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## Moving Pictures

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A MOVIE is a sequence of pictures made with a camera. Since the camera defines the medium, all movies have a strong connection to the camera art and its history; movies are patent heirs to all the artistic claims staked by the camera at its very beginnings. But photographic pretensions have as their background a concern for the proper character and function of painting, and the camera arose specifically to confront the nineteenth-century painter.

Now the movies, as they continue to further camera work in the mode of realistic pictorial sequences, are still engaging with certain painters of the past. The far-reaching picture-making possibilities shown by the camera at its very outset were perceived by eyes trained in the strategies of painters for rendering reality inside a frame; and such artistic strategies were known, at least by artists themselves, to have evolved from earlier methods. Whatever the camera could do as illuminator of the visual world was first seen in painter's terms, backed up by centuries of painterly tradition.

Photography itself quickly escaped those terms. The camera established and expanded its own separate empire of the eye, and eventually, as a reproductive tool and agent, turned back to consumer painting itself. But the original link between the pictorial scope of the camera and the long history of painterly aims was an authentic one, since all picture-making forms a common heritage. Certain painters in the later nineteenth century such as Manet, Degas, and Mallabotte responded to the camera even more creatively than the current state of camera art would have allowed photography itself to do. It was painters who were able to lead the camera beyond its ten current possibilities and project it into the cinematic realm.

But to do this, they drew not just on the newly revealed capacities of camera composition and expression but on an existing painterly tradition as well, one that history-minded artists could see was already aligned with early versions of camera vision. This was the

tradition of northern European realism that has flourished most famously in seventeenth-century Holland but whose roots lay in the great Flemish works of the fifteenth century. It had a much later flowering in northern European painting of the romantic period; and still later this same cinematic impulse appears in the visionary landscapes and distinctive genres of nineteenth-century America, as well as in the work of such French realists as Fantin-Latour, Bonvin, and Ribot on whom the camera had its most immediate artistic impact. Many painters in the complexly interwoven history of European art had shared in the particularly northern cinematic impulse without being themselves Nordic, having learned from the original Flemish and Dutch examples long before the camera existed. Velazquez, Chardin, and Goya all had affinities with northern art; and their works have contributed to the pictorial tradition that led to modern cinema, even more than to the opposing classical one that inexorably led to modern painting.

For five centuries realistic painting in northern Europe had been expressed in what Kenneth Clark calls the *Alternative Convention* — a mode of rendering visible reality in art that was fundamentally different from the classicizing tradition of realism established by the Italian Renaissance artists and theorists. One way to describe what they were doing is to say they invented a cinema in painterly terms. There was more to this than using narrative material and rendering natural appearances convincingly — Italian Renaissance painters were very good at both of those. But a cinematic art has a way first of investing natural appearances with their own absolute meaning and then of incorporating the viewer into the universe created by such appearances. The viewer is himself encompassed by the terms inside the frame so that his responses and acceptances need no instruction, no mediation, no prior knowledge, no patent agreement with an artist about the meaning of what he is seeing. Just such effects were managed by the painters of the North.

The classical tradition in art, founded on the ideals attributed to a revived antiquity, embraced what was believed to be a higher aim than a simple grip on the beholder through his naked eye. A painting could be a microcosm, an independent universe, but the terms on which it came into existence to engage the beholder had to

be those of an acknowledged creator, implicitly modeled on the divine creator. Such acknowledgment had to be perpetually evoked, so that every stroke of the artist's brush, his every minute disposition inside the painted world, said to the gazing eye, you must know that I have made this. The painter thus performs for the viewer; his act is what you see.

When the camera began, it seemed to destroy or at least to sidestep this function of the painter as vicar of our responses to the visible world. Between the actual scene and the picture made for the beholding eye came only some technical magic. No forming hand showed the force of a transforming mind and will; the whole thing was a trick of the light, arousing cheap wonder and stupefaction. In 1936, Focillon wrote in his essay on the artist's hand about "the cruel inertia of the photograph, attained by a handless eye, repelling our sympathy even while attracting it, a marvel of light but a passive monitor. Photography is like the art of another planet . . . the hand never intervenes to spread over it the warmth and flow of human life." But moviegoers know that the hand is unnecessary; human warmth may flow straight from the eye of the moving camera itself.

Movement and light create the cinema image out of phenomena in the world, and in this way they bring it closer to certain painters' work than still photographs ever are. A photograph may indeed compel and fascinate, as Focillon says and Susan Sontag reaffirms, but the movie screen engulfs. Modern responses to movies, not to photographs, are more like what certain engulfing painters of the past were obviously after; and the "handless eye" was in fact one of their secrets.

