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EIDÔLON/IMAGO.
Some Reflections on the Film Image[1]

In a conversation with André Parinaud, the sculptor Alberto Giacometti talks about how vision has been changed in the film age. He describes how "the invention of the photographic apparatus and everything that has followed - film, television, x-rays and the microscopical enlargements of reality - has turned reality upside down. Painting and sculpture used to be the only means by which man could grasp the outside world. There was no doubt about the unity of the head. For us, this unity has collapsed, it is not true any more."[2]

But in this very collapse, Giacometti also sees the possibility of a renewed vision: "I had accepted the fundamental split between the photographic way of seeing the world and my own way of seeing. Then, suddenly, reality began to amaze me as never before. Nothing used to happen to me when I left the cinema - I continued to look at the world as if it was a film image. Then suddenly, there was a split; the images of the screen no longer bore any resemblance to reality, and I looked at people in the cinema theatre as if I saw them for the first time."[3]

It may be a cliché to claim that our visual experiences have been fundamentally changed by the development in the realm of images that has taken place since the 19th century. Today, the society of the image seems to be a fact, for better and for worse. Our society is permeated by visuality - thanks to cinema and television, but also through information technology and the increasing possibilities to communicate by means of images. At the same time, we have to ask the question if the status of the image in our Western civilization really has changed in any decisive way, in spite of the increasing amount of images that we meet in our daily life.

For example, there remains the puzzling fact that thought and writing on the image have been neglected for a long time, except in the domain of art. I think one could say that it isn't until the last decade that vision and its transformations in history and in contemporary society have been subject to serious reflection and research, at least to any greater extent. On the other hand, visuality has became trendy: I dare say that it is one of the most frequently used terms among researchers in the different domains related to the image.

Still, however, the broad debate on moving images is restricted to questions such as the influence exerted by images of violence in cinema. The film image is often made the scapegoat for problems in society, it is made responsible for the use and misuse of images in our culture as a whole. Thus, film - especially in television and on video - is often said to cause a weakening of the perceptual capacities, to dissolve the border between fiction and reality, and to give impulses to acts of violence. The image as such, on the contrary, has tended to be put in the shade in the public sphere, a redundant visitor in the civilization of words. It disposes

only of a limited, restricted area. As long as the image serves a purpose it transmits a message, everything is fine. However, it isn't allowed to take the lead...

Of course, it is also somewhat paradoxical that whoever wants to talk about images has got to use words. This requires a translation, where something always gets lost, because when talking about films, it is the easier to take the story as the point of departure, and to tell what the film is all about. The image as such is much more difficult to determine: light, shape, colour, a certain shade impossible to render.

Looking at the Platonic tradition it would be easy to claim that Western culture - at least a great deal of it - suffers from a kind of "imagophobia". The cave of Plato seems to have been materialized in film - at least certain theoreticians and critics have reflected upon the medium in similar terms. People in front of the screen look at the shadows of real life, which, however, can never reach the cave of the cinema. Maxim Gorky, in relating his first experience of the Lumière cinematographer, writes precisely about the shadows of life and of reality.[4] Also, the whole realist tradition in film theory tends towards this position. Kracauer talks about the grey and fugitive shadows on the screen in his different articles concerning Karl Grüne's *The Street*.[5] These images can never render reality, just as we, human beings in modernity, cannot fully grasp the outside world. And André Bazin also considers the film image the shadow of reality, albeit a shadow that might appear as a window to the outside world.[6]

According to this view, film is founded upon a fundamental lack, the lack of the real object that we see on the screen. The impression of reality is nothing other than an attempt to compensate or to hide this lack. It is an attempt bound to fail: the absence can never again be transformed into presence, representation can never restore the object. At the same time, absence constitutes the very basis of the medium. We go to the cinema to look at the images on the screen - not because we hope to see people in flesh and blood.

The whole tradition in film theory focusing upon the absence or lack could in fact be seen as inheritors of platonic dualism, at least if one looks at the image in its emptiness as a pale imitation, the shadow of a possible fullness. However, as a result the image becomes suspicious, because it is doomed to failure. But it would also be possible to look at the image so to speak from the opposite direction, as a paradoxical, insisting presence. The image on the screen is there after all, remaining where nothing should remain, offering precisely itself to our vision just because of this famous absence of the object.

In his book *Vie et mort de l'image, Une histoire du regard en Occident* (Life and death of the image, A history of vision in Western culture) the French philosopher Régis Débray formulates an hypothesis on what he calls the three ages of vision in Western culture. These are determined by three different modes of reproduction, namely the era of handwritten manuscripts, the epoch of the art of printing and the videosphere.[7] Under the first era the image moves gradually from the domain of magic to religion. Either it is in itself considered an idol, or it is the image of the divine prototype or archetype. In both cases, it is endowed with a life of its own. It is considered capable of seeing - or as the advocate of God's gaze. It's primary function is allusive - it points to eternity. The image captures its spectator, but it also preserves him. The spectator in his turn does not primarily regard the image: he sees behind it, beyond it. In looking at the image, the spectator is able to exceed his own limits, to enter into a reality beyond the ordinary, transcending the visible.

