Thomas Elsaesser
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Abstract

Seen from today's vantage point, Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* (1960) envisages the possibility that the cinema may turn out to have been a historical phenomenon whose technological specifications as well as aesthetic properties are contingent, but whose 'ontology' speaks to such broad concerns as 'history' and 'life'. Kracauer poses affinities between photography and the cinema which can be understood not only in the context of a phenomenologically-inflected aesthetics of realism or as a covert manifesto supporting the modern cinema of the time-image, but they can also provide a foil for the moving image in its current condition, where art and life tend to change places and where the contingent, the endless, and the indeterminate have become the basis for extracting from images 'useful' information and 'usable' data.

Keywords: Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, medium specificity, life, history, the fortuitous, the endless, the indeterminate, Rudolf Arnheim, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, mind-game movies, history of film theory

The five affinities ... with photography?

In Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, under the rubric of 'general characteristics' of the medium, there is a section called 'Inherent Affinities'.[1] It follows two sections where Kracauer discusses the recording function and the revealing function – two of the vectors along which Kracauer conducts his theory of the cinema as the 'redemption' of physical reality. Kracauer lists five inherent affinities, by which he means the qualities that the cinema has in common with photography. They are: *The Unstaged, The Fortuitous, Endlessness, The Indeterminate*, and *The 'Flow of Life'*.[2]

These five affinities set up a network of properties or qualities that are meant to support Kracauer's theories of realism, and they reflect his evident preference at this point in his life (the book was published in 1960) for documentary forms of filmmaking and open-ended, paratactic narratives. In this respect the five affinities seem very much in tune with the New Waves of the period and, as we would expect, highlight certain aspects of Italian neo-realism. Kracauer was especially enthusiastic about *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) and discusses Rossellini at various points throughout *Theory of Film*,[3] as well as Robert Bresson, another of Kracauer's favorite directors, whose films tend to look unstaged even as they are formally rigorous.[4] Kracauer is also sensitive to a major Bresson theme: the tension between the apparently fortuitous and the retroactively predetermined, which Kracauer recognises as posing many of the issues he himself is wrestling with in his reflections on history; for him, famously, history is 'the last things before the last' (meaning that history precedes but also stands next to philosophy-as-theology).[5] It is a very poetic but also deictic way of describing the retroactive loop that ties the present to the past. Kracauer also comments favorably on *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950) and *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) because of the multiple points of view and their play with indeterminacy, relativism, and retroactive revision.

What strikes me the most is that these affinities, encountered from our own perspective 50 years on, associate themselves with some difficulty with photography and instead speak to many of our current concerns – with 'flow' and 'the open', with 'contingency' and 'indeterminacy', with 'non-linear causality' and 'Nachträglichkeit' (deferred action), with the 'infinite' and the 'indefinite'. Before endorsing this apparent topicality and projecting the sort of retroactive prescience that makes Kracauer 'one of us' – and thus mitigating our own 'anxiety' not of influence but of 'belatedness' – I should let him describe some of these affinities, keeping in mind his choice of the term 'affinities' addresses and acknowledges but also sidesteps and circumvents the issue of *medium specificity.*

In art history, medium specificity has been associated with Rudolf Arnheim and has also been tied to Clement Greenberg's version of 'authenticity', according to whom a work of art is authentic when it is self-reflexive and centripetal, referring to itself and its conditions of existence.[6] As interpreted by Rosalind Krauss, art works are not only at their most authentic when they rely on their medium specific characteristics but also when they instantiate the constraints of their material support as creative constraints or 'conditions'.[7] The question then becomes whether these constraints or conditions can and must be defined in material terms – as they first were in our field

of film studies by photography, and later with the structuralist-materialist filmmakers' insistence on the ontological properties of celluloid – signified by dust particles, scratches, and visible sprocket holes – or whether this medium specificity can be interpreted 'immaterially' or conceptually, as the ability, for instance, of indexing time and capturing matter in motion by whatever material or technical process the filmmaker chooses or has at his/her disposal. This 'expanded' view of medium specificity is one that Rosalind Krauss has defended as the 'post-medium condition', and it is one that allows us to consider Kracauer's affinities as compatible with digital media, and thus – despite appearances – not circumscribed by the photographic ontology.

