

1 Heidegger quote

2 Title Slide

3 Bazin & Kitty

ANDRE BAZIN

- Andre Bazin, pictured here screaming at a cat on the cover of the Journal Quest Coo Se le Cinema, was a leading film theoretician of his time, writing primarily in the 1940s and 50s.
- Central to many of his theories is the idea that the image ought to represent reality and that, through technology; this image ought to challenge the viewer's perception and actively engage the viewer to find meaning for his or her self.
- One of his most famous writings, published in 1958, is titled, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," and contains two theories that I would like to begin by exploring for they hold not a systematic or total approach to the ideas he presents, but they do present some very interesting concepts that I would like to develop in my talk here today

Egyptian Tomb

- The first of these theories, the Mummy Complex is Bazin's concept that humans have an innate desire to preserve their own image, through art, as a means of achieving immortality and of defeating death
- Providing what he felt was a salient example, Bazin cites the Egyptian practice of mummification as a clear manifestation of this complex in ancient civilizations
- Describing the complex, Bazin says in his ontology of the photographic image:
 - "If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be the fundamental factor in their creation."
 - "...by providing a defense against the passage of time the mummy complex satisfied a basic psychological need for man, for death is but the victory of time."
 - "To preserve, artificially, [the] bodily appearance and experience is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly... in the hold of life"

- What Bazin describes is the desire to create a unique world in the likeness of the real with its own temporal destiny – one that can be shaped and imagined by the creator once captured from his own life and experience. He argues that this complex seeks no less than to create an immortal corpus of being that will persist through all time.
 - His example of the mummies of ancient Egypt attempt to do this by preserving the corporeal body but he argues that the ultimate dream of the mummy complex is to lift this immortal image completely out of the corporeal body and preserve it through the presentation of an alternative parallel reality that continues to exist even once the corporeal body is returned to dust
 - To put Bazin's theory in its original context, here in the tomb of Mehu in Saqqara, Egypt the deceased's body was both preserved and mummified, but the reality, which was experienced by the deceased, was also ritually recreated in pictographs lining the walls of the tomb.
 - The purpose of this was to preserve of the reality of the deceased and project it into the afterlife – and, in effect, immortal life.
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- So if the mummy complex is the psychological condition we are subject to, the idea of “total cinema”, the second theory of Bazin's I would like to explore, is the end fantasy.
- It is, essentially, the ability to totally capture reality in all of its forms through reproduction via technology in art.
- It's called the myth of total CINEMA because during the time Bazin was writing, cinema was the most perfect method of reproducing reality.
- Cinema, it was felt, could not only reproduce reality in a perfect, moving, and accurate way, but could actually present a reality more real than that of the audiences' through its ability to transport the viewer to another place and time
- Bazin also believed that Technology was driven by what Bazin outlines with his “Icarus”– that technology and technology in art especially is driven by a fantasy – that, for example, the fantasy of man in flight gave rise to the flight itself or that – in context – the desire of man to render himself immortal through image has driven us towards the myth of total cinema

4 Myth of total cinema graph

- This myth is best represented by a graph that shows the asymptotic relationship between cinema – or art – and reality that Bazin describes in his essay
- HERE, as technology and technique evolve into a “more perfect cinema,” they draw closer and closer to “reality” until they are virtually indistinguishable.
- Virtually, however, is the necessary operator because the important part of the myth of total cinema is that it IS a myth – Bazin asserts that cinema, or art in technology, can never BE reality or represent reality in a convincing enough way to create the total illusion of reality.

5 Myth of total cinema graph DETAIL

- The gap seen here – between cinema and reality – quite literally is the “myth” and one of several limitations in Bazin’s theory.
- If one were able to cross, bridge or jump this divide, “cinema” or any other reproduction of one’s reality would merge with true reality and render them the same.
- Thus far Bazin’s assertion of the existence of this myth has remained valid, though with every advancement in technology and art under the influence of the mummy complex this myth falls deeper into question.