In the next era, called the era of the image by Débray, the image instead offers itself to the spectator. It is no longer the sign of a divine presence. Instead, it is a representation and therefore illusory. Art has left the religious sphere to become profane. It still looks for immortality, but an immortality in itself, or by the mediation of the artist. It does not play the role of eternity's spokesman in time. Instead of possessing a life in itself, it has became an object. It pleases its spectator instead of preserving him. This is the era of the work of art, where the image as object has become an end in itself. If the gaze in the era preceding this one strived to reach beyond the image, it here gives way to the visual abundance offered to the spectator by the image. It is also during this period - which starts in the Renaissance - that all of a sudden the new film medium starts to serve as a point of reference or norm to the other art forms. Suddenly, it is to film one glances in the search for renewal. Consider this, hasn't our own inner repertory of images been formed just as much, or even more by the films we have seen as by classical art?

In our own age, finally, which Débray calls the visual regime, the other forms of expression

The little girl communicates with someone or something on the TV-screen in Poltergeist

within the field of moving images - the video, the electronic image on the computer - have taken over from film as a barometer for the future. Thus, in a certain respect, the film image already belongs to the past. This of course does not mean that film production will stop - no more than the production of images in art has.

Today the image has to a certain extent lost its material existence. The electronic images consist of electronic impulses forming images only through perception. Also, actuality has taken over as a temporal horizon to the image. Time is nothing but the point in the present where the image temporarily appears. In an epoch where novelty is the keyword, it is the ability of the image to surprise its spectator that has become the lodestar. It is no longer possible to seek for hidden meanings or mysteries that would give the image a reason to exist. Neither is it possible to find another dimension beyond the image, whether it is a sacred or an aesthetic dimension: there is nothing beyond.

Like any other model trying to outline a complex historical development, Débray generalizes a bit. Still, I find his arguments convincing in many ways.

One of the consequences, if you accept his distinction between the three ages of vision, is that Walter Benjamin in his analysis of the loss of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction makes a miscalculation by a few centuries.[8] According to Débray, the aura in the strict sense of the word is lost already from the moment where the image ceases to belong to the domains of magic or religion, in other words when it no longer belongs to the cult but becomes a work of art.

At the same time, Débray notes that our contemporary society in several respects seems to look back to times where the image was directly related to religion and thus had a direct function, a clearer meaning. He talks about a nostalgia for the lost aura. In *The Sacrifice* by Andrei Tarkovsky, we find a similar idea expressed by the main protagonist Alexander. While turning the pages in a book on Russian icons, he says "Oh, this is extraordinary. Such a strange refinement. Wisdom and spirituality, and at the same time the innocence of childhood. Depth and innocence at the same time. Yes. Incredible. It is like a prayer. And now all this is lost, we don't know how to pray any more."

It isn't necessary to turn to art film to find examples of this research for this aura. There are huge amount of rock videos which utilize religious properties with symbolic meanings to express a similar nostalgia...

On the other hand, this nostalgia does not belong to the age of electronic images only. When Ingmar Bergman in an article from 1965 discusses art and especially the role of the artist, he glorifies an era when art still was part of the cult, namely the age of the medieval cathedrals and the men who constructed them.[9] They worked in a complete anonymity, and at the same time with a naturalness that Bergman envies them. They did not strive for success, but only to the goal that they had in common. They offered their skill to serve collective ends. *In F for Fake*, Orson Welles expresses a similar thought in praising those who built the cathedral in Chartres. He is completely fascinated by all the details of the building; the sculptural master-pieces and the beautiful ornaments that can never be seen by the spectator on the ground. They lack every function, except that of being seen by God's eye.

The nostalgia for this aura is related to the wish to be able to give an ultimate meaning to the image. I think it is a wish which in turn is related to the horror that is new to our visual era, and which is grounded in the vertigo we can feel when looking at the flow of images that seems never-ending. What if behind this image there would only be another image, and behind that yet another, and so on and so forth for eternity... The horror of infinite regression...

The criticism of the visual era that could be traced in Débray could, however, also lead to a certain blindness. According to Débray, the most important rupture in the history of the image in Western culture takes place between the age of the image and the visual era. If the borderline that separates our own era from the former is made too sharp or too absolute, one runs the risk of making the non-electronic image sacrosanct, and thus glorifying the film image as if it was a rarity, a representative of a dying species that has to be defended at any cost. At the same time, the sharp distinction between the film image and the electronic image also tends to conceal the revolution that the introduction of moving images in film meant to the culture of the image.

Hélas pour moi by Jean-Luc Godard opens with a short story, told by a man who remains off-screen. The voice says that his great grandfather when he had to face a difficult task used to go to a certain place in the woods where he lit a fire and said a prayer. And so he achieved what he had wished for. The grandfather in his

turn followed his father's example, but he didn't remember how to light the fire. He only went out in the woods and said a prayer. Still, he achieved what the had wished for. When the turn came to the father, he also went into the woods but he could neither light a fire or say a prayer. But he still knew the right place in the wood, and so he achieved what he had wished for.

