

# Films, the Visual, and their Effects on our Minds and Emotions

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## 1. The Orientation of our Research

The visual, and in particular the audiovisual, appears to be overbearingly present in today's world, not only in the so-called "technologically advanced" society, but also in places where we could hardly imagine the existence of the devices that allow us to constantly check information that is often accompanied by images. Abundant media research is already warning about various levels of influences this exposure to the devices may have on today's humans, especially the younger generations (see, f. ex., Kabali *et alii* 2015). What does such a massive exposure to images mean for the research in the field of myth criticism, the approach we apply in the present volume of *JCLA*? The main hypothesis is that images, together with all other domains of human creativity, from literature to fine arts and even music, carry within them a layer, a substratum that I would call a "mythical charge." In this sense, the main purpose of our collective endeavors in this context is to verify the modalities in which the underlying mythical schemes, connected to ancient myths from various cultures, continue to manifest themselves in the vast realm of the (audio)visual. Furthermore, we are interested in finding out how these mythical models are being transformed because of the various media in which they may appear, from photography, paintings, comics and video games to cinema.

My thoughts, as developed below, rather than attempting to answer some of the most persistent questions mentioned above, are meant to invite further discussions that will eventually bring more clarity to the underlying (mythical) structures that we continue to perceive even in the material that would initially seem far from any transcendental concerns. Some of the main issues I wish to deal with in this introductory essay relate, in the first place, to what I identify as the inevitable presence of a narrative, of a story, in the (audio)visual material. The story that underlies the visual domain thus appears to be the very condition for a possible presence of myths in a given cultural product—and, hence, for their identification.

As I will show, referring to some of the leading specialists in the field, our culture continues to be text-based, which means that the images remain attached to a narrative and do not exist on their own, outside of a story. This deeply engrained perception of images has a huge impact on the way we study the mythical elements in the realm of the (audio)visual: as we know, the word "myth" comes from the Greek "mythos"—a story, a narrative. The other major point I address below relates to our conscious or unintentional integration of images, and especially our ability to also register their mythical or more largely symbolic elements, particularly in films or in any other productions that include moving images.

As myth criticism scholars affiliated with the research groups primarily located at the Complutense University in Madrid, Spain, we have witnessed the expansion and continuous explorations of multiple cultural manifestations of the imaginary. The notion of the imaginary, a vast domain that includes various intellectual, psychological and spiritual dimensions, is thus a general term that incorporates all the expressions of myths, symbols and archetypes. As our research has shown, myths or any other manifestations of the imaginary might be more or less visible, more or less readily available for observation, be it in literature, fine arts or in music. Furthermore, the imaginary has established its strong presence within the contemporary modes of artistic expression supported by the new technologies, such as the visual and the audiovisual. It also includes more interactive—and even addictive—phenomena such as video games, as a specific venue for all types of mythological or archetypal reenactments. The discussions that were launched some ten years ago, thanks to the teams created around José Manuel Losada and concentrated at the Complutense University, have generated new research projects, instigated in order to continue even further the (collective) explorations of the many dimensions of the imaginary.

These creative endeavors partly culminated in the October 2018 series of extensive conferences at various universities in Madrid. They were centered around the questions of how the audiovisual “industry” inevitably continues to build upon the imaginary, regardless of its other preoccupations, often of a more technical nature. The conferences explored countless mythical dimensions from a variety of points of view, perceptions and understanding of traditions and their reactivations in modern media. In many ways, the present editorial project thus represents an extension and a prolongation of the Madrid 2018 debates, adding to them some new developments in an on-going discussion that is far from being exhausted, as new “mythical phenomena” and modalities emerge and prosper.

Additionally, this third issue of the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics (JCLA)*, in a series dedicated to myths and their manifestations in contemporary culture, builds upon the achievements of our predecessors. In many ways, we thus continue where the previous two issues left off in their study of the “eternal return” —observing the perennity of myths not only throughout history but in today’s world. Quoting from the second volume codirected by Manuel Botero Camacho and Juan González Echeverría:

Myths still talk to us. This second volume on the Eternal Return emphasizes the relevance of myths in our world. As a matter of fact, its main objective is to show how these emotional and structural narratives have been adapted to modern times in different artistic disciplines, such as literature, cinema or graphic novels. (Botero Camacho & González Echeverría 2019, 1)

