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### Positioning the Eye and Positioning the Head: Reality and Realist Style

The use of the long take and the shot in depth, famously defended by the French film critic André Bazin, is widely associated with realism. But is it true that this film style bears a special and unique connection to reality? It has long been contended that the realist style permits an especially honest and genuine reproduction of the real world, in contrast to other styles that merely create the appearance of reality, and so deceive their viewers. This essay will seek to demystify the techniques of realism, showing that they are not so different from other techniques after all, and that their claim to a special relationship with the profilmic reality is far from absolute. Although many of the arguments I deal with originate with Bazin, my specific engagement is often with Andrew, who in *The Major Film Theories* does an admirable job of gathering Bazin's ideas from scattered sources to form a coherent argument. This essay does not attempt to evaluate Bazin's views on the purpose of cinema, or on the value of reproducing reality. Rather, it accepts these goals as axiomatic, and assesses the techniques which he endorses as the best ways to fulfil them.

The style featuring the long take and depth of field has come to be known traditionally as the "realist" style, but the alternative style to which it is opposed is not a style that is unrealistic, but rather a style which is realistic in a different way. This is the style of psychological realism, exemplified in the tradition of continuity editing. The goal of the continuity style is understood to be verisimilitude, causing the viewer to believe what he is seeing because it is presented to him in a way that corresponds with the way he subjectively experiences reality. The cut is the characteristic attribute of this style, as the instantaneous movement between two subjects mimics the instantaneous movement and refocusing of the eye.

For Bazin, such an editing style represented the imposition of a single meaning onto a scene (Andrew 1976, 162). By focusing on specific objects in a specific order, filmmakers using this style force a certain subjective experience of events on the viewer. Bazin called this type of psychological realism “analytic” or “dramatic” editing, because its purpose is to break down or analyze the dramatic action (47). In distinguishing such editing from the realist style, we will refer to it the analytic style.

Bazin further distinguished between two ways in which the analytic style conveys the filmmakers’ interpretation of a scene to viewers (Andrew 1976, 144-146). First, the “plastics” of the image, meaning the framing and appearance of individual shots, create meaning visually, in a manner comparable to the art of painting. Second, montage, meaning the lengths of the shots and the order in which they are presented, creates meaning rhythmically, in a manner similar to music. The realist style seeks specifically to minimize the impact of these two processes, with depth of field preventing shots from visually emphasizing a single element and the long take reducing the relevance of montage. By reducing the interpretive features of analytic editing, the realist style attempts to present a more objective and “democratic” view of the scene (Andrew 1976, 162). The viewer is then free to interpret the scene for himself, just as he interprets for himself the events he experiences in the real world.

This last contention is worth additional consideration. The argument that the long take is closer to how we experience events in real life is a recurring argument in defenses of the realist style. Bazin argued, “Depth of field brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independent of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic” (50). Orson Welles described the shot in depth as putting “the spectator back into the true conditions of perception in which nothing is ever determined *a priori*” (quoted in Andrew 1976, 163). What is curious about this line of argument is that it seems to draw the realist style within the purview of psychological realism. If one claims that the long take in depth is similar to how people normally view the real world, does not one risk conceding that the realist style represents a single subjective viewpoint just as the analytic style does?

We can resolve this contradiction if we redefine the difference between the realist and analytic styles. It is not the case that analytic editing is psychologically realistic while the realist style is objectively realistic. Rather, both styles are psychologically realistic, but in different ways. The key difference is that, while in the analytic style the camera imitates the movements of the eye, in the realist style the camera imitates the movement of the head. The filmmakers still provide the viewer with a single defined field of vision—to do so is unavoidable as soon as the camera is placed within the scene. But the viewer is free and expected to determine for himself where to focus his eyes and attention within the field of vision provided.

