

V. F. Perkins' Functional Credibility and the Problem of Imaginative

Resistance

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In *Film as Film*, V. F. Perkins attempts to establish criteria through which we may judge excellence in film art. Rather than developing a proscriptive theory based on media specificity arguments found in such classical theorists as Rudolph Arnheim and Andre Bazin, Perkins finds that a pluralistic understanding of features of cinema, celebrating both the photographic image and montage, offers a better ground for developing criteria of judgment. Perkins' project is that of meta-criticism, the domain of philosophical aesthetics in the narrow sense. Rather than merely assessing the concepts employed by film critics, Perkins attempts to identify those properties of a film that contribute to its aesthetic value.

In the preface to *Film as Film* Perkins begins by saying that "[t]his book aims to present criteria for our judgments of movies."¹ Echoing Beardsley's trinity of unity, complexity, and intensity, throughout the course of the book Perkins develops three interrelated criteria on which to base an evaluation of film: credibility, coherence, and significance. The distinction between credibility and coherence is not always explicit and the best kind of significance is constrained by the other two criteria. Credibility emerges as the foundational criterion, which Perkins says is necessary for there to be significance or coherence. As with most filmic elements, he argues that the "significance of the treatment, and its artistic integrity, is conditional upon its credibility" (p. 94).

To understand Perkins' project we need to have a clear grasp of his fundamental criterion. In this article, I will assess whether Perkins' criteria of credibility serves as a useful standard for film criticism. Most of the effort will be devoted to charitably reconstructing the notion of credibility by bringing together some of Perkins' particular comments. Then I will briefly examine whether Perkins has successfully achieved his goal of developing standards of judgment by holding credibility up to his own criteria of successful meta-criticism: "The clarification of standards should help to develop the disciplines of criticism without seeking to lay obligations on the film-maker" (p. 59). Although I argue that Perkins fails to achieve his goal, his criterion of credibility remains a useful mechanism for evaluating artistic attempts to achieve a particular end, namely spectator immersion. A limited domain of application for his criteria might seem to leave us with little more than an idiosyncratic expression of his classicist artistic taste, but *Film as Film* also contains valuable insights relevant to the so called "problem of imaginative resistance."

Credibility

Perkins' notion of credibility is difficult to pin down, since he uses it in at least three different senses and he never makes it clear how they all fit together. We must keep in mind that Perkins offers his criteria as evaluative measures of how well certain aspects of a film function in light of a larger artistic goal. He argues that "[a]nything possible is also permissible, but we will still have to establish its value. We cannot assess worth without indicating function" (p. 59). So, we

might ask, what is the purpose that a filmmaker seeks to achieve for which an element must be credible? A working answer might be that the filmmaker needs to preserve the "illusion" of the fictional world. We will return to this notion and the questions of why this is or should be the filmmaker's goal and how this goal fits into a larger artistic purpose.

Despite his avowed anti-essentialism, Perkins thinks that the value of the elements of a film is tied to the nature of the medium. "As an illusion-spinning medium, film is not bound by the familiar, or the probable, but only by the conceivable. All that matters is to preserve the illusion" (p. 121). He continues to describe how credibility is dependent of both the "inner-consistency of the created world" and on a "*physical* dimension" which amounts to something like photographic accuracy (p. 121). Sometimes it seems as if Perkins flits between these two forms of credibility in an ad hoc fashion to fit his tastes, but it is possible to come up with a coherent concept that fits his stated purpose.

Credibility in the Ordinary Sense

Just what does Perkins have in mind for his criterion of "credibility?" What does it mean for a film to be credible and why should filmmakers want to make credible films? Noël Carroll suggests that Perkins' original notion of credibility is strongly informed by a naïvely realist view of the nature of photographic pictorial representation.² Carroll calls this our ordinary notion of credibility, which can be described as the degree to which a film corresponds with the ways things are. This obviously is not all that Perkins has in mind, but it seems to be a standard

underlying many of his judgments of the credibility of certain visual aspects of film.

Reminiscent of Bazin, Perkins argues that the photographic basis of film creates expectations on the viewer's part that in turn put constraints on the filmmaker's ability to manipulate features of the artwork. He argues that "[f]aced with the camera's obstinate literal-mindedness (which means our literal-minded approach to the camera's products) [. . . and] since the image insists on its relationship with visual reality" (p. 121), filmmakers are constrained if they want to achieve credibility. This constraint manifests itself in limitations on the manipulation of the plastics of the cinematic image.

