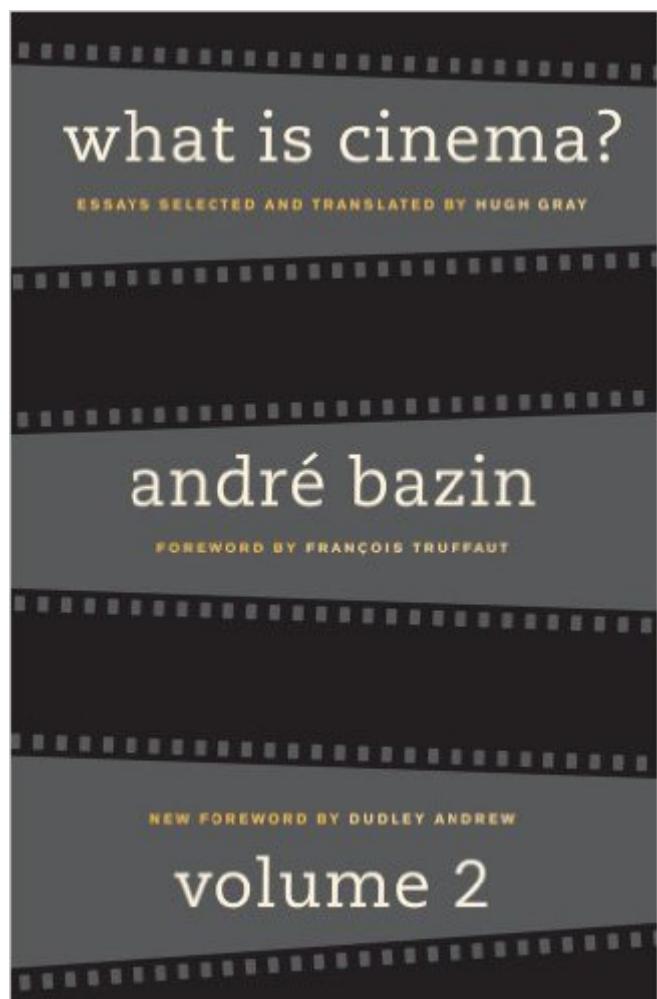


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What Is Cinema?: Volume II



Synopsis

André Bazin's *What Is Cinema?* (volumes I and II) have been classics of film studies for as long as they've been available and are considered the gold standard in the field of film criticism. Although Bazin made no films, his name has been one of the most important in French cinema since World War II. He was co-founder of the influential *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which under his leadership became one of the world's most distinguished publications. Championing the films of Jean Renoir (who contributed a short foreword to Volume I), Orson Welles, and Roberto Rossellini, he became the protagonist of François Truffaut, who honors him touchingly in his foreword to Volume II. This new edition includes graceful forewords to each volume by Bazin scholar and biographer Dudley Andrew, who reconsiders Bazin and his place in contemporary film study. The essays themselves are erudite but always accessible, intellectual, and stimulating. As Renoir puts it, the essays of Bazin "will survive even if the cinema does not."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What is Cinema? Volume One and *What is Cinema* Volume 2 are English translations drawn from the original French four-volume work. They are not the entire four-volume work, but include some of the more important essays. In France itself, the four-volume work was later boiled to a one-volume set of selections. This French version was later used for the selections in the Spanish and Portuguese versions. The Italian version is different from the others, but also drawn from the four-volume work. Much of the four-volume original French work that has been omitted from the English *What is Cinema?* volumes I and II can be found in Cardullo's more recent collection "Bazin at Work." Since Bazin's passing, film theory ventured more deeply into such things as semiotics,

Freudian and Lacanian analyses, and sociological/Marxist perspectives. However, Bazin was one of the first and arguably most important writers to take film discourse beyond the "funny" "sexy" "scary" level. Some of the places film discourse has gone since the time of Bazin would be difficult or impossible for an uninitiated person to comprehend. This is not so with Bazin, a man who also did such things as take Charlie Chaplin films to show at factories during lunch hour. Although Bazin passed away more than 40 years ago, he remains relevant even if his writings have been subject to some critical analysis from writers like Brian Henderson and Noel Carroll. Moreover, in reading Bazin, one often has moments of recognition that are applicable to more recent things in the theatres; for example, a remark Bazin makes about Marilyn Monroe's skirt flying up is pertinent to discussion of the Austin Powers films, Bazin's remarks about such things as films about arctic expeditions, bullfighting documentaries, or films of Chinese executions may have a certain relevance in talking about the phenomenon of "The Blair Witch Project" . . .

AndrÃ© Bazin was one of the most important writers on film. His views have been influential worldwide. The term Bazinian realism has become one of the major theoretical categories in film studies. The impact of Bazin's work on English-language film studies has been generated, to a large degree, by this two-volume collection of essays. A number of major debates that have been going round for years now (decades actually) in English language works center on issues arising from these essays; e.g. the relation between objects and their photographs. However it must be stressed that these English language essays are re-workings by their "translator" rather than faithful renderings of the originals. Hugh Gray, the translator, not only chose some of the essays from the original French editions but also treated them with great liberty. Sentences and footnotes are missing, others are combined without reason; expressions are made more "flowery"; and meanings are changed. I cannot tell whether the translator was not up to the task of doing this job properly or he decided to mistreat his subject to such a degree consciously. In any case it is a great pity that Bazin's work is available in English only in this unfortunate form. The original works deserve 5 stars; it is impossible to decide how to rate this particular version.

Bazin is one of the best film philosophers and critics. He sensitively defines his notion of cinema as an evocative art, rather than necessarily a descriptive one. He chooses a fine selection of films and filmmakers to talk about.

Fairly dense.

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