

scious life, resembles dreams," he argued, "then the cinema does not exist."<sup>4</sup> These analogies to what would later be called the "dream state" were subsequently taken up by theorists such as Hugo Mauerhofer, Suzanne Langer, and Christian Metz. The Surrealist-inflected work of Jacques Lacan later continued the tradition of "subversive Freud," a tradition which was to have a strong impact on film theory. Later avant-gardist artists such as Maya Deren, Alain Resnais, Stan Brakhage, and Alejandro Jodorovsky would also continue the intertextual dialogue with Surrealism, as would the latter-day theorists of the avant-garde such as Annette Michelson, P. Adams Sitney, and Peter Wollen.

## The Debate after Sound

The advent of sound cinema generated considerable debate about the relative merits of sound versus silent cinema. In the United States Gilbert Seldes denounced sound cinema as a regression to theatrical modes (Seldes, 1928, p. 706). In France Germaine Dulac, even before the advent of sound, saw cinema as a necessarily silent art.<sup>1</sup> Marcel L'Herbier and Leon Poirier were also hostile to sound, while others, such as Abel Gance, Jacques Feyder, and Marcel Pagnol, cautiously embraced it. "The talking film," Pagnol argued "is the art of recording, preserving, and diffusing theater" (Pagnol, 1933, p. 8). For Epstein the *phonogenie* of sound could potentially complement the *photogenie* of the image. But Artaud, in "The Premature Old Age of the Cinema" (1933), warned that sound might prod the cinema to adopt outmoded conventions, while René Clair proclaimed that "the cinema must remain visual at all costs."<sup>2</sup> In Russia Eisenstein, Alexandrov, and Pudovkin in their 1928 manifesto called for the non-synchronous use of sound, warning that the inclusion of dialogue might reestablish the hegemony of outworn methods and trigger a flood of "photographed performances of a theatrical sort" (Eisenstein, 1957, pp. 257-9). Synchronous sound, they feared, would destroy the culture of montage and thus the very

basis of the autonomy of cinema as an art form. In Germany Rudolf Arnheim, in the name of the plastic specificity of the cinema, enshrined silent cinema as the definitive, paradigmatic form of the seventh art. In what now seems like a counter-intuitive move, Arnheim argued that sound detracts from visual beauty. "When real sounds are emitted by the filmed virtuoso's violin," Arnheim lamented, "the visual picture suddenly becomes three-dimensional and tangible" (Arnheim, 1997, p. 30). The introduction of the sound film, for Arnheim, aborted the progress of film art by tempting filmmakers to submit to "the inartistic" demand for a superficial "naturalness" (ibid., p. 154). Ultimately, the sound/silent debate had to do with notions of the putative "essence" of cinema and the aesthetic and narrative implications of "realizing" that essence. (It took 1960s semiotic theory to suggest that "essence" and "specificity" were not coterminous, that the cinema could have some dimensions that were "specifically cinematic" without those traits dictating any single style or aesthetic.)

In 1933 Arnheim published in German his book *Film* (a revised version of which appeared in English as *Film as Art* in 1957). Arnheim had in common with Munsterberg a fondness for Kant and an interest in psychology, although the psychology that interested him was of the Gestalt variety. The Gestaltists under whom Arnheim studied experimented in the areas of "visual field" and "perception of movement." Influenced by neo-Kantian thought, they stressed the active role of the mind in shaping dumb matter into meaningful experience, a perceptual process hyperbolized and foregrounded by art. Arnheim's work on film thus forms part of a larger project in which the visual arts provide a kind of proving ground for the study of visual perception (Arnheim's own 1928 dissertation was on perception).

Gestalt theory, like aesthetic modernism, as Gertrud Koch points out, is constructivist; it sees the relation between art and the perceptual world as one not of imitation, but of shared structural principles.<sup>3</sup> Arnheim's *materialtheorie* emphasizes what he sees as the essential traits of the film medium and the means by which those traits might be deployed for artistic ends. According to Arnheim,

misjudgments about film arise “when theatrical, painterly, or literary standards are applied” (Arnheim, 1997, p. 14). Arnheim begins by outlining all the attributes of the medium which differentiate it from everyday perception and from reality: the reduction of depth, the projection of solid objects upon a single-plane surface, the absence of color, the lack of a space-time continuum, the exclusion of all senses other than the visual. By foregrounding film’s constitutive lacks, Arnheim set out to “refute the assertion that film is nothing but the feeble mechanical reproduction of real life” (ibid., p. 37). Within Arnheim’s less-is-more algebraic principles, apparent deficiencies engender aesthetic strength; the lack of depth, for example, brought a welcome element of unreality into film.

For Arnheim, vision in general, and film viewing in particular, is primarily a mental phenomenon. Arnheim shared with latter-day realist theorists like Kracauer the premise that film as a reproductive art “represents reality itself,” yet he moved from that premise toward the aesthetic injunction that film should go *beyond* realistic representation. Within Arnheim’s *via negativa*, it was precisely film’s mimetic “defects” and its facility for manipulation through lighting effects, superimposition, accelerated or slowed motion, and editing that made it more than a mechanical recording and thus capable of artistic expressiveness. By bypassing the mimetic portrayal made possible by the mechanical apparatus, film establishes itself as an autonomous art.