The affinities explained

Concentrating on three of the five affinities (the fortuitous, the endless, and the indeterminate), here are Kracauer's definitions:

> *The Fortuitous*: 'The affinity of film for haphazard contingencies is most strikingly demonstrated by its unwavering susceptibility to the "street" – a term designed to cover not only the street, but its various extensions, such as railway stations, dance and assembly halls, bars, hotel lobbies, airports, etc. [...] The street, as a center of fleeting impressions, is of interest as a region where the accidental prevails over the providential, and happenings in the nature of unexpected incidents are all but the rule.'[8]

In other words, the fortuitous for Kracauer evokes the flâneur, the chance encounter, the fleeting moment, the fatal accident, and all the other tropes we associate with modernity and the cinematic city (as argued by Walter Benjamin); but the fortuitous also points to our current obsession with mobility and location, with tracking, tracing and mapping, as well as with multi-strand network narratives. We may also connect the fortuitous with the way we now encounter the cinematic in galleries as installations, where the visitor is free to stroll but where installations solicit the viewer to experience the tension between their spatial multi-dimensionality and their temporal duration, where authorial control and spectatorial fortuity enter into a kind of mutual dance – a point to which I shall return.

> *Endlessness*: 'Film tends to cover all material phenomena virtually within reach of the camera. To express the same otherwise, it is as if the medium

were animated by the chimerical desire to establish the continuum of physical existence. [...] This desire is drastically illustrated by a film idea of Fernand Leger's. Leger dreamed of a monster film, which would have to record painstakingly the life of a man and a woman during twenty-four consecutive hours: their work, their silence, their intimacy. Nothing should be omitted; nor should they ever be aware of the presence of the camera. "I think", he observed, "*this would be so terrible a thing that people would run away horrified, calling for help as if caught in a world catastrophe." Léger is right.* Such a film would not just portray a sample of everyday life but, in portraying it, dissolve the familiar contours of that life and expose what our conventional notions of it conceal from view – its widely ramified roots in crude existence. We might well shrink, panic-stricken, from these alien patterns, which would denote our ties with nature and claim recognition as part of the world we live in and are.'[9]

The Indeterminate: 'As an extension of photography, film shares the latter's concern for nature in the raw. Though natural objects are relatively unstructured and, hence, indeterminate as to meaning, there are varying degrees of indeterminacy. Notwithstanding their relative lack of structure, a somber landscape and a laughing face seem to have a definite significance in any given culture; and the same holds true of certain colors and light effects. Yet even these more outspoken phenomena are still essentially indefinable, as can be inferred from the readiness with which they change their apparently fixed meaning within changing contexts.'[10]

The affinities and television

At first sight Kracauer's argument, like André Bazin's 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' of a few years earlier, seems to take for granted the photographically-produced moving image as cinema's sole support, as well as to endorse the historical fact that film theory, when it promoted cinema as legitimate art, relied heavily on the aesthetics of media specificity. Yet this would, I believe, shortchange the nature and direction of Kracauer's thought.

True, he did not seem to know or did not want to know that moving images could also be produced through electronic scanning of images transmitted wirelessly and displayed on a cathode ray tube. But we might also say that Kracauer wrote *Theory of Film* in the full knowledge of television, which then would have been one of the reasons for writing the book – to

try and define the cinema one last time ['the last film before the last'], at the historical moment of losing its dominance as *the* medium of the moving image and acceding to the special status that Kracauer is so keen to confer on it: a redemptive art form. In this perspective *Theory of Film* would be a work of mourning as much as a summa of all that was known about the cinema at that point in time, confirming yet again the idea that a theory can be the funeral of a practice.

The affinities and the New York art scene of the 1950s

As a work of mourning, and focused on the 'affinities', *Theory of Film* can be seen as offering a two-pronged 'response' to the previous three decades' disputes over 'specificity'. First, it envisages the possibility that the cinema may turn out to have been a particular historical phenomenon whose technological specifications as well as aesthetic properties are contingent, but whose 'ontology' refigures what we hitherto considered to be 'history' as well as modify or even challenge our definitions of 'life' (animate/inanimate, spirit/matter, consciousness/body).