Even though Perkins explicitly limits the constraint by reference to internal consistency, his examples implicitly rely on an assumption that divergence from plastic realism threatens credibility. Focusing on the visual, Perkins says only that "[a]n image must be credibly derived from the created world in order to maintain its reality" (p. 121), but his criticisms of *Red Desert* (Michaelangelo Antonioni, 1965) are not consistent with this weak form of physical credibility. For Perkins, Antonioni's use of the color of a bedpost to express the emotional states of a character is incredible in its particular kind of divergence from reality. Perkins' condemnation of Antonioni's expressive manipulation of object coloration only fails on a strong notion of physical credibility, indicating that Perkins has something else in mind when he attacks this example. Rather than assume inconsistency, we should ask how Perkins might be able to hold a

consistent view of physical credibility that would allow for criticisms of Antonioni and celebration of fantasy worlds of highly manipulated set color.

Perkins focuses on the constraints of image manipulation but often he applies a weaker notion of physical credibility to elements other than lighting and expressive coloration. He praises diegetic sound sources, but never explicitly, and attacks non-diegetically motivated soundtracks. The weak form of physical credibility is also applied to musical numbers, where Perkins operates with a notion of credibility based on a concept of rules of divergence from reality. Perkins thinks that internal consistency allows for certain kinds of weak physical credibility, hence fantasy films have something *Red Desert* lacks.

Credibility as Internal Consistency

A full, strong form of physical credibility, taken as correspondence to reality, cannot be what Perkins has in mind, since one of his favorite examples of excellence is the musical *Carmen Jones* (Otto Preminger, 1954). He argues that the relationship between the image and our "common knowledge and experience of the visible world [. . .] cannot be one of simple correspondence" (p. 122).

Unless we assume that Perkins' is incomprehensibly incoherent, we must think that he has a more varied notion of credibility at play.

Not entirely distinct from his concept of coherence, perhaps Perkins' notion of credibility boils down to something like playing by the rules of the game. Perkins suggests that these rules are created in contradistinction to reality, in that the various aspects of film should only diverge in consistent and roughly

equivalently constrained ways from the world of perceptual experience. In other words, film-makers are advised not allow animals to unexpectedly start talking half way through the film without any explanation or surprise on the part of the characters or any hint of insanity or shift in perspective. Likewise, ordinary objects such as fruit should not sometimes appear battleship gray. However, this notion of credibility does not completely capture what Perkins intends.

Often what seems to be at work here is not just the constraints of an ordinary notion of internal consistency, but a criteria derived from strong physical credibility. Perkins says that "[t]he credibility of an artificial world, the reliability of an artificial eye, depend on the consistency of their relationship with our reality and on a system of deviation from the norms of our experience" (p. 124). Weak physical credibility amounts to consistently abiding by these rules of divergence. However, this formulation is not fully comprehensible, since it is not clear exactly how aspects of films, like non-diegetic music, diverge from or converge with reality. One may press the point further, since it is even less obvious how the red bedposts in *Red Desert* are any different from non-diegetic music. After all, *Red Desert* is arguably consistent in its use of coloration to externalize the emotional state of its main character. If mere internal consistency was the issue, then Perkins lacks grounds for criticism.

In relation to the image, Perkins seems to be arbitrarily restricting certain visual aspects, like lighting and expressive coloration, while making exceptions for the décor in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) without principle. At one point Perkins makes reference to diegetic music, saying that the sound

source is credible, as if to imply that many uses of non-diegetic sound are incredible in some way, though to make this explicit would have raised questions with the concept itself. Notably, does the criterion of credibility apply to the story-world or to the presentation of the story-world? Credibility as internal consistency and credibility as correspondence with reality are both restricted to discussions of the story-world, but Perkins also criticizes the presentations of story-worlds as lacking credibility.

Perkins acknowledges that the story-world's specific rules for divergence from reality seem completely unrelated to many aspects of cinema, such as camera position and movement. He thinks that for the most part, the camera is not bound by the credibility constraint. However, he does criticize techniques like moving the camera's perspective out of earshot for the sole purpose of hiding dialogue. Though this technique may highlight an inconsistently omniscient narrator, it does not exactly fit the pattern of failing to respect the rules of divergence from reality. It is not clear how one would assess whether a camera moving out of earshot—clearly motivated only to hide crucial dialogue—diverges or converges from reality: The standard is simply not applicable. With only two notions of credibility—strong visual physical credibility and weak, internally consistent physical credibility—Perkins' concept seems both arbitrarily applied and uninformative.

