

THE SIN OF REPETITION¹

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If ever there was a film theorist one would not associate with something like “falseness,” that would certainly be André Bazin. His theory is usually believed to deal primarily with the truth that cinema can “ontologically” grasp. Apparently, there could not be a greater divergence.

However, things are not that simple. His almost 2600 articles, with all their dialectical contortions, make it impossible to think of Bazin’s theory merely as an outdated fetishism for some sacred presence, for something unique captured by the movie camera and transposed onscreen as such.

The complete collection of these writings, gathered together by Dudley Andrew and placed in Yale University, reveals new theoretical inputs and paths every time that a glance is cast on it, however quick and inaccurate it might be. Moreover, in 2008, Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin organized two conferences on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the critic’s death: *Ouvrir Bazin* (Université de Paris VII-Diderot, November 25-29) and *Opening Bazin* (Yale University, December 4-7).² These events aimed to open again the academic interest on a critical-theoretical journalistic production which is still largely unexplored. What Adriano Aprà wrote in his introduction to the Italian edition of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* is still true after 35 years: “Stating that Bazin is an idealist critic means saying something true, but it also amounts to saying nothing at all: everything starts from this point.”³ Bazin was harshly criticized in the decades following his death, especially by those relying on a semiotic, post-structuralist perspective (Annett Michelson’s seminal review⁴ of Hugh Gray’s English translation *What is Cinema?*), or even by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* themselves (starting from Jean Louis Comolli).⁵ All these reservations have had a great importance for the constitution of Film Studies as a discipline; with regard to this, Philip Rosen asserts that they were even a sort of mandatory foundational act.⁶ Regardless their target, these counter-arguments were all highly theoretically valuable in themselves.

By no means do they exhaust, though, the potential of Bazin’s theoretical thinking, whose nuances are far from being duly traced back and investigated. And, firstly, most of his articles (namely that 94% part of his overall work which was never republished in any collection or anthology) are still *unread*, unknown to most of film scholars. Again, to use Aprà’s words, everything *restarts* from this point, from this immense amount of material being brought back to light. By the way: the following pages are going to deal precisely with *repetition*.

Indeed, “Falseness” will be investigated from the standpoint of the relationship between

uniqueness and repetition. Firstly, we will try to find out how this relationship is referred to in some of Bazin's writings. Then, a specific example will be examined: remakes and *reprises* as Bazin conceived them. This will allow us to discern the differences and the similarities between this perspective and the various present-time "falsifying" practices, in which what is essentially at stake is a certain way of binding together uniqueness and repetition.

Uniqueness and repetition

True enough, Bazin writes that "rien ne vaut pour nous comme l'événement unique, pris sur le vif, à l'instant même de sa création."⁷ But it is also true that the essay (1946) from which this excerpt is taken has been written to make wary of whoever or whatever (like the *Why We Fight* series) mistakes a document for the truth, whereas "nous croyons spontanément aux faits, mais la critique moderne a suffisamment établi qu'ils avaient en définitive que le sens que l'esprit humain leur prêtait."⁸ Hence, the pivotal element is the voice-over comment, determining what the images mean in the film in question.

In his 1947 article *Paris 1900*, about the montage film of the same name by Nicole Védres showing found footage from the Parisian *belle époque* of the early 20th century, the world running up the timeline towards us thanks to cinema is "plus réel que nous-même et pourtant fantastique."⁹ "Trueness" is then questioned, and meets its opposite. But the point is especially *uniqueness*. "Le cinéma est une machine à retrouver le temps pour mieux le perdre. *Paris 1900* marque l'apparition de la tragédie spécifiquement cinématographique, celle du Temps deux fois perdu."¹⁰ Time is lost *twice* because, the article affirms, the "memories" that we see onscreen when some old footage is projected *never* belonged to us in the first place. It is rather an "objective" past: the camera, working automatically and "inhumanly," is a memory working *outside* our consciousness. So the "images from the past" that we see onscreen were never really "there" – at least, not for us. The first time we see them is already the second, because the first one is literally "nobody's" – that is, the camera's.

