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The Unacknowledged Brothel of Art

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Because it is both "reproductive" and "creative," and may copy or fake as easily as it may invent, all graphic art has been situated at a crossroads, a meeting place for the most refined and the crudest aims. It is the largely unacknowledged brothel of art, to which high thought, low feeling and commercial interest may all resort, to make use of the same commodities on an equal footing. For centuries, gifted artists working directly in popular commercial media not only extended the technical scope of all graphic art but importantly compounded its emotive power. Popular graphics, which everyone sees without looking at them, have given direct underground nourishment to all the flowers of fine art achieved at a carefully great distance from it, and also to the constant visual education of the audience for fine art.

Meanwhile, through generations of graphic reproduction, the world's great paintings and sculptures have gradually been transmuted into popular art themselves, only thus made fit to enter the stream of public consciousness and to plunge below that into the public unconscious, to feed and reseed all artistic awareness on equal terms with erotica and Popeye. For a long time, that same graphic reproduction of great art, just like most popular art, was realized in some kind of black-and-white medium. The language of monochrome vision has in fact been the great lingua franca of Western art, and it is another original secret behind the effectiveness of movies.

"Graphic" means "like writing"; it now also means "like truth." These two meanings both combine and diverge when pictures are the issue. From the early sixteenth century until well on into the nineteenth, most pictorial reproductions of both sculpture and painting were black-and-white prints done by professional engravers, who copied onto metal plates from drawings that had in turn been copied by a different hand from the one that had made the original works. The outlines, spatial arrangements and tonal modeling of any work could be fairly well conveyed

by such reproductions, but it would be right to think of them as "written" versions, translations into a distinctively graphic language remote from paint or marble.

The black and white that gave them life is the same kind that vivifies words on paper, the transmogrifying print that can make them seem to be true. All the old engraved emblem-books carrying significant pictures inseparable from texts only confirmed the sense that an engraving of a painting is an especially meaningful "reading" of it—perhaps even a clearer reading than the direct gaze, dazzled by color, can rightly apprehend from the original. Many paintings reproduced in engraving were in fact accompanied by a verse printed underneath that expounded or described them—sometimes wrongly, as in the case of the famous Terborch brothel scene, called *Fatherly Advice* only in reproduction. Printed versions of paintings were thus rendered authoritative by the incorporation of printed words. With the spread of illustrated books in the sixteenth century, black-and-white pictures also became the straightforward vessels of instruction, some of them diagrams and maps offered in the same clean lines used to shade the curves of botanical specimens or the walls of fortifications. Similar crisp lines would march alongside, in platoons of words formed to escort such images with all the strength of printed type straight into the viewer's understanding.

Such early combinations of printed words and pictures helped form the association between black-and-white printed representations and unadorned truthfulness that gives the term "graphic" one of its meanings. We have built on this association the idea that if a picture is in black and white, it can be understood better, even though it may be enjoyed less. By extension, photographs and movies in black and white are beautiful because they are so true, not because they are so real. "Living color" is more lifelike and more delicious, but like life itself it is also more distracting, entrancing and misleading. We are back to Rembrandt and the power of chiaroscuro to invoke the feelings rather than please the senses—and thus to stand for unadorned emotional truth, rather than the abstract fictions made possible by the limitless orchestration of color.

Graphic and photographic modes here overlap. In pictorial illustration or narrative art, "photo-graphic" black-and-white rendering (the chiaroscuro mode, whether done by a camera or etching or ink and wash) has the power to suggest both the objective truth of printed matter and the subjective truth of feeling, which is signified by the image of falling light that must always illuminate a particular view. It has a distilled intensity that carries over easily from the etchings of Rembrandt, Piranesi and Goya straight into the documentary style of photography and on into *film noir*. Circumstances and events offered in this pictorial mode have double impact, again redoubled by the interaction between their two kinds of graphic truth.

All this is leaving out drawing, the truly graphic art done by the wrist, the "written" pictures that draw the story for us as we watch. This is truly "descriptive" art, personal and spontaneous, with the air of being improvised for present company. This art has a great theatrical fascination akin to what enchants in classicizing art. In the comic vein, Wilhelm Busch, Al Hirschfeld and Gavarni draw like witty conversationalists, even more like jugglers; the hand keeps moving, as we watch open-mouthed and laugh and marvel. The real power of such cursive comic art moreover comes from its being printed immediately in the thousands for everybody, and appearing in new daily or weekly versions that urge no pondering nor demand any study. Such art looks swiftly done, dashed off like a brief note to the whole world while the thought is still occupying the artist—and through print, the entire public may get it at a glance. Black-and-white expression delivers laughs fast, as it does all other emotional freight. The reading eye is ready for it, and nothing impedes the swift flight and sharp dig of graphic wit. Nothing in color is ever nearly so funny, even though it may be more fun.

