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

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PART II. Cinema Is the Art of Reality

“La fabrication de l’image s’est même libérée de tout utilitarisme anthropocentrique. Il ne s’agit pas de la survie de l’homme, mais plus généralement de la création d’un univers idéal à l’image du réel et doué d’un destin temporel autonome.”^{1, i}

In his seminal work “Le Mythe du cinéma total,” André Bazin approaches film through the framework of its inimitable association with the world, developing his understanding of what he terms “integral realism”² as the ontology of the cinematographic image. From his introduction to *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma* (1958) he describes this ontology in lay terminology, stating emphatically that cinema is the art of reality: ‘en termes moins philosophiques: le cinéma comme art de la réalité.’^{3, ii} In the following chapters, I hope to provide a contemporary examination of cinema as an art of reality: I intend to explain the ways in which Bazin understands the relation between the world and its image, and towards this end I will look at several references in Bazin’s writing that are either theological, mythological or scientific. I will then discuss his notion of integral realism against the background of several texts on exploration film, wherein he develops the analogy between cinema and one particular mythical image which I see as a guiding principle in his approach to this art of reality: the myth of Icarus.

¹ Bazin, André (1945). “Ontologie de l’image photographique.” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* Paris: Éditions du Cerf (2008): p. 10

² In his 2009 translation, Timothy Barnard translates *réalisme intégral* as “complete realism;” this, however, does not do justice to the term originally chosen by Bazin, as it empties it of its mathematical reference, which I will lay bare in the following chapter (cf. *infra*, **2.4 Integral Realism: Reality and Cinema “Ultimately Equal”**).

³ Bazin, André (1958). “Avant-propos.” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma? Tome 1: Ontologie et langage*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf (1959): p. 9