

**John MULLARKEY**

*What Does the Cinematic Background Demonstrate?  
Depth of Field Thinking in Bazin*

The ongoing duel between realist and anti-realist tendencies in film theory usually positions the ideas of André Bazin unambiguously on the realist side. But what type of realism? Is it ontological, and, if so, is it based on a claim for the primacy of photography's "analogical" relation to the world, even to the point of a "direct contact" with the physical existence of nature? In this paper I argue for a new alternative: that Bazin's realism involves an "education of the senses" whereby depth of field cinematography is not a fetishisation of the optical, but rather a demonstration of the "democracy of vision". The use of backgrounds, décor, and composition are not ornaments – a question of aesthetic taste – but an attempted re-education of vision that teaches us to give equal weight to all parts of the non-human, objective field – space, objects, animality realities that we are put in contact with by cinema.

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