Apart from comic art and instructive diagrams, certain linear, expressive drawings that have been made specifically to be reproduced also share in the authority of the wit that is the soul of writing, as well as in the power of print. Dürer, for example, was the first great calligraphic poet in print; his engravings are like dense and mesmerizing handwritten epics. Given his delicate way with watercolor, it is clear that he "wrote" these images deliberately, omit-

ting the atmospheric dimension so as to ally his printed work with scriptural tradition rather than with painting. They require "reading," and they almost defy seeing. Such works are far from the cinematic spirit, however spirited their narrative content or how brilliant the internal movement of their inspired lines.

But all kinds of printed monochrome graphic narrative—apocalyptic visions, news photos, cartoons, early magazine illustration—are unified by their medium. The black-and-white mode in art remains the vessel of a truthfulness that is temporally conceived and notated, and that deals with the drama of subjective experience. Color, working directly on the senses and operating deep within the realm of symbol, affects responses of *mood* much more than it urges sympathetic feeling or promotes thought; it can do its own work very well in realistic pictures, for example, without needing to be at all naturalistic. As comic strips show, color is irrelevant to narrative, however important the sensory impact of color is. In colored popular art, like that of the Épinal prints in France or of the modern Sunday funnies or of animated color film, color serves the interests of pleasure rather than of meaning. In some Expressionist art, it has served the interests of pain. But whether "written" like calligraphic cartoon art and line engraving, or revealed like Fritz Lang movies and Rembrandt etchings, pictorial narrative in black and white has a satisfactory completeness of emotional impact and a higher speed of effectiveness than anything in color. It moves, and it is moving.

Consequently, generations of art lovers hung engravings and later black-and-white lithographic and photographic reproductions of great paintings in their homes—moved, through arrangements of tone alone, by the works of Raphael and Reynolds, of Murillo and Guido Reni unsupported by the beauties of the spectrum. Such reproduced works, although they look obviously incomplete as paintings, nevertheless look powerfully real as pictures. In the 1890s, people owning black-and-white prints of Murillo might simultaneously feel the effect, for instance, of Sidney Paget's brilliant black-and-white illustrations for the Sherlock Holmes stories in the *Strand Magazine*. And the

potent qualities of such different forms of narrative picturing would yet reinforce each other, through the black-and-white medium that contained and mobilized them both.

When the photographer arrived to join the painter as a fellow artist, he was also joining the graphic artist at all his much lower esthetic levels, sharing not only in painters' serious aims but in the essentially underground movement of popular commercial art, with its traditional aim to stir the public with comedy, violence, sentimentality and eroticism. The camera could now convey all these elements in the potent chiaroscuro rendering that in the fine arts had already established so firm a grip on the feelings. As a popular graphic medium, the camera thus had more built-in potential impact even than calligraphic skill had. Meanwhile, it could reproduce great paintings in that same chiaroscuro, and thus share in the traditions of the great printmakers of the past.

This reproductive capacity in turn brought the camera into line with the "graphic" authority of printed texts and into connection with the "graphic" immediacy of writing. As a new vehicle of black-and-white expression, photography thus came into existence supported by a formidable history of distinctively persuasive colorless image-making—pictorial in fact, but literary by extension and analogy. Film took the same history to the next logical stage. Eventually, filmmakers could combine the themes of popular graphics with the powerful formal technique of Rembrandt. They performed the great synthesis foreseen or envisioned by the nineteenth-century Realists, with Baudelaire as spokesman, that of creating a history-painting in genre terms, of making universal myths out of everyday comic, mundane and banal material.

The old reproductive graphic arts have been the means, as the camera soon came to be, of putting the fine arts into motion, of moving them into the world, of getting them to do their larger cultural and emotional work. Goltzius's glamorous sixteenth-century engraving of the Farnese Hercules, for example, rendered with glistening musculature and shown admired by upgazing citizens, is echoed by the glorious modern photographs of Michel-

angelo's sculptures, which caress and exalt his works with seductive lighting and bathe them in dramatic luster for everyone's eyes, so that Michelangelo may touch everyone's heart.

Monochrome sculpture yields naturally to enhancement by the black-and-white camera, just as it did to the suavities of engraving; but paintings also take on new qualities under the camera eye that sees beyond the colors. What the black-and-white camera does to a painting is not to give a reading of it, as an engraving does, but to make a movie of it—to plumb, as it were, its cinematic heart. It tells the "story" of the painting by translating it into the graphic medium of unmitigated drama, making it accessible and intelligible to everybody.

Thus painting could gradually be transmuted into popular graphic art in the emotional medium of light and shade, not just in the intellectual terms of strict engraved lines—which have, as W. Ivins has repeatedly demonstrated, their own editorial effect on any original. Intermediate stages, such as lithography and the nineteenth-century use of the seventeenth-century mezzotint technique, had already carried the cinematic reproductive ideal further than line-engraving, specifically to reproduce chiaroscuro paintings originally conceived in terms of light. The camera came to confirm that impulse and apply it to all other sorts of painting as well. Black-and-white photographs of paintings began to share in the uncanny emotional atmosphere of the "*carte de visite*" portraits and topographical studies being purveyed by professional commercial photographers. The black-and-white camera seemed not to take something away from paintings but to add something, as the engraving techniques also had done—only this time it was something directly optical and directly emotional, the truthfulness of light, not language.