For our narrator today, things are worse. He cannot find his way into the woods. He doesn't know the words of the prayer and he is not able to light a fire. But, he says, I am still able to tell the story. You could say that this short story concentrates the whole process of development described by Débray, from magic via religion and representation to citing.

In a way, you could say that *Hélas pour moi* is an apology for the art of narration. At the same time it is - with a contradiction typical of Godard - a film on the impossibility of narrative. It is constructed with the collage technique typical of Godard: the seemingly arbitrary joining of loose threads that may have something to do with a story, philosophical commentaries - quotations - and intertitles, musical fragments and - not to be forgotten - images of stunning beauty, where especially light creates strong suggestions. Thus, *Hélas pour moi* is focusing the question of the film image, of vision and visuality.

"Je ne vois pas" is a recurring phrase in the film. It's meaning - I don't understand - is of course double - I don't see. Vision is also blocked in different ways during the film. Once in the film, someone walks up to the camera and puts his hand in front of the lens. This of course is nothing new in film history: during the French New Wave - to cite just one example - the directors used to point out the presence of the camera to destroy the illusion. Here, though, I think that the hand in front of the camera has a somewhat different function. It is not the question of destroying an illusion since there is no illusion in the film to destroy. No, Godard tries to take a step further: to question vision in film, to show the limits of film as a visual medium and maybe also point to the limits of vision as such. In the film, someone also refers to the imperfection of the film image, which forces the narrator to speak out, to tell what the spectator might already have guessed. This, then, should be the paradox of the film image: its imperfection makes the narrator think he has to speak more clearly. At the same time, the spectator interprets the image, thus filling in the gaps of the images. Thereby, the elucidations of the narrator run the risk of being redundant, too clear.

Later in the film, Godard also includes some black images which are interrupted by glimpses of images. On the soundtrack, someone says that only half of the materia in our galaxy is visible. The other half remains invisible, like phantom materia. The fact that Godard cuts in the black images right here may indicate that the same holds true for the film medium. Maybe we can only see half of the film. Several indications in the film point in this direction, not only the repeated "je ne vois pas". For example, there is especially a young woman in the film who is the advocate of invisibility.

When her dialogue partner complains about not seeing and not understanding, she tells him always to keep a margin of something undefined. And, she says, "une vision ne se discute pas", you can't discuss what you have seen. There is something to visibility that will not let itself be explained by words, not grasped by understanding. It can't be defined - maybe not even seen. Visibility is the landscape of unpredictability.

The life of the image has its roots in death. Imago in Latin was originally the term designating the death mask. The dead were given a possibility of survival through the cast image. Eidôlon in Greek means spectre, phantom. It wasn't until later that the word came to designate the image or portrait. The image, thus, is the shadow of the dead. In his essay on the ontology of the photographic image, André Bazin interprets its origins from this point of view.[10] The Egyptian mummy, he writes, must be protected from grave plundering and destruction to be able to fulfil its function to preserve the human being for eternity. This was granted by the presence of small statues in terracotta, ready to function as "stand-in mummys". These statues also reveal the function of art: to save being through seeming-to-be. Art - as well as photography or film - grant the human being the ablility to vanquish time and death.

Thus, this quality has not left the technically mediated image. On the contrary, both still photography and film have been considered as ways of preserving the dead in a new and unique manner. In 1895 we find these lines in the French journal *La Poste*, apropos the first film screenings: "The beauty of the invention resides in the novelty and ingenuity of the apparatus. When these apparatuses are made available to the public, everybody will be able to photograph those who are dear to them, no longer as static

forms but with their movements, their actions, their familiar gestures, capturing the speech on their very lips. Then, death will no longer be absolute."[11]

In a fascinating essay published in the anthology by Patrice Petro, *Fugitive Images*, Tom Gunning has mapped out the complex relationships between the photographic image and spiritualism, magic theatre and film.[12] In the discussions on photography during the 19th century the photographic image or film image was often related to the supernatural. Behind this, Gunning writes, lies the idea that "people, places and objects in a certain way could cause their own images" by leaving an imprint of theirselves in the photographic image.[13] Photography, or the film image therefore are given an ambivalent status. On one hand, they remain a technique - scientific invention. On the other hand, they belong to the order of magic, the supernatural and the spooky.

From its beginning to its end, the horror film *Poltergeist* perfectly illustrates these ideas, now transmitted via the medium of the TV. The plot takes place in a house where the TV is on day and night. The little girl in the family seems to communicate in a strange way with someone or something on the screen when there is no more than flickering to be seen. Suddenly, she disappears mysteriously, and strange things begin to happen in the house. Flashes of lightning appear, and furniture and objects begin to move. The family seeks help from professionals in order to understand what is happening to them. They are advised to use a camera in order to capture the mysterious force that has appeared through the image on the screen. Video equipment is installed in the house, and unexpected things appear on the tape. The light becomes clearer, and the movements of the objects as well. A procession of shadows appears, moving down the stairs in the house. Then everything finds its explanation. The house is built over a churchyard, which has been moved. However, only the stones have been moved. The graves are left, and the dead whose peace has been violated have been forced to choose the easiest way to make themselves known to the living.

