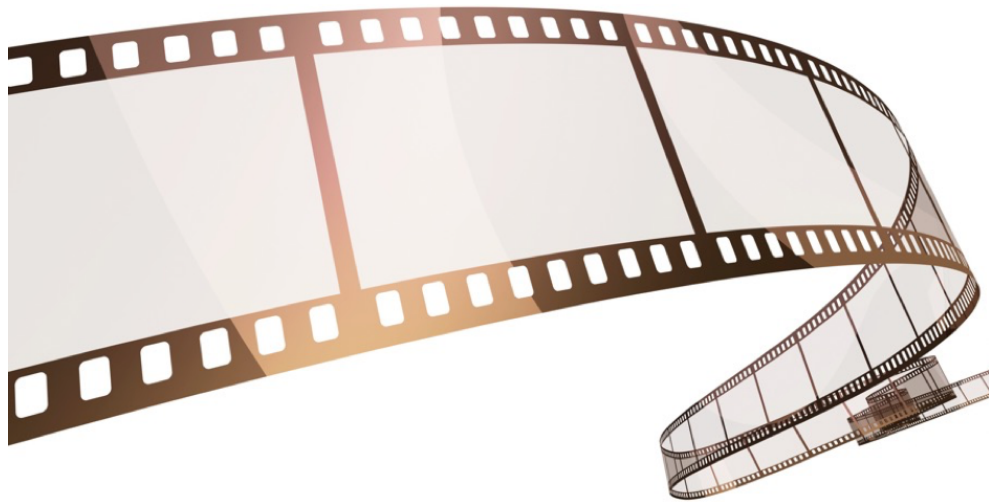


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What *They* See is What *We* Get in Film: Reality Tells the Fiction

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Abstract: Robert Bresson's cinematography allows him to show the affordances that things and situations have for characters in a film. By intimating these affordances, Bresson authentically presents the affordances *as well as* the characters. The fact that Bresson views and conceives of his 'actors' as models, rather than as malleable actors, illustrates, again, an effort to authentically film real persons in real situations. He thus allows us, the external spectators, an authentic view of what the characters in the film see. In the process of discussing this I appeal to a view Richard Wollheim introduced, of internal spectators.

In the cinema theatre the spectator is an outsider observing events on view in a film. How can this external spectator be made to engage thickly with what is represented as though they were actually present in the situations projected on the screen?¹ This seems to me to be the biggest challenge for cinema, indeed for all narrative art, I think.

One might distinguish two more or less opposed strategies. The first would be for the filmmaker to use travelling shots, and the full range of camera options to present the world as though being viewed from an all-seeing, divine point of view capable of noticing all the details. This would make the representation seem transparent. The second would be to lure the external spectator into the fiction by showing the fictional world as it would be seen by internal spectators.

These strategies may both have to deal with moments of inauthenticity. I think such inauthenticities can often be prevented by revealing the fact of the representation as such; by making explicit the cooperation between the film – with its actors, camera, editors, directors – and the spectators in the cinema theatre. The films of Bresson are an example of the second strategy. He shows what a putative internal spectator would be perceiving: *they* see what *we* in the cinema theatre will come to see.

Robert Bresson's last film, *L'Argent*, is a masterpiece, and his *Notes on the Cinematograph* is a singularly beautiful book, expounding, one could say, the insights Bresson found in his cinematography.² Below, I use both the film and the book to philosophise about film, without theory. The book does not present a theory and the film is not an illustration of the insights and reflections in the book; both are on a par. You could appreciate either of them and still be surprised by what you find in the other. Both proceed by presenting their content without accompanying explanation, and it is up to us to explore what we are presented with.

The title of this article, 'What *They* See Is What *We* Get', is meant to provoke argument.³ Put bluntly, I suggest that when watching certain films in the cinema we get to see what the fictional characters in the film see. On the view I wish to develop, perception is more important for the appreciation of fiction films than imagination is. In a number of ways reality literally helps us see the fictional.⁴

I. CENTRALLY SEEING AFFORDANCES

We do not see the actual scenes which the camera has captured themselves, since these things, persons, and events are not here with us, the spectators. When we see something, thickly, in real life we can walk towards it, circle around it, touch it, smell it, and so on. We cannot do these things with what we see in a film. Yet neither are we imagining the things that we see there. We are, as Kendall Walton argues, imagining seeing these things that

are projected onto the screen before us, and this ‘imagining seeing’ is a case of seeing them.⁵ We see something and know it to be something somewhere else, not in our space and time.

If I were to look through binoculars – perhaps also if I look via a mirror – at a woman filling a coffee cup, I am actually seeing her filling the cup, even though it all happens elsewhere – the gap can be crossed, it is merely spatial. There is a conceptual gap between the woman in the film and us seeing her, though (see figure 1). We must understand the concept of representation. A representation is something in its own right. When we hold and view a photograph or read the paper, or hear a poem its properties are present to the senses. Through these properties a representation presents something to the mind which is not present to the senses: the things represented. We see the woman [Sylvie Van den Elsen] represented in the film, and it remains normally unclear how one might get from where one is to where she is. It seems to require some form of complicated, abstract research. This has nothing to do with the fact that the film is fictional. Our incapacity to interact with the woman is not due to the fact that she is a fictional character but to the fact that she is represented.