"Cinematic" paintings of the later nineteenth-century, the works by Manet, Vuillard and Degas that seem most pregnant with possibilities for movie-camera art, tend to be subdued in palette and to diverge from the Impressionist absorption in the realm of color, where the vibrations of color itself provide the light and unify the

surface. Similarly, in the contemporaneous works of Adolph Menzel and in much Scandinavian painting of the same period, it is the relationship between the tonal system and the subject matter that gives the paintings their atmosphere, just as in films, not the relationship among the colors, nor the further one among the subject, the colors and the composition—as in Impressionist works. The general impulse altogether of most avowedly Realist painting in the middle of the century had been toward monochromy. This retreat from color suggests an awareness that approximation to a graphic mode might be appropriate to both psychological and social truth-telling.

The suppression of color in painting apparently guaranteed the look of both subjective engagement and objective observation. Concentration on color relations, however, as in Impressionism or Expressionism whatever the subject matter, produced a vivid sensory milieu in which the subject could be dissolved or sublimed, and where the fundamental skill and choice of the artist form the most noticeable elements of the picture. A pure energy, a self-perpetuating life is generated by the interaction of the colors the painter deliberately deploys; and their beauty (or, as in Van Gogh, their unbearable vibrance) ravishes even before the subject registers. Ambiguous feelings, uncomfortable facts or uncertain circumstances may only be apprehended through a veil of pleasure (or perhaps discomfort) woven by the color alone, and the subject is given a separate, extrinsic measure of stress or delight.

Color proves the painter. It definitively separates him from the workaday graphic practitioner and raises his efforts into the sphere of arcane understanding. The alleged "Secrets of the Old Masters" were all about the control of color, which stands for the control of all natural forces and supports the idea of the artist as analogue of a divine creator with a divine plan. When painters such as the Impressionists wished to reassert the autonomous sovereignty of the painter's art, they would naturally use color to contain and elevate their new vision of the painter's reality—perhaps particularly to distinguish theirs from other etiolated or degraded modes of showing it.

But Manet (by contrast with the later Monet), Degas (by contrast with Renoir), and Vuillard (by contrast with Bonnard) are painters who seem to have waived the painter's divine prerogative, to refrain from offering to the beholder the intoxicating sensory possibilities of color, choosing instead to permit the possibilities of tone to predominate. In the works of these painters, color remains potent, just as it does in Vermeer; but the atmospheric and emotive flavor conjured by the dialectic of light and shade is pervasive. Tonality unifies the muted palette, just as it does in Velásquez—the color works all the better as the servant of tone. This tonal predominance produces the "graphic" look in the painting, graphic in the sense of emotionally realistic: the subject is perceived and rendered as contingent, ephemeral and immediate, rather than timeless, remote and beautiful. But a perfect balance of color regardless of subject, as in a painting by Matisse, produces a satisfaction unclouded by the drama of circumstance. The web of color holds the woman on the sofa and inside the room forever; and we are not forcibly engaged by her momentary inner state or personal difficulties. The artist is seen to master and subdue the subject through the medium.

But in portraiture, the subject must ideally be shown to master the painter, to a certain degree—to matter, to have its own emotional valence and temporal importance. That is why Velásquez's, Van Dyck's and Rembrandt's tonal priorities made them unsurpassed masters of the portrait genre. Manet and Sargent continued their program, and the movie camera is final heir to the method. The most beloved modern screen performers are spoken of as being "loved" by the camera: their inmost souls are drawn out by its fleeting, contingent, tonal mode of rendering, and so they draw the viewer to them. There are people who cannot allow the camera to love them—perhaps they should only be painted by Matisse or Modigliani or Cézanne.

Ordinary commercial color movies have become more and more effective the more the color has been subordinated to tone, following the example of the cinematic painters of the past. It is now commonplace to see the

deliberate use of Hopper and Eakins in the production design of current movies, even when they are not directly quoted, although they often are. But it is also noticeable that such distinctively *cinematic* painting is the only kind that translates well into actual film. Attempts to suggest Raphael and Botticelli or Poussin cannot be successfully made without looking contrived, whereas the Caravaggesque frames in *The Verdict*, for example, blended unnoticeably and effectively with the modern subject. Goya has been very well and also unnoticeably transferred to film, since in both painting and graphic art his fusions of tonal abstraction with emotional content are so complete and his temporal sensibility is so keen. Goya's sense of fashion, for example, was clearly as acute as his sense of horror or irony; and all his works record ongoing agonies and ambiguities, not frozen moments.

