

# A Study of Film

for Michael Paietta

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1. In the following remarks I propose to answer three questions. First, whether film, or to speak a little more accurately, 'narrative film', is an art? Second, how the art of narrative film distinguishes itself from other arts, principally, drama and the novel? Third, what are the powers most proper to narrative film insofar as it is an art?

2. To answer the first question, whether film is an art, I will do three things. First, I will make clear the sense of art in question. Second, I will clarify what sort of film I am presently discussing. Third, I will reformulate and give a preliminary answer to the question.

3. Now, Saint Thomas Aquinas gives a general definition of art that can be restated more or less as a 'certain' ordering of reason by which human acts can arrive at their proper end by determinate means. In the strictest sense, such art is a reasoned understanding in the soul by which the artist produces his work or *opus*. So a poet might write a line of iambic pentameter through a definition of such meter. Note here that art in this sense proceeds from an account of the principles, that is, the proximate principles, for example, stressed and unstressed syllables in iambic pentameter.

4. But we recognize that the works known and perhaps produced by art in the strictest sense are also produced by those who possess not art but experience. This experience is also a habit, though it is not a universal grasp of principles but an ability to 'size up' particulars and order them so as to produce a 'work of art'. Such experience is in many ways a necessary adjunct to art, and for the purposes of this study, no distinction will be made between art and such experience.

5. Now it is a commonplace that art both completes or perfects things left 'unfinished' by nature and also imitates things found in nature. As I am understanding art here, all art in some way does both, though not equally. In particular some arts are clearly devoted to perfecting or completing the things of nature, and these imitate for

the sake of such completion. Agriculture, carpentry, and medicine are examples of such arts. Their *opus* or work is something man needs that nature does not sufficiently bring into existence.

6. Other arts, however, make a work which is itself an imitation. So far as I can see, these also 'perfect' nature in at least two ways. Insofar as that imitation is for the sake of some delight or pleasure, they perfect human life. Further, insofar as the imitation is not merely a re-presentation of reality but a 'manifestation' of that reality, the art must 'refine' and 'perfect' the reality imitated. Even the most obscure work of art – and I have no *prima facie* objection to such obscurity – must somehow 'clarify', in my understanding, if it so be worthy of the name.

7. Now this manifestation of reality found in the imitation seems to be the basis for the association of these 'imitative' arts with two things. First, the imitative arts are regularly praised or criticized with respect to their 'realism'. Clearly, an imitation is a better imitation because it comes nearer to the thing it imitates. But this cuts both ways. More often a work of art is praised for its realism. Most, though not all, of the 'innovations' or 'reformations' in the various arts, to my knowledge, have been championed for their realism. Developments in drama, music, painting, opera, as well as film, are thought to be better than the preceding 'style' precisely because what is new is more 'realistic'. Yet, works of art are often and reasonably dismissed as mere 'reproductions', as 'slavishly realistic'.

8. Art's manifestation of reality is also the reason for its association with beauty. Such arts are called the *beaux-arts* or fine arts neither accidentally nor mistakenly. For in imitating reality they are manifesting the natures of what is found in reality, and the delight or pleasure taken in the imitation is the pleasure by which beauty is defined.

9. Note that I am not conceiving these arts as having 'expression' as their immediate purpose. I do not deny that any work of art in some way 'expresses' something of the artist's own interior life and of the time in which he lives. But such expression is more universal than the fine arts. Further, it is not difficult to see that in

many of the greatest works of art, perhaps most of all in Shakespeare, the thought and feeling of the artist dissipates in the sheer representation of reality.

10. In passing, I should state that there are some arts that hover, as it were, between perfecting nature and imitating it. Architecture is the example that comes first to mind. Even if architecture were in no way a fine art, it would be necessary as the art that makes us the homes and buildings that nature provides by chance and instinct to other animals. When, however, it passes from merely making 'shelters' to making the places in which well-ordered human life, both public and private, can be lived, architecture rises to the status of a fine art.

11. I speak of 'rising' here because one must see that the fine arts in some way take a place 'between' the servile arts, which in some way serve the needs of 'active life', and the liberal arts, whose *opus* serves the intellect and contemplation immediately. I think it can be said, though I do not propose this contentiously, that such arts serve that part of life we call 'recreation', though this should not suggest that they are in any way frivolous.

12. The final point I wish to make regarding art involves its relation to human happiness. Again I do not propose this contentiously, as desiring to settle the matter, but merely because I think it clarifies some aspects of 'art' as said of film. I suggest that drama, including comedy, is rightly conceived to be in some way the fullness of art. Most obviously this is because it has the powers of the lower arts within it. But more importantly drama represents some human action that leads to happiness or misery. Later I will say why drama manifests human happiness and misery more exactly than other arts. At present, I only suggest that in doing so, drama does something present more or less perfectly in every art. If so, the delight we take in art arises from the sense that something of happiness, whether found or lost, has been experienced in the artistic imitation.

13. Now I will determine the sort of film the making of which constitutes the subject of this study. To be clear, film in the sense of the habit by which one make 'films' is formally the subject of this study. The study considers whether and how such a habit

is an art. But this habit is called 'film' from its object, that is, insofar as it makes films. Thus the Oxford English Dictionary defines film as 'film-making considered as an art-form'.<sup>1</sup>

14. Clearly, there are several names that signify more or less the same thing: film, moving pictures and thus movies or pictures, and likewise cinema from the Greek work for movement. 'Moving picture' obviously names the work from 'projection' of images in such a manner that something appears to move before us. This aspect of the work is clearly essential to what I am speaking of.

