



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Today, Icarus: On the persistence of André Bazin's myth of total cinema

Joret, B.

Publication date

2015

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Joret, B. (2015). *Today, Icarus: On the persistence of André Bazin's myth of total cinema*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

TODAY, ICARUS

On the Persistence of André Bazin's
Myth of Total Cinema

TODAY, ICARUS:

On the Persistence of André Bazin's Myth of Total Cinema

This research was supported with a fellowship by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.

TODAY, ICARUS:

ON THE PERSISTENCE OF ANDRÉ BAZIN'S MYTH OF TOTAL CINEMA

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit

op vrijdag 3 juli 2015, te 11.00 uur

door Blandine Joret

geboren te Malle, België

Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: Prof. dr. P.P.R.W. Pisters Universiteit van Amsterdam

Copromotor: dr. M.A.M.B. Lous Baronian Universiteit van Amsterdam

Overige leden:

Prof. dr. D. Andrew	Yale University
Prof. dr. T.P. Elsaesser	Universiteit van Amsterdam
Prof. dr. G. Fossati	Universiteit van Amsterdam
Prof. dr. J. Früchtl	Universiteit van Amsterdam
dr. A.M. Geil	Universiteit van Amsterdam
Prof. dr. V. Hediger	Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main
Prof. dr. H. Joubert-Laurencin	Université de Paris X

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

Today, Icarus

In loving memory of papa.

“Il est du “ci-né-ma” comme de la poésie.”
(André Bazin, 1948)

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	9
Acknowledgements	12
Prologue: Myth, Reality, Cinema	17
PART I. Myth as Method	23
Chapter I: Talking Cinema: Cinephobia and Myth	26
1.1 Myth versus <i>Histoire générale</i>	28
1.1.1 “You must speak!.” Total Cinema and the Myth of Charlot	29
1.2 Methodological Prudence: Existence Precedes Essence	38
1.2.1 The Aseptic Study of Filmologie	40
1.3 Film and Criticism: Cinema Enters History	46
1.4 Bazin’s Mayonnaise Theory	50
PART II. Cinema Is the Art of Reality	58
Chapter II: The Photograph of Danger: A Shark in the Cinema	59
2.1 The Paradox of Authenticity: Bazin’s Shark and Schrödinger’s Cat	65
2.2 Montage prohibited? CGI and the Dummy of Danger	69
2.3 Cinematic Specificity: “the eternal dead-again of cinema”	71
2.4 Integral Realism: Reality and Cinema “Ultimately Equal”	74
2.4.1 No <i>moment suprême</i> : Bazin Opposes Ellipsis (and <i>Photogénie</i>)	75
2.4.2 Bazin on <i>Umberto D</i> : Reformulating the Pregnant Instant	80
2.4.3 The Asymptote of Reality: Reality \approx Cinema	86
2.5 Bazin’s Wager	89
Chapter III: A Leap of Faith In Reality	95
3.1 No More “Bazinism:” An Apologetic Reading	99
3.2 The Imprint versus the Index: Faith and Belief	103
3.2.1 An Assurance in Things Not Seen	105
3.2.2 The Irrational Power of Photography	106
3.3 The Photographic Image as <i>Acheiropoieton</i>	109
3.4 Accidental Beauty: the Principle of Doubt and Organic Effects	116
Chapter IV: Myth, Invention and Imagination	122
4.1 Icarus and the Imagination of Cinema	125
4.2 On Other Annapurnas	130
4.3 <i>Icare sous-marin</i> : Freed from Terrestrial Chains	132

PART III. Perspectives on the Centrifugal Screen	136
Chapter V: Cinema and Painting	138
5.1 “How Everything Turns Away:” Bruegel Cinematographer	140
5.1.1 W.H. Auden: Icarus as an Anti-War Statement	142
5.2 A New Cosmology of Film	152
5.2.1 Debates on Contemporary Art: Bazin, Marcel and Portmann	152
5.2.2 Two Revolutions on Film: Geographic Temporality	159
5.2.3 Van Gogh’s Ear: Mythic Reality Becomes Flesh	167
5.2.4 Self-portraits with Bandaged Ear: Mirror and Mask	172
Chapter VI: A Matter of Form	177
6.1 Gravity and Buoyancy	178
6.1.1 On Floating Bodies: Serge Daney and the Case of <i>Le Grand Bleu</i>	180
6.2 A Perspective on 3-D: “Relief en équations”	187
6.2.1 From a Realist Perspective: “ <i>L’Image imaginaire</i> ”	190
6.2.2 “Will this be the triumph of the fat?”	197
6.3 <i>Oh langage!</i> The Poetry and Realist Grammar of 3-D	201
Epilogue: Cinema Is Also a Language	211
Works Cited	217
Summary	235
Samenvatting	238
Appendix: Translations	241

Today, Icarus

Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to thank my esteemed supervisor, Marie-Aude Baronian, for her enduring encouragement and invaluable guidance over these past years, and for making this research truly enjoyable throughout. She first supervised my MA thesis at this university, which I at the time considered to be my final work on André Bazin: about cinema, cartography and framing. From there on, and this would have never happened if it wasn't for Marie's support, I drew out a research proposal for a PhD on the myth of total cinema, which gradually brought me from maps to Icarus. Marie's feedback on my work was always constructive, her criticism to the point. Having now completed this dissertation under her watchful eye, I can only hope she enjoyed this collaboration as much as I have!

