THE VIRTUES AND LIMITATIONS OF MONTAGE


(Montage Interdit. Crin Blanc. Le Bailon Rouge. Une Fee pas comme les autres.)

THE CREATIVE originality of A. Lamorisse was already apparent in Bim, le Petit Ane. Bim and perhaps Crin Blanc are the only two real children's films ever made. Of course there are others although not as many as one would expect that are suited to a variety of young age groups. The Soviet Union has made special efforts in this field but it is my feeling that films like Lone White Sails are already aimed at young adolescents. The attempts of J. Arthur Rank at specialised production in this area have failed both aesthetically and commercially. In fact, anyone wishing to set up a film library or to compile a series of programs for young children would be hard pressed to find more than a few shorts, of unequal merit, and a certain number of commercial films, among them some cartoons, the inspiration and the subject matter of which were sufficiently childlike; in particular, certain adventure films. It is not, however, a matter of specialised production, just of films intelligible to those on a mental level under fourteen. As we know, American films do not often rise above this level. The same is true of the animation films of Walt Disney.

It is obvious that films of this sort are in no way comparable to children's literature properly so called, and of which there is any how not a great deal. Before the disciples of Freud came on the scene, J.-J. Rousseau had already noted that this literature was not without offence. La Fontaine is a cynical moralist, the Countess of Segur is a diabolical, sadomasochistic grandmother. It is now admitted that the Tales of Perrault conceal highly unmentionable symbols and one must concede that it is difficult to counter the arguments of the psychoanalysts. All the same, it is certainly not necessary to employ psychoanalysis to discover the delicious and terrifying profundities that are the source of the beauty of Alice in Wonderland and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. These authors had a capacity for dreaming that was equal in kind and intensity to that of a child. There is nothing puerile about that imaginary world. It was pedagogy that invented harmless colours for children, but to see the use they make of them is to find your gaze riveted on green paradises peopled with monsters. The authors of genuine children's literature, then, are only rarely and indirectly educators… Jules Verne is perhaps the only one. They are poets whose imagination is privileged to remain on the dream wavelength of childhood.

That is why it is always easy to argue that their works are in a way harmful and really only suitable for grownups. If what we mean by that is that they are not edifying, this is true, but it is a pedagogic point of view, not an aesthetic one. On the other hand, the fact that adults enjoy them even perhaps more than children is a proof of their authenticity and value. The artist who works spontaneously for children has attained a quality of universality.

Le Ballon Rouge is already perhaps a little on the intellectual side and to that extent less childlike. The symbol appears in clearer outline in the myth, like a watermark. Nevertheless, to compare it with Une Fee Pas Comme Les Autres is to bring out, to a marked degree, the difference between poetry that is valid both for grownups and children and the childlike things suitable only for children.

But it is not from this point of view that I wish to discuss them. This article is not strictly speaking a critical study and I shall refer only incidentally to the artistic qualities that I consider belong to these works. My intention will be, on the basis of the astonishingly significant example that they provide, to make a simple analysis of certain rules of montage as they relate to cinematic expression, and more specifically still, of its aesthetic ontology. From this point of view, on the
contrary, the similarities of Bailon Rouge and Une Fee Pas Comme Les Autres could very well have been premeditated. Both are marvellous demonstrations, in exactly opposite ways, of the virtues and the limitations of montage.

I shall begin with the film by Jean Tourane and show what an extraordinary illustration it is of the famous experiment of Kuleshov with the close-up of Mozhukhin. As we know, the naive ambition of Jean Tourane is to make Disney pictures with live animals. Now it is quite obvious that the human feelings we at tribute to animals are, essentially at any rate, a projection of our own awareness. We simply read into their looks or into their behaviour those states of mind that we claim they possess because of certain outward resemblances to us, or certain patterns of behaviour which seem to resemble our own. We should not disregard or underestimate this perfectly natural tendency of the human mind, which has been harmful only in the realm of science. Indeed it is worth noting that today science, as a result of experiments carried out by distinguished investigators, has rediscovered a measure of truth in anthropomorphism. An example of this is the language of bees which, as tested and interpreted by the entomologist Von Frisch, goes far beyond the wildest analogies of the most unrepentant anthropomorphism. In any event, the margin of error is greater on the side of Descartes and his animal-machine than of Buffon and his half-human animals. But over and above this elementary aspect, it is quite evident that anthropomorphism derives from a form of analogical knowledge that psychological investigation cannot explain, still less refute. Its domain extends then from morality (the fables of La Fontaine) to the highest form of religious symbolism, by way of every region of magic and poetry.