Far from disappearing, myths result into new forms of reinterpreting the different dimensions of human reality, as well as their interpenetration. The reason for this is to be sought in the way myths—as rebellious narratives—can still produce further possibilities to understand contemporary themes and concerns, and keep their main quality of making us getting to know ourselves. (5)

In the first volume of the *JCLA* journal, *A Special Issue in The Eternal Return of Myth: Myth Updating in Contemporary Literature* (2017), the co-editors Ana González-Rivas Fernández and Antonella Lipscomb defined their collective endeavors as follows:

The eternal return still both fascinates and baffles scholars from all over the world, who witness how the myth acquires multiple forms as new narrative modes appear. As a

response to this phenomenon, all the articles collected in this volume try to analyze the various implications of the eternal return in modern times, covering the perspective of different nationalities as well as the expression it takes in different disciplines. (2017, 2)

As our project continues with the international and intercultural perspective described above, we also take example in the rich scholarly interactions generated in the second *JCLA* volume. Actually, our colleagues already set the path for the approaches and the investigations of the contributors in our own volume, proving indeed the perennity of myths in their multiple manifestations:

As all the articles in this volume seem to suggest, the eternal return is both our blessing and our misfortune, our strength and our weakness. Human fate is shaped by the eternal return, and, whether we want it or not, it seems our true happiness relies on the full acceptance of this fact. Since the dawn of humankind, myths from all over the world have re-enacted the different forms of this eternal return, as illustrated in nature, heroes or marvelous lands; the same applies to writers, painters, and artists in general, fascinated all of them by the cyclical pattern that surrounds us. The present volume offers examples drawn from American, English, French, Italian, Greek, and Russian literature, as well as from cinema, music, comic-books, and politics. Poets, novelists, playwrights, composers and filmmakers have given a new twist to myths that emerge once and again, always renewed and adapted to modern times. Neither can new technology nor new media resist the alluring and evocative nature of ancient myths. (2017, 6)

Indeed, in the present volume of the *JCLA*, we examine how the new approaches to revitalizing and reorganizing myths practically span across continents, especially in the new fields or the newer media that we gather under the notion of “(Audio)visual” — to include at times the more “visual” and allow it to prevail over uniquely “audiovisual” in the submitted essays. Also worth underscoring, with the largest number of contributors coming from various Spanish universities, the present volume of *JCLA* continues to partake in the discussions within the research groups and subgroups on myths in Madrid and elsewhere in the country.

## 2. Myth and the (audio)visual

As we dive in the realm of myths and the above-mentioned (audio)visual, both domains need to be defined in the first place: the notion of *myth* and the whole vast domain of the *visual*, in its various manifestations. The present text does not have the pretention of covering exhaustively any of the two notions. Rather, its primary aim is to remind us that we shouldn't forget some of the basic dimensions of the two, to be better aware of how they combine, and to understand what makes their combinations possible.

To mark the continuity of our interactions within the realm of cultural myth criticism such as explored by the Complutense University research groups, together with the development of ideas about the study of myths, especially in the media that have been largely enhanced through the digital age, let me use the general definition of myth such as suggested by José Manuel Losada in the 2016 volume *Mitos de hoy*,<sup>1</sup> reproduced in English in *Myth and Emotions* (2017, xiii), and more recently in *Myth and Audiovisual Creation*:

Explanatory, symbolic and dynamic account of one or various personal and extraordinary events with transcendent referent, that lacks in principle of historical testimony; is made up of a series of invariant elements reducible to themes submitted

to crisis; that presents a conflictive, emotive and functional character, and always refers to an absolute cosmogony or eschatology, either particular or universal. (Losada & Lipscomb 2019, 20)

If we correlate Losada's succinct definition with the essays included in the present volume, it is important to remember that the presence of myths in a particular setting presupposes and even requires some *extraordinary events*, often of *transcendent* nature, that bind together the narrative and the actions of the protagonists, and that a particular myth is recognizable thanks to the *invariants* that constitute it. The modifications that occur in the new forms of myths are often a source of renewal, ingenuity and even originality. They are to be compared to the invariants from various mythical stories, which still need to be recognizable and properly identified for a myth to be functional in a particular context.

