Conclusion

Vital Media

By way of a conclusion, I would like to trace briefly the journey traveled in this book and indicate how the vital nexus between spectator, film form, and the philosophical and biological discourses on life outlined here connects to contemporary discussions in film theory and theory at large. These discussions concern the relationship between nature and culture and, by extension, the sciences and the humanities; the question of the body as an organism and its relationship to the (technologically mediated) environment; the nature of matter, organic and inorganic, and of affection as that which connects, disconnects, moves, and changes matter; and the materiality of media in particular and their relationship to the environment at large.

Though, as I noted in the last chapter, Bazin used terms such as ‘organic’ and ‘the whole’ in his description of cinema, in the 1950s these terms no longer had the same connotations that they possessed for turn-of-the-century vitalist discourse. Hence, the axolotl’s development could illustrate for Bazin, as well as for Merleau-Ponty, the fact that both aesthetic and biological existence have a quality of openness: an open interaction between organism and environment; a temporality that every moment opens new possible futures; and a ‘centrifugal’, infinite spatiality that can turn everyday objects as well as a human being into the center of the universe into which they radiate. This correlation of aesthetics and biology was, as I have suggested, by no means a naturalization of aesthetics. Rather, it suggested a notion of life that does not separate ‘crude existence’ and ‘art’, but understands life to be aesthetic.1 If life is located in aesthetic and material existence, thinking about the laws of living matter, that is, biology, also yields knowledge about the nature of aesthetics, while thinking about aesthetic experience finds a correlation in the capacities of living matter.

This understanding of life as aesthetic and material, and thus of art as vital in a profound sense, posits itself against a classical understanding of aesthetics that seeks to separate these realms. This kind of separation was exemplified by, for example, G.W.F. Hegel’s approach to aesthetics:

1 The aesthetic vitalism I am tracing here could thus be configured to go back to Nietzsche’s claims about the inseparability of life and aesthetics in Birth of Tragedy.
The mitigation of the power of passions therefore has its universal ground in the fact that man is released from his immediate imprisonment in a feeling and becomes conscious of it as something external to him, to which he must now relate himself in an ideal way. Art by means of its representations, while remaining within the sensuous sphere, liberates man at the same time from the power of sensuousness. Of course we may often hear favourite phraseology about man’s duty to remain in immediate unity with nature; but such unity, in its abstraction, is purely and simply rudeness and ferocity, and by dissolving this unity for man, art lifts him with gentle hands out of and above imprisonment in nature. For man’s preoccupation with artistic objects remains purely contemplative, and thereby it educates, even if at first only an attention to artistic portrayals in general, later on an attention to their meaning and to a comparison with other subjects, and it opens the mind to a general consideration of them and the points of view therein involved.²

For Hegel, art is sensuous, but this sensuous relationship is subdued and contemplative, in contrast to the power of passions and the sense of natural existence. Art lifts the spirit out of its imprisonment in feeling and nature.

All of the authors and filmmakers I have considered in this book contest this basic approach to life and art. As I noted in Chapter 1, the contrast between Hans Richter’s understanding of film reception as a sensual bond with film’s rhythmic temporality and Wilhelm Worringer’s definition of abstraction and empathy with respect to painting illustrated that as a temporal and ‘physical’ art form, film broke with a contemplative attitude and aligned itself with the spectator’s temporal being, her life. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate how Uexküll’s Umwelt theory became inspirational for artists and theorists because it provided a way to conceive of life as creative engagement with the environment, an engagement they then sought to give shape to in art. The turn-of-the-century discussion of Stimmung as transient, embodied resonance with external impressions likewise sought to grasp art’s imbrication in the fabric of sensuous experience (Chapter 3). Bazin and Kracauer, each in his own way, go even further and ascribe to film a vital aesthetic that does not lift the human being out of her imprisonment in nature, but seeks to allow her to grapple with nature on a new plane, by acknowledging her material existence (Chapter 4). As Kracauer put it, film ‘undermines idealist and anthropocentric positions on the level of reception, in the

² Hegel, Aesthetics, 49.
ways it engages the materiality of the spectator—the human being “with skin and hair”.3

