

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC IMAGE: AN HEGELIAN PERSPECTIVE

Jean-Philippe Deranty

What is the matter of cinematographic images? What is the specific materiality of those complex projections of light onto screens that we call motion pictures? And consequently, what is the matter *with* cinematographic images?

This paper is a phenomenological meditation on the ontology of cinematographic pictures, taking its inspiration from Hegel's lectures on aesthetics.¹ The justification for this anachronistic use of Hegel is hopefully provided by the analysis as a whole. In his aesthetics, Hegel studies the modes in which ideas and ideals are expressed differently in the different art forms. Since these expressions are expressions of relevant ideas and ideals, Hegel also studies why they matter to societies and social beings. Few theories deal more extensively with the matter of, and with, art. It seems to me that the fundamental theses at the core of his aesthetics can be extended with great fecundity to the question of cinema.

Part I gives a brief overview of the framework of Hegel's aesthetics. This framework helps clarify the different meanings of the "matter" of art. By asking how cinema would fit in this framework, we gain a useful perspective to analyse the specific materiality of cinema by contrast with other media.

Part II focuses on the first evident material dimension of cinematographic images, their being made of light. Hegel's idea of a historical progress of art as a process of spiritualisation applies also to the different uses of light. It can be said that for him art history is also the history of the "spiritualisation" of light, from the most material, spatial type of light in symbolic art (architecture), to the inner differentiation of light in the colours of painting. Cinema, as an art of light, seems to represent the culmination of the arts of visibility.

For Hegel, spiritualisation of the matter of art leads ultimately to poetry, where light is no longer material but, metaphorically, the light of spirit; where the matter of the artwork is the whole realm of human representations. This narrative inspires the speculative thought expounded in Part III: that cinema could in fact be conceived beyond simple mimesis as the externalisation and projection of human representations, as the visualisation of the imaginary.

Finally, Part IV deals with another obvious material aspect of cinematographic images, namely the fact that they reproduce movement by moving themselves. Once more, a central tenet of Hegelian aesthetics can be put to use to give an account of this dimension. For Hegel, the capture of movement is another fundamental aspect underpinning art history in its progress. Again, the question can be raised from another perspective: despite being an art of visibility, doesn't cinema, as the art of movement, fulfil one of the essential representational functions that Hegel assigns to art in general?

1. The matter of artworks

I will refer mainly to the 1823 Berlin lectures published in Germany in 1998, because they offer more authentic formulations than the reference 1845 Hotho edition translated by Knox.²

As stated in the introduction, in his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel attempts to answer the following questions: what is the matter of, and what is the matter with, works of art? He answers these questions at three different levels, even though these three levels are delineated along the form-content dichotomy. These three levels can be characterised as the *symbolic* order, the order of *representation* and the *material* order.

The first sense of *matter* in the expression "artistic matter" is the *symbolic* matter that provides the cultural framework and the cultural objects for the artwork. For Hegel, this matter is spiritual, it is Spirit itself in the guise of sensible representation.³ By Spirit, Hegel understands 'the highest representations of a people', the system of values, core beliefs and norms that underpins that people's existence. In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel sometimes understands Spirit as meaning literally the highest entity in a people's belief system, in other words this people's deity or deities, but sometimes he means, more prosaically, the interests and values that are truly important for human beings and particular societies:

in general, Art has the aim of making visible what is in the human Spirit, what is true in the human Spirit, what stirs the human soul to its roots, what takes place in the human Spirit Art teaches humans about the human, wakes slumbering emotions about, and gives representations of, the true interest of Spirit.⁴

For Hegel, the signified, the spiritual content of art, is Spirit, which can mean the god or gods of a people, but also, more simply, their highest values, or even more prosaically their highest interests.

The aim of art is to give the spiritual realm a sensible representation, that is to say a representation for the senses in sensible matter. The *material* order is therefore constituted by the use representation makes of the two dimensions of space and time, which are defined as the "general forms of the sensible, that through which all that is sensible is sensible, the general abstraction of the sensible".⁵ Architecture uses brute matter, abstract space and light; sculpture uses formed matter; painting uses colour and design; music uses sound; and literature uses words. Hegel sometimes takes the term "content" to identify this particular aspect of the artwork, sometimes he refers to it as "form", mostly, however, as "material" (*Material*).