You cannot therefore condemn anthropomorphism out of hand and not take into consideration the level it is on. One is forced to admit however that in the case of Jean Tourane it is on the lowest level. At once the most scientifically unsound and the least aesthetically adapted, if his work can claim any indulgence, it is on the grounds that its quantitative importance allows us to a staggering extent to explore the comparative possibilities of anthropomorphism and montage. Thus the cinema can actually multiply the static interpretations of photography by those that derive from the juxtaposition of shots.

For it is very important to note that Tourane’s animals are not tamed, only gentled. Nor do they ever actually do the things they seem to be doing. When they do, it is by a trick, either with a hand offscreen guiding them, or an artificial paw like a marionette on a string. All Tourane’s ingenuity and talent lies in his ability to get the animals to stay put in the positions in which he has placed them for the duration of the take. The environment, the dissimulation, the commentary are already sufficient to give to the bearing of the animal an almost human quality which, in turn, the illusion of montage underlines and magnifies to such an extent that at times it makes the impression almost complete. In this way, without the protagonists having done anything beyond remaining perfectly still in front of the camera, a whole story is built up with a large number of characters in complicated relationships—often so complex that the scenario is confused—and all with a wide variety of characteristics. The apparent action and the meaning we attribute to it do not exist, to all intents and purposes, prior to the assembling of the film, not even in the form of fragmented scenes out of which the set ups are generally composed. I will go further and say that, in the circumstances, the use of montage was not just one way of making this film, it was the only way. Actually if Tourane’s animals were as intelligent say as Rin-Tin-Tin and able to do for themselves, as a result of training, the bulk of the things that montage here credits them with doing, the focus of the film would be radically altered. We would no longer be concerned with the story but rather with the skill of the animals. In other words, it would pass from being something imaginary to something real. Instead of delighting in a fiction, we would be full of admiration for a well-executed vaudeville turn. It is montage, that abstract creator of meaning, which preserves the state of unreality demanded by the spectacle.
The opposite is true of Le Ballon Rouge. It is my view, and I shall prove it, that this film ought not to, nor can it, owe anything to montage. This is all the more of a paradox since the zoomorphism of the balloon is even more an affair of the imagination than the anthropomorphism of the animals. Lamorisse’s red balloon actually does go through the movements in front of the camera that we see on the screen. Of course there is a trick in it, but it is not one that belongs to cinema as such. Illusion is created here, as in conjuring, out of reality itself. It is something concrete, and does not derive from the potential extensions created by montage.

What does it matter, you will say, provided the result is the same, if, for example, we are made to accept on the screen the existence of a balloon that can follow its master like a little dog? It matters to this extent, that with montage the magic balloon would exist only on the screen, whereas that of Lamorisse sends us back to reality.

Perhaps we should digress here for a moment and point out that by nature montage is not something absolute, at least psychologically speaking. In its original, simple form, people did not see it as an artifice any more than did those people at the first showing of Lumière’s film who rushed to the back of the room when the train entered the station at Ciotat. But the habit of cinema-going has gradually alerted audiences and today a sizeable portion of the public, if you asked them to concentrate a little, would be able to distinguish between real scenes and those created by montage. It is a fact that other devices such as process shots make it possible for two objects, say the star and a tiger, to be seen together, a proximity which if it were real might cause some problems. The illusion here is more complete, but it can be detected and in any case, the important thing is not whether the trick can be spotted but whether or not trickery is used, just as the beauty of a copy is no substitute for the authenticity of a Vermeer. Some will object that there is trickery in the handling of Lamorisse’s balloon. Of course there is; otherwise we would be watching the documentary of a miracle or of a fakir at work and that would be quite another kind of film. Ballon Rouge is a tale told in film, a pure creation of the mind, but the important thing about it is that this story owes everything to the cinema precisely because, essentially, it owes it nothing.