Lars von Trier also hints at this strange capacity of the eye of the camera, in his TV-series *Riget*. Here, without reservation the camera takes side with the second-sighted, the clairvoyant, by visualizing what cannot be seen. Those who are not able to see the spirits thus appear twofoldly blind. In a documentary on the series, a medium was interviewed who had contributed as a technical consultant during the production. She is a living illustration to this affinity between the film image and the spectral. She says that von Trier during the whole production had been very thoughtless in his belief that it should be possible to represent fictictious spirits on the screen. While asking for the spirits to come, the camera has inevitably attracted them. Thus, the images are completely invaded by real spirits...

In his film *The Sacrifice* a couple of years earlier (1987) Andrei Tarkovsky lets the eccentric postman Otto, played by Allan Edwall, collect all sorts of strange or inexplicable phenomena. On request, Otto tells his incredulous listeners one of the stories in his collection. It is the story of a woman, who has been to a photographer together with her eighteen-year-old son who is going off to war. Only a few days later, the boy is killed. The woman in a state of shock forgets to get her photograph.

Twenty years later, she goes once again to the photographer for some reason. When she is about to get her negatives, she finds to her own surprise that she is not alone on the images. Beside the new photo of herself, the image of her son appears, just as he would have looked twenty years ago on the photograph that she never picked up... If we are to believe Otto, there is nothing strange in the story. It is only that we are blind that large portions of reality escape our ordinary vision and it is only on the negative that the negated may reappear.

The different terms in Latin and Greek to express the reality of the image also offer two completely different ways of considering it. The Latin term imago refers etymologically to the Greek mimesis - imago means reproduction, imitation. The image comes into existence in its relationship to the reality depicted. Therefore, it is also doomed to be defective, immature: the image can never completely reproduce the reality represented.

The Greek eidôlon, on the other hand, stems from eidos: what is seen, the form. The verb eido is transformed to video in Latin: I see. Here, the accent is put on the image as something that offers itself to be seen, to be appropriated by the eye. By concentrating upon the question of the gaze the existence of the image as such is focused there, rather than upon any mimetic relationship in which it might be involved.

Behind this difference in emphasis that we find

in the two different terms, I would like to propose the use of the terms to designate two completely different ways of considering the image. In one case, the narrative content of the image is considered, in the other case the image's existence in itself. One could regard them as two different ways of as considering film as a medium, where previously - the imago tradition - has dominated strongly throughout film history. It is the imago concept that has mostly found its expression in the classical Hollywood cinema and the films that are still made in that tradition.

That this development is in no way natural, but rather the result of historical decisions, becomes clear if one considers - for example - the debate on cinema in France in the 1910's and 1920's. The search for principles to create continuity in film than other narrative logic plays an important part in this debate. Visual rhythm, the plastics of the image, symbolic relations among successive film images - there are many variants, but all pointing in the same direction. At the same time, concrete experiments are made in the French avant-garde, by Marcel L'Herbier, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, Abel Gance and others. Here, the filmmakers do not take the story or plot as their point of departure, but rather musical parameters, or the principles of painting and architecture. Loose associations between similar forms may join one film image to another. There is also a very concrete striving to various artistic expressions combine in film. L'Herbier, for example, was engaging Fernand Leger to make scenery in his film *L'Inhumaine*. Darius Milhaud composed the music for the film and The Swedish Ballet in Paris conducted by Rolf de Maré was used also. The film is a great example of the attempts made to create a synthesis between different art forms. With its combination of extremely beautiful images and a sensational story it also makes the two aspects of the image meet, eidôlon and imago.

But of course, the question is somewhat more complicated. Even if the distinction made above is useful, you could never reduce the question of the film image to this dichotomy between two types of images or rather two different perspectives on film image.

Also in an ever so classical film image there always remains a secret. There is always a possibility to discover something more and unexpected. Rather than two types of images, maybe we should distinguish between two aspects of the film image, impossible to separate completely but also impossible to merge.

The dynamics of the film medium, I think, consists of nothing but precisely this interlacing of narrativity and visuality: of the narration on one hand and the "pure visibility" that the film image offers its spectator on the other hand. There is always more to the image than what belongs to the narrative, even in a real Hollywood film where everything is made to support narrative closure. But this abundant visibility also reminds the spectator of the paradox inherent in the film image. The image as a rule contains more than the spectator is capable of seeing, as she/he often concentrates on the plot, or to speak with Bordwell & Co, on the the construction of the story. Thus, maybe she doesn't notice all the details in the image. However, the plot may in its turn arouse associations and mental images in the spectator, images by far exceeding whatever is present in the concrete image in question, and may thereby also bring to the fore the limits of the film image and the fact that everything does not belong to the order of visibility.