When we relate Kracauer’s and Bazin’s film aesthetics to the philosophy of nature and science in Merleau-Ponty’s writings, we effectively flatten both the categorical difference between natural expression (phenotype) and aesthetic expression. Already in Bergson’s work, we find the implicit idea of a profound interconnection of nature and culture—that is, the historical determination and variability of cognitive processes, nervous tissues, bodily formation and comportment in conjunction with cultural techniques. Bergson’s ideas reappear in the texts of Walter Benjamin in the 1920s and 1930s on the innervation of mass media and modern machines. The imbrication of nature and culture is also central to French anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular André Leroi-Gourhan’s Gesture and Speech from 1964.4 In his account of primordial evolution, Leroi-Gourhan asserts that certain mechanical conditions (the freeing of the hands and the visibility of the face in particular) guaranteed a certain liberation from the environment and the development of what we now call human. Also in the 1950s and 1960s, Canguilhem, Raymond Ruyer, and Gilbert Simondon, like Merleau-Ponty, reintroduced vitalism into the debates in the history and philosophy of science. We should understand their notion of vitalism as a kind of post-vitalism, that is, a vitalism independent from the scientific divide between vitalism and mechanism. Rather than a dogmatic stance, vitalism for these thinkers afforded a certain freedom and independence from narrow, determinist scientific frameworks, a position that emphasizes interrelation, connection, creativity, affection, and temporality in its approach to problems, questions, and tasks, whether these latter are intellectual, emotional, or physical in nature. Just as ‘life’ in this post-war lineage is increasingly understood as something relational, rather than as an individuating property, vitalism, in this sense also becomes a kind of medium, namely one in which, or by means of which, a critical, problem-oriented and unrestricted approach to the life sciences becomes possible.

As an example of the natural aesthetics, or aesthetics of nature, outlined above, let me briefly turn to Kracauer’s discussion of the organizing principle of certain films he champions. Like Bazin, Kracauer finds in certain narrative films an arrangement or mode of expression that corresponds to film’s affinity for life, namely, films featuring ‘found stories’

4 Though certainly, Claude Lévi-Strauss was an important influence and corollary, too. See Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked.
or ‘episodes’, such as the neorealist films of de Sica, Fellini, or Rossellini. What characterizes these narrative forms is a material (biological) structure that, like the axolotl or any other living being, comes into being as a result of the interaction between internal development and external forces. For Kracauer, both found story and episode well up out of the flow of life as suggested by the film, and disappear back into it. The found story consists of environmental material that temporarily congeals into a narrative—Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) is one of Kracauer’s examples—while the episode can contain events and situations that are not merely derived from the environment and may be contrived; examples of the latter are *Mr. Hulot’s Holiday* (Jacques Tati, 1953), *Umberto D.*, or *L’Atalante* (Jean Vigo, 1934). Neither found story nor episode ever ‘develop into a self-contained whole’. The found story always remains ‘part and parcel of the raw material in which it lies dormant’; it is a momentary crystallization of environmental forces and forms, as such, a ‘pattern’ in the water ‘produced by some eddy or a breeze’, which constantly seems to ‘dissolve into the environment from which it is being distilled’. The episode is like ‘a monad or cell’ that might combine to form a greater story ‘like the cells of an organism’. Yet this story remains open-ended and thus maintains its relationship with the flow of life, rather than closing itself off. Each episode, as well as the film as a whole, remains ‘porous’, ‘permeable to the flow of life’ out of which it rises; as a consequence, the film ‘is full of gaps into which environmental life may stream’. Kracauer champions these types of film because they capture and grasp life not only on the basis of the qualities of the medium of film, but also on the basis of their organization. The quality of an organic film, in other words, depends not on a closed-off whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, but rather on an open ‘aggregate’ that differs from the sum of its parts.

