

would like to call the cinematic circle. Exploring this circle is something that can be thought of as exploring the medium of film.

This is a way of specifying what at the beginning of this Foreword I spoke of as "the immediate and tremendous burden" on one's capacity for critical description in accounting for one's experience of film. Such description must allow the medium of film as such and the events of a given film at each moment to be understood in terms of one another. Because the value of such an ambition is tied to its usefulness in reading films as a whole, and because in the present pieces I for the most part read only fragments, I will append a bibliographical note of some later writing of mine that, in various ways, does something you might call attending to films as wholes. I conclude these remarks not exactly with a reading of a film fragment but rather with a fragmentary reading of a whole film, or rather with a prescription of such a reading.

It concerns Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*. I assume that anyone who has taken an interest in the film wishes to understand what its extremities of beauty are in service of; and not just its extremities but its successions of beauty. Whatever its subject will be understood to be, no one could have undertaken to explore it without the confidence that his or her capacity for extracting beauty from nature and from the photographic projection or displacement of nature is inexhaustible, which is of course a confidence at the same time in nature's and in film's capacities to provide it. This ranging of confidence is itself exhilarating and must somehow be part of the subject of the film. Shall we try expressing the subject as one in which the works and the emotions and the entanglements of human beings are at every moment reduced to insignificance by the casual rounds of earth and sky? I think the film does indeed contain a metaphysical vision of the world; but I think one feels that one has never quite seen the scene of human existence—call it

the arena between earth (or days) and heaven—quite realized this way on film before.

The particular mode of beauty of these images somehow invokes a formal radiance which strikes me as a realization of some sentences from Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking?* (Harper Torchback, 1972).

When we say "Being," it means "Being of beings." When we say "beings," it means "beings in respect of Being." . . . The duality is always a prior datum, for Parmenides as much as for Plato, Kant as much as Nietzsche. . . . An interpretation decisive for Western thought is that given by Plato. . . . Plato means to say: beings and Being are in different places. Particular beings and Being are differently located. (p. 227)

According to Plato, the idea constitutes the Being of a being. The idea is the face whereby a given something shows its form, looks at us, and thus appears, for instance, as this table. In this form, the thing looks at us. . . . Now Plato designates the relation of a given being to its idea as participation. (p. 222)

The first service man can render is to give thought to the Being of beings. . . . The word [being] says: presence of what is present. (p. 235)

The presence we described gathers itself in the continuance which causes a mountain, a sea, a house to endure and, by that duration, to lie before us among other things that are present. . . . The Greeks experience such duration as a luminous appearance in the sense of illumined, radiant self-manifestation. (p. 237)

(I do not wish to hide the knowledge that years ago Malick translated Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons* for the Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy.) If Malick has indeed found a way to transpose such thoughts for our meditation, he can have done it only, it

seems to me, by having discovered, or discovered how to acknowledge, a fundamental fact of film's photographic basis: that objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances. Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place. Then if in relation to objects capable of such self-manifestation human beings are reduced in significance, or crushed by the fact of beauty left vacant, perhaps this is because in trying to take dominion over the world, or in aestheticizing it (temptations inherent in the making of film, or of any art), they are refusing their participation with it.

Beyond offering this instance—whether I am right or wrong in my experience of it—as an extreme illustration of the unpredictability of what we may have to count as an element of the medium of film to which significance is given in a particular film, I offer it as a case which suggests the unpredictability of the audience for what may be taken as the study of film. The poignance of this question of audience can be brought out by thinking of the accelerating professionalization of the study of film. To ask those inside the subject, attempting to make it academically or anyway intellectually respectable, to think about Heidegger is to ask them to become responsible for yet another set of views and routines that are inherently embattled within English-speaking intellectual culture and whose application to the experience of film is hard to prove. To ask those outside the subject, those being asked to lend it the respectability of their academies, to think about Heidegger in this context is to ask them in addition to grant film the status of a subject that invites and rewards philosophical speculation, on a par with the great arts. This is no small matter, for as writers as different as Robert Warshow and Walter Benjamin more or less put it,

to accept film as an art will require a modification of the concept of art. And even if some among them grant that film is as brilliant and beautiful a subject as, say, jazz, what then? Jazz can indefinitely postpone the question of high art because its accomplishments exist in relation to music as a whole, some of which is definitively high. Whereas film has only itself for direct reference; distinctions between high and low, or between major and minor, if they are to be drawn, must be drawn within the body of film itself, with no issue postponable and none definitive until someone says otherwise. But who is to say that this status of uncertainties is less creative in principle than the status of academic certainties accorded the remaining arts whose names are great?

S.C.

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Bibliographical note. The second half of "Leopards in Connecticut" (*The Georgia Review*, Summer 1976) consists of a reading of Howard Hawks' *Bringing Up Baby*; its first half considers the legitimacy of introducing film into a university curriculum and expands on relations between the writings of Warshow and of Benjamin. "Pursuits of Happiness" (*New Literary History*, Summer 1979) consists of a reading of Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve* that expands on ideas broached in discussing *Bringing Up Baby*, to the effect that certain Hollywood talkies of the 30's and 40's form a definite genre that invokes narrative features established in Shakespearean romance. "What Becomes of Things on Film?" (*Philosophy and Literature*, Fall 1978) relates something I call "the discovery of a natural subject of film" to certain masterpieces (e.g., Bergman's *Persona*, Bunuel's *Belle de Jour*, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*) that employ a particular mode of juxtaposition between