Here, very clearly, uniqueness meets repetition. Cinema makes them inextricable. No wonder that an illuminating example of all this is shortly to follow in the article: "Ainsi, dans cette prodigieuse séquence de l'homme-oiseau où il paraît évident que le pauvre fou prend peur et juge enfin l'absurdité de son pari. Mais la caméra est là, qui le fixe pour l'éternité, et dont il n'ose pas finalement décevoir l'oeil sans âme. N'eût-il eu que des témoins humains, une sage lâcheté sans doute l'importait."¹¹ An outstanding gesture, such as the bird-man trying to fly, is revealed by the camera as *repeated* while being performed *a single* time. His "only" time is equally a second time: the bird-man tries to do it, changes his mind, notices the camera, and finally performs it by doing it *for the second time*.

All this concerns as well Bazin's key-topic: realism. One of the first articles ever written by Bazin (1944) makes it clearer through a comparison between cinema and theater.

Chaque soir au feu de la rampe la pièce renaît, nouvelle, de son texte. Son éternité est inséparable de l'actualité de la "présence" vivante de l'exécution. Il y a eu et il y aura autant de "Phèdre" que de représentations de la tragédie. L'oeuvre dramatique comprend un soma et un germen. Elle n'est elle-même qu'à ce prix. En d'autres termes, si nous ne possédions pas

de "Phèdre" que le film parlant de sa première représentation, Jean Racine n'existerait plus. C'est que la pellicule fixe nécessairement l'oeuvre d'art dans un certain contexte historique et social (le dernier bain photographique s'appelle précisément le "fixateur"). Ce ne sont pas seulement les objets, les costumes, le maquillage les mille détails datant l'espace autour de l'homme qui viennent nous gêner dans notre participation au drame, c'est l'homme lui-même, interprète de la société à travers le moindre de ses gestes, sa façon de marcher ou de sourire. La symphonie ou la tragédie nous suivent de notre enfance à notre vieillesse, leur éternité ne cesse de nous être contemporaine. Le film au contraire reste par sa nature même ancré à la durée de sa naissance. Dans la couche de gélatine ne se conserve que du temps fossile.¹²

Any viable definition of cinema then cannot but take into consideration the specific temporal contingency which gets stuck to whatever piece of footage gets filmed. This does not mean that "eternity" is just discarded: Bazin remarks that Max Linder and Murnau look as alive as they did decades ago. It is their *being in touch with realism* that did the trick. Here things get more difficult, since we are approaching the heart of the whole matter. "Le cinéma ne peut s'évader de son essence. Il n'accède à l'éternel qu'en acceptant sans réserve de le chercher dans l'exactitude de l'instant."¹³

Each repetition of a theatrical play (*Phèdre*, for instance) is unique in its own way. Whereas the specific, unique and unrepeatable time "glued" on film is repeated identically by virtue of cinema's *technical realism*. But whenever someone like Murnau or Linder is capable to seize the piece of eternity hiding behind some fleeting moment, then *aesthetic realism* is achieved. The essence of this second realism is the same as the technical one – but on a different level: "eternity" here simply means that a specific temporal uniqueness glued on film is "awarded" a supplementary "repeatability value" (something like an "imperishable actuality" as it were). Thus, aesthetic realism achieves on a formal level what technical realism would be able to grant *in any case* on a purely pragmatic level: repeatability. Cinema can concretely and faithfully show again, and re-present, that specific piece of time stuck on film, just by projecting it anew. Without repetition, the uniqueness glued on film by technical realism 24 times a second *wouldn't even exist*: obviously, it can only exist insofar as it is reactivated in a moment in time which is *not* (and never could be) that "unique" moment immortalized on film.

Much more than theater, cinema binds uniqueness and repetition to each other. The portion of time captured by the camera is "more unique" than the theater piece living again night after night,¹⁴ and yet it is also "more repeatable" than those ever-differing performances.

Le miracle du cinéma, c'est qu'il est capable de dissoudre le temps. Alors que la photo s'applique sur l'événement comme le moulage d'un masque mortuaire et qu'elle n'en retire que l'empreinte lumineuse de l'instant, le cinéma extrapole tout à la fois la durée et l'espace. Il est capable de re-présenter l'événement révolu dans son bloc de temps.¹⁵