Long before photography, chiaroscuro modes of realistic picture making had been developed in the north of Europe in regions where light itself has the character of a rare treasure to be sought and kept, a precious source to be carefully tapped. The greatest northern painters, beginning in the fifteenth century used light as a general medium, as if it were alive, inviting it and coaxing it to expand and create its own visions, just as the movie camera does. For Italian painters, on the other hand, the pervasive glare of the sun needed to be kept at bay, mediated by art, diffused into brilliant color, and tempered by controlled modeling into refined shapes. The artist's

hand intervened to modify the crude light that made phenomena too harsh for a direct gaze. But in paintings by Van Eyck or Hugo van der Goes, or later by Vermeer and DeHooch, the "reality" of the image, like that in a movie frame, depends on the sense that the eye has been directly engaged, through light alone, by the phenomena — by each thing itself, not by an idealizing transmutation or harmonizing version of it. Painted light, imitating the action of seen light, can give this sense that the world of the picture is actual — it becomes seamlessly part of this world, even while remaining a picture in a frame. It does not fool or please the eye; it is part of the eye's experience. This "photographic" method, whether applied in paint or by the camera, gives a peculiar kind of "reality" to the phenomena it records — an atmosphere, a presence, the look of having a distilled meaning.

A picture made this way does not show forms outlined and modeled by a painter's learned and informing hand, or whipped into shape by the brilliance of a tutored brush; it does not show color seized out of nature to be an elemental formal tool, manipulated and harnessed into leading its own vibrant autonomous life. It does not show cleverly created artificial space, a stage box populated by ravishingly believable fictions. It seems to be something conjured by the artist, not wrought. Light behaves inside the frame just as it does outside it; and the artist seems to stand back, saying like the camera, behold what there is, see what I have seen. Scrupulously hard-edged details are quite unnecessary to this effect; it can be created entirely by tonality rendered with flecks and smudges, as in Rembrandt or Goya. It was probably the meticulous Van Eyck, however, who first achieved entire success with rendering natural lighting, and his own understanding of its effect appears in his inscription on the Arnolfini marriage portrait: "[J]ohannes de Eyck fuit hic," or "Jan van Eyck was here," not only witnessing the wedding but "seeing" the scene into existence for us, just as if paint had nothing to do with it.

In the fifteenth century, one aspect of the northern use of light was the illusionistic rendering of surface. In the great Flemish paintings, the textures of fur and glass, of stone, gold, and skin were famous in their time for their uncanny distinctiveness; they even

produced a certain discomfort along with admiration. And here is where the psychological dimension of "photographic" image making first appeared. The "handless eye," impartially and relentlessly focused on the variable appearances of phenomena, seems to expose not just the phenomena but the viewer, too. Naked representations of separate objects, using light effects apparently unedited by an ideal of visual or ideological harmony, have an unsettling impact: things that look too real force a relation to us, not to each other. What are we to make of them? Their perfection and their totality seem to charge them with meaning: but what do they mean? And what are they asking of us? It is as if the artist had left the meaning to be provided by the viewer. And indeed, allegorical significance has for generations been energetically read into many paintings in the northern tradition as if it had been pulled into them, snared and tugged by the sharp hook of the charged atmosphere. The presence of objects and persons manifested by northern light is a steady invitation, even an imperative demand. Ambiguous genre works in the seventeenth-century Dutch tradition have had elaborate moral meanings attached to them on the basis not of hard evidence but of the strong feelings of mysterious awareness and expectation they generate.

In the classical Italian Renaissance mode, on the other hand, phenomena patently submit to the sovereignty of creative artistic will; and so that mode saw its descendants flourish in baroque rhetoric, rococo elegance, neoclassic and romantic historical narrative, Impressionist vibrance, and modern formal abstraction. The meanings of separate phenomena in a classic picture can be relied on to be primarily nourishing to the internal coherence of the whole. The artist conducts the painting like a symphony, standing up in front; all parts clearly serve a sustaining artistic purpose, however arbitrary their choice and arrangement may appear. The painting holds itself and its meaning together in the net of its own form. If it is realistic, any inexplicable action on the part of pictured figures, or cryptic arrangements of landscape, architecture, and objects — as in Giorgione's *Tempesta*, for example, or Botticelli's *Primavera*, or some Pre-Raphaelite narrative works — may invite study, philosophical or theological speculation, and historical interpretation; but they will not be directly unsettling. They will not make inordinately

direct emotional and psychological demands. The composition, palette, the painterly or linear rendering, all the obviously achieved unity of paint and surface will keep the picture inside a work of art and keep the viewer safe — safe from uneasiness, and safe to feel whatever pleasure and profit that unity itself affords. No matter how turbulent or peculiar the action inside the frame, it can get out. What does get out is the message of art itself that carries: subject in solution, like the music in an opera. Strong emotional demands are made, but indirectly by the artist through the paint and not by the subject.

