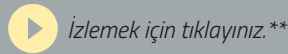## SİNEMADA GERÇEKLİK: TEK PLAN FİLMLERİN YOLCULUĞU

REALISM IN CINEMA: ODYSSEY OF ONE-TAKE FILMS

▶ *İzlemek için tıklayınız.***

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the historical evolution and theoretical underpinnings of one-take films, examining their role in the perpetual debate between cinema and reality. Beginning with the inception of cinema and its early implications for recording versus shaping reality, the essay progresses through the technological advancements that paved the way for one-take features. The essay delves into the perspective of influential film theorist André Bazin, exploring his views on realism, minimal editing, and the unique potential of the camera to capture reality. Then it navigates through Bazin's reservations on montage, considering it an interference in cinema's potential for an authentic portrayal of reality. Drawing on Bazin's propositions, the essay posits one-take films as a potential antidote to the debate on realism in cinema, and it further examines contemporary examples, such as Alexander Sokurov's Russian Ark (2002) and Victoria (2015). The essay concludes with a reflection on Walter Benjamin's ideas about the impact of mechanical reproduction on art, introducing discussions on aura-real and the virtues of one-take films in the context of technological advancements.

INTRODUCTION

Deriving from the ancient Greek term kinema "movement" and graphien "writing", cinema with its birth brought up the question if it was fundamentally recording the actual word or shaping the reality itself thanks to its promising virtutes. The invention of cinematography generated heated dispute about reality and recording. Cinematography caused unpredictable impact on the masses. Although it is an urban legend if the first screened film The Arrival of The Train (1895) caused panic in audiences (Loiperdinger and Elzer, 2004), it contributed to the debate on cinema and reality. One continuous real-time shot running only 50 seconds, this film is one of the great examples of recording the reality. In a single, uninterrupted 50-second real-time shot, this movie stands out as a remarkable instance of capturing reality. Its groundbreaking impact on film theory has developed in tandem with debates questioning whether it constitutes an art form or merely functions as a medium for recording reality. Within the course of history, early days of recording short clips of real-life was accompanied with special effects, techniques, screenplays and mise en scène. As more than a technological advancement in history, the first movie camera paved a new art form.

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Thus, cinema began to mediate a fancy world through visual composition and theatrical production. However, artistic and creative interventions such as editing, staging and colouring, etc., changed the discourse, and its "purest" form has been distorted in the course of time with the prominent advancements in technology.

One of the most remarkable film theorists André Bazin proposed thought-provoking questions and analysis in exploring the real potential of camera. Bearing in mind Bazin's propositions, the question whether one-take-films are antidote to the debate on realism in cinema will be covered in this video- essay. After a brief look into the first one-take short documentaries in cinema history, the reality and cinema are explored in following steps: (a) Birth of Cinema: Upbringing the Never-Ending Debate Realism (b) Realism in André Bazin's realist film theory (c) André Bazin's reservations on montage (d) One-take film virtues as antidote to editing in cinema.

BIRTH OF CINEMA: UPBRINGING THE NEVER-ENDING DEBATE REALISM

Realism as a movement in art history emerged around the mid-19th century. In contrast to romanticized depictions prevalent in earlier art forms, realistic pieces provoked the portray of real-world subjects, scenes, and objects in a straightforward manner. Realistic art reflections on film theory are attributed to authentic and unembellished portrayals of everyday issues. Prominent realist films can be traced in Italian Neorealism movement. Some characteristics of realist films, which capture the essence of everyday life to embody it as authentically as possible, are long -takes, minimal editing, deep-focus and non-professional actors.

The oscillation between cinema and reality can be traced in early cinema history. Lumière brothers' first documentaries capturing real life without any interruption depicted the spirit of the period though various artistic virtues like causality, colour, and sound were absent then. Recent developments in digital technology have revived the old debate on cinema and realism. Today digital technology enables cameras to shoot not only unbroken one continuous snapshot documentaries but also to capture fictional world with one continuous long take. Therefore, advancements in digital technology have opened up the question of whether one-take long features shot with digital technology revive the never-ending discussions on cinema and reality in early film theory.

REALISM IN ANDRÉ BAZIN'S REALIST FILM THEORY

André Bazin was a French film critic and theorist, known for his significant contributions to film criticism and theory. Ontological arguments in the early period of film theory were based on camera's capacity to record just the real life without interpretation. One of the most influential film theorists and critics, André Bazin considered cinema as a realistic medium. For Bazin, potential of cinema lies on the record of photographic image with invisible editing. Among other virtues of cinema are long shots and deep focus rendering the experience real. Tracing the idea of reality in art history, he states that "for the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man." (1985, p. 13).