15. The name 'film', however, comes from the traditional means by which this projection was made. The name may also suggest the manner in which a moving picture is most appropriately experienced, in a hall on the wall of which such images can be seen 'larger than life'. However gratifying this way of experiencing the film may be, and granting that some films do not make the transition to the 'small screen' very well, I think that we generally agree that substantially the same work of art is experienced in this traditional manner and upon the home screen. I myself have seen the vast majority of films I know on a 37-inch screen at home.

16. The one reservation I am inclined to make is the broadcast of a film interrupted by commercial breaks. Although in many of today's longer films I often admire the 'intermission' built in to many older films, I suspect that constant interruption at least takes away from the flow or movement most proper to the genre.

17. Now what I have described so far is often spoken of as though one thing. Many books on making film have a chapter on the documentary, even if they make clear that they are concentrating on a sort of film closer to what I have in mind here. In this sense, 'film' or 'moving picture' is equivocal. Likewise, literature is often spoken of as one thing, comprising poetry, novels, essays, and so on. But in neither case is the name said univocally.

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<sup>1</sup> OED 'film' 3d.

18. To me a sense of the word 'film' is quite clear, in which the word distinguishes some films from documentaries, filmed concerts, filmed sports, perhaps cartoons, and in principle, any number of other 'films'. This sense is, so far as I can see, the sense by which the OED defines film as an art. Their definition reads, 'a cinematographic representation of a story, drama, episode, event, etc.'<sup>2</sup> This sense is clearly most related to dramatic productions, whether or not in verse. It seems clear to me that we use the word 'film' most properly in this sense.

19. This is more or less the sense of film by which I want to define the habit of film making. I make one qualification regarding the order in which films 'deserve' this name. With the drama or the play, one can see without much difficulty that comedy and tragedy are not equally 'dramas' or 'plays'. This is not to say that they are not univocally named by these terms. But, as 'affirmation' and 'negation' are univocally named 'statements' or 'propositions', while in reality the negation clearly depends upon and is therefore posterior to the affirmation, so comedy and tragedy may bear these names equally, although the nature of one may be prior to the other. Similarly, one might easily admit that for some reason dramas in verse are more perfectly dramas than those employing prose. Further, one might make these judgments without necessarily seeing the reason why.

20. So, I am here proposing a discussion of film according to which various kinds or 'genres' of film must be taken in order. So tragedy is in some way prior to, or more perfect than, comedy. (In asserting this I must admit that my appreciation of comedy, while healthy, is limited by temperament and someone might, without becoming frivolous, enjoy comedy very much more than I.) Sufficient evidence, I suggest, can be found in considering the greatest comedies. First, only those 'addicted' to comedy, I suspect, would consider them equal or better than the greatest tragic films. Second, there is reasonably less agreement about the best comedies, as appreciation of the genre tends to depend upon temperament and character more than the appreciation of

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<sup>2</sup> OED 'film' 3c.

tragedy does. Third, comedies are infamously more 'time-bound' than tragedies. The ultimate reason for this order, I suggest, is simply the fact that comedy is defined by the laughable and the ludicrous. But human life, which film if an art must in some way imitate, is serious.

21. Likewise, various kinds of film are in some way 'secondary', whether one clearly sees why this is so or not. The James Bond films, as examples of some larger genre, seem to fall short of film in the perfect sense, simply because he lives in amoral world. This is to say the films represent him not as an immoral man, nor do they critique social morality by proposing him as the truly moral man. Rather they simply set a boundary upon reality so that his actions do not have full moral worth or perhaps moral worth in all the moral categories and this is clearly seen in their plots. Thus such a genre of film is necessarily secondary.

22. For various reasons, science fiction and fantasy films, Westerns and samurai films, musicals, most of what we call 'religious' films, and any number of genres fall short of the full nature and power of the film. Note, however, that in many of these genres, perhaps in any of them, a particular film may 'take' the genre beyond its proper limitations. So, for example, Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* is an excellent film simply speaking, although it obviously achieves this within the limits of a 'secondary' genre. Many feel this way about *The Searchers* with John Wayne.

23. Note also that certain distinctions we make most commonly in film, and incidentally these arise from its technology, need not imply an order in the kind of film. Most clear to me is the distinction between the color film and the black and white. So far as I can see, this distinction touches essentially upon a film's power, as two films combining color footage with black and white, Kurosawa's *High and Low* and Victor Fleming's *Wizard of Oz*, particularly convince me that it does. Nonetheless, each of these kinds of film can possess the full power of film as perfectly as possible. Anyone whose list of 'the greatest films' does not include at least a few of each has not seen enough films. And though I have seen only one 3-D film, I feel as certain, in passing, that this 'style' of film making is distinctly secondary.

24. I am less certain about another distinction in film, the silent film and the 'talkie'. Instinct, habit, and a few reasons suggest to me that the silent film is secondary. They often demand reading, which is clearly something extraneous to the nature and power of film. And, whether one reads dialogue or the film-maker can present an action without it, such silence attenuates the experience of action as it really exists. Further, the fact that comedy, a secondary genre, succeeds in the silent movies better than tragedy suggests that the mode itself is secondary. On this understanding, the small handful of silent films I consider 'perfect', such as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and to a lesser extent Victor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage*, must be judged as transcending the 'genre'.

25. On the other hand, two things make me fear these inclinations. One is merely the judgment of those who know silent film well and believe it equal or even better than the talkie. This is qualified, or perhaps answered, by the fact that most of these people are considering comedy most of all. Thus James Agee wrote a famous tribute to the comedies of the silent era. So Jacques Tati drew much of the inspiration for his comic style from Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

26. The other reason I feel a hesitation to judge this question is yet unresolved. The two directors I admire most, Satyajit Ray and Akira Kurosawa, each assert somewhere that among the most fundamental principles of film making is not to say what can be shown. Dialogue or narration that merely states what the viewer does or can look at is otiose and therefore detracts from the most proper power of film. So in *Rashoman*, for example, Kurosawa states clearly that he wished to regain a power found in silent film. I shall discuss this later for other purposes.

