourd'hui le mythe et qui mettra en cause tout à la fois les conditions d'existence formelle des arts plastiques et leurs fondements sociologiques. ^dLibéré du complexe de la ressemblance, le peintre moderne l'abandonne au peuple {5} qui l'identifie désormais d'une part à la photographie et de l'autre à la seule peinture qui s'y applique.]

* * *

3.1 ^aL'originalité de la photographie <devant> la peinture réside <en effet> dans son objectivité <intégrale>. ^bAussi bien, le groupe de lentilles<, > qui constitue l'œil photographique substitué à l'œil humain<, > s'appelle-t-il précisément <un objectif>. ^cPour la

mécanique ► 2.3d, 3.3e, 4.4b, 4.5g

la satisfaction...est exclu (satisfaction ► 1.1d, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7d, n. {2}) **HG** to wit, in completely satisfying our appetite for illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part **TB** photography completely satisfies our appetite for illusion by means of a process of mechanical reproduction in which there is no human agency at work

2.7βd *complexe de ressemblance* ► 2.3b

[*Libéré...ressemblance*] **HG** Freed from the "resemblance complex" **TB** Freed from the complex of resemblance

3.1a devant *QQC* par rapport à (► 4.1a)

en effet *QQC* donc

objectivité ► 3.2b, 3.4a n.

intégrale *QQC* essentielle

L'originalité...objectivité [essentielle] **HG** Originality in photography as distinct from originality in painting lies in the essentially objective character of photography **TB** Photography's originality compared to painting thus lies in its objective nature

b lentilles, ... humain, *QQC* lentilles ... humain

un objectif *QQC* « l'objectif » (*objectif* ► 3.3b, 4.2b)

Aussi bien...[« l'objectif »] (**HG** replaces this sentence with an in-line explanatory note on Bazin's evocation of the double meaning of *objectif*)

première fois[,] entre l'objet initial et sa représentation, rien ne s'interpose qu'un autre objet. ^dPour la première fois, une image du monde extérieur se forme automatiquement sans intervention créatrice de l'homme, selon un déterminisme rigoureux. ^eLa personnalité du photographe n'entre en jeu que par le choix, l'orientation, la pédagogie du phénomène; si visible qu'elle soit dans l'œuvre finale, elle n'y figure pas au même titre que celle du peintre. ^fTous les arts sont fondés sur la présence de l'homme; <seule la photographie tire son efficacité de son absence>. ^gElle agit sur nous en <temps> que phénomène <naturel>, comme une fleur ou un cristal de neige dont la beauté est inséparable <de leur origine végétale ou tellurique>.

- 3.2 ^aCette genèse automatique de la photographie a bouleversé radicalement la psychologie de l'image <ou plus précisément son ontologie {4}>. ^bL'objectivité de la photographie lui confère une puissance de crédibilité<, et par là une existence> absente de toute œuvre picturale. ^cQuelles que soient les objections de notre esprit critique<,> nous sommes obligés de croire à l'existence de l'objet

-
- c* Pour...qu'un autre objet **HG** For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent **TB** For the first time, the only thing to come between an object and its representation is another object
- d* Pour...déterminisme rigoureux **HG** For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. **TB** For the first time, an image of the outside world takes shape automatically, without creative human intervention, following a strict determinism.
- f* seule...son absence **QQC** dans la seule photographie nous jouissons de son absence
- g* temps **QQC** tant
naturel **QQC** « naturel »
de leur...tellurique **QQC** des origines végétales ou telluriques
- 3.2a *Cette genèse...de l'image* **HG** This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image **TB** The automatic way in which photographs are produced has radically transformed the psychology of the image (the violent upheaval suggested by *bouleverser* is lost in both translations [“affected,” “transformed”])
ou plus précisément son ontologie **QQC del.** (*l'identité ontologique* ► 1.2b; *l'ontologie du modèle* ► 3.3c; see below for commentary on this deletion)
- b* objectivité ► 3.1a, 3.4a n.
, et par là une existence **QQC del.** (With the removal of these references to ontology and existence, Bazin decidedly shifts the emphasis away from the constitution of the object proper and toward the valence of the subject/object relation as such—from ontology to psychology, from essence to credibility.)
- c* critique, **QQC** critique