Speaking of the visual, or rather the audiovisual such as we know it in cinematography, we should remember some of the historic facts that led from the exclusively visual forms to the moving images combined in a new art form. The profound change from the ageless visual forms may have been stimulated and also made possible by the advancement of photography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Maybe we could also associate this change in artistic aspirations with the spreading endeavors by the impressionists, at the turn of the century, to capture, in a sequence of paintings, the light and the colors of a specific moment in a day, and then eventually display them side by side, as a continuum that could generate an illusion of a movement.

At the core of the development of cinematography, stemming from the 1895 presumed initial combination of images into movement,<sup>2</sup> two schools have evolved side by side. Actually, although the first one might have become predominant, none of the two prevailed, while they sometimes combined into new ramifications, especially in more recent years. The brothers Lumière were documentarists at heart and thus set the trend for the movies as documents—meant to capture some of the key events of their own time, as it were. The other approach, established by Méliès, was based on the rather unbridled imagination (see Sever—OM Produkcija 2015, 27-28). The brothers Lumière's approach was vastly attractive to Charlie Chaplin, for example, and to the new industry in the United States. The latter determined the cinematic conventions in which the events in front of the camera are considered far more important than the image itself, namely the phenomena that can be developed thanks to the particular nature of the cinematic medium (Sever—OM Produkcija 28).<sup>3</sup> The approach created by Méliès saw its continuation with Buster Keaton and even the brothers Marx, with the attempt to capture the very essence and the mystery of the medium, creating the effects of illusion, of something beyond reality, and thus influencing the many avantgarde schools of cinema (Sever—OM produkcija 28).

Possibly alluding to similar issues, and speaking generally of images, I find that José Manuel Losada's explanation of the visual similarly inscribes itself in a distinction between the two major orientations that we still witness today:

We reduce the immense variety of images to a typology: the more traditional—the image that represents an expected reality—and the more innovative, the image represented by a series of unforeseen associations with no real previous referent. Both images coexist in our imaginary world, and both can replicate (for example in a drawing, a painting, a sculpture) in the real world. We call it visual

creation when, in the latter case, an image is coupled with an artistic dimension.  
 (“Myth and the Digital Age,” in *Myth and Audiovisual Creation* 2019, 17)

It appears that both approaches to the visual, the more realistic attempts to “reproduce reality,” combined with the attempt to take the images to a different, higher artistic level, are certainly at the core of filmmaking. They will affect the way in which particular mythical elements with their invariants, or conjoined in a more complex mythical story, will appear in a visual artefact or an audiovisual production. But let us see how some cinematographers view their creative medium, first from a more professionally oriented point of view that attempts to define it in its “true” nature. Then, I wish to look at the association of images with the narrative: if images are to carry mythical schemes that evolve in a particular cinematic setting, we should remember that in all situations, the *narrative* is the *sine qua non* condition and the very foundation for the presence of myths.

### 3. Godard and Greenaway on the Fate of the Audiovisual

Jean-Luc Godard and Peter Greenaway, two major contemporary film makers, both rather revolutionary in their attitudes and in their productions, claim somewhat paradoxically that the hundred and twenty odd years of cinematography have not yet taught us one major skill. We—the audiences and possibly the cinematographers—do not know how to watch films and how to properly use the images, to give the medium its full value. Separately, yet expressing similar positions, Godard and Greenaway claim that this incapacity to learn a new or a more “appropriate” way of seeing is an anticipation of cinema’s most probable decline (Godard, for example in his 2016 interview with Daphné Roulier; Greenaway, for example in his 2014 lecture “The Cinema is Dead, Long Live the Cinema”). In addition, Jean-Luc Godard is convinced that the whole Nouvelle Vague–New Wave school of cinematography that he helped to establish, together with his own cinematic endeavors, must be understood as a continuation of the Lumière documentary model, especially as the group started off with the short films that they produced in the nineteen-fifties. In this sense, to make a film, in Godard’s mind, documentation comes first, and fiction is then affixed to it (see “Jean-Luc Godard et Anne-Marie Miéville—Prénom Carmen” 1984 interview with Christian Dufaye).