Actions and objects in movies get straight at the viewer in a way that seems utterly at odds with the classic aims of painting, even without considering the difference between a moving and a still image. In their essential looks, films move us with that kind of pictorial command, created by their particular mode of realism, that many painters do not ever wish to make — that unmediated appeal that goes straight through the eye to the feelings and leaves the declared industry of the artist out. Much painting made this way, like much cinema art, has been said to use cheap effects because it works "sensorially" on the viewer instead of drawing him out of himself in an artist's orbit and subduing him to an artist's terms.

In a figurative picture, light alone can do this work better than any use of line and color, even of story and action. Almost a century of black and white cinematography has proved this, even more than has photography; but both painters and especially graphic artists had known it long before. The look of trees silhouetted against a glowing sky, or of beams slanting through a window to gild the shadows inside a dark room, the look of water sparkling in the hot afternoon of firelight on faces, of torchlight on stone and candlelight on sails — such phenomena have obviously had raw impact for centuries, not in art but in life. For human creatures dependent on the sun, the action of light has an unavoidable primal drama, and inevitably underlies imaginative constructions. The universal dramatic relation between light and vision has forged the metaphors for achieving redemption, for gaining understanding, for acquiring knowledge, for all transcendence. Consequently, light in figurative art, Van Eyck discovered, has a profound edge over any other form

element. If the action of natural light can be harnessed in a religious picture, for example, it can manifest spiritual transfiguration and illumination simply by showing the real light of day on the right group of common objects. They will seem to fill with meaning, just as the whole world seems to fill with it when dawn breaks. And so an ordinary stable can effectively be shown as the sacred birthplace of the Redeemer, not by applying stagy spotlights or supernatural gold rays, but just by showing exactly how thin daylight filters through the uneven timbers of a broken door. Two centuries later, a similar rush of human meaning seems to fill the room where a woman is standing at her kitchen window and nothing at all is happening, except for milk pouring out and light coming in.

Here is the great secret of moviemaking and the power of the whole cinematic dimension in art; light does not stay still. The camera, that can go on to make film drama out of action in time and space, has already by its very nature engaged our feelings about the movement of the earth and sun simply by making art out of the action of light. The quality of movement in Vermeer's still kitchen is not carried in the rendering of arrested human action — it is in the surge of feeling that attaches to the perception of light's motion. The offering of light's pictured action to the gazing eye carries with it the analogy to an offer of enlightenment: the picture is a discovery. But at the same time, the still image is a lesson in perpetual continuity. The moment is not one instant, but a dip into a flow of light that must keep changing, that shows what both is and is not a present moment, a moving present that is always full of both hope and loss. And so it is like a sequence of movie frames, not like a photograph that tries to freeze the light. The still image is laden with constant shift, like life itself.

For the eye, only light and its accompanying shadows are needed to make the world. Color, shape, and texture utterly die in the dark. The passage of every daylight hour changes all relationships between light and shadow in the seen world, as it changes the character of all color, and artificial lighting is itself always a reference to the ineluctable cycle of day and night. Everything directly seen at all is seen in motion, since light itself moves; and so not only does nature never stay the same, it never stays *looking* the same.

Consequently, any mode of visual art, like Vermeer's or like the movies, that makes this point about light in terms of human experience is bound to be very compelling. It engages our deepest feelings about our whole relation to time, vision, and material things: our sense of all transience. Movies always do just that, whatever style of filmmaking they are cast in, and whatever else they do.

And so the dialectic of light and dark ensures the emotional potency of any movie. It is the black-and-white ones that acknowledge this; but films in color also draw their power from the same source, the mutable chiaroscuro that makes us see and know the mutable world. The vivid force of color can only live in it by its leave and never alone. Recent advances in color cinematography are in fact largely a matter of improvements in lighting. In earlier movies the color tended to flatten and deaden the natural chiaroscuro of the medium, and as Stanley Cavell points out, they seemed unrea and inexpressive in consequence, less rather than more like nature. Movies redouble the effect of light's motion by actually moving. The picture never stands still, just as light never does — and just as the eye never does. The moving eye is the other half of moving light, the analogue of the seeking heart and searching mind. The fixed gaze is the property of death; the living eye is in motion always ranging for food. Again, modes of art using human experience for their subject that both engage the scanning eye and suggest its analogy to the inner life can rely on a raw emotional pull. In movies the camera itself is a seeking gaze, demanding enlightenment; and it can also give the effect of satisfying the eye's immediate prior longings at every instant. The camera unerringly finds what the bodily eye and the mind's eye are both unconsciously lusting for. Movies are thus all voyages of psychic discovery, trips so much like dreams that memory can confuse the two.