The notion of organicity to which both Kracauer and Bazin make recourse differs vastly from a traditional understanding of organicism. Their conception of organicity has more in common with Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) definition of non-organic life, of the ‘Body without Organs’, than classical notions of organicity. One can see a ‘line of flight’ from Kracauer and Bazin to Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that ‘[t]he organism is not at all the body, the BwO [body without organs]; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes

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5  Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 245-46, 49.
6  Ibid., 252-56.
upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences’.7 The question remains, though, to what extent Deleuze and Guattari’s neologism of the ‘body without organs’ reveals and to what extent it conceals. Their new term helps us to highlight a difference in thinking about the vital organism, but it also conceals the longer, nuanced history of which their radical ‘break’ is a part. It seems hardly coincidental that Kracauer, in talking about the found story, takes up the same image that Bazin used in ‘De Sica’—and which Bazin drew from Bergson—to describe the interaction between organism (story) and environment, where the story ‘involved the environment instead of being part of it; like a magnet, the film’s fictional core attracts its repertorial elements which group themselves accordingly’.8 This open concept of organization operates by means of forces that organize matter both inside and outside bodies. What counts is the pattern or assemblage this force of affection produces, rather than any pre-constituted body.

This emphasis on a pattern of affection governing both film image and narrative organization that I distill from Bazin’s and Kracauer’s film aesthetics resonates with recent theories of materiality in the humanities that expand upon the ‘bodily turn’s’ focus on the finite body. These theories, in some ways, continue the cine-vitalist strands of thought and practice traced in this book. After years of neglect of the body and materiality in deconstructivist and poststructuralist theory, in the 1990s scholars turned their attention to the role of the body in engaging with both media and the immediate environment. In film studies, feminist scholarship has played an important part for this turn, shifting its attention from psychoanalysis—which had enabled it ‘to reclaim the body from the realms of immanence and biology in order to see it as a psycho-social product’—to matters of embodiment.9 Linda Williams has emphasized that we should understand key film genres—melodrama, porn, horror—as ‘body genres’ that make sense of, and with, visceral reactions.10 In Vivian Sobchack’s work, Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology became an important touchstone to understand how the spectator’s body and the film body engage one another.11 Laura Marks and Jennifer Barker have stressed the corporeal engagement of the spectator

7 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 159.
8 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 250.
9 Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Psychoanalysis and the Body’, 270. See also Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.
10 Linda Williams, ‘Film Bodies’.
11 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye and Carnal Thoughts*. 
with the film, in particular the role of the sense of touch. How can one acknowledge the specificity of bodies and incorporate it into theory without falling back into naturalization and essentialization of the female body in particular? Additionally, scholars such as Donna Haraway, Stacey Alaimo, Anne Balsamo, and others addressed the fact that the natural and cultural determination and potential of specific bodies significantly includes technology as well as bioengineering. Work on the posthuman condition has also traced the dissolution of the (human) subject and the finite body by interrogating questions of subjectivity, of the relationship between humans and animals, the organic and the non-organic, and technology and nature.

In recent years, building on this work, attention has focused on describing and carving out new definitions of both matter and affect. As the position of the subject and the body have become unstable, so has the account of our perception and interaction, including feelings or affects. This shift from a ‘bodily turn’ to an ‘affective turn’ thus entails a shift of focus from ‘being’ to ‘doing’, a flattening of differences between individuals, species and finite machines, and an interest in the specifics of materialities, their interactive properties and their dynamics. Vitality and technology have become complementary terms, and rather than insist on a specificity of life, theorists including Patricia Clough, Brian Massumi, Mark Hansen, and Luciana Parisi have argued for vital qualities governing material dynamics—or affections—more generally, a tendency Marie-Luise Angerer has described as ‘an enlargement of the purview of what is called life: growth, change, development, adaptation, sentience, and suffering, these have become (virtually) universal traits . . . What would have been dismissed out of hand as pure anthropomorphism not too long ago is now in vogue as a critical objection to conceptual anthropocentrism.