Figure 1: Robert Bresson: still from *L'Argent*

I can *acentrally* imagine seeing the woman fill a cup – as if from no point of view – or imagine seeing her *centrally* from some particular person’s point of view.⁶ According to Richard Wollheim, such a particular spectator – internal to the represented situation – though they may not be depicted, would be invested with a psychological repertoire. That is what makes them particular,

after all. That particular person may be, for instance, the woman's father who thinks highly of her, or her guest who is happy to be handed a cup of coffee to begin with. According to Wollheim, the psychological repertoire of the invisible internal spectator colours the way the woman is shown – we see her like they see her. And this is what interests me: how can a film show something *as seen* by someone particular?

Traditionally, subjective shots are used to show something a character is seeing. Subjective shots induce a seeing that is loaded with a psychological repertoire that is introduced by the narrative: first we see the protagonist looking in a certain direction, then, by convention, we come to see what they are looking at. Thus, in a subjective shot it is the story that tells us what to watch for, and hence what to see.⁷ Almost no shots in *L'Argent* are subjective in this conventional sense, constructed by editing, acting, and movements of the camera.

Bresson's shots are not pre-arranged by the film's narrative like this: 'Don't show all sides of things. A margin of indefiniteness.'⁸ The 'indefinite' shots precede the narrative, build it, if you want – as perceptions build an event in real life. Many shots in *L'Argent* convey a view of things invested with meanings and values that are actually at stake in the scene, there for all to see, so to speak.⁹



Figure 2: 'See beings and things in their separate parts.' Robert Bresson: still from *L'Argent*

Through the image in figure 2, the spectator gets close to what the man in the picture, Yvon Targe [Christian Patey], is working with. We, too, concentrate exclusively on his action while the character realises the affordances of the

oil inlet in the wall. An affordance is, so to speak, that which some artefact more or less ‘asks’ the perceiver to do with it – like a chair ‘asking’ one to be sat upon. I will return to this concept shortly. We are engrossed in the inlet as much as the antagonist is. Watching what happens, we match Yvon’s preoccupations. Often, in Bresson’s films we are not given much more than what the characters themselves perceive while dealing with the same clues. It seems only right to think that in such instances we perceive what they are perceiving, in its worldly meaningfulness. We see what Yvon sees but are not told by convention that this is what is happening. We are not shown Yvon looking at what he is doing. The relevant affordances are generally apparent to people and don’t require subjective shots for us to notice them.¹⁰ We are centrally seeing the same things, persons, and events that the characters are privy to.

Near the end of *L’Argent*, when the woman puts the money she has just withdrawn at the bank in her purse, we are also shown Yvon noticing this (see page 370). But Yvon seems not to be interested in the money – Bresson merely shows something the woman is preoccupied with and its visibility to a passer-by as such, all from the point of view of the woman. It may seem like Bresson is daring us to think that Yvon is already planning to go after her money as we would normally interpret a sequence of images like these following the principle that such things are shown for a narrative reason. But, really, Bresson is leaving it up to us to decide just what Yvon is registering. First, the woman is seen putting her money away (fig. 3a), then she sees someone looking at her (fig. 3b, shown over the shoulder), and then, when the man (Yvon) walks away, she returns to her task (fig. 3c). Bresson:

See beings and things in their separate parts. Render them independent in order to give them a new dependence.¹¹

The reality of these ‘beings and things’ is not to be altered by acting or narrative steering but by their own affordances as recognised both by the characters and the spectators.

II. ‘COMMUNICATING IMPRESSIONS AND SENSATIONS’

Bresson is adept at summoning up reality with a single sound or partial image. In *Les dames du Bois de Boulogne* at one point you hear a blackbird, and it takes you inside the film’s scenery in the park. Bresson:

Accustom the public to divining the whole of which they are given only a part. Make people diviners. Make them desire it.¹²

Bresson intimates the real to the external spectators in the cinema, by visual or auditory synecdoche, or *pars pro toto*. We see part of the action, particularly the affordances of the objects acted upon, as a living part of the reality of the on-screen world. An affordance is not just a property of something, but



a. 1:02:19



b. 1:02:23



c. 1:02:28

Figure 3: Three shots juxtaposed in *L'Argent*, with affordances due to the psychological repertoire of the woman – we see her seeing these things.

a perception of something as allowing certain behaviour; more or less inviting it. What Bresson achieves is no small feat. He does not just show objects but shows them as perceived centrally for their affordances. A chair at the bottom of the sea is not an affordance – it turns into one by being perceived by someone who considers sitting on it. Filmed in such a way as to allow the viewer to share that affordance-generating perception had by the on-screen character, it can take the viewer themselves into the world on screen. An affordance is a subjective property – I mean ‘subjective’ as ‘perceivable only by (human) subjects’, not as ‘merely private’.¹³

How much of our own surroundings do we consciously perceive in real life, for instance when we enter the kitchen to fill a coffee cup? We see the world’s subjective properties as they present themselves meaningfully to us. Of course, we know full well that the world does not stop at the limits of our perceptions. What we perceive in films we, or our imaginations, take to be no less aspects of real life. That assumption is the necessary viewers’ contribution to the success of a film. Travelling or panning shots arguably stem from a lack of trust in this contribution of the external spectator; whereas Bresson expressly expects it.