Peter Greenaway, regardless of his noted cinematographic explorations, insists that he remains a painter at heart. In his insightful talks, with many ideas that carry over from previous lectures, he contends that ours continues to be a civilization of the word and not of the image, regardless of the overwhelming presence of various types of visual materials around us (“The Cinema is Dead, Long Live the Cinema,” Turku, Finland, 2014; “Cinema is Dead,” Mexico City, 2016). He is quite convinced that we should never even have developed moving pictures, but rather should have stayed with paintings and only added music to them. In his opinion and in his artistic experience, nevertheless, the old adage “In the beginning, there was Word” is to be deconstructed, as one cannot have a text without first having an image: to posit that he believes in the primordial value of images might thus be an understatement. Yet, as he claims, the problem comes from the fact that in general, a film is nothing more but an illustrated text, and is thus completely predictable. This means that we have a text-based cinema, an extension of a text-based society. The biggest pieces of our times, such as *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc., are in fact only illustrated texts. As we notice, Greenaway, without speaking of mythology *per se*, chooses to mention two cinematic productions that are completely

grounded in myths, and in this sense, his conviction about the text-based cinema is crucial for our own approach, as I will show it later. If in addition, the audiences are visually illiterate, as he is convinced, it would most probably help us all tremendously to be visually trained, to see how images work on the screen and to better understand the mythical dimensions of a particular (audiovisual) work of art.

When speaking of the “death of cinematography,” Greenaway regularly cites Godard: in his opinion, the biggest problem in movie theaters is a whole room of spectators fixing for some two hours, in silence and in darkness, a square on the wall in front of them, with three-thirds of the world concealed behind them. In this sense, cinema hasn’t evolved at all; and, for this same reason, in his mind, it is doomed. Yet, the director admits that ironically, the anticipated decline is accompanied by an almost unrestrained proliferation of new cinematographic productions. Additionally, for both Godard and Greenaway, the new technical opportunities to consume visual materials are in fact detrimental to the art as such. People now watch them alone at home, on various devices. One could even posit that we became movie consumers as we have previously done it with books—dealing with the text individually, in our private space, before the advent of the “moving pictures.” Yet, the early cinema was definitely a public event and practically a ritual; I will return to it later.

In a certain way, for Greenaway in particular, the main problem with the (audio)visual, regardless of the device we use, is the frame, the most artificial proposition ever developed. As he claims, we don’t see the world or each other in frames, even from the anatomical point of view. Maybe the destruction of the frame as the basis of a film might lead to a new visual culture. For his own part, Greenaway wishes to revive the audiovisual by introducing a non-narrative, multiscreen cinema based in the present, which would allow him to use and develop the elements that are uniquely visual, such as, for example, translucency and opacity. The question is whether a non-narrative production is ever possible, especially from a semiotic point of view, as a signifier might always produce significance. Yet, where there is meaning, there is myth: in myth criticism, we have been trained to watch images in order to uncover the hidden myths, archetypes or symbols underneath the visual. In other words, we are interested in images inasmuch as they convey meaning, the “text” underneath it.

In view of the income-oriented mass production that continues to pile more “stories” upon the visual, we may often deplore the loss of “true heroes” on screen. An informal discussion group about myth criticism, mainly around the nucleus at the Complutense University in Madrid, have recently discussed the notion of “disenchantment” especially in the realm of the audiovisual. We might rather consider the watering-down of possible heroic characters and their feats mainly as a sign that we have now entered the realm of stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> I see it especially in the science-fiction or the post-apocalyptic productions, because from the point of view of industry, this is what the so-called general audiences would supposedly be capable of accepting, digesting, and eventually identifying with. As an example of a possible modern (mythical) hero that is progressively turned into a stereotype, while the actor himself might become a heroic figure for his audiences, allow me to cite the 2019 film *Joker* by Todd Phillips, starring Joaquin Phoenix, doubtless a very powerful performer, justly honored with a plethora of awards. As we observe it with “celebrities,” successful actors tend to be elevated to a heroic, exemplary status, regardless of the stories they incarnate in cinematic productions. The disturbing factors in *Joker*, as I see them, concern the underlying values

that the film seems to be promoting, maybe with the intent to show the tragic fate of the mentally unbalanced man at the center of the narrative. Whatever the aspirations of the lead protagonist, he embodies a progressive desacralization of a possible mythical character and a spiraling movement toward complete degradation. When the mad mobs start to wear clown masks in a stereotypical emulation of their degraded, psychotic and even criminal model, the “original” clown, he, Arthur Fleck, becomes a true representation of the ill-perceived and wrongly integrated “ideology” that only leads to chaos and trouble.

