

DOUBTS ABOUT THE IMAGINARY

Questions:

1. The Movement-Image seems to take up once more the problematic of The Logic of Sense, but from a very different angle. Where The Logic of Sense explored the consubstantial relation of paradox and language, The Movement-Image suggests going beyond paradox by substituting the transversal notion of an open totality for that of a paradoxical set.

What role does the cinematic model play in working toward a resolution that, by reading Bergson from the viewpoint of cinema, appears to lead to seeing "the universe as cinema in its purest form"?

In other words, does cinema play the role in your work of a metaphor that helps you read a conceptual text, or of a conceptual tool you use to arrive at a new logic?

2. Your reflection, rooted in the links between Bergson and cinema, turns on (aesthetic) categories and (philosophical) entities that you eventually characterize as Ideas in the Platonic sense of the term.

You also, while rejecting a semiological analysis of cinema, revive Peirce's project of a general semiology of signs.

Do you think cinema has a special part to play in resurrecting, in a machinic version, thinking in terms of substance and universal? What, in the very notions of movement-image and time-image, are the aspects that

support this conception of cinema? And what are the relations between image and movement in the movement-image?

3. In your analysis of cinema you never use the term the imaginary, widely used in other work to characterize cinematic language.

What are your reasons for avoiding the term? Might not your reflections on the role of light in filmic figuration, your fascinating suggestion of a look that is already there in the image, allow you to trace out your own conception of the imaginary?

4. More generally, does the notion of the imaginary, which varies widely from one discipline to another, have any place in philosophy? How would you characterize this place?

5. Might not your analysis of cinema induce you to set out the heuristic role of the imaginary in your own work—including that on cinema—and in the way you write?

1. The idea of an open totality has a specifically cinematic sense. Because when images move, then by linking up with one another they're internalized in a whole, which is itself externalized in the linked images. Eisenstein worked out the theory of this image-whole circuit, where each term depends on the other: the whole changes as images are linked together. He invokes the dialectic. And for him, it's effectively the relation between shots and *montage*.

But cinema isn't completely defined by the model of a moving open totality. Not only can this totality be understood in a way that isn't at all dialectical (in prewar American, German, and French cinema) but postwar cinema brings the model itself into question. Perhaps because the cinematic image ceases to be a movement-image and becomes a time-image: that's what I try to show in the second volume. The model of the whole, of an open totality, presupposes that there are commensurable relations or rational cuts¹ between images, in the image itself, and between image and whole. This is the very condition for there being an open totality: here again, Eisenstein works out an explicit theory, using the golden number, and the theory's not just "dumped" on us but deeply connected with his practice, in fact with a fairly general prewar filmmaking practice. If postwar cinema breaks with this model, it's because it sets up all sorts of irrational cuts and incommensurable relations between images. False continu-

ity becomes the rule (a dangerous rule, because one can get a false continuity just as wrong as a true one, more wrong even).

So here again we find paradoxical sets. But if irrational cuts become fundamental in this way, it's because what's fundamental is no longer the movement-image but rather the time-image. From this viewpoint the model of an open totality deriving from movement doesn't work any more: there's no totalization any more, no internalization in a whole or externalization of a whole. Images are no longer linked by rational cuts but relinked around irrational cuts (in Resnais, Godard). It's a different cinematic system, where linguistic paradoxes turn up once more. Thus talking pictures seem initially to have perpetuated the primacy of the visual image, making sound a new dimension of the visual image, a fourth dimension, often wonderful. Post-war talking pictures, on the other hand, tend toward autonomous sound, an irrational break² between the aural and visual (in the Straubs, Syberberg, Duras). There's no totalization any more, because time no longer derives from motion and measures it, but manifests itself directly, inducing false moves.³

So I don't think cinema can be reduced to the model of an open totality. That was one model, but there are and always will be as many models as cinema manages to invent. Also, no models are specific to one discipline or one field of knowledge. What interests me is resonances, given each field with its own rhythms and history, and the dislocation between developments and transformations in different fields. At a particular point philosophy, for example, transformed the relations between motion and time; cinema may have been doing the same thing, but in a different context, along different lines. So there's a resonance between decisive events in the histories of the two fields, although the events are very dissimilar. Cinema is one type of image. Between different types of aesthetic image, scientific functions, and philosophical concepts, there are currents of mutual exchange, with no overall primacy of any one field. In Bresson you get disconnected spaces with tactile continuities, in Resnais you get probabilistic and topological spaces, which correspond to spaces in physics and mathematics, but which cinema constructs in its own way (*Je l'aime, Je l'aime*). The relation between cinema and philosophy is that between image and concept. But there's a relation to the image within the concept itself, and a relation to the concept within the image: cinema, for example, has always been trying to construct an image of thought, of

the mechanisms of thought. And this doesn't make it abstract, quite the reverse.