The Hungarian film theorist Bela Bálázs, meanwhile, began writing on cinema in the early 1920s with books like *Der Sichtbare Mensch* (The Visible Man, 1924), continued with *Der Geist des Films* (The Spirit of Film, 1930), and work subsequently gathered in English and revised in *Theory of the Film* (Bálázs, 1972). Bálázs defended popular cinema against high-art prejudice. The motion picture, he argued “is the popular art of our century” (ibid., p. 17). Like Arnheim, Bálázs was concerned with the specific nature of film as art: “When and how did cinematography turn into a specific independent art employing methods sharply differing from those of the theater and using a totally different form-language?” (Bálázs, 1933, p. 30). In *Theory of the Film* Bálázs answered his question by suggesting that it was montage, i.e. cinema’s capacity to vary distance and angle with respect to the

staged action, that differentiated film from theater. Film discarded the basic formal principles of the stage – integrity of space, fixed spectatorial position, and fixed angle of vision – in favor of varying distance between spectator and scene, the division of the scene into shots, and changing angle, perspective, and focus within the same scene. Unlike Arnheim, who defined filmic specificity in terms of the inherent constraints of the medium, Bálázs stressed the artistic intervention of montage as a synthesis of fragments creating an organic whole. Like Arnheim, Bálázs wanted film to undermine the superficial naturalism of the filmic image, but unlike Munsterberg he did not see film as a “mental phenomenon,” but rather as an instrument for generating a new understanding of the real world. The cinema could democratize the act of looking. Like the “euphoric” theorists, Bálázs glorified the cinema as capable of estranging our perceptions of the world: “Only by means of unaccustomed and unexpected methods produced by striking set-ups can old, familiar and therefore never-seen things hit our eyes with new impressions” (Bálázs, 1972, p. 93).

Bálázs was the poet-laureate of the filmic close-up, not as naturalistic detail but as radiating “a tender human attitude in the contemplation of hidden things, a delicate solicitude, a gentle bending over the intimacies of life-in-the-miniature, a warm sensibility” (ibid., p. 56). The close-up “shows you your shadow on the wall with which you have lived all your life and which you scarcely knew” (ibid., p. 55). The close-up revealed the “polyphonic play of features,” the impact of changing emotions on the face:

*We cannot use glycerine tears in a close-up. What makes a deep impression is not a fat, oily tear rolling down a face – what moves is to see the glance growing misty, and moisture gathering in the corner of the eye – moisture that as yet is scarcely a tear. This is moving, because this cannot be faked. (Bálázs, 1972, p. 77)*

The “microphysiognomy” of the close-up offered a window on the soul; the apparatus of the cinema mirrored the psychic apparatus.<sup>4</sup>

Bálázs also anticipated later theory by speaking of “identification” as the key to film’s “absolute artistic novelty.”

*We look up to Juliet's balcony with Romeo's eyes and look down on Romeo with Juliet's. Our eye and with it our consciousness is identified with the characters in the film, we look at the world out of their eyes and have no angle of vision of our own. (Bálázs, 1972, p. 48)*

Anticipating later "gaze" and apparatus theory, as well as later theories of identification and engagement, Bálázs argued that this kind of identification was unique to film. He also spoke of the role of "physiognomy" as revelation. After centuries of word-based culture, he argued, the cinema prepared the way for a new culture of "visible man." It could even prepare the way for a more tolerant, international kind of human being, thus contributing to the lessening of "differences between the various races and nations, thus becoming one of the most useful pioneers in the development of a universal, international, humanity" (quoted in Xavier, 1983, p. 83).

As a practicing filmmaker, Bálázs was sensitive to the concrete procedures of film, whence chapter headings like "changing set-up," "optical tricks, composites, cartoons," and "the script." Although he complained initially that the sound film had undermined the expressiveness of film acting, he later became an astute analyst of sound in the cinema, with suggestive comments on the dramaturgy of sound, the dramatic possibilities of silence, and the "intimacy of sound" which makes us perceive sounds which are usually drowned out by the accustomed din of everyday life (Bálázs, 1972, p. 210). He also points out that the anti-sound critics never objected to sound *per se* in the cinema – for example, Chaplin's sound gags – but only to dialogue as the real enemy (ibid., p. 221).

Siegfried Kracauer also began writing in this period. As a columnist for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* he wrote on such topics as the "Cult of Distraction" and "The Little Shopgirls Go To the Movies." Kracauer was concerned with the potential for both alienation and liberation of the mass media. For him the task of the cinema was to look unblinkingly at social malaise, to promote a kind of activist pessimism, to show that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds, and thus to provoke doubts about the Panglossian ideology of the reigning system. "Were [the cinema] to depict things as they really are today,"

Kracauer wrote in 1931, "moviegoers would get uneasy and begin to have doubts about the legitimacy of our current social structure" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 24). As early as the 1920s Kracauer exalted the cinema's capacity to capture the mechanized surfaces of modern life. What interested him was what might be called the profundity of the superficial, the micro-calamities and everyday epiphanies that make up human experience. The cinema, in this sense, could help spectators "read" the phenomenal surfaces of contemporary life. Films also gave expression to the "daydreams of society," revealing its secret mechanisms and repressed desires. In his 1928 essay "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" Kracauer spoke of the ideological function of films – here projected onto women spectators exclusively – in ways that anticipated Adorno and Horkheimer, but unlike them he saw the "distraction" of popular spectacles as in some ways a positive force, a subjunctive escape from Taylorization and uniformity. (We will return to Kracauer subsequently.)

Finally, it is important to mention the work of the film journal *Close Up*, which from 1927 to 1933 discussed a wide range of film-theoretical issues. It was here, as Anne Friedberg points out, that the female literary modernists – H. D., Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore – began to write on the cinema (see Donald et al., 1998, p. 7). Just as important, the journal began a serious discussion of the question of race and racism, culminating in a special issue on "The Negro and Cinema" in August 1929, featuring contributions by black and white critics and a letter from Walter White, assistant secretary of the NAACP. Anticipating much later critiques of the "positive image," Kenneth Macpherson warned that the "white man is always going to portray the negro as he likes to see him, no matter how benevolently. Benevolence, indeed, is the danger" (Donald et al., 1998, p. 33). As if to illustrate his own warnings about white projections, Macpherson himself speaks in primitivist tones of the "jungle, lissom lankness" of Stepin Fetchit. At the same time, Macpherson called for "confederated negro socialist cinema," while Robert Herring called for films "by and about" blacks. Harry Potamkin, in "The Aframerican Cinema," surveys black roles in film (Bert Williams, Farina) within the context of a comparative

study of black representation in the graphic arts, the theater, and the cinema. An essay by Geraldyn Dismond, identified as a "well-known American Negro writer," finally, stresses the co-implication of white and black representation, in that "no true picture of American life can be drawn without the negro" (ibid., p. 73). Although blacks entered the cinema through the "servant's entrance," Dismond points out, "the negro [has turned out] some of the best acting on the American screen and stage" (ibid., p. 74). Wide-ranging, the essay addresses issues of "primitivism," the stereotypical casting of blacks as comic menials, and self-representation, in ways that at times anticipate the multicultural film studies of the 1980s and 1990s.