In the pursuit of real, he discusses the essence of cinema through its unique potential. When a piece of art is called as "realistic", obviously we can trace a clear reflection of the real world. Camera as a medium has capacity to capture real-time realm. These films often employ techniques that prioritize a sense of immediacy and unaltered representation Techniques such as natural lighting, shooting on real places and unprofessional actors are some features in realistic cinema. Therefore, it makes sense why Bazin considered Italian neorealist films as genuine examples of his ideal cinema definition (Hanley, 2015). In André Bazin's film theory, realism refers to his belief in preserving the inherent qualities of reality within cinema. He advocated for techniques that maintained a strong connection between the film and the actual world. Bazin championed deep focus cinematography, long takes, and minimal editing, as these techniques allowed the viewer to experience the film's events in a manner more closely resembling real life. He believed that such techniques enhanced the viewer's immersion and engagement with the film, emphasizing the importance of capturing reality without heavy manipulation or stylization.

ANDRÉ BAZIN'S RESERVATIONS ON MONTAGE

In André Bazin's theory, cinema has a potential for capturing the essence of reality. Therefore, minimal editing poses a serious technique for relatable realistic experience on screen. As a renowned film theorist, he positioned his theory against excessive editing and montage. Instead, he proposed long take and deep-focus are two effective and authentic ways in filmmaking. For realistic and immersive cinematic approach, he argued rapid and frequent cuts between shots blemish one of the unique characteristics of cinema art spatial and temporal continuity. In this view, heavy stylization and artificial touches are impediments or disadvantages in the unfiltered and direct interaction between cinema and audiences. Therefore, for him heavy stylization and artificial touches are two handicaps in unfiltered and direct encounter between cinema and audiences.

From Bazin's perspective, assertive editing in Soviet Cinema and excessive use of contrasts in German Expressionism was a kind of interference to the cinema's potential. In his two volume seminal works What is Cinema? (1985-1986), he frames reality and cinema as (a) the ontological reality of the photographic image (b) an objective record of the real and the cinematic reproduction of the real; (c) the use of deep-focus photography and the long take. He explores the role of the camera in revealing the reality itself. He says: "The camera cannot see everything at once but it makes sure not to lose any part of what it chooses to see." For him, rather than heavy use of montage, a film should enhance deep focus, natural sound, subject level shots and invisible editing. He lists three motives for cutting as a purely logical descriptive analysis of the narrative, a psychological analysis from the point of view of one of the protagonists and a psychological analysis from the point of spectator interest (1967, p. 92).

ANTIDOTE TO EDITING IN CINEMA: CONTEMPORARY ONE-TAKE FILMS

Bazin (1967, p. 33) suggests the scene shot with deep-focus in Orson Welles's Citizen Cane (1941) would have been less powerful if it had been divided into shots. He states: "Thanks to the depth of field, whole scenes are covered in one take, the camera remaining motionless. Dramatic effects for which we had formerly relied on montage were created out of the movements of the actors within a fixed framework" (1967, p.33). His statement accentuating the "fixed framework" in shooting one of the iconic scenes in film history conjures up the inquiry how it would be with a dynamic shot.

When mapping the history of one-take films, we first encounter snapshot documentaries from early cinema. However, with considerable advancements in the cinema industry, film production underwent a dramatic change, enabling the creation of one-long take features. Filmmakers of that era grappled with numerous technical challenges in contrast to the present-day technological developments that have revolutionized filmmaking. Today, it is possible to shoot one-take films blended with static and dynamic shots. Before these groundbreaking developments in digital technology, directors attempted to shoot one-take features despite technical restrictions. Alfred Hitchcock's Rope (1948) stands out as a phenomenal example. By deftly zooming in and out on the actors' backs, Hitchcock concealed the cuts in the film.

Pierre Sorlin notes that Bazin once envisioned a ninety-minute film shot in continuous real time but reluctantly acknowledged the necessity of cuts (2016, p. 115). Today, small and lightweight cameras allow directors to shoot one-take films without the need for subtle cuts. Alexander Sokurov's Russian Ark (2002) and Victoria (2015) are two of the most recent one-take long features. The space and time continuum remains undisturbed in these films with constantly moving shots. Particularly, Victoria (2015), a heist film full of action and movement, is a meticulous work. Yet, the question of whether one-take long shot films capture "the real" remains suspended. In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935/2008), German-Jewish Marxist literary critic Walter Benjamin argues that the mechanical reproduction of art and photography irreversibly changed the aura. Consequently, the following question seems to originate from discussions on aura-real and the virtues of one-take films.

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