It is very easy to imagine Ballon Rouge as a literary tale. But no matter how delightfully written, the book could never come up to the film, the charm of which is of another kind. Nevertheless, the same story no matter how well filmed might not have had a greater measure of reality on the screen than in the book, supposing that Lamorisse had had recourse either to the illusions of montage or, failing that, to process work. The film would then be a tale told image by image-as is the story, word by word-instead of being what it is, namely the picture of a story or, if you prefer, an imaginary documentary.

This expression seems to me once and for all to be the one that best defines what Lamorisse was attempting, namely something like, yet different from, the film that Cocteau created in Le Sang d’un Poète, that is to say, a documentary on the imagination, in other words, on the dream. Here we are then, caught up by our thinking in a series of paradoxes. Montage which we are constantly being told is the essence of cinema is, in this situation, the literary and anticinematic process par excellence. Essential cinema, seen for once in its pure state, on the contrary, is to be found in straightforward photographic respect for the unity of space.

Now we must take our analysis a little farther, since it might with reason be pointed out that while Ballon Rouge owes nothing essentially to montage, it depends on it accidentally. For, if Lamorisse spent 500,000 francs on red balloons, it was because he wanted to be sure he would not lack doubles. Similarly, the horse Crin Blanc was doubly a myth since...
several horses, all looking the same, all more or less wild, were shown on the screen as a single horse. This observation will allow us to give an even more precise definition of an essential law of film stylistics.

It would be a betrayal of Lamorisse’s films, for example Le Rideau Cramoisi, to call them works of pure fiction. Their believability is undoubtedly tied in with their documentary value. The events they portray are partially true. The countryside of the Camargue, the lives of the horse-breeders and the fishermen, the habits of the herds, constitute the basis for the story of Crin Blanc, providing a firm and unshakable support for the myth. But it is precisely on this reality that a dialectic belonging to the realm of the imaginary, and interestingly symbolised by the use of doubles for Crin Blanc, is founded. Thus Crin Blanc is at one and the same time a real horse that grazes on the salty grass of the Camargue and a dream horse swimming eternally at the side of little Folco. Its cinematic reality could not do without its documentary reality, but if it is to become a truth of the imagination, it must die and be born again of reality itself.

Undoubtedly, the shooting of the film called for a variety of skills. The little boy that Lamorisse chose had never been near a horse, yet he had to be taught to ride bareback. A number of scenes were shot virtually without the help of trick work and certainly with a considerable disregard for very real dangers. Yet a moment’s reflection is enough to show that if what we see depicted had been really the truth, successfully created in front of the camera, the film would cease to exist because it would cease, by the same token, to be a myth. It is that fringe of trick work, that margin of subterfuge demanded by the logic of the story that allows what is imaginary to include what is real and at the same time to substitute for it. If there had only been one wild horse painfully subjected to the demands of the camera, the film would have been just a tour de force, an exhibition of successful training like Tom Mix and his white horse.

It is clear what we would lose by this. If the film is to fulfil itself aesthetically we need to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked. Obviously the spectator does not have to know that there were three or even four horses¹ or that someone had to pull on a cotton thread to get the horse to turn its head at the right moment. All that matters is that the spectator can say at one and the same time that the basic material of the film is authentic while the film is also truly cinema. So the screen reflects the ebb and flow of our imagination which feeds on a reality for which it plans to substitute. That is to say, the tale is born of an experience that the imagination transcends.

Correspondingly, however, what is imaginary on the screen must have the spatial density of something real. You cannot therefore use montage here except within well-defined limits or you run the risk of threatening the very ontology of the cinematographic tale. For example, a director is not allowed to dodge the difficulty of showing two simultaneous aspects of an action by simply using shot-and-reverse-shot. Lamorisse in the scene of the rabbit hunt has shown that he clearly understood this. The horse, the boy, and the rabbit are all in the same shot together. However he came near to making a mistake in the scene of the capture of Crin Blanc when the boy is letting himself be dragged along by the horse. It is of no consequence that the horse we see dragging Folco in the long shot is a double for Crin Blanc, nor even that for that dangerous shot, Lamorisse had himself doubled for the boy, but I am embarrassed that at the end of the sequence when the horse slows down and finally stops, the camera does not show us, so that we are in no doubt about it, that the horse and child are in physical proximity. This could have been done in a panning shot or by