27. While these things make me hesitate in the judgment that the silent film is in principle a secondary form of film, I propose an experience which is itself imperfect but, I hope, revealing. When I was a child, foreign films were still dubbed into English. I remember the discomfort I felt the first time I saw such a film in a theater. By the time I was a young man, subtitles were regular. Almost immediately I developed a feeling for what we often call 'foreign film' for various reasons. But I propose that hearing the

sound of the actors, hopefully without dubbing in the original, completes the experience even when one does not understand that language.

28. I wish now to state the kind of film I am immediately considering in a positive though not overly restrictive manner. While I do not want to consider the tragic exclusively, I am speaking about film as though the tragic is naturally prior to the comic. Thus, film, as examined here, is the narrative film that imitates human action insofar as it leads to happiness or misery, as it is more or less commonly experienced, without such 'stylization' that the moral sensibility is in some way limited. Such films may obviously focus on certain aspects of the moral life, and perhaps they must. The principle point is that the moral sensibility, as it is naturally experienced, without the 'filter' of supernatural revelation, must be in play. I leave one puzzling exception, namely, the 'heroic' suicide, which is not experienced, so far as I can see, according to the moral character such suicide has in reality.

29. With this, I hope my last distinction regarding the most proper subject of this study will be clear. I propose that the 'epic film' does not fulfill this account as perfectly as the 'simple' tragedy, although it is 'closer' to it than any other 'genre'. More will be said about this when comparing film with drama and the novel. At present, let me assert that epic, whether a poem, a novel, or a film, does not consider human action precisely as proportioned to individuals, who are thus responsible for their happiness and misery. Rather, in its fullness, it considers the action of a people and, as though such action is not perfectly proportioned to individuals, epic resolves such action to its proper principles, the gods or God or 'atheism' and so on.

30. This may explain the deficiency film critic Roger Ebert expresses in his review of Sergei Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*: 'it is vulgar in the way all epic films must be vulgar (because they place value on sheer numbers and a massive production scheme)'. When I read this, I felt enlightened about my constant disappointment with films that are most properly called 'epic'. I also thought he probably explained my disappointment with Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*. Then I recalled that I had seen the film in a modified version that 'fit' a widescreen film to older television proportions.



Suspecting this may have had something to do with my disappointment, I obtained and watched the film in its proper aspect ratio. I was not surprised that I found it an exception to Ebert's general judgment against epic, although I do agree with his judgment.

31. Now the first question can be restated. Is there a distinct art, an intellectual habit, by which the one having makes an imitation of serious action acted out by persons determined in moral character and purpose with language and music by projected moving images, and does so well? Now the question is more than rhetorical. If the answer to the question is not seriously in doubt, the reason for this answer is not so clear. There are some reasonable objections to film as an art. To my mind, these come down to two aspects of the 'medium' itself. Insofar as film is a 'mere' recording, it does not seem distinct from the art which it records. Insofar as relies upon technology, film seems not be an art at all. Let me elaborate upon these objections.

32. What seems immediately clear to me is that the recording of music does not constitute an art distinct from the previously existing art of music. True, studio recording makes possible a few things impossible live. Most obviously, one musician can play more than one instrument or sing more than one line, and these can be played back simultaneously. So, Placido Domingo sings both the baritone Figaro and the tenor Lindoro in one recording, also filmed, of the Barber of Seville. Clearly the audio recording does not demand any art beyond music. Nor do I suspect that anyone would propose that such a trick as Alec Guinness' playing several roles in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is what makes film an art distinct from dramatic theater.

33. What I want to make clear is that the mere recording of a drama does not constitute a new art. This can be seen in numerous recordings of dramatic presentations, whether or not involving a 'live performance'. This can be experienced easily in a number of recordings of Shakespeare, some of which I commend as of particular excellence: The Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Winter's Tale* and *Julius Caesar*, The Royal Shakespeare Theatre's *The Comedy of Errors*, and various recent

recordings from the Globe, especially its *As You Like It*. These do not even attempt to become film in the sense I will defend as a distinct art.

34. But there are films that take Shakespeare 'off' the stage. Of course, Laurence Olivier plays with this very idea in his *Henry V*, passing from a stage production into a film about a stage production into a true film and so on. (Ingmar Bergman does something similar with Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.) Comparison of the San Francisco Repertory Theater's production of *The Taming of the Shrew* (put out by Broadway Theater Archive) with Zefferelli's film would make this distinction of a recorded play and a narrative film. Each is very good, if not excellent. Another worthwhile comparison can be found in Richard Burton's *Hamlet*, directed by Sir John Gielgud, and Peter Brook's *Hamlet*. The one is a 'full final rehearsal' without costumes, scenery, and props; the other is a film made in a theater. The one is not quite a theater performance; the other hovers between an intimate recording of such a performance and narrative film of the sort I am presently examining. On the other hand, Nick Havinga's production of *Mourning Becomes Elektra* seems to me to have moved completely from the stage to film, while retaining many strengths of the stage.

35. Another objection to the understanding of film as an art is its reliance upon technology. I cannot examine the distinction between technology and art here in any detail. Let me propose the general conception of art as 'correct reasoning applied to the making of things'. Technology, insofar as it is distinguished from this understanding of art, involves precisely making things with instruments whose causes are unknown and insofar as no act of reason is demanded in the proper use of these instruments. Thus general objections to photography suggest that the photographer is merely 'taking pictures'. He 'just records what is there'. Clearly, this objection is quite just for most still photography.