Thus, in Bresson’s scenes we see what is meaningful to the characters. The core of their perceptions are the affordances that objects and situations have in store for them. Figure 1 not only shows the woman pouring coffee in a cup but, also, how she steadies the cap of the coffee pot. We do not just see an action, but also a certain dedication, a virtuous consideration – her subjectivity. We do not need to see the woman’s face to notice this, or better: if we did see her face we would be more concerned with what goes on in her mind. The face would distract us from the meaning of the gesture. The scene and Bresson’s written commitments coincide. Neither merely illustrates the other.

The task of the cinematographer – or film-maker – is, in Bresson’s words: ‘To communicate impressions, sensations’, and: ‘Cut out what would deflect attention elsewhere.’¹⁴ Clearly, the aim is to convey subjective awareness of the situations in the film. And the result is:

Theatre and cinema [i.e. traditional cinema that uses theatrical conventions]: alternation of believing and not believing. [Bresson’s] Cinematography: continually believing.¹⁵

In stage theatre (and cinema) we know we are looking at real people (actors) – and do *not believe* in the reality of the fiction – yet at times we *do* come to believe in the fiction. In cinematography, in contrast, we constantly believe what we are seeing. The woman’s pouring the coffee, carefully, is real.

Bresson accommodates our belief in the reality of these sounds and images of affordances without guiding us in a prefigured manner through an intricate and detailed narrative toward an interpretation which veils the affordances.

Instead, he works with the reality that we hear and see, and stimulates us to bring their juxtapositions to life.¹⁶ These sounds and shots are the part of the reality that the character, too, sees and hears – the world’s affordances, open to their actions. In *L’Argent* we experience what the characters experience in handling things. *With them*, we experience how, in these parts and aspects, the world gazes at them, authentically, as it would, and does. Reality does not lie. The ground of every affordance, and of all authenticity I think, is this real-life world-to-perception direction of fit.¹⁷

Though as a matter of fact, spectators in the cinema theatre are outsiders to the world in the film, by presenting the subjective aspect of things and events, films like Robert Bresson’s *L’Argent* – and Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Uzak* – change the external spectators into internal spectators.¹⁸ Both the external spectators and the internal ones (the fictional characters) register these subjective properties, these affordances of things, and in so doing, the external spectators join the fictional characters as internal spectators. The narratives of Bresson – and Ceylan – are quite intimate. In fact, these narratives, more often than not, are nearer to the everyday chaos, as one could call it, of the perceptual here and now than those we know from major box office films. This is, I believe, because Bresson’s films – and Ceylan’s – work with reality itself.

III. ACTORS AND MODELS

When in real life we see another person, they may be a competitor for affordances that we are about to realise – we may notice what they are doing on the park path that we are taking, and with the bench we are heading towards in order to read a book. Seeing that other person like this, as a competitor, is seeing them as an object, according to a narrative that we have in our mind, which involves affordances like those just mentioned. This is merely noting the other, like we note the path, the bench. We do this all the time with people – recognising others as tokens of some type, where *we* decide the type.¹⁹ But then, when they look directly at you, your pre-occupation with them as affordances changes drastically. The other turns into a subject, a person, someone like us. And both of us are absorbed in this experience of reciprocity. This is Sartre’s way of explaining how we see another as a person. ‘“Being-seen-by-the-other” is the *truth* of “Seeing-the-Other”’.²⁰

How, though, are we to think about this reciprocal recognition in the cases of external spectators in the theatre, internal ones in the fiction, and actors looking at each other? Characters and actors do not look back at external spectators, fictional characters do not exist hence cannot gaze at each other, and the actors are not supposed to figure as themselves in the fiction film.

Stage actors are present *in person* to their audience in the theatre, and the audience is present to them. Stage actors try to portray the characters, inducing the audience to cooperate in the process of bringing the character,

as such, to life. It is not that each little piece of behaviour must be scripted, but it does help if there is a clear consistency in the actions and situations which fits the narrative.