représenté, effectivement <représenté>, c'est-à-dire rendu présent dans le temps et dans l'espace. ^aLa photographie bénéficie d'un transfert de réalité de la chose sur sa reproduction [{{6}}]. ^eLe dessin le plus fidèle peut nous donner plus de renseignements sur le modèle, il ne possédera jamais[,] en dépit de notre esprit critique, le pouvoir irrationnel de la photographie qui emporte notre croyance.

- 3.3 ^aAussi la peinture n'est elle plus du même coup qu'une technique inférieure [de la ressemblance], un ersatz des procédés de reproduction. ^bL'objectif seul nous donne de l'objet une image capable de « défouler », du fond de notre inconscient, ce besoin de substituer à l'objet mieux qu'un décalque approximatif<;> cet objet

esprit critique ► 3.2e

représenté *QQC* re-présenté

Quelles que soient...dans l'espace **HG** In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space **TB** Whatever the objections of our critical faculties, we are obliged to believe in the existence of the object represented: it truly is re-presented, made present in time in space

- d* *La photographie...sa reproduction* **HG** Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction **TB** Photography transfers reality from the object depicted to its reproduction

...sa reproduction. (**HG** begins a new paragraph here.)

- e* *esprit critique* ► 3.2c

Le dessin...notre croyance **HG** A very faithful drawing may actually tell us more about the model but despite the promptings of our critical intelligence it will never have the irrational power of the photograph to bear away our faith **TB** The most faithful drawing can give us more information about the model, but it will never, no matter what our critical faculties tell us, possess the irrational power of photography, in which we believe without reservation

- 3.3b *objectif* ► 3.1b, 4.2b

« défouler » **HG** satisfying **TB** relieving (cf. *satisfaction* ► 1.1a, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7d, 2.7g, n. {2}). Both translations overlook the psychoanalytically inflected sense of *défouler* [cf. *refoulement* = “repression”]—a sense which is surely conferred both generally by the essay's overall narrative and specifically here by the naming of the *inconscient* as the very locus of the *besoin* in question. Rather than “satisfying” or “relieving” the need located in the depths of the unconscious, we should understand photography as *un-repressing* that need, which is to say, as bringing it to light, allowing it to emerge in its essence, and perhaps even as aggravating it and fuelling it. Far from satisfying the need for “something more than a likeness” of the object, photography provides us with the possibility of experiencing that need as such.)

besoin ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, 2.6b, n. {2}

approximatif; cet *QQC* approximatif : cet

lui-même, mais libéré des contingences temporelles. ^cL'image peut être floue, déformée, décolorée, sans valeur documentaire<;> elle procède par sa genèse de l'ontologie du modèle; elle est le modèle. ^dD'où le charme des photographies d'album[s]. ^eCes ombres grises ou sépia, fantomatiques, presque[e]'[]illISIBLES, ce ne sont plus les traditionnels portraits de famille, c'est la présence troublante de vies arrêtées dans leur durée, libérées de leur destin, non par les prestiges de l'art, mais par la vertu d'une mécanique impassible; car la photographie ne crée pas[,] comme l'art[,] de l'éternité, elle embaume le temps, elle le soustrait seulement à sa propre corruption <{6}>.

[* * *]

3.4 ^aDans cette perspective, le cinéma apparaît comme l'achèvement dans le temps <de l'objet, étroite photographie>. ^bLe film ne se contente

L'objectif seul...approximatif **HG** Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer **TB** Only the photographic lens gives us an image of the object that is capable of relieving, out of the depths of our unconscious, our need to substitute for the object something more than an approximation

cet objet...temporelles **HG** The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it **TB** That something is the object itself, but liberated from its temporal contingencies

décolorée **HG** discolored **TB** devoid of colour

c documentaire; *QQC* documentaire,

l'ontologie ► 1.2b, 3.2a

elle procède...le modèle **HG** it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model **TB** it has been created out of the ontology of the model. It is the model