## The Frankfurt School

If the Surrealists had expressed both hope for and disappointment in the cinema, others from both left and right lauded and critiqued the cinema for different reasons. The critique often coincided with an intense and anti-democratic form of anti-Americanism. Herbert Jhering warned in 1926 that the American film was more dangerous than Prussian militarism: millions of people were being "co-opted by American taste; they are made equal, made uniform."<sup>1</sup> One prominent leitmotif was the idea that the cinema rendered its audience bovine and passive. For the conservative Frenchman Georges Duhamel, the cinema was the slaughterhouse of culture, and movie theaters were "Gargantuan maws" where hypnotized pilgrims, corralled into long lines, went "like lambs to the slaughter." Reacting to what he saw as the desecration of literature in the form of filmic adaptations, Duhamel wrote:

*And no one cried murder! . . . All those works which from our youth we have stammered with our hearts rather than with our lips, all those sublime songs which at the age of passionate enthusiasms were our daily bread, our study, and our glory . . . were dismembered, hacked to pieces, and mutilated.* (Duhamel, 1931, p. 30)

The apologists of mass culture were responsible for "having allowed the cinema to become the most powerful instrument of moral, aesthetic and political conformism" (ibid., p. 64). While film theorists like Arnheim were trying to decide exactly what kind of art the cinema was, Duhamel denied that the cinema was an art at all: "The cinema has sometimes diverted me and sometimes moved me; it has never required me to rise superior to myself. It is not an art. It is not art" (ibid., p. 37). From a self-consciously elitist perspective, Duhamel ridiculed cinema as "a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety . . . a spectacle that demands no effort, that does not imply any sequence of ideas . . . that excites no hope, if not the ridiculous one of someday being a 'star' at Los Angeles" (ibid., p. 34).

Cultural critic Walter Benjamin took a contrary view. At the end of his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (first published in France in 1936) Benjamin argued, against Duhamel, that the new medium had a progressive epistemological impact. For Benjamin, capitalism planted the seeds of its own destruction by creating conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself. Mass-media forms like photography and the cinema created new artistic paradigms reflective of new historical forces; they could not be judged by the old standards. Anticipating Andy Warhol's "15 minutes of fame," Benjamin argued that in the age of mechanical reproduction every human being had an inalienable right to be filmed. More important, the cinema enriched the field of human perception and deepened critical consciousness of reality. For Benjamin, film's uniqueness derived, paradoxically, from its non-uniqueness, the fact that its productions were multiply available across barriers of time and space, in a situation where easy access made it the most social and collective of the arts. Film's mechanical reproduction triggered a world-historical aesthetic rupture: it destroyed the "aura," the luminous cult-value or presence, of the putatively unique, remote, and inaccessible art object. The modernity of the cinema reveals the artistic aura as the product either of illusory nostalgia or of exploitative domination. Thus critical attention shifts from the venerated object of art to the dialogue

between work and spectator. Just as Dada had turned respectable art into an object of scandal and thus perturbed the passive contemplation of artistic beauty, the cinema had shocked the audience out of its complacency, forcing it to participate actively and critically.

Benjamin turned the much maligned "distraction" of film viewing into a cognitive advantage. Distraction did not entail passivity; rather, it was a liberating expression of collective consciousness, a sign that the spectator was not "spellbound in darkness." Through montage, film administered shock-effects which effectuated a break with the contemplative conditions of bourgeois art consumption. Thanks to mechanical reproduction, film acting, too, lost the literal presence of the performer which characterized the theater, thus diminishing the aura of the individual. (Metz would later argue that the very lack of real presence of the actor would paradoxically induce spectators to invest the "imaginary signifier" with their own projections and thus render the image even more charismatic.) For Benjamin, film exemplified and itself shaped a kind of mutated perception appropriate to a new era of social and technological evolution. Duhamel's critique of film was for Benjamin merely the "same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration of the spectator" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 241). As opposed to the solitary absorption provoked by the reading of a novel, film spectatorship was necessarily gregarious and potentially interactive and critical.<sup>2</sup> The cinema could therefore transform and energize the masses for purposes of revolutionary change. The politicized aesthetics of socially conscious and formally experimental films provided one possible response to fascism as the "aestheticization of politics."

On one level Benjamin's thinking reflected a perennial tendency, evidenced later in McLuhan's utopian claims about the "global village," as well as in the more giddy proclamations of contemporary cyber-theorists, to over-invest in the political and aesthetic possibilities of new media and technologies. And indeed the publication of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" triggered a lively polemic about the social role of film and the mass media. In a series of epistolary responses to Benjamin's essays, Frank-

furt School critical theorist Theodor Adorno attacked Benjamin for a technological utopianism which fetishized technique while ignoring the alienating social functioning of that technique in reality. Adorno expressed skepticism about Benjamin's claims for the emancipatory possibilities of new media and cultural forms. Benjamin's celebration of film as a vehicle for revolutionary consciousness, for Adorno, naively idealized the working class and its supposedly revolutionary aspirations. Adorno worried over the effects of what Frankfurt theorists called the "culture industry," discerning vast potential for alienation and commodification. Ironically, although a man of the left, Adorno expressed the same scorn for the passive popular audience as was shown by an extreme right-winger like Duhamel, but this time reformulated in a Marxist idiom. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno almost seems to echo Duhamel when he says that "every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider or worse" (Adorno, 1978, p. 75). Representing the more pessimistic wing of the Frankfurt School, Adorno placed his faith not in what he regarded as circus-like popular distractions but in what would later be called the difficult "high modernist" art of an Arnold Schoenberg or a James Joyce, art which staged the dissonances of modern life. At the same time, Adorno knew that even the high art of erudite modernists was caught up in capitalist processes, although at the "higher," more sublimated level of patronage, museum exhibition, state subsidy, and independent wealth. High art could be "difficult" precisely because it did not have to sell itself directly on the open market. Nevertheless, high art did have the capacity to dramatize through form the social reality of alienation. What Adorno missed was the fact that popular art, for example jazz, might also be difficult, discontinuous, complex, challenging.