True enough, Bazin mentions "the sin of repetition." "Le péché capital de Charlot, dont il n'hésite pas du reste à nous faire rire à ses dépens, c'est la projection, dans le Temps, d'une façon d'être approprié à l'instant; c'est la 'répétition'."¹⁶ But if, on the one hand, Bazin's Catholicism is easily recognizable here, on the other hand this recognition must be taken to the extreme. For a Catholic, sin is not a simple threat that one should avoid: it is rather the very essence of

mankind. The origin is the Fall: if ever there was something “original,” it is sin.¹⁷ Bazin explains the “sin of repetition” in a 1948 article dedicated to one of his most favorite directors (Charlie Chaplin), and the words he employs closely recall his definition of the essence of cinema, outlined earlier in that article. Whatever this “sin” refers to, by no means should we think that it alludes to an evil temptation of some sort, something to stay away from in order to preserve a supposed phenomonic non-repeatability – which after all is *never* considered an immovable aesthetical canon in *any* of his copious writings. If ever such a canon exists, it is so dialectic that it winds up being unusable: it is the very *inseparability* between uniqueness and repetition that is an aspect of Bazin’s concept of cinema. Every time that someone like Folco Quilici or Enrico Gras is violently despised and condemned for having “spoiled” and “raped” the virgin Polynesian landscapes making a gross pseudo-exotic spectacle out of them,¹⁸ some other might be reproached, like Louis Malle, for not having been pornographic enough while dealing with a subject that would require such an attitude.¹⁹ The point is that, for Bazin, one cannot possibly seize what cinema is without facing the dialectic entanglement between uniqueness and repetition – just as for a Catholic, sin has to be faced and overcome, but not simply ignored. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

This also applies to the quintessential unrepeatable moment: death. Notoriously, in his *Death Every Afternoon*, Bazin charged of “obscenity” the cinematic reproduction of death, because death and the sexual act are the only events that human conscience cannot repeat, whereas it can virtually re-present any other moment in time.²⁰ This of course is not at all to be intended as an iconoclastic and one-way prohibition, but rather as a consequence of the inextricability between production and *re*-production; however, I will not insist on this subject, which has been already discussed in detail and very convincingly elsewhere.²¹ My argument here will be twofold.

Firstly, we should not misunderstand *Death Every Afternoon*’s mention to the red spies brutally executed in Shanghai and obscenely “resuscitating” every day, each time that those images were projected. Obscene as they might be, these images are *not* condemned nor rejected. In another article written for *Esprit* on the same subject just some weeks before, Bazin wrote:

*Tout ce qui peut secouer notre torpeur ou cette pharisienne curiosité qui nous permet de lire dans le journal du soir les nouvelles de Changhai du même oeil que le crime du jour, tout ce qui peut nous faire toucher de quelque façon la réalité de l’horreur de la guerre en dépit des alibis géographiques, tout ce qui nous contraint à la conscience et donc, à la responsabilité, est bon. Même si les producteurs de ces actualités filmées n’ont, quant’à eux, recherché que le document sensationnel et le sang à la une, ils ont, en dépit de leurs intentions et par la force même des choses, rempli pour une fois leur mission.*²²

Secondly, and speaking of bulls and bull-fights, it is worth noticing that around 1956-1957 Bazin wrote a series of enthusiastic articles²³ dedicated to *Toro* by Carlos Velo (1956), a biography of bull-fighter Luis Procuna mixing up documentary scenes showing actual bull-fights in which Procuna was risking death “for real,” with other fictionally reconstructed scenes. In the latter ones, Procuna *re-played* himself and his own life outside the arena. The reality-fiction interplay invented by the film is, according to Bazin, even more breathtaking than it seems; we will leave aside the dialectical contortions of his argumentation to point straight to its rather surprising conclusion.

La corrida relève du théâtre par la mise en scène et la participation active du public, la structure tragique du cérémonial et surtout l'interprétation du matador. Chaque course est comme une pièce qu'il doit mener à bien et jusqu'au bout, mais que le taureau peut interrompre. Le torero à tout instant éprouve en public et contrôle plus ou moins des sentiments violents, et, même quand ceux-ci le dominent, cette domination même est encore spectacle. Aussi n'est-il pas étonnant que Procuna, décomposé par la peur, buvant d'une main tremblante un verre d'eau, nous paraisse plutôt jouer cette peur avec un art consommé, cependant que l'on peut admirer l'intense sobriété de son inexpression dans les plans reconstitués. La vérité ici renvoie au jeu, et le jeu à la vérité. Si, comme je le pense, l'essentiel des problèmes esthétiques posés par le film réside dans la résolution du paradoxe: l'art par la réalité, Toro m'apparaît comme un cas limite du cinéma. L'extraordinaire entreprise de Carlos Velo nous permet d'apercevoir plus distinctement que jamais encore cet envers idéal du monde: la vie même résolue en imagination.²⁴

So the pseudo-partisan of “the Truth at any cost” admits here his enthusiasm for a movie which makes it so that reality itself appears as false, taking back its uniqueness while still fully relying on it.

