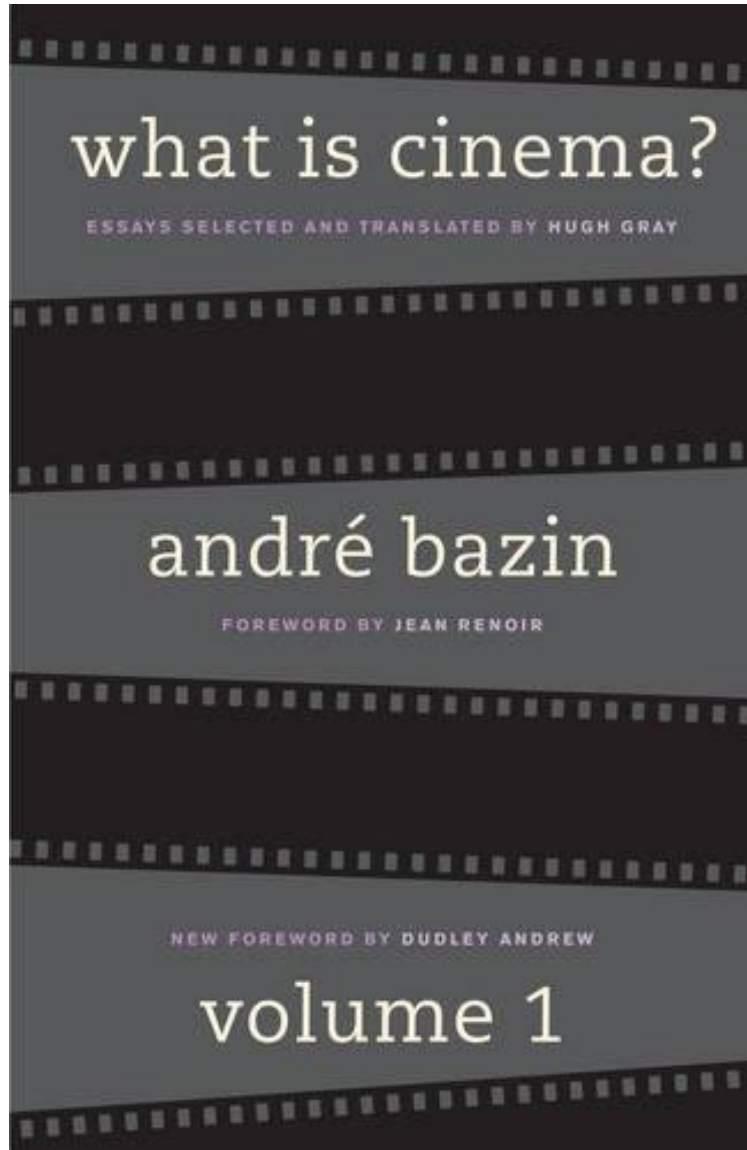


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What Is Cinema? Vol. 1

Andre Bazin

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Andre Bazin : What Is Cinema? Vol. 1 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What Is Cinema? Vol. 1:

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful. "The cinema has not yet been invented!" - a rich collection of essays that remains rewarding for lovers and students of cinemaBy NateAndre Bazin, who edited the famous French film journal Cahiers du Cinema, is perhaps most well remembered as the champion of "realism" in film. In film textbooks and histories of cinema, he is lumped together with a number of early "classical film theorists" who are said