Modern eyes and minds trained by movies have learned to appreciate certain cinematic artists of the past in preference to other classic-minded painters, who used to be more admired before the ascendancy of camera vision. Guido Reni and Raphael have lost some of their supremacy to Vermeer and Chardin. Piranesi has appealed profoundly to cinema-trained viewers in the twentieth century, just as he did to Baudelaire's prophetically cinematic soul more than to the general nineteenth-century public. Caravaggio and Velásquez are preferred to Rubens, whose huge painterly talents led him to emphasize a cursive and chromatic flow of form rather than the flow of light. In Rubens the unmediated eye is always less important than the mediating, life-giving and ennobling hand. But Caravaggio and Velásquez show the alternative preoccupation with tone and its capacity to suggest the mystery of ordinary appearances. Their interest in the direct links between light, vision and feeling strikes a more sympathetic chord in the modern filmgoer than Rubens's robust and brilliant idealizations ever can.

Caspar David Friedrich, the effect of whose work depends greatly on dramatic arrangements of tone, especially backlighting, has achieved a great vogue in the later twentieth century. His way of centering an image is in fact like

the use of a moving camera gradually homing in on an object, to invest it with meaning by fixing it in the center of the frame—a tree, a woman from the back. Movies now allow us to respond willingly to such tactics, rather than rejecting them as too blatantly emotional, too "romantic." All the American "Luminist" landscape painters have lately come in for a similar new respect, now that filmmakers have shown us not to fear any artistic compromise in their lighting effects.

The American Romantic painters' view of nature had strong ties with Germany, and their techniques of landscape painting show this: the same backlighting used by Schinkel in 1814 was employed in 1860 by Frederick Edwin Church. Modern echoes of this relation resonate in the influence of those German film directors, trained in Expressionism, who came and made American movies in a German Romantic Realist genre—the *film noir*, where lighting matters so much. In so doing, they bequeathed a whole distinctive kingdom of cinematic reality to the American imaginative life. Those immigrant German film directors were themselves heirs to the old Northern artists' mode that uses light as the primary source, the mobile animator of feeling. Their movies have helped later generations of filmmakers to transmute that "graphic" pictorial mode into the basic stuff of modern vision, modern feeling and modern fantasy. In part through them, we can now "see" Friedrich, Schinkel, Church and other painters using similar Romantic methods deriving from the Northern tradition.

Our difficulty in actually "seeing" what many people originally found so dreadful about Manet's *Olympia* shows how far we have come, not just on the path through the later history of modern painting, but along the enlightening track of modern movies. Sargent's *Madame X* got a similar unbelievably hostile response when it was first exhibited in Paris nearly twenty years later, in 1884. It was the harsh, realistically erotic impact of these female portraits that actually gave offense, although the voiced objections were about the technique—the application of paint, the color and the modeling, as well as the unprecedented details. But the unbearable sexiness of these two very

different women is conveyed not only by their unequivocal postures, accouterments and expressions, but by the way they are lighted—their up-front, flashbulb directness. The lighting *exposes* them, and so seems to expose the unqualified vigor of their sexuality. The veil has been lifted: they are too "graphic." The very lack of flattering tonal gradation—flattering, that is, to the viewer's artistic and erotic sensibilities—gives them life in a new dimension of artistic reality. This is not just the new world of painterly abstraction, but the particular photo-graphic one that the movies later came to provide and expand.

Another cinematic and initially unacceptable element in these two paintings is their offer, closely linked in one image, of both graphic realities and conventional erotic material. They combine the kind of thing common in stylized, cheap erotica (Madame Gautreau's corseting, cosmetics and originally slipped shoulder strap; Olympia's slippers, pussycat and neck ribbon) with the established components of serious Realism—the real look of muscle and bone, to say nothing of will and character, on the faces and bodies of both women. These same combinations now produce the whole visual flavor of the movie-star image—the piquant details of a woman's actual, wholly personal physical quality are fused with a slick, often highly eroticized version of current fashions in desirable appearance.

Such fusions are invincibly gripping, and were scandalously so when they were first exhibited as components of salon painting. They were the heralds of both modern art and modern film. Olympia's harsh coloration was compared by some to that of Épinal prints—a whiff of popular commercial imagery could be sensed in the demands the picture made. The link with popular graphics, even popular pornographics, gives uncomfortable pungency to the "universal" imagery of realism, which is known to use art to ennoble harsh facts and ordinary circumstance, as Rembrandt made it do. An unmistakable appeal to "low" feeling in an avowedly "high" depiction of lowlife strikes a disturbing—but undeniably authentic—note. It was done by bootlegging well-understood elements of "cheap" art into serious Realist compositions; but the *Olympia*

evokes not so much slick erotic prints as certain erotic photographs of its day, with all their similarly crude and graceless suggestiveness, which gave them all the greater impact. Such forms of graphic art had no conventional place in serious nude painting, the more especially in serious Realist painting, which usually sought to use respectable old techniques, often culled from the seventeenth century, to legitimize its contemporary themes.