Finally, the *representational* matter of the work of art is the myth, the *muthos*, the actual artistic representation, narration in the case of literature, the motif in painting, the character in sculpture. Hegel refers to this side as the "form" of the artwork.

Truth in art is defined as correspondence between content and form. A spiritual, or symbolic, content requires the corresponding type of forms, which are best expressed in a particular art form, which in turn uses a certain material. The three orders are interconnected and the different grades of this interconnection define the system of the art forms (symbolic, classical and romantic) and of the arts (architecture, painting, music, poetry).

Symbolic art corresponds to a spiritual content that is "more or less abstract, dim and not yet truly determined in itself"⁶, natural, pantheistic deities, the "religion of light".⁷ The "form", the representational object that corresponds to this dim content, is the "form that is still external, indifferent, the natural, immediate one".⁸ Since the symbolic content remains ill defined, no form can adequately express it. Symbolic art is therefore the realm of the sublime. It is best captured in architecture, for instance in the sublime shapes of the pyramids, or "giants, colossi, statues with a hundred arms and a

hundred breasts".⁹ The corresponding material is abstract space, the most abstract form of the abstraction of the sensible.

Classical art is the interconnection of a "true content, the concrete spiritual", with the true form "which is the human form; since only this form is the form of the spiritual, the way the spiritual can form itself in temporal existence". In this (human) shape, Nature and Spirit, the divine and the human are united.¹⁰ The best representation of this correspondence is in sculpture. The material is a new use of space, "the whole space determined in organic figuration originating inside and spreading into the outside (*von Innen heraus*)".¹¹

Finally, romantic art's content is the spiritual order developed to the stage of "the freedom of Spirit", "absolute interiority", "subjectivity that knows itself as infinite".¹² Again, as in classical art, the human form is here predominant, but this time the human form is inhabited by the infinity of Spirit and is therefore beyond sensible representation. The sensible, like in the symbolic form, is unable to capture adequately the level that Spirit has reached, but this time because Spirit has moved beyond the natural. The natural and the sensible are unable to symbolise the content of the artwork. The three romantic arts are painting, which uses an even more spiritualised form of space, the surface; music where space goes to the point, the point in time (*Zeitpunkt*);¹³ and poetry that uses the material of "time, equally the point, but such that it does not exhibit itself as formal negativity, but as perfectly concrete, as point of Spirit, as the thinking subject uniting in himself the infinite space of representation with the time of sound".¹⁴

II. The material of representation

For Hegel, there are two ways of writing the historical development of artistic materials. I shall analyse one in the last section. The first is the one I have just highlighted. The history of art is the history of the gradual spiritualisation of the materials used in different art forms, from the heavy, angular masses in architecture and their expansion in the three dimensions of space, to the vanishing, near-inexistent sound of words evoking the whole space of the imaginary in literature. As art progresses in history, its material loses the resistance of materiality and becomes more capable of being formed. Artistic matter becomes what Spirit itself is, form forming itself.

What then is the material of cinema? What stuff is the motion picture made of? What are the specific temporal and spatial features of the materiality of the cinematic picture?

At first, reasoning in Hegelian terms, cinema seems to operate at a stage of materiality less advanced than literature. Cinema is made up of moving pictures. It is the same material as the one used in painting, surface and colour, with the addition of movement.

In point of fact, however, the cinematographic image is made up of light. The cinematic picture is projected light, whose potentially infinite expansion is arrested by a screen, a flat, two-dimensional space.