36. The tedium of many 'home movies' suggests that the objection has some force against moving pictures too. Such recording may give us images 'taken from live' all too accurately. Many find the Italian neo-realist movement in film to fall short for just this reason. They may not, really or apparently, distinguish them self-sufficiently from

nature to constitute an imitation. According to this objection, there might be many reasons that various pictures, moving or still, draw us and keep us looking, but these are accidental to photography's inability to rise above 'technology' so that it might become true art.

37. To answer these objections, I will do three things. I will recall the principles proposed by Aristotle in the *Poetics* for distinguishing and thus defining arts. Then, I will identify the principles by which the play and the novel are defined. Finally, I will propose the principles definitive of film, with particular attention to the relation of these to the art of the play and that of the novel.

38. Now Aristotle famously proposes that the imitative arts 'differ from each other by three [things], for by imitating with things other in kind or by [imitating] things other [in kind], or by [imitating] otherwise or in another way.' First, let me note that I do not sense that Aristotle is using the word *genus*, here translated kind, according to its distinct logical sense according to which it is said relative to species. Rather, it seems to me to abstract from whether these arts differ in genus or species or even from whether such a distinction is applicable, simply speaking, to the imitative arts.

39. Second, I propose a brief understanding of the three kinds of otherness. First, an imitation must be an imitation of something, its object. Imitations of things other in kind will be imitations other in kind.

40. Likewise, an imitation, insofar as it is an imitation and not the thing imitated, must be in some way other than the thing imitated. That which is other or distinct from the imitated is that in which is found that by which it imitates the imitated. This is that with which the art imitates its object, namely, the means of imitation. Imitations with means other in kind, even of the same things, will be imitations other in kind.

41. Finally, since the imitation is not the object, but something in which a likeness to the thing is found, the imitation falls short of the thing imitated. It is not the object by nature. To my mind, such a 'falling away' implies that it does not imitate one aspect or another of the object. Since the objects we are speaking of are material beings in which

there are manifold aspects, there are many ways in which the imitation may fall short of its object. Even imitations of the same things with the same means may determine distinct ways in which the object is imitated. I will later propose this part of the definition is particularly significant in any art's 'realism'.

42. Now Aristotle has already proposed the defining principles as well as the parts or elements of the tragic drama or play. I will briefly review his 'deduction' of these elements from tragedy's defining principles, while pointing out how the novel agrees with or differs from it. In stating the defining principles, Aristotle begins by establishing the object of tragedy, a serious action, sufficiently great to be a complete action. The most immediate means is language. Finally, this action is imitated by acting it out rather than merely 'telling' or narrating it.

43. From these Aristotle 'deduces' six elements of tragedy. From the fact that the action is 'acted out', we do not merely hear but also 'see' the tragedy. This element is traditionally called the 'spectacle'. Clearly the spectacle is not an element of the novel.

44. Aristotle then points out that 'melody' and diction' are the tragedy's means. I understand him to propose here that these are two aspects of the tragedy's language, each of which gives rise to determinate principles in the making a tragedy. 'Melody' implies both rhythm and consonance or harmony, so far as I can see. A novel obviously has language and thereby diction, though the novel seems to lack meter and harmony by definition. I wish to note in passing that I am supposing Aristotle to speak of language here as something heard with the ears. I suspect it is no accident that the novel is too rarely read aloud and often conceived as something experienced wholly in the imagination.

45. Finally, the action from its nature demands those who 'do' this action, who are such as they are by their character and thought. Further, the element intrinsic to the tragedy that corresponds properly to the action imitated is its plot, the *muthos*. Clearly all of these are critical to the novel. The novel's fundamentally narrative character, however, aided perhaps by silent reading, makes thought especially preeminent, albeit in subordination to plot.

46. Let me sum up the various elements of the tragedy and the novel—I am excepting the distinctly 'comic' novel. Both imitate human action, sufficiently serious and great so as to lead to happiness or misery. Because of this each have plot as their principle element or part. There must be those who do the action imitated and these will have some moral character and thought. Both imitate their object in language.

47. The novel uses language alone, and so it has 'diction' as an element or part. I would suggest that one might speak here of 'rhythm' as well, in the manner in which George Saintsbury wrote a study of English prose rhythm. Tragedy has an additional element available to it, 'meter' or 'measured rhythm'. Tragedy may be presented in 'verse', prose, or in a mixture of both.

48. Finally, from its mode the tragedy has a 'spectacle'. The novel from its mode does not. This should not imply, to my knowledge, that 'narration' will not give rise to principles proper to the novel. But as Aristotle points out that the spectacle is more the work of the 'mask-maker', so the principles of 'narration' may pertain more to elocution or some other art or technique.

49. The claim that film is an art is therefore a claim that it differs from these and other arts according to its object, means, and manner in such a way that the elements or parts of film, and therefore the principles that govern its making differ from those that govern other arts. I will therefore consider its object, means, and manner, and then determine its proper parts or elements.

50. Clearly the film considered here has the same object with tragedy and the novel. With them, language is a means to it, even in the silent film of significance. The film is acted out, like the tragedy and in distinction from the novel. Already this suggests the more obvious likeness of film to the tragedy which was itself the foundation for the first objection.

51. From its imitation of action, film has plot, character, and thought. So far as I can see, these do not differ much in themselves, from the role of these elements in tragedy and the novel. From its means, it has 'diction'. But one would not want to deny the role of music here, though rarely as song, which is how melody, harmony, and

meter enter into tragedy. Suggestive here is the famous claim that, when editing *Battleship Potemkin*, Eisenstein used a metronome. Further, his widow said regarding a re-cut version of the film that the intertitles were 'a visual and significant element of the montage. When they are removed the rhythm is lost.' Again, since the film is acted out, it has spectacle, and in this it agrees with tragedy and differs from the novel.