Movies get a lot of their visual potency by following *Madame X* and *Olympia* in feminine imagery, linking the greatest painterly traditions, now carried on by the camera, with the popular graphic mode that includes both tawdry prints and salacious photographs. The depth of suggestion possible in film images is made possible by a translation of the hard-won, historically grounded achievements of such advanced Realist painters as Manet and Sargent into the medium of popular cinematographics. The generations of eyes conditioned simultaneously by monochrome reproductions of old and new realistic paintings and by black-and-white commercial art were bound to be primed for the poetics of movies even in the first quarter of this century, while they were finding modern painting increasingly difficult. "High" and "low" art thus began to split even further in the general awareness, as all painting came to be seen in modernist terms and the painterly antecedents of movies lost artistic credibility.

The most cinematic painters of the American Realist school were graphic commercial illustrators first. Both Homer and Hopper were thoroughly versed in creating emotional impact by graphic means; but in the modernist view of painting, such forms of picturemaking seemed inferior and demeaning to serious artists. In mid-nineteenth century England, Rossetti and Millais and others had been black-and-white illustrators as well as narrative painters; but there the connection between painting and graphic illustration was legitimized by the general sense that art should enlighten the public at large, and the intense, detailed paintings themselves were speedily engraved and sold as prints.

Millais was the most cinematic painter among the Pre-

Raphaelites, partly because the quality of his realism has the same contingent, awkward flavor that informs the great Flemish paintings. His formal methods contrast with the way Holman Hunt, Rossetti and Burne-Jones tended to imitate the harmonious linear beauty and theatrical compositions of Italian art. Like these other painters, Millais was concerned with the power of color; but it is nevertheless the light in *Autumn Leaves*, for example, that makes it haunting. Millais also used individual models without ever reducing them all to one type, and so his paintings still continue to breath and move, while Rossetti's, Hunt's and Burne-Jones's look embalmed in their idiom. Arthur Hughes made similarly mobile and moving pictures, infused with air, light and feeling; and he and Millais both had a superior grip on how to render the progress of personal drama convincingly, rather than how to freeze symbolic action. This grasp shows up vividly in Millais' black-and-white illustrations, which look just like movie frames.

Authentic illustration is not the same as narrative art; the whole story is not in one picture, where many Pre-Raphaelite and other nineteenth-century painters, following Renaissance and medieval examples, wished to put it. An illustration gives the sense of a moment full of the possibilities of the adjacent moments, a vision of the phrase in process, not its cadence. Painters freezing a moment, like photographers with similar aims, make a perpetual static memorial out of a fleeting instant—an artificial cadence. The graphic illustrative spirit, on the other hand, which shows up in modern news and sports photographs, never tries to eternalize an instant but rather to suggest (not narrate) a whole event. In just this spirit, one picture can suggest a whole movie—suggest, not elucidate in fixed tableaux. The comic graphic art that does it best is not the kind by Daumier or Busch that shows a sequence of vivid poses described by the artist's hand, but the kind done by Feiffer or Schulz, which shows only the same two people talking or one person thinking in each frame. The text may appear to be the point; but really it is the graphic vision of emotional confrontation or inner state that gives life to the thought. The monochromy of such imagery

manifestly aids its veracity; and modern satisfaction in such artists' work comes from a cinematic understanding of life.

Movies accomplished the poeticization of popular graphic art, besides continuing the graphicization of certain kinds of serious figurative painting; and so they produced a synthesis and a modernization of both. Figurative painting has come back into favor partly because of our fully achieved cinematic awareness—movie vision has made it possible to find a way toward a "Postmodern" Realism in painting itself, to form a bridge with all its old realisms, partly because of the deal that the popular graphic art of film has made with traditional painterly methods for appealing to the modern soul.

Old-fashioned graphic illustrations, such as Paget's Sherlock Holmes pictures, compare significantly both with certain kinds of painters' sketches and with the continuity sketches (or story-boards) made by sketch artists for art directors to use in designing scenes for movies. There is a clear affinity between some of Van Dyck's preliminary sketches for paintings, done entirely with a brush in ink and wash, Chodowiecki's atmospheric vignettes, Goya's "caprichos," Winslow Homer's illustrations, Manet's swift lithographic urban scenes, and the surviving sketches made for scenes in *Gone with the Wind* or Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The pictorial method consists chiefly of massing figures and objects both near and far in deep back-opening space, and rendering them in patches of light and shade for maximum emotional and kinetic effect in each frame. Not only the story-boards but all such works show an abstract arrangement of light and shade governing the "ordinary" disposition of significant elements. We therefore may not easily "read" the event in terms of composition, as we can in tableaulike painting, but we feel plunged into it with one glance. To understand it, we must "watch" what is happening, try to feel it out; the composition itself does not give away the story. In addition there are no linear caresses of the artist's hand to give emphasis and direction to the flow of meaning, no "writing" to help us and no "beauty" to distract us, just as there is no color to diffuse our attention.