Artistic modernism reached its zenith in the 1920s. But if the 1920s constituted an orgy of theoretical experimentalism, the 1930s were the hangover after the party, as Nazism, fascism, and Stalinism (and in a very different way the Hollywood Studio system) began to close down the various insurrectionary aesthetics and art movements. Thus the 1930s became a period of intense anxiety about the social effects of mass media. Both Benjamin and Adorno were affiliated

with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, which was established in 1923, moved to New York in the 1930s after Hitler came to power, and was reestablished in Germany in the early 1950s. The Frankfurt School, which also included Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and (on its outskirts) Siegfried Kracauer, became a key center of institutional reflection, inaugurating critical studies on mass communication. The Frankfurt School was shaped by vast historical events such as the defeat of left-wing working-class movements in Western Europe after World War I, the degeneration of the Russian revolution into Stalinism, and the rise of Nazism. One of the School's main concerns was to explain why the revolution envisaged by Marx had not occurred. Departing from Benjamin's *via positiva*, they counterposed their own *via negativa*, a faith in the power of critical negation. The Frankfurt School studied the cinema synecdochically, as a part-for-whole emblem of capitalist mass culture, deploying a multifaceted and dialectical approach that paid simultaneous attention to issues of political economy, aesthetics, and reception. Deploying such Marxist concepts as commodification, reification, and alienation they coined the term "culture industry" to evoke the industrial apparatus which produced and mediated popular culture, as well as the market imperatives underlying it. They chose the term "industry" rather than "mass culture" to avoid the impression that culture arises spontaneously from the masses (see Kellner in Miller and Stam, 1999).

In "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," published in 1944 as part of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer outlined their critique of mass culture. That critique formed part of a larger critique of the Enlightenment, whose egalitarian promises of liberation had never been fulfilled. If scientific rationality had on the one hand freed the world from traditional forms of authority, it had also facilitated new, oppressive forms of domination of the kind exemplified by the high-tech Holocaust engineered by the Nazis. But Adorno and Horkheimer were equally critical of liberal capitalist societies, whose cinemas produced spectators as consumers. As opposed to those who saw the mass media as "giving the public what it wanted," Adorno and Horkheimer saw

mass consumption as a consequence of the industry which dictated and channelled public desire. The cinema, as the "*mésalliance* of the novel and photography," created a fictive homogeneity reminiscent of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Commercial films were simply mass-produced commodities engineered by assembly-line techniques, products which themselves stamped out their own passive, automated audience. Adorno's and Horkheimer's overwhelming concern was with the question of ideological legitimation: how does the system integrate individuals into its program and values and what is the role of the media in this process? As they put it, "the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology that enslaves them." The culture industry, caught up as it is in the world of commodification and exchange-value, stupefies, narcotizes, zombifies, and objectifies what is symptomatically called its "target" audience. A difficult, modernist art, in contrast, fosters, for Adorno especially, the development in its audience of the critical capacities necessary for a truly democratic society. Interestingly, Adorno and Horkheimer share with Brecht the critique of "stupefying" art, but unlike Brecht they did not applaud popular forms like boxing, vaudeville, the circus, and slapstick, although they did make an exception for Chaplin. At the same time, their condemnation was not unnuanced. Adorno and Horkheimer did show some sympathy for the undisciplined, anarchic, pre-Taylorized silent cinema, before it became "streamlined." (Adorno's major direct contribution to film theory *per se* was the book - co-written with Hanns Eisler in 1937 - *Composing for the Films* - which discerns progressive possibilities in such techniques as sound-image disjunction, which go against the *Gesamtkunstwerk* tradition.)

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the emergence of the cultural industry signified the death of art as the site of corrosive negativity. The Adorno-Horkheimer denunciations of the culture industry, and indirectly of its audience, were subsequently criticized as simplistic, positing the audience as "cultural dopes" and "couch potatoes." The modernist "difficult" art they praise, meanwhile, has been criticized as elitist. Noël Carroll argues that the idea of "disinterested

art" traces its origins to a misreading of Kant, a hand-me-down aesthetic of "purposeful purposelessness" based on a misunderstanding of "The Analytic of the Beautiful" in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (Carroll, 1998, pp. 89–109). Film theory and cultural theory are still very much under the influence of these debates. The Adorno-Benjamin debates, and the attendant oscillation between melancholic and euphoric attitudes toward the social role of the mass media, returned in force in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Adorno-Horkheimer claim that "real life" has become "indistinguishable from the movies" clearly anticipates Debord's "Society of the Spectacle," Borstin's notion of "pseudo-events," and Baudrillard's proclamations about the "simulacrum." It could also be argued that 1970s proposals for "counter-cinema" and for a cinema of production rather than consumption are indebted to Adorno's call for "difficult" art. Another influential aspect of "Critical Theory," broadly defined, was the attempt by figures such as Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse to forge a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis. Germany before Hitler, after all, was the country where psychoanalysis was strongest, and Frankfurt was also the home of the Frankfurter Psychoanalytisches Institut. Both Freudianism and Marxism were seen there as two revolutionary forms of liberatory thinking; one aimed at transforming the subject, the other at transforming society through collective struggle. This project would be approached differently, and in a Saussurean-Lacanian vocabulary, by Althusserians and theoretical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s and by Slavoj Žižek in the 1990s.