Second, the 'affinities' open up a path towards an understanding of the cinema in the context of the other arts – but with the other arts figuring not in the terms of the debates from the 1920s and 1930s (i.e. of the cinema as the *seventh art*, of cinema as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or of Arnheim's *New Laokoon*) but rather in terms of the debates of the 1950s in the US about the then contemporary arts, and thus in a sense also in dialogue with Greenberg's 'Another New Laocoon'[11] and 'American Type Painting'.[12]

To take this second response first: Kracauer's gloss on the fortuitous and indeterminate would seem to resonate with the emerging art-movements in New York at the time that Kracauer was living there and writing his book. Abstract expressionism, minimalism, and pop art – as different and hostile to each other as they might have appeared to its proponents – nonetheless made themselves felt as manifestations of a break with the limits and thresholds that separated art from non-art, materiality from representation, the determinate from the indeterminate, while allowing contingency and the fortuitous to create new orders of being and perceiving. Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Willem de Koening were at the height of their fame in the late 1950s and early 1960s, while minimalism, in reaction to abstract expressionism (Donald Judd, Robert Morris), would also make its appearance in the early 1960s. Similarly, the American initiators of pop art (Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg) came to the fore at the same time and

were also focused on New York. Somewhat speculatively, I would venture that the affinities Kracauer prizes in the cinema fit the conceptual and experiential qualities of these art movements. Given that they themselves carry with them and respond to the legacy of the European avant-gardes of the 1920s (Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism) to which Kracauer had been attentive and receptive, his affinity or at least alertness to their aims when he encountered them in New York can be assumed to have shaped his aesthetic-philosophical horizon.

In fact, it encourages one to learn more about the New York circles Kracauer frequented and how much of the world of the Museum of Modern Art, for whom Kracauer had worked in the late 1940s, caught his attention as it surrounded him in the subsequent decade.[13] The important point, apart from any biographical influence, is that Kracauer sketches one intellectually-viable bridge for charting the affinities of the cinema with the arts and the avant-gardes of the time – a point of some consequence, when we think of the increasing presence of moving images in the art spaces of today.

The affinities and specificity: Rudolf Arnheim and Siegfried Kracauer

Theory of Film, at least in respect of the five affinities, also has a surprisingly radical agenda. Not only is it a bold attempt to think the cinema outside the usual technological, institutional, generic, or authorial categories by which we tend to classify and define individual films; the fortuitous, the endless, and the indeterminate are categories that refer us to the nature of human experience *and* to the consistency of the world, rather than to the material supports on which these aspects of life might manifest themselves.

As it happens, this part of Kracauer's argument also impressed Rudolf Arnheim, perhaps the greatest and most articulate theoretician of the specificity argument. Arnheim is usually considered the formalist among film theorists and thus holds the counter-position to Kracauer and Bazin's realist aesthetics. He famously stated that

> not until film began to become an art was the interest moved from mere subject matter to aspects of form. What had hitherto been merely the urge to record certain actual events, now became the aim to represent objects by special means exclusive to film. These means [...] show themselves able to

do more than simply reproduce the required object; they sharpen it, impose a style upon it, point out special features, make it vivid […].[14]

Arnheim was keen to stress that 'mechanical reproduction' while inherent in film was the material resistance or external agent against which the film artist imposes form, shape, expressive design, individual signature – all the values that, as he said, 'mold the object' into a work of art. In this respect he is the theorist against whom all those are reacting who consider mechanical reproduction and automatism the very essence and indeed the redemptive feature of cinema: Benjamin, Bazin, Kracauer, Stanley Cavell, and more recently Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy.

Arnheim would not let go. In an essay entitled 'Two Kinds of Authenticity' published in 1993, when the author of *Film as Art* and *Art and Visual Perception* was already 89 years old, he picks up the gauntlet and responds to his challengers – or at least, he responds to Kracauer.