In a review of Béla Balázs' *Der sichtbare Mensch* from 1924, the Austrian author Robert Musil wrote a few beautiful lines on the subject: "Mute as a fish and pale as a creature from the underworld, film is floating on the pond of pure visibility. /.../ It is in this state that the images of objects cease to have a practical purpose, to be turned into a mute experience."[14]

The difficulties of film theory remind us that visibility is not the same thing as readability. The many theoretical attempts to establish exact models to describe film images in linguistical terms have often turned out to be failures. You can't draw parallels between the single film image and the word or between the sequence of images in succession and the sentence, nor can you - as Pasolini proposed - see the objects within the image as equivalents of the word.[15] The film image can never be completely uncoded. The codes and conventions of images are weaker than the codes of verbal language, but above all, they are different, they function according to other kinds of rules and patterns. The diversity of the film image is infinite. If one should want to draw a parallel between verbal language and the language of film images it must be on another level than the direct comparison between two systems of linguistic codes.

One of the most interesting attempts to compare film to language is made by the Estonian scholar Iakov Lintsbakh, one of the precursors of modern semiotics. In 1916,

Lintsbakh published his book *The Principles of Philosophical Language*, "which brought forward a highly original theoretical model of natural language as part of a larger semiotic ensemble including body language, languages of music, and, above all, the language of cinema."[16] What is interesting about Lintsbakh's model is precisely that he does not take ordinary language as his point of departure. If one does so, one will always find that film language will never be able to function as a "real" language. According to Lintsbakh, cinema creates a completely new type of language: "Let us note that, although the language of cinema has no grammar, logical relations usually reflected through grammar are better expressed in it than in natural languages. As we know, no description, complex as it may be, can substitute illustrations. Things that are completely impossible to define in linguistic terms, can easily be described in a drawing and still easier by means of cinema performance. Here the grammar is dissolved in the image. Only artificially can it be distilled from the image...".[17]

In a posthumously published essay from 1916, the same year as Lintsbakh's book was published, Walter Benjamin formulates the idea of a mute aspect of language, a non-signifying aspect. Beside the ordinary communicative function of language, there is also, he writes, a nameless, non-acoustic language. "Language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the noncommunicable".[18]

The language of images, as it meets us in film, functions in a similar way. It also contains a non-signifying aspect - the dimension of pure visibility. Visibility is to the image what silence is to speech. It remains a necessary part of the image, or rather: it is the very materia from which the image is formed. At the same time, it also exceeds the image, it opens out into the unknown.

The language of the film image leads its life between; on the one hand, the sensations caused by the image - sensations of sight and sound, the photogenie of human beings and objects - and on the other hand the meaning conveyed by the narrative, by the representation of a succession of events. Maybe one could say that the film image to a certain extent always resists representation. It may do so to a larger or smaller extent, and it may be more or less successful. But in any case, the image always contains more than the narration is able to tell.

The skepticism of the early slanderers of the new medium was often grounded in its technical character. They would argue; 'what is so special about film - all the images are able to do is register in a mechanical way whatever happened to be in front of the camera! In any case, an image that is created by technical means can never claim to be art!' Even among those who are positive about film, there remains a doubt about its technically mediated gaze. What will be the consequences if this gaze is to take over as point of reference, if people should start to look at their environment as if it was a film? Carlo Mierendorff, a German newspaperman and politician from the beginning of the century, is a typical representative of this ambivalence.[19] With a certain enthusiasm mixed with irony, he pays tribute to the new medium, and he is among the first to acknowledge that film - the art of the masses - in several respects was to conquer literature and theatre. At the same time - in an article from 1920 on the success of the cinema theatres - he warns against the consequences of this new image medium: "Man has begun to listen with his eyes. He loses his mental images, the words become shadows. Tree, horse, heaven - these words no longer bear any significance. The ear has become deaf. The world reaches us only through the eye."[20]

At the same time, early film theory defended the eye of the camera. The great expectations that several theoretical texts from the first decades of the history of cinema had in the new medium were often related to its technically mediated gaze. The idea of hidden aspects of reality that would be revealed only through the film image figures in these texts in different shapes. Part of the specificity of the medium, many writers on cinema seemed to claim, is a certain capacity to discover and make visible the invisible. This invisibility is not, however, absolute. Rather, it is a blocked visibility that can be unblocked through the camera. With a vivid polemics directed against the critique of technically constructed images, these writers tried to show that there is more to film than only the mechanical reproduction of images in succession. It is not only in the Futurist circle or other extreme movements that we meet with this enthusiasm about the possibilities generated by film technique. Here again, we could turn to Iakov Lintsbakh, who wrote about the strange capacity of the camera: "In terms of the completeness of images, no man-made language can compare with this mechanical language. It is a miracle which does not surprise us only

because we are used to it. The means it employs thousand times surpass the capacity of human perception. The still camera can see better, farther and clearer than the human eye; likewise, the cinematograph gives more than a man can take. Its pictures are more complete than any kind of images known so far, and only reality itself can be called more comprehensive."[21]

Fernand Leger, among others, completely loses his head in front of cinematic apparatus. He seriously considered giving up painting in favour of the new medium.[22] The only film he made, the short experimental *Ballet Mecanique*, clearly bears witness to this enthusiasm. Without restraints, the film tries out the different possibilities of the medium to make unexpected combinations and visual paraphrases. Among the latter the animated Chaplin doll (signed Leger, of course) is one of the most well-known. But *Ballet Mecanique* especially makes use of the capacity of film to animate dead objects. Saucepans and whisks, funnels and soup ladles swing around and move rythmically. They perform a hectic, frenetic dance around the camera. The lids of the saucepans blink at the spectator with their metalic eyes. A woman's face appears on the screen at short intervals. Sometimes, her mouth is focused upon and sometimes her eyes are in close-up - or rather a single eye, glancing at the spectators.