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- NOW while the Mummy Complex provides a strong theory, Bazin did not ground it in much more than his own ideas and perceptions
 - Bazin failed to historicize his argument and provide examples from throughout the history of art and in general he was more inclined to think and theorize rather than deeply analyze his own arguments.
 - This, combined with now outdated technological perspective from which he was working leaves serious limitations and gaps in these theories.
 - As Prince notes, in this digital age, an age now passing the era of conventional photochemical cinema and moving quickly, and in many cases wholly into the digital, it is necessary to update these ideas while at the same time contextualizing them in the history of art in order to ground them in a historical framework.
 - With this, the digital revolution further problematizes Bazin’s arguments regarding the nature of Technology and fantasy. One must now question whether evolution within digital technology –

ones often that seem explicitly driven by non-artistic or utilitarian devices – can be characterized within Bazin’s argument on Icarus and the desire to realize our dreams through technology or vice versa.

- I believe that with his mummy complex, Bazin correctly identified an impetus for the creation of artwork in an effort to preserve ones image – but I see the need to problematize his arguments
 - I will show that there exists a specific thread throughout the history of art, photography and film rooted first and foremost in the impulse of the Mummy Complex
 - This in no way serves to completely unite the entire of bodies of these disciplines, but it does tie specific works together through a psychological complex
 - This psychological complex can be explained and exhibited through analysis of the formal characteristics along with their methods of physical immersion and psychological illusion
 - I will to render his argument artistically historical by contextualizing this complex in work throughout the history of art and attempt to resolve the issues surrounding Bazin’s assertion that fantasy begets technology through its pursuit as art and technology now share a space that is in rapid and revolutionary transformation
 - This, coupled with a historically grounded look at the history of immersive and illusionistic art as symptomatic of the mummy complex will serve to both advance some of his more troubled arguments towards resolution and expansion in their ability to recognize these specific conditions throughout other work in the plastic arts, film, and new media.

- I’d now like to cover a few definitions that will be useful from this point on in my talk.

- But first let me note that these definitions as well as background information on the slides I will be showing are all on the slide sheet. That said, if you don’t have a slide sheet, be sure to listen closely.

6 Illusionism Definition

First, illusionism in an art historical context –

→ Or, “The endeavor of artists to represent visual phenomena as completely as possible within the limitations of their particular medium.”

Second, immersion from a text in a new media context, which reads

7 Immersion Definition

“... a mentally absorbing process... it is characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening.

Achieved through numerous means, the majority are experienced by sealing off the observer hermetically from external visual impressions.”

- Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art*

So, please keep these definitions in mind going forward

→ The first historical example of illusion and immersion as symptomatic of Bazin’s mummy complex is the Villa of Mysteries in Pompeii, Italy.

Villa dei Misteri Panoramic View

- Painted around 60 BCE this is called the red room, a space in what is called the Villa of mysteries
- It is not only spatially evocative with consistent ground plane and repetitious architectonic elements but also, in its plan, works to completely immerse the viewer in unified environment
- Though it contains mythological characters in addition to figures from the context of everyday life in 1st century BCE Pompeii, the repetition of these figures, actions, and consistency of their placement gives a sense of ritual immersion – of one being in a consistent time and place.
- While the depth of space is extremely limited and the characters are all apparently at the same depth throughout, this also pulls them further towards the viewer’s own space and aides in the illusion of the figures occupying a plane consistent with your own

- In addition the figures themselves are nearly life size and present the viewer with both a spatially immersive and illusionistic representation of – for the most part – scenes from contemporary life.
- Looking at the plan view...

Villa dei Misteri PLAN View

- It is clear from viewing the plan that – while interrupted at several necessary intervals for passageways – this work creates an environment in which one is occupying space with these figures, not simply observing them in a framed image.