The chief link among them all is the sovereignty of chiaroscuro vision as the essence of meaningful illustrative imagery. And this leads to the idea that even color film is *graphic*—that is, essentially in black and white, just as Manet's *Olympia* is, and much of Sargent and Eakins, along with the paintings of Velásquez, Goya and Rembrandt. Technological developments in fact made color movies possible long before they were considered desirable; and much later they were perpetuated on black-and-white television, as they still are—like the illuminating black-and-white photographs of great paintings. To a certain extent, it has been possible for color to remain irrelevant, as it was in the beginning, to the profound effect movies have had on modern life.

We have noted that the advent of color for movies created a setback in the quality of their realism, not an advance. The advance was in the pleasure they gave, the unalloyed excitement added to the sequence of images, despite the fruit-salad, Currier-and-Ives look of many early color movies. True "graphic" realism remained in the rich range of black-and-white imagery used for urban and suburban melodrama, the fables of organized crime, psychological thrillers or the *Grapes of Wrath*, forms of rural grimness that derived most directly from Rembrandt.

Meanwhile in Westerns, color made Monument Valley more beautiful but not more dramatic. Efforts at non-"graphic" realism, or cinematic romanticism, however, do in fact look "realer" in color: musical comedy, historical pageantry, nature-adventure, and the more ritualized and operatic Westerns. In the movies, the realities of both wild nature and the unruly distant past are pleasant to take only in color, which mollifies and harmonizes and beautifies the raw material of the unfamiliar, the harsh and the dangerous. Lately, modern horrors submit to the same beautifying effects, as in *Apocalypse Now*. Color keeps them, as it keeps the Middle Ages or the Sahara Desert, unreal enough to bear. Spilled blood is really a lot more horrible in black and white, although it is more exciting in color—and of course much more beautiful.

The flavors of the psyche are echoed in colors, and consequently they have had a long connection with the history of symbol. In art, a realistic image using colors may trade simultaneously on their symbolic meaning and their direct psychic impact. Creative perversity may have enormous play, if impact and meaning are made to diverge: brilliant yellow skin, red grass. Color has always seemed to float free of realism in art, even while enhancing it. It is rather color relations, which have their own psychological reality, that artists fuse with realistic formal composition and lighting in order to make naturalistic images look right. All color in art is a code, as Gombrich has said, not an imitation. The colors in color photography and cinematography are no "realer" than those of paint, which have long adhered to artistic conventions independent of nature, and to the technical limitations of the medium. Printed color, just like painted color, is a technical matter of great complexity, and the photographic color reproduction of paintings is a well-known technological pitfall. Usually no two color photographs of the same painting are alike, and few are like the painting itself, which in turn is often not much like nature. The "reality" of color in photographic reproduction or in direct photography is a fiction all accept, because the result is often so beautiful or so stirring.

For films, relationships among colors may be created to serve the viewer's sense of conventional reality, or to distort it deliberately—or both. Hitchcock's color films are full of extra tension created by color relations operating quite separately from the demands of naturalism, or of straightforward narrative meaning. The color is in fact often anti-real, abstract like all the other deceptively natural appearances in Hitchcock films. The everyday objects and the buildings as well as the colors have their own emotional freight, while the surface aim of the imagery is plain naturalism.

In recent years, the less novelistic the narrative in color film gets, the more color alone may create the movie—just as it came to create modern paintings. Color now has a role in cinema like the one played in avant-garde twentieth-century art. It is the sign, the basic vehicle of the superior artist who transcends narrative and illustrative goals (and thus what has come to be thought "natural") to push the

medium itself into fresh territory. All this continues to demonstrate the independence of expressive color from narrative meaning—from the effort to render drama in realistic terms.

In nature films, on the other hand, color has its own abstract "realistic" beauty. We love to believe in the vivid desert flower blossoming against the drab sand, the glistening emerald insect in the harsh crevices of the bark. Such cameratic uses of color have great sensory impact, which helps emphasize the distance between wild life and our life. In documentary works, as in similar natural-wonder sequences in narrative film, color now elevates Nature into the highest sphere of art, to distinguish all of it from Man, especially modern Western Man, who remains by unstated contrast sordid and depressingly "lifelike" in the metaphorically drab colors of his ordinary existence. This is another way that color may be made to suggest the celestial plan, while black and white stands for commonplace human arrangements. The gaudiest Western films (*Shane, Days of Heaven*) have always insisted heavily on this Romantic division between scenery and humanity. Such insistence emphasizes the Romanticist character of Westerns in particular, and of movies in general.