Since *Red Desert* is consistent throughout in its color-coded divergence, it is not clear what requirement of credibility it fails to achieve. Also, since we are not supposed to think that the bed posts and the fruit cart in *Red Desert* are

alternatively colored in the story-world—they are merely presented expressively—any criteria about how the story-world can diverge from reality is inapplicable. For the most part, what seems to get Perkins are not just visual inconsistencies, like the blue haze around Hitchcock's birds, but specific types visual divergences from reality in the plastics of the film. To many readers of *Film as Film*, it may not be clear why Perkins thinks that some visual aspects are governed by strong physical credibility and others are not.

If all he offers are these two requirements, then Carroll's analysis seems to be correct: Perkins is equivocating between two notions of credibility, neither of which will do the work he wants from the concept. However, we can combine the two notions into a coherent whole, by finding method in what seem like mere equivocations.

Credibility as Convention

Perkins tries to head off objections from modernist films, saying that different standards would have to be applied to judge much of the work of Godard, "where the fictional action attempts neither credibility not the absorption of personal meaning into a dynamic pattern of action" (p. 190). Carroll is critical of his ad hoc scope refinement, arguing that "[s]urely Perkins has no way of supplying a principled procedure for accepting the anti-naturalistic conventions of stylistically consistent genre musicals while rejecting stylistically consistent exercises in cine-Brechtianism."³ However, many of Perkins' flaws can be redeemed if we understand the more limited goals of his project. At one point he limits his scope

to "photographic fiction" (p. 61), although his actual scope is far narrower than he suggests. Perkins is indeed offering an aesthetic based on what Carroll calls expressive realism, and his theory cannot serve as a prolegomena for all future film criticism, but the credibility requirement starts to make a bit more sense if we limit it to the goals of one form of dramatic realism.

What Perkins' concept of credibility amounts to is a rough composite between internal consistency and correspondence with reality in the form of convention. Perkins is insistent that the filmmaker must remain out of mind, and luckily, the paint of convention can make the artist invisible.⁴ The "system of deviation from the norms of experience" is not just a matter of internal consistency with a divergence pact, but an agreement that itself takes into account conventional rules. Antonioni's gray fruit and Eisenstein's lions (in *The Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) both lack precedence and end up failing to be credible. The weight of convention seems to lessen the requirements of strong credibility on certain visual aspects of the film, but why?

Perkins' criteria lead us to criticize any aspects of the film that point up its artifice—any technical errors or non-conventional usages. By offering examples of the incredible, Perkins describes what conventions are acceptable for him not to become aware of the filmmaker's technique. Thus, we could develop a criterion of Perkins' credibility that might be fit his tastes. It would include rules like the following: plastic visual manipulation is to be limited to the fantasy film; diegetic musical sources are to be preferred since less attention will be drawn to the film itself, though some non-diegetic sound is acceptable if it is conventional

as in the musical (if the songs are good); special effects should not be noticeable; many varieties of camera movements have become conventional, so most are acceptable, however the perspective should not be motivated to block information from sources that we have been able to perceive prior. We can assume that jump cuts and crossing the 180 line are also ruled out, as are any unfamiliar, flashy, or faulty techniques that draw attention to the film's artistry.

Earlier we looked at two notions of credibility, a weak notion that requires internal consistency in how the film diverges from reality and a strong notion that limits manipulation of visual aspects to appearance of the ordinary world. We can make sense of Perkins' criticisms of Antonioni if we see him working with a third, conventional notion of physical credibility that, roughly, conventionally allows for peculiar uses of color in fantasy films but not in dramas. Following any consistent set of rules of divergence from our experience of reality is not enough to lend credibility to a film; the rules themselves must have sufficient enough precedents for the viewers to see film as usual. However, it is not clear if the conventional always makes a rule credible, or if there are rules that are limited in other ways, say through some peculiar epistemic stinginess on the part of our visual system, or through the requirements of internal consistency. To answer this question, we will have to explore the reason behind the credibility requirement.

Belief as the Goal of Credibility

Throughout *Film as Film* Perkins develops what looks like a quasi-Coleridgean notion of belief and the crucial importance of spectator immersion within the fiction. He mentions belief at least 11 separate times in the course of the book, each time in relation to credibility.⁵ Echoing some of Bazin's comments on the psychological effects of the presumed authenticity of the photographic image, Perkins argues that "[i]t is the belief in the actual (if past) existence of the objects on the screen which enables us to discuss movies in terms of credibility" (p. 67). Earlier we noted that Perkins' notion of physical credibility stems from what he calls our "literal-minded" view of the photographic image. This photographic legacy gives film a particular power, a "peculiar magic" (p. 67), of believability for Perkins that must not be jeopardized.