Chambre du Cerf Panoramic View

- IN AN addition to the papal palace at Avignon, the Chambre du Cerf, or chamber of the stag, similarly exhibits this desire to recreate a space in which one may be a part and inhabit as well.
- Roughly 1300 years separate this work from the Villa of Mysteries and there are very few salient examples from the middle ages to speak of, but this shows that even if the consistency with which immersive spaces are created waxes and wanes, it nevertheless continues throughout history

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- With scenes of life from the perspective of nobility – hunting with falcons, servants breaching for fish and hunting wild boars for the palace – this piece, attributed to Matteo Giovanetti, embodies the reality of medieval feudal existence
 - The corpus of the piece works in service of this cultural reality and serves the purpose of perpetuating this reality in steadfast image
 - This is especially relevant considering that the Renaissance was on the horizon and the social and economic culture of Europe's society would be irrevocably changed
 - The work itself immerses the viewer in a nearly seamless 360-degree panoramic view of a countryside filled with activity. The breaks in the image occur in the doorway, two windows, and portions now missing where two temporary fireplaces were installed

- While it begins about two feet above floor level and does not extend to the ceiling, which is beamed and accentuated with heraldic devices, there is no attempt to frame or otherwise delineate its image from the architectural or decorative elements present in the room
- This represents a willingness and desire to recreate an immersive environment evocative of and idealizing the feudal society in which it was created while also accentuating the perspective of nobility for which it was created

Perspective Definition

- This image of Albertian perspective captures single point, or as defined, *linear* perspective. I would like to note going forward that there exists many other forms of perspective but linear perspective is most applicable to the Renaissance era work we'll be looking at in the next few minutes and linear perspective coupled with stereographic – commonly called 3D vision, the type using blue and red filters – persists as the dominant implementation of perspective in the work we'll be looking at up this very day.

Sala Delle Prospettive Clear

- This room, the walls painted by Peruzzi around 1515, was commissioned by a wealthy Roman merchant who owned over 100 local businesses and over a dozen ports along the coastline
 - I'd like to ask you all, what is part of the structure and what is painted?
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Sala Delle Prospettive WIREFRAME

- With a wire frame overlaid on this image of the interior of the Sala Delle Prospettive, you can clearly see how the illusionistic nature of the painting by Peruzzi creates a sense of depth and three dimensional space that does not exist
- Only the moldings above the door frame (HERE) actually enter the viewer's space and none of the apparent column-lined passages lead anywhere but the wall

- Why would someone do this?
- We have a large though not extraordinarily impressive room that has been painted to depict an authoritative, and dominating view of Rome
- Embodying both the wealth and societal stature of the client, this example of Renaissance Trompe L'oeil – or trick of the eye – and linear perspective painting projects the wealth and power of its client in the illusion of its place in space, that of a commanding presence over Rome that is not, in fact, there
- And thus the corpus of the merchant's wealth and power is expressed here through images that show impossible wealth

Sant' Ignazio Cathedral

- Here we see the apotheosis of the Sant' Ignazio cathedral, also in Rome
- Also painted in the 16th c., this work demonstrates another aspect of the mummy complex in its embodiment of faith and worldview for the contemporary spectator.
- While obviously not an example of a possible or experienced event in most people's lives, this painting works to seamlessly blend the faith of the spectator with that of their own physical reality and merge them into a unified experience
- To view this trompe l'oeil work correctly, you stand in the center of the chamber directly on top of a bronze disk. Gazing up, the viewer is drawn up from their physical reality and drawn up and immersed in the heavenly spectacle painted above them.
- Critical distance is shattered by the impressive naturalism and illusion of space created by Andrea Potezo, when in fact the ceiling itself is flat.

Sant' Ignazio Cathedral PERSPECTIVE IMPOSITION

- The technological and judicious use of linear perspective can be seen here....

Sant' Ignazio Cathedral Off-Center SERIES

- Moving away from the bronze disk, however, the illusion is destroyed, revealing the limitations of this type of trompe l'oeil displays.

- Regardless, the illusionistic and immersive qualities of this painting serve to transport the viewer – when properly aligned – into another space, one where their faith and world merge and are held in perpetuity
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In the 17th century Samuel von Hoogstraten innovates another way to specify the location of viewer to create illusion. His device, seen here

Peepshow Box

- Is called a peepshow box and, on the interior, is painted a scene of a typical Dutch home of the time,
- Hoogstraten's work in creating portable, contained spaces of illusion and immersion were, considering their popularity among well to do households, the equivalent of 17th century home theater systems.
- Gazing through a single eye hole, one would most often witness a typical Dutch home setting
- These painted settings were often augmented by flattered figures – such as persons, pets, or furniture – as so-called REPOUSSAIRS, or middle-ground figures within a linear perspective
- This setting - typical though invariably idealized – provide a permanent immersive and illusionistic depiction of life within the Netherlands from this time, again embodying the desire to isolate and preserve one's reality through the image