...elle est le modèle. (**HG** begins a new paragraph here.)

e *durée* ► 1.1e

la présence...leur destin **HG** the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny **TB** the troubling presence of lives halted in time and liberated from their destiny

mécanique impassible (*mécanique* ► 2.3d, 2.7g, 4.4b, 4.5g; *impassible* ► 4.2b) **HG** impassive mechanical process **TB** impassive mechanical device

car la photographie...sa propre corruption **HG** for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption **TB** Photography, unlike art, does not create the eternal; it embalms time. It simply places time beyond the reach of its own decay

3.4a de l'objet, étroite photographie *QQC* de l'objectivité photographique (*objectivité* ► 3.1a, 3.2b)

plus de nous conserver l'objet enrobé dans son instant comme
 <l'ambre immobilisait> le corps intact des insectes d'une ère
 révolue<;> il délivre l'art baroque de sa catalepsie convulsive. ^cPour
 la première fois, l'image des choses est aussi celle de leur durée et
 comme la momie du changement.

<* * *>

- 4.1 ^aLes catégories {7} de la ressemblance qui spécifient l'image
 photographique, déterminent donc aussi son esthétique par rapport à la
 peinture.
- 4.2 ^aLes <puissances> esthétiques de la photographie résident dans la
 révélation du réel. ^bCe <chardon à contre-jour, ce> reflet dans le
 troittoir mouillé, <ce frémissement des feuilles de bouleau>, il ne
 dépendait pas de moi de les distinguer dans le tissu de monde
 extérieur; seule l'impassibilité de l'objectif[,] en dépouillant l'objet

b comme l'ambre immobilisait le corps *QQC* comme, dans l'ambre, le corps
 révolue; *QQC* révolue,

c *Pour...la momie du changement* **HG** Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the
 image of their duration, change mummified as it were **TB** For the first time, the image of
 things is also the image of their duration, like a mummification of change
 ...*du changement*. (**HG** omits the paragraph break here)

4.1 (In *QQC* the section break between 3.4 and 4.1 is moved to between 3.3 and 3.4. This change
 makes little sense insofar as the argument in 3.4 seems to develop further that which
 immediately precedes it, i.e. a discussion of mummification, time, and ontology, which is
 here extended to incorporate cinema; whereas 4.1 begins a new discussion entirely of
 photography's aesthetics —wherein revelation, not time, is the primary concern. **HG**
 confounds things further by omitting the paragraph break between 3.4 and 4.1)

a *par rapport à la peinture* ► 3.1a *n*.

4.2 (*QQC* omits the paragraph break between 4.1 and 4.2)

a puissances *QQC* virtualités

Les [virtualités]...du réel **HG** The aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power
 to lay bare the realities **TB** Photography's aesthetic potential resides in the way it reveals
 reality

b chardon à contre-jour, ce *QQC del*.

ce frémissement...bouleau *QQC* ce geste d'un enfant

il ne dépendait...extérieur **HG** It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the
 objective world **TB** these are things that do not depend upon me to perceive them in the
 fabric of the outside world

des habitudes et des préjugés, de toute la crasse spirituelle dont l'enrobait ma perception, pouvait le rendre vierge à mon attention et partant à mon amour. ^cSur la photographie, image naturelle d'un monde que nous ne savions ou ne pouvions voir, la nature enfin fait plus que d'imiter l'art : elle imite l'artiste.

- 4.3 ^aElle peut même le dépasser dans son pouvoir créateur. ^bL'univers esthétique du peintre est hétérogène à l'univers qui l'entoure. ^cLe cadre enclave un microcosme substantiellement et essentiellement différent. ^dL'existence de l'objet photographié participe au contraire de l'existence du modèle [comme une empreinte digitale]. ^ePar là[,] elle s'ajoute réellement à la création naturelle au lieu de lui en substituer une autre.
- 4.4 ^aLe surréalisme l'avait entrevu quand il faisait appel à la gélatine de la plaque sensible pour engendrer sa tératologie plastique. ^bC'est que, pour le surréalisme, le but esthétique est inséparable de l'efficacité

impassibilité ► 3.3e

objectif ► 3.1b, 3.3b

seule l'impassibilité...à mon amour **HG** Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love **TB** Only the impassive lens, in stripping the object of habits and preconceived notions, of all the spiritual detritus that my perception has wrapped it in, can offer it up unsullied to my attention and thus to my love

c savions...voir (savoir ► 4.5βa)