One way of reading this book, then, is as a historical account of what has recently gone by the name of ‘vital materialism.’ By joining theory and historical context, however, I have sought to stress the co-evolution

12 Laura U. Marks, The Skin of the Film; Jennifer Barker, The Tactile Eye.
13 Donna Haraway, Modest_Witness and When Species Meet; Stacy Alaimo, Bodily Natures; Anne Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body.
14 For a forceful account of the posthuman that engages with animality, see Cary Wolfe, What Is Posthumanism?
of media, science, and theories of life (and, by extension, the human)—an evolution that places new media in a long line of media. Film is not just an object that authors such as Epstein, Kracauer, Balázs, or Benjamin think about; they recognize its agency in the world, its actions that change and reorder our bodies and environments. Technological media—and here I concur with new materialism—constitute reality and are not merely tool or prosthesis. Karen Barad has captured the idea that ‘distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge from’, their entanglement and co-constitute one another with the neologism ‘intra-action’. As much as digital technologies and new media have ushered in this thought, I believe that a focus on what technologies do, rather than what they are—that is, a shift from ontology to agency and relationality—enables a historical account of media to be specific while nevertheless avoiding essentializing differences between old and new media. A conceptual shift away from agents, finite bodies, and technological media as entities also allows us to be more open to the idea that (human) life and our environment have been profoundly altered in the technological age—historical changes the terms ‘posthuman’ and ‘Anthropocene’ seek to capture, respectively.

My invocation of a cinematic vitalism is, in many ways, an attempt to carve out how cinema and human beings—spectators, makers, thinkers—have intra-acted, and how ‘life’ describes that in which both partake, the force field that continues to reorder the properties, abilities and interactions of both. The aesthetics of the moving image, its flow, its evolving, contrapuntal forms, their ‘growth, change, development, adaptation’, the ‘sentience and suffering’ the images produce—these qualities, to return to Angerer’s description of the ‘purview of life’ in recent theory, highlight the fact that film aesthetics, as I have historicized it here, describes and structures material processes that new materialists and affect theorists have more recently sought to grasp as well. With their focus on material affection in mind, we can understand better how the vitality of the moving image perceived, described, and put to work by film theorists, philosophers, and filmmakers is less a matter of ontology and more of an activity; this vitality outlines a change in perception and possibilities for new (intra-)actions. The use of the term ‘life’ by early film theorists signaled the deep disturbance

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16 The term ‘vital materialism’ was coined by Jane Bennett. See Bennett, Vibrant Matter.
17 Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 33.
18 On posthuman, see Wolfe, What Is Posthumanism? For a compelling account of what was at stake when proclaiming the Anthropocene, see Joanna Zylinska, Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene.
created by the encounter with cinema: even more forcefully than other technical media before it, it upset the division between individual, living autonomy and technical phenomenon. By granting the experience of 'life outside itself', the cinema created both a new environment for human bodies and ushered in a new phenomenal body. Rather than tracing this affection or intra-action on a purely conceptual and theoretical level, I have sought to focus on several protagonists who framed it in sophisticated and innovative ways: Richter, by attempting to orchestrate the affection of temporal regimes; Painlevé, by combining film technology, animals, scientific explanation, and a queer anthropomorphism; Balázs, by thinking about the role of film form for the atmospheric entanglement of film and spectator; Bazin, by identifying cinematic realism as the mediation between our existence and the film world; Kracauer, by further exploring the physical connection between spectator and moving image; and so on.

This book thus stresses the extent to which technological media are life media, that is, specific milieux that enable (and disable) visceral, emotional, and intellectual engagements with the world. In the wake of the dominance of digital technologies and virtual realities, scholars have returned to the question of the materiality of media, and the terms 'media ecologies' as well as 'environmental media' have become important touchstones to capture how the understanding of an agential, affective materiality applies to our understanding of media technologies. The notion of media ecologies focuses on, in Matthew Fuller’s words, a ‘dynamic system in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of those connections, and always variable, such that it can be regarded as a pattern rather than simply as an object’. These emergent patterns are by no means simply computational, however, rather should be understood in the sense of the vital patterns that Bergson, Bazin, and Deleuze describe in their image of a magnetic movement organizing iron filings. This vitalist understanding of media ecologies reaches into Fuller’s language as well, when he seeks to analyze ‘how elements of complex medial systems ‘cooperate’ to produce something more than the sum of their parts’ or how ‘the capacities and behaviors of media objects, systems, and dynamics are changed, potentiated, and mobilized when brought into abnormal or inappropriately preformatted relations to one another’.