Peepshow Interior WIREFRAME

- With the actual dimensions of the space defined the illusion is lessened and the technique more exposed
 - The skewing of perspective and devices (see chair) to hide the illusion are visible
 - Still, the various planes still give the internal space a convincing sense of depth that confuses the senses

Hoogstraten Trompe L'oeil Painting

- Another trompe l'oeil painting by Hoogstraten, I would like to use this work highlight the change to be seen in capturing naturalistic images of the natural world...

Louis Daguerre Still Life Photo

- Here, on the right, we have a daguerrotype produced by Louis Daguerre in 1828 titled "Still Life".
- While the medium of photography, as with framed painting, does not provide a sense of immersion, photography would come to represent a lessening of the role painting as obligated to reproduce reality
- Daguerre is, in a sense, poking fun at painting with this photo, showing that it, too, can create an image of still life – coincidentally also the title of Hoogstraten's painting at left.
- Painting would continue to play a role in the immersive, plastic arts, but from this point on it is relieved of its obligation to naturalistically depict reality...

London Panorama Cross Section

- This is a cross section of Robert Baker's infamous panorama house of 1793
- Panoramas of the time were actually buildings that were entered – for a charge of course – that, from a central platform, present the viewer with a usually 360 degree view of some setting
- Robert Baker, an Englishman, pioneered the technique and technology necessary to recreate such an environment, largely driven by profit motives but ostensibly in the pursuit of creating an immersive environment
- There are actually two panoramas in this structure – SHOW METHOD OF ENTRY AND WHERE PANORAMAS ARE INSIDE

London Panorama Subject Projection

- At right we see the plan for the upper panorama, one of the London cityscape
- Tens of thousands of visitors filed through this panorama house accompanied by immense financial success for Baker
- But what is interesting is that these people – Londoners – flocked to see a city in which they all lived.

- This popularity was certainly linked to the spectacle of the image and the illusionistic quality with which it reproduced the city they knew so well

Paris Panorama Later Interior Image

- This image the interior of a later Paris panorama demonstrates the way in which viewers of these panoramas were first isolated, confined to this narrow, circular stairway in low light
- When one would emerge at the top, finding themselves on the viewing platform, both the openness and lightness of the image would be a startling contrast to the confines of the previous, winding, monotonous space
- It is reported that many, finding themselves inside so immersive an environment displaced in both location and time, would faint upon emerging on the viewing deck,
- It is possible that these tales were inflated by the companies operating the panoramas, however, to add to the mystery and allure of these attractions

- The financial success of panoramas from the early to mid 19th century is absolutely astounding and, at its peak, would give rise to investment companies that churned out panorama after panorama, raking in millions of 19th century dollars.

- The favorite subjects were, almost without exception, cityscapes, landscapes, and battle scenes, which were often used as tools of nationalism such as in the depiction of the battle of Sedan.

- The ability to implement real artistic skill on the scale of many of these panoramas is doubtful, but their popularity and subject matter certainly speak loudly to the fact that immersive environments, depicting only events or settings from reality, could provide a much desired outlet for viewers to view a static and unified place and time, again symptomatic of the mummy complex.

Edison "Feeding the Doves" Film

- Towards the turn of the 20th century Thomas Edison and the Lumiere brothers of France were dabbling in film, progressing photography towards movement

- This short Edison film titled “Feeding of the Doves” from 1896 features a rather ordinary scene of a woman tossing feed to a flock of birds
 - Many early films, similar in their audience to that of panoramas, had similarly typical scenes from everyday life.
 - As with panoramas film simply represented another means by which to present the audience’s everyday lives, the only difference with film being that illusion – that of motion – replaced what we call today a panoramic display of immersion.
 - This, as we will see in a few minutes, would not last...
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- But before discussing modern cinema and other immersive and illusionistic environments of the 20th century, there are other parallels in the plastic arts such as...

