

# Chapter One

## Film as Art

The philosophy of the motion picture was born over the issue of whether or not film can be art. The question here, of course, was not whether all films are art – surely raw surveillance footage is not. Rather the question was whether *some* films could be art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the lurking suspicion in many quarters was that, since films are photographic, they are somehow precluded from the order of art. That is, photography as a medium – and film as an extension of photography – lacked the capacity to create art, properly so called. Thus, no films could possibly be artworks, since photographic media, whether still or moving, by their very nature, are incapable of producing art. This debate, moreover, was (and remains) a philosophical one, because it presupposes views about what is required of an object, if it is to be legitimately classified or categorized as an instance of the concept of art.

To contemporary ears, the contention that no films can be art undoubtedly sounds bizarre insofar as some films – such as *Citizen Kane* – number among our paradigms of twentieth-century art. We are sure that some films are art because we think we've seen a number of straightforward cases; in fact, we believe we've seen quite a few. We even call some films – such as Robert Bresson's *Mouchet*, Federico Fellini's *8½*, and Hou Hsiao Hsien's *Millennium Mambo* – art films. But things were far less obvious when film first arrived on the cultural scene. For in the first decade of the twentieth century there were not that many, if any, agreed-upon masterpieces of cinema for the friend of cinema to cite.

However, the problem went deeper than merely the lack of available evidence. Skeptics concerning the possibility of film art thought that they had prior reasons that conclusively established that no film could be an artwork. Those reasons had to do with the supposition that film was essentially photographic in nature. Moreover, cinematography, on their view, was merely photography that moved. So, since these skeptics were convinced that photographs, given their essential nature, could not be art, they therefore surmised that moving photographs couldn't be either.

That is, the argument that films could not be art rested upon antecedent arguments – arguments that had been voiced throughout the nineteenth century – which maintained that photography could not be art. That the first moving pictures were *films* – the very name of which betrays their photographic (celluloid) basis – encouraged skeptics who contemplated the prospects for film art to extrapolate their reservations about the possibility of photographic art to the products of the new technological medium of motion pictures. The skeptics did so just because they believed that motion pictures were nothing more than moving photographs. Thus, in this chapter, in order to discuss the possibility of film art, we will have to spend a very great deal of time talking about photography.

## Against Photography

So why, from the outset, did skeptics challenge the artistic credentials of photographs? Even in the nineteenth century were there not already photographs – by people like Julia Cameron Mitchell, for example – which were undeniably artworks? However, for often subtle reasons, many skeptics were not prepared to grant this.

Skeptics about the potential for an art of photography begin by taking note of the fact that photographs are mechanical productions. Photographs are the causal consequences of a series of physio-chemical processes – the exposure of silver haloids to light. A photograph was the sheer physical output of the operation of brute laws of nature. Thus, the skeptics concluded that photography precluded the creative, imaginative, subjective, expressive contribution of the photographer. Photographic images, according to the skeptic, were the automatic product of a machine, not of a mind. Press a button and you get a picture. But art is not made thusly. Art requires an artist who expresses herself through her work and who imposes form or style upon her materials. Yet that cannot be achieved by a machine slavishly grinding its way through a sequence of physical states.

According to the philosopher, Benedetto Croce, “if photography be not quite art, that is precisely because the element of nature in it remains more or less unconquered and ineradicable” in a way that blocks the transmission of artistic intuitions and points of view. The visual artist gives form to his subject, grouping its elements in a way predicated upon securing a specific effect. But the photograph allegedly does nothing more than mechanically reproduce the formless flow of reality as it passes before the lens of the camera.

This view of photography, moreover, was confirmed for many by the earliest film screenings, such as the newsreels of the Lumière Brothers in France. Called *actualités*, these one-minute shorts captured street scenes from home and abroad, travelogue footage, domestic affairs, folkways, historic events, everyday details, and the like. These films appeared to be little more than documentary records of whatever flitted before the cameras of the itinerant Lumière photographers. People wandered in and out of the frame. Audience fascination was with the reproduction of reality in all its shapeless bustle. Putatively, it was not as though some comment or feeling on the part of the photographers regarding their subjects emerged from the screen. What there was to see and wonder at was arguably nothing more than the simulacra of reality mechanically reproduced with neither the intervention of a subjective artistic interpretation nor formal invention.

On the one hand, the skeptic argued that inasmuch as photography was mechanical, it foreclosed the opportunity for creativity – both expressive and formal – on the part of the artist. An objective physical process, it left no space for the subjective influence of the artist. Photography was simply a mechanism. Moreover, the skeptic also drew attention to the kind of mechanism it is. It is a machine for automatically reproducing whatever finds its way in front of the camera lens. In this regard it is nothing but a recording device. When the camera is pointed at a street scene, it mechanically records reality. And, the skeptic maintains, just as reality comes without expressivity or form, so does a mere mechanical recording of it.

But what of the case where what the motion picture camera is trained upon is not an everyday street scene, but a dramatic enactment of a fiction? Might not that be an artwork? After all, aren't the actors expressing their thoughts and feelings about the characters they are playing? However, the skeptic rejects this possibility, again by stressing that photography, moving or otherwise, is essentially a process of exact recording and, therefore, incapable of being art in its own right.

Consider the case of the museum-shop postcard of Munch's painting *The Scream*. It is not an artwork in its own right, though *The Scream* is. The postcard is at best the photographic reproduction of an artwork. It is not an artwork itself. Likewise, a CD of Bizet's *Carmen* is not an artwork itself; it is the recording of one. The postcard and the CD give us access to already pre-existing artworks, but they are not artworks themselves. They are recording media, not artistic media.

The photograph of *The Scream* does not make art; it only preserves art. Photographs and, by extension, films are recordings; they are rather like time capsules – temporal containers – that convey artistic achievements

that are far away in space and/or time from us. But just as the jar in which the caviar is sold is not the delicacy itself, neither is the photographic recording of the artwork – whether of a painting or a dramatic fiction – the work of art. No one would mistake the photographic plates in an art history book for the works of art they showcase. Furthermore, this argument can be applied to dramatic films. If a filmed drama is thought to be an artwork, then it is not the film that is the pertinent artwork. Rather it is the drama – enacted before the camera and preserved on film – that is the artwork proper. Fiction films are not artworks under their own steam; they are at best slavish, mechanical recordings of theatrical or dramatic artworks – that is, recordings of artworks staged in front of the camera.

For decades, many contended that the German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was not really an example of cinematic art, but only the mechanical recording of a stage play. Yes, the sets are expressive – expressive of a kind of existential claustrophobia. But this, it was said, is the product of the work of the set designers; the filmmaker simply photographed the antecedently expressive sets that stood before the camera. Similarly, the acting is expressive. But that is the contribution of the performers. The filmmakers merely mechanically recorded that which the actors creatively invented.