The moving eye as the engine of psychic movement is open, and it signifies openness to experience — the constant susceptibility of the inner life. Using the movement of light and eyes, films work directly on the psyche just as Van Eyck's religious pictures did, only in a sacred context it was called the soul. The Flemish paintings were famous for arousing pious feeling and expressing it almost too acutely. They did it not just by shedding light on the breaking of woolen folds

and the wrinkling of knuckles, and striking the soul with truth as the eye is struck with phenomena, but by putting the soul itself in motion. In art, for the soul to be moved, the eye must move; and so, apart from the light, the painting must move.

To make this happen, the picture plane—the effect of a flat, fixed, and containing surface—must seem to disappear. Natural lighting goes a long way toward creating this illusion, but it is not the only thing that does. The forms inside the frame can be so arranged that the frame itself seems to be in motion through space, the action inside it perpetually going on—and so the eye may move over it, or even in and out of it, with the random scan it uses on real life. The sense of the frame potentially moving from side to side or up and down is wrought by any composition based on an ideal of the arbitrary and the unstable. Looking at the scene from just here, everything arranges itself thus; but as we look, we can plainly see that another perspective would do just as well, or still another even better. We could obviously shift a little to the left, or climb up and look down: we might just see a little more of the horse over here, or less of the shrubbery over there, more sky or fewer townfolk. The visual field seems constantly subject to rearrangement, just as it is in the daily life of the eye, and of the attention, and of the feelings.

Paintings that continually suggest all this turn the frame into an empty screen where action in and out and to and fro is always imminent, and the eye and the psyche are floating, exposed to possibilities just as in a film. This effect appears in Hugo van der Goes, but it shows up much later in Goya, in Caillebotte, Vuillard, and Munch. Such art unsettles rather than soothes, and raises expectations rather than satisfying them. Like film, it suggests a great deal more than it states; and so it continually makes nebulous emotional demands on the viewer.

All this is redoubled moreover when the actual subject matter inside the frame is recognizably naturalistic, even ritualized and conventional. The possibilities outside the frame, or in a differently chosen frame, can make even a trite subject ambiguous and suggestively incomplete. The motion in movies partly consists of this same uneasy potentiality. In any such art, the demand is for a vital sort of meditation, a condition of steady psychic action—as in dreaming,

fantasizing, or in ordinary seeing. In painting of this kind, the fixity of any image must be done so that it keeps our private meditation the move. We are never really taken out of ourselves; we stay in ourselves as we participate. And the picture keeps shifting to include our inner movements in its own motion, to allow room for our own conscious lives.

There are many more ways to make a painting move. A painter may avoid all familiarly stylized cadences in the figural poses achieve a look of no fixed instant but of a progression. This means insisting on a slight ambiguity of form, perhaps even an awkwardness, so that the shapes taken by bodies become abstract and unfixed to preconceived notions of the action portrayed. They cannot immediately read: they must be *watched*. Georges de la Tour, if Rembrandt, was very good at this—it is an anticlassic strategy great force. Similarly, by tipping the pictured floor down toward our feet a painter can keep the frame always moving toward us, mysteriously enlarging so that we feel compelled to move into the picture, where the light is already in motion and ready to fall on just as on the moving subject. At the same time the reverse motion occurs, especially in small Dutch interiors with visible doorways and openings—the frame is both coming to enclose us as retreating, drawing us with it after the light, like a tunnel. This the engulfing effect, the camera movement that comes to claim the viewer, acknowledging no barrier between the action and the inner life.

The effect is the opposite of the one that stays at a fixed distance inside a still frame and weaves its pictorial spell, to entrance us in stillness before it. That is the effect of pictures by Leonardo or Rubens, for example, at which the eye tends to stare as at a whirling gold watch, and the feet to stand rooted—or even to back away. The movement inside such pictures is autonomous, the vibration self-generated. It is an incantation, humming with the constant interplay of color, the satisfying accord of shapes and volumes, the magnetic poetry of line, or only with the dazzling array of strokes dealt by a masterly wrist, tracks that the ensorcelled eye cannot resist tracing in their dance around the confines of the plane. Realist narrative couched in such terms exerts an enormous power: the art

tion has been woven like a charm and seems like fate. But it is never our fate.

Gazing at some great paintings in that mode can turn you to stone or stop your breath—they invoke the artifice of eternity and transcend the common business of living, even while they may portray it. But the “moving” picture makes the eye mirror the psyche’s mundane flutter and invites it both to move into the picture and then to stay free inside it, free to scan, to pause, to close in and move back, to seek its own path. The uncertain path of private feeling is correspondingly opened up, and so we project the motions of our own souls into the picture, where they engage with the action.