> The figurative arts are always dealing with two kinds of authenticity. They are authentic to the extent that they do justice to the facts of reality, and they are authentic in quite another sense, by expressing the qualities of human experience by any means suitable to that purpose. […] The new concern with the passing moment aroused an interest in the dimension of time, explicitly introduced into the photographic medium by the motion picture. Not only did the new invention enlarge enormously the range of phenomena accessible to visual art and thereby broaden the medium's authenticity of the first kind, it also shifted the aesthetic emphasis. It enriched authenticity of the second kind by focusing on action. This new world view was formulated in 1960 in the principal thesis of Siegfried Kracauer's book *Theory of Film*. […] Kracauer's intention was most clearly expressed in the subtitle of his book on film, which called for 'the redemption of physical reality'. This claim was most timely, but it was also one-sided in that it neglected the indispensable contribution of interpretive form. The opposite was true of my own book, first published in 1932. Devoted to 'film as art', it was written to refute the belief that the photographic medium was nothing but a mechanical copy of the optical projection of nature. I showed that by the framing of the image, its reduced depth, its limitation to black and white, and other qualities it used the restriction of the optical image as an aesthetic virtue. I claimed for the film the traditional qualities of art. Thereby, however, I all but neglected the 'documentary' aspects emphasized by Kracauer. In practice, any photograph or film partakes of both authentici-

ties, because, as the poet Alphonse de Lamartine had said, 'photography' is 'a solar phenomenon, where the artist collaborates with the sun'.[15]

This is very nicely put and also very generous, because Arnheim here makes several important points. First, he allows for Kracauer's affinities to reflect the historically-specific interest in the dimension of a-chronological, 'empty' time and open duration manifested in postwar European cinema (which has become one of the characteristics of 'modern cinema', in the way defined and described by Gilles Deleuze, for instance). Furthermore, Kracauer's affinities emphasise what Arnheim calls the 'first kind of authenticity', rendering the world 'as it is' and as it could not be perceived before the advent of moving images, its contingent or random qualities, and its ongoing, endless, and ever-changing nature, but also its sheer presence and there-ness.

Kracauer's affinities also affect what Arnheim means by the second kind of authenticity (that of rendering human experience) by focusing on action. Finally, Arnheim also concedes that Kracauer's affinities, seen in the context of digital images, modify his own argument against 'automatism', which had been his reply to Benjamin's theory of cinema as mechanical reproduction. As he put it in 1932: 'no less than other artists, filmmakers use their medium [...] to create perceptually vivid effects akin to those in other arts'. But in 1993 he surmised that the mathematically-programmed image (i.e. automatism in the digital age) 'increases the formative power of the imagemaker, and when applied to extreme degree, it becomes a pictorial technique like painting or drawing'.[16] In other words, Arnheim concedes that digitisation may empower the expressive artist, albeit at the level of code and concept, as well as by manipulating the material, sensuous, and 'perceptually vivid' properties of the medium. The question would then be whether the 'mechanically-programmed' image is closer to the 'automatism' of Kracauer or to the 'expressive artist' of Arnheim.

The time-image and the modern cinema

We can now return to Kracauer and, with Arnheim in mind, try and re-assess what historical and aesthetic legacy his affinities have passed on to us today. For instance, one aspect of Kracauer's argument is that the unstaged, the fortuitous, and the flow of life not only name some key parameters of neo-realist aesthetics but also make room for successors to neo-realism,

such as Alain Resnais or Michelangelo Antonioni (the latter is a director that Kracauer does not discuss).

This allows him to prefigure a film he probably could not have seen since it premiered the same year as the book was published: *L'Avventura* (Antonioni, 1960), which displays in a radicalised fashion the power of the fortuitous, the flow of life, and the indeterminate of a face or a landscape, particularly when one thinks of the contingent circumstances that bring together the protagonists as well as the unexplained and unresolved disappearance of 'Anna', or Monica Vitti's inscrutability and the long sequences where nothing happens and life goes on.

In other words, the affinities that Kracauer uses to define what cinema is can also be taken programmatically, as a covert manifesto, anticipating Deleuze's 'cinema of the time-image', where the causal nexus in the way the world is presented and the motor-sensory relations that tie the body of the spectator to the screen are disarticulated or severed. His affinities also fit Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) (whose *Hiroshima Mon Amour* [1959] Kracauer does mention) where complex temporal relations of memory, trauma, and affects such as love and jealousy are mapped spatially and in aleatory terms of chance and contingency rather than rendered sequentially and as a causal chain of concatenated events.