¹ In the same way, apparently, Rin-Tin-Tin owes his cinematic existence to several Alsatians who look like him and are all trained to do all the tricks that “only Rin-Tin-Tin” can do on the screen. Every one of these actions has to be completed in reality and without recourse to montage, the latter being used only in a secondary sense, in order to contribute to the imaginary power of the myth of some very real dogs, all of whose qualities Rin-Tin-Tin possesses.
pulling the camera back. This simple precautionary shot would in retrospect have authenticated all that had preceded it. To show two separate shots of Folco and the horse dodges a problem, albeit at this stage of the action with less harmful results, and thereby interrupts the lovely spatial flow of the action.

If one forced oneself at this point to define the problem, it seems to me that one could set up the following principle as a law of aesthetics: “When the essence of a scene demands the simultaneous presence of two or more factors in the action, montage is ruled out.” It can reclaim its right to be used, however, whenever the import of the action no longer depends on physical contiguity even though this may be implied. For example, it was all right for Lamorisse to show, as he did, the head of the horse in close-up, turning obediently in the boy’s direction, but he should have shown the two of them in the same frame in the preceding shot.

It is in no sense a question of being obliged to revert to a single shot sequence or of giving up resourceful ways of expressing things or convenient ways of varying the shots. Our concern here is not with the form but with the nature of the recital of events—or to be more precise with a certain interdependence of nature and form.

When Orson Welles deals with certain scenes in The Magnificent Ambersons in a single shot whereas in Mr. Arkadin he uses a finely broken-down montage, it is only a change of style and in no essential way alters the subject matter. I would even say that Hitchcock’s Rope could just as well have been cut in the classic way whatever artistic importance may be correctly attached to the way he actually handled it. On the other hand it is inconceivable that the famous seal-hunt scene in Nanook should not show us hunter, hole, and seal all in the same shot. It is simply a question of respect for the spatial unity of an event at the moment when to split it up would change it from something real into something imaginary. Flaherty as a rule understood this, except in a few places where, as a consequence, there is a failure of consistency. While the picture of Nanook hunting seal on the rim of an ice hole is one of the loveliest so in all cinema, the scene of the struggle with the alligator on a fishing line in Louisiana Story, obviously montage, is weak. On the other hand, the scene in the same film of an alligator catching a heron, photographed in a single panning shot, is admirable.

However, the reciprocal fact is also true. That is to say, to restore reality to a recital of events it is sufficient if one of the shots, suitably chosen, brings together those elements previously separated off by montage. It is not easy however to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.

For example, it was all right for Lamorisse to show, as he did, the head of the horse in close-up, turning obediently in the boy’s direction, but he should have shown the two of them in the same frame in the preceding shot. When Orson Welles deals with certain scenes in The Magnificent Ambersons in a single shot whereas in Mr. Arkadin he uses a finely broken-down montage, it is only a change of style and in no essential way alters the subject matter. I would even say that Hitchcock’s Rope could just as well have been cut in the classic way whatever artistic importance may be correctly attached to the way he actually handled it. On the other hand it is inconceivable that the famous seal-hunt scene in Nanook should not show us hunter, hole, and seal all in the same shot. It is simply a question of respect for the spatial unity of an event at the moment when to split it up would change it from something real into something imaginary. Flaherty as a rule understood this, except in a few places where, as a consequence, there is a failure of consistency. While the picture of Nanook hunting seal on the rim of an ice hole is one of the loveliest so in all cinema, the scene of the struggle with the alligator on a fishing line in Louisiana Story, obviously montage, is weak. On the other hand, the scene in the same film of an alligator catching a heron, photographed in a single panning shot, is admirable.

However, the reciprocal fact is also true. That is to say, to restore reality to a recital of events it is sufficient if one of the shots, suitably chosen, brings together those elements previously separated off by montage. It is not easy however to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.