This distinction, between the positioning of the eye and the positioning of the head, proves to be quite useful in analyzing the technical differences between the analytic and realist styles. The use of a shallow depth of field is logical in the analytic style, because an analytic close up represents the focusing of the eyes on a specific point. Likewise, a greater depth of field is logical in the realist style, because from a single head position one is able to look at things at varying distances. There is a bit of unreality in deep focus photography, in that looking at one thing does not cause the rest of the scene to fall out of focus as it would in real life. But this is not troubling for the viewer, because one is not accustomed to paying attention to the out-of-focus things that fill most of one's vision. Thinking about something usually causes the eyes to move over to it, bringing it into focus; we are used to seeing things in focus wherever we look.

Other techniques too can be subjected to this analysis. As already mentioned, the frequent cuts of the analytic style match the rapid jumps of the moving eye; by contrast, the long take matches the continuity of the head's position in the world. One must often move one's head to see things better; likewise, reframing plays an important role in realist cinematography (Andrew 1976, 159). Reframing is less used in the analytic style, just as the eye rarely drifts slowly across the space from one object to another. The exception is the tracking shot, which imitates the eye's natural ability to follow a moving object.

Thus, neither the analytic style nor the realist style ought be seen as inherently more or less realistic psychologically, for each accurately imitates one aspect of the process of looking. In

real-world experience, one normally positions both one's own eyes and one's own head, and sees the world in a particular way as a result of how one chooses to do so. But there is certainly a difference in the level of intimacy with which the two styles seek to create psychological realism. Both the positioning of the eye and the positioning of the head are acts of deciding what the viewer will see, but the positioning of the eye seeks to exercise a much higher degree of control over the viewer's experience. Rather than viewing this as a fundamental difference between the two styles, we can conceive of them as two points on a continuum of filmmakers' (attempted) level of involvement with their viewers' experiences. Moving past the analytic style to a more extreme point on the continuum would bring us to the style of the associative montage, which sought to move not as the eye between aspects of a scene but as the very mind between ideas. Presumably, at a more extreme point in the opposite direction, beyond the realist style, only the scene would be determined and not the position of the viewer's head at all; but exploring this possibility space is difficult. One can imagine a virtual reality recording functioning something like the magical memory sequence in the film *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, in which Harry wanders like a ghost while watching past events unfold. But, for now at least, it is a limitation of the cinematic medium that the camera must be placed somewhere in particular.

It is important that we understand in what sense the realist and analytic styles take different types of control of the viewer's experience of a scene, because a major component of the argument in favour of the realist style relates to the concept of ambiguity. Bazin believed that few things in the real world admitted only a single meaning or interpretation, and felt that film should therefore try to reproduce this natural ambiguity (Andrew 1976, 158). He felt that this goal was incompatible with the analytic editing style, arguing, "In analyzing reality, montage presupposes of its very nature the unity of meaning of the dramatic event. Some other form of analysis is undoubtedly possible but then it would be another film. In short, montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression" (50). Bazin's contention that the less controlling style of deep focus and the long take is better able to capture the ambiguity of reality makes much intuitive sense. After all, the positioning of the head leaves the eye free to look at any of the many objects in a

scene in any order. This allows for a multitude of possible viewer experiences—by simple multiplication, as it were. But it is worth considering carefully whether more possible experiences necessarily equates to more possible interpretations of meaning.

Part of the difficulty in analyzing this argument is determining what is encompassed by the concept of “meaning.” In what sense should a film be ambiguous? We could consider ambiguity on the level of literal meaning—of what actually happens within a scene. This, after all, is the type of meaning which analytic editing is intended to make clear. But it is not clear why a single shot in depth would be more ambiguous in this sense than a series of shots breaking up the action of the scene. It is true that an action which would be obvious in a close-up might be subtle or difficult to notice among the distractions of everything else in a shot in depth. But such an action would not truly be ambiguous, simply easy to miss. It would still be possible to determine exactly what happened by rewinding the scene and replaying it in slow motion. One could also conceive of a case where the use of a long take could render some action impossible to discern. There might not be time for the camera to reframe to where it would need to be in order to catch certain details at all. But in such a case the ambiguity stems from what is not shown, rather than from the way something is shown. Such a type of ambiguity could easily be reproduced in the analytic style by not including a shot of the action to be hidden, or by framing the shot such that certain details are excluded. Artistic or narrative advantage could certainly sometimes be gained from keeping the literal action of a scene ambiguous, but the realist style does not offer any particular advantage towards this end.