Whatever artistry is attributable to *Caligari*, the skeptic protests, belongs to the enactment of the narrative and the design of the stage sets which were automatically imprinted on the film stock as the camera routinely cranked on. Surely, the skeptic charges, exposing film is not the work of an artist. If there is art in *Caligari*, then it is due to the work of the writers, the actors, and the set designers and not to the people running the cameras. If the director, Robert Wiene, added art to the proceedings, it is as a theatrical director of actors and not as a cinematic director of cameras that he makes his mark. The film as such simply preserves an already existing dramatic accomplishment for posterity. It does not make art itself; at best it makes available art from elsewhere in space and/or time. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is just like the postcard of Munch's *Scream*, except that it moves.

Because photography, still or moving, was regarded as the mere mechanical recording or copying of reality, its potential for creating art was denied. For it seems reasonable to presuppose that art requires the addition of artistic expression and/or formal articulation to its subject matter. And a mere copy adds nothing. Unlike a painting of a street scene, the Lumière *actualité* reproduces mechanically the look of said reality sans artistic invention. On the other hand, where the subject of a film is a fiction, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, then, allegedly, the art is in the

dramatic enactment of the story as it played in front of the camera. The art is not in the camerawork – not in the film as film. In contrast to theater, which creates artistic fictions, film at best records their performance.

To summarize: if a film is a nonfiction – say, a Lumière newsreel – it cannot be art, since art, properly so called, affords the scope for artistic expression and/or formal invention. Machine reproductions do not afford the scope for artistic expression and/or formal invention, since they are, by definition, automatic mechanical transcriptions of how things look. So insofar as non-fiction films are machine reproductions, they cannot be artworks.

Nor, on the other hand, argues the skeptic, are fiction films art. Again, the problem is that film is essentially a recording medium. Where a fiction film is said to be art, the skeptic maintains that this confuses the recording of something artistic – namely, the performance of a drama – with an artwork in its own right. If Charlie Chaplin created art when in *The Gold Rush* he made us see his boot as a turkey dinner, it was his pantomime before the camera and not the filming of it that belonged to the Muses. But in that case, there is not art of the film as such; there is only theater art – in Chaplin's case mime – captured on film.

Of course, many remained unconvinced by these skeptical arguments against photography and then film. And in the process of resisting the skeptic's case, the philosophy of film took flight. For in addressing the skeptic's allegations that films could not be art on a priori grounds, the friends of film began to clarify the ways in which films could qualify as authentic candidates for the status of artworks.

Some theorists, like Rudolf Arnheim, pointed out that in spite of their mechanical dimensions, both photography and film were not perfect replicas of that which they represented and that, in virtue of the ways in which they diverged from being perfect mechanical recordings, photographs and films could be expressive. A low-angle shot, for example, can portray a typewriter as massive, thereby commenting upon it. In his *The General Line*, Sergei Eisenstein uses shots like this to underscore the *oppressiveness* of the bureaucracy that employs such typewriters. Similarly, a filmmaker can use a distorting lens to make a point; laughing faces can be made to appear hideous by means of a wide-angle lens, thereby unmasking the cruelty that can lurk underneath a smile.

Moreover, as silent film theorists frequently emphasized, film is not reducible to moving photography. Editing is at least as important to film as we know it. But since film editing can rearrange the spatio-temporal continuum, including the sequence of events in a play, a film need not be a mere slavish recording of anything – of either an actual everyday event

or the theatrical performance of a fictional one. Editing gives the filmmaker the capacity to rearrange reality creatively as well as to body forth imaginatively alternative fictional worlds – worlds of works of art.

Considerations like these have by now won the day – hardly anyone presently questions whether or not the motion picture is an artform. Indeed, some maintain that it was *the* artform of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the arguments of the skeptics should not be dismissed as nothing but cranky conservatism. The skeptics recognized certain profound features of film whose possible implications enthusiasts sometimes failed to appreciate. Thus, one can learn about film from the skeptics, even in the process of trying to refute them. So, for the rest of this chapter, I will be taking a long look at the skeptic’s case against the possibility of film art both in order to see how it goes wrong and what it gets right.

## The Skeptical Argument

The skeptic’s leading argument against the possibility of film art has three major movements. It goes like this:

- 1 Photography is not art.
- 2 A film is at best a photographic recording of a work of dramatic art.
- 3 Therefore, film itself is not art.

This skeptical argument, in turn, is supported by three further arguments, each of which is intended to bolster the first premise of the leading argument. For convenience sake, let us call these three supporting arguments respectively: (1) the causation argument; (2) the control argument; and (3) the aesthetic interest argument. Typically the skeptic does not appear to have additional arguments to reinforce the second premise of the lead argument. This premise is sometimes treated as if it were absolutely unobjectionable. This, however, is not so, and we will return to this lacuna after reviewing the three arguments in behalf of the first premise of the skeptic’s master argument.

## The Sheer Physical Causation Argument

Crucial for the skeptic’s case against film is the premise that photography is not an art. One way in which the skeptic supports this is by means of *the sheer physical causation argument* (henceforth, usually just called “the

causation argument”). The skeptic presupposes that anything worthy of being classified as art is necessarily an expression of thought – the expression of an idea, a feeling, an attitude, a point of view, or the articulation of a formal conception. If the snowflakes falling in my driveway assemble themselves in such a way that the results look exactly like one of Rodin’s statues of Balzac, the skeptic would argue (and I think that most of us would agree) that that thing in my driveway is not a work of art. Unlike Rodin’s statue of Balzac, there is no thinking, expression, or formal invention behind our putative snow “sculpture.” Indeed, does it even make sense to call it a *sculpture*, since, given the case as we’ve described it, there was no sculpting involved. And, in any event, it is not the product of a sentient human agency. It is a natural event, the result of a mindless sequence of causes and effects, the outcome, albeit freakish, of the sheer operation of physical laws. That it resembles Rodin’s Balzac, or, for that matter, Balzac, is an accident.

True, things that look like my snowdrift are usually the product of a mind – but not always. There are shadows cast by the mountains of the moon that from a certain angle are said to resemble a face. But such anomalies are not even representations, let alone artworks, the skeptics argue, since they are not the products of mental acts. They are not the result of human intentions, but of the sheer movement of matter. They do not express thought, since they do not express anything. If expression involves bringing something that is inside, such as a thought, outside, these stochastic flukes have nothing inside to manifest outside. They are completely the product of the random operation of physics, not psychology. They involve no thinker; they express no thinking; they are neither portraits nor artworks properly so called.

But what does this have to do with photography, including moving photography? A photograph can occur sans human agency. Imagine the camera falling off the back of a truck in such a way that it starts to click off perfectly focused snapshots. These images would not meet the skeptic’s criterion for art status, since they express no thoughts. How could they? No one is taking the picture.