In short, by no means can one say that Bazin refuses all which transgresses the neutral factuality of the Real, if such a thing ever exists. He does not at all reject what reality, roughly speaking, “points to” beyond itself. We must pay attention though to what this “beyond” might be, and especially to the mediation that only can lead to such a “beyond” – that is, *sign*.

It is not possible to give a full overview of Bazin’s “ontology and language” topic here. It will suffice to recall that, as even the vulgarization²⁵ of Bazin’s thought (the so called “bazinism,” ideally starting from Eric Rohmer’s attempt to make Bazin’s concepts into a compact theoretical system) tells us, the ontology of cinema does not consist in the pure and simple reproduction of reality, but rather in making the way for *manifestation* of meaning instead of its *expression*. While traditional art forms (the ones prior to the advent of cinema) expressed the non-sensible essence of phenomena in a sensible although indirect way, that is, by the mediation of some kind of *sign*, cinema manifests the non-sensible essence of sensible phenomena directly *on their skin*, immediately on their *appearance*. It is not a sign (that is, something constitutively separated from its referent) that indicates what reality “means;” meaning is rather something *exceeding* reality, whose potential to signify depends from this very excess rather than from any sort of linguistic attributions “from the outside.” In other words, meaning is no more based on the separation between sign and referent, but is “spread” all over the *appearance* of reality, as a meaningful surplus being *immanent* to phenomena – a sort of structural imbalance appearing *within* phenomena as the essence itself of phenomena, since the essence of a phenomenon is, by definition, *the very fact that it appears*.

As Dudley Andrew put it,

It appears, then, that Bazin demolished the symbolic and abstract use of cinema only to be able to rebuild it in a new way. While he rejects arbitrary symbols, Bazin allows “correspondances” (a term he borrows from Baudelaire) and sensual metaphors if they arise from reality itself. He claims that the neorealist directors, for instance, while they seemed to abandon style, actually “reinstated the conventions of style no longer in reality but by means of reality.” Such statements help Bazin avoid the cul de sac into which the other great theorist of realist cinema, Siegfried Kracauer, wanders.²⁶

In this sense, by means of appearance, reality is shown as being “self-eloquent:” not by magically erasing the discrepancy on which language is based, but rather by assuming this discrepancy directly onto appearance itself. This is why, in most of Bazin’s writings, a thorough preference for manifestation is easily discernible. “Expression” implies a certain linguistic hiatus, and a mediated representation that is supposed to fill it up, whereas “manifestation” stands for the visibility of that hiatus as such onto the skin of reality. The former goes virtually from the inside to the outside: what cannot be seen is *brought* to evidence. In the latter case, evidence bears immediately on itself the traces of what cannot be seen: appearance obliterates and wholly eclipses interiority, without erasing the imbalance on which appearance is based (something appearing more than it appears to be, while still showing nothing more than what it is). “Manifestation” means that one cannot separate an idea from its own transposition as image.

Si l’une des quelques formules les plus récurrentes de Bazin est le mot d’Oscar Wilde: “La nature imite l’art,” c’est parce que le “réalisme ontologique” est aussi philosophiquement une “artialisation” qui s’ignore, une théorie de l’art comme “anticipation,” qui suppose que le cinéma s’empare du paysage, le fait s’exprimer “tel qu’en lui-même...” avant de lui ajouter quoi que ce soit, avant de s’affirmer comme langage.²⁷

Incarnation instead of representation.