19 Friedrich Kittler’s Gramophone, Film, Typewriter is a forceful account of this history of interfaces.
20 Matthew Fuller, Media Ecologies, 4.
21 Ibid., 6, 9.
Con considers the way in which the materiality of media is bound up with the environment at large. Bazin’s and Kracauer’s emphasis on the material connections between spectator and film—for Bazin, via the light reflected off objects, impacting the silver nitrate on the plate, and projected onto the screen; and for Kracauer, the notion of a spectator who has “sensuous and immediate” contact with “life” in the cinema, experiencing by incorporating film images in the manner of ‘blood transfusions’ rather than a superficial encounter—are picked up in the notion of a material medium as a ‘living medium’ or ‘mode of being’ and ‘mediation’ as ‘the primal connectivity shared by human and nonhuman worlds’, by scholars such as Sean Cubitt and John Durham Peters.22 Cubitt, Peters, and others, by privileging mediation over communication, are infinitely expanding our canon of what constitutes media, including animals, light, clouds, nitrate, coal, and water.23 This focus on mediation also highlights how we partake in, and depend upon, a multitude of mediations at any given moment, all of which come with their own, vastly different temporal and spatial scales, from the nanoseconds of computer processes to the melting of glaciers.

If meaning arises from material interactions of all kinds, rather than residing as a property in objects, then the domains of the natural sciences and the humanities, mathematics and aesthetics, themselves intra-act. Important work in the history of science has recently demonstrated the malleability of scientific questioning and reasoning, the creativity and imagination involved in scientific theories and worldviews, and thus science’s direct partaking in domains usually reserved for the humanities (though often it requires the reading of theoretical scientific texts by humanities scholars to detect this).24 Scientists such as Jean-Henri Fabre, Hans Driesch, Claude Bernard, and Jakob von Uexküll, who reflect on the philosophical implications of their scientific work and who are aware of the way scientific experimentation intra-acts with worldviews, are therefore a crucial component of the probing of life by the images and people in this book. Many more cross-connections between science, film and philosophy than the ones outlined here exist, creating a dense, co-evolving network. The musical principle of counterpoint that became so central as formal expression of vitality for Richter and Eggeling, for example, is also picked up

22 See Bazin, ‘Ontology of the Photographic Image’; Kracauer, Theory of Film, 170, 297; Sean Cubitt, Finite Media, 2, 4; John Durham Peters, The Marvelous Clouds, 17.
23 So-called German media theory, following in the footsteps of Friedrich Kittler, has been an important theoretical foundation for this expansion of the notion of media.
24 Great recent examples include Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, and Jimena Canales, The Physicist and the Philosopher.
by Uexküll, who detected in counterpoint the central ‘motif/motive of form development’ and the central formula of how structures in nature relate to one another: ‘Were the flower not beelike/ And were the bee not flowerlike/ The consonance could never work.’\(^{25}\) Meaning arises from the counterpoint between an object and a subject, rather than distinct properties. Another example of the vital network between disciplines sketched in this book is Ludwik Fleck’s theory of the genesis and development of scientific facts published in 1935. Fleck highlighted how moods (\(\textit{Stimmungen}\)), in particular the dominant \(\textit{Stimmung}\) within a given thought collective (i.e., a group of researchers agreeing in their goals and methods and thus, ultimately, their ‘truths’), determine scientific questions, experimental setups, explanations, and theses: ‘Cognition [\(\textit{Das Erkennen}\)] modifies the knower [\(\textit{den Erkennen}\)] so as to adapt him harmoniously to his acquired knowledge [\(\textit{das Erkannte}\)]. This situation ensures the harmony within the dominant view about the origin of knowledge.’\(^{26}\) Fleck recognized that scientific facts are the results of dominant, variable moods, and thus not independent, timeless entities, but rather social, historical phenomena.