52. Now one might think that this account is sufficient to distinguish these three arts. All have plot, character, thought, and diction as elements. The tragedy and film have spectacle, while the novel only has narration. The tragedy, however, has meter, while the film and novel do not.

53. But such a judgment would be precipitous. Since Aristotle, the tragedy, and generally drama, has perfected a form, using prose alone. Such dramas obviously achieve the catharsis of pity and fear without any impediment caused by the use of prose. Further, such plays are often the basis for some of the greatest movies. Nonetheless, as proposed above, one readily distinguishes the mere filming of a play from a movie based upon it. Again, the script of the film is often called a 'screen-play'.

54. I suggest that the distinction between between tragedy and the film should be sought by defining the manner more exactly. When Aristotle states that insofar as the tragedy is acted out, it is seen and thus involves a spectacle, he is presenting this element without qualifications now needed to clarify the difference between these arts. The action of the tragedy is acted out 'in person' before us. But the film projects moving images of actors acting out the action.

55. This may not seem like a sufficient distinction. Two things will make its sufficiency more clear. First, a distinction that severed the film more completely from tragedy and the drama would be suspect. The film is so close to these arts that it often takes their names. Likewise, the practitioners of these arts are often the same people. Those who do make both works say clearly that the principles by which they make each work of art are the same in part and differ in part.

57. Second, this distinction in the presentation of the spectacle has significant effects upon our experience of the imitation of the action. One might say that the play

imitates action as observed in actual human life by a still and inactive observer. The film, however, imitates action as observed by someone able to shift his 'point of view' not only with respect to place and time but also with respect to the agents of the action. The audience can 'look' with the eyes of an 'impartial' observer or again with the eyes of those who act out the drama.

58. I will develop this understanding in the remaining two parts. For now, let me summarize the account of film as the art producing an imitation of an action significant in length and moral worth through language, usually with music, by projection of moving images of agents acting it out. Note that here I leave aside the question of whether my distinct mention of music, something I understand as common to music and drama, is simply a more explicit statement of Aristotle's understanding or an addition.

59. Next is a comparison of film, drama, and the novel to clarify what are the most proper elements of each, which will found the principles proper to the art. Thus, insofar as they agree, more or less, in imitation of a human action leading to happiness or misery, they share many rules, as it were, for plot, character, and thought laid out in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Speech and its principles will be common too. Nonetheless, all of these may differ and will be affected by their differences regarding music and spectacle, and, as I have suggested, especially the latter.

60. Attention to what is proper to them can be made clearer by consideration of an agreement at a much higher level. Though the imitative arts as a whole prescribe certain rules for the movements by which their works come to be, some of the imitations themselves are mobile or dynamic, while others are still or static. The painting and the sculpture themselves exist all at once and do not move, however necessary the *observer's* movement may be to grasp and appreciate the work. Think, above all, of *The Ambassadors* of Hans Holbein, one element of which can only be seen from a particular angle.

61. But the 'dynamic' arts have an object that only exists in movement. This emphasizes something common to all art, that the work must in some way be composed

or synthesized in the observer himself. Even the painting's elements must be analyzed and brought together with some appreciation in the viewer's interior powers.

62. But in the 'dynamic' arts, no part of the work exists 'all at once' outside the observer. Rather, the various parts are always passing. Several consequences must be noted. First, the various parts and the whole work must in some way be held in what I will, for now, call merely the 'memory'. Second, the grasp and the appreciation of the work, particularly at its 'climax' and end, cannot occur independent of the memory. Nonetheless, the work must be understood to be completed in the very images, actions, words, or combination thereof that constitute some last part of the *opus*, even if these are words imagined while reading.

63. Now I will begin the consideration proper to the three arts mentioned with a comment from Aristotle's *Poetics*. In arguing that the spectacle is the least proper of the elements of tragedy, he gives as evidence the fact that 'the tragedy's power occurs even without the actors and the acting out.'<sup>3</sup> He should not be read here as though he thinks these are accidental to the tragedy or to drama as a genre. But he is pointing out an aspect of the tragedy that will be helpful in comparing it to the others.

64. First, the novel seems to take such an isolation of dramatic power to its limit. There is no acting out, no actor, no music, no scene, no props, no masks. All that remains as an object independent of the observer are the novel's words. These have slightly more independence when read out loud. And though I do not think reading aloud is negligible to the novel, I cannot see that it is critical and certainly not definitive, especially as the exterior word itself must always be completed by an interior conception.

65. What follows immediately from this is the fact that the tragedy or drama is never experienced perfectly without some performance, however exquisite might be one's sensitivity to its power. The novel, however, exists complete and perfect, even if it

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<sup>3</sup> 1451a18-19.



be read entire without even a movement of the lips. This fact tells much about the relative power of the elements common to these genres.

66. From this it follows that the novel is tied much closer to certain elements of the observer's interior 'reconstruction'. There is no spectacle apart from his imagination of these events. No actor distinct from the novel's reader forces upon him a reading of a character's lines. The character and purpose of the plot's agents are not sensed objectively as present in men and women outside the observer. Rather, they are known only in the interior conception that would otherwise complement words brought forth from an actor who has taken on a *character* by which he embodies the character and thought or purpose of some agent of the plot.

67. In the drama, these elements, and, to this extent, the action, are experienced more distinctly as belonging to distinct and particular men and women. In this way the dramatic object is more realistic. This is closer to the way in which actual human action exists and is experienced. But, as in life, the interpretation of that action is limited by the power of dialogue or conversation.

68. The novel gains in its interior depth. We can see, so much more and so much more distinctly, the passions and motives that constitute the characters of the plot. A certain leisure in piecing out and meditating upon these aspects of a novel can give it even greater power. The drama, however, drives on, whether or not we have grasped the significance of its elements or our delight in them has been satiated.