Claude Monet Three Willows

- Here we see Monet’s “Three Willows”, a panoramic, immersive painting of the pond behind his home, the subject of all his later work
- Early on his depictions of the pond behind his home progressed towards more and more immersive techniques, moving from large canvas paintings, to triptychs – or three paneled paintings – to the example seen here, which completely immerses the viewer within an oval room.
- It’s interesting to see that even in the plastic arts the drive towards immersion continued into the 20th century, even if the work itself was painted in relative abstraction
- The vast majority of advancements in illusion and immersion in the 20th century, however, would occur within the realm of cinema and its derivatives

Cinerama Diagram

- This diagram illustrates the filming and projection techniques employed by the film technology called “Cinerama”, introduced commercially in 1952
- Most people know Cinerama by the landmark film “This IS Cinerama”, a promotional film that, when it debuted in 1952, was

- the highest grossing film of the year even though it did not actually contain significant narrative elements
- TV – to compete with TV, Cinerama offered an immersive experience that TV could not
 - The technology was, interestingly, not originally created for artistic purposes but driven all the same by the fantasy of an immersive, naturalistic environment
 - The development of the optics necessary to display a huge, immersive, moving image was actually funded by the US military to train the gunners that defended bombers during WWII
 - The previous method of training, using gliders pulled by other aircraft, unfortunately often resulted in the inexperienced gunners hitting the tow plane instead of glider, thus the development
 - EXPLAIN SYSTEM
 - The experience of Cinerama was described Bosley Crowther of the New York Times...

Cinerama Advertisement

- “Somewhat the same sensations that the audience in Koster and Bial's Music Hall must have felt on that night, years ago, when motion pictures were first publicly flashed on a large screen were probably felt by the people who witnessed the first public showing of Cinerama the other night... the shrill screams of the ladies and the pop-eyed amazement of the men when the huge screen was opened to its full size and a thrillingly realistic ride on a roller-coaster was pictured upon it, attested to the shock of the surprise. People sat back in spellbound wonder as the scenic program flowed across the screen. It was really as though most of them were seeing motion pictures for the first time.... the effect of Cinerama in this its initial display is frankly and exclusively "sensational," in the literal sense of that word.” – Bosley Crowther, NYT

How the West Was Won Clip

- Films shot in Cinerama often depict expansive landscapes that both lend themselves to the massive frame and conventions of landscape painting
 - Here we have the introductory sequence to HOW THE WEST WAS won from 1962
 - NOTE TECHNOLOGICALLY REVEALING AREAS
 - This massively immersive technology thrilled audiences and even resulted in the occasional sick stomach.
 - This technology, as with panoramas, presented the natural world in huge, immersive moving images that would only increase in their ability to totally encompass the viewers senses
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- This would eventually lead to developments such as CINEMAX and IMAX theaters of today, which encompass up to 260 degrees of vision and can nearly completely disconnect the viewer from their surroundings and working towards, what Grau called in his description of immersion, a hermetically sealed environment in which critical distance is lost
- This lack of critical distance, while necessary in some physiological ways including avoiding a sense of vertigo or disorientation, moves us closer towards what Bazin described in his asymptote metaphor – we now move cinema towards reality with technology and fantasy coupled together

Sensorama Advertisement

- Other relevant developments of the time include Sensorama
- Though found almost exclusively in amusement parks in California during the 60's, this device for a nickel, would do the following..
- RUN THROUGH EXPERIENCES...
- The experience of Sensorama is still deeply rooted in analog technology – that is bound by the laws of physics and practicality. The smell of a foreign avenue may still not be able to stand up to the aroma of the park's hot dog stand, for example.
- The dramatic rise in digital computational power through the 70's , 80's , and 90's would open up entirely new and fantastic

possibilities. Based on Moore's law, that transistors in microprocessors will half in size every year, the ability for artists to create naturalistic and believable images of reality has increased exponentially. **Raw computing power ability to render digital images and environments.**