Remakes and *reprises*

After this quick and inevitably approximate digression on the “ontology and language” topic, we can now go back to the bond tying together uniqueness and repetition. One of the most poignant cases of such a knot is *remake*. Bazin frankly dislikes remakes, mainly because of that aforementioned “technical realism” gluing any piece of film to a definite and specific temporal circumstance. There is nothing wrong about some work being re-written and adapted for a different context, nor about Pompeii’s last days being retold by countless films in countless ways. It has always been done by each and every art form. “La lente évolution des arts plastiques ou littéraires est établie sur la copie autant que sur l’invention. Combien d’oeuvres fondamentales ne nous sont connues que par l’état d’une de ces copies et à travers les variantes qu’elle a fait subir à l’original (si tant que la notion d’original conserve encore un sens dans ce système d’avatars).”²⁸ The problem occurs when a film is slavishly copied, to such an extent that its original visual features are captiously reproduced – as in Joseph Losey’s (1951) remake of Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), or in *Algiers*, the 1938 remake by John Cromwell of Julien Duvivier’s *Pépé le Moko* (1937). Or when the original film proves to be inseparable from the historical, geographical and sociological context it was attached to in the first place (something that technical realism makes more frequent in cinema than it could ever be in any other art forms), to such an extent that it would be impossible to reinterpret it without making a totally different movie.²⁹ We should be careful though: it is not at all a matter of violating the unattainable original. The trouble is rather that the usual knot uniqueness/repetition lurks back, ready to unexpectedly and decisively affect aesthetical realism.

Why? To clarify his point, Bazin recurs to Marcel Carné’s *Le Jour se lève* (1939): a film which, although not extraordinarily successful at the box office, immediately gained outstanding world-

wide fame and prestige. Consequently, a huge and still unexploited commercial potential was sensed in Carné's movie.

C'est alors qu'intervient le producteur de Hollywood: il constate objectivement la formidable manque à gagner de l'exploitation par rapport au prestige acquis et il se dit que la cause en est seulement que le film n'est point américain. Il en achète donc la licence de fabrication, refait l'objet dans ses usines et le relance sur le marché en contre-marque U.S.A., multipliant ainsi le prestige du prototype initial par la force de pénétration sociologique du film américain auquel la moitié du monde – à commencer évidemment par l'Amérique – est habituée. C'est un peu ce qui se passe pour la mode quand un grand couturier parisien cède les droits de reproduction d'un modèle à une maison de confection New-Yorkaise.³⁰

What Bazin cannot stand (here, about Losey's *M*), is that the difference inevitably (because of automatic technical realism) brought along by slavish repetition ends up being entirely channeled into this vague Hollywood universality. Of course, there is absolutely nothing strictly wrong about it (only few others have been as passionately supporting Hollywood's anonymousness as Bazin), yet in that case the original knot intertwining uniqueness and repetition breaks loose. It is true that repetition reinforces uniqueness here – but only *a certain* uniqueness: repetition serves the false uniqueness of something pretending to be universal while being nothing more than a geographical and historical context among many possible others – namely, Hollywood.³¹ What is violated is not uniqueness as such, but rather the mutual implication between uniqueness and repetition: *this* is unforgivable, in Bazin's view. Instead of rendering visible its essential bond with uniqueness as such, repetition “shifts” uniqueness on a totally different level.

Must we then conclude that, to borrow the distinction Umberto Eco outlined in his *A Theory of Semiotics*,³² literal and passively inertial replica (*ratio facilis*) has to be ranked below the re-contextualization, re-interpretation and critical re-writing of an original text into a different one (*ratio difficilis*)? Not at all. On the contrary, the opposite is true. Remake is to be condemned because it compels to recur to *ratio difficilis*, whereas it is not at all a necessity.

Another article, about the *reprise* practice, confirms this point. The French term *reprise* indicates the theatrical re-release of a certain film years after its first time. Such an “obtuse” and automatic practice (you take a film and you screen it again) cannot but be classified as *ratio facilis*. Again, the fact that cinema relates each time to only one definite and unrepeatable temporal circumstance proves to be crucial: in fact, this makes film, more than anything else, liable to be subjected to a fatal *obsolescence*. Yet, precisely because of this deeply-rooted obsolescence, the film can appeal to some other audience, even possibly very far from the one the film was originally intended for, both spatially and temporally. This is possible by virtue of cinema's *automatic classicism*: only by being repeated and submitting to its own essential obsolescence can a film become “eternal,” a classic, something unique.

Il n'y a donc pas de raisons de voir les “reprises,” comme on l'insinue parfois, la conséquence d'une hypothétique décadence du cinéma. Ce n'est point parce que le films actuels sont moins bons qu'il y a quinze ou vingt ans et que le public s'en aperçoit, qu'on repasse Les 39 marches [The 39 Steps, Alfred Hitchcock, 1935], Drôle de drame [Bizarre, Bizarre, Marcel Carné, 1937] et Une nuit à l'Opéra [A Night at the Opera, Sam Wood, 1935]. Mais

inversement parce qu'il commence seulement d'exister un public capable d'apprécier ces chefs-d'oeuvre en dépit de leur ancienneté. Aussi bien en son temps, Drôle de drame a-t-il connu un échec sensationnel avant de remporter sur Juliette ou la Clef des Songes [Juliette, or the Key of Dreams, Marcel Carné, 1951] une ironique revanche d'estime. Mais il se peut qu'en 1955 une salle des Champs-Élysées ressorte Juliette à l'occasion d'un nouveau film de Carné et qu'on lui trouve alors des charmes qu'on lui dénie aujourd'hui.