So it seems more likely that Bazin was interested in ambiguity with regard not to what happens but to why it matters or to what it means in some deeper hermeneutic sense—ambiguity on the level of significance, rather than of signification. Is it true that the realist style has a special ability to present a scene with multiple meanings in such a sense, an ability that the analytic style does not share? The proposition in contention here is not really whether the realist style possesses the power of ambiguity—for it undoubtedly does. There are countless possible examples, but one which Bazin used was the Italian neo-realist film *Journey to Italy*, directed by Roberto Rossellini.

Bazin compared the film, filled with lengthy shots of the city of Naples and everything going on there, to “blocks of stone scattered in a river bed,” which one must find one’s own way to use as a bridge to understanding (quoted in Nowell-Smith, 155). Few would deny that such scenes could be taken to mean many things. No, the more puzzling question is why the analytic style would be thought to lack this power. The fact that a shot with multiple subjects can contain multiple meanings does not imply that a shot with a single subject must admit only a single meaning. We noted earlier the comparisons Bazin drew between the analytic style and the ways that paintings and music create meaning. Why, then, did he believe that analytic editing leads to a film scene with less potential for ambiguity and depth than painting or music? Consider an example from the film *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott. The final scene of the film, in which Deckard and Rachael discover an origami paper unicorn and then step into an elevator, is very analytic in style. Separate shots show Rachael’s shoe disturbing the unicorn, Deckard looking back and noticing it, his hand reaching down to pick it up, him examining it in the light, what it looks like in close-up, and finally him crushing it in his hand, turning, and stepping into the elevator. The literal meaning of the sequence is clear, but nearly everything else about its meaning is ambiguous. Was the unicorn left as a threat or a warning? Does it imply Deckard is a replicant, or doesn’t it? Why is the unicorn chosen as a symbol? What does the scene suggest about the connections between myth and technology, or about the human search for immortality? The unicorn is clearly a “meaningful” detail, but it invokes many different responses and suggests many different ideas.

This example shows the possibility of ambiguity in what is contained in an analytic sequence. But we also need to consider what the analytic sequence leaves out. Bazin criticized narrative editing not only for reducing a scene to a single analysis, but specifically for privileging an analysis “entirely determined by the action” (Andrew, 162). He praised Renoir’s decision to shoot boat scenes in depth on real water, rather than in a studio with rear projection, for refusing to imply that the actors “are more important than the reflection of the water on their faces, the wind in their hair, or the movement of a distant branch” (quoted in Andrew 1976, 154). The danger described is that of isolating characters and actions from the world in which they live and

occur. Because analytic editing is normally used to point the eye to the key plot details within a scene, it is unlikely that details not relevant to the plot will be shown in any given shot of an analytic sequence. For instance, imagine a scene consisting of two people speaking to one another in a park. One would expect the shots in an analytic treatment of the scene to be almost exclusively of the two characters, probably in a shot/reverse-shot pattern. These shots might well have ambiguous meanings—the characters' faces alone could hold many different possible messages. But these would not be the *same* ambiguous meanings that would be found in a realist treatment of the scene. A long take in depth could let in many additional details about the world surrounding the characters, such as leaves fluttering in the wind and geese swimming in the water nearby. The ambiguous meanings suggested by this version of the scene would be far likelier to deal with questions about how the characters and the plot fit into the natural world visible all around them, or even how civilization as a whole has dealt with the natural world. So even while the positioning of the eye does not preclude ambiguous meanings technically, the analytic style's frequent fixation on plot-relevant information may greatly reduce the scope of shots' meanings in practice.