69. From this one might infer that I will propose that the film, being tied even more to the spectacle than drama, is yet more objective. I do admit one sense in which this is so. An anecdote will be of use. Once I attended a live performance of *Twelfth Night* performed entirely by men. The intrigue at an opportunity to see 'boys' play the female roles was undone, however, when I heard the day before the performance that the man playing Olivia—the famous one—was nearing forty years old. I went anyway and was astounded when, stepping slightly upon his toes and taking a certain weight from his voice, he 'became' Olivia. And he was a rather muscular man whose broad

shoulders were only accentuated by the low cut of his dress. Still, these little tricks sufficed and I suspended disbelief.

70. Such tricks cannot work in film. The demands are 'higher' for realism in film, though such realism is still a product of art. Consideration of the reason that realism is so 'strict' in film will also lead to an understanding of the distance of film from objectivity, together with the novel and away from drama.

71. Now the source for the hyper-realism of film can be found in its technology, the camera. The camera is in its nature an extension of human visual power. Note that it is not, in itself, an imitation of objects as perceived by this power, as, for example, is painting. Rather, it instantiates the very experience of seeing. This may happen moment by moment, as in still photography, or again over time, insofar as the limitations of human visual powers leave pictures moving at a certain rate in a certain way indistinguishable from objects moving before us.

72. And, while I have made clear that I do not consider technology as such to be art, some art may follow technology insofar as there are acts of reason that relate its use to certain effects. However much art may go into making the camera, no art is involved in merely making a reproduction of a visual image by its means. Art will occur once one proposes to use the camera in determinate ways to produce visual images of various kinds, with various powers.

73. Film, I propose, determines its imitation of action precisely by the addition of such an art of moving visual images. The drama imitates actions by live actors acting them out before us, with all the powers and limitations that follow its manner of imitation. The novel imitates actions by narrating them in words that are hardly distinguishable from the observer's own thoughts, with the powers and limitations proper to this manner. Film imitates actions by presentation of moving visual images of actors acting them out, with the powers and limitations proper to such a manner.

74. That a hyper-realism should arise, with its own artistic strengths and limitations, should not surprise. But this realism gives the false sense that film is yet more objective in its representation than is the drama. I propose that its contraction to

the visual image, to the 'artificial eye', involves a necessary determination to imitating sight itself and the various interior powers that immediately follow sight, imagination, judgment, and memory, in the various forms these may take.

75. An illustration of this understanding can be found in one of the greatest and most perfect films ever made, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashoman*. We are told a story by various characters, principally a bandit, a samurai who dies, his wife who has been raped in his presence, and by a woodcutter who watched the event in hiding. Each proposes a significantly different account of what has happened. Whether any of them is conscious he is lying is beyond my present consideration. What I suggest is that we experience in this film the appearance of reality, but in fact we are experiencing another's memory or perhaps some false imagination that he 'foists' upon us. But in some way, even if the camera is not always showing us his visual field, we are always 'watching' what some one of these characters has experienced or feigns to have experienced. This is exaggerated in *Rashoman* by the fact that, for most of the film, these characters are testifying in court. But we do not see or hear the judge. Rather, we see from his vantage point, we take on the role of judge.

76. To make this account more universal, I suggest that when, in a film, we do not take on the role of judge, or the particular conscious experience of some character, we generally take on unconsciously the role of narrator. For the events in the film, in particular the integration of many different visual fields, is necessarily the work of the observer. Perhaps this is the reason that for some time the editor was thought to be the principal maker of the film, the one who had the art *par excellence*. Kurosawa says explicitly that he considers editing the most important task in making a film.

77. The following account of film is a refinement of what has been drawn from this comparison with drama and the novel. Its details will be confirmed in answering the third and final question. Film is an art imitating serious action having a plot enacted by various persons having moral character and thought or purposes, through language and music, by the projection of visual images that reproduce an act of sight or visual imagination insofar as such an act is presently judged or remembered or as something

to be judged. Or maybe one can say that it presents through words and music an action as seen, imagined, or remembered and apt to be judged. And perhaps it should be emphasized here that this must all be taken as the foundation for an art that understands the ability of such a work of art to produce the tragic and, secondarily, the comic, passion.

78. The third question was proposed at the beginning: what are the powers most proper to film? Answering this demands brief attention to the distinction between powers common to various arts and those proper to one. After doing this, I will make a remark or two about the powers common to drama and film. Then, I will answer the question directly.

79. When Aristotle states that the 'tragedy's power' exists even without the actors' acting it out, he points out what we all experience, that there is something common experienced in watching a drama and in reading it. This is clearly what we experience in the likeness of the novel and short story to the drama and even more in the likeness of film to the drama.

80. Whatever is common to all three (and any other genres) will give rise to the rules that in some sense constitute these arts. So in his preface to the novella *Joseph Andrews* (which can be taken as laying out the principles of all his novels), Henry Fielding suggests that his determinations regarding comedy complete Aristotle's consideration of the tragic in the *Poetics*. Yet his model for comedy is quite clearly Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. He rightly understands that there is something common to his art and the art that Aristotle examines and that what is common is prior to what distinguishes these arts. Note that this does not exclude the possibility or perhaps the fact that whatever is proper to an art that has things in common with others will determine the rules that guide them in common.

81. Now certain rules that Aristotle lays out in the *poetics* regarding the nature and unity of the action imitated, the character of the hero, and so on must be common to these three arts. The rules must, however, be adapted to the particular art, since Aristotle clearly presents them in the manner proper to drama. Let me also add that I

understand Aristotle to present them to the dramatist that needs them. Many times he makes clear that Homer has a power to produce poetic pleasures even with plots that are less conducive to these pleasures.

