“Moving Pictures” by Arthur C. Danto

**Section I**

Most basic point in the first several paragraphs: *Cinematic Art* always has a *metaphysical distance* from the quotidian (ordinary activities and objects of daily experience) and the voyeuristic position of the film viewer.

For AD, film is distinct from drama at least because “each spectator watch[es] as in a stereoscope a décor [image?] that was only for him, although similar to the thousands of others, each for [themselves], the rest [for] the spectators.”[101] It is that last part that makes up the difference. “The set of performances of the same play stands to the latter in something like the relationship in which the set of platonic particulars stands to the same archetype [form], or as the various interpretations of it stand to the same sonata, while the showings of the same film stand to one another somewhat as copies of the same newspaper do [my emphasis] … so there is no relevant difference between reading the same paper twice or two papers one time each.”[101L/B]

The basis of similarity among showings of the same film is “*in rebus* [‘in the individual thing/particular’, a la Aristotle] rather than *ante rem*[prior {as is a universal} to the reality of particulars]” [101R/T]

 Put simply: the film *is a distinctive particular* and all of its ‘showings’ are merely *instances of a particular*.

JP: All this, taken as an opening salvo in favor of a view that takes film to be *very different* from theater drama, might make more sense to the students if they are reminded that in classical music, many philosophers of music think that Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 is, ontologically, *the score,* not any of its performances (just as Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet is, ontologically, *the written out play [with instructions for scene, mood, etc.]* and performances of the play are, ontologically, related but only as copy to original).

Film as different from Painting: “provenance and history [of a film] are irrelevant” whereas they are central to what *counts* as Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa. [101R/M]

But AD rejects the temptation to then treat photographic prints and films the same, which would mean to treat all prints of a photograph as *the same artwork* in the way all showings (or DVD/celluloid print copies) of a film are the same film. His reasoning is: what makes all prints (DVD or celluloid of digital file copies) of a film the *same film* ontologically does not apply equally to *photographic prints, even though many different prints can be made from the same original plate/film negative*. Unlike film, each print is ontologically determined by reference to the original from which it originates, and he thinks this is because *if we find out the print* came from a *different original plate,* we tend to think this compromises its status as a print *of the same photographic artwork.* [102L/T]

 JP: Here AD is just noting that the way we think of photographs shares ontological assumptions with paintings, and so provenance and history of a copy matters whereas with film that seems not to be the case.

AD seems to think films and plays are more ontologically alike. But this couldn’t be due to a parallel between *performances of a play* and *showings of a film* since AD has already indicated that each performance of a play is ontologically distinct from every other in a way that does not seem to apply to film showings (in the same way hearing John Coltrane play a new piece at the same club on successive nights, if recorded, would, if both performances were recorded, be regarded as *ontologically different* [because, as with theatrical performance, live musical performances, especially of Jazz pieces that include improvisation {where theatrical performances have ‘interpretations based on who directs or acts in them’…..these differences between performances of the same play by Shakespeare generate, AD argues, essential different in what is *presented* to the audience, making the performance of *Hamlet* directed by Noel Coward with John Malkovich playing Hamlet *ontologically distinct* from *Hamlet* directed by Harold Prince and starring Mel Gibson as the lead}].

The key to the ontological similarity of theatrical performances and film showings [advanced on pg.102L/M] is that they are **events** that are **temporally fixed to a time and place** and we attend them **expecting something to HAPPEN** [even when, as in The Turin Horse by Bela Tarr, very little does!].

AD: part of what makes film *essentially temporal* is that even if literally nothing happens (his example: three hours of a static camera shot of the front page of Tolstoy’s War and Peace), it nonetheless is the case that a single slide of the same front page of the same edition of that novel, projected on the same screen as the film, would be *different* for a viewer who knew the difference in how each was produced (or where one was *advertised* as a film, the other as a photographic ‘happening’/art performance piece). The film *brings with it an expectation that something could [and usually will] happen*. Or, as AD puts in on pg. 102R/M, “…a perfectly legitimate right [of the viewer] is frustrated in the case of the film…”

 Another way to see the same point: a film has a beginning, middle, and end, whereas a projection of a single slide does not (and, *mutatis mutandis,* a photographic print and/or a painting).

 Same thing with *tableau vivant* (live persons are frozen in specific positions) and “a play, in which by artistic design, the actors do not move.”