But does this have to be so? Is there any reason that the positioning of the eye must be wielded only in service of plot? Bazin praised Renoir for finding “a film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments” (quoted in Andrew 1976, 158), an implicit criticism of the analytic style. But must breaking a scene into parts imply leaving any of those parts out? Would it be possible to construct an analytic sequence that conveys the same kinds of meaning as its single-take realist equivalent? It may be instructive here to draw an analogy to another medium: comics. Comics are by their very nature dependant on a process similar to the analytic editing style. The action of the comic story can only move forward by way of the “cuts” between the panels. In his examination of different types of transitions between comic panels, McCloud finds that, across a sample of well-known American and European comics, panel transitions are almost universally motivated by action and plot advancement (74-76). The transitions in these comics are akin to the narrative editing style Bazin

criticizes. But when he examines a sample of Japanese comics, McCloud finds that several entirely different types of panel transitions are common (77-80). Most significant is the prevalence of a type of transition he names the “aspect-to-aspect” transition (79).

The aspect-to-aspect transition joins panels showing different details or aspects of the same scene, such as the hinge of a door, items on a shelf, and a figure sitting leaning against a wall. McCloud discusses how such aspect-to-aspect sequences emphasize mood and place, de-emphasize sequence, and require readers to “assemble a single moment using scattered fragments” (79). Such a sequence is still analytic in style, for it depends on breaking a scene down into parts and then jumping from one part to another. But it evokes the same kind of ambiguous meaning as the long-take realist style—a contemplation of man’s place within his world. Could the same not be done on film, stringing together shots of all a scene’s details rather than only those most relevant to the plot? Bazin himself admits that an analytic sequence showing the key actions of narrative allow the viewer to assemble just as complete an understanding of that action as viewing the same action on a stage from a single vantage point (47-48); why shouldn’t an analytic sequence of a location provide just as full an understanding of that location as a single shot in depth?

De Luca argues that the use of the “hyperbolic long take” in contemporary realist films such as Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó* provides a stronger sensory engagement with what is shown, “[foregrounding] reality primarily as a perceptual, sensible and experiential phenomenon” (192). But in these examples, the main reason the viewer is driven to close sensory examination of a scene is that the takes go on so long that there is nothing else to do. An aspect-to-aspect analytic sequence might instead encourage close sensory engagement with reality by showing the parts of reality that are sensually engaging. Consider, for example, a scene from the film *Return to Oz*, directed by Walter Murch. Dorothy Gale, her adventures in the marvelous land of Oz complete, reawakens to find herself lying on a forested riverbank in Kansas. This development is revealed through a series of close ups, showing a twig floating in muddy water, Dorothy’s cheek lying against wet leaves, and a bird singing in a dry, leafless tree. Though each brief, these images are



incredibly vivid and tactile. Together, they convey very effectively the sheer overwhelming *realness* of the world Dorothy has returned to. By contrast, a single wide shot of Dorothy lying on the riverbank would likely only have portrayed the literal fact of her return to Kansas; the trees—and the reflections in the water and the motions of the bird and the textures of the dead leaves—would have been lost in the forest. Here it is analytic montage that keeps the character situated properly in the world.

One potentially problematic aspect of this technique is that the filmmaker is required to arrange the scene fragments in some particular order, with a particular amount of time devoted to each one. Even if all the important details are included, have they not been torn one from another and rebuilt into something new, a sort of Frankenstein's monster of a scene, with its origins in the editing room rather than in nature? There is indeed room for possible concern here, but it should not be overstated. It is too large a step to equate all editing with the manipulative editing of Soviet montage; putting pictures into an order does not inherently change them from captured views of reality into a constructed argument.

McCloud's analysis of the aspect-to-aspect sequence suggests that, because such a sequence does not portray plot actions playing out in a narrative order, the importance of the specific ordering of such a sequence is greatly lessened. The viewer is given no reason to focus on the order of the shots or on the connections between adjacent shots when determining the meaning of the scene. When we see a cut between a group of fleeing peasants and the slaughtering of livestock, as in the associative montage of Eisenstein's *Strike*, we are driven to look for metaphorical meaning because no literal connection between the images is clear. But if we see a cut between a shot of treetops blowing in the rain and a shot of rain splashing on pavement, we are unlikely to assume there is any metaphorical meaning in this ordered pair of images because a literal interpretation is already apparent: the trees and the pavement are part of the same location, and it is raining there. As Bordwell argues in his analysis of film through the lens of cognitive science, film viewers are likely to go away from a scene remembering the overall "gist" of its meaning, the sum of its details rather than the specific order and way that they are