#### 4. The (Audio)visual and the Collective

Yet, if there is to be a myth, as stated by José Manuel Losada (June 2014), it needs “extraordinary events” as its building blocks. Such events may generate a feeling of transcendence, of grandeur that audiences seem to crave, possibly as a way to feel elevated in their own psyche. The cathartic function of myths might be derived from the shared experiences of mythical realms, especially during a collective viewing of a film, which thus becomes a particular type of a ritual (I return to these notions further in the essay). Paradoxically, the required “extraordinary” dimensions seem to be created more frequently in science-fiction, with the beyond-the-normal, the paranormal and the exceptional characteristics of the protagonists and the situations in which they are featured. It is certainly impossible to provide an appropriate answer to the question of why people seek extraordinary feats in the movies, but, as already alluded above, I could suggest that we cannot ignore the ingrained urge to find a deeper meaning to our existence. Consciously or unconsciously, the industry consequently capitalizes very efficiently on the perceived deep yearning of the audiences. This yearning has obviously been proven and verified often enough, for this type of films to keep flooding the market. As in a vicious circle, continuous and repeated demands then make it worthwhile for the films to be produced. In the name of entertainment, willfully obliterating any deeper impact of these productions, the industry continues to manipulate the audiences. It creates, as I suggested above, either mythical or rather stereotypical models for the current and forthcoming generations, often in connection with extreme and unnecessary, gratuitous violence that fills large portions of these productions.

Let me approach the topics tackled above from yet another perspective. In 2019, when our project was launched, we celebrated the anniversaries of some outstanding cinematic creations, some of which have generated true cult following. These celebrations certainly gave us an additional justification to continue our inquiry into the role the movies play in today’s world, especially in view of advanced technologies that convey images to us with accelerated immediacy and presence. From the point of view of myth criticism, those images carry with them not only superficial possibilities of meanings, but very often a whole symbolic and thus archetypal charge. The impact of the symbolic dimensions will most probably fail to be immediately integrated in viewers’ minds and in the complexity of their emotions.

In every second of a film, a succession of 24 single images creates the illusion of an uninterrupted movement, yet, our eyes are only able to distinguish and integrate three or four of them (Sever—Om Produkcija 2015 [1994]: 27). This fleeting succession of images may indeed account for the “entertaining” —quick and often superficial— aspects of the cinematic industry. A deeper perception of all the multiple layers contained in a film would require more thorough and repeated encounters with the same material.

When dealing with a book, be it a traditionally written word-by-word narrative or a graphic novel, readers may stop at any time and easily return to a previous formulation that will help them understand the next sequences. In films, as in music, linear continuity in time calls for undivided attention. It requires that we let go of immediate pondering, reflections or any other reactions. They would only make us lose the thread, the establishment of the “story” through all the tools that are brought together for us to be taken in.

In this sense, a film (as well as a musical event) functions indeed in a manner similar to all possible rituals and has to some extent replaced the cathartic processes of ancient drama. If this is the case—if we agree that this is how films affect us, we may also accept that through this particular ritual, our psyche or a more hidden layer of our beings will be able to perceive the symbols, the archetypes underlying the narrative, and be affected by them. The need for a darkened room, with our full attention fixated forward, is conditioned by the very nature of the projection of the images that come from behind. A passive screen at the front, which only serves as a receiver and does not interact in any way with the audience, adds to the mysterious nature of the collective event. This particular ritual then subconsciously binds together all those present.

As in all rituals, most probably, the impact may be amplified when a larger community partakes in an event. This is probably what Francis Ford Coppola had in mind in the summer of 2019, in Bologna, Italy, when he introduced the “final cut” of his own “cult” movie, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), celebrating the 40 years since its creation. Another “cult” film comes from an even earlier time: Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless (À bout de souffle)*, premiered in 1959, continues to attract audiences over decades. The question, in the case of these two films, and certainly many others that marked us, is to understand the nature of the *engouement*, infatuation, craze, which happens much less in the shared spaces, but rather at an intimate level of our perceptions. Even if we watch a film in a crowd, the story that is being told will affect each and every one of us differently, intimately. Keeping in mind that only three or four images, out of the 24 contained in a second of a movie, are being assimilated by our brains, each of us will eventually resonate with a different segment of the projected frames and will recompose them differently in his or her mind.<sup>5</sup> As it happens, the story, and the different levels of its integration in our body-mind-psyche constitution, may bind together the spectators in a movie theater. It nevertheless fails to create a true collective infatuation similar to the one created during the concerts by Beatles, Queens, Rolling Stones or many other similar groups. The communion between the musicians and the ecstatic crowds might happen because of a certain energy or vibrational level created by music, a topic I can only mention in passing. Another unresolved question is the way in which a “cult” following is created in cinema. Watching a sequence over and over again, in our own intimacy, after the eventual exposure to the group energy in a movie theater, will doubtless produce a lasting imprint on the viewers. But until recent years, a private repeated viewing, on a variety of devices, was technically impossible. A shared enthusiasm regarding a certain cinematic phenomenon must thus have been created differently, eventually through discussions or, to some degree, through repeated collective viewings.