Sur la photographie...elle imite l'artiste **HG** By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist (Gray's translation has been revised to read "that we neither know nor can see" in later editions) **TB** In the photograph, a natural image of a world we are no longer able to see, nature finally does more than imitate art: it imitates the artist

4.3d *participe (participant de la nature* ► 4.4e)

L'existence...[empreinte digitale] **HG** The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint **TB** The existence of the photographed object, on the contrary, shares in the existence of the model, like a fingerprint (the activity or agency inherent in *participe*—and the suggestion that photographs *participate in* the being of the natural world [developed further in the following sentence]—is lost in both translations; cf. 4.4e)

e Par là...une autre **HG** Wherefore, photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it **TB** In this way, photography plays a real part in natural creation, rather than substituting for it

...une autre. (**HG** omits the paragraph break here)

mécanique de l'image sur notre esprit <{8}>. ^cLa distinction logique de l'imaginaire et du réel tend à s'abolir. ^dTout image doit être sentie comme objet et tout objet comme image. ^eLa photographie représentait donc <la> technique privilégiée de la création surréaliste<, > puisqu'elle réalise une image participant de la nature : une hallucination vraie. ^fL'utilisation du trompe-l'œil et de la précision méticuleuse des détails dans la peinture surréaliste est la contre-épreuve <de cette hypothèse. ^gA l'opposé du cubisme (que ses tendances à l'abstraction éloignent radicalement de la photographie), le surréalisme cherche par tous les procédés à obtenir cette crédibilité de l'image que la photographie seule lui permet de réaliser>.

- 4.5 ^aLa photographie apparaît bien comme l'événement le plus important de l'histoire des arts plastiques. ^bA la fois<, > délivrance et accomplissement, elle a permis à la peinture [occidentale] de se débarrasser définitivement de <la tentation> réaliste et de <retourner à> son autonomie esthétique. ^cLe « réalisme » impressionniste[,] <de la couleur> sous ses <prétextes> scientifiques[,] est à l'opposé du trompe-l'œil <et par lui-même esthétique>. ^dLa couleur ne pouvait d'ailleurs dévorer la forme qu'autant que celle-ci n'avait plus d'importance imitative. ^e<Et quand cette forme elle-même> reprendra possession de la toile, ce ne sera plus [et tout cas] selon la géométrie

4.4b *mécanique* ► 2.3d, 2.7g, 3.3e, 4.5g

e la technique *QQC* une technique
surréaliste, *QQC* surréaliste

une image participant de la nature (*participe...de l'existence du modèle* ► 4.3d) **HG** an image that is a reality of nature **TB** an image which shares in the existence of nature (again the agency of *participer* is lost; cf. 4.3d)

f de cette hypothèse...de réaliser *QQC del.*

4.5b fois, *QQC* fois ►

la peinture [occidentale] ► 2.6d

la tentation *QQC* l'obsession (*obsession* ► 2.7b; 2.7d n.)

retourner à *QQC* retrouver

c de la couleur *QQC del.*

prétextes *QQC* alibis

et par lui-même esthétique *QQC del.*

e Et quand cette forme elle-même *QQC* Et quand, avec Cézanne, la forme

illusionniste de la perspective. ^f<A travers les écoles les plus opposées, les volontés les plus contradictoires, un phénomène a pu se faire jour dans l'abandon de la troisième dimension : la recherche d'une expression non plus imitative, mais symbolique, essentielle de l'objet. ^gPar delà l'hérésie baroque, l'image mécanique, en obligeant la peinture à conquérir les domaines où elle n'entraîne pas en concurrence avec elle, la ramène à ses traditions universelles.>

4.5β [^aVanité désormais que la condamnation pascalienne puisque la photographie nous permet d'une part d'admirer dans sa reproduction l'original que nos yeux n'auraient pas su aimer et dans la peinture un pur objet dont la référence à la nature a cessé d'être la raison.]