Likewise airport surveillance cameras do not require operators; they may be fully automated. That is why, in the normal course of things, we do not count that footage as art. For, once again, it is not plausible to suppose that any thought is expressed by an automated surveillance camera. Perhaps an artist can take such footage and re-edit it in such a way that it counts as art. But that is another story. Raw surveillance footage is not art, if only because it is mindless. So again: that a photographic image of  $x$ ,

moving or otherwise, enables us to recognize  $x$  in it does not entail that the image of  $x$  is an intentional product. Thus, we might also call this argument the *absence of intentionality argument*.

A photograph need not be the product of an intentional agent; it may be the consequence of a concatenation of sheer physical events. For example, we might imagine certain improbable but nevertheless logically possible instances of photographs that express no thoughts. Think of a cavern in the recesses of which there is a puddle of photographic salts; overhead there is a tiny crack in the ceiling of the cave that admits a ray of light. This light, in turn, functions like a pin-hole camera and fixes the outline of a neighboring volcano on the floor of the cave. A randomly occurring, “natural” photograph like this would not require a human photographer nor a human intention. And for that reason, we would not count an image such as this as an artistic representation of a volcano, no matter how nicely it appeared to resemble one. For, since it lacks a photographer, it expresses no thought about the volcano.

What these examples are intended to show is that photography does not necessarily require a camera operator. There could be cases of things that we would be perfectly willing to call photographs – i.e., genuine products of the process of photography – that are the outcome of a sequence of physical causes without any human intervention. Stripped down to its essence then, a photograph does not require human input, and, consequently, need not involve the expression of human thought or the implementation of human intentions. The expression of thought, in other words, is not an essential feature of photography. Therefore, with respect to its essential nature, photography is not art.

In this regard, what might be called the essential photograph differs profoundly from the essential painting, which, for the purposes of argument, we may take to be paradigmatic of art status. All paintings putatively have the property of *intentionality* which means, according to the skeptic, that paintings are (1) about something because (2) the painter intends this. A painting is intentional both in the sense that it is directed at something and in the sense that it is a vehicle for the thought of its maker (such as a comment on or interpretation of whatever the painting is about). But essential photographs are not intentional in either of these senses. They can be the result of completely causal processes lacking any intentional/mental mediation. Nor is the appearance of the volcano in our fanciful example of the aforesaid “natural” photograph *about* anything; it is just a happenstance collision of events with no more content than a lightning bolt. Such an essential photograph could not express the thought that the



volcano is awesome, as a painting of a volcano might, since an essential photograph of the sort imagined lacks an author to bear the thought, whereas a genuine painting, according to the skeptic, requires a sentient artificer by definition.

So the sheer physical causation argument ultimately boils down to this:

- 1 If something is art, then it must involve the expression of thought.
- 2 If something involves the expression of thought, it requires a mental dimension, also known as intentionality.
- 3 Intentionality is not an essential feature of photography.
- 4 Therefore, photography (including moving photography) is not essentially or necessarily art.

But if photography is not essentially art, then photography – whether still or moving – is not art qua photography, i.e., not in virtue of being photography.

Furthermore, whereas a painting can depict imaginary things, a photograph allegedly always delivers up the appearance of something that quite literally stood before the camera. Photographs present the spectator with what philosophers call referentially transparent contexts – in other words, in the typical case, the photograph P is the effect of cause C (a volcano, for instance) in such a way that the existence of P allows us to infer the existence of C (a volcano or, at least, something that looks like a volcano).

Paintings, in contrast, are referentially opaque. From the painting of a satyr, you are not advised to infer the existence of a satyr. Paintings can be about whatever painters imagine; their subjects do not necessarily exist. This too is a feature of intentionality, sometimes called intentional inexistence. On the other hand, that which gives rise to a photographic image must have existed and the photograph gives one inferential grounds to affirm it. Thus, this is another way in which the photograph lacks intentionality.

But painting is a representational artform in large measure because it involves intentionality – which feature of painting is intimately related to its capacity authorially to express thoughts concerning its subjects. Instead, photography, seen in terms of its minimal or essential nature, produces its images by means of mechanical causation rather than by means of intentionality. Consequently, photography as such – photography qua photography – is not a representational artform and neither is film, since film is basically to be understood as merely moving photography.

## The Control Argument

In addition to the causation argument, the skeptic may also bring forward *the control argument* to elaborate the case against photographic art. According to the skeptic, an artist working in a medium requires control over the medium. Why? If art is the expression of thought, then in order to express one's thought clearly, you need to have control over every detail of the medium. If one lacks control, wayward effects may intrude into the results, undermining the thought or the feeling one intends to express. To articulate clearly one's thoughts, one must have a handle on the elements that go into presenting such thoughts. Ideally, it is said, every element in a genuine artwork either serves or should be capable of serving the expression of the artist's thoughts. To express a thought or a feeling is to clarify it; to clarify a thought or a feeling requires the capacity to hone every element that makes the thought or feeling more definite, and the capacity to expel or modify any element that might render it ambiguous. That is, art as the expression or articulation of thought or feeling requires consummate control over the relevant medium.

Painting evinces the requisite degree of control, since everything in a painting is ostensibly there because the painter *intentionally* put it there. Also, as we have seen, the painter – again in virtue of intentionality – can clarify her ideas or emotions by imagining whatever she needs to sharpen her thoughts, not restrained by what is. However, the photographer, including the cinematographer, supposedly has nothing approaching these resources. The photographer/cinematographer is at the mercy of what is in a way that it seems a painter never is.

The camera is akin to a mirror; the lens captures whatever looms before it, whether or not the camera operator is aware of the details she records and/or whether she intends to photograph them. For this reason, many historical spectacles are marred by the intrusion of unwanted anachronisms. A telephone pole, for example, may appear in the background of a medieval romance to the embarrassment of the camera crew just because it was a detail of the actual *mise en scène*,\* albeit not one the cinematographer noticed or desired to record. However, since photography is a causal process, if something stands before the camera, the physical procedure guarantees, all things being equal, that it will appear in the image, no matter what the cinematographer intended.

\* The scenographic layout – what is next to what and in front of what else, etc.

Were a telephone pole to appear in the background of a painting of what otherwise looked to be a medieval scene, we would suppose the painter intentionally drew it there and then go on to interpret what the painter meant by doing so. But when comparable anachronisms erupt in historical films, as they do with unnerving frequency, we infer that they arrived there because things got out of control. Since we know that the photographic process is automatic, abiding blindly by the laws of chemistry and optics, we understand that things appear, to the chagrin of filmmakers, in motion picture images that were never meant to be there.