In paintings by Rembrandt such as the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1646) in Munich, or the very late *Conspiracy of Julius Civilis* in Stockholm, inspired lighting puts the atmosphere into dynamic motion, so that it perpetually overflows the space and reaches toward the viewer: meanwhile the figural style and compositional mode suggest continuous behavior in a shifting frame. The result is moving drama without the need of any bright color, any vigorous action, or any sharp surface detail. Its motion moves us, whatever the subject; and we answer with that emotional response that follows the response of the eye to light. Just as in cinema, the narrative action inside the picture is psychologically freighted in advance and needs no theatrical emphasis or conventional rhetoric. Gestures and postures, facial expressions and drapery movements may be extremely muted, unstylized, and unfocused, and yet achieve maximum impact.

Rembrandt’s genius for rendering all experience as psychological drama and giving such immediacy to all historical, legendary, or contemporary narrative—portraits, too—springs directly from his famous skill at manipulating light as the conduit of meaning. The facial and bodily expressiveness he mastered so well would be less telling if he had worked primarily with color, like the much later Expressionists, instead of with tonality. Shadow, which in art is what shows that light is present, has a long history of signifying inwardness, the dark of the interior self. Used discreetly with light on faces and figures, it conveys the idea of inward change or introspection going on, while the light invites from without or strives to penetrate.

Using almost no figures at all, Turner achieved a similar charged emotional effect with landscape by using light as if it were the agent of physical turbulence and cataclysm. The great Turners are cinematic because of this method—the lighting works directly on the feelings, so as to render wind and water in its distinctive emotional terms. No detachment about the scene portrayed is permissible or even possible.

Because they are made out of forward movement, as well out of the fundamentals of light and dark, films are essentially dramatic and not theatrical. Drama orders action as meaning, not a relation that symbolizes something else, such as a significant condition or relation. Really experiencing the movement of time is necessary drama, whereas theater can be static like an emblem, wherein the significant action is all simultaneous and consists of some timed and constant interaction. Like many Italian Renaissance paintings Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, for example, is a piece of theater—an apparition, not a scene. Even though it purports to show an ever everything is present at once and all relationships are already completed. The pictured movements of waves, limbs, hair, fabric, as wind actually go nowhere, but remain stationary, standing for the eternal, celestial mosaic that holds all things in orbit, here show fixed, complete, and recycling forever.

By contrast, movies are always going somewhere, like Shakespeare’s plays and Greek tragedy, and taking us with them. Nevertheless they also remain pictures, even if they are never ones that fit into Botticelli’s pictorial universe. They do fit, however, into Rembrandt’s, just as they fit into Goya’s—that is, into a scheme of expression founded on the dialectic of night and day, and the progress through them that produces the next day and night, and the next. In such a scheme, all other seen movement is subject to that intractable movement, which itself is only perceptible through the fluid activity of the eye, that evokes the uncertain journey of experience—the inner state subject to outer circumstance. In the art that illustrates inner state rhythm can be shown to sustain itself, unfragmented by the partialness of all human perception (and consequent human feeling) that suspends all life in a net of time. The timeless universe is outer darkness, a howling void: there is no cosmic harmony that we can actually see. Seeing means only seeing something, never

everything; the view is subjective, always from here. Film art demonstrates this idea, which is the fundamental stuff of drama, using chiaroscuro pictures to engage us in it. Then it puts the pictures into an actual, ongoing sequence.

Since their significant sequence itself constitutes the drama, each frame has the look of being dramatically necessary to all the others. The formal dispositions inside any frame carry the implicit relation to other frames on either side—that quality of contingency, incompleteness, and lack of resolution that characterizes all the cinematic painting of the past. Even if the movie camera sits still on a still subject, the film is still moving, and we are still waiting, expectant and responding, our eyes and souls in motion. And this situation is what puts film art into an old artistic tradition, a modern step on a long particular path.

The dramatic essence of the film medium makes movies an ideally persuasive narrative vehicle. Any story gets the benefit of that distinctive pictorial mode, where meaning is alive in the very form, and feeling is de facto engaged. Inevitably, movies became a popular commercial art, apparently aimed in a different direction from the one pursued by serious painters, and arriving from a different source. Whereas it is now easy to see sophisticated references made to great paintings in recent movies, it is still not easy to see film and painting as fundamentally connected. Because of the clearly sensual possibilities of the film medium, movies naturally allied themselves with the persuasive arts of entertainment and propaganda, during the same period when modern painting was succeeding more and more in detaching itself from them. Photography itself became a form of modern art pursuing a course directed away from cheap sensationalism and toward a formal seriousness that ensured an accompanying high esthetic status. The dramatic pictorial narratives of film art flourished for decades in Hollywood, far away from modern painters' studios. The brilliant art direction and cinematography that created the compelling visual flavor of popular movies operated in a different universe from those of modern painting and photography.

As art critics viewed painters of the past with increasingly modernist and formalist eyes, movies lost their connection not only

with art but with art history. "Fine art" could be referred to in movies by the use of visual allusion to a known work of art or style of art, such as the Aubrey Beardsley reference in the film of Wilde's *Salome*; but such an allusion explicitly sought to deny the cinematic character of film, rather than to demonstrate constitutive affinities between any historic cinematic art and the current art of movies. Moviemaking became show business, carried on by a huge industry mounting vast collaborative efforts to please the public and make a profit: painting was perceived to be the inspired work of single individuals pursuing artistic goals in preference to worldly aims.