Bresson views the traditional way of making films as the recording of actors playing roles on a stage. Filmmakers should not use actors who perform as if they are going through all sorts of emotions, not their own, but supposedly experienced by their characters. According to Bresson, in contrast, cinematography – i.e., filmmaking as he conceives it – should make use of technical means specifically available to film, and not those of other art forms such as stage acting. Cameras and microphones record real events, and these recordings are edited. Editing of scenes is, also, unavailable to performances on stage.²¹

According to Bresson, actors in cinema (‘filmed theatre’) aim at a plausible rendering of their character. It is this view, that characters must be brought to life through play-acting, I think, that makes it particularly challenging for cinema to convey a character noticing an affordance in something, as well as seeing another character as a subject and not an object, or a type of person, or a ‘plausible person’. Actors can fake their gazing. Bresson, in contrast, works with models who do not fake, but, like the models of the painter, remain the individuals that they are:

Models. Their way of being the people of your film is by being themselves, by remaining what they are. (*Even in contradiction with what you had imagined.*)²²

Models are authentic because they are not pretending. We can see that. But one question remains: how can these ‘relations with the objects and persons around them’ be shown to outside spectators, from the outside, and by a camera at that? How can subjective reciprocity be captured by a camera – a machine? Does not the camera objectify, and hence annul the subjective?

How can one depict an object or situation *as seen* by someone particular, i.e. by someone with a particular psychological repertoire? Richard Wollheim discusses this question in the chapter in his *Painting as an art*, on ‘The spectator in the picture’, a discussion which is helpful for the philosophy of film.²³ Furthermore, in fiction films, the people are a figment of the narrative, they are not real, or are they? How can one character look at another as a subject when neither really exists? In other words, perhaps: whose subjectivity is in play when characters in a film gaze at one another, or when they look at things and events? Who is looking? I will come to this shortly.

I concluded section II with the view that reality does not lie. ‘The ground of every affordance, and of all authenticity ... is this world-to-perception direction of fit.’ This same authenticity is found in the exchange of gazes between any two persons. The reciprocity involved in this is what distinguishes *looking at* someone from *observing* them. Hence the problem of the observing external spectator. We cannot *observe* a person without removing their

personhood and turning them into a type. That is, without overlaying what we see with what a particular narrative instructs us to see. Hence Bresson's critique of acting. Acting turns a person into a character, a type, hiding the individual.

A director drives his actors to simulate fictitious human beings in the midst of objects that are not so.²⁴

Model. The cause which makes him say this sentence or make that movement is not in him, it is in you [the director]. The causes are not in the models. [In] cinema-films, the actor *must* make us believe that the cause is in him.²⁵

Acting may be as problematic as Bresson thinks. Looking at another person and meeting their gaze is not. Lee Strasberg, one of the founding fathers of Method Acting, started from a seemingly similar position regarding the actor, 'emotional realism'.²⁶ The camera will show the real emotions in the actor. The actor should not play. Instead, the actor is to become the character in real life, outside the studio, so that in front of the camera they do not have to act. No method acting for Bresson, though, as we saw. He works with models, who merely have to be who they are.

Every movement reveals us (Montaigne). But it only reveals us if it is automatic (not commanded, not willed).²⁷

Models. What they lose in apparent prominence during the shooting, they gain in depth and in truth on the screen. It is the flattest and dullest parts that have in the end the most life.²⁸

IV. WHAT WE SEE IN A GAZE

The posture and gaze of Bresson's models may be authentic, deep, and true, and they may add reality to the events and actions in the film for expressing their real subjectivity. Yet, in *L'Argent*, the gazes are not dialogical – not as Sartre would have it, where seeing the other is turned true by 'Being-seen-by-the-other'. The idea that models, in contrast to actors, produce more life on the screen confuses me, though, as there is little facial expression apparent in Bresson's models. But I may be mistaken. In the 1983 Cannes Film Festival press conference with Bresson and his cast, a number of things are worth noting. First, the audience did not seem to understand the film very well and, rather tragically, this annoyed Bresson. But, secondly, and particularly interesting, I felt immediately at home with the models who played Yvon and his wife, and the woman, as they were sitting next to Bresson. They were just like in the film. Or should I say, they were really themselves in the film?

The point I wish to emphasise here is that the gaze of real persons – actors and models alike – plays a major role in luring the external spectator into a fiction. A gaze has two aspects: Person A's look upon, or at, Person B's face;

and B's awareness of A seeing B. Someone's gaze normally reveals aspects of the one it is aimed at. As it would, given the fact that looking at each other is the prime means for members of a biological species such as ours, for reciprocally recognising and expressing feelings and intentions.²⁹ In real life, these two aspects form a single whole. In gazing at each other, two persons acknowledge each other's existence – to each other as much as to themselves. Gazing at each other has existential force: it authenticates both persons who engage in it.

The authenticity of persons gazing at each other may, however, be lost in traditional cinematic constructions. A good camera operator and a good editor can 'match eyelines' so it convincingly looks like Person A is looking at Person B (and then B is looking at A) in the shot/reverse shot construction. But the apparent continuity is construed, instead of being a reproduction of a real exchange.³⁰ This can disturb the authenticity of the gazing, sometimes subtly, sometimes more overtly.