Jurassic Park Film Still

- The problem with digital technologies, of course, is that, through immersive technologies they allow artists to create believable images that have absolutely no referent in reality, as seen with the brontosaurus here in 1993's Jurassic Park.
 - This is, just to be clear, not one of my examples of immersive or illusionistic art, though there is certainly the illusion that there exists dinosaurs in the receding space of this image
 - With such illusionistic images that have no actual place in reality possible now for commercial and artistic production, it must be asked if the digital – which is separated in its medium from that which it portrays can actually provide naturalistic spaces that satisfy the fantasy of the mummy complex
 - As Stephen Prince notes in his Digital Dialectic, digital imagery can indeed depict naturalistic environments in the same way and detail as photography or cinema, but argues that the method of reproduction is simply different, not inferior or exclusive of the ability to reproduce an analog image
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- How then, is digital moving the myth of total reality forward?

CAVE Environment Diagram

- Here is a diagram depicting a CAVE environment. First demonstrated in 1991, this system balances immersion and illusion with the need to maintain a non-hermetically sealed environment for the viewer
- DESCRIBE SYSTEM OF PROJECTION

CAVE Environment Inhabitant in Virtual Space

- DESCRIBE SYSTEM OF VIEWING AND INTERACTION
- The ability to actually remove oneself from this system at any given time leaves the opportunity to escape this artificial reality and avoid what could be called a total other reality.
- Of course limitations including touch, smell, and physical space have not been addressed with this environment but the navigation of a three dimensional, totally immersive and interactive environment affords opportunities for the exploration

World Skin CAVE Implementation

- This is a still from World Skin, a application that can be run inside of a CAVE environment that allows the user to interact with a battlescape that attempts to embody the Baltic ethnic conflicts of the 1990's.
- Created by Maurice Benajoun for the ARS Technica digital arts festival in 1998, it allows the user to not only navigate this space but also interact via a camera which can take photos not of the projections, but the actual digital space at which it is pointed.
- This supplants the viewer's place in the analog world by allowing direct interaction with the underlying digital elements of the program in which one is immersed, even going beyond what could be called "meta" digital imaging

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- This piece, along with others that are increasingly harnessing raw digital processing power to depict more and more naturalistic, shaded, and detailed spaces along with such examples of interactivity are now pushing the limits of Bazin's asymptote theory
 - They are enabling users to not only blend technology, art and reality but to also partially negate the need to interact with physical space while still providing a referent in reality, realizing the mummy complex in a decidedly different way
 - This, of course, still leaves the opportunity to move forward with Bazin's notion of total cinema or reality.

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- In 1998 the British Museum commissioned Fake Space incorporated, working with various medical imaging

companies, to create 3D models of the coffin and mummy of Nesperennub, an Egyptian mummy whose coffin had never been opened

- Without breaking the seal on the coffin the technicians created detailed rendering of the mummy, its dress, and bone structure.

British Museum 3D Mummy Exhibit

- They were even able to reconstruct what Nesperennub likely looked like from the structure of the skeleton.
- These images were then displayed not in 2 dimensional image, but utilizing a CAVE environment to allow visitors to explore every part of this ancient and immortal figure in immersive, 3 dimensional space
- Nesperennub, for one, had perhaps fully realized the fantasy of his own condition, bringing our innate human desires full circle in the pursuit of immortalizing our own image

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- Building on Bazin's original argument about the mummy complex, I have historicized his thesis by showing a continuum in the desire to create immersive and illusionistic environments through the history of the plastic arts, cinema, and new media technology. Further, I have advanced his argument into the realm of the digital, emphasizing that the myth of total cinema is in fact the myth of total reality.
 - On one hand, perhaps our way of seeing is simply changing. If technology and the fantasy of the mummy complex work to change the way we both see ourselves and the world around us, is Bazin's theory necessarily bound by the conventions of perception?
 - On other, through new technologies that Bazin could not have fathomed we now find ourselves with the immense power to nearly duplicate our own environment in glorious multi-sensory immersive environments. It is now up to artists to determine whether it is, in fact, wise and appropriate to attempt to fully realize the fantasy of the mummy complex. With this possibility, the myth of total cinema may end up, as with so many other issues, becoming both a scientific and political issue – a

development only appropriate considering the immense potential of modern technology and the human psyche to both dream and abuse its own devices.

THANK YOU!