Ce qui revient à dire que le cinéaste peut enfin envisager de gagner son procès en appel et non plus seulement dans le cénacle des cinémathèques ou devant le public prévenu des clubs, mais devant le public tout court, celui qui paye, le seul qui compte pour le producteur.³³

Here is the point. Both at the beginning and in the end of his article, Bazin insists on the *reprises* having nothing to do with *ciné-club*'s cult. "Les clubs sèment une bonne graine mais elle lève ailleurs."³⁴ Whereas *ciné-clubs* could arguably strive for the original 1931 copy of *À nous la liberté* by René Clair (the film exemplifying Bazin's point in this article), Clair himself did provide a 1951 re-release of his film *not even caring about its integrity* ("René Clair aura retranché les passages incompréhensibles sans dictionnaire"³⁵) without losing its original liveliness and value. Uniqueness has nothing to do with "the original copy:" it is, at the same time, what grounds the possibility to repeat *and* what repetition brings along. Whether a film might or might not resist time's offense, depends from its encounter with an audience which is *not* its own, through the repetition in a time which is *not* its own. Only in relation to such an audience can the essential obsolescence of cinema's equally essential uniqueness ("that" specific time glued on a piece of film) intervene. "Le cinéphile allait aux vieux films. Quelques vieux films s'avèrent capables d'aller au public des boulevards."³⁶

What about today?

Rather than a critical-interpretive practice (*ratio difficilis*) contextualizing movies and confining them in their own time (no doubt an important move, but in a sense also a superfluous one, since all this is already and automatically provided *a priori* by technical realism), or making the way for their transformation into vain remakes, Bazin seems to prefer an automatic practice that might be capable of approaching cinema's constitutive and substantial mechanical bond between uniqueness and repetition. This bond also relates to cinema's thoroughly *commercial* genius. Throughout his critical production, Bazin repeats quite often (to the extent that it becomes a sort of formula) that cinema is not an industry "and" an art, but rather an *art industry*. It is precisely the void placed at the heart of commercial mechanism that inevitably engenders a vital margin of risk, the kind of ineludible unpredictability regarding the chances of audience success that allows art to regain a crucial role as an indispensable variable.

Here, we can rejoin the present time, and falseness. Nowadays, more than ever, one cannot but be struck by the proliferation of simulacra along the multiple paths opened by media. The integrity of text gets lost in several different media, and in the general blurring of the border between authors and users. If we were to borrow the bazinian metaphor of the *bull-fight* as the perfect epitome of cinematic show, we should also add that, in this sense, today the bull tends to jump over the stand and run among the audience: it is precisely what unusually (and frightfully – but also indicatively) has happened in Spain in the summer of 2010.

By virtue of recognizably and purely economic reasons, audiovisual productions tend to be increasingly shattered, and to take the shape of an intertextuality more and more out of control, where the pervasive playing with differences cancels any residual claim over the origin. With regard to this, Bazin's dialectical contortions are still extremely useful, in that they help us disentangle the mutual implication between uniqueness and repetition, and sharpen our sight so that we can better find out where the former hides when there is a glut of the latter everywhere we could look at. And even the other way round.

But then as well it would be worth to take Bazin literally: eternity and obsolescence walk side by side. Recovering Bazin today means first of all having a very clear idea of what part of Bazin could *not* be recovered at all. In this sense, there is a specific article which proves to be particularly relevant – one of the many relying on the “art industry” refrain. It is an article about amateur cinema,³⁷ violently attacked for his its being made by the public itself, and created directly on the audience's own scale: this way, there is no place anymore for precisely that inscrutable risky chance of commercial cinema only through which art could eventually sneak unexpectedly in. *This* is what has mostly changed since Bazin's times. Audiovisual commercial production is more and more compelled to deal with user generated contents. The “commercial” and “amateur” sides tend to blur one into the other – or at least to come to terms with each other. The keystone of all this has been, of course, the Internet.