presented. He applies this argument to the way the viewer may be led to miss significant details in a mystery film, but it applies just as well here. When one looks at something in real life, such as the face of a building, one's eyes flit from detail to detail in some defined order, noticing perhaps first the windows, then the door, then the texture of the bricks, and so on. But one is unlikely to understand the building differently than someone who looked at the bricks first. One might not even realize one hasn't simply seen the whole face of the building as a single perception. If all the important elements of a scene are provided and the spatial relationships between them make sense, the viewer should be expected to assemble them together into a single understanding of the scene, an understanding not only as complete as the understanding provided by the shot in depth but further enhanced by the extra details that individual close ups can provide.

If one is still unsatisfied, it is worth considering that a shot in depth may involve the deliberate arrangement of subjects in space just as the use of montage may involve the deliberate arrangement of subjects in time. An image shown many times in a montage sequence could be said to have been artificially infused with greater importance than one shown only once, but an object closer to the front of a shot in depth likewise seems more important than one partially obscured and farther to the back. A still photograph is the ultimate long take—there is no risk whatsoever of contamination with montage. However, no one would deny that there can be a definite implied meaning in a still picture. To shoot from a particular angle is to decide on a particular way of projecting three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional image, as was pointed out by Arnheim in his argument that film was more than the impartial recording of reality (283). Bazin argued in favour of techniques that would bring film back *closer* to such an impartial recording—but is not the long take a technique that, by its very nature, literally reduces our understanding of a scene to a single point of view? By contrast, the analytic sequence involves looking at a scene from several different angles, giving us more information with which to interpret it spatially and thus drawing the focus away from individual two-dimensional compositions.

In the end, theory is not always the same as practice. If realism in film means correctly

representing the ambiguities of life, especially the ambiguous relationships between people and stories and the world, then the analytic style—the positioning of the eye—is capable of being realistic. At times, it may be able to do so more effectively than the traditionally realist style of deep focus and the long take. But it often does not, nor is it usually intended to. Meanwhile, the realist style—the positioning of the head—can still accomplish the goals of ambiguity very naturally, and could even be said in a way to accomplish them more efficiently than the analytic, as it is able to show both the action and the world simultaneously.

There is one final question which we should consider, a question in the context of which most of the things we have considered so far are really only technical details. This is the question of the relationship between film and the profilmic reality. We have talked about how film can create an image perceptually or psychologically similar to the real world, and about how film techniques can preserve the ambiguities characteristic of the real world, but we have not yet considered in what sense and to what degree the camera actually reproduces what it sees in the real world.

The question of the relationship between the film and the real world has a long and storied history. At first, the close, mechanical link between film and life led to skepticism that film could even be considered an art form. Carroll lays out some of the “skeptical” arguments against film and against photography in general, such as the argument that film is not an art because the filmmaker does not have complete control over what he creates (16-18), and the argument that film is only a reproduction of other arts such as acting, rather than an art in itself (18-20). In response, film theorists such as Arnheim sought to show the ways in which film was more than or different from a mechanical reproduction of reality, in order to establish its right to be considered art.

Bazin, on the other hand, pointed to the advancing march of technologies bringing film into closer alignment with real experience, and argued that the greatest film was that which embraced or at least came to terms with its close relationship to reality. As the sarcophagi of the ancient pharaohs preserved their features beyond their deaths, Bazin suggested, so film could

preserve real events long after they occurred, fulfilling a deep human need that other arts such as painting could only partially satisfy (159-163). He also pointed out that, because people were aware of film's dependence on real subjects, people were more psychologically prepared to believe what they saw in film than in other arts. In his words, while "all the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence" (quoted in Andrew 1976, 138). Rather than abusing this trust, Bazin encouraged filmmakers to make films which recreated things as they were. Where earlier critics had sought to reduce film by calling it only the recording of a play, he argued that the best recording of a play would be one that showed clearly its fictional and dramatic nature (Andrew, 150). He even argued for the artistic merit of a medical film which objectively recorded the appearance of a cancer (Andrew, 144).