But there are different sorts of lights. Painting itself, but also architecture and sculpture, make use of light, but these different uses must be carefully distinguished. In his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel defines light as the primary degree of physicality, because light, as immediate self-identity, points to the primordial indivisibility of matter: "the first qualified matter exists as pure identity with itself, unity of reflection in itself, therefore the first still abstract manifestation This existing universal self of matter is light". And further on: "as the abstract self of matter, light is absolutely lightweight, and as matter, infinite, but as material ideality it is inseparable and simple being outside of itself".¹⁵ Despite being the first degree of physicality, that is to say, in Hegel's system, the first degree in the non-spiritual sphere, light is, however, also an adequate physical figuration, or metaphor, of Spirit itself since Spirit is also defined as self-identity. Light corresponds in the natural (the non-spiritual) to what Spirit becomes in its own sphere: "pure identity with itself".

Hegel distinguishes between the different uses of light in the different arts, depending on the degree to which this art is able to reveal the essence of light, namely its spirit-like nature. The history of art is also the history of the liberation of light from matter, the history of the spiritualisation of light, until light reaches the point where it fully reveals its essence as figuration of Spirit. This liberation of light is liberation from space:

True, the material of architecture and sculpture is likewise visible and coloured, but it is not, as in painting, the making visible as such; it is not the simple light which, differentiating itself in its contrast with darkness, and in combination therewith, becomes colour. This quality of visibility, inherently subjectivised and posited as ideal, needs neither the abstract mechanical difference of mass operative in heavy matter, as in architecture, nor the totality of sensuous spatiality, which sculpture retains, even if concentrated and in organic shapes. On the

contrary, the visibility and the making visible which belong to painting have their differences in a more ideal way, i.e. in the particular colour, and they free art from the *complete* sensuous spatiality of material things by being restricted to the dimensions of a *plane* surface.¹⁶

From architecture to painting, we move from material light to spiritual light. Material light is used in the symbolic form of art and corresponds to the lesser stages of spiritual development. It corresponds, for instance, to early Eastern religions.¹⁷ Spiritual light is the material of romantic art and an image of Spirit revealed in its true form.¹⁸ Light is both the material and the object of the romantic artwork.

What kind of light is the cinema image made of? If painting's medium is "visibility as such", which means light differentiating itself into itself, not needing spatiality to produce its differences (viz. colour), then cinema, as the art of light, can be characterised as the culmination of the arts of visibility.

If we recall, in the mid-1890s, when engineers throughout the Western world were engaged in a race to find the right formula that would make the existing motion picture devices technically and commercially viable, the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe* (patented 13 February 1895) was only one of the possible solutions, alongside Charles Jenkins' and Thomas Armat's *Phantoscope* (patented 28 May 1895), the 'lightviewer'.

Mimicking Hegel's phrase, we could say that the cinematographic image is made up of pure self-differentiating light that does not even need space, since it can be projected onto any screen and still remain what it is. Cinematic light is light (almost) liberated from space. Its relation to space is only contingent. The cinematographic image is essentially holographic, or ghostly. Thus it is a superior form of visibility compared to painting and even photography, since they both require a specific spatial support to which they are attached. It is striking to note that this short characterisation of the cinematographic image as expanding in infinity corresponds to what Hegel thinks is the very essence of light: "absolute expansion in space ... infinite spatial dispersion (*Zerstreuung*)".¹⁹

To this substantive thesis, a few supplementary remarks can be added:

1. This characterisation of cinematographic light could speculatively explain the eerie beauty of black and white films (as well as black and white photography), a beauty that often cannot be matched by the

naturalism of colour films. This is a kind of aesthetic fact that demands explanation. It arrested many of the great heroes of cinema theory in the 1930s. Foremost amongst them was Rudolph Arnheim. For him, black and white, silent photography, was superior to coloured "talkies" because it does not deter the spectator from the "essence" of the cinematic medium. Being closer to its artistic essence, it is closer to art than naturalistic reflexes.²⁰

It is a fact, for example, that colour, like sound, was a technical possibility long before it was universally exploited by the industry. The first fictional director, Georges Méliès, introduced colour through hand-painting and tinting. Hand-painting of the negatives was still commonly used until the early 1930s. By 1906, the Kinemacolor system of Charles Urban and Albert Smith was already a technical and commercial success. In 1922, the first Technicolor film was shot (*Toll of the Sea*). Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 version of *The Ten Commandments* had a few scenes in colour using the Technicolor technique. It is as though for generations of cinema audiences, the naturalism of colour impinged upon the aesthetic power of moving pictures.