Once this shift is duly estimated (and we are not talking about a minor or negligible shift at all), Bazin can be again a major guide with regard to the relation between uniqueness and repetition – a relation which is never stable nor obvious. Arguably, it is not only a Hegelian “irony of History,” the fact that Bazin was not included in the colophon of the first issue of the review he contributed to found (*Cahiers du Cinéma*), being there only from number *two* onwards...

- 1 This article, albeit never published before, was originally conceived for the issue 23-24 of *La Valle dell'Eden* review (Kaplan, Torino, July 2009-June 2010), entirely dedicated to the topic of “Falseness.”
- 2 See also Dudley Andrew, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (eds.), *Opening Bazin. Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011.
- 3 Adriano Aprà, *Presentazione*, in André Bazin, *Che cosa è il cinema?*, Garzanti, Milano 1973, pp. IX-XV, here p. XIV (my translation).
- 4 Annette Michelson, “What is Cinema?,” in *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 10, Summer 1968, pp. 67-71.
- 5 Not to mention *Screen*, or the critiques coming from the field of cognitivism: Noël Carroll, David Bordwell and so on.
- 6 Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis 2001.
- 7 André Bazin, *À propos de “Pourquoi nous combattons”*, in Id., *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? I. Ontologie et langage*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1958, pp. 31-36, here p. 31. English translation by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, *On Why We Fight: History, Documentation, and the Newsreel*, in Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Bazin at Work. Major Essays and Reviews From the Forties and Fifties*, Routledge, New York-London 1997, pp. 187-192, here p. 187: “Nothing suits us better than the unique event, shot on the spot, at the very moment of its creation.”
- 8 *Idem*, p. 36. English translation *idem*, p. 191: “We spontaneously believe in facts, but modern criticism has sufficiently established that in the end they have only the meaning that the human mind gives to them.”

- 9 André Bazin, *À la recherche du temps perdu: "Paris 1900"*, in Id., *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? I. Ontologie et langage*, cit., pp. 41-43, here p. 41.
- 10 *Ibidem*.
- 11 *Idem*, pp. 42-43.
- 12 André Bazin, *À propos de réalisme*, in Id., *Le Cinéma de l'occupation et de la résistance*, Union générale d'éditions, Paris 1975, pp. 90-92, here p. 91. English translation by Stanley Hochman *On Realism*, in André Bazin, François Truffaut (eds.), *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance. The Birth of a Critical Aesthetic*, Frederick Ungar Publishing, New York 1981, pp. 70-72, here p. 71: "Each evening a play is reborn anew from its text in front of the footlights. Its eternity is inseparable from the current living 'presence' of the execution. There have been and will be as many 'Phèdres' as there are performances of the tragedy. The dramatic work includes both a soma and a germen. This is the price it pays for being itself. In other words, if the only 'Phèdre' we had was a sound film of its first performance, Jean Racine would no longer exist. The point is that film necessarily fixes the work of art in a certain historical and social context (as a matter of fact, the last photographic bath is called a 'fixer'). It is not only the objects, the costumes, the makeup, the thousand details dating the space around man that limit our participation in the drama; it is man himself, interpreting his society through the least of his gestures, his way of walking or smiling. The symphony or the tragedy follows us from our childhood to our old age; its eternity is always contemporary with us. Film, on the contrary, remains by its very nature anchored in the moment of its birth. What is conserved in the layer of film gelatin is only fossilized time."
- 13 *Idem*, p. 92. English translation *idem*, p. 72: "Cinema cannot escape its essence. It can achieve the eternal only by unreservedly searching for it in the exactitude of the instant."
- 14 "Les amateurs de corridas de ces arènes d'Arles en 1954 deviennent des contemporains de Shakespeare, puisqu'ils écoutent et admirent le même drame que les spectateurs élizabéthains." André Bazin, "Petit journal intime du cinéma (vu de Tourettes-sur-Loup)," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 38, August 1954, pp. 36-40, here p. 39.
- 15 André Bazin, "La Mort à l'écran," in *Esprit*, no. 159, September 1949, pp. 441-443, here p. 442.
- 16 André Bazin, *Introduction à une symbolique de Charlot*, in Id., *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? I. Ontologie et langage*, cit., pp. 97-106, here p. 104. English translation by Hugh Gray, *Charlie Chaplin*, in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1967, vol. I, pp. 144-153, here p. 151: "The capital sin of Charlie, and he does not hesitate to make us laugh about it at his own expense, is to project into time a mode of being that is suited to one instant, and that is what is meant by 'repetition'."
- 17 "Sin is not primarily an act, it is a condition, and an original *condition*. It is only through the original sin that we get the full schema of the divine plan: creation, sin, redemption. Outside this divine plan, neither God's love, nor the incarnation, nor *homoousia*, nor the history of mankind has sense. Sin is, therefore, above all, an original condition, and an original condition of historicity, of development, because sin is a generative condition, setting in motion the history of salvation and salvation as history, it is not a specific act." Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Dis-enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, translated by Bettina Bergo and Gabriel Malenfant, Fordham University Press, New York 2008, p. 155.
- 18 André Bazin, "Paradis des hommes," in *France Observateur*, no. 406, 20 February 1958, p. 20.
- 19 "Aussi bien me placerais-je à un point de vue purement esthétique pour critiquer néanmoins l'audace un peu naïve de ce réalisme érotique. Il me semble qu'en ce domaine le cinéma n'a de choix qu'entre la pure suggestion et la vraie pornographie. Louis Malle veut échapper à ce dilemme. Il n'y parvient néanmoins comme bien l'on pense qu'en se censurant lui-même, mais cette censure est-elle moins arbitraire que celle de l'administration? Voilà ce dont je ne suis pas convaincu." André Bazin, "Au festival de Venise," in *L'Éducation nationale*, no. 24, 2 October 1958, p. 23.
- 20 André Bazin, *Mort tous les après-midi*, in Id., *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? I. Ontologie et langage*, cit., pp. 65-70. English translation by Mark A. Cohen, *Death Every Afternoon*, in Ivone Margulies (ed.), *Rites of Realism. Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, Duke University Press, Durham 2002, pp. 27-31. This essay re-elaborated various articles appeared between 1949 and 1951.
- 21 Antonio Costa, "Lo sguardo visibile: Bazin e la visione filmica," in *Cinema & Cinema*, vol. 6, October-