It seems to be more than a coincidence that the composer Maurice Ravel in 1925 - the same year Leger makes his film - completes *"The Bewitched Child"* - which he calls "a lyrical fantasy in two pieces". Interestingly enough, Ravel's piece is based on a text by the female author Colette, who also wrote film scripts and worked as a film critic. Maybe this is also the reason why *"The Bewitched Child"* is such a cinematic piece of music. The similarities between Ravel and Leger in this respect are striking. Colette describes a little boy that is forced by his mother to do his homework, and who is also accused of laziness. The result turns out to be fatal: through the boy's mediation, his whole environment takes on a life of its own and is turned completely upside down. The boy's gaze is cinematic, his gaze unexpectedly animates the objects that it falls upon. When the teapot and the Chinese cup in Colettes text come to life and dance away, the mobile kitchen utensils in Leger's work are not far away. Like Leger, Ravel pays tribute to a certain magic of childhood, a secret capacity to see the hidden life of the objects or to bring to life their slumbering

ability to move. Colette's piece is a good example for illustrating how the potential of the film image influenced other domains of expression during the first decades of our century. Both Colette/Ravel and Leger also call to mind a genre of the first decades of cinema, namely the genre of objects taking on a life of their own. In the Méliès film *Le locataire diabolique* (1910), for example, a man with a suitcase who is renting a room starts to unpack. His suitcase turns out to be a veritable furniture store: tables, chairs, a piano, and so on and so forth are unpacked and unfold themselves. They find a place in the room for themselves. Then suddenly the man has to move. All the objects then move into his suitcase again.

In Siegfried Kracauer's writings, we find a similar reflection on the ability of film to give life to objects, to dead materia. Kracauer sees a unique possibility in film to bring about a direct, material imprint of modern life. Above all, film is capable of capturing the dissolution of existence in modern society, with its patchwork, chaotic multiplicity of impressions and ideas. This explosive force of cinema gives it a unique mission in relation to humans today, beautifully expressed in a small phrase uttered apropos of Karl Grünes film *The Street* from 1923: "The work of art tends a mirror to the world, which not only reflects it but also makes it see."[23]

To Kracauer, film also possesses a new kind of memory, where what he calls the force of dead objects in the film image comes to life. This takes place as film shows itself capable of bringing to life the past in different objects, albeit invisibly, as these objects carry traces of the people that have handled them and the destiny they have been subject to. Kracauer describes almost ecstatically how "...all these objects function as witnesses of time past, they are imbued with human substance and now they speak, better than humans would be able to".[24]

Jean Epstein on his side seems to attribute to cinema a certain ability to think. It is a discussion that we meet early in his writings, but is given a more definite form in his essay "The Intelligence of a Machine".[25] In 1921 he writes about the Bell and Howell camera as a metal brain with the ability to transform reality into art.[26] In the same spirit, he proposes that the camera should be seen as an artist behind which other artists stand, like the director or the photographer. The common denominator for all these possibilities is in Epstein's language called photogenie.

The concept of photogenie becomes a key

word in the French debate already in the 1910's. Here, the word has a broader significance than in our everyday language. To Louis Delluc or Epstein, the camera transmits instance between the spectator and "reality" or "nature", as they appear on the screen. It is precisely this capability of transmission that they regard as the most important function of cinema, not the story or the director's intentions. But film does not reflect reality in any direct way, on the contrary it transforms and reveals it in the very process of transmission. Reality changes fundamentally because the camera is able to discover new aspects of the given, the reality at hand. Photogenie comes into existence as soon as film begins for this new dimension in its transformation of the reality registered by the camera.

Photogenie can only appear in motion. Therefore, it is also endowed with a temporal aspect, it arises in glimpses during a certain period or space of time. Thanks to photogenie, the film image can also reveal a psychic or even a moral dimension of life - at least according to its spokesmen. This can happen because cinema is en eye with a perceptual capacity greater than the human eye, which at the same time makes the values of the human eye its own, and transcends the limitations of human vision.

For Epstein, magnification is best suited to create photogenie, and thus also the intelligence of the machine. With magnification he refers not only to the enlarged space of the close-up, but also to the prolongation of time created by the use of slow motion. Through the photogenic effect of magnification, film adds something to the object filmed, in the same way as thinking adds a new dimension to its object. What is revealed through photogenie would not be revealed by any other means, in any other medium.