In response technological developments allowing for far easier manipulation and modification of film images, some have questioned whether there is still a strong connection between film and reality. Reversing the usual categorization of animation as one variety of film, Manovich proposes that "digital cinema is a particular case of animation that uses live-action footage as one of its many elements" (801). Andrew disparagingly suggests the phrase "cinema as animated storyboard" to describe "much of today's audiovisual entertainment" (2010, 34). But, *pace* postmodernist philosophers everywhere, the idea of recorded truth is by no means dead. Even while it may be difficult in the specific instance to tell an edited video recording from an unedited one, most people would still affirm that an unedited video recording is a reliable reproduction of reality. As Andrew points out, technology to project animated images not recorded from reality has existed since 1889, even if the use of such technologies remained unusual until the advent of computers (2010, 1-2). The existence and mounting popularity of modes of filmmaking not firmly based in reality do not invalidate the reproduction of reality as a valid goal for film.

In light of these considerations, we might separate Bazin's ideal of realism in film into two separate but necessary components: the objectivity of the recording, and the objectivity of the finished film. The first of these components entails that film should be created by mechanically

recording reality, rather than, for example, by animation. The second component entails that film should seek to reproduce the ambiguous experience of reality, rather than, for example, a constructed argument. We have already considered the second component in great depth, and have touched briefly on the first component, but we now turn to consider the all-important relationship between them. Throughout this essay, we have been seeking to assess the proposition that realist techniques (specifically the long take and the shot in depth) provide a special connection to the real world. But all of our analysis has been rooted firmly in the way that these techniques and other techniques are experienced by the viewer of a finished film—rooted firmly, that is to say, in the second component we have identified in Bazin's realist ideal. Is it possible for us to show that there is a meaningful connection between the two components? In other words, does the ambiguous meaning we see in the final film necessarily have any connection to an ambiguous real world at which the camera was pointed?

There are certainly times when it does. One of Bazin's well-known examples is the classic documentary *Nanook of the North*, in which the long take Flaherty uses to show Nanook struggling with a seal accurately represents the time the struggle took (Andrew, 165). But once we move beyond documentary, things become much less clear. In an Italian neo-realist film like the aforementioned *Journey to Italy*, the city scenes of the real locations used could be said without great difficulty to be translated accurately from reality into film. But what about the actors? Obviously, their literal appearances, words, and actions are translated accurately from life to film. But in the finished version, we are given a seemingly objective picture of a couple visiting Naples, while, in the filmed reality, there were only two actors pretending! Though it feels like reality, the meaning of the final film is partially artificial, a cunning fake. If we consider some of the famous shots in depth from *Citizen Kane*, we will discover that they are entirely deceptive, as neither the actors nor the sets are really what they appear to be in the film.

It may seem unfair to dismiss these scenes on such grounds. Bazin obviously didn't, considering *Citizen Kane* to be the gem of a new, realistic wave in film style (50-52). But throughout this essay we have struggled to maintain a distinction between the meanings of the

natural world and the meanings constructed by man. We have accepted and worked with the paradigm that to omit the trees in the background of a scene in a park is to commit an act of violence against the natural and ambiguous meaning of that scene. How can we now accept a scene which has in its entirety been concocted by the filmmaker? Why should such wholesale fabrication be considered any more natural than the construction of meaning through analytic narrative-centred editing? Or consider the film *The Turin Horse*, directed by Béla Tarr. Despite its hyperbolic use of realist techniques such as the long take, the content of the film is clearly not real life. Its two characters live a dehumanized existence on a strangely isolated farm surrounded constantly by an unnatural wind; the film is more of a symbolic parable about Nietzsche's philosophy than it is an examination of the real world. Should we still call this a realist film, simply because Tarr has made use of traditionally realist techniques to create a realist feel?