Later theory also took up again the 1930 debates about "realism" which opposed Bertolt Brecht (and Walter Benjamin) to Marxist theorist Georg Lukács. For Lukács, realist literature portrays the social totality through the use of "typical" characters. While Lukács took the novels of Balzac and Stendhal as his model for a dialectical realism, Brecht favored a theater realist in its intentions – aimed at exposing society's "causal network" – but modernist-reflexive in its forms. To cling to the ossified forms of the nineteenth-century realist novel constituted for Brecht a formalistic nostalgia which failed to take altered historical circumstances into account. That particular

artistic formula, for Brecht, had lost its political potency; changing times called for changing modes of representation. Haunted by the Nazis' fondness for overwhelming spectacle which exploited blinkered, visceral emotion, Brecht called for a fragmented, distanced "theater of interruptions" which fostered critical distance through the systematic demystification of dominant social relations. Walter Benjamin (1968) took Brecht's epic theater as a model of how the forms and instruments of artistic production could be transformed in a socialist direction. Epic theater, he argued, "derives a lively and productive consciousness from the fact that it is theater" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 4). Through interruptions, quotations, and tableau effects, epic theater supersedes the old illusionistic, anti-technical, auratic art. Benjamin compared epic theater, somewhat speciously, to film:

*Epic theater proceeds by fits and starts, in a manner comparable to the images on a film strip. Its basic form is that of the forceful impact on one another of separate sharply distinct situations of the play. The songs, the captions, the gestural conventions, differentiate the scenes. As a result intervals tend to occur which destroy illusion. These intervals paralyze the audience's capacity for empathy. (Ibid., p. 21)*

While one might question Benjamin's analogy (since the images on a film strip, unlike the sketches of epic theater, proceed in *apparent* continuity), and while one might wonder if empathy *per se* is necessarily reactionary, such ideas were to have immense impact on the practice and theory of film over subsequent decades.

The Frankfurt School had a major impact on subsequent theories of the culture industry, on theories of reception, and on theories of high modernism and the avant-garde. Walter Benjamin was influential not only through "the age of mechanical reproduction" essay, but also through his ideas on the "author as producer" and on the necessity of artistic as well as social subversion, the idea that revolutionary art must first of all be revolutionary in formal terms, *as art*. His readiness to embrace new forms of mass-mediated art provided a foundational insight for what came to be known as "cultural studies."

His rejection of classical ideals of beauty in favor of an aesthetic of fragments and ruins prepared the way for the postmodern "anti-aesthetic." Benjamin's ideas on allegory and the *trauerspiel*, meanwhile, had an impact on theorists of national allegory like Fredric Jameson and Ismail Xavier. The Frankfurt School, more generally, had a long-distance impact – via such thinkers as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Alexander Kluge, John Berger, Miriam Hansen, Douglas Kellner, Rosewitta Muehler, Roberto Schwarz, Fredric Jameson, Anton Kaes, Gertrud Koch, Thomas Levin, Patrice Petro, Thomas Elsaesser, and many others – who later reworked its theories.

## The Phenomenology of Realism

Apart from debates within Marxism (such as that between Brecht and Lukács about "realism" and between Benjamin and Adorno about the progressive potential of the mass media), the decades following the advent of sound were dominated by arguments about the "essence of cinema," and more specifically by the tensions between the "formative" theorists who thought the artistic specificity of cinema consisted in its radical differences from reality, and the "realists" who thought film's artistic specificity (and its social *raison d'être*) was to relay truthful representations of everyday life. As already discussed, one current of film theory was dominated by "formative" theorists like Rudolf Arnheim (*Film as Art*) and Bela Balázs (*Theory of the Film*), who insisted on film's differences not only from "reality" but also *vis-à-vis* other arts such as theater and the novel. If some theorists, like Arnheim and Balázs, favored an interventionist cinema which flaunted its differences from the "real," other, later theorists, partially under the impact of Italian neo-realism, favored a mimetic, revelatory, and realist cinema. The realist aesthetic predated the cinema, of course, and could trace its roots to the ethical stories of the Bible, to the Greek fascination with surface detail, to Hamlet's "mirror up to nature," on through the realist novel and Stendhal's "un miroir que se promene lelong la rue."

But in the 1940s, realism takes on a new urgency. In a sense, postwar film realism emerged from the smoke and ruins of European cities; the immediate trigger for the mimetic revival was the calamity of World War II. Surveys of film theory too often forget the essential contribution of Italian theorists, including filmmaker-theorists, to the debates about film realism. In the postwar period, Italy became a major scene not only of filmmaking but also of film-theoretical production, through film journals such as *Bianco e Nero*, *Cinema*, *La Revista del Cinema Italiano*, *Cinema Nuovo*, and *Filmcritica*, and through prestigious publication series like "Biblioteca Cinematografica." In his film *Histoires du Cinema*, Godard suggests that there was a historical logic behind this filmic Renaissance. As a country which was formally part of the Axis powers, but which had also suffered under the Axis, Italy had lost its national identity and therefore had to reconstruct it through the cinema. With *Rome Open City*, Italy regained the right to look at itself in the mirror, hence the extraordinary harvest of Italian film. The war and the liberation, filmmaker-theorist Cesare Zavattini argued, had taught filmmakers to discover the value of the real. Against those like the Formalists, who saw art as inescapably conventional and inherently different from life, Zavattini called for annihilating the distance between art and life. The point was not to invent stories which resembled reality, but rather turn reality into a story. The goal was a cinema without apparent mediation, where facts dictated form, and events seemed to recount themselves. (Metz, basing himself on Benveniste's categories, would later call this form of telling "histoire" [story] as opposed to "discours" [discourse].) Zavattini also called for a democratization of the cinema, both in terms of its human subjects and in terms of what kinds of events were *worth* talking about. For Zavattini, no subject was too banal for the cinema. Indeed, the cinema made it possible for ordinary people to know about each other's lives, not in the name of voyeurism but in the name of solidarity.