2. There are many films in which the treatment of light is one of the main stylistic and thematic issues. One illustrious historical example is provided by the systematic use of black and white contrasts in classical Hollywood productions to structure individual frames, scenes and the narrative itself. *Casablanca* is a particularly representative case. Most frames are composed using a sharp opposition of black and white. For example, throughout the film, Bogart wears a white jacket and black trousers and moves in a set also sharply contrasted between heavy black and white elements. In the final scene, Bergman's and Bogart's fates are symbolically enmeshed in a smooth scaling of greys that blends into the median shared grey of their lips and bodies, while the darkness of their heads (Bogart's hat, Bergman's hat and hair) contrasts with the whiteness of their hearts (their shirts).

The scenes of smoking rooms could also be mentioned. Smoke is an object of choice for cinematographers since it arrests light, makes it appear, as the developer, the *révélateur*, does in the treatment of the negative. Smoke is the revealer of light, but so are veils, filters, windows, broken mirrors, the surface of lakes and oceans, and so on. One striking example is the aesthetic universe of Max Ophüls. In his films, obstacles, shutters, curtains, veils, staircases, systematically

interfere with light. These interferences are not just metaphors but real instruments, and even protagonists, of the narrative.

3. Many of the great cinematographers have produced images that have endured because of the poignancy of their light effects. Interestingly in this Hegelian context, the most famous proponents of stark light contrasts, the German expressionists, combined their highly formalistic use of light with their research into the architectural aspect of cinema. One could argue that the light of the German expressionists corresponds to the architectural use of light that Hegel defined.

4. Every art form develops into an abstract stage, where reflexion on its own stylistic, representational and material possibilities and limits constitutes its main content. Abstract painting ends up in pure colour and in geometry. Abstract cinema (as in Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique*) would be about the movements of light, its possible sources, its diffractions, reflections, and the infinite shadings of *chiaroscuro*.

The need for art in human beings stems from Spirit's drive to make itself objective, to achieve self-reflection: "Art shares its highest vocation with religion and philosophy; like the other two it is a way to express and bring to consciousness the highest demands of Spirit".²¹ Art's specificity compared to other spiritual domains is that its self-representation is in the realm of the sensuous. Art's material is "spiritualised sensible as well as sensibilised spiritual (*vergeistigtes Sinnliches sowie versinnlichtes Geistiges*)".²² The other name of this element is *Schein*, semblance, appearance, apparition: "the pure sensible is *Schein* and in more accurate form, the shape (*Gestalt*), it is the pure appearing (*Aussehen*) and sounding (*Klingen*) of things"; "Art is beauty's realm of shadows. These sensible shadows are the works of art".²³

This characterisation, which characterises art in general, is suited more particularly for cinema. Cinema is the art of *Schein par excellence*, the art of semblance, where objects and persons are reduced to their ghostly envelopes. In these metaphors, Hegel links once more the essence of art to the visible, and more precisely to light effects, to shadows. Art is simply what makes Spirit visible. Since Spirit tends towards its own representation, and its material representation is visible, Hegel might have said of the arts of the visible that they, as opposed to poetry, were the most adequate figurations of Spirit. Cinema would then mark the end of Spirit's quest for its own visibility.

In strict Hegelian terms, however, the materiality of light, as opposed to the ideality of time, puts the non-figurative higher. For Hegel, a crucial step in spiritualisation is accomplished when art moves from visibility, always tied to spatiality, to temporality, in which space is reduced to its absolute simplicity as point. Spiritualised space becomes time as instant, *Zeit-punkt*, the point in time. Cinema, despite the fact that it is light in movement, temporal light, remains bound to the materiality of light, to the externality of visibility. Therefore, cinema, as the ultimate art of the visible, would have to be pronounced less "spiritual" than poetry in a Hegelian system of the arts. In poetry space is present, but only as internal space, as the space of inner life.