Perhaps I shall make myself clearer by giving an example. In an otherwise mediocre English film, Where No Vultures Fly, there is one unforgettable sequence. The film reconstructs the story of a young couple in South Africa during the war who founded and organised a game reserve. To this end, husband and wife, together with their child, lived in the heart of the bush. The sequence I have in mind starts out in the most conventional way. Unknown to its parents, the child has wandered away from the camp and has found a lion cub that has been temporarily abandoned by its mother. Unaware of the danger, it picks up the cub and takes it along. Meanwhile the lioness, alerted either by the noise or by the scent of the child, turns back towards its den and starts along the path taken by the unsuspecting child. She follows close behind him. The little group comes within sight of the camp at which point the distracted parents see the child and the lion which is undoubtedly about to spring at any moment on the imprudent kidnapper. Here let us interrupt the story for a moment. Up to this point everything has been shown in parallel montage and the somewhat naive attempt at suspense has seemed quite conventional. Then suddenly to our horror, the director abandons his montage of separate shots that has been used to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.

Perhaps I shall make myself clearer by giving an example. In an otherwise mediocre English film, Where No Vultures Fly, there is one unforgettable sequence. The film reconstructs the story of a young couple in South Africa during the war who founded and organised a game reserve. To this end, husband and wife, together with their child, lived in the heart of the bush. The sequence I have in mind starts out in the most conventional way. Unknown to its parents, the child has wandered away from the camp and has found a lion cub that has been temporarily abandoned by its mother. Unaware of the danger, it picks up the cub and takes it along. Meanwhile the lioness, alerted either by the noise or by the scent of the child, turns back towards its den and starts along the path taken by the unsuspecting child. She follows close behind him. The little group comes within sight of the camp at which point the distracted parents see the child and the lion which is undoubtedly about to spring at any moment on the imprudent kidnapper. Here let us interrupt the story for a moment. Up to this point everything has been shown in parallel montage and the somewhat naive attempt at suspense has seemed quite conventional. Then suddenly to our horror, the director abandons his montage of separate shots that has been used to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.

Perhaps I shall make myself clearer by giving an example. In an otherwise mediocre English film, Where No Vultures Fly, there is one unforgettable sequence. The film reconstructs the story of a young couple in South Africa during the war who founded and organised a game reserve. To this end, husband and wife, together with their child, lived in the heart of the bush. The sequence I have in mind starts out in the most conventional way. Unknown to its parents, the child has wandered away from the camp and has found a lion cub that has been temporarily abandoned by its mother. Unaware of the danger, it picks up the cub and takes it along. Meanwhile the lioness, alerted either by the noise or by the scent of the child, turns back towards its den and starts along the path taken by the unsuspecting child. She follows close behind him. The little group comes within sight of the camp at which point the distracted parents see the child and the lion which is undoubtedly about to spring at any moment on the imprudent kidnapper. Here let us interrupt the story for a moment. Up to this point everything has been shown in parallel montage and the somewhat naive attempt at suspense has seemed quite conventional. Then suddenly to our horror, the director abandons his montage of separate shots that has been used to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.

Perhaps I shall make myself clearer by giving an example. In an otherwise mediocre English film, Where No Vultures Fly, there is one unforgettable sequence. The film reconstructs the story of a young couple in South Africa during the war who founded and organised a game reserve. To this end, husband and wife, together with their child, lived in the heart of the bush. The sequence I have in mind starts out in the most conventional way. Unknown to its parents, the child has wandered away from the camp and has found a lion cub that has been temporarily abandoned by its mother. Unaware of the danger, it picks up the cub and takes it along. Meanwhile the lioness, alerted either by the noise or by the scent of the child, turns back towards its den and starts along the path taken by the unsuspecting child. She follows close behind him. The little group comes within sight of the camp at which point the distracted parents see the child and the lion which is undoubtedly about to spring at any moment on the imprudent kidnapper. Here let us interrupt the story for a moment. Up to this point everything has been shown in parallel montage and the somewhat naive attempt at suspense has seemed quite conventional. Then suddenly to our horror, the director abandons his montage of separate shots that has been used to state offhand to what kind of subject or in what circumstances this applies. I will confine myself, prudently, to just a few examples.
few indications. First of all, it is naturally true of all documentary films, the object of which is to present facts which would cease to be interesting if the episodes did not actually occur in front of the camera, that is to say in documentary films that approximate to reporting. Newsreels may also be included up to a point. The fact that reconstructions of actual events were acceptable in the earliest days of the cinema is a clear indication that there has been an evolution in the attitude of the general public.