One could film an exchange between two people authentically by two cameras positioned along the axis of the interaction between A and B, in such a way that neither camera shows up in any of the shots. One can also use a single camera showing both antagonists at the same time. We see this in a scene in the Romanian film *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, directed by Cristian Mungiu (2007), where Otilia [Anamaria Marinca] and Alexandru [Adi Radu] are shown during a long conversation actually looking at each other.³¹ Another way out of this predicament of cinema may, indeed, be a Bressonian approach to treating the actor as a model, to ensure some other way for such an onscreen couple to manifest their subjective reality.

Models who have become automatic [...] and are then dropped in the [middle] of the events of your film – their relations with the objects and persons around them will be *right*, because they will not be *thought*.³²

But I don't want to give up too soon on the reciprocal nature of the gaze. I think capturing two characters gazing at each other must of necessity involve their actors' reciprocal personal gazes.

As we know from selfies, one can look at a camera feigning to be looking at someone particular, presumably the person you intend to send your selfie to – and addressing them in a certain meaningful way. But such gazing is one-directional. Viewing a selfie one can only see to whom the gaze is addressed if one already knows: the other person is a projection, not a real person present to the gaze. One can see that in the gaze, if only one develops an interest in it.

If one is actually looking at someone, an on-going to-and-fro developing exchange invests each of the two looks with a complicated but shared personal communication – and, what is more: this provides some kind of existential proof of the reality of both persons. I cannot think of any other way to

prove a person's existence. We can feign such gazing by looking at a camera, but cannot look at another person as if looking at someone else. Unless one chooses to construct the interaction in a shot/reverse shot manner so as to represent character types. That is not so much a reproduction of stage acting, as Bresson thinks, but, rather, an animation of some sort.³³

I cannot look at you as though looking at my mother. My incapability is not due to a lack of imaginative creativity, but to the absence of my mother's subjectivity in you. So it seems that an actor looking at another actor cannot fake looking at a character – they meet each other's *personal* gaze.³⁴ Thus, no matter what characteristics the script dictates that the characters have, the gazing from one actor to another will be authentic. Actors looking at each other provide an authenticity which forms the core of their characters' mutual gazing. This makes them – actors/characters gazing at each other – the internal spectators in the fiction who bring the film world to life. They do this, one might say, amongst other things, for the sake of the external spectator.³⁵

Bresson wants his models to relate, like people do, to what is really before them, however, he concentrates more on objects and situations than on the human beings they are confronted with.³⁶ At least, that is the impression one might get from watching *L'Argent* (or *Pickpocket*). This gives his cinematography a somewhat abstract look; a look that suggests that humanity will fall into place as a consequence of getting the environmental relations right, which I think is indeed a large part of getting things right.³⁷

V. THE CAMERA

Many have commented that looking at a photo is like seeing, or even *is* seeing, the thing depicted in it without actually being present to it.³⁸ Journalistic photographs seem to us to transparently reveal the reality they capture. As a result of a trick played on us by the camera, the camera shows the image as if it is taken from nowhere.³⁹ Yet, the camera is in actuality present in the situation photographed – how else can it be used to take the picture? Nothing in press photos, though, betrays the presence of the camera or the person wielding it. Yet, photographers really are internal spectators in the situation.

That a journalistic photograph presents a god-like *observer's* point of view illustrates how we, the spectators do not look at the scene from the particular photographer's psychological perspective. Instead, we bring nothing to the photograph other than our own general beliefs, feelings, and psychological make-up. There is no story in a still picture to prefocus or prompt us to encounter the photograph in a particular way. We can easily project some narrative on it – like one delivered by the report in the newspaper – and *observe* the events in the picture. Any moral response to the photograph

is a product of our extra-photographic knowledge of the relevant real-life circumstances and situation that contextualises what has been photographed. In press photos we see types, not persons.⁴⁰ Types fit narratives, ideologies, and political views, whereas individual persons escape this ‘typecasting’.⁴¹ Bresson’s cinematography can be viewed as an alternative for such views from nowhere.

From the spectator’s point of view it is as if in a press photo no-one stands in our way whilst we view reality as it is. But of course, at least a camera and the photographer stand, or have stood, in our way. Both are necessarily *present* in the situation where the shot is, or was, taken. But both are equally necessarily *absent* from the image in a journalistic photo. Perhaps, in a film the presence and authenticity of the models require a camera that is palpably present for the external spectator?

Without suggesting that Bresson has a similar god’s eye point of view in mind in his cinematography, neither does he make the camera present to the spectator. He juxtaposes shots in a way that make us aware of the editing, but keeps us concentrated on the events portrayed. (See the shot of the coffee cup in figure 4). We realise Bresson’s interferences, but not so much those of the camera.