This last remark, however, indicates a new direction, in which the hierarchy between literature and cinema can be questioned again.

III. The space of representation

As Hegel explains, poetry marks a progress in the system of the arts because "the content of the discursive art form, the determinate formation that is placed in the subjective element [= sound], is the representation", because

representation itself is the element, the way in which the substantial content becomes for itself. It is the thing itself, the content, that must become the object of Spirit. It becomes that in consciousness as represented. The latter is here material, just as marble, or colour, or sound were.²⁴

In other words, poetry marks a progress in art history, indeed poetry is the epitome of art, to the extent that all arts are forms of poetry, because it uses as material a stuff that is already fully spiritual, namely the whole realm of human representations: "the content of the discursive art is the whole wealth of the representation".²⁵ Words, the sounds carrying meaning, are near-immaterial signs whose single purpose is to evoke the infinite richness of representations. This superiority of poetry entails also its artistic weakness:

This stuff also has a default, which is that it is not as determinate as sensible intuition. Representation is of spiritual nature, and as such, it inherits the generality that belongs to thought. Consequently, representation cannot represent the thing concretely as one, as does sculpture.²⁶

By the power of representation, Hegel understands the power to create a series of mental images that capture the universality of the thing conceived, without all the moments that are organically connected being conceived in their systematic interrelations. Representation is therefore "picture-thinking", the extraction and putting-next-to-each-other of the different moments of a notion. The severing of the systematic links between those moments is what Hegel calls abstraction. Picture-thinking is opposed to the conceptual thinking that respects the links between the moments of a notion.

The way picture-thinking operates is fundamentally akin to literature, as it establishes linear narratives. Famously, the emblematic mode of representational thinking occurs in religious representation where:

[representation] gives a separate being to the elements of its content ... making them presuppositions towards each other, and phenomena which succeed each other; it makes their relationship a series of events according to finite reflective determinations.²⁷

Representational thinking works by telling a narrative linking the moments of thought in linear, successive, often causal, fashion. Conversely, literature is the art of representation. It is on the basis of this homology that Hegel claims that the material of literature is made up of the whole wealth of human representations, those meaningful images present within the human soul, the products of the rational, non-conceptual powers of the human soul.

This inspires the following speculation: if representation is the real material of poetry, cannot the same be said of cinema?

The cinematographic picture oscillates between two ontological dimensions: on the one hand, it is the simple recording of reality, the recording of the actors acting, of the set, of the light on the set, and so on. But it is also a fictionalisation of that reality. Even the most naturalistic form of recording fictionalises its object by framing it, choosing a point of view, lighting in a certain way, and so on. The cinematographic image is never simple mimesis. I would like to propose that the ontological supplement that it brings can be described in the same terms as poetical images, as representation. In that sense, what cinema offers is not a simple re-presentation of reality, but already our intellectual processing of it. Cinema, in that sense, is the projection outside of internal imagery. It is the imaginary made visible.

This can be substantiated by the fact that, for Hegel, the representational faculties of the human mind are directly involved in the creation of inner images, of an imaginary: "Spirit as human intelligence is reproductive power to create images (*reproduktive Einbildungskraft*)".²⁸ This is the lower stage of imagination, the power to evoke inner images that were created in contact with the external world. This power becomes active, productive creative power as *Phantasie*, the power to create images autonomously as arrangements of the picture-like material drawn from the wealth of the unconscious imaginary. But these two types of image-creations function representationally by extracting aspects of the world, which both capture them and separate them from each other. A mental image for Hegel is an aspect of the world made autonomous and internalised. Those mental images, it could be argued, are exactly what is exposed on screens in the shape of cinematographic pictures.