to have been interested above all in the question how to define the essence of cinema and how to establish that it is a viable new art form with its own distinctive properties. In such accounts Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer appear as champions of realism, the idea that what is distinctive to film is its capacity for revealing reality, as a result of its ability to come into direct contact with reality by means of its photographic basis. "Realism" is held to be in debate with "formalism," championed by thinkers such as Rudolph Arnheim and Sergei Eisenstein and Hugo Munsterberg, which insists that reality is not captured and depicted directly on celluloid but is framed or selected and arranged via the process of editing. These classical film theorists are also often held to have been equally committed to the "medium specificity thesis," the view that the best films are those that take advantage of its essential or distinctive properties. So the "formalists" consider the best films to be those which exploit the formal properties of film - framing, arranging elements on screen for maximum impact and significance, editing - and the "realists" consider the best films to be those which as far as possible step back from and allow the reality that is captured on celluloid to reveal itself directly - exploiting such techniques as long takes, deep focus, on location shooting, and the use of non-actors and improvisation. Lately, the attempt to define an essence of cinema and the idea that an account of its essence could yield a prescription for artistic success have lost credibility, and Bazin, along with the other "classical film theorists" are often held to have been naive for their commitment to such ideas. If all this were true then this collection of essays would have at most a historical and literary value. The problem with this familiar account is that it's wrong and anachronistic, and a careful reading of even just this wonderful little book can show in part what's wrong with it as applied to Bazin. Bazin and Arnheim were not writing at the same time, and while Arnheim's work appeared when cinema was still largely silent, Bazin was writing when sound film had thoroughly established itself and silent film was a thing of the past. Moreover, while Arnheim wrote to champion the artistic potential of film in a time when it was considered merely a form of popular entertainment and communication, Bazin was writing for an audience that took for granted film's artistic potential. Arnheim pointed to the number of creative choices involved in filmmaking, and stressed the distance between reality and film in order to show that the film artist had to do a great deal more than merely turn on the camera and let it record reality. Bazin can take all of that for granted, and what he aims to do, by contrast, is point to a divergence in the results of different cinematic traditions. While some, perhaps the majority and most popular, films exploit the resources of cinema in order to tell a story that is emotionally engaging and entertaining, Bazin noted that there was a notable lineage of filmmakers who employed film to a different end, whose efforts were directed at allowing a real situation with all of its unruly complexity to unfold on screen in an approximation of real time. In spite of the impression one might glean from an exclusive focus on his opening essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," Bazin is not writing to champion an exclusive essence of film, as if only films like those of Stroheim or Murnau or Welles were aesthetically valid. What he aims at, instead, is to recover and champion and account for the rich artistic potential of a tendency towards realism in film. This is not so much a metaphysical speculation, either, since he can point to a number of films that are working in a different vein than mainstream classical entertainment, and he is writing at a time when the tendency he points to is undergoing a renaissance of sorts in the works of the "Italian neo-realists" (a development he writes about more in the second volume of "What is Cinema?") A quick look at the titles of the later chapters in this volume shows that championing realism isn't all he does, either. (The quotation I placed in the title alone should clarify that Bazin is no "essentialist" but an "existentialist" with respect to cinema: the essence of film is what filmmakers make of it and so the question what cinema is can only be answered in terms of the potentials realized in the course of its history - "the cinema has not yet been invented!"). While Bazin is remembered by film theorists above all for the more theoretical and manifesto-style essays, perhaps more exciting are his critical essays, that focus on a film or a filmmaker, or on the question what is involved in adapting film from another medium such as literature, or on the relation between cinema and theater - and show that in spite of his excitement about a certain kind of film he's quite eclectic in his tastes and not at all dogmatic. While, as others have pointed out, it would be nice to have a new, more complete and freshly translated edition of Bazin's writings, this volume reads quite well and is rewarding as it stands. Essential for lovers of film. For a nice update of many of the ideas contained here, that shows them to have continued validity in a world when "cinema" as we know it is changing due to emerging digital technologies, see Dudley Andrew's attempt to answer Bazin's question in *What Cinema Is!*. 7 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A must for any lover cinema! By Hiram Gmez Pardo Venezuela Andre Bazin was the most powerful mind and one of the deepest thinkers , creator of the famous Cahiers du cinema , these were passionate and interesting digest who meet to famous and youth film makers and very valuable people related with this art. Bazin goes to the origins of the cinema his meaning and implications in the psiquis and its mythical roots , Bazin death (40) was a painful loss for the raising french directors in 1957 . When you get *The 400 Blows* of Francois Truffaut (The quintessential New Wave film) in the initial titles you will watch the special homage to Bazin in memoriam . You may consider several mistakes in the traduction , when this happens remember the chinese statement: All traduction is a betray. Try to get a spanish edition . I have both of them since I have not been able to get the french edition.

Andr Bazin's *What Is Cinema?* (volumes I and II) have been classics of film studies for as long as they've been

available and are considered the gold standard in the field of film criticism. Although Bazin made no films, his name has been one of the most important in French cinema since World War II. He was co-founder of the influential Cahiers du Cinéma, which under his leadership became one of the world's most distinguished publications. Championing the films of Jean Renoir (who contributed a short foreword to Volume I), Orson Welles, and Roberto Rossellini, he became the protégé of François Truffaut, who honors him touchingly in his foreword to Volume II. This new edition includes graceful forewords to each volume by Bazin scholar and biographer Dudley Andrew, who reconsiders Bazin and his place in contemporary film study. The essays themselves are erudite but always accessible, intellectual, and stimulating. As Renoir puts it, the essays of Bazin "will survive even if the cinema does not."

"Although André Bazin died shortly before the onset of what we now regard as the modern cinema, our understanding of this cinema wouldn't be the same without him. He's also one of the most scrupulous humanists and polemicists we've had, on a par with George Orwell, and these essays map out the busy highways we're all still navigating." - Jonathan Rosenbaum, film critic for the Chicago Reader "From the Inside Flap" Although André Bazin died shortly before the onset of what we now regard as the modern cinema, our understanding of this cinema wouldn't be the same without him. He's also one of the most scrupulous humanists and polemicists we've had, on a par with George Orwell, and these essays map out the busy highways we're all still navigating." Jonathan Rosenbaum, film critic for the Chicago Reader "What Is Cinema?" remains an invaluable and beautiful landmark in film and media studies. In both my research and my classrooms I return to these essays again and again not only for the richness of their arguments but also for their passionate belief that the cinema is a form of revelation vital to our lives." Vivian Sobchack, Professor, Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media, University of California, Los Angeles