Meanwhile an independent art of cinema was being generated. Distance from painting seemed to increase as filmmakers developed the medium on its own terms, referring and alluding to the works of its own past. By this century's last quarter, artists of the film have gained independent recognition and status as high as any painter for the individuality and artistic integrity of their work. Moviemaking has been recognized to have affinities with the whole history of literary fictions, and with novels in particular. The steady engagement of common fantasy and the multilayered character of film art give it an obvious poetic dimension. To scholars of poetics, movie seem like models of modern poetic consciousness, and by now the entire corpus of film history may be viewed in the light of such awareness.

But the actual pictorial vessel in which it is all carried has its own significant aptitude for the work. The power of the cinematic method of picture making, already established during centuries of realistic painting in the particular tradition begun by the Flemish never lost its hold. Its ability to engage, mystify, and unnerve the beholder now serves the art of movies in quite traditional artist ways, although these were obscured during the modernist consideration of past art and the nonpictorial consideration of past films.

Movies have been supposed to carry on the tradition of spectacular historical narrative and fictional anecdote in painting. With respect to subject matter, but only to that, they certainly have done so. Costume epics are alleged to correspond to the paintings of Dela-

roche, Meissonier, and Gérôme, or of Lord Leighton, Poynter, and Alma-Tadema. By the same token it could even be said that film melodramas and domestic comedies carry on the kind of narrative art derived originally from the descriptive and somewhat coy Dutch genre scenes of the seventeenth century, which continued to be popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth when translated into the language of Greuze and Fragonard, or of Wilkie, Faed, and Frith. Except for the themes, however, there is hardly anything cinematic about any of these — except Alma-Tadema, who was in fact a sort of closet Flemish painter. For the most part, spectacular history painters have taken their style from the other more prestigious classical tradition.

Lawrence Gowing has pointed out an important difference between what Vermeer does and what Dou or Steen do when painting a woman working in a kitchen or a group sitting around a table. It boils down to the difference between letting us see something and carefully showing it to us, with descriptive accompaniment. Any Vermeer scene, like a film shot, is rendered wholly in terms of light, the constant vehicle of possibility, and avoids the clever manipulations of drawing used by Steen or Dou, whereby our eyes and mind are pushed into grasping a preconceived shape. The drama between men and women in Vermeer may appear to unfold and even escape the frame as we watch; but in Steen and Dou the scene is ostensive, complete, unveiled as on a stage and accompanied by a gloss.

This descriptive style was the mold in which most historical and anecdotal painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was also cast. The gloss was not verbal but pictorial: it was the visible choice made to expound a scene according to a style, a set of rules for composition, modeling, and delineation that was already understood by the beholder and previously assimilated by him as a language suitable for carrying such meanings. Thus, knowing comes before seeing; not during it; expectations are satisfied, not mysteriously raised. Assumptions are made in advance, and so a comfortable distance from the viewer is maintained. Thousands of nineteenth-century narrative paintings devoted to startling incident or heroic action have this textual flavor — and such works are wholly at odds with what moviemaking does, no matter how meticulous and

naturalistic the historical details or how sensational the subject. They are always more like the lucid theater of Botticelli than the ambiguous drama of Rembrandt.

The narrative meaning in movies is discovered by absorbing the sequence of pictures directly, not by reading them and understanding them. There isn't time for that; you are immersed in the pool, not looking at its surface, and you must swim. Such unmediated vision is in fact offered by many painters; but they have not been the ones giving the leisurely entertainment provided by Frith and Meissonier, the sensuous pleasure produced by Titian and Delacroix, or the intellectual exercise afforded by much Pre-Raphaelite art.

Nevertheless, to feel pleasure while reading and understanding something, perhaps precisely because of doing so, is certainly very satisfying. There is a deep flattery in the art that offers this kind of experience — and that is why the whole storytelling, theaterlike, ostensive tradition of the artistic past has kept its extended hold on the public imagination. Movies, even in their revelatory rather than descriptive style, eventually took on a lot of that illustrative work; but a flood of graphic illustration made for books and magazines had done so long before.

These earlier popular black-and-white media had many of the same antecedents in the great cinematic art of the past; and they had a similar license both to ignore the advance of modernism in painting and to concentrate on an economy of emotional effect rather than on beauty or completeness. Consequently there is, in fact, much more formal affinity between movies and the unpretentious but dramatic black-and-white illustrations for late nineteenth-century fiction than there is between movies and most narrative salon painting of the same period.