This, however, is precisely what constitutes the very material of art in general: "the [specific] productivity [in art] is the inseparability of the spiritual and the sensible. We call this type of production, production of the imagination (*Produzieren der Phantasie*)".²⁹ *Phantasie*, based on the Greek radical *pho-*, *phant-*, is obviously dependent on visibility. *Phantasie* makes inner intuitions visible, as it is "the spirit, the rational, the producing spiritual, that brings its own production into the sensible realm".³⁰ Cinema, as the ultimate art of the visible, is the most adequate expression of *Phantasie*. In cinema, the fundamental homology between the picture-creating, story-telling powers of the human mind, representation and imagination, and the means and ends of art, finds its most appropriate manifestation.

This characterisation of the cinematographic picture as externalisation of mental images accounts for its uncanny powers, for which pure mimesis is insufficient. The cinematic image is not, or not just, an image of the real. It is also an image of our inner world. Of course, this distinction is ultimately irrelevant for Hegel.

This is the source of cinema's quasi-hypnotic effect. It explains the lack of effort that is required to view a cinematic sequence compared to the intellectual strain of reading a page, or the active contemplation of a painting. The cinematographic picture finds direct access to our souls because it is the direct exposing of their content. This famous passage from the 1805 *Lena* lectures describing the first stage in the mind's creation of inner images, applies well to the cinematographic world:

The Human being is this night, this empty nothingness that contains everything in its simpleness, the richness of an infinity of representations and pictures. This is the night, the interior of nature, which exists here—pure Self. In phantasmagoric representations, it is night all around; a bloody head suddenly shoots out here, another white shape there, which disappear in the same way. This is the night we look into when we look the human being in the eyes—into a night which is horrible; here one is faced with the night of the world.³¹

In the dark room, the ray of cinematographic light makes this night visible. Cinema is the representation of our representations, the imaging of our own images, the staging of the inner world of images, the telling of immanent stories. Human dreams, nightmares, desires, phantasms, fears, ideas, ideals, all the pictorial, story-like thoughts of the human soul become exposed on the screen. This connects to the ghost-like character of the cinematic picture. The ghostly materiality of the cinematic picture is adequate for the phantasms and phantasmagorias of the human soul.

An important dimension of the cinematic picture linked to this is its intractable generalising aspect. Unlike painting, cinema is unable to give a sense of the singularity, of the haecceity or thisness, of objects. Objects in cinema always appear as types. The individual object serves only to signal a function, a particular usefulness, or bears some narrative, metaphoric or symbolic connotation.³² It can never be exhibited in its individual, specific essence, except in rare cases where an object is granted a particular significance within the narrative, like Rosebud in *Citizen Kane*. Even then, though, the sled's particularity is its name, not its material features. The material features of Rosebud are such that they merely indicate *a* sled, not *this* sled.

The same is true of characters. A person in a cinematic image is never *this* particular person, with her specific physical and psychological traits. The person immediately indicates a social position, the character of a genre, a psychological type, and so on. Even the hero's particular features often depend on general cultural assumptions about the ideal individual, or particular psychological types. The typifying nature of cinema, unable to reveal the uniqueness of objects and individuals, can be related to the generalising tendency of the picture-creating, connectively-operating activities of the human mind, the imagination and the understanding.

Literature's content is indeed the whole realm of human representation. But in it representation is immanent, evoked by the word-signs, still in imaginary form. Cinema makes this representation explicit, visible, "for itself". And this is precisely the mission of art, to re-present Spirit, to "present what is the highest in sensuous form".³³

IV. Movement

Of course, the most important feature of the cinematographic image is the fact that it appears to be moving. In one sense, it is obvious that cinema provides the end of the long quest to represent nature and human nature, a quest that could not end until movement was captured.³⁴ In Hegelian terms, this is the idea that Spirit (humanity) is destined in essence to give its own representation of itself to itself. But Hegel's notations can also account for the particular aesthetics of movement in more precise terms.

When discussing the essence of beauty in art, Hegel starts by discussing the beautiful in general and equates it with life. Formally, artistic beauty is defined like natural beauty, as that which gives the intuition of the presence of Spirit within nature.