The significance of this problem is enormous. Andrew posits the style of computer-animated film—which privileges the free expression of imagination—as fundamentally contrary to Bazin's ideals of realist film—film that “negotiates between man and nature, the imagination and the real” (2010, 30-31). But can we truly draw such a distinction? If one is willing to accept a film with constructed sets and a planned script as realistic, then on what basis can one reject an animated film which is no more or less constructed? Take, for instance, the film *WALL·E*, directed by Andrew Stanton. The early part of this film is filled with long shots of its eponymous robot hero in a dusty, deserted city. These are not all technically shots in depth, in the sense that artificial blurring has been added to the computer-generated scenes to simulate the effect of a real camera lens, but they nonetheless fulfill well the purpose of shots in depth, showing *WALL·E* as a part of his environment rather than as something distinct from it. Should we deny that these scenes bear any true relation to shots in depth captured using live actors on film? Surely the true “meaning” of reality is not some form of airy essence which flows in through the lens and permeates the film when the camera is turned on pointing at anything in the real world, even if the arrangement and behaviour of those real-world things is entirely planned out within a studio. Of course, even carefully controlled filming is never *entirely* controlled. One

might point to the ever-present possibility of accident, which could carry the effects of wild, uncontrolled nature into a film—but are we really prepared to say that the watches or telephone poles that might sneak into a historical film are at the core of its meaning?

Or, if one insists on rejecting the possibility of realist animated film, because of the lack of any direct contact with reality, then what about a film whose contact with reality is in a manner entirely different from the traditional camera? Both film cameras and digital video cameras record reality in the form of images based on the projection of light through a lens. But what about technologies like motion capture? In examining the idea of transparency in film—the idea that one can look not at film but through it to the reality beyond it—Carroll introduces a thought experiment involving a computer-updated counterfactually-dependant scale model of a distant South-American railyard, and asks whether it would be fair to say one is looking through the model and seeing the real trains (97-98). This question is far from hypothetical when it comes to a film like *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron. Ng describes the sophisticated “swing camera” technology that Cameron used to “film” the actors on a motion capture stage (277). There was no real camera involved, only an array of motion sensors which allowed him to direct the actors and camera together and have their every motion translated into in a single computer-generated scene. A scene shot in this manner is clearly based on a mechanical reproduction of reality, but in the final film it is translated into images of blue-skinned extraterrestrials in an alien jungle.

What all of these examples lead us to see is the fundamental disconnect between the objectivity of recording and the objectivity of the final film. The techniques of the realist style—the long take and the shot in depth—may preserve the appearance of reality, but no more imply the presence of the real world in a film than they are implied by it. The apparent links between realism and reality are neither solid nor definite. The positioning of the head is ultimately another style of psychological realism, a set of techniques well suited but by no means uniquely suited to showing scenes in a way that will cause viewers to examine them and understand them in the same way they examine and understand reality. Applied to a film that truly is based on reality, as in the case of documentary, or which is filmed against reality, as in the case of Italian

neo-realism, the realist techniques may well serve a very valuable purpose, passing on the signal from reality intact so that those who view the film later are able to conclude from real evidence what to think. But none of this is to say that the “realist” techniques have no applicability beyond documentary or semi-documentary film. In Andrew’s reading of Bazin, the ultimate goal is not to find reality in film, which would be impossible, but to locate its absence—the hollowed out inside of the mummy beneath the sarcophagus of film—and to find within that absence the ghost or the trace left behind by the real (2010, 25, 41-42). Realist film theory has always been based on the assumption that this trace is to be found through physical contact with the real, as the camera physically records what it sees. But the power of a film like *Citizen Kane*, which though inspired by a real story is itself a meticulously constructed one, suggests another way the trace of reality could enter a film: through the creation of stories and characters inspired, in one way or another, by the real world of their human creators. And so, if this trace of reality is indeed of value, there is no reason that realist techniques should not be able to help transmit it far beyond the reach of reality itself, unto fiction, animation, and all the ends of the earth.



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