Figure 4: Robert Bresson: *L'Argent*

The truth of fiction films is to their fictional worlds, as Kendall Walton argues.⁴² They are true in their own right – and that includes, or should include that they be more or less plausible or convincing aesthetically, psychologically, and narratively. They are not presented as being true to the real world. But a scene in a fiction film is true to the fictional world only if it is

perceived as such – by the external spectator and, perhaps even more fundamentally, by the characters in the fictional world. Indeed, the spectators' perception of the truth of the fiction is a product of the characters' reciprocal recognition of each other and of their surroundings; a recognition constituted by the reality of their joint gazing. A film's authenticity is the perceived authenticity of objects, events, and looks – the authenticity of affordances, gazes, in short: the fictional world's subjective properties. For Walton, the fictional reality of a fiction film is due to the coherence of the film. But Bresson uses real sights and sounds, and real persons (models). While Bresson's cinematography does not contradict Walton's view, Walton need not go as far as Bresson does.

Right in the middle between us and the fiction projected onto the screen there is the camera. The camera in a fiction film does not need to behave as a situation's external *observer* – why it might do, would be a matter of choice. The spectator, however, cannot but act as external since they are conceptually excluded from the world viewed on the screen. Which strategies are available to films to make their spectators less distant observers? I submit that one such strategy of fiction films is to present us with spectators within the fictional film world – who perceive the events and the other characters on our behalf. Because such internal spectators are moral agents *in the film world* we centrally imagine seeing the events from their point of view – as the moral agents that *we* are, watching films as if they were reporting actual events.

The notion of the internal spectator is developed by Richard Wollheim who sees their presence in certain paintings, most notably those of Edouard Manet.⁴³ For instance, we see a woman serving drinks behind a bar, staring absent-mindedly at some patron, or better looking *straight through* them (see fig. 5). Looking at the woman we feel that someone is noticing her stare. It is not as though no-one sees this happen and some god-like absent observer catches the image and reproduces it. We see the woman the way someone in the bar is currently seeing her – you can see that from her staring. And the one seeing her has a certain psychological repertoire, as Wollheim calls it: he is not a machine – an all-seeing camera – but a certain person. In this painting, Manet provides us with a clue about the identity of this person, in the mirror in the back, to the right – but Manet needn't have done so for the image to reveal that it is being seen by an internal spectator, Wollheim argues. Indeed, in many of his other paintings Manet does not do this.

Wollheim is interested in the phenomenon of the internal spectator because of the possibility that something may be depicted from the point of view of a person with a particular psychological repertoire that informs the view in the picture. We saw this in Bresson's 'affordance images' which show how the characters in the fiction view things. Wollheim asks his readers to imagine a picture of Waterloo in ruins after Napoleon's defeat, from the point



Figure 5: Edouard Manet: *Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, 1882, © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

of view of Napoleon surveying the battle field and realising that the end has come. You would see devastation all around. If, by contrast the ruins were depicted from the point of view of the victors, the image would have had a different, more festive expression.

One other way to lure the external spectators, in the cinema theatre, into the film world is by turning the camera (and its handler) into a presence in the film world.⁴⁴ In this way, the recording resembles that of two persons looking at each other: the camera looks at a character who acknowledges the camera as a stand-in for the one handling it. Thus, the external spectator acquires an internal view, so to speak, of the character (and the scenery and parts thereof) – from the psychological repertoire that the camera is invested with. Bresson, I think, makes no use of this strategy. His models, too, ignore the camera, as if it weren't there.

We see the camera almost 'role-play' its own presence in real life footage shot by victims of disasters such as the 9/11 attacks on the WTC towers in New York, or the tsunami following the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011. This footage shows people recording their own predicament. Their fears and curiosity control the movements of the camera, not a directorial scenario. At times, their behaviour produces inscrutable imagery



Figure 6: Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011

– for instance, when they flee from the surge of the tsunami that is pushing aside their cars, roads, homes, their lifeworld, or from the dust clouds of the collapsing Twin Towers.

Curiously, these latter images, which are taken with hand-held cameras, hardly ever make it into the documentaries that we make of these events. That should give us pause. The narrative of a documentary requires images that the narrator can control. But the result of such narrativisation is a loss of reality. In fiction films, the hand-held camera resurfaces as a strategy in Dogma '95 films like Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (1998) and *Jagten* (2012), and also more recently in Erik Poppe's *Utøya, 22. June* (2018).

We see a certain combination of these strategies – Bresson's use of models, and a camera that is present and near – in Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak* (2002), especially in a scene near the end of the film where the two main characters have a decisive quarrel. The camera is close to everything in the narrow space of the apartment where the scene is taking place, and where the two antagonists are physically present to each other. You can see that. The director is not the external puppeteer of the film world he is controlling and observing, but is integrated in it: it is Ceylan's flat apartment, the characters are played by his family members – all they have to do is play having trouble being together. And they may not even have to play that: perhaps it is

all really happening – both improvised *and* true. That is the point: the authenticity of this scene is personal. Interestingly, we succeed in empathising with *both* characters. The characters are internal spectators in the film. We get to see what and whom they see.