82. As the novel lacks the spectacle, which is common to film and drama, these arts must have more rules that apply to them in common. So a very popular book exists called '*Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*' with the sub-title 'Storytelling Secrets from the Greatest Mind in Western Civilization'. While many of its chapters might be useful to a novelist, others have titles that clearly imply a spectacle: 'Whatever Causes the Action Better Be Up There on the Screen', 'Action Speaks Louder Than Words, and Together They Can Speak Volumes!', and so on. The principles or rules discussed in such chapters will concern the importance of using the available principles to manifest the action imitated.

83. Now the proper rules for film will follow immediately from the aspects of the spectacle that are proper to it. I do not, however, want to suggest that these will be limited to the spectacle. Clearly the speaking of dialogue in a theater affects the manner in which they are delivered and probably even the sort of dialogue possible. This can make a filmed theater performance difficult to watch. Again, when the image is fixed for ever as it is in film, music can have a more determinate power, but at the cost, perhaps, of a certain freedom. Nonetheless, I will be attending only to the aspects proper to the spectacle, since these are the principles of the proper effects even with other elements of the film.

84. I will begin by considering the re-presentation of the act of sight. Now some concerns are clearly more 'material' than others. Most immediately, certain aspects of the projected image arise. Is this image black and white, tinted, or in color? Further, one film can really use all three, albeit for some effect. Again, is the image in the ratio of 4:3 or in one of the various widescreen ratios?

85. I suppose that answers to these questions must be resolved to real properties of sight. For now, I can only make some provisional suggestions. Seeing black and white involves the use of our eyes' rods only, while seeing color involves the use of rods

and cones. In my understanding, the black and white vision is particularly apt to bring out the figures of things, though it does not distinguish the things figured very much. Color has just the opposite effect; it highlights the distinct surfaces but obscures their edges.

86. In fact, a black and white film without very distinct figures is simply hard to see. Many great black and white films, such as Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and *Othello*, involve many scenes in which certain shapes stand out, almost in an iconic manner. Both these films by Orson Welles use light and shadows to suggest bars and cages that constrain the hero. Again, Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* uses this effect with particular power in the scene in which Saint Joan is presented with the instruments of torture. Along the same lines I mention Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal* and *Virgin Spring*, Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, *High and Low*, *Stray Dog*.

87. Perhaps this is one reason why a filmmaker like Akira Kurosawa came late to making color films, especially given the uneven quality of color film for some time. When he did make color films, he often made very brightly colored films such as *Ran* and *Kagemusha*. There are some color films that seem to luxuriate in the 'bleeding' of color over the screen rather than bright, distinct patches of colors. Some films of Ermanno Olmi seem to have this character: *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs* and *The Profession of Arms*. Likewise, Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala*, *Bright Star*, and the 'musical' *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*.

88. Yet a few films—and Luchino Visconti may be the master here—seem to balance the sense of figure and the harmony of color against color quite perfectly. Visconti's *The Leopard* and *Senso* come most readily to my mind.

89. I should add here that I have not yet introduced here the question of lenses. The telephoto lens, for example, by changing the apparent sizes of farther and nearer things, seems to flatten the image and sharpen the figures. Yet clearly this, as well as the question of color or black and white, will affect our sense of focus in the act of sight, whether one focuses on color or figure, whether one focuses near or far, and so on. To counterpoise color with black and white is also possible. The movement from black and

white to color and back again was famously used with great effect in the *Wizard of Oz*. The moment of color that distinguishes 'heaven' and 'hell' in Kurosawa's *High and Low* is that much greater for its simplicity.

90. The question of wide-screen or full-screen must also be resolved to the visual field. Both ratios are wider than they are 'tall'. Note that this is opposed to the 'standard' for the photograph. The general principle in cinematographic ratios seems to be founded on the character of our visual field, which, from the orientation of our two eyes extends more 'across'. The 4:3 ratio seems to give us a general sense of the field upon which we are focusing. The widescreen seems immediately to reproduce the field so as to include our peripheral vision. This certainly fits some of the names for widescreen technologies: VistaVision, Cinerama, CinemaScope and Panavision. The first widescreen films seem to underscore this fact. Perhaps too the near necessity of filming epics in widescreen. Again, some films leave one with this feeling. Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven* and Peter Weir's *Gallipoli*, as well as Kurosawa's color films in the samurai genre, come immediately to mind.

91. But this might be too hasty. In fact, widescreen is capable of greater contrast of focus than full-screen. Though it can provide the impression of panorama, it can also suggest the most intense focus. The widescreen close up seems to force the attention to one spot on the screen, while the full-screen close up allows us some freedom up and down. An opportunity for comparing aspect ratios is available with the recent Criterion edition of Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, which present the film in three ratios, 1.66:1, 1.85:1 and 4:3. It was filmed during a period in which widescreen was being introduced, though not everywhere. The camera men shot with a technique called 'shoot and protect'. The focusing lens provides lines marking the wider aspect ratios, so that the cameraman can be sure that the wider ratios do not lose anything essential and the taller does not include inappropriate material.

92. So far I have considered what I am calling 'material' aspects of the image. The remaining considerations I will call 'formal'. All these concern the sort of interior attention that is given to the image. Now sometimes, for some length of time, the act of

seeing is merely re-presented as itself desirable. This was almost the only pleasure I took the first time I watched Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, and I doubt the film intends too much more. The film critic Roger Ebert says, 'Malick's vision of the land, indeed, is so sweeping that an ordinary, human-scale "story" in the foreground would be a distraction...This is one of the most beautifully photographed films ever made'.