2. In fact it's the principles that are sometimes realized in images, sometimes in functions and sometimes in concepts, that one might call Ideas. It's signs that realize Ideas. Images, in cinema, are signs. Signs are images seen from the viewpoint of their composition and generation. I've always been interested in the notion of a sign. Cinema has given rise to its own particular signs, whose classification is specific to cinema, but once it produces them they turn up elsewhere, and the world starts "turning cinematic."⁴ If I've used Peirce, it's because in Peirce there's a profound mirroring of images and signs. If, on the other hand, a semiotics based on linguistics worries me, it's because it does away with both the image and the notion of sign. It reduces the image to an utterance, which seems very bizarre, and then of course finds in it the linguistic components of utterances—syntagms, paradigms, the signifier. It's a sleight of hand that makes us forget about movement. Cinema begins with the movement-image—not with any "relation" between image and movement even: cinema creates a self-moving image. Then, when cinema goes through its "Kantian" revolution, that's to say when it stops subordinating time to motion, when it makes motion depend on time (with false moves manifesting temporal relations), the cinematic image becomes a time-image, an autotemporalization of the image. So the question isn't whether cinema can aspire to universality. It's not a question of universality but of singularity: what are the image's singularities? The image is a figure characterized not by any way it universally represents anything but by its internal singularities, the singular points it connects: the rational cuts whose theory Eisenstein worked out for the movement-image, for example, or irrational cuts in the case of the time-image.

3, 4, 5. There's actually a real philosophical problem here: is "the imaginary" a good concept? We might begin with the terms *real* and *unreal*, defining them the way Bergson does: reality as connection according to laws, the ongoing linkage of actualities, and unreality as what appears suddenly and discontinuously to consciousness, a virtuality in the process of becoming actualized. Then there's another pair of terms, *true* and *false*. The real and the unreal are always distinct, but the distinction isn't always discernible: you get falsity when the distinction between real and unreal becomes indiscernible. But then, where there's falsity, truth itself becomes undecidable. Falsity

isn't a mistake or confusion, but a power that makes truth undecidable.

The imaginary is a very complicated notion because it marks the intersection of these two pairs of terms. The imaginary isn't the unreal; it's the indiscernibility of real and unreal. The two terms don't become interchangeable, they remain distinct, but the distinction between them keeps changing round. This comes out well in three different aspects of the phenomenon of crystallization: there's an exchange between an actual image and a virtual image, virtual becoming actual and vice versa; there's also an exchange between clear and opaque, opaque becoming clear and vice versa; finally there's an exchange between seed and environment. I think the imaginary is this set of exchanges. The imaginary is the crystal-image. It's the key factor in modern cinema: one finds it in very different forms in Ophuls, in Renoir, in Fellini, in Visconti, in Tarkovsky, in Zanussi . . .

And then there's what we see in the crystal. What we see in the crystal is falsity or, rather, the power of falsity. The power of falsity is time itself, not because time has changing contents but because the form of time as becoming brings into question any formal model of truth. This is what happens in the cinema of time, first of all in Welles, then in Resnais, in Robbe-Grillet: it's a cinema of undecidability. In short, the imaginary doesn't lead us on to a signifier but to a presentation of pure time.

This is why I don't attach much importance to the notion of the imaginary. It depends, in the first place, on a crystallization, physical, chemical, or psychical; it defines nothing, but is defined by the crystal-image as a circuit of exchanges; to imagine is to construct crystal-images, to make the image behave like a crystal. It's not the imaginary but the crystal that has a heuristic role, with its triple circuit: actual-virtual, clear-opaque, seed-environment. And in the second place, all that matters about the crystal itself is what we see in it, so the imaginary drops out of the equation. What we see in the crystal is a time that's become autonomous, independent of motion, temporal relations constantly inducing false moves. I don't believe the imaginary has any power, in dreams, fantasies . . . and so on. The imaginary is a rather indeterminate notion. It makes sense in strict conditions: its precondition is the crystal, and the unconditioned we eventually reach is time.

I don't believe the imaginary is at all specific, but that there are

two systems of images: a system one might call organic, that of the movement-image, which is based on rational cuts and linkages and itself sets forth a model of truth (truth is the whole . . .). And then a crystalline system, that of the time-image, based on irrational cuts with only relinkings, and substituting for the model of truth the power of falsity as becoming. Cinema, precisely because it set images in motion, had its own resources for dealing with this problem of two different systems. But one finds these systems elsewhere, drawing on other resources: Worringer long ago brought out a confrontation in the arts between a "classic" organic system and an inorganic or crystalline system with no less vitality than the first, but a powerful nonorganic, barbaric or gothic life. These are two stylistic forms, and one can't say one is "truer" than the other, because truth as a model or as an Idea is associated with only one of the two systems. Perhaps the concept, or philosophy, also takes these two different forms. In Nietzsche one sees philosophical discourse toppling into a crystalline system, substituting the power of becoming for the model of truth, nonorganic life for the organon, "pathic" relinkings (aphorisms) for logical links. What Worringer called expressionism is a fine way of approaching nonorganic life, fully developed in cinema, that one can't adequately explain in terms of the imaginary. But expressionism is only one approach, and in no way exhausts the crystalline system: it appears in many other guises in other art-forms and in cinema itself. Might there not even be other systems than the two considered here, the crystalline and the organic? Of course. (What sort of system is there in digital electronic images—a silicon system rather than a carbon system? Here again, art, science, and philosophy interact with each other.) What I set out to do in these books on cinema was not to reflect on the imaginary but something more practical: to disseminate time crystals. It's something you can do in cinema but also in the arts, the sciences, and philosophy. It's not something imaginary, it's a system of signs. Making, I hope, further systems possible. Classifying signs is an endless business, not least because there are an endless number of different classifications. What interests me is a rather special discipline, taxonomy, a classification of classifications, which, unlike linguistics, can't do without the notion of a sign.