Figure 7: Nuri-Bilge Ceylan: *Uzak*

Uzak is a fiction film that shows the value of Aristotle’s distinction between history and poetry, and which reveals the applicability of this distinction to documentary and fiction films. The difference between documentary and fiction, too, is not one of style.

The difference between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse . . . The difference is that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts. [. . .] By universal truths are to be understood *the kinds of thing a certain type of person will probably or necessarily say or do in a given situation.* ⁴⁵

Does Aristotle mean that fictions produce the universalisation that ethicists require? Not likely. For all we know the ‘type of person’ at stake in *Uzak* could be just these token people, these two cousins. They show the kinds of thing someone with their specific traits will probably or necessarily say or do under these circumstances. Fictions are after more personal bait than ethical universalisation: us. Spectators using their power of judgement have

the capacity to decide which ‘kinds of thing a certain type of person will probably or necessarily say or do in a given situation.’ *We* decide about the probability – we accept it or we do not.

The direction of fit of fiction films is not work-to-world, but work-to-psychology. When a film is true to itself, this shows in its being true to our psychology and that of the characters. We, the spectators of the film, are real – we have subjectivity – and we need an entrance into the world projected onto the screen. We need a real connection. ‘What our eyes and ears require is not the realistic persona but the real person.’⁴⁶ With film the character as an internal spectator (as in the films of Ceylan and Vinterberg, and with Bresson’s models) and the reality of sounds and visions *per se* (in the films of Bresson and *Dogma* ’95) fulfil that need. This is how, in film, reality tells the fiction. The truths Aristotle refers to are universal in so far as they describe the way we fit within the world, the way we are at home in it, as the persons that we are, perceiving its affordances and the others that we share this lifeworld with.

When a film matches all that, by showing real affordances, real sounds, and real exchanges of gazes, it meets the challenge I started out with. It will be more true, in the Aristotelian sense, than a documentary. It is still a representation of the world, and not the actual world, and we are still not the ones gazed at, nor the ones realising the affordances that are shown. All of this remains well within the on-screen world. But having internal spectators engage with that world on our behalf, as authentic as that can get, proves Aristotle’s point that art can be more true than history, as true as reality.

So film can do something which Aristotle might have appreciated. It can prove psychologically the universal truth to be found in the interactions of a certain person in a particular situation. The shot/reverse shot construction may be advantageous for making characters put on their fictional looks, allowing the director to construct an exchange of gazes informed exclusively by narrative strands in the film.⁴⁷ But such films are more like animation films than their god-like *observing* camerawork suggests. In my view, Bresson or Ceylan, among a few others, show a different way ahead.⁴⁸

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NOTES

¹We use *thick* concepts to describe moral situations, choices, actions, and events. Bernard Williams introduces the term as follows: ‘If a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason to act, though that reason need not be a decisive one and may be outweighed

by other reasons [...]’ Williams 1985, p. 140. I use ‘thick’, in line with the term Williams’ coined, as a qualifier of perceptions, situations, and so on, and am most interested in film’s powers to match real life thick so-an-sos, or in other words: to make the external spectator’s perception thick.

²The title of the book is sometimes translated as *Notes on the Cinematographer*, but the cinematograph is a more literal translation of the French ‘cinématographe’.

³This is definitely different from the notion of WYSIWYG that we came to know in the early days of the computer. WYSIWYG was the acronym of What You See Is What You Get. It brought to mind that people no longer had to be programmers to process their texts. In WYSIWYG text editors, the code was kept invisible for the end-user. I love the graphical interface, as we call it nowadays, but would rather work in L^AT_EX, open source software that allows me to work in code and trust the software to deliver the goods.

⁴Van Gerwen 2002.

⁵See Walton 1998.

⁶In Wollheim 1984, 72-96.

⁷We can see a lot more in another’s gaze than we have come to think, I believe. We may have been misled by a century of constructed gazes. The shot/reverse shot, the over-the-shoulder shot – they mostly show gazes not actually addressed to the person supposedly gazed at. This teaches us, external viewers, to jump to conclusions about gazes in films – we do not so much gather our insights in the characters’ mental states from their gazes but project what we are to expect there on account of the narrative about them.

⁸Bresson 2016, 64.

⁹All of this is central to Bresson’s cinematography, as he calls it, his individual style, as Wollheim might call it. See Wollheim 1993 for a clear exposition of individual style in painting.

¹⁰J.J. Gibson 1986. I agree with Gibson that perception is the processing of the affordances of objects, situations, events, and people.

¹¹Bresson 2016, 57.

¹²Bresson 2016, 67.

¹³See Van Gerwen 2018, chapter ‘Subjectivity’, § ‘Subjective Realism’, in Dutch.

¹⁴Bresson 2016, 53 and, respectively, 56.

¹⁵Bresson 2016, 40

¹⁶And see p. 369, above, where I discuss Bresson 2016, 67.

¹⁷I believe we should think of the world

as subvenient under the meanings of our ‘impressions and perceptions’, rather than as the latter supervening on the objective. The subjective precedes the objective. See Van Gerwen 2018 (in Dutch).