The affinities and ontology

From today's perspective this raises in a more general way how Kracauer's affinities bring the cinema so much closer to 'life' than any of the other arts – but now 'life' less in terms of phenomenological experience but as refigured in the advanced sciences; not only with respect to the physics of Poincaré and Heisenberg, Einstein and Nils Bohr, where the concept of indeterminacy and relativity upended the way we think about the physical universe, about time space and causality, but also with respect to biology, where the fortuitous (as in mutations) and the endless (as in bio-diversity, repetition, and seriality) play an increasingly important role in our conception of the origins of life. This too is perhaps somewhat speculative and I shall confine myself to a few points on how one might understand Kracauer's affinities as referencing the broader ontological concerns that in recent decades have revived and revitalised thinking about the cinema in the shadow of the cinema's many transformations that – paradoxically – both change everything and leave everything in place.

Kracauer's affinities first drew my attention when I investigated a tendency in contemporary cinema that I have variously described as 'mind-game films' or the 'cinema of ontological doubt', where certain criteria we once deployed in order to make sense of films – i.e. their readability as linear narratives, causally connected actions, and clearly motivated protagonists – no longer apply. These films also challenge the nature of representation in that they propose to their characters, if not the spectator, to 'enter' several (multiple or impossible) diegetic worlds – a potential for the cinema to become a 'portal' that Kracauer already formulates in *Theory of Film*. In other words, does an image have to be a representation of something (a 'Bild' understood as 'Abbild')? Do we have to decide between the diagrammatic and the figurative? How viable is the opposition 'reality' and 'illusionism'? These and many other criteria have to be re-examined wherever they implicitly rely on an epistemological conception of the moving image as the purveyor of visible evidence and thus as a guarantor of objective knowledge (even if much of the actual practice of cinema only confirms the existence of this epistemological demand by apparently betraying it, or seemingly sinning against it).

From an ontological perspective and now considering all five of Kracauer's affinities one can indeed redefine the main claim of *Theory of Film*, specifically the redemption of physical reality, by rephrasing it in the terms used by Deleuze and Cavell, but perhaps demonstrated more provocatively by Rancière and Nancy: the apparently counterfactual and paradoxical claim that *the cinema can restore our faith or trust in the world*.

Art and life changing places

I want to connect this claim once more with Kracauer, and in particular with Arnheim's comment that Kracauer's affinities imply a shift to 'action' and agency more generally as the determinate feature of the moving image. As film historians we tend to forget that, from the beginning, moving images were used to record all manner of physical processes and actions and that not all were destined for movie theatres. Many if not more moving images were produced in science labs, medical facilities, for military purposes, as animation, and in surveillance than ended up in cinema theatres. Only recently have these parallel histories or counter-histories resurfaced and claimed the attention of artists and archivists, thus giving us new pre-histories as well as parallel histories of the moving image. Such images have been called *operational images* and they are distinct from images as

we generally know them – even in the cinema; they are no longer or never were windows on the world nor mirrors for ourselves as spectators. They are also primarily the material of much of installation art, anonymised and decontextualised under the label of 'found footage' but reinscribed into the different forms of agency we now – pace Arnheim – concede and attribute to the moving image as such, prior to any specific representational content.

Operational images thus extend Kracauer's thinking about the endless and the indeterminate, and at the same time they radically reverse them by making these 'aesthetic' qualities 'instrumental' and 'operational'. In other words, they function as 'tests' and 'experiments' and thus prove themselves 'useful for life'. Operational images still make use of screens but they also subvert their function of framing a view according to the rules of monocular perspective.

From the 'redemption of physical reality' to 'trust in the world'

Given these and other programmatic attempts to re-boot our senses, especially our sense of orientation in cinematic space, how then to make good on *redemption* and *restore our faith or trust in the world*? The argument would proceed in several stages, not all of which I can elaborate here. So far the reasoning has been that Kracauer's affinities, understood not only in the context of a phenomenologically-inflected aesthetics of realism or as a covert manifesto supporting the modern cinema of the time-image, can provide a positive/negative foil for the moving image in its current condition, where art and life tend to change places and where the contingent, the endless (as the serial), and indeterminate (as risk calculus) have become the basis for extracting from images 'useful' information and 'usable' data.

The second part of the argument would be to come back once more to what for Kracauer makes possible the 'redemption of physical reality', which in the final instance is the automatism of the camera. It captures the phenomena of the world without the interference of the human mind and thus, for the first time in history, is able to store time as the medium of change, of becoming, of transformation, and of possibility, but also records the thereness of things and the presence of human beings in their transient singularity and evanescent particularity. We find a version of this redemptive power of automatism in technical images in many philosophically-inclined thinkers on the cinema: from Jean Epstein's photogénie to Bazin's ontology of the photographic image; from Cavell's consolation that the

cinema shows the world to us as it is, without requiring our presence in it, to Deleuze's conviction that the cinema returns us to a liberating exteriority, multiplicity, and immanence. The view that the cinema's automatism is a value in itself is also shared by Rancière and Nancy.