The criterion of credibility seeks to protect this believability by restricting all aspects of the art form, so long as they could jeopardize belief. Perkins suggests that "the primitive magic which creates belief in the real presence of the object shown soon loses its power" if it is relied on too heavily (pp. 65-66). There is reason to think the Perkins subscribes to an illusion theory of film spectatorship and that his criterion of credibility is in service of what Currie calls an illusionist theory of cinematic realism.⁶ Perkins makes several remarks indicating that this is what he has in mind:

Changes in film technology have all tended in one direction: towards completing the illusion of reality. (p. 44)

Increases in realism are necessarily extensions of illusion. (p. 43)

The most 'realistic' films are the ones which convey the most complete illusion. (p. 64)

Although Perkins sounds like an illusionist, his comments on what the beliefs are that underlie the "illusion" reveal that he is not presenting an entirely naïve illusionist theory. In his most explicit commentary on what he means by belief, Perkins argues:

But even if we do not believe in the actual presence of the things we see, a film remains credible so long as we are not led to question the *reality* of the objects and events presented. Verbal statements and propositions are seen as either true or false: if we believe them, we believe them; if not, not. Sights, sounds, and, particularly, stories—the things which we believe *in*—present a much more complex problem. Belief here can occur in so many ways and at so many levels. (p. 66)

Given that Perkins is not using "belief" in the ordinary sense, and is making a confusing contrast between believing something and believing *in* something, it is unfortunate that he did not just choose a different word. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Perkins is more concerned with our being asked to question the "reality" of the story world, than with how a filmmaker might create a "belief" in the story world in the first place. Other comments make it clear that by belief *in* Perkins has in mind something akin to engaged imaginings of fictional worlds. He argues that "[o]ur involvement is a game as well as a dream: literally, a game of make-believe" (p. 144).⁷ As such, it is safe to conclude that

throughout *Film as Film*, the principle targets of the credibility criterion are factors that threaten immersion.

As his discussion on "belief" reveals, instead of exposing a naïve illusionism Perkins seems somewhat undecided about just how to explain the power of cinema. Rather than presenting a simple illusionist theory of cinematic realism, *Film as Film* makes the most sense if we see Perkins as struggling to explain how, when, and why spectator immersion is threatened. Perkins thinks that immersion involves a bit more than merely being engrossed in the story world, perhaps even requiring "the belief in the actual (if past) existence of the objects on the screen" (p. 67). However, given his reluctance to use "belief" in the ordinary sense, it is not clear exactly how much more a film must do to be credible, except to keep the viewer engaged with the story world. As his examples indicate, Perkins thinks that the most prominent obstacle to spectator belief is any indication of the artist's technique. To make a credible film, the filmmaker must recognize the limitations of spectator "belief" and avoid presenting any obstacles to immersion.

Along these lines, we can develop a response to Carroll's charge of Perkins' unprincipled inconsistency regarding the conventions of musicals and Brechtians. The artist should stay invisible. Otherwise, we will end up "noting that we respond to our awareness of the device than to the state of mind it sets out to evoke" (p. 85). Technical flaws and non-conventional devices tend to draw us into either a mode of artifact appreciation or technical scrutiny, both of which

stand in the way of content appreciation. Conventions designed to thwart the effort of spectator immersion should be avoided for the same reason.⁸

Just what does spectator immersion get us? Perkins offers only a partial answer to the question of why spectator immersion should be a goal of the director. In criticizing Antonioni's use of expressive coloration in *Red Desert*, Perkins argues that the "director's effort to point to the meaning of an action blunts the raw impact of the action itself. The process is self-defeating since it calls attention to the director at the expense of the events *through* which he set out to convey meaning" (p. 86). This is one of the few clues he gives as to why he thinks that spectator immersion is critical. Partly, Perkins sees immersion as a "peculiar magic" of cinema that should be respected, but he does not base the importance of belief on purely medium specific grounds. The belief is a means towards the end of the appreciation of the significance of the content. Hence, the filmmaker must try to achieve significance within the constraints of credibility. However, Perkins never explains why there might be other forms of significance, arising, say, from authorial asides, which do not require this degree of immersion.

The criterion of credibility is, roughly, a set of limitations put on filmmakers who are pursuant of significance. Perkins argues that "a film remains credible so long as we are not led to question the reality of the objects and events presented" (p. 66). However, he gives us few reasons to see spectator immersion as the means to all forms, or even the most important kinds, of excellence within the domain of photographic fictional cinema.