It is specifically the old Romantic-Realist terms that defined ordinary popular movies altogether as a pictorial genre and created their artistic landscape in the modern imagination. The chiaroscuro film medium fused Romantic ideals about the sovereignty of feeling with details of acute visual currency. Consequently, deliberately nonrealistic or surrealistic film was always apt to be experienced as a *departure* from the romantic standard set by the great popular masterpieces of melodrama, comedy, documentary, adventure and crime caper that gave movies their generative place inside the world's fantasies. All of these separate genres take pictorial realism for their starting-point, all proceed by calling attention to the extraordinary in the ordinary, and unfolding a romantic tale made entirely of realistic pictures all containing that same paradox—a continuous flow of directly presented actualities, each nevertheless pregnant with possible meaning and

each giving birth to the next, a sort of perpetual Vermeer or Manet, an ongoing Goya, an endless Hopper, used to create a fairy tale not much different from Cinderella or Jack the Giant Killer.

All other kinds of film strain, perhaps unconsciously, against that standard. In *Passion*, Godard specifically brings up the avant-garde filmmaker's struggle against the force of "the story" in modern cinematic expectations. And indeed it is a legitimate force in all expectations about art, but especially about graphic art, which film is by definition. A graphic story, however, need not be a melodrama or a true-to-life narrative, only an emotionally satisfying dramatic sequence, like a myth—an emotionally realistic one such as the great photo-graphic illustrators like Rembrandt offered, or the great illuminative painters like Vermeer. Filmmakers need only do that, as Antonioni does, especially in *L'Eclisse* and *La Notte* (both, naturally, in black and white), and no plot other than the story of inner states needs much elaborating to satisfy the need for "story." But without *emotional* continuity a film becomes disjointed and irritating and easy to forget, however beautiful. This is because the very nature of the chiaroscuro mode sets up those particular expectations—the sense of identifiable psychic movement that Hitchcock, in black and white or color, was such a master at manipulating.

Since cinematography is only one part of moviemaking, what the audience eventually sees is the result of a good deal of random circumstance intermixed with the result of careful effort. Moviemaking is intrinsically somewhat aleatory, partly because it represents the combined efforts of diverse practitioners who necessarily cannot all be aiming for the same thing, cannot always even be completely aware of each other's aims or sometimes even of their own, and cannot be in complete agreement about very immediate common goals. One single and absolute controlling artistic purpose has been impossible for the popular movies that have shaped consciousness. The movie-camera eye itself can moreover only come to some agreement with the phenomena under its gaze; it cannot totally control or shape them, having no hands. The human hands and eyes that help the camera to give us its final results, especially

those of editors, must always work with the fundamental arbitrariness of film footage itself. Ultimately the viewing eye allows for and comes to delight in the flux of chance in any shot, and that very arbitrariness becomes part of the stuff of the myth itself. It constitutes the romance as well as the reality.

The narrative in such a medium is quite unlike any kind that moves in a single track; pictured storytelling in the comic-strip or narrative-art style is not what movies use for their romantic dramas. The movement of the tale is rather analogized to the movement of the eye, to the same kind of path the eye takes through a Vermeer, a movement comprehending a situation where everything is perceptible at once even while nothing is happening—an emotional world. Since this activity matches the movement of the psyche, all movies must by nature be Romantic—committed to feeling, conscious or unconscious, more than to fact or to fiction. When movies tell a story, it has the poetic form of a nonnarrative painting, not the prose form of a picture story, even when the theme is documentary.

The essentially Romantic character of the film medium makes neutral historical chronicle almost impossible in movie form. No matter how much research is done on pots and pans, on private motivation and social forces, on dialect or custom, and how much historical expertise is brought to bear even on the actual shooting, a movie like *The Return of Martin Guerre* ends up a poetic romance. Efforts to reproduce Bruegel paintings fail of their effect, since Bruegel himself was a highly detached, "modern" sort of painter—although highly cinematic in his compositional methods. In his treatment of subject matter, he was an ironic, not a Romantic, realist. He won't translate very fruitfully into the Romantic terms of a film like this, which builds a modern Romantic French story on an original real-life romantic plot from southern Renaissance France—which was indeed an original home of literary Romance. Bruegel, with his slightly grotesque Northern style, could only be stuck onto the surface of *Martin Guerre* as a necessary allusion, to make a flattering reference to what we are all supposed to know from him about the look of Euro-

pean rural life in the sixteenth century. It might have been better to use the manuscript illuminations for the romantic epic poems from sixteenth-century France itself, which have the right emotional flavor even if they haven't as many well-known picturesque peasants. An avowedly romantic filmmaker like Visconti can very smoothly translate historic painting into historical film by adapting only works of art that depend, like his camera, on the romantic use of light to convey romantic themes; and so he can make the past come alive in *The Leopard*, for example, as it fails to do in *Martin Guerre*.