The human eye in itself, thus, cannot discover photogenie, except for an eye that has been specially trained. The lens of the camera on the other hand is capable of capturing it and focusing it - or, in Epstein's words, distilling it. Vision in itself means to select and to interpret - to transform what is seen. The projected image on the screen therefore becomes a transformation in a double sense of the word: we see an image that the camera has already seen before us. This double distillation gives film its psychic dimension. Epstein regards film as supernatural in its very essence, because it transforms everything in the photogenic process. As Jukka Sihvonen shows, Epstein differs from his predecessors "first of all in that his vision is 'mystic' and 'esoteric' rather than aesthetic".[27] He writes breathlessly, in a staccato style, and at the same time in a singular solemn way: "The cinema is essentially supernatural. Life recruits atoms, molecular movement is as sensual as the hips of a woman or young man. The hills harden like muscles. The universe is on edge. The philosopher's light. The atmosphere is heavy with love. - I am looking."[28]

Even though the historical materialism of Walter Benjamin belongs to quite another domain than the mysticism of Epstein, the similarities are striking between Benjamin's well-known idea of the optical unconscious and Epsteins idea of photogenie, in its underlining of the ability of the machine to see in a way that the human eye cannot do. In the same way as psychoanalysis reveals our unconscious, the film image is capable of revealing what the ordinary look tends to censor or repress. The camera can make details visible by magnifying them, it may slow down the action of the plot, thereby revealing the movement inherent in the images. He in turn cites Rudolf Arnheim: "So too, slow motion not only presents familliar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones 'which, far from looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions'".[29] And he continues: "Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is a familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowering and lifting, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses".[30]

The optical unconscious embraces everything that our ordinary perception represses, everything that it does not want to see, or that it isn't capable of seeing. You could say that cinema compensates for the imperfection of the eye and ordinary perception. And there is more to it: it also functions preventively. It prevents catastrophies, not through catharsis but in more secret ways. Benjamin continues: "The diverse aspects that the camera may extract from reality lie beyond a normal spectrum of sensations. Several deformations and stereotypes,

transformations and catastrophies that happen to the external world in cinema happens to it in reality through psychoses, hallucinations and dreams."

Film, thus, functions in a way analoguous to the different ways of psychic defense by making it possible to see the impossible, to look at the insupportable.

A similar thought could be found some decades later in the notes of Robert Bresson: "What the human eye has not been able to capture and no chalk or pencil could fix, your camera captures it without knowing what it is, fixing it with the scrupulous indifference of the machine."[31]

This theoretical idea of the exactitude of perception in the camera has found its cinematic articulation in *Lightning over Water* by Wim Wenders, the portrait of his colleague Nicholas Ray and the last weeks of his life - he suffered from cancer. It is a beautiful and very personal film, closely following Ray in his daily life. The mood created by the film is strikingly optimistic in the beginning. The spectator never gets the impression of being in the shadow of death. But then Wim Wenders tells us about how death suddenly became visible in the film. It was out of his control: "Each time the camera was pointing at Nick something happened that I had no control of. It was in the camera itself, pointing at Nick through the viewfinder. Like a very precise instrument, the camera showed clearly and mercilessly that his time was running out. You couldn't really see it with your bare eyes, there was always hope, but not in the camera." The friendship with Ray and the desire to see him recover deceives Wenders. It isn't until his screening of the material already filmed that the state of things clearly appear to him. Thus, the film helps him to gain an insight that is necessary although it is almost too painful.

Béla Balázs, whose theoretical discussion of film often focuses upon the close-up and its signification in cinematic narration, describes yet another similar phenomenon that he calls micro-physiognomy. He uses the term to describe the hitherto unnoticed details that film can reveal in a face thus making them visible to the spectator. Film can "read the human face between the lines",[32] writes Balázs, between the features. For example, it may indicate a contrast between a person's outward appearance and the expression of his face, that might reveal an abyss to the spectator. On the contrary, it may also show a unity just as amazing between the inner and outer

self, intention and appearance, this is much easier to discover in film than in reality thanks to the capacity of the medium to concentrate its attention through the intimacy of the close-up.

According to Balázs, the face remains to be discovered: quote "The human face still hasn't been discovered, several unknown territories remain on its map".[33] Film reveals what he calls "the invisible face", a hidden aspect of the human countenance that to his imagination remains hidden beyond visibility. In this way, film opens out a new kind of visibility that at the same time remains closely related to the impossibility of vision. The discovery of the invisible face therefore also means the discovery of a certain blindness as the very condition of seeing.

I think one could say that sight is a kind of movement, bridging distance to objects. It has a direct aspect: to see is to assimilate what is seen. But this immediacy is not possible without a certain distance and thus also a kind of absence. Only in being deprived of the immediate proximity of an object can we grasp it through vision.