There are so many things in front of the motion picture camera that may make an inadvertent debut in the final print of a film. Indeed, there are typically far too many details – large and small – for the cinematographer to keep track of. Many surprises appear uninvited in the finished film and the filmmaker just has to learn to live with them. On the other hand, everything in a painting is putatively there because that is what the painter intended. The painter is not surprised by what she finds in her painting, because she put it there. What would we make of a painter who, looking at her medieval scene, asked: “How did that telephone pole get there?” The painter has ultimate control over what inhabits her canvas.

Not so the photographer/cinematographer. Details appear in the photographic image, whether still or moving, just because they were in the camera’s visual field even if no one on the film crew took heed of their presence. Furthermore, there are always an indefinitely large number of potential gaffs lying in wait for the unwary cinematographer. In this regard, the painter must be said to exert far more control than either the still or moving picture photographer.

Since paintings are intentionally produced, painters enjoy a degree of control such that there is nothing whose appearance in her pictures takes her aback. But photographers are often startled by what they *find* in their photos, because the causal process they initiate evolves in utter obliviousness of whatever the photographer believes, desires, or intends.

The photographer not only falls far short of the level of control the painter imposes over what can show up in her image; the photographer also lacks the painter’s imaginative freedom to picture whatever she will – absolutely unrestrained by what is – inasmuch as the photographer can only present what can be placed before a camera. The painter can picture a werewolf for us; the filmmaker can only give us a photographic picture of a man got up in a werewolf outfit. The painter, in this regard, has greater freedom than the photographer, which, in turn, entails greater control over shaping her subject matter and the expression of her thinking about it.

Because art involves the expression of thought, only media that afford a high level of control are suitable for the purposes of artmaking. The clarification of thought requires a degree of plasticity. To get across an idea or a feeling clearly you may have to depart from the way the world is – either by adding to it or by subtracting from it. Photographic media, however, are inhospitable in this regard. They are tied to what is and they incorporate details, like inadvertent telephone poles, that are beyond the photographer’s ken. Unlike painting, photography is not an artform; it lacks the degree of control evinced by an unquestionable artform like painting. And for the same reasons, moving photography suffers the same liabilities as does still photography. So, once again, we must conclude that film is not an art.

### The Aesthetic Interest Argument

A third skeptical argument to the conclusion that photography/cinematography is not art can be labeled the *aesthetic interest argument*. An aesthetic interest is an interest that we take in something *for its own sake*, that is, because of the kind of thing it is. We take an aesthetic interest in the novel *Remembrance of Things Past* when we are preoccupied by the kind of thing it essentially is – an expression of thought – rather than as a set of books the color of the covers of which contrasts appealingly with the drapes in our living room.

According to the skeptic, photography cannot command aesthetic interest because a photograph is strictly analogous to a mirror. When we are interested in a mirror the object of our interest is whatever is reflected there and not the mirror itself. When one brushes off one’s jacket in front of the looking glass, one is concerned with whether there is any telltale lint anywhere. We look into the glass in order to learn something about our jacket; our interest is in our jacket, not in the mirror reflection for its own sake. We are only interested in the mirror reflection because of what it tells us about something else, namely our jacket. Thus, the interest one typically has in a mirror is not an aesthetic interest.

Moreover, the skeptic argues that what is true of mirrors is also true of photographs. We are interested in them for what they show – historical events, atrocities, family weddings, dead relatives, and so on – and not for their own sake. It is the object in the photograph and not the photograph as an object that engages our attention.

With respect to the art of painting, it is the painting as object (indeed, as art object) that commands our attention and it does so because it is an

expression of thought. Mirrors are not expressions of thought; they are optical appliances whose images are produced naturally, not intentionally. They relay appearances to us mechanically. There is no point in taking an interest in them in the way that we care about paintings. In fact, the only way to take an interest in the images in mirrors, if our interest is not scientific, is to be occupied by what they show us – like the police cruiser with the flashing blue light in our rear-view mirror.

Likewise, the skeptic argues that photos record appearances; they do not convey thoughts. We are interested in a photograph of  $x$  – say of Osama Bin Laden – because we are interested in seeing the way he looks. We are not interested in the photograph for itself, but only as a mechanism that transmits appearances. The interest is not aesthetic, since it is not an interest in the kind of thing the photograph is, but rather an interest in the person whose appearance it delivers.

Another way to make the skeptic's point here is to say that the skeptic is claiming that photographs, properly so called, are *transparent*. We have already seen that photographs are referentially transparent in contrast to the referential opacity characteristic of the productions of intentionality. That is, there is a causal connection between the photo and the object that gives rise to it such that the photo supplies grounds for inferring the existence of the object in the photo. My appearance in the surveillance footage supplies evidence that I was in the bank on the night of the robbery. All things being equal, the jury will legitimately infer it was so. But in addition to providing this inferential warrant, skeptics are also maintaining that photography as it is usually employed – what has been called “straight photography” – is also transparent in the sense that it provides us with indirect perceptual access to the object it represents. Just as seeing an object *through* a rear-view mirror is a special, indirect way of seeing the police cruiser behind me, so a photograph is a special way of seeing an object.

That is, we see objects *through* photographs just as I see objects through mirrors. In this way, photographs, like mirrors, are perceptually transparent. But, the skeptic adds, if photographs are perceptually transparent, then it is not the photograph in its own right that preoccupies us. It is the object to which the photograph gives us perceptual access that interests us, either for its own sake, or otherwise. In either case, our interest is not an aesthetic interest. We are not interested in the photograph as an object; we are not interested in the photograph as an artwork; we are interested in it because of what it shows and not how it shows it. Moreover, if a photograph cannot support aesthetic interest, then why suppose it is an

artwork? For, the skeptic presumes, an artwork is just the kind of thing that enjoins aesthetic interest – that is, an artwork is the kind of thing in which we are interested because of the kind of thing (the kind of object) it is (rather than because of the kind of object to which it affords us perceptual access).

Suppose that the object of a photograph is something very beautiful – like a flowering rose – of the sort whose appearance we are typically said to value for its own sake. The skeptic maintains that the putative aesthetic interest here is the beautiful rose. Our attention is not drawn to the photograph itself – as it would be were it a genuine artistic object – but to the appearance of the flower which the photograph serves up transparently and mechanically. It is not, so to speak, a beautiful photograph but a photograph of a beautiful thing. And it is the beautiful thing in the photograph that is the object of our aesthetic interest, properly speaking. Likewise, when the movie presents us with a beautiful vista, it is the vista that is the object of our aesthetic interest, not the movie that allegedly merely records it.

The Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov called film the “microscope and telescope of time.” Just as perceptual apparatuses like microscopes and telescopes enable us to penetrate very small and very large spaces, photographic processes enable us to “see into” the past, to “bridge” temporal distances at a glance. But, equally, just as in the normal course of affairs neither the microscope nor the telescope is the object of our interest, unless we are optical technicians or repairmen, neither, the skeptic maintains, is the photographic or cinematographic image. With respect to these things, we are meant to see “through” them; they are transparent.