Guido Aristarco, meanwhile, in his critical essays as well as in his *Storia delle Teoriche del Film*, argued against Zavattini that realism, in the sense of registering daily life, was never simple or unproblematic. Inspired both by the work of Hungarian Marxist



theorist Georg Lukács and by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, Aristarco called for a "critical realism" which would reveal the dynamic causes of social change through exemplary situations and figures. (For an excellent overview of neo-realist theory, see Casetti, 1999.) Partly inspired by the anti-fascist achievements of Italian neo-realism, theorists such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer made the camera's putatively intrinsic realism the cornerstone of a democratic and egalitarian aesthetic. The mechanical means of photographic reproduction, for these theorists, assured the essential objectivity of film. Here we find a converse ju-jitsu from Arnheim's. For Arnheim the cinema's defects (for example, the lack of a third dimension) were a trampoline for artistic excellence. But what Arnheim saw as something to be transcended – film's mechanical reproduction of phenomenal appearances – was for Bazin and Kracauer the very key to its strength. As Bazin put it in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945), "the objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture making" (Bazin, 1967, pp. 13–14). For the first time, as Bazin put it, "an image of the world is framed automatically, without the creative intervention of man" (ibid., p. 13). For Bazin, the fact that the photographer, unlike the painter or poet, could work in the absence of a model guaranteed an ontological bond between the cinematographic representation and what it represents. Since photochemical processes entail a concrete link between the photographic analogon and its referent, the charismatic indexicality of photography was presumed to make possible unimpeachable witness to "things as they are." It is this same "impersonality" that makes film comparable, for Bazin, to the process of embalming and "mummification." The cinema instantiates a deeply rooted desire to replace the world by its double. The cinema combines static photographic mimesis with the reproduction of Time: "the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, changed, mummified as it were" (ibid., p. 15). In an overly veristic formulation subsequently critiqued by film semiologists, Bazin went so far as to claim that "the photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" (ibid., p. 14).

The formative/realist dichotomy – Lumière vs. Méliès, mimesis vs. discourse – has often been overdrawn, obscuring what the two currents have in common.<sup>1</sup> Both relied on an essentialist notion of the cinema – as being intrinsically good at certain things and not others – and both were normative and exclusivist: they thought that the cinema should follow a certain path. Both formalist and realist currents featured their own brand of "progressive" teleology of technique. For Arnheim, the advent of sound derailed what would have been the normal train-like progress toward a consciously artificial cinema, while for Bazin the "Old Testament" of silence, in a telling formula which reveals the religious-providential substratum to his thinking, prepared the way for its fulfillment in the "New Testament" of sound. Although Bazin did praise what he calls the "narrational dialectic" of opposing styles in *Citizen Kane*, stylistic counterpoint, or what Bakhtin called the "mutual relativization" of styles, was not generally seen as a viable option.

For Bazin, the valorization of realism had an ontological, apparitional, historical, and aesthetic dimension. In apparitional terms, realism was the mediumistic realization of what Bazin (1967) called the "myth of total cinema." This myth animated the inventors of the medium: "In their imaginations they saw the cinema as a total and complete representation of reality; they saw in a trice the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief" (ibid., p. 20). Thus silent, black-and-white cinema gave way to cinema in sound and color, part of an inexorable technological progression toward an ever-more persuasive realism. (One discerns an interesting tension in Bazin between the mimetic megalomania of the desire for a total simulacrum of life, and the quiet, self-effacing modesty of his stylistic preferences.) In 1963 Charles Barr extended Bazin's myth to include the development of widescreen cinema, and the phrase "total cinema" obviously resonates with later innovations such as 3-D, IMAX, Dolby Sound, and Virtual Reality. (In a reverse chronology, Jean-Louis Baudry's 1970s linking of the cinema to Plato's allegory of the cave certainly has Bazin's "myth of total cinema" as its dialogizing backdrop.)

Bazin also generated novel accounts of film history and aesthetics.

In his essay "The Evolution of Film Language" he postulated a kind of triumphal progress of realism in the cinema not unlike a telescoped version of Auerbach's account in *Mimesis* of an ever-more verisimilar western literature. Bazin distinguished between those filmmakers who placed their faith in the "image" and those who placed their faith in "reality." The "image" filmmakers, especially the German Expressionists and the Soviet montage filmmakers, dissected the integrity of the time-space continuum of the world, cutting it up into fragments. The "reality" directors, in contrast, deployed the duration of the long take in conjunction with staging in depth to create a multi-plane sense of reality in relief. Bazin's annointed realist tradition began with Lumière, continued with Flaherty and Murnau, was strengthened by Welles and Wyler, and reached quasi-teleological fulfillment with Italian neo-realism. Bazin particularly valued the down-to-earth, relatively eventless plots, the unstable character motivations, and the relatively slow and viscous quotidian rhythms characteristic of early neo-realist films. He distinguished between a shallow Zola-like naturalism, which seeks superficial verisimilitude, and a profound realism which plumbs the depths of the real. For Bazin, realism had less to do with literal mimetic adequation between filmic representation and the "world out there" than with the testimonial honesty of *mise-en-scène*. Deleuze takes on certain aspects of Bazin's historical teleology in his 1980s work, especially in terms of neo-realism as a crucial break.

According to Bazin, new approaches to editing and *mise-en-scène*, especially long-take cinematography and depth of field, allowed the filmmaker to respect the spatiotemporal integrity of the pro-filmic world. These advances facilitated a more thoroughgoing mimetic representation, one linked, in Bazin's thinking, to a spiritual notion of "revelation," a theory with theological overtones of the presence of the divine in all things. Indeed, Bazin's critical language – real presence, revelation, faith in the image – often reverberates with religiosity. Cinema becomes a sacrament; an altar where a kind of transubstantiation takes place. At the same time, this in-depth conception was linked for Bazin to a political notion of the democratization of filmic perception, in that the spectator enjoyed the freedom

to scan the multi-planar field of the image for its meaning. Although Bazin did speak in favor of "impure cinema," i.e. a mixture of theater and film, in general Bazinian stylistics left little room for the self-conscious mixing of styles, and indeed Bazin played down the mixing of long takes and montage, of Expressionism and realism, that characterized the work even of some of his favorite directors, such as Orson Welles. Bazin's favored techniques like the single-shot sequence, as Peter Wollen points out, could also be used for ends diametrically opposed to those endorsed by Bazin; for example, *de-realization* and reflexivity.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Bazin was never the "naive realist" that he is often caricatured as being; he was well aware of the artifice required to construct a realist image. The automatization of the cinematic apparatus is a necessary but not sufficient condition for realism. Indeed, Bazin is on some levels a formalist, in that he is less concerned with any specific "content" than with a style of *mise-en-scène*. Nor can Bazin be reduced to a theorist only of realism; his ideas about genre, authorship, and "classical cinema" also had immense impact.