The same rule does not apply to didactic documentaries, the purpose of which is not to report but to explain an event. Of course in these, too, there is a place for sequences of the first type of documentary. Take, for example, a documentary about conjuring! If its object is to show the extraordinary feats of a great master then the film must proceed in a series of individual shots, but if the film is required subsequently to explain one of these tricks, it becomes necessary to edit them. The case is clear, so let us move on!

A much more interesting example is that of the fiction film, ranging from the fairytale world of Crin Blanc to the mildly romanticised type of documentary such as Nanook. It is a question then, as we have said above, of fictions that do not derive their full significance or, at most, only derive their value, from the integration of the real and the imaginary. It is the aspects of this reality that dictate the cutting.

Finally, in the case of narrative films that parallel the novel or the play, it is probable that certain kinds of action are not adapted to montage for their full development. The expression of concrete duration conflicts with the abstract time of montage as Citizen Kane and Ambersons so well illustrate. Above all, certain situations can only be said to exist cinematographically to the extent that their spatial unity is established, especially comedy situations that are based on the relations between human beings and things. As in Ballon Rouge, every kind of trick is permissible except montage. The primitive slapstick comedies, especially those of Keaton, and the films of Chaplin, have much to teach us on this score. If slap stick comedy succeeded before the days of Griffith and montage, it is because most of its gags derived from a comedy of space, from the relation of man to things and to the surrounding world. In The Circus Chaplin is truly in the lion's cage and both are enclosed within the framework of the screen.
It seems to me that the depth of field in Citizen Kane doesn’t perform the role that Bazin assigned to it. Far from being this agent of a “more realistic structure of image” that “renders the film from a sense of ambiguity to that of reality”, I believe the opposite, in that it creates a dramatic force, pushing out the sense of reality. Accenting the lines of perspective (more than is capable of in the dominance of today’s short focal lenses) it underlines the coding of the scene’s perspective play and at the same time replays it, draws it in such a way to render it readable like an excessive code in the face of reality, the vision of realistic representation, with a similar effect to violence. Perspective finds itself overloaded and it dramatically outweighs what may be perceived as natural perspective.

In the same manner, the wide variety of the subjects in the interior of the frame produce an internal series of tensions and contrasts between the different steps, or stages of the shot such that the effect of depth, far from playing with the idea of distancing and “natural” prioritisation of the visible, which renders the depths of secondary importance, brings back its depths, or long shots, marking them with an intensity that rivals that of the set ups of the first shots. This emergent force of depth is something other than “supplementary reality”, it replaces the eye in everyday conditions, the other system of inscription in the depth of field in the cinematic image which is the undoing of lighting, confirms this with ease. In effect, in Citizen Kane, light isn’t organised along the lines of perspective. It comes instead to break the natural paths or trickles of light, giving a series of marks which delineate the iconic space, isolating certain areas putting them in relation over and against the throw of the lines of perspective.

Often the subject that appears at the deep end of the shot is drawn not only with clarity but with strength, is produced in a lighting state (whether direct or side lit against a bright background) such that it doesn’t rest in its logically assigned place in perspective, but is brought out against this background and comes to play in the dramatic grill which obliterates and overloads the perspective grill or frame.

The combined interplay of depth of field and lighting effects produce a composite image, discontinued, barred from masks and baffles of marks and internal masks such that, in the perspective of Bazin, they must have the effect not of “more than reality” but very precisely “less”… It should also be more than visible. These visible effects become evident in these holes, hiding places and screens.

Therefore I say, if Bazin’s postulation that the depth of field produces effects which are additional, supplementary, this supplementarity is not one of reality but one of visibility. There’s not, in the depth of field of an image more “things to see”, more reference material offered in to the spectator’s gaze, but there is on the other hand an accumulation of iconic signifiers of intensities and incentives of scope which bulks out the image and forbids it from functioning like a filter, letting the layer of perspective pass through it “the complexity and the ambiguity of reality” desired by Bazin. The same depth of field which is supposed to align the cinematographic image on the normalising codes of perspective, played here as distortion which exteriorises, denaturalises, de-territorialises internalised codification as well as naturalistic representation through shared perception.