To sum up: we are not interested in the photograph – as we are interested in genuine art objects – for the sake of the object it is. The photograph does not sustain aesthetic interest on its own. It is not an instance of genuine representational art. Consequently, if film, as its name indicates, is basically, essentially photographic in nature, then it is not a representational artform in its own right either. If a given film appears to elicit aesthetic interest – as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* does – that is because it is a transparent photographic record of a dramatic (theatrical) representation. It is the dramatic representation itself – as it was staged and enacted in front of the motion picture camera – that grips our interest, just as it is Groucho Marx’s monologues and not the moving picture recording of them that is the locus of our aesthetic interest in *Animal Crackers*. To suspect otherwise is to confuse the box that contains the cookies for the cookies themselves.

## Responding to the Skeptics

These three arguments – the causation argument, the control argument, and the aesthetic interest argument – are the basis for the skeptic’s brief against the possibility that some films are artworks. These arguments, however benighted they may appear, call our attention to intriguing features of film, even if the skeptic does not always draw the right conclusions from his observations. The arguments often sound convincing, but are they decisive? Let us review them critically in order to locate their potential shortcomings.

### Round Two: The Causation Argument

First, let us reconsider the causation argument. The skeptic correctly points out that the production of a photograph, properly so called, does not necessarily require the intentional contribution of an agent. A photograph, still or moving, could result from a series of physical events with no intentional input. A malfunctioning camera might switch on when dropped, or, more fantastically, photographs might appear in nature as the result of a sequence of statistically improbable but logical possible events as discussed earlier in the case of our natural “cave” photo of the volcano. These cases suggest that intentionality is not an essential feature of photos. That is, there can be photos stripped of intentionality altogether which are nevertheless still appropriately classified as photos. But if there is no intentionality involved, they cannot be expressions of thought, for they are bereft of thought content (something they are about). Thus, what might be called essential or minimal photographs are not necessarily artworks, where to be an artwork requires, *ex hypothesi*, being an expression of thought.

So there are *conceivable* photographs that are not artworks. But, granting that there *may* be such a case, what about actual photographs rather than merely conceivable ones? When we admire the photos of Edward Steichen as works of art, we are talking about actually existing photographs and not just conceivable ones. Moreover, in the cases of the actually existing photographs that we classify as artworks, do we not believe, with good cause, that the intentions of the relevant photographer are expressed in his images? Steichen’s photos convey thoughts and feelings about the content toward which they draw our attention and we believe they are undoubtedly intended to do precisely that by their maker.

As Walter Benjamin noted, Atget's photographs, for example, express thoughts about Parisian cityscapes. The pertinent photographs, in other words, possess intentionality in the ways the skeptic mandates, and said photographs should, consequently, count as works of art in accordance with the terms the skeptic's argument dictates. What difference does it make to the artistic status of actually existing photographs that express thought, as Atget's do, that there are some other conceivable photographs that do not?

That some photographs express thoughts is enough to establish that some photographs are art. The fact that there may be conceivable photographs, like those we have explored, that do not express thought at best shows that not all photographs must necessarily be art. But, on the one hand, no one wants to prove that; even the greatest fan of photography will concede that not every photograph is or must be art. Who thinks the photos on standard automobile licenses are art?

On the other hand, the skeptic has to prove more than just the proposition that some photos are not or may not be art. The skeptic is committed to proving that necessarily no photograph is art nor can it be. But how will the skeptic show that? What the skeptic, invoking the notion of an essential or minimal photograph, has demonstrated is that intentionality is not necessarily involved in producing something that we would be willing to categorize as a photograph. But it does not follow logically from the proposition that intentionality is not necessarily involved in producing some photographs that necessarily intentionality is not involved in the production of any photographs. The fact that a surveillance camera at a traffic light records a scofflaw automatically – without the intervention of any intention – does not entail that intentionality and intentions do not come into play productively when I select the subject of my snapshot, choose the lens, film stock and aperture setting that I desire, and adjust the lighting for my purposes at the same time as I prepare to execute my photograph. To imagine that the lack of intentionality in the case of the surveillance camera must imply a lack of intentionality in the shoot I've just described is a logical error (called a *modal fallacy* because it is an error in alethic modal logic, i.e., the logic of necessity and possibility).

From the fact that mere photographic status does not necessarily require intentionality, it does not follow that anything legitimately classified as photography must necessarily lack intentionality. Though the skeptic appears to presume this inference, it is a non sequitur. Technically, it is a fallacy of alethic modal logic to attempt to move from (1) photography is not *necessarily* an intentional product to (2) *necessarily* photography is not an



intentional product. But the skeptic seems to attempt, erroneously, to make precisely this inferential leap.

Against the skeptic, we can argue that even if certain conceivable photos lack intentionality and are not artworks for that very reason, this does not even remotely suggest that all actual photos are equally compromised. For as we have just seen, if we did not know already, some actual photos can and do have intentional content and can be and have been intentionally produced, thereby satisfying even the skeptic's criteria for art status. And if still photographs can be representational artworks on these grounds, so can films, even films considered as merely essentially moving photographs.

Perhaps the skeptic will argue that anything short of what we've called an essential or minimal film should count as an authentic specimen of the medium. But when adjudicating the question of whether some photos are artworks, why would we grant greater weight to how they might have been made as opposed to how they were actually made?

Moreover, the skeptic cannot plausibly argue that if causation is implicated in the production of a work, then that precludes the kind of intentionality requisite for art status. For were that so, virtually no medium could be said to be capable of producing art, since almost all of them possess an ineliminable causal dimension. Consider: even a paintbrush is a tool; once an artist touches his brush to the canvas, a causal process is set in motion; the paint flows at a rate determined by chemical law. The sculptor is beholden to physics. The organ, of course, is a machine. But in none of these cases do the facts that there are causal processes involved preclude the expression of thought. So, if in countless cases of already acknowledged artistic media their causal or mechanical aspects do not foreclose the possibility of expressing thought, then why does the skeptic suppose matters to stand differently with photography and film?

## The Control Argument Revisited

The skeptic emphasizes that the expression of thought – for him, the *sine qua non* of art status – requires control. If there is no control over the medium in question, the skeptic contends, then one is simply not expressing one's own thought. This seems fairly persuasive. For if there is no control whatsoever, then it is doubtful that any thought is being expressed at all. Furthermore, if you believe that there is an essential connection between the expression of thought and the possession of style, then if one lacks control over one's medium, what one produces lacks style, with the upshot: no control, no style, no art. Such is the control argument.

An initial response to the control argument must be that it is utopian. If what is required for art status is *total* control of a medium, then we will be compelled to discount as artforms most of the practices that we esteem as such. Most artists have to negotiate compromises with their medium – to adjust to the material at hand. A theater director will have to cast her drama with the available actors; these may not be and often are not exactly how she imagined the characters upon her first reading of the script. But she will make do. A director does not have total control; she has to work within parameters set by others and by circumstances.