**KEY:** [pg. 103L/T] “Finding the difference between pictures and moving pictures is very much like finding the differences between works of art and real objects, where we can imagine cases in which nothing except knowledge of their causes and of the categories which differentiate works of art from real things make the difference between the two, since they otherwise *look* exactly alike.”

**Section II**

AD lays down his method: “An one method for isolating philosophical relevance is to look for principles which must be invoked if we are to distinguish between things which are otherwise exactly alike.”

 JP: consider how we would make the distinction between a human being copied from another by a process that produces a second live human being with all the same configurations among the atoms and what is built upon the atoms, but with a *different set of atoms,* each one of which is *otherwise no different* from those found in the original. What principle would we use to distinguish them (i.e., what principle would we use to preserve our conviction that they are not the same human being?).

Tough passage they will need explained (pg. 103L/M): “….causality and reference are relations at right angles to the experiences [waking or dreamt], which the experiences then underdetermine.” Explain that ‘causality’ here refers to *what caused the experiences,* and ‘reference’ refers to *what we take the experiences to* ***represent in the external world***. [Talk about Descartes’ **Dream Problem** here as it illustrates what AD thinks prevents us from simply identifying the *artwork* with *what we* ***perceive*** [no matter how carefully we look for every *perceptible detail* that marks off what we perceive from **what caused us to see exactly what we saw**.]

 AD’s point here: it is a matter of *philosophical reflection* that we can make out the difference between otherwise identical dreamt vs. waking experiences. The distinction arises at *the level of our concepts* of each (concepts that are sensitive to something **BEYOND** the *literal content of conscious awareness* in each of the two kinds of experiences) and these depend on ‘factors logically external to what we experience, on what does not meet the eye. [my emphasis] [103L/B]

 Another example AD gives: the problem of induction (including Goodman’s *grue* case). Which hypothesis correctly accounts for the data is underdetermined by that data, forcing us to *go outside the data* to find a basis for deciding which inference from the data is correct.

In art there are similar problems that arise when artworks are *faked.* The difference between a *fake* and *genuine* artwork can usually be settled if information about the causal origins of the two is known. But, as AD rightly points out (and my case of the perfect copy of a human being raises), whether the difference between the two *makes a difference that* ***matters*** is not something that can be settled in advance. We have to think about the difference and whether it matters. In the case of the perfect clone, it seems *at least* that, all things being equal, *my clone* does not have any rights to *my property.*

 JP: Alert students to the ‘problem of indistinguishable counterparts’ both in philosophy of art and elsewhere in philosophy (say, in estimating whether a clone is morally culpable for something I do, or vice versa). Again, AD’s point is that what settles questions about the ontological status of counterparts, as with different artwork types (films, paintings, photographs), lies in “factors [that] will always be logically external to the thing[s] in question.”[103R/B]

 For AD, this problem is “the central issue in the philosophy of art.” [104L/T] And he makes clear that it wasn’t until it was *possible* to produce the kind of simulacra of *‘real world’ things* like boxes of Brillo pads and cans of Campbell Soup you buy a the store that were created **as artworks** by Andy Warhol that a question about how to make out the difference between the real ones and the artwork ones could be raised. **New fodder for strictly philosophical reflection (lucky philos!).** But the main thing to notice here is that our ability to mechanically create *reproductions/copies* that these questions about the ontological status of ‘copies’ comes into play. Whereas a talented painter who produces a painting that is *perceptually indistinguishable* from the Mona Lisa *has NOT produced a SECOND MONA LISA,* someone who makes a print copy of a photograph of Abraham Lincoln using the original daguerreotype plate seems to have produced *just one more instance of that photograph* and in that case, the *copy seems to be ontologically the same as any other print* and hence *is the same photograph.* But now notice: if you learn that a print you bought on Ebay of that photograph was generated by a *different* daguerreotype plate [imagine this one has a line near Lincoln’s nose due to a scratch on that plate], you *think you were mislead* since the scratch *degrades the value of the print* since it is *not the* ***of the same photograph*.** Here, what makes the photographic print *genuine* lies in the *causal relationship between the plate and the print*.