In the same breath, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my promoter, Patricia Pisters, whose contagious enthusiasm about anything cinema and beyond is truly inspirational. Thank you for the many conferences, workshops, screenings and seminars, and for continued support and advice along the way.

I'm delighted to have been part of the vibrant research community at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. The list of people to thank here is really endless, but I will try anyway: Peyman Amiri, Uzma Ansari, Selcuk Balamir, Tina Bastajian, Marie Beauchamp, Adam Chambers, Pedram Dibazar, Enis Dinc, Simon Ferdinand, David Gauthier, Pepita Hesselberth, Martine Huvenne, Penn Ip, Annelies Kleinherenbrink, Noam Knoller, Melle Kromhout, Aylin Kuryel, Erin La Cour, Flora Lysen, Geli Mademli, Niall Martin, Lara Mazurski, Miriam Meissner, Judith Naeff, Marjan Nijborg, Nur Ozgenalp, Jeffrey Manoel Pijpers, Alexandre Poulin, Melanie Schiller, Irina Souch, Rik Spanjers, Mikki Stelder, Hanneke Stuit, Margaret Tali, Birkan Tas, Asli Ozgen Tuncer, Irene Villaescusa Illán, Lucy Van De Wiel, Thijs Witty, Tim Yaczo, Vesna Vravnik and many others. Thank you all for making these past years so memorable! Thank you, Eloë Kingma and Jantine Van Gogh, for keeping things going here at ASCA.

I particularly enjoyed attending the Film Philosophy seminar, in which we discussed a wide variety of film-philosophy related matters from "What is cinema?," "Sound Epistemology," "New Materialism" to "New Sincerity." I would like to thank the organizers, Josef Früchtl and Patricia Pisters, and the participants for their perceptive insights and for making these monthly meetings a true pleasure to attend. Thanks to Paula Albuquerque, Nil Baskar, Matt

Cornell, Allard den Dulk, Daniela de Paulis, Miklos Gaál, Yvette Granata, Jonathan Gray, Julian Kiverstein, Nina Köll, Philipp Schmerheim, Halbe Kuipers, Bogna Konior, Eva Sancho Rodriguez, Lonnie van Brummelen, Maryn Claire Wilkinson and many others.

Over the past years, I also had the opportunity to travel to many places and participate in several international workshops and conferences. I thank the people I met along the way for contributing to an overall exciting network of friends and colleagues.

Furthermore, I want to take the completion of this dissertation as an opportunity to acknowledge the enduring effort of several scholars in encouraging new research on Bazin and promoting an on-going international discourse on his work, to which I hope the present study is a substantial contribution.

I am grateful to Dudley Andrew for his readiness to welcome me as a visiting scholar at Yale University, and for his guidance during my stay there. I remember the excitement I felt when he first handed me a small key labelled “BAZIN” — the key to Bazin’s complete works, all compiled in an outwardly dull-looking filing cabinet. Needless to say, access to these texts, most of them still unpublished to this date, has been absolutely invaluable to my research as it enabled me to include previously unconsidered texts and to reread his well-known essays differently. I also enjoyed the company of the lovely people at the Film Studies office, as well as many screenings, lectures and conferences that altogether made for an enthusing, cinephile research experience.

My sincere appreciation also goes to Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, whose persisting advancement of Bazin’s legacy undeniably motivates and expands further reading of his texts. I’m eager to hold a copy of the *Œuvres complètes d’André Bazin*, which he is preparing: a much-needed publication that will undoubtedly have a profound impact on future research on Bazin and beyond. I was delighted to attend his monthly seminar “Traverser Bazin” in Paris, and am grateful for the responses, also from his students, on my presentation there last year. Many ideas that were raised during this session proved invaluable for me to complete the Icarus-argument. I am thankful for his enthusiasm regarding my project, as well as his willingness to share his expertise on Bazin.

I’m furthermore particularly indebted to Stephen Franklin Clark for countless inspiring conversations and for his relentless support of my research; and thank you so much, Olivia Joret, for daily chats and much needed diversion, as well as your always thought-provoking insights on art, philosophy and criticism.

Acknowledgments

And then, my mother! It was thanks to her that I first encountered Bazin, quite by accident, when she bought me the pocket edition of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* for my twenty-first birthday, right around the time that I was starting my studies in cinema here in Amsterdam. I remember being touched by her considerate present. An introduction to cinema, which the title somehow suggests, was precisely what I needed coming from a more general theoretical background in visual communication. Little did I know that this small collection of essays was going to mean so much to me!

I had barely started my PhD when mama became ill, and was given a frighteningly short time frame by the doctors. Thankfully, doctors do make mistakes, and regardless of the real difficulties we were all forced to face, I'm extremely grateful for the many beautiful moments we have shared these past years, and for the miraculous fact that she is among us today. Mama once wrote me a postcard during a period of intense and difficult exam preparations my first year at university. It says: "*Courage et confiance!*" The card hangs beside my desk at home, and her words have indeed given me much strength and confidence. I thank her with my whole heart for her support, encouragement and her love.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved and dearly missed father, Paul Joret (1948-1998). His memory has been my greatest source of inspiration.

Amsterdam, April 2015

A Note on Translations

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the original French texts by André Bazin. I provide English translations of these quotations in appendix; whenever translations of a particular text already exist, I reference those and in some cases modify them slightly. All other translations are mine. Translations are referred to with roman numerals directly following the citation; when a citation occurs in a footnote, these numerals are placed in parentheses next to the footnote reference in the text.