Likewise a choreographer has just these dancers and just these spaces. Whatever dreams she had for her dance must be brought down to earth, so to say. Virtually every particular artistic element comes with limitations. Even the writer has to work within the confines of a specific language. The composer has to work with the array of existing instruments and the musician has to work with the peculiarities of his tool. Architects and sculptors are evidently very constrained physically in terms of the amount of leeway they have for exerting their will on their materials, while even the painter will have to live with the resources to which she has access – such as the available varieties of paint – and their attendant properties. Though critics may speak of this or that artist as controlling every aspect of her creation, this is, in the main, journalistic hyperbole – a feel-good fantasy for the Sunday arts and leisure section.

Few artforms, if any, realize the fantasy of total control. Are we to say, then, that no medium is capable of producing art? Surely a more reasonable tack is to lower our sights – to require only that a medium permit its practitioners sufficient control, rather than total control. But this adjustment then reframes the terms of the debate – to wit: does the film medium allow enough control for the filmmaker to project intentional content – i.e., to express thoughts and feelings and/or to structure formally his subject matter?

We can start to formulate a positive response to this by reminding ourselves of some of the points that we made in the process of refuting the causation argument. We noted that the photographer has a number of variables at her disposal that enable her to articulate and, thereby, express her thoughts. She can select her subject matter, for instance. Certainly it is not random statistical coincidence that explains the undeniable consistency in the work of a Diane Arbus. Also, the photographer may choose the type of camera, lens, film stock, aperture setting, and lighting effects that she determines to be suitable for whatever thoughts and/or feelings she means to express. And, in addition, the photographer may set up the

shot – staging it, establishing the right subject-to-camera distance, electing the props, costumes, and make-up, and, indeed, often the very models who then strike the pose in this regalia.

Frequently, the photographer makes a series of photos of a given subject, settling ultimately on the one from an array of alternatives that most realizes her conception. And once she shoots the film, she can then go on to clarify more specifically her expression by deploying a gamut of laboratory processes, including printing on various papers, cropping, air-brushing, and so forth.

At each step in the creation of a photograph, there are choices that can be made, each of which will inflect the expression of thought and/or feeling embodied in the picture. Opting for one of these alternatives rather than another – a wide-angle lens rather than a long lens – may make a difference that expresses with greater precision the content and/or qualities of the thoughts and/or feelings that the photographer endeavors to convey. Should not all this count as enough control of the medium to warrant regarding photography as a representational artform?

One reason to think so is that there is a striking inventory of correlations between many of the acknowledged variables for modifying paintings expressively and those that obtain with respect to photography, including choice of subject, lighting, scale, framing, and so on. Moreover, we already know that variations along these expressive dimensions have proven rich enough to differentiate the thoughts and feelings that an August Sandler intends to express from those of a Robert Mapplethorpe.

Whether a medium grants sufficient control to be categorized as a representational art can be put to the test by gauging if there exist enough alternative variables of articulation for us to identify distinctive stylistic or expressive profiles. That we can isolate stylistic and expressive contrasts between photos by Cindy Sherman and Walker Evans and then go on to associate these with the expression of different thoughts strongly supports the conjecture that photography possesses the degree of control sufficient to qualify as a medium capable of artmaking.

The style or form of a work of art is the ensemble of choices that function to realize its point or purpose – for example, the expression of thought and/or affect. Control is required in order to possess a style and to express thoughts. The level of control is a function of having at one's disposal a range of articulatory options such that the choice of one of these strategies with respect to the pertinent variable rather than another makes for stylistic and/or expressive differences; for it is choice from a field of alternative elements with contrasting qualities and associations that clarifies thought and particularizes style.

Photography possesses multiple expressive channels, replete with alternative, contrasting strategies of construction at each level of articulation. This wealth of options affords the creative wherewithal for the photographer to implement her intentions by strategic decisions. Furthermore, such has proven to be more than enough control for artistic purposes, since it has enabled us to locate the divergent “authorial intentionalities” of a Man Ray, a Nan Goldin, a Weegie, and a Moholy-Nagy.

The cinematographic image, moreover, offers even more levers of stylistic control and choice than does the still photographic image. For example, camera movement allows the cameraman the opportunity to explore the array, bracketing this or that detail for special attention. Of course, neither medium grants absolute control. But, as indicated, the real argument is over the issue of whether the relevant medium permits sufficient control. And for the reasons just rehearsed, we can insist against the skeptic that photography and film appear to satisfy the requisite level of control justifiably expected of an artform, representational or otherwise.

### **Back to the Aesthetic-Interest Argument**

Plato demeaned the seriousness of mimetic painting and poetry by analogizing them to mirrors. Similarly, the skeptic disparages the pretensions of photography, still and moving, to the status of art by alleging that cameras are little more than mirrors artlessly reflecting whatever wanders into their purview. For if photos and films are like mirrors, then they no more express thoughts than does the glass on the front of your bathroom medicine cabinet. A mirror trades in mere appearances rather than intentionality. Thus, if photography and film are strictly analogous to mirrors, then we do not care about them for their own sake; we do not take an aesthetic interest in them. Rather, we care about them or take an interest in them for the sake of the objects they show us. I do not care about the curling, sepia snapshot of my beloved grandmother as a photograph but as a reminder of Nanny.

The capacity of film and photography to afford a window into the past has been called “photographic transparency.” The notion of photographic transparency provides the basis for the skeptic’s assertion that photography and film are not artforms, representational or otherwise, because they are not capable of commanding our attention to the kind of objects they are in their own right. Consequently, neither photography nor film can sustain aesthetic interest. For if they are transparent, then we see through them and our interest lands on the appearance of whatever they are images of.

If the photograph is of President Bush's inauguration, then my interest lies in his inauguration. It supposedly makes no sense for me to be interested in the photograph as such, since it is transparent – i.e., we see through it.

But there seems to be a dubious presupposition underlying the skeptic's polemic, namely, that if a photograph, still or moving, is transparent, then it is invisible. Here "invisible" means something like seeing an object through a photograph is *just like* seeing the object in question face to face. That is, the mediating agency of the photograph goes undetected by the human eye, and, since we allegedly don't see it, we don't take an interest in it, where *it* is the photograph as such – the photograph as an object of attention in its own right and not merely the image of some other object.

Yet even if we grant that photographs are transparent, it would not follow that they are invisible. In fact, not even all mirrors are invisible in the way the skeptic suggests. When I look into one of those convex mirrors that enables one to see around corners in parking lots, I may see through it to the car that is racing toward me; however, I also see the distortion in the mirror. Such a mirror is hardly invisible even if it is transparent; transparency does not entail invisibility. But the skeptic's aesthetic interest argument against photography only gains traction if photos are invisible; alleging they are simply transparent is not enough. Moreover, the case for the invisibility of photographic mediation is even more unlikely than the case for the invisibility of mirror mediation.