For centuries it had been possible for illustrative and narrative painting to satisfy simultaneously both the highest standards set by current art theory and the highest public expectations of entertainment. It is the similarity between that state of things and the present high public and critical favor of movies that makes people want to compare De Mille with Couture, without noticing that a Couture stands still to be savored — read and reread, so to speak — and De

Mille goes on in continuous flux. There is no reading, only watching; it is happening to you, not being shown to you.

Those great scenic painters of the past produced a very different kind of thing, one that was much more like the sensational historical novels of modern days, or for that matter like those of Walter Scott in his day. The stage of his period followed the same pattern when it adapted his books, using tableaux and theatrical arrangements taken from historical paintings. The literary ground on which so much narrative art had always stood and the language-like mode in which it was often expounded had given it a staged flavor to begin with. It was necessarily disconnected from really cinematic art, which is never necessarily anecdotal or spectacular; and so it is also remote from most modern spectacular film, despite similarities of subject matter and the capacity to give pleasure in its time.

Most classic history-painting was essentially theatrical because the story was conventionally demonstrated to an audience in comprehensible form, instead of being unevenly revealed to a participant, as movies are, in a constantly varying flow. Good movies, like the De Mille epics, sustain the drama of imminent disclosure and incipient revelation that informs many paintings of Manet, of Eakins, and lately of Estes. The scene of expectation is uneasy: what is going to happen? Not in the plot, but simply before our eyes? It will not necessarily be terrible or wonderful; it will just be something not yet seen. Such an atmosphere can invest a neutral or tranquil scene with meaning when there is as yet nothing obvious to mean — the sense that it is about to mean something. Paintings that convey such a feeling are not spellbinding, nor do they repay a minute, satisfying study of many details. They tend, rather, to demand glancing at, glancing away, and then glancing back, as if the eye had missed something it might yet apprehend the next instant. As I have suggested, they seem to bear watching. Details may indeed abound, but their function lacks clarity beyond themselves, and no study can yield any obvious relationship among them, only the strong sense of imminent meaning for us. They invite projection.

Nothing is more unsettling than to look at some significant-seeming communication and feel, "I can't read this. What is it about?" Yet much movie-power is generated by that very circumstance —

maybe you'll get it in a minute; keep watching. Other cognition comes quite easily, only logical or textual comprehension eludes. The reading of films is in fact actually accomplished in these conditions, with ambiguity as a given, each shot full of what hasn't yet happened, may happen, or be actually happening but inexplicable until later, or be present but never need explaining. Such a situation is characteristic of the cinematic mode. Any unfolding drama may contain the presence of phenomena that both contribute mightily to the audience's engagement in and understanding of the action, and yet also fail to convey any readable meaning.

Material objects — cars, buildings, trees, chairs — are poetic in purely pictorial ways: they are themselves characters in the drama, not inanimate properties invested with meaning from elsewhere. Narrative paintings that ostentatiously describe all the objects inside them in terms of significance, like many of the Pre-Raphaelite compositions such as *The Awakening Conscience*, are anticinematic. But paintings in which ordinary objects are filled with their own self-aware breathing life, and seem independently to desire a share in the inexplicable possibilities of the drama — not obediently to support its patent certainties — are the forerunners of film. The objects in Van Eyck's marriage portrait are like this; so are the ones in Manet's *Luncheon in the Studio*. So, too, are the buildings in a street scene by Berckheyde or the parts of church interiors by Emmanuel de Witte, or even the water and fire in Turner's visions. These paintings are not anecdotal, but they are infinitely dramatic, full of perpetual promise and continuous suggestion.

In the life of French art — other nations' art is another story — narrative painting became deeply divided and sharply compromised after the middle of the last century. The new fundamentalist realism propounded and practiced by Courbet and other painters of his generation demanded acute currency of subject and unheroical honesty of execution, instead of established artistic themes suavely rendered in standard artistic terms. What had formerly seemed real became unreal in a new climate; what constitutes realism apparently must be continually retranslated into a fresh visual language. The new terms of French Realism were visually and technically refined by the Impressionists and expanded by Symbolist painters

seeking to render imaginative rather than optical or political realities. The persistent idea of realism led still further, in part inspired by the advance of science, to more extreme concern with ultimate structure; and advanced painters took an increasingly narrowed path toward a realism expressed in the abstraction and reduction of form. In this long process, awfully narrative and illustrative painting lost out and lost caste—lost reality of a kind—without, however, losing any power. The showing and telling of stories never ceased being done in pictures, but its continuing life was sustained in the graphic arts, where the narrative tradition had kept great cumulative force and had all the unbroken authority of popular art.