A crucial feature in Hegel's study of the manifestation of life in natural beings is the emphasis placed on movement. Life is defined firstly as "ideality". This points to the fact that the different organs and limbs necessary for the conservation and reproduction of a living organism must indeed exist separately, but as dependent on the whole body. They are only relatively real. They are governed by what Hegel calls the "negative unity" of the whole body.³⁵ Hegel asks the following question: "How do we recognise the ideality of differences which appear to exist?" By saying "appear to exist", Hegel simply points to ideality: the limbs seem to exist by themselves, but in fact they owe their existence to the entire body. The verb translated by "appear" is again *scheinen*. As we know, this is what art is about: art's function is to produce the *Scheinen* of Spirit. Consequently true art, as the mastery of the *Schein*, can also be conceptualised as the adequate manifestation of the ideality of living organisms.

The natural manifestation of ideality is movement, purposive movement in the case of higher organisms. This is because ideality, the continual negation/vindication of limbs and organs, is a continual process:

autonomous movement is the continual liberation from place, from the sensible being-one. The sensible one is thus constantly reduced to appearance. In so far as the one *being* has *one* spatial being—a shape—, it moves in its limbs, and the more these limbs change, the more it is lively. This is the way the ideal (*das Ideelle*) reduces its concrete material existence to appearance (*Schein*).³⁶

In this passage, Hegel goes on to discuss music and dance as two forms of art that are able to reproduce movement as the expression of the soul, the life-principle in the organism.

This points to the second way of writing art history, as progress towards spiritualisation of the sensible: "progress in art is that movement given to the figures".³⁷ This provides a new way of analysing the aesthetic powers of cinema.

Cinema, the power to create the illusion of movement, is obviously the most appropriate form of capturing purposeful movement, the manifestation of souls within bodies. This explains in a new way the immediate attraction noted earlier, why we are immediately drawn to the spectacle of other human beings in action. One may recall one of the first cameras invented was called the *praxinoscope*, the viewer/recorder of action.

To make this possible new explanation more vivid, let us consider for one moment the phenomenological differences between the literary description of a person performing an everyday action, or the description of objects or vehicles moving into space, and the same scenes depicted in cinema. We would only become interested in the literary depictions if we could sense that they were narratively or symbolically relevant, or if the author demonstrated exceptional stylistic skills in rendering them. In this latter case, these skills would become the very object of the description. On the other hand, the simple live recording of a person's actions, even the simple movement of a machine, the flight of a plane, the running of a train, draw our attention and keep us captivated. We are able to watch for a very long time even the most trivial series of actions without any narrative coherence, for the sheer pleasure of following autonomous movement. Movement needs no substantive aim since it is its own *telos*. This is what Hegel refers to as locomotion in his analysis of the ideality of life as manifested in movement. Locomotion is "self-movement" (*Selbst-bewegung*): both a transitive, and intransitive, immanent process, since making oneself move is both moving

towards something else and, by actualising one's power to do so, making oneself move towards and within oneself.

The culmination of Spirit in nature is reached in the individuality of the human being because in it, ideality takes its supreme shape in the form of teleological movement. This implies two features of artistic beauty that apply particularly well to cinema.

First, as a consequence of locomotion as self-movement, for Hegel, the human body is more beautiful than any other body. This points to the fact that cinema is extremely reluctant to depict anything but human actions. We can become enthralled by the painting of apples on a table but the same depiction in a film would be far less powerful if it did not take place in a narrative involving the actions of persons.

Moreover, "the second side of singularity is that in order to be, it excludes [other things], is thus implicated with the outside world, dependent on external goals of which it serves as a means, or that it uses the external as means."³⁸ This is the side of the "prose of life"³⁹, the many sides that tie the purposeful movements of human singularity to outside elements. We are moving into the sphere of the thematic content of art. It is worth noting that the thematic, representational order, emerges out of considerations on the material aspect of movement. The whole prose of life is immediately of interest to us because it is the environment in which the self-determining process of Spirit, symbolised by actions and purposeful movements, manifests itself. Again, this goes a long way towards explaining the immediate attraction we feel for the most realistic, or conversely the most incredible, plots in visual media, whose banality and triviality would be totally unacceptable in works of literature, of which we demand wit and originality.