[* * *]

5.1 [^aD'autre part le cinéma est un langage.]

BAZIN'S NOTES

{1} [Étude reprise de *Problemes de la peinture*, 1945.]

{2} (In *PP*, this note appears in para. 2.7; in *QQC* it is moved up to the end of para 2.4 and the third and fourth sentences of the note are deleted/replaced)

illusionniste (*illusion* ► 2.3e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.6b, 2.7c, 2.7g)

f A travers...universelles *QQC* L'image mécanique, en opposant à la peinture une concurrence qui atteignait, au-delà de la ressemblance baroque, l'identité du modèle, la contraignait à se convertir de son côté en objet.

g *mécanique* ► 2.3d, 2.7g, 3.3e, 4.4b

4.5β (**HG** omits the paragraph break between 4.5 and 4.5β)

a *Vanité...pascalienne* (cf. 1.2e)

su aimer (*savoir* ► 4.2c)

La photographie...aimer **HG** the photograph allows us on the one hand to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love **TB** photography allows us to admire in its reproduction an original for which our eyes would otherwise not have filled us with love

5.1 *a* [*D'autre part...langage*] **HG** On the other hand, of course, cinema is also a language **TB** Then again, film is a language

Il serait intéressant de suivre de ce point de vue la concurrence[,] dans les journaux illustrés de 1890 à 1910[,] entre le reportage photographique, encore à ses origines, et le dessin. Ce dernier satisfaisait surtout le besoin baroque du dramatique (cf. le *Petit Journal illustré*). Le sens du document photographique ne s'est imposé que peu à peu. <Aujourd'hui le paysan le plus authentique préfère la photographie la plus insignifiante à l'illustration la plus pathétique. Cette victoire du réalisme de l'objet sur le dramatique du sujet jusque dans la mentalité populaire, n'a pas été suffisamment aperçue par les historiens de la peinture.>

{3} (This note has been added in *QQC*.)

[Peut-être en particulier la critique communiste devrait-elle, avant d'attacher tant d'importance à l'expressionnisme réaliste en peinture, cesser de parler de celle-ci comme on aurait pu le faire au XVIII^e siècle, avant la photographie et le cinéma. Il importe peut-être assez peu que la Russie soviétique fasse de la mauvaise peinture si elle fait du bon cinéma : Eisenstein est son Tintoret. Il importe en revanche qu'Aragnon veuille nous persuader que c'est Repine.]

{4} (In *PP*, this note appears in para. 3.2; in *QQC* it is moved up to the end of para 2.7 and a sentence is added to it)

Il y aurait lieu cependant d'étudier la psychologie de genres plastiques mineurs, comme le moulage de masques mortuaires qui présentés, eux aussi, un certain automatisme dans la reproduction. [En ce sens on pouvait considérer la photographie comme un moulage, une prise d'empreinte de l'objet par le truchement de la lumière.]

{5} (This note has been added, along with all of para. 2.7 β , in *QQC*. *HG* omits the note entirely from his translation. *TB* restores it but moves the location to the end of para. 2.7 β)

[Mais est-ce bien « le peuple » en tant que tel qui est à l'origine du divorce entre le style et la ressemblance que nous constatons effectivement aujourd'hui? Ne s'identifie-t-il pas plutôt avec l'apparition de « l'esprit bourgeois » né avec l'industrie et qui sert

{2} *satisfaisait* ► 1.1d, 2.4b, 2.6b, 2.7d, 2.7g

besoin ► 1.1d, 1.2a, 1.2e, 2.4b, 2.5c, 2.5d, 2.6b, 3.3b

Aujourd'hui...peinture *QQC* On constate du reste, au-delà d'une certaine saturation, un retour vers le dessin dramatique du type « Radar ».