The swift establishment of the camera in the middle of the century could not help but complicate the subsequent progress of realism in painting. Colorless, or at least monochromatic as they were, pictures made directly with the pencil of nature were nevertheless unanswerably real when it came to the look of light on surfaces and the random look of natural phenomena—the action of water, the clustering of leaves, the flow of hair, the odd juxtaposition of things seen from certain angles. Peter Galassi demonstrates that for some years painters had been thinking more intensely than ever about such visual problems and had created an artistic climate for the camera's invention and acceptance. Nevertheless, some viewers had difficulty seeing early photographs: one lady spoke of leaves resembling "bits of tin."

At that time, and for a long time afterwards, the mechanical camera eye seemed soulless and detached from feeling by definition, and only the creative painter's eye could claim to be imaginative and personal; and so camera art early on became commonly associated with heartless and chilly academism. In speaking of art, *photographic* came to mean congealed in an aspect of perfect details, not informed with a new dimension of light and motion. But the poetics of camera art developed quickly enough, and much fruitful intercourse with painting began to occur as both painters and photographers responded to emotional flavors inherent in its formal properties. It was then, in the 1860s, that Vermeer was rediscovered and revived, the work of Frans Hals was first exhibited in its own museum at The Hague, and many painters paid new atten-

tion to Dutch art, which seemed to prefigure so many modern artistic concerns, now that the camera had come to add to them.

Nevertheless the camera sat uncomfortably between high and low art, where it still remains. It might propose a new set of possibilities for painting, and itself draw upon old ones; but at the same time it was simply the newest and most mechanical graphic art, obviously open to corruption, clearly ready to become a tool, like many others, to be used mainly for commercial purposes, or pornography, or propaganda. But among the several nearly simultaneous inventors of photography, some in fact came upon it while searching for an improved reproductive method, something to increase the commercial scope of all picture making.

The engraved reproduction of paintings had been an established branch of graphic art for centuries; but it was exclusive and expensive, much more important for artists and collectors than to the public at large, the consumers of all the popular political, commercial, and crude religious imagery flooding Europe since the invention of printing itself. Cheaper and more accurate reproductive methods were constantly being sought and tried; but it was the camera that made the greatest leap.

The most fruitful result of the camera's rise was a kind of synthesis of high and low art—one that only the modern art of movies has realized. Through photographic reproduction, great paintings could be instantly transmuted directly into popular imagery as *photographs*. Their real looks, their basic beauties and virtues could be directly exposed to everyone, in the same medium that exposed the beauties of the cityscape, the half-open blossom, or the neighbor's kids—and the same one that also entertained and swayed the eager public with all kinds of crude, slick, funny, or sentimental junk. And so the Mona Lisa and Vermeer's woman pouring milk could become part of everyone's visual consciousness and influence everyone's unconscious idea of how a picture of a woman looks—or can be made to look for certain reasons—right along with Garbo and Grandma, the girl in the beer ad, and the stricken widow in the newspaper.

Movies are the richest art that grew out of this synthetic vision created by the camera. Filmmakers could now draw directly, even

largely unconsciously, on the great art of the past, because the camera had already taken possession of it all. Movies build on the visual past, using old artistic means that have been translated directly into film — an activity quite distinct from the surface quotation of actual paintings on the part of production designers. The best film imagery, the stuff that made movies the art they are, derives its power from the expressive methods used for centuries in the kind of realist art devoted to conveying subjective experience. The camera, by being both a popular graphic medium and a reproductive mirror through which such art became accessible and film became viable, has allowed the movies to carry it on.

## *Irreconcilable Similarities: Man and Semantic Machines*

HERBERT HRACHOVEC

THE BIOLOGICAL structure of certain animals is very similar to that of the human body. And there are machines that can reproduce certain cognitive performances perfectly. It should be possible to combine these facts in building an *animal rationale*, artificially constructing man out of given components. That such a thought is repugnant to the humanistic tradition is hardly a reason for rejecting it out of hand. Instead of appealing to some mysterious essence of "being human," this tradition should be made to fight in order to make clear what it means by its emotionally charged pronouncements about man's incomparability to intelligent biomachines. My line of thought will in fact lead to the traditional conclusion, but: will demand controversial decisions at some crucial points. The issues raised by recent developments in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence do not simply and inevitably lead to a humanistic dismissal of the subject, and I shall be trying to map out the fundamental turnings of the road that leads to a conviction that nothing can be compared to man.

This conviction sounds both commonplace and arrogant. In arguing it, decisions will have to be made that lead in the desired direction only if the desirability of the result is presupposed. The well-known difficulty of hermeneutical reflection is in fact appropriate to this subject matter. The "essence of man" is not a given which can be approached by arguments free of prior metaphysical bias. There is no hope of avoiding some very partial presupposition in expounding my thesis, and any counterargument might find itself in a similar situation. But rather than indulge in mutual polemical deconstruction I choose a tentatively edifying procedure: there are some very good reasons to hold that recent research does not come near to showing that man can be considered as just an extraordinary complex artifact.