Like Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer was also concerned with issues of realism, and like him he cannot be reduced to being a "naive realist." As Thomas Levin points out, Kracauer is often made out to be a kind of anti-Benjamin, when in fact he had much in common with Benjamin. Indeed, it is ironic that 1970s film theoreticians, in their anti-veristic rage, often used Kracauer as a kind of whipping boy, when in many ways his views were aligned with theirs. Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament*, dedicated as it was to topical analyses of ephemera such as street maps, hotel lobbies, and boredom, clearly anticipated Barthes's *Mythologies*. Some of the confusion arises from the fact that Kracauer's works in the 1920s and 1930s – especially the essays later collected in *The Mass Ornament* – only became available decades after they were written (1977 in Germany, 1995 in English).

In the background of Kracauer's analysis was a concern with the democratic and anti-democratic potentialities of the mass media. In *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), a study of German cinema from 1919 to 1933, Kracauer showed how a highly artificial Weimar cin-

ema "really" reflected "profound psychological tendencies" and the institutionalized madness of German life. Films could reflect the national psyche because (1) they are not individual but collective productions and (2) they address and mobilize a mass audience, not through explicit themes or discourses but through the implicit, the unconscious, the hidden, the unsaid desires. Within Kracauer's figural approach Weimar cinema foreshadowed the Caligaresque insanity of Nazism. Kracauer discerned a kind of morbid teleology in Expressionist masterpieces such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1921) and *M* (1931), a movement toward Nazism evidenced in the authoritarian tendencies of the films themselves. In this sense, Kracauer explores another kind of social mimesis, to wit the historicity of form itself as figuring social situations. In aesthetic terms this cinema represented the "complete triumph of the ornamental over the human. Absolute authority asserts itself by arranging people under its domination in pleasing designs" (Kracauer, 1947, p. 93; Kracauer's analysis indirectly enabled Susan Sontag in "Fascinating Fascism" to align the aesthetics of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* with those of Busby Berkeley musicals). While not completely persuasive, and vitiated by a sense of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, Kracauer's overall argument interestingly displaces the question of realism onto another level, whereby films are seen as representing, in an allegorical manner, not literal history but rather the deep, roiling, unconscious obsessions of national desire and paranoia.

Much of the view of Kracauer as the ayatollah of realism is based on his magnum opus *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), which laid the foundations for what he called a "materialist aesthetics." Kracauer spoke of the film medium's "declared preference for nature in the raw" and its "natural vocation for realism." For Kracauer, film was uniquely equipped to register what he variously called "material reality," "visible reality," "physical nature," or simply "nature." At times, Kracauer seems to posit a quasi-Platonic hierarchy of realities, running from the "sort of real" to the "really real," with "natural reality" at the apex. Although everything which exists is hypothetically filmable, some subjects are *inherently* cinematic. Within a kind of romantic ecologism, Kracauer seems to

want to keep nature "virginal" and "intact." But a skeptic might ask why a film of a staged performance, or a shot of a computer screen, is less "real" than a shot of a forest. As usual, the implicit ontological claims of the word "real" lead into dead ends and aporias. Writing in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, Kracauer was perfectly aware of the dystopian, Hitlerian potential of the mass media. Nevertheless, he maintained his faith in film as the artistic expression of a democratizing modernity, besieged but not yet overcome by barbarism and catastrophe. Central to Kracauer's valorization of the cinema was its capacity to register the quotidian, the contingent, and the random, the world in its endless becoming. As Miriam Hansen puts it:

*Kracauer's investment in the photographic basis of film does not rest on the iconicity of the photographic sign, at least not in the narrow sense of a literal resemblance or analogy with a self-identical object. Nor, for that matter, does he conceive of the indexical, the photochemical bond that links image and referent, in any positivist way as merely anchoring the analogical "truth" of the representation. Rather, the same indexicality that allows photographic film to record and figure the world also inscribes the image with moments of temporality and contingency.<sup>3</sup>*

Although Kracauer at times seems to confuse aesthetics with ontology, he was not ultimately the partisan of a single style such as neo-realism. The anarchistic slapstick of a Mack Sennett, for Kracauer, could critically foreground the well-ordered abuses of instrumental reason. (Here Kracauer anticipates the later French radical deconstructionist embrace of the films of Jerry Lewis.)

Film for Kracauer stages a rendezvous with contingency, with the unpredictable and open-ended flux of everyday experience. It is no accident that Kracauer cites that other great theorist of democratic realism, Erich Auerbach, who speaks of the modern novel's registering of "the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair; it passes unaffected by them, as daily life."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps in visceral recoil from the authoritarian certitudes and monumentalist hierar-

chies of fascist aesthetics, Kracauer, like Auerbach, stresses the "ordinary business of living." The vocation of the filmmaker, in this conception, was to initiate the spectator into the passionate knowledge and critical love of everyday existence. Speaking overall, Kracauer's work anticipates Metz's later emphasis on the analogy between film and daydream, Jameson's work on national allegory and the "political unconscious," and the cultural studies notion of culture as a "discursive continuum."

Theorists of this period were also concerned with the perennial issue of cinematic specificity, and whether this specificity was of a technical, stylistic, or thematic nature, or some combination of the three. Bazin asked the question in his title *What is Cinema?* and answered it by grounding cinema's essence in the charismatic indexicality of photography, with its existential link to the pro-filmic referent. Kracauer, similarly, saw cinema as rooted in photography and its registry of the indeterminate, random flow of everyday life. Film theory in the 1950s and 1960s also revisited the perennial question of cinema's relation to the other arts. Theorists quarreled, more specifically, about precisely *which* arts or media should be seen as allies or antecedents. Should cinema flee from theater or embrace it, see itself as analogous to painting or deny any relationship? Film theory is particularly haunted by its prestigious forebear, literature. A famous essay by Bazin was entitled "For an Impure Cinema: In Defense of Adaptation." Others were less interested in adaptation than in the fact that filmmakers should proceed *like* novelists, an idea implicit in Alexandre Astruc's metaphor of the "camera pen." Maurice Scherer (the future Eric Rohmer) once wrote: "Cinema should recognize the narrow dependence which links it, not to painting or to music, but to the very arts from which it had always tried to distance itself," literature and the theater (Clerc, 1993, p. 48). Cinema, in sum, need not give up its right to draw on or be inspired by other arts.

