WHAT IS CINEMA? CRITICAL APPROACHES

Week 5 – Realism I

Lecture Structure
Introduction: Cinema and Realism
I. Bazin: Historical Context
II. The Ontology of the Photographic Image and the Essence of Cinema
III. Critique of Montage
IV. Depth of Field and Spectatorship
Conclusion: Bazin the Straw Man?

Quotations
1. All the arts are based on the presence of man; only in photography do we take pleasure in his absence. Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty. (André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image")

2. Cinema is objectivity in time. The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber. […] Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were. (Ibid.)

3. Depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic. [This] implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives. (Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema")

4. [Renoir] forced himself to look back beyond the resources provided by montage and so uncovered the secret of a film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, that would reveal the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them. (Ibid.)

Film Clips
La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game, Jean Renoir, 1939)
Waking Life (Richard Linklater, 2001)
The Best Years of Our Lives (William Wyler, 1946)
Key Reading


Further Reading

**Primary Sources**


**Secondary Sources**