In the question of how this automatism figures in the broader context, however, the thinkers just named do differ considerably. For some the technically-produced image is 'redemptive' or restorative of trust because it generates an 'aesthetic' moment already prior to the intervention of the human eye, the mind, and therefore 'sense' (as meaning). It thus represents a new kind of beauty more closely aligned with Kant's sublime, because it does not demand comprehension, is indifferent to the beholder, and may not even require contemplative immersion. However, for others the aesthetic aspect is less crucial and what makes the cinema special with respect to the question of trust is that it produces its own cogito, as it were, because its 'thereness' and being exists on a plane where Descartes answer to skepticism – cogito ergo sum – becomes unnecessary. The cinema's automatism makes possible a form of discovery and disclosure which, temporarily, mutes or suspends skepticism and thus provides instances of belief that (depending on the nature of your faith) either confirm the self-sufficient immanence of the world or shows in sensible form the work and presence of the creator.

However, the very possibility of this disclosure in the cinema is a condition of its opposite: human intervention, whether it is through editing, montage, and framing, all of which impose on this flow the formalised shape of a narrative, or whether it is the extractive or subtractive conditions of legibility, as in operational images. Arnheim, when insisting on his two kinds of authenticity, in turn quotes Kracauer, for whom the best moment in *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier, 1948) is not Shakespeare's text or Olivier's acting, nor even his direction, but a moment when the camera, almost by inadvertence, frames a window of Elsinore castle and lets us see the 'real ocean' in all its force:

> In his *Hamlet* Laurence Olivier has the cast move about in a studio-built, conspicuously stagy Elsinore, whose labyrinthine architecture seems calculated to reflect Hamlet's unfathomable being. Shut off from our real-life environment, this bizarre structure would spread over the whole of the film were it not for a small, otherwise insignificant scene in which the real ocean outside that dream orbit is shown. But no sooner does the photographed ocean appear than the spectator experiences something like a shock. He cannot help recognizing that this little scene is an outright intrusion; that it abruptly introduces an element incompatible with the rest of the imagery.

> How he then reacts to it depends upon his sensibilities. Those indifferent to the peculiarities of the medium [...] are likely to resent the unexpected emergence of crude nature as a letdown, while those more sensitive to the properties of film will in a flash realize the make-believe character of the castle's mythical splendor.[17]

Yet – and this is also Arnheim's point about the two authenticities needing each other – 'crude nature' in the form of the 'real ocean' is real and present in all its force precisely because it is not just framed by a window but by Shakespeare's text, the set design, and Olivier's acting-directing. Arnheim's point underlines what can be called the mutually-interdependent determinations of countervailing forces that keep Kracauer's affinities together and in place – as a constellation permanently oscillating between 'art' and 'life'.

In a similar vein Rancière calls these countervailing but interdependent forces the 'thwarted fable' which is at the heart of cinema 'whose basic principle [is] the unification of conscious thought and unconscious perception'.[18] For Rancière the cinematographic 'cogito' unites the machine's automatism (the recording moment) with the human mind's activity (the editing moment). In Rancière's version of Arnheim's two kinds of authenticity the cinema is always divided against itself, and this would be its non-specific specificity. As a consequence, the history of cinema – and even more so, the history of film theory – has been about how to deal with this double nature, how to tame the contingent, frame it for disclosure, while nonetheless not losing the force, the 'life', which the contingent and the fortuitous bring to narrative, to characters and protagonists, as well as to the formal parameters of 'representation'.

A more radical version of this dual nature is proposed by Nancy, especially when considering the reasons he offers for thinking the cinema capable of redeeming or reclaiming the world. In *L'evidence du film*, his book ostensibly devoted to the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Nancy talks about the inhuman mechanical gaze and the human interpretive or expressive gaze, drawing from their antagonistic interdependence a conclusion that would be fascinating to put to Kracauer for consideration.[19] In Nancy's eyes both classical cinema and modern cinema are reactionary – classical cinema because it presumes that the world makes sense and that the cinema can show this sense in action; modern cinema because it is obsessed with the trauma of the world no longer making sense. For Nancy these are two sides of the same false coin, because what the cinema was meant to show is that the world does not exist in order to make sense.