 AD then suggests that showings of a film have the same relationship to each other as prints made from the same photographic plate/negative do: they are regarded as *genuine* counterparts and, because what makes them *genuine* is that they are caused by the same ‘original’ (the **master film print** in the case of film), all showings of *Dune* whether streamed, seen in a public theater, or at the Denis Villeneuve’s home screening room in Paris are **of** *the same film* and, hence, **are** the *SAME FILM.*

Why for AD questions about the ontological status of artworks cannot be answered strictly by *induction* (as many others in this section have done) because of the explosive changes in how art is made, particularly most of the newer art forms (including *recorded music,* film, almost-indistinguishable-from-real people ‘hyper-realistic sculptures’ [Ron Mueck], etc.). For this reason, “Theory of art which is based upon such induction has necessarily to fail if something can be an artwork but share all the manifest features of an erstwhile ordinary object….”[104L/M]

AD explains his method and how it leads to his focus on slides and films in Section I: “Usually the differences are obvious, but we don’t learn much philosophically by sticking to obvious differences. It is with this in mind that I want to explore some differences between film and drama.”[104L/B]

STOP HERE. Shift to discussing Documentary filmmaking.

**Section III**

Cinematic images arise mainly the way and as photographic images do, and “I believe we have an almost spontaneous representationalist theory of photographic content which almost precisely resembles a parallel theory of perception. Something is a photograph *of* x when ti is caused by what it denotes, so that if the causal condition fails, the semantical identification fails as well”.[104R/T-M]

KEY: “It seems to follow that there are no *false* photographs” [104R/M]

AD: “…a photograph has its closest linguistic peer in the ‘proper name,’ (if Russell is right that names without bearers are noises and if Kripke is right that a name denotes only what it is causally connected with).”[104R/M]

 Upshot: “So photographs are very tightly linked to their causes when construed representationally rather than as abstract patterns of light.” [105L/T]

 KEY: “Indeed, [photographs] are linked in just the way in which ideas are in a Lockean or Cartesian view of representation: (1) as *of* their causes, in the respect that their having any real content at all is put in question the moment we have doubts as to their provenance…”[105L/Tm]

NOW TO FILM: “We can, of course, liberate ourselves from these severe constraints by letting a photograph be *of* something other than its cause, if we transform the cause into a model and (1) let *it* acquires a semantical structure of its own; (2) let it stand for something ulterior—in which case we require a rule of interpretation.”[105L/M]

Photographs can either be representational *motifs* “in which case [they are] documentary”… “or as models, in which case it anagogic [=an interpretation of something represented]”[106L/T]

Now AD considers the contrast/difference between the *film of a play* (using cinematic techniques to record a stage play) vs. “a *screenplay proper,* where the play, so to speak, is in the film but there is in reality no play which is actually photographed” [106L/M] (AD’s language is ambiguous here, but the clear contrast is between *recording through video-audio recording technology a* ***Stage Play*** *performed* ***On Stage*** *vs. a* ***film*** *of the* ***same drama articulated through the medium******of film***)

In the case of a filmed stage performance of a play, this is *film-as-documentary* (and in that case, the play is a *motif* of the film, and nothing more) vs. a film of the play in which the *play is* ***in the film essentially*** and the film as representation **represents the persons and storyline of THE PLAY** not of the actors, or situations in which they operate. [106R/B]

Famous actors in film tend to become such that we cannot separate who they are from the role they play (unlike on stage) such that “we almost cannot separate the person from the role.”[107L/M-B]

 JP: AD’s point here is that the star actor becomes *part of the film* in the *same sense* that the character Hamlet in a film based on Shakespeare’s play of the same name is part of the film.

KEY: “In a movie, a role belongs to the person who plays it in the sense that were another to play the so-called same role, it would be in a different *work*.” [107L/B-R/T]

 JP: AD’s point is that in a *stage play* the person who plays a role doesn’t *change the play,* but rather, is thought only to render *an interpretation* of the role *as written by the playwright*. For that reason, Kenneth Branagh’s performance as Hamlet on stage vs. Laurence Olivier’s doesn’t make the **play** different. Whereas, in a film, the opposite is true (just in the same sense that Gus Van Sant’s *Psycho* is a different film than Hitchcock’s *Psycho* [we don’t say that van Sant’s is a *performance* of *Psycho* even though the director did actually try to shoot and edit each scene exactly as it was shot and edited for the Hitchcock film).