- December 1979, pp. 18-34; Serge Daney, *L'Écran du fantasme. Bazin et les bêtes*, in Id. *La Rampe. Cahier critique 1970-1982*, Gallimard, Paris 1983, pp. 34-50, English translation by Mark A. Cohen, *The Screen of Fantasy (Bazin and the Animals)*, in Ivone Margulies (ed.), *Rites of Realism*, cit., pp. 32-41; Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, *La Lettre volante. Quatre essais sur le cinéma d'animation*, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 1997.
- 22 André Bazin, "La Mort à l'écran," cit., p. 441.
- 23 The following are the most significant ones, out of approximately a dozen of writings dealing with the film: André Bazin, "Un film extraordinaire de Carlos Velo: *Toro*," in *Le Parisien libéré*, no. 4083, 28 October 1957; André Bazin, "*Toro* (Torero): une révolution dans le réalisme," in *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, no. 408, 10 November 1957.
- 24 André Bazin, "*Toro*," in *France Observateur*, no. 391, 7 November 1957, p. 20.
- 25 This term is not to be necessarily intended in a pejorative way here.
- 26 Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: an Introduction*, Oxford University Press, London 1976, pp. 154-155.
- 27 Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, "A.B./S.D., ou les frères passeurs," in *Trafic*, no. 37, Spring 2001, pp. 107-116, here pp. 114-115.
- 28 André Bazin, "Remade in USA," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 11, April 1952, pp. 54-59, here p. 54.
- 29 See for instance André Bazin, "Le Grand jeu. La condamnation du 'remake'," in *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, no. 226, 16 March 1954.
- 30 André Bazin, "Remade in USA," cit., p. 57.
- 31 Bazin loathed psychoanalysis (or at least the vulgarized freudism classical Hollywood had so much over-used) for similar reasons: he could not stand its comfortable, reassuring determinism reducing any possible "American way of life" demon to merely individual pathologies. André Bazin, "Le Diable n'est pas américain," in *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, no. 270, 20 March 1955, p. 36.
- 32 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1976.
- 33 André Bazin, "À propos des reprises," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 5, September 1951, pp. 52-56, here p. 56.
- 34 *Idem*, p. 53.
- 35 *Ibidem*.
- 36 *Ibidem*.
- 37 André Bazin, "L'Autre 'Festival de Cannes'," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 40, November 1954, pp. 51-53.