By arguing that classical narrative organises every element of a film toward a pre-determined meaning and modern cinema confronts a world that can no longer be understood while representing this loss of meaning with the techniques of documentary and realism, Nancy takes Deleuze's version of Bazin's neo-realist aesthetics and turns it on its head. His Heideggerian philosophical move is to argue that 'this loss of a meaningful world is actually a gain, because a world without meaning is the world itself – not that the world is nonsense but that the 'sense of the world' can only be apprehended when we realise that 'the world is not about meaning but is a mere locus for the meanings'.[20] Letting go of meaning actually gives us the world, and the cinema can thus be a means for freeing ourselves from this obsession with meaning – not by representing the world but by presenting it in its self-evidence and self-sufficiency:

> The evidence of cinema is that of the existence of a look through which a world can give back to itself its own real and the truth of its enigma [...] a world moving of its own motion, without a heaven or a wrapping, without fixed moorings or suspension, a world shaken, trembling, as the winds blow through it.[21]

It seems to me that Kracauer, when he spoke of the world as 'indeterminate to meaning', was already there – in the 'thereness', as it were, without invoking Heidegger or the absence of God, and instead affirming the countervailing forces that make the cinema so life-like and yet so different from life. Redefined as antagonistic reciprocity, 'redemption' may after all be as apposite a term as 'trust' or 'faith' in the presence of the 'thereness of the world', which suggests that Kracauer's affinities position the cinema in the tense of both the actual and the virtual, understanding its thereness also as the locus of possibility (as well as of our absence).

Reading *Theory of Film* today we can ask ourselves whether it is, as I suggested at the beginning, a work of mourning ahead of the many 'deaths of cinema' we have been witnessing since, or whether Kracauer's affinities sidestep medium specificity (and thus the photographic ontology) precisely in order to offer us something more like the historical conditions and the ontological constraints of cinematic disclosure: primarily, 'meaninglessness' and human finitude. In other words, Kracauer's affinities allow us to experience, at their most exacting, the mutual interdependence of art and life in the cinema as *each other's* promise of redemption.

Notes

1. Kracauer 1960, pp. 60-74.
2. Ibid., pp. 60-62, 62-63, 63-68, 68-71, 71-74.
3. Ibid., p. 110, 129, 131, 253.
4. 'No matter to what extent these patterns still bear on the [object] they explore, they are cinematic in as much as they tend to immerse us in the infinity of shapes that lie dormant in any given one. Robert Bresson in his *Diary of a Country Priest* seems to aspire to the same kind of infinity. The face of the young priest looks different each time you look at him; ever-new facets of his face thread this film.' Ibid., p. 66.
5. Kracauer 1969.
6. See Greenberg 1982, p. 5.
7. Krauss 2006.
8. Kracauer 1960, pp. 62-63.
9. Ibid., p. 64.
10. Ibid., pp. 68-71.
11. Greenberg 1940.
12. Greenberg 1961, pp. 208-229.
13. For some of Kracauer's intellectual friends and the New York scene see von Moltke & Rawson 2012, pp. 1-26.
14. Arnheim 1957, p. 57.
15. Arnheim 1996, pp. 26-27.
16. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
17. Kracauer 1960, p. 36.
18. Rancière 2006, p. 211.
19. Nancy 2001.
20. Kretschmar 2002. The passage continues: 'And while we are becoming aware of that simple reality, the world opens itself. Overcoming what we saw as a loss literally gives us the world, a world that Nancy describes through references to Heidegger's phenomenology as the neutral "there-is" that comes ahead of beings and meanings and allows them to come to existence.'
21. Nancy 2001, p. 44.

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About the author

Thomas Elsaesser is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Media and Culture of the University of Amsterdam and Visiting Professor at Columbia University since 2013. He has authored, edited, and co-edited some 20 volumes on early cinema, film theory, German and European cinema, Hollywood, new media, and installation art. Among his recent books as author are: *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010, with Malte Hagener), *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and *German Cinema – Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2013).