In postwar France film theory marched hand-in-hand with developments in philosophical phenomenology, the dominant movement of the period. Following up on Husserl, philosophers returned to "things themselves" and their relation to embodied, intentional

consciousness. The leading phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty, discerned a kind of "match" not only between the film medium and the postwar generation but also between film and philosophy. "The movies," he argued, "are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and the world, and the expression of one in the other. . . . The philosopher and the moviemaker share a certain way of being, a certain view of the world which belongs to a generation."<sup>5</sup> Anticipating Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty saw film and philosophy as cognate forms of intellectual labor. In "The Film and the New Psychology," based on a 1945 lecture, Merleau-Ponty discussed the phenomenological parameters of the cinema as a "temporal gestalt" whose palpable realism was even more exact than that of the real world itself. A film is not thought, Merleau-Ponty pointed out, "it is perceived." Applying an amalgam of Gestalt psychology and existential phenomenology to the cinema, Merleau-Ponty suggested, would provide a psychological basis for the basic structures of the cinematic experience as a mediated experience of being-in-the-world. A number of later theorists came to build on Merleau-Ponty-style phenomenology, for example Henri Agel in *Le Cinéma et le Sacré* (1961), Amadee Ayfre in *Conversion aux images* (1964), Albert Laffay in *Logique du cinéma* (1964), Jean-Pierre Meunier in his *Les Structures de l'expérience filmique* (1969), Jean Mitry in his two-volume *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (1963-5), and much later, Dudley Andrew in "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film" (1978) and *Major Film Theories* (1976), and Alan Casebier in *Film and Psychology* (1991). In *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992) Vivian Sobchack used Merleau-Ponty's method of phenomenological interpretation to suggest that "The film experience not only *represents* and reflects upon the prior direct perceptual experience of the filmmaker *by means of* the modes and structures of direct and reflective perceptual experience, but also *presents* the direct and reflective experience of a perceptual and expressive existence *as the film*" (Sobchack, 1992, p. 9).

Concurrent with Merleau-Ponty's work, an academically based French movement called *Filmology* gave rise to a research institute (Association pour la Recherche Filmologique), an international jour-

nal (*La Revue internationale de filmologie*), and a collective text (*L'Univers filmique*). The movement's inaugural tome was Gilbert Cohen-Seat's *Essai sur les principes d'une philosophie du cinéma* (Essay on the Principles of a Philosophy of the Cinema, 1946). Partly inspired by phenomenology, the "filmologists" sought to organize various academic disciplines – sociology, psychology, aesthetics, linguistics, psychophysiology – around the project of a comprehensive and scientific theory of film. At their First International Congress, the filmologists defined five categories of interest: (1) Psychological and Experimental Research; (2) Research in the Development of Cinematic Empiricism; (3) Aesthetic, Sociological and General Philosophical Research; (4) Comparative Research on Film as a Means of Expression; and (5) Normative Research – application of studies of the filmic fact to problems of teaching, of medical psychology, etc. (Lowry, 1985, p. 50). In subsequent years Henri Agel wrote on "Cinematic Equivalences of Literary Composition and Language," Anne Souriau wrote on "Filmic Functions of Costumes and Decor," and Edgar Morin and Georges Friedman wrote on "Sociology of the Cinema." In his paper "Filmologie et esthetique comparée," Souriau argues, somewhat problematically, that four structural properties of the novel – time, tempo, space, and angle of approach – render it difficult to "translate" into film.

The filmology group undertook a systematic study of all aspects of the cinema, from the "cinematic situation" (theater, screen, and spectator) to the social rituals surrounding the cinema, to the phenomenology and even the physiology of spectatorship. The filmologists elaborated a number of concepts – "cinematic situation" (Cohen-Seat), "diegesis" (Etienne Souriau), "cognitive mechanisms" (Rene and Bianka Zazzo) – which were subsequently deployed (and reworked) by both Metzian semiotics and, much later, cognitive theory. In Souriau's proposal (in *La Correspondance des arts*, 1947) for a comparative study of the specificities of the various arts, for example, we see the partial source of Metz's attempts to classify and differentiate media in terms of their "specificity," just as Romano's work on the "character of reality" provoked by film anticipates Metz's work on "the impression of reality." Filmology's investigation of

such issues as the perception of movement, the impression of depth, the role of immediate and deferred memory, motor reactions, empathic projections and the physiology of spectatorship, by the same token, prefigured many of the concerns of cognitive theory in the 1980s.

## The Cult of the Auteur

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a movement called auteurism came to dominate film criticism and theory. Auteurism was in some ways the expression of an existentialist humanism inflected by phenomenology. Echoing Sartre's pithy summary of existentialism – "existence precedes essence" – Bazin claimed that the *cinéma's* "existence precedes its essence." Bazin's vocabulary, moreover, as James Naremore points out, was a Sartrean one, fond of words like "freedom," "fate," and "authenticity" (Naremore, 1998, p. 25). Bazin's essays "Ontology of the Photographic Image" and "Myth of Total Cinema" were roughly concurrent with Sartre's essay entitled "Existentialism and Humanism." Sartre and Bazin share a fundamental tenet: "the centrality of the activity of the philosophical subject, the premise of all phenomenologies" (Rosen, 1990, p. 8). Auteurism was also the product of a cultural formation which included film magazines, ciné-clubs, the French cinématèque, and film festivals, and it was fueled by the screening of newly available American films during the Liberation period.

Novelist and filmmaker Alexandre Astruc prepared the way for auteurism with his 1948 essay "Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera-Pen," in which he argued that the cinema was becoming a new means of expression analogous to painting or the novel. The filmmaker, Astruc claimed, should be able to say "I" like the novelist or poet.<sup>1</sup> The "camera-pen" formula valorized the *act* of filmmaking; the director was no longer merely the servant of a pre-existing text (novel, screenplay) but a creative artist in his/her own right. François Truffaut also played an important role with his stra-