This excessive depth, this escalation of that which is visible, the perspective over encoding, does not lead to “additional realism” as desired by Bazin. They lead rather, if it’s absolutely necessary to preserve this term of realism, to a sort of hyper-realism before the letter registered not by the actual “real” but by the reality of representation. That’s to say,
coded visibly to the visible which is attached to it like an effect, like production and becomes, therefore, perceptible as such instead of a supposed reality which, far from manifesting thus, it recovers, it masks, and superimposes in exactly the same way as the representative takes the place of the represented.

Certainly the work done on the depth of field and perspective in Citizen Kane has something of a limiting case about it, and it may be objectionable but it occurs to me that depth of field is not pursued in the same way in other films. Yet, with Citizen Kane, with the work of Renoir… And, for example, in Boudu Sauvé des Eaux, which dates from 1932 (although we can easily find other examples).

The Lestingoises apartment is a series of rooms, of open or closed cells onto of each other. It’s the principal setting of the film, the dramatic space. Renoir’s mise en scène plays with all notions of space and, notably, by the use of depth of field, deploys successive framings, moving around the rooms, which in effect are like scenes defining the progress of the action. For Bazin this use of a technical model (the depth of field) purposely plays like a pledge of “the vocation of realist cinema” in the “Evolution of the language of cinema”. It seems undeniable to me that Renoir is a realist. But once again, what sort of reality does he propose? Does the realistic setting permit the depth of field to identify the “more than real” and identify the “profound ambiguity of reality” in which Bazin believes? To my mind, nowhere more so than in Citizen Kane (although by different processes).

There is, in the domestic setting of Boudu Sauvé des Eaux, three characters who move around each other from room to room. The depth of field is not used here to show us, to realistically illustrate the decor in producing truthful details, but more so, as in Citizen Kane, to articulate the setting in to a series of internal frames, by way of door frames, wall frames which play again like baffles or blinds over which the gaze of the participants pass, who survey, spy, hide and ignore. The Depth of Field is here principally the depth of vision pertaining to the characters themselves, and not immediately that of the spectator. The realistic space produced by the depth of field isn’t immediately given over to the spectator: the spectators gaze is mediated, it is taken, captured, registered by the interplay of the characters’ gazes. That which is represented is rendered visible, it is not a family show made to be shown to the spectator, but places the gaze of the spectator there at the centre of the family portrait. There is nothing else to see, but the look. The only reality represented is that of the untenable spectator, at the same time in front of and in this representation, at once exterior to the perspective of of the portrait and captured in the space it describes, at once both watching and watched. Here depth of field acts as a trap. It makes the act of observation itself visible. We area in a system of perverse, reverse realism, such that the spectacle isn’t immediately in the centred in the vision of the spectator, and, on returning the perspective, it’s the gaze of the spectator that finds itself the focus of the spectacle.

Having said that, bringing in to play that which is more than visible, the depth of field manifests at once both the settings and the traps.
When I was young I was happy to be appreciated critically. It took me 40 years to understand what cinema and the interests of life are that I explore in a film. Until then, I had only made films on life in towns and the Meiji period. But from the moment I started to film *Sisters of the Gion*, my perspective on man and the matters of life became more refined. It was at this time that I started to use the long take. I was much criticised for having done so. A professor of psychology at the university of Kyoto criticised this way of ignoring the psychology of every day folk, as, to his mind, the public were unable to stomach a shot of more than five seconds in length. It's not human stability, but human drive that's in the frame. It is solely for that reason that I chose this manner of filming. If a scene becomes more dramatic, I don't like to cut it. Silent cinema, in distancing itself from theatre, used close ups to express psychological states. I wanted to avoid this, but there are evidently many ways in which to explore this. Silent cinema possessed its own grammar, as do talking pictures. If all films were made in technicolor, I would study the art of technicolor. We need to always preserve that desire, that which keeps the film maker perpetually youthful.

**Pierre Paolo Pasolini**

*Interview with Jean Duflot*

p. 131: *The Refusal of the Natural nature of the Long Take*

[...]