Throughout most of the history of photography, both still and moving, most photographs were black and white. This feature of photos was scarcely invisible. Looking at a photograph of the blood-spattered body of the Archduke Ferdinand was not *just like* seeing a dead body staring you in the face. It was obvious to everyone that the absence of color was a feature of the photographic mediating process.

Needless to say, one could take an interest in this aspect of a certain photograph – noticing whether the blacks and whites contrasted starkly and brutally, or whether they were subtly mapped along the grey scale. Moreover, a photographer could intentionally design a photograph in such a way as to reward attention to photographic features like this. That is, photographers could make photos that could support taking an aesthetic interest in such objects in their own right. In short, there is no reason to suspect that the photographer cannot meet the skeptic's challenge on the skeptic's own terms.

Photography may be transparent, but even if it is, it may still be interesting because of the ways in which the medium displays views of objects that depart, in various respects, from the ways in which those

objects would appear to “photographically unassisted” or “normal” vision. The photograph, even on the transparency thesis, need not be thought to disappear; the image need not collapse into the object of which it is an image. Thus, it is possible to take an interest in a photographic object for its own sake – an aesthetic interest, that is, in a photographic art object. Taking an aesthetic interest in a photograph as an object in its own right, moreover, will be especially apposite where the photograph has been designed to encourage such an interest.

If we are willing to say that we see objects through photographs, then that kind of seeing, like seeing through a mirror, is indirect, rather than direct. Furthermore, indirect “photographic seeing” is different in kind from direct seeing – seeing that involves a close encounter of the third kind, a face-to-face brush with the object of attention. Photographs, for example, lift the object out of its natural context and reframe or bracket it, often enabling us to see the object afresh in ways denied to us in routine face-to-face encounters with it. Photographs freeze the object in a moment, potentially disclosing aspects of it that might be otherwise typically occluded in everyday life. And the object pictured in a photograph is absent from the viewer, inviting an opportunity for scrutiny that in “real life,” where the object is present to the viewer, might be dangerous, callous, insensitive, impolite, or confusing. Moreover, it is this feature of absence that can make nostalgia an appropriate emotional response to the someone or something depicted in the photograph, whereas nostalgia would be an absurd reaction were they “in our face.”

In virtue of the differences between photographic seeing and face-to-face seeing, features of the photographic medium can defamiliarize the objects whose appearances they convey. Defamiliarization, in turn, may serve as an artistic strategy for expressing thoughts about the relevant objects, persons, events, actions, and places captured on film. Even if photographs are said to be transparent, their departure from face-to-face or direct seeing leaves open the possibility of artistic defamiliarization and, thence, the expression of thought and feeling. Furthermore, if a photograph by means of features of the photographic medium expresses a thought and/or emotion about its objects, then we may take an interest in the photograph qua photograph – that is, we may take an aesthetic interest in the way in which the photograph at hand mobilizes characteristic features of its medium to express thought.

Our concern, in other words, need not be presumed to be absorbed solely in the appearance of the object as it has been relayed to us by the photograph. The defamiliarizing resources of the photographic medium can be harnessed to express thoughts about the objects portrayed and this

process, in consequence, can give rise to ruminating aesthetically about the way in which the kind of object a photograph is has given birth to a thought. That photographs may defamiliarize opens the possibility for them to express thoughts about the object they depict, contrary to what the skeptic assumes about the alleged transparency of photography. Moreover, the process of expressing thoughts not only gives us a renewed interest in the object upon which the photograph comments, but an interest in the photograph itself as viewers ask themselves how the use of various features of the medium has managed to engender thought.

Like the still photograph, the motion picture shot has an estimable repertoire of devices that diverge from the direct face-to-face perception of objects. These include the close-up, high- and low-angle shots, lenses of various types, filters, traveling shots, alternating camera distances, and so forth. Each of these devices makes possible the expression of thought and/or feeling about the objects presented in the shots. If such shots are transparent, they can nevertheless be expressive, since there is no coherent view of transparency that implies that the photographic image, still or moving, is plausibly indiscernible from that of which it is an image. But that is what the aesthetic interest argument that the skeptic advances would appear to require. And that is just unconvincing.

The skeptic argues that an aesthetic interest is an interest that we take in an object because of the kind of thing it is. Photographs do not afford aesthetic interest because whatever interest we have in photographs, still or moving, collapses into the interest we have in the objects of which they are photographs. Two things need to be said about this.

First, as has already been emphasized, we may take an interest in the photograph qua photograph in virtue of the ways in which it has exploited the photographic (or cinematographic) medium to express a thought or feeling.

However, we may also wish to challenge the skeptic's conception of an aesthetic interest. For the skeptic, it seems that an aesthetic interest in an object must be about the kind of object it is; so it must be an interest in the modes and materials that comprise the object. An aesthetic interest in an oil painting must be one that takes notice of how oil paint has been used to achieve a certain effect. This seems to imply that an aesthetic interest in an artwork requires insider knowledge about properties of the modes and materials of the artform in which the object is created.

But this seems to be an overly stipulative conception of what counts as an aesthetic interest. Surely, I have an aesthetic interest in a film if I am absorbed by its expressive properties. For example, I think many viewers

had legitimate aesthetic interests in the “hot chocolate” number in *Polar Express*, taken as they were with its infectious exuberance and good spirits. And yet I suspect that few viewers, including myself, have much of an understanding of how it was made. However, even though we might not be able to be interested in the object in terms of the immensely technical achievement it is, our interests were still aesthetic in the usual sense of that term.

Moreover, the relevance of this for the prospects of taking an aesthetic interest in photography should be clear-cut. Photography, still and moving, can manifest expressive properties of objects that might otherwise go unremarked, especially in direct, face-to-face encounters with said objects in quotidian experience. People are very often absorbed in these qualities as revealed by a master photographer or cinematographer, like Gregg Toland. Thus, it is false to suggest, that photographs, whether still or moving, cannot reward aesthetic attention and sustain aesthetic interest.

### What about the Skeptic’s Second Premise?

Thus far we have been bickering with the first premise of the skeptic’s master argument. This has been a fairly intricate exercise because the skeptic supports this opening move with an elaborate set of considerations. But the skeptic’s case also depends upon the truth of the second premise in the argument – namely, that film is at best a photograph (a moving photograph) of a dramatic representation. Without this premise, the skeptic cannot extrapolate what he alleges to be the limitations of photography to the case of film. That is, without this second premise the argument that film cannot be art falters.

Luckily sketching our reservations about the second premise in the skeptic’s argument need not be as complex as unhorsing his defense of the first premise, since the skeptic presents little by way of motivating the claim that films are nothing more than moving photographs of dramatic representations. The skeptic appears to regard this as self-evident, which it truly extraordinary, since it seems so palpably mistaken.