The visual sequences in that movie carry a message not so much of sixteenth-century rural life but of the romantic conventions of twentieth-century French filmmaking, in the familiar style of the poignant bittersweet love stories of the nineteen-forties. The historical films of that period, such as *Les Enfants du Paradis* and *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, used to have perfectly acceptable somewhat *incorrect* period costumes, to support the ahistorical, Romantic spirit of the films. No pointed references to paintings were attempted; it was pure French moviemaking, melodrama made transcendent by the chiaroscuro mode in motion. *Martin Guerre* is actually very similar, and all the expensive historical accuracy is wasted and irrelevant. The stars' amorous relation is the real subject of the movie, and the greatest care and finesse is expended on the modern emotional accuracy of the sequences depicting it—not on a true emotional rendering of French Renaissance peasant life.

By contrast, the quality of Italian peasant existence—its tedium, its weight; the way delicate feelings seek expression in obscure physical terms; how relationships become muffled by circumstance and vulnerable to crude chance—all this itself constitutes the romance in Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*. That film is altogether a good example of documentary pictorial romanticism. Emotional response to its situations is drawn from the viewer directly through the muted color, the composition, lighting and editing of the action that renders it apparently *artless*—just as in the cinematic Realist paintings of peasants by Courbet and Millet (or again by Rembrandt), and not by rendering "moving" scenes with theatrical pointedness, or giving

youthful characters an attractive gloss—as in *Martin Guerre*, or in the sentimental Realist peasant paintings by Jules Breton.

Cinema is intrinsically graphic, and can only be painterly in graphic terms. These are always dramatic, not theatrical. Meaning lies in the very recording of the phenomena; the showing is the telling. Our perception and appreciation of past painting and graphic art has been transmuted since we have internalized these aspects of film art, just as it has been by reproductive photography. Meyer Schapiro speaks of "all art fusing through hindsight" after the Armory Show, to create a modern criticism that would account for the art of both present and past. The gradual ascendancy and pervasiveness of movie-camera vision has also done this to us, although without our actually knowing it, creating both a moviegoer's response to past art and an art viewer's response to movies. Without our knowing it, that is, because for a long time the poetic character of the graphic imagery in films was not so consciously perceived as were the qualities that linked them with theater. Movies were allowed to be emotional *entertainment*, but art was supposed to be judged by modern standards that precluded putting their emotional, illustrative, dramatic qualities first. Nevertheless, movies evoked emotional responses that had already been schooled by the unconscious absorption of old pictorial cues, transmitted via graphic illustration that used the old formulas and through the graphic reproduction of past art—especially the cinematic art that uses light to suggest psychic motion.

The Garbo spell, for example, is a matter of light and shade creating an emotional atmosphere analogous to the spell of Vermeer's women, an uncanny evocation of female inwardness conveyed in a picture that seems to show a sequence of important moments without showing any action. A fashionably dressed woman is in a room—we see her from the knees up. Perhaps a man has just left, or is coming, or is on the other side of the world. She is aware and full of feeling, but her face is still and her hands quiet. She holds something, a vessel or a hairbrush, a letter or the window frame; meanwhile we look at her and feel

that the scene is momentous, she is heartbreaking, the image is unforgettable. Garbo could never create such effects on a theatrically lighted stage; and it wasn't acting. She (and we) needed the "realistic" filmlighting, the film setting and the creative camera "loving" her as it moved in to regard her, just as Vermeer seems to have "loved" the lady with the scale, the glass or the guitar. In cinematic drama the sequence of *incidents* is much less important than the sequence of just such effects created by individual shots. Ever since it became possible for the camera to move and the actors to be still, and artistry could be applied to the choice of image to be framed, just as in painting, the basic narrative component in movies has been the shot, not the scene. The imagery, not the action, became the basic vehicle of movie meaning. And so the works of graphic visual art that movies resemble are revelatory and not descriptive. They are never like Hogarth, full of a great confusion of explicitly described and readable incident and relation, but rather like Piranesi, where everything is dramatically shown but nothing is explained.

Movies began by being stagey. Vaudeville turns and other theatrical material could be offered as if seen inside a stage frame, not a picture frame. In those early days, movement was the point, not camera imagery. But the more the medium advanced, the closer it came to its dramatic pictorial ancestors and the further from the stage. Authentically cinematic motion is comprehensive, surging in and out of the frame and back and forth in time like psychic movement. It is quite unlike the temporal language of the stage, which moves along always at a fixed distance from the watcher, with conventional stage rhythms governing its phrasing, the stage space enclosing the action, the stage time forcing all issues, and the live performance itself invoking the whole sacred concept of artifice. But true cinematic drama in movies and paintings follows a movement similar to Diderot's sense of his own soul as *"un tableau mouvant"*: as Michael Fried says, it works as the reflection of "integral yet constantly changing being." And *that* is the story.

The camera, which in still photography can look so objective, in motion is the narrative vessel of subjectivity

itself, like the painter's eye in the idiosyncratic tradition we have been invoking. Not detached observation, not lively commentary, but total engagement is what it offers—a persuasiveness of seeing, not as understanding or as knowledge, but as being itself. The work of seeing is rendered so as to signify the image of time and our movement through it, as we all try to find the correspondence between our inward journeys and the march of outward events.

HAT PASSION

Sylvia Plachy