In our ordinary perception, we never grasp only a detail or two. Every gaze means a survey. Even in our fixation upon a detail, we see its environment. Vision always means a view of a whole, even if it is also always limited by a horizon: our field of vision. The close-up however possesses the unique ability of magnification, it can make a detail huge, so that the environment is almost totally lost. Thus, it functions in a twofold way. First, it reminds one of the possibility to see the hitherto unseen, thus also pointing to the limits of ordinary vision. But it also creates a kind of blindness, through its radical limitation of the visual field surrounding the magnified object. In its very discovery of the optical unconscious it also uncovers the impossibility to grasp everything by sight. Here we touch upon a limit more absolute than the defects of ordinary vision, the boundaries of an invisibility of a more absolute kind. I wonder if even the close-up could fully reveal the invisible face...

I also think that it would be a mistake to view the reflections of Lintsbakh, Kracauer, Epstein, Benjamin or Balázs as pointing to an increasing degree of visibility. In different ways, they also describe the limits of vision, revealed to the spectator by the film image. The film image permits us to see that which those we cannot see, aspects of reality that inevitably escape our gaze. In this respect, the medium is endowed with a

visionary capacity. The film image possesses a gaze exceeding everyday vision, it creates a vision surpassing its own limits.

Giacometti's discussion cited above is in a way diametrically opposed to these ideas. Giacometti discovers reality when the events depicted on the screen have ceased to remind him of it, when the continuity between film and reality has been disconnected. Of course, there is also a fundamental similarity. In the same way as Kracauer or Benjamin, Giacometti takes, as his point of departure the possibility of the film image to reveal a new way, to reveal the surrounding world. But unlike them, he sees no possibility to use the film image to discover new dimensions of reality. On the contrary, it isn't until the impression of reality in the film image collapses, until eidôlon completely takes over the imago, that he also suddenly becomes capable of discovering his own environment with fresh eyes.

Notes

[1] This essay is a slightly different English version of the first part of my forthcoming book *Blick och blindhet*, Stockholm: Bonnier Alba Essä 1996.

[2] *Alberto Giacometti skriver*, Mary Lisa Palmer & François Chaussende eds., Stockholm: Raster förlag 1993, 366. Whenever Swedish sources are quoted, the English translations are mine.

[3] Ibid., 367.

[4] Maxim Gorky (1896), in Leyda, Jay: *Kino. A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, London: George Allen & Unwin 1983, 407-409.

[5] Siegfried Kracauer (1924, 1925, 1947, 1960), in *Sätt att se, Texter om estetik och film*, Astrid Söderbergh-Widding ed., Stockholm: T Fischer & Co 1994, 91-111.

[6] See André Bazin (1958), *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*, Paris: Ed. du Cerf 1985.

[7] Régis Débray, *Vie et mort de l'image, Une histoire du regard en Occident*, Paris: Gallimard 1992.

[8] Walter Benjamin (1936), "Konstverket i den tekniska reproduktionens tidsålder", i *Sätt att se*, 112-146.

[9] Ingmar Bergman, "Ormskinnet", in *Persona*, Stockholm 1966.

[10] Bazin, 9-17.

[11] *La Poste*, December 30, 1895, quoted in Georges Sadoul, Louis Lumière, Paris: Ed. Seghers 1964, 119.

[12] Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny", in *Fugitive Images, From Photography to Video*, Patrice Petro ed., Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 42-71.

[13] Ibid., 42.

[14] Robert Musil (1924), "Eléments pour une nouvelle esthétique. Remarques sur une dramaturgie du cinéma", in *Essais: conférences, critique, aphorismes et réflexions*, Paris: Seuil 1984, 188, 195.

[15] Pier Paolo Pasolini (1972), *Heretical Empiricism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ Press, 1988, 197-222.

[16] Cited from Yuri Tsivian in a preface to his translation of chapter 17 in Iakov Lintsbakh, *Principy filosofskogo jazyka. Opyt tocnogo jazykoznaija*, St Petersburg 1916, 68-75. I am indebted to Yuri Tsivian for the discovery of Lintsbakhs importance. A Swedish translation of the same chapter is published in *Aura. Filmvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 2/1995 (in print).

[17] Ibid., unpublished translation by Yuri Tsivian.

[18] Walter Benjamin (1916), "On Language as Such and the Language of Man", in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, London: Verso 1985, 123.

[19] Carlo Mierendorff (1920), in *Sätt att se*, 19-20.

[20] Ibid., 20.

[21] Lintsbakh, in Yuri Tsivian's unpublished translation.

[22] Fernand Leger (1925), in *Sätt att se*, 25-26.

[23] Siegfried Kracauer (1925), in *Sätt att se*, 96.

[24] Ibid., 79.

[25] Jean Epstein, *L'intelligence d'une machine*, Paris: Ed. d. Mélot, 1947.

[26] Epstein (1921), in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol I, 1907-1929, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ Press, 1993, 244.

[27] Jukka Sihvonen, *Exceeding the Limits*, Turku: The Finnish Society for Cinema Studies, 1991, 55.

[28] Epstein (1921), in *Abel*, 246.

[29] Benjamin, in *Sätt att se*, 138.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, Paris: Gallimard 1975, 33-34 .

[32] Béla Balázs (1949), in *Sätt att se*, 183.

[33] Ibid., 190.