justement de repoussoir aux artistes du XIX^e siècle, esprit qu'on pourrait définir par la réduction de l'art à ses catégories psychologiques? Aussi bien la photographie ne prend-elle pas historiquement de manière directe la relève du réalisme baroque et Malraux fait remarquer à juste titre qu'elle n'a d'abord d'autre souci que « d'imiter l'art » en copiant naïvement le style pictural. Niepce et la plupart des pionniers de la photographie cherchaient d'ailleurs par ce moyen à copier les graveurs. Ce dont ils rêvaient c'était de produire des œuvres d'art sans être des artistes, par décalcomanie. Projet typiquement et essentiellement bourgeois mais qui confirme notre thèse en la portant en quelque sorte au carré. Il était naturel que le modèle le plus digne d'imitation apparut d'abord au photographe être l'objet d'art en ce qu'il imitait déjà à ses yeux la nature, « mais en mieux ». Il fallait un certain temps pour que, devenant lui-même artiste, le photographe en arrive à comprendre qu'il ne pouvait copier que la nature.]

- {6} (This note appears at the end of para. 3.3 in *PP*, and is moved up to the end of 3.2d in *QQC*. The note's mention of the Shroud of Turin is dramatically complemented by a full-page negative image of the Shroud, attributed to Enrie, appearing on the facing page of the 1958 volume.)

Il faudrait faire ici une psychologie de la relique et du << Souvenir >> qui bénéficient également d'un transfert du réalité procédant du complexe de la momie. Signalons seulement que le Saint Suaire de Turin <est un document absolument unique puisqu'il> réalise la synthèse de la relique et de la photographie.

- {7} (*HG* moves this note to the end of 4.1a)

J'emploie ce terme de « catégorie » dans l'acception que lui prête M. Gouthier dans son livre sur le théâtre quand il distingue les catégories dramatiques des <catégories> esthétiques. De même que la tension dramatique n'engage aucune valeur d'art, la perfection de l'imitation ne s'identifie pas avec la beauté; elle se constitue seulement une matière première dans laquelle le fait artistique vient s'inscrire.

{6} « Souvenir » *QQC* « souvenir »

complexe de la momie ► 1.1b

est...puisque'il *QQC del.*

{7} catégories *QQC del.*

{8} (This note is omitted from *QQC* and the English translations.)

<On pourrait même se demander dans quelle mesure le fait paradoxal qu'une toile photographiée nous procure parfois plus de joie que l'original ne viendrait en partie de ce que le monde imaginaire de la peinture se trouve plongé dans la réalité photographique qui lui prête une autre existence. L'imaginaire vu à travers le réel.>

APPENDIX B: HUGH GRAY TRANSLATION PUBLICATION HISTORY

Version		1	2*	3	4
Publication history	First Publication	<i>Film Quarterly</i> 13, no. 4 (summer 1960)	<i>What is Cinema?</i> 1 st hardcover printing (1967)	<i>What Is Cinema?</i> 1 st paperback printing (1968)	<i>What is Cinema?</i> Sixth printing or later (after 1974)
	Anthologies		<i>Classic Essays on Photography</i> ; <i>Film Theory and Criticism</i> (from 5 th Edition on)	<i>The Camera Viewed</i> Vol. 2; <i>The Film Theory Reader</i>	
Variations in text	Section breaks	Spaces between 2.6 –2.7 and 4.5β–5.1	None	None	None
	“si elle fait du bon cinéma” (note {3})	“provided she gives us first-rate cinema”	“provided Russia gives us first-rate cinema”	“provided Russia gives us first-rate cinema”	“provided Russia gives us first-rate cinema”
	“expression limite” (2.2a)	“limited expression”	“limited expression”	“completest expression”	“completest expression”
	“accomplissement” (4.5b)	“accomplishment”	“accomplishment”	“fulfillment”	“fulfillment”
	“ne savions ou ne pouvions voir” (4.2c)	“neither know nor can know”	“neither know nor can know”	“neither know nor can know”	“neither know nor can see”

* The 1967 version also includes very minor revisions to punctuation throughout.

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