## 5. Conclusion

Yet, massive obsession with films exists, persists and continues to occur. Another science-fiction series of films, building upon the success of the first 1977 installment,

created a major cult following. The initial *Star Wars*, celebrating more than forty years in existence, has recently been followed by the sequel n° IX, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019). In his 1988 televised interviews with Bill Moyers, titled *The Power of Myths*, Joseph Campbell provided an analysis of *Star Wars* in conjunction with his understanding of mythical heroes. He associated all the characters in the movie with the subsequently vastly exploited notion of monomyth; of the archetype that is subject to all the stages of a heroic journey. If he were to see the more recent *Star Wars* sequels, what archetypal strength would he have been able to identify in the newer productions? Had they lost any of the initial energy they carried, what would that mean for their proliferation? How meaningful are now the characters whose cinematic actions still try to emulate myths and archetypes but often linger in the realm of stereotypes? Are they being adapted to what the marketing strategies anticipate as the “needs of the crowds,” recommending special “recipes” that will potentially draw the largest possible audiences? Do archetypes eventually follow such trends and are being modified according to them? These are some of the questions asked by the contributors to this particular *JCLA* volume. Doubtless, these are also the questions that will continue to nourish the debates during the forthcoming myth criticism conferences, the first anticipated being on myths and science fiction.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The original text in Spanish reads as follows: “Escuetamente, defino mito como relato, explicativo, simbólico y dinámico, de uno o varios acontecimientos extraordinarios personales con referente trascendente, que carece en principio de testimonio histórico, se compone de una serie de elementos invariantes reducibles a temas y sometidos a crisis, que presenta un carácter conflictivo, emotivo, funcional, ritual, y remite siempre a una cosmogonía o a una escatología absolutas, particulares o universales” (Introduction, by José Manuel Losada, to *Mitos de hoy* 2016, 10).
- <sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the 1895 birthday of cinematography may not represent its true beginning, yet, it is generally agreed upon, most probably because Auguste and Louis Lumière held at that time “the first public screening of their films” (Dixon & Foster 2008, xii). I’d like to underscore the notion of “public”—the fact that showing films was indeed an event destined to larger audiences, and thus, meant to bring about the awareness about the revolutionary new technique.
- <sup>3</sup> Circumstances having brought me back to Slovenia, where I can now further my exploration of the audiovisual, especially of cinematography, I was privy to abundant information and archival material from OM Produkcija/Production Museum and its Guardian. I’d like to take the opportunity to express my debt of gratitude to the authors of this collective entity, for the inspiration and verification of ideas.
- <sup>4</sup> With her 1991 volume *Les idées reçues: Sémiologie du stéréotype*, Ruth Amossy offers an unsurpassed analysis of stereotypes in general. In terms of the presence of stereotypes in

the films, see in particular *Film and Stereotype: A challenge for Cinema and Theory*, by Jörg Schweinitz (2011).

<sup>5</sup> In terms of how our brains may respond to the visual stimulations that we call “moving pictures,” I am referring in particular to a significant passage from the vast 2008 volume, *A Short History of Film*, by Dixon and Foster:

Motion pictures don't really move. The illusion of movement on the cinema screen is the result of “persistence of vision,” in which the human eye sees twenty-four images per second, each projected for 1/60th of a second, and merges those images together into fluid motion. [...] Roget believed that persistence of vision was caused by the retina's ability to “remember” an image for a fraction of a second after it has been removed from the screen; later research demonstrated, however, that it was the brain's inability to separate the rapidly changing individual images from each other that caused the phenomenon. Simply put, persistence of vision works because the brain is receiving too much information too rapidly to process accurately, and instead melds these discrete images into the illusion of motion. (2008, 1)

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