93. Perhaps no film can escape entirely from this but some use it to particular effect. *West Side Story* begins with a magnificent view looking directly down upon Manhattan and taking us, without hurry, to the block on the West Side where the story begins. Needless to say, such an interpretation of the musical's title is impossible on stage. A similar approach to the island opens Kineto Shindo's *The Naked Island*.

94. Again, such sight may of itself, without attention to a conscious judgment, produce some passion. In Michael Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia*, after Clytemnestra and Iphigenia set off with their entourage for the camp of Agamemnon's army, a long passage of the film alternately watches them traveling and Agamemnon waiting. At first one merely enjoys the sight of the wedding party in their carts moving over the Greek countryside. This is 'counterpointed' by Agamemnon's expectation. After a break in these views, while the wedding party rests for the night, we again take up watching. The continued alteration of views without dialogue necessarily increases our sense of Agamemnon's agitation, which thereby becomes even more opposed to the joy of the party.

95. Sometimes, in fact quite often, a film leaves aside the view of the 'observer' or rather, the 'narrator', and takes on the visual field of one of the characters. One of innumerable examples here is the moment in *Anna Karenina* when Vronsky and Anna first see each other. This moment is critical to the novel's plot and every production must make much of it. The Russian film by Aleksandr Zarkhi does this in a manner very faithful to the novel. The observer qua narrator sees them meet and this is all the drama can do. But then we see Vronky's seeing her. We experience his act of seeing her. The novel can describe what Vronsky sees and his thoughts or feelings upon seeing her,



but the film can reproduce his experience of seeing her. In a drama we can only see them meet and perhaps hear a soliloquy.

96. Now sometimes the sight is immediately a principle of our judgment about the film's action. Note that I am distinguishing this from the presentation of an act of sight as a principle of judgment on the part of some character in the plot. The latter I will discuss later. Inescapably more often, the observer sees something which allows him to judge the action. The most famous case must be the closing scene of *Citizen Kane*, when we see 'Rosebud', for which the anonymous 'hero' of the film has been searching throughout in vain. I leave aside here what sort of resolution this is meant to bring the observer.

97. More proper to the film is when it reproduces the character's visual field as the principle of some judgment or sizing-up. In Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, this is used to particular effect when, sitting around the dinner table and discussing a murder of a rich old widow in New York, from which Uncle Charlie has recently arrived, the young lady of the house, his namesake, Charlie, says pointedly, 'They are human.' We see Uncle Charlie turn to the girl, then from her point of view we see him close-up, asking 'Are they?'

98. Often, from the very beginning of film, the visual field has been used to reproduce a character's imagination. Buster Keaton does this in *Our Hospitality*, when the hero hears that he has inherited his father's house and again when he stands before the inherited shack, we see the grand Southern estate that he 'dreams' he has inherited. Likewise, Charlie Chaplin uses this technique in *The Gold Rush*, when another starving character imagines him as a big chicken.

99. Sometimes this is taken to the 'extreme' of presenting dreams or even hallucinations. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* seems to present itself as a whole as the hero's hallucination. Perhaps Christopher Nolan's *Memento* is open to a similar interpretation. More common is presentation of a dream, hopefully balancing the twin difficulties of synthesizing its images and of judging its reality.

100. Kurosawa seems to aim at this in the early segments of his later work *Dreams*. Here he wants us to get a sense of his own dreams as a child, but perhaps the sections are too long and too coherent to give us the feeling of the dream proper. In George Cukor's comedy *The Marrying Kind*, Aldo Ray stars in a delightful dream sequence. And there are many later and better examples.

101. I have already mentioned *Memento* and I suppose it manifests *par excellence* the power of re-presenting acts of memory. I am not as sure how good a film it is, but it has great power from this ability. The visual field is present as something remembered with a certain judgment. We see that something happened. Perhaps we see it again and see more of it or more in it. Again, as *Memento* suggests, memory may be confused with imagination and may be associated with false judgments.

102. Of course, many films are presented, in whole or in part, as the act of someone remembering. Often this does not touch the representation except as a way into the story. But sometimes, even when it is not used as intensely as in *Memento*, memory introduces depth to a film.

103. In *Citizen Kane* we are offered various memories of Kane: a newsreel reporting his death and reviewing his public life and then intimate accounts from people who knew him at various points in his life. While we are never led to think that any of these accounts have distorted the principal character, we sense that something essential to the man has been missed by everyone or rather that the man himself missed something essential to life. This is highlighted by the hero-reporter's assertion to Kane's second wife, 'You know, I kinda feel sorry for him.' 'You think I don't?' she sobs. This sense is, of course, underscored by our discovery of Rosebud.

104. Again, in *Rashoman* we are presented with various pretended memories and, of course, we discover that everyone is lying, at least a little. This adds a different order of depth. As Kurosawa says, 'Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings—the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are. It even shows this sinful need for

flattering falsehood going beyond the grave...'<sup>4</sup> Note that *Rashoman* and various films like it also suggest the power that someone's proposed memory has upon us.

105. I do not want to overemphasize here the role of representing acts of imagination and memory in films. They must remain techniques in telling a story, revealing character and purposes, showing us points of view. But the ability to represent such acts as they belong to particular characters is merely an aspect of its general power to represent an ordered variety of acts: sight, imagination, suspicion, certitude, judgment, and so on. Further, these acts can migrate from one character to another, from narrator, observer, hero or heroine, the antagonist, etc.. This power distinguishes it fundamentally from the drama, which has very little of such power. The novel, of course, can enter deep into the interior lives of characters but they can be reproduced for us only through words and to this extent through thought and rather close to thought. This relationship with thought gives the novel exceptional possibilities for clarity and determination. What the film loses in the determination of its images, it gains as a more immediate impact because of its critical tie to the immediate sensible, albeit, visual, experience.

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<sup>4</sup> *Something Like an Autobiography*, p. 183.