¹⁸I do not use ‘subjective’ pejoratively, on the contrary.

¹⁹It is quite a large step, I think, from this everyday perceptual discrimination to social, or systemic discrimination. Systemic discrimination can only be removed when we see the other as a person, as James Baldwin is quoted saying in *I am not your negro*: ‘You cannot lynch me and keep me in ghettos without becoming something monstrous yourselves. And furthermore, you give me a terrifying advantage. You never had to look at me. I had to look at you. I know more about you than you know about me. Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.’ What we do not face we cannot change.

²⁰Sartre 1956. As long as you see the other as an object, instead of as a subject, you do not really see them for what they are. See also Van Gerwen 2018, 176.

²¹Among the particular things issuing from Bresson’s views is the parsimonious dealing with sound and imagery: ‘What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear.’ (Bresson 2016, 36).

²²Bresson 2016, 52.

²³Wollheim 1988.

²⁴Bresson 2016, 59

²⁵Bresson 2016, 38.

²⁶Strasberg means that the emotions that we see expressed in a face are real. My interest is in a form of subjective realism: a realism of the subjective properties of things and events in the world out there. This is a realism in the philosophical sense of the term: the properties at hand are there independent of the subject. But how can subjective properties be there in that sense? Clearly, their reality depends on subjects? Yes, but not on any one particular subject. All subjects should be able to notice these subjective properties. Yet these properties are not objective, they cannot be proven to exist by scientific means.

²⁷Bresson 2016, 83.

²⁸Bresson 2016, 45.

²⁹See Fridlund 1997 and Frijda and Tcherkassof 1997. For other members of our species, someone must by default betray themselves in their facial expression. Empathy and expression have co-evolved in tandem.

³⁰If the camera showing B from over the shoulder of A also shows part of A's head, the next shot showing A from the point of view of B should show that camera. To avoid that two series could be recorded first and then edited together: first the whole interchange from the point of view of A, and then the interchange re-enacted, now shown from B's point of view. This would however, result in gazes that do not respond to the other while they make the utterance that we hear. Inauthenticity would be the result, even though that result might look good, and might suffice for certain narrative aims.

³¹Thanks to Britt Harrison for this reference.

³²Bresson 2016, 16.

³³I have no principled issue with cartoon-like films. I love *Sin City* – though that is a film expressly modeled after Frank Miller's comics it is based upon – and the series *Too Old to Die Young* by Carlos Winding Refn and Ed Brubaker. However, so-called realist films are often more *animated* than they profess.

³⁴'Two persons, looking each other in the eye, see not their eyes but their looks.' Bresson 2016, 11. I think it is difficult to assess the truth in the actor's movements, unlike the truth in his gaze at a real person. 'Nine-tenths of our movements obey habit and automatism. It is anti-nature to subordinate them to will and to thought.' Bresson 2016, 17.

³⁵This is part of the cooperation between actors and spectators that I referred to above.

³⁶Perhaps he thinks that this cannot be done with the hidden mental life of persons – a Cartesian thought.

³⁷We later find this approach in Dogma '95's first rule: 'Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is neces-

sary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).'

³⁸Think of Roger Scruton 1983; Kendall Walton 1984; Stanley Cavell 1979; Ariella Azoulay 2008; Roland Barthes 1980. Gregory Currie 1998b and 1998a has taken this a trifle too literally. See above. Bresson rightly starts from film's technological apparatus to make sense of what we see in the cinema theatre. What the spectator sees is a product of shots, images, sounds, and editing.

³⁹Cf. Nagel 1986. And see Wollheim on acentral imagining as an imagining of some situation not from a particular point of view (see note 6).

⁴⁰Jodi Bieber's iconic portrait of Bibi Aisha is one of a few exceptions that I know of. See Van Gerwen 2013 and 2018, 120-123.

⁴¹Identity politics involves a protest against viewing people as types, yet it merely seems to suggest we switch to different types. But is it not normal, psychologically, to see people as instances of types at first sight? Yet we have a duty to see others as the individuals they are, just like we have a right to be seen as the person we are. Fighting types is important, but it is not enough by far.

⁴²In Walton 1990.

⁴³In Wollheim 1988.

⁴⁴We see this, too, in Bresson's remark: 'Shooting with the same eyes and the same ears today as yesterday. Unity, homogeneity.' (Bresson 2016, 52). The director, too, uses his own psychological repertoire as an internal spectator. But in relation to the events in the film this repertoire makes no sense; it forms an artistic addition to the individual style of the cinematographer.

⁴⁵My italics. Aristotle 1965, 43-44.

⁴⁶Bresson 2016, 67.

⁴⁷'A director drives his actors to simulate fictitious human beings in the midst of objects that are not so.' (Bresson 2016, 59)

⁴⁸Thanks to Britt Harrison and Craig Fox for their active engagement with the argument, and Britt for detailed suggestions.

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