Films are not mere *photographs* of dramatic representations for the painfully obvious reason that films are not merely photographs. Photography, that is, is not the only constituent element that comprises film. In addition, there is, among other things, most notably, also editing. So even if all the arguments against photography had won the day, those objections could not be transferred to the case against film, since the edited dimension



of cinema can express thoughts and feelings, is not transparent, can facilitate a more than sufficient level of artistic control, and can abet a locus of aesthetic interest, both in the skeptic's narrow sense and in the broader, more ordinary sense. The Odessa Steps sequence of Eisenstein's film *Potemkin* expresses a viewpoint about the event that it is implausible to suppose any stationary-camera position on the actual event in 1905 could have delivered. Perhaps skeptics will carp that editing is not really film art, but something else. However, to deny that editing is a characteristic element of the motion picture begs the question. But it also invites the question: if not film, what else?

Nor can the rich repertoire of techniques available to the contemporary filmmaker for coordinating the audio with the visual components of film be reduced to the photographic aspect of the medium. When the horror-suspense filmmaker of *The Descent* introduces frightening, off-screen sounds, how is the emotional anxiety she is provoking simply attributable to photography. The *frisson* would not occur without the sound. And the sound design of a movie is patently not part of its photographic dimension.

Film, in sum, has many more dimensions than the photographic one. So even if photography/cinematography was as sullied artistically as the skeptic insinuates, it would still not follow that cinema is comparably incapacitated as a player in the art game.

But another problem with the skeptic's second premise is that it presupposes that the image track of film is exclusively photographic. Undoubtedly, in the main, for most of film history, this has been true of most movies. But it is not *necessarily* true of motion picture images, as one realizes when one contemplates the development of new moving picture technologies, such as computer-generated mattes. As seen in *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, not to mention recent installments of *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings*, whole cities, armies, and air fleets can be created without primary recourse to the mediation of traditional photography/cinematography. These things can be concocted out of thin air, digitally fabricated, if you will. Indeed, in the future, entire feature-length motion pictures are likely to be constructed in the computer. I say that this is likely if only because it is so economically attractive. Producers will not have to drag casts and crews to expensive locations, and troublesome, highly paid actors can be retired in favor of digitally synthesized ones. I can see the producers smiling already.

Again, the skeptic may say that these are not really films, since they are not celluloid-based. But I doubt that most people will hesitate to call moving picture narratives that look like the movies of yesteryear film. They

will continue to call them *film* for the same reason they continue to call blue jeans “Levis,” copiers “Xeroxes,” and cola “Coke.” *Film* was one of the first names we had for this sort of thing and it will stick, just as we continue to call those things “zippers” after their inventor.\*

Of course, although it might be more accurate to call the optical creations made possible by computer technology and whatever new inventions come down the pike in the future “moving images,” most people, I predict, will continue indiscriminately to call motion picture narratives, however they are produced, *films* in honor of the first medium that made these moving spectacles popular.

But it is important to remember that photographic film is not the only delivery system for what we call film (a.k.a. motion pictures) in the broader sense. And since some of these delivery systems need not employ photographic film in any way, it is false to allege that a dramatic film is a photograph of a dramatic representation. It could be a computer-generated representation in its own right. Moreover, this has always been a logical possibility for the film medium, even if the mass production of such work awaits the future.

Furthermore, it should be evident that computer-generated imagery faces none of the challenges that the skeptic levels at straight photography. Such imagery may mirror nothing, nor can it always be said to be transparent because sometimes it creates its own objects. What appears on screen is as much under the control of the CGI specialist as what appears on the canvas is under the control of the painter. Nor can there be any question of whether computer-generated imagery can express thoughts. It can do so in the same ways that a painting does.

At this point, the skeptic may reject these claims on the grounds that computer-generated imagery and anything else like it that is invented in the future is not really film, but, perhaps, animation or even painting. But at that point, the skeptic is in danger of exiting a genuine philosophical debate about the evolving practice of motion picture making and indulging in, at best, an antiquarian and primarily verbal debate about some of its earliest stages.

\* For example, I doubt anyone, including both ordinary and informed viewers, will hesitate to call the last section of Kiarostami’s 1997 *Taste of Cherry* “film” just because it was shot on video. “Film” has just become another way of saying “moving image,” irrespective of the provenance of its material process of production, Or so I conjecture.

In short, the second premise of the skeptic's master argument is as troubled as the first one. Consequently, at this point in the dialectic, it seems fair to say that the skeptics have failed to carry their point. Thus, we may continue to share the common-sense conviction that (some) films (some motion pictures or moving images) are art. The burden of proving otherwise belongs to the skeptic.

In sum, throughout this chapter we have been engaged in addressing the arguments of skeptics who contend that art cannot be made by means of film. Though this debate, from the outset, may not have seemed particularly alive to many readers, it is to be hoped that in considering the skeptic's brief a number of interesting and heuristically valuable claims about photography and photographically based cinematography have been brought to light – such as their alleged transparency. As we will see in ensuing chapters, these claims will continue to figure in other debates concerning the moving image.

However, until further notice, the debate about whether film, or, more precisely, the moving image, is art is closed. Motion pictures can be art. It is important to establish this unequivocally from the outset, since I doubt that we would have any interest at all in developing a philosophy of motion pictures were it not the case that this particular technology (or set of technologies) had evolved into a genuine artistic practice.

### Suggested Reading

If some of the topics in this chapter have intrigued you and stimulated your interest in pursuing them in greater depth, let us offer some further readings for your consideration. If the skeptical position about the possibility of an art of film appears worth a second look, by far the most sophisticated version of it can be found in "Photography and Representation," by Roger Scruton in his book *The Aesthetic Understanding* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 1998), 119–48. A discussion of the historical background of the prejudice against photography and then cinematography as art can be found in the first chapter of *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* by Noël Carroll (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). A particularly effective and extremely historically influential answer to the traditional charges that neither photography nor film is art is *Film as Art* by the indomitable Rudolf Arnheim (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956).

Powerful responses to Roger Scruton's arguments include Berys Gaut, "Cinematic Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60:4 (Fall 2002), 299–312, and Dominic McIver Lopes, "The Aesthetics of Photographic Transparency," *Mind* 112:447 (July 2003), 433–48.

The idea of photographic transparency is developed in Patrick Maynard, "Drawing and Shooting: Causality in Depiction," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44:2 (Winter 1985/6), 115–29, and Kendall Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Critical Inquiry* 11:2 (Dec. 1984), 246–77. Kendall Walton has defended criticisms of his view in the article, "On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered," in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Of classical film theorists, the author who comes closest to articulating the "transparency" view is André Bazin. See his "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). Consider also Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, 1974, 1979).