In my films there are hardly any instances of the long take, if it is there at all, it's so brief as just to follow an action, nothing more. It never encompasses a sequence of actions. Therein lies a contradiction with my primordial, archetypal conception of cinema, in other words with an uninterrupted long take do I invoke a reproduction of reality (in its entity and its duration)? The contradiction certainly exists! But contradictions, as you know, are all apparent.

In truth, this same unconditional love for reality, which, translated in to linguistic terms, makes me see cinema like a fluid representation of reality, translated in to expressive terms, and pins me in front of the diverse aspects of reality (face, landscape, gesture, object) as if they had been frozen solid in the flow of time.

In short, to conceive of cinema as a continuous, infinite long-take is far from naturalistic. Quite the contrary! On the other hand, the practical application of the long take in films is a natural process (although- it is not, if corrected by the opposition of other processes). This is why I've avoided the long take, because it is naturalistic in tendency and part of that which is natural. My fetishistic love for “the things of the world” stops me from seeing that which is naturalistic. They are consecrated or deconsecrated one by one: they are not linked by their fluidity, they don’t tolerate this notion of fluidity. They are isolated and left alone with a greater or lesser degree of intensity.

That’s why, in my cinema, the long take is completely replaced by montage. The continuity and the infinitely linear nature of the long take, which is cinema, like action transfigured in to a written language, is made continuous and infinitely linear “synthetically” thanks to the intervention of Montage.
The difference between cinema and film, all films, consists of the following: cinema has the linear nature of a continuous, infinite, analytical long take, whereas films have a potential synthetic continuously linear, infinite nature. There are some auteurs who search, by a sort of debonair love accustomed to the things of the world, to reproduce, in their films, the linear analytic, a linearity which has the greatest possible duration of reality; others, on the contrary, are faithful to montage which renders this linearity as synthetically as possible. (As a film maker I fit in to this second category) […]

When I make a film, I render myself in to a state of fascination in front of an object, a thing, a face, a look, a landscape as if it were part of an engine, or as if in the instants before an explosion. […] For clarification when I speak of this presence of the sacred, I'm not speaking of the whole of the film, the internal forms of the film, the events, the series of cause and effect, or of the interior outlines of a character. I speak of the sacred, thing by thing, object by object, image by image. […]

Abbas Kiarostami
Cahiers du Cinéma no. 495, July - Aug '95

p. 83 “Cutting”

In my first film, The Bread and Alley, there's a close up on an old man approaching the camera, the camera then follows his path, while a child follows him. At that time people said that it wasn't a film: I didn't have the courage to move my camera, to do a tracking shot, to find the right connection, preferring to wait until the subject entered the frame. I believed all these criticisms because I was afraid. Camera movements were always difficult for me but, at this time, I reasoned thus: when we await the arrival of a character on screen for a long time from a distance we are constantly looking. We wait for them to arrive, because they're not an ordinary passer by, its so important for us that we our fix our gaze on them and we don't cut from the shot ourselves. I don't understand the point of random cuts, they were never my taste, for instance when 8 or 10 cuts get in the way of your actually seeing the scene. Sometimes reality itself decides that we should not cut the film, and to get closer to people, you don't necessarily have to move the camera. You have to wait, give time to really observe and discover things. Sometimes the close up doesn't require you to be close up; quite the opposite, it can push you away. I see that all the rules that we've learnt from books don't work in practice, with that which we find ourselves in front of.

In one scene in Experience a teenager is having his shoes polished. The shoe polisher, sat in front of the teenager, tries to repair the boys shoes. The boy refuses as his shoes are full of holes. There follows a subjective shot which shows the polisher elevated, against the boy. In this shot the polisher looks at the boy with such confidence that the boy can not help but to finally remove his shoes. What is that rule that tells us that if the camera shows that some one is elevated that shows they are dominant?

It all depends on who's looking at who, and how they are looking… It's worth learning all those rules just to break them! […]

p. 84 “The Long Take”

In filming I’ve had to abandon certain close ups, preferring instead to use long takes to allow the audience to get in direct contact with the totality of the subject. In a close up, we eliminate all elements of reality so as to put the spectator in to the situation and to judge, it is necessary that all these elects are present. The correct approach in
respecting the audience, would be to allow them to chose where they want to look. In a long take it's the audience member that choses the close up in response to what they're getting from the film.