To conclude, I shall just mention two new questions that will signal the direction of further meditation on the aesthetic powers of cinema inspired by Hegel's aesthetics.

1. What are the defining features of an age, such that cinema was to be its most adequate form of representation? In other words, what is the link, in a Hegelian or post-Hegelian framework, between philosophy of history and art history, after the "end of history" and "end of art"? Other ways of asking the same question would be: is cinema a new form of romantic art or is there such a thing as a post-romantic art? Or more simply: who are the gods depicted in our films? This paper has attempted to give some elements towards

answering the question of how they are depicted.

2. How and why is it that Hegel's analyses of the identity, status and roles of heroes, and on the normative features of narratives, reflect so accurately so many of the heroes and narratives that can be seen in cinema, and especially in contemporary commercial cinema? What could scriptwriters learn from Hegel's aesthetics?

Notes

- 1 I wish to express my gratitude to Dr Robert Sinnerbrink for the many insights I have gained through conversations with him on these matters
- 2 G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Kunst (1823). Nachschrift von H. G. Hotho*, Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998); henceforth: Hotho (all citations my own translation from the German). *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); henceforth: Knox.
- 3 Hegel's works in German will be referred to as follows: *Hegel Werke*, Eva Moldenhauer and Markus Michel, eds (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) to be cited as MM, with volume and page number following.
- 4 Hotho, p. 26.
- 5 Hotho, p. 44.
- 6 Hotho, p. 34.
- 7 To use the expression from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.
- 8 Hotho, p. 34.
- 9 Hotho, p. 35.
- 10 Hotho, p. 36.
- 11 Hotho, p. 45.
- 12 Hotho, p. 180.
- 13 Hotho, p. 45.
- 14 Hotho, p. 45.
- 15 *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II (Philosophie der Natur)*, in MM, 9; henceforth: PDN. See PDN, § 275, § 276, p. 111, p. 116. *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); henceforth: Miller. See Miller, pp. 87-91.
- 16 Knox, p. 87.
- 17 "In the Oriental, intuition of the substantial unity of the spiritual and the natural, the pure selfhood of consciousness—self-identical thought in the abstract form of the true and the good—is one with light", PDN, § 276 MM, 9, p. 116; Miller, p. 91.
- 18 "Subjectivity is the spiritual light which shines in itself, in its hitherto obscure place, and, while natural light can only illumine an object, the spiritual light is itself the ground and object on which it shines and which it knows as itself", Knox, p. 521.

- 19 PDN, MM, 9, p. 113. Miller, p. 88.
- 20 Rudolf Arnheim, *Cinema as Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958, 1983). This was famously Tarkovsky's stance towards colour: "You have to try to neutralise colour, to modify its impact on the audience ... strangely enough, even though the world is coloured, the black and white image comes closer to the psychological, naturalistic truth of art", in A. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.138.
- 21 Hotho, p. 9.
- 22 Hotho, p. 21.
- 23 Hotho, p. 21.
- 24 Hotho, p. 271.
- 25 Hotho, p. 271.
- 26 Hotho, p. 272.
- 27 Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III (Philosophie des Geistes)*, MM, 10, §565, p. 374. *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); henceforth: Wallace. See Wallace, p. 299.
- 28 MM, 10, § 455, p. 262. Wallace, p. 206.
- 29 Hotho, p. 22.
- 30 Hotho, p. 22.
- 31 *Hegel: Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, Klaus Düsing, Heinz Kimmerle and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, eds (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1982), p. 187 (my translation).
- 32 A point well highlighted by Alain Badiou in his papers on cinema. See his *Petit manuel d'esthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 121, pp. 132-4.
- 33 Hotho, p. 5.
- 34 See Arthur Danto's reconstruction of art history as progress of mimetic powers, leading teleologically to the invention of devices able to reproduce movement, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 86-99.
- 35 Hotho, p. 51.
- 36 Hotho, p. 53.
- 37 Hotho, p. 257.
- 38 Hotho, p. 77.
- 39 Hotho, p. 77.