KEY2: “So the star is intimately woven into the substance of the film…”[107R/T]

**Film-as-documentary-treatment-of-staged-play vs. Film-that-includes-a-staged-play [107LR/T]**

AD shows that a film of a play alters the *nature* of the play such that there is a semantic difference between the film and the play (in a sense, the play is only *mentioned* in the film, whereas the play on stage **is the play**). His example to illustrate the point involves a film in which the film’s main character (Mary Mutt), played by actual real-life star Delilah De Lillo, is an actress who plays the role of Blossom Beauchamps in a Broadway hit *Tepid Latitudes*, and AD then doubles down on the point by suggesting that the Beauchamps character is playing in *another* play that is part of the storyline in *Tepid Latitudes,* and that play is called *Broken Playthings*. This play-within-a-play-within-a-play illustrates AD’s idea that neither *Tepid Latitudes* nor *Broken Playthings* is presented in the way it would be if we (the audience viewing the film of all these stories-within-stories) were to simply go to a theater **in real life** and see **either play**. And while a film of a staged production of either play *would be a* ***documentary-style film***, the film in which Delilah De Lillo plays the role of Mary Mutt *is not a documentary either!*

AD’s main point here is: seeing a play is very different than seeing a play that *contains* a play. The two are different exactly in the sense that in the first case, the *play* is what the staged production and audience experience *is about,* whereas in the second case, the play within the play is not *what it would be about if that embedded play were being staged next door* ***as the play being staged!*** [107R/Mb]

Upshot: Even where a film actor is famous and tends to become *part of what the film* ***is,*** it is nonetheless the case that while in My Left Foot, Daniel Day-Lewis is part of what the film ***is***, that doesn’t change the fact that the film **is ABOUT** Christy Brown, a man afflicted with cerebral palsy. In considering what a film **is**, we have to take all this into account and that establishes that a film is a different *kind of thing* than a play meant for the stage.

 “What a nondocumentary film is about cannot be photographed.”

**Upshot #2 (and KEY)**: “Nondocumentary films stand to documentary ones — a common photographic base notwithstanding —in the relationship in which perception stands to imagination.” [108L/B]

**Section IV**

“Moving pictures are just that: *pictures* which move, *not* just (or necessarily at all) pictures *of* moving things.”

 JP: For example, there are many temporal segments of Bela Tarr’s *The Turin Horse* in which *nothing happens* ***literally***. But this is nonetheless a part of a *motion picture.*

AD’s evidence: “Before the advent of moving pictures, it would not have been illuminating to characterize nonmoving pictures as nonmoving; there would have been no other sort.”[108R/Mb]

AD mentions Kant’s observation that a representation of permanence need not be a permanent representation, and thinks the same is true of a representation of motion: it *need not be a* ***moving representation***(show Bernini’s *David* to the class)

In this section AD is using various examples to mark the difference between *mode of presentation* used to represent something, and *the thing represented* (Chiang Yee’s story of the Chinese painter who made a drawing of bamboo for a patron using red ink because that was all there was….when the patron remarked “where have you ever seen red bamboo” the painter replied “where have you ever seen **black** ones?”). 109/RM]

But does this mean that the *means used to represent a thing* cannot *share any properties of that thing*? AD says **no!** Had the Chinese painter presented bamboo that had a zigzag shape, it would no longer be possible to reply to the obvious question “where have you ever seen zigzagging bamboo”, “where have you ever seen straight ones?”

 Upshot: the mode of presentation employed to represent a thing need not share all its properties with the thing represented, but it surely must share *some* properties.

AD then concludes: “So perhaps the difference is this. In describing our experience with *David,* we might say that we see he is in movement, but we don’t see him move. And with the bamboos, we see that they are yellow, but we don’t see their yellowness.”

 AD’s point: what an artform represents need not be built into the literal perceptual properties of the means by which it is represented.

 JP: A representation of a coward need not be performed *by a coward*.

What does all this have to do with the nature of film vs. photographs, filmed plays vs. staged plays?

Some questions to consider:

On page 111 AD draws a contrast between a static camera recording a moving thing (a horse running from right to left in the film) and a *moving camera* that both records the movement of moving things it ‘sees’ and introduces movement as an essential feature of the ‘window of perception’ the film presents to the viewer. Ask the breakout rooms members to explain what this distinction is based upon.

Second question: on page 111 offers an account of how film introduces “self-consciousness” into its form of representation. How does film do this, and why does AD think that other 20th century arts have also introduced self-consciousness as a feature of their art forms?

Third question: how does the