As a final example of the arc spanning from this book to contemporary theory, and from aesthetics to science, I want to return to Bazin’s and Kracauer’s notion of organization. Their opening of the organism to the environment currently finds affirmation in the sciences. A branch of biology known as ecological developmental biology, for which the axolotl is an important model organism, investigates the interactions between genetics and environment on an animal’s phenotype and has found many examples of variability that seem to confirm Merleau-Ponty’s hunches.\(^{27}\) For Merleau-Ponty, the axolotl’s organic openness served as an example of the post-war dissolution of the contrast between ‘materialism’ and vitalism. Along with this dissolution, Merleau-Ponty found a ‘mutation of biological concepts’ such as ‘that of behavior, then that of information and communication. Introduced at the beginning in order to renew the conception of the animal-machine (Watson’s psychology without a soul, the nervous system as an electronic machine), these notions are [now] charged with a meaning which

\(^{25}\) Uexküll, \textit{A Theory of Meaning}, 190.

\(^{26}\) Ludwik Fleck, \textit{Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact}, 86-87; \textit{Über die Entstehung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache}, 114. The German original, by using permutations of the word ‘erkennen’, expresses the dynamic of ‘cognizing’, ‘cognizer’ and ‘cognized’ much more beautifully and poignantly.

\(^{27}\) See, for example, Ehab Abouheif and Gregory A. Wray, ‘Evolution of Development’; and Scott F. Gilbert, ‘Ecological Developmental Biology’.
is no longer mechanical. While I have foregrounded the ambivalence of the notion of behavior (which eventually brings Merleau-Ponty to Uexküll in his lectures), Merleau-Ponty’s mention of ‘information and communication’ also hints at a trajectory that leads, via cybernetics, to a certain neo-vitalism in new media and computational discourses, especially around the issue of artificial life and affective computing.

Cinema and other screen arts have, in recent years, been privileged reflective media (or, to use Benjamin’s term, ‘second technologies’) to capture the material intra-action of organisms, technologies, and objects. At first glance, it might seem as though contemporary global art cinema, and the so-called ‘Slow Cinema’ in particular, have simply developed an aesthetic of slowness to celebrate cinema as a formal antidote to the fast switches of TV programs, computer windows, and cell phone interfaces. This would be a story of cinema finding its uniqueness as medium within a fast-paced, distracted, media-saturated society. Against this somewhat nostalgic image I argue that much of recent art cinema is in fact investigating the manifoldness of media flows and their adherent temporal and spatial orders, not least by disrupting our habitual engagement with the world. Films such as Lisandro Alonso’s Liverpool (2008), Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Once Upon a Time in Anatolia (2011), or Cristi Puiu’s The Death of Mr. Lazarescu (2006) eschew driven plot lines, dramatic acting and affecting close-ups in favor of long shots and long takes, which allow us to observe the behavior of characters in very specific milieux as though we are watching an axolotl learning to swim. The way in which these films affect us, then, is not based on identification with a specific protagonist; rather, it comes from much further away, and relates to the affections that attach to the interactions in the films: emptied of direct utility and purpose, gestures and actions refer us back to the dormant possibilities inherent in all interactions and open up ‘our receptivity toward the intensities, atmospheric values, and resonances of the moment’, as Lutz Koepnick has put it. This unfolding of

29 See, for example, Stefan Helmreich, Silicon Second Nature; Richard Doyle also discusses Alife in Doyle, Wetwares. On affective computing, see Rosalind Picard, Affective Computing, and Luciana Parisi and Erich Hörl, ‘Was heißt Medienästhetik?’.
30 An example of an analysis of slow cinema based on an opposition to contemplation and distraction can be found in Ira Jaffe, Slow Movies. Throughout this book, and with the help of 1920s thinkers such as Kracauer, Richter, and Benjamin, I have sought to argue against the opposition of contemplation and distraction. Many would argue that slow movies in fact foster a distracted reception.
31 Lutz Koepnick, On Slowness, 4.
possibilities allows cinematic mediation to return to us a quality Kracauer sought to grasp with the term 'experience':

We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavoring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmentized. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.32

Experience, if we read Kracauer against the background of contemporary media theory, need not depend upon a coherent subject and an authentic, unmediated encounter; rather, we might grasp the nexus of experience and mediation better, especially in our present time, if we understand it as instances of understanding, sensing, the vital media flows of which we are a part.

32 Kracauer, Theory of Life, 300.