Evaluating Functional Credibility

Earlier, we noted that Perkins argues that "we cannot assess worth without indicating function" (p. 59). The function of credibility is to maintain spectator "belief" in the reality of the fictional world. The three forms of credibility describe limitations that a film must abide by in order to achieve the goal of maintaining spectator belief in the reality of the fiction. The ordinary notion of credibility and the implicitly developed strong physical credibility are constrained by the visual requirements that the photographic image puts on the image. Internal consistency, and abiding by the rules of the fiction, can loosen the requirements of strong, visual physical credibility. However, internal consistency is not enough if there are not conventions established for a particular type of divergence. The area most in need of conventional precedents is that of the visual aspects of film – mainly lighting and color. Apart from the visual, Perkins does not think that elements such as sound or camera movement are as constrained by physical credibility. As such, we can charitably describe Perkins idea of credibility as *functional credibility* under conventional, internal, and photographically based constraints. Perkins does a poor job making this explicit, perhaps because of the implications this requirement entails.

A serious problem with Perkins' project is that films like *Red Desert* do not aim at the type of illusionism that Perkins finds necessary to achieve certain effects. He would seem to have to write Antonioni off as he does Godard. The degree to which Godard attempts to destroy the illusion of convention, perhaps marks his purpose as radically different from Antonioni's. Whatever the

differences, Perkins' application of his criteria does not suggest that Antonioni has merely failed at a goal that he did not have, but that his goal should have been different. If this is what is motivating Perkins' criticism, then the crippling conservatism of his criteria is more extreme than any of the theorists from whom he tries to set himself apart. In conflict with his expressed intent, his criteria amount to a proscription — saying "what is good for the medium" — what goals the artist working in the medium should have, not just what filmmakers should do if they have certain goals.

On Perkins' composite criterion of credibility, it is not clear where exactly physical credibility constricts convention, except the standard of not drawing attention to the fiction. In some cases, such as the unreliable narrator in Roman Polanski's film *The Tenant* (1976), it is difficult to say if the internal inconsistency is allowable since it may not draw the viewer out of the fiction. It is difficult to say whether this is increased immersion or takes one out of the fiction. If not, then on functional grounds Perkins' might be able to waive the consistency requirement, since immersion is not threatened. However, if we have to criticize this move strictly because of the change in the rules of the game, or if spectator immersion is disrupted, then all such unreliable narrator structures will fail Perkins's test, regardless of what convention may apply to them or the acknowledged excellence of the film.⁹ The standards of application are far too unclear if not arbitrarily restrictive. What function could such a restriction serve? Perkins wants the criteria to help us find directors who are cheating, creating weaker forms of significance, but the criterion rules out too many other forms of

achievement. For example, he unfoundedly assumes that internally expressive relationships between actor and environment require spectator immersion and that they are the primary source of value in cinema.

Perkins mentions the décor in *The Wizard of Oz* as conventional and internally consistent, meeting the weak form of physical credibility. However, if we ask about the décor in Eric Rohmer's *Lady and the Duke* (2001), then we have an even more difficult case. The décor is perhaps internally consistent, not quite conventional, though sets of paintings are common in musicals. It certainly does draw attention to the work as a fiction, as do any literary framing devices. It is not clear how to judge such devices on Perkins' criterion, nor clear whether the films would be better if they passed Perkins' test.

Not only is the criterion difficult to apply, but it is established with the goal of immersion in mind, which not is not a universally applicable prerequisite of excellence. In fact, it cannot even be applied across the costume-drama sub-genre. What Perkins gives us is a composite concept to test for the achievement of a particular goal appropriate to a large class of fictions, but not a clarification of the universal standards of film criticism.

Perkins and the Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance

Although Perkins does not succeed in providing universal criteria of judgment for film excellence, his criterion of functional credibility is one of the most nuanced accounts of what is currently called the puzzle of imaginative resistance in regards to the art of the moving image. The puzzle of imaginative resistance is

actually a host of related problems, of which the primary issues are the aesthetic problem, the imaginative problem, and the fictional problem. As Kendall Walton¹⁰ describes the three, the aesthetic problem is whether resistance to imagining the immoral to be fictionally praiseworthy can affect the aesthetic value of a work of art. The imaginative problem is to explain why people are willing to imagine some fictional scenarios and not others. The fictional problem concerns whether some things, such as blatant contradictions, can be thought of as fictional.

Perkins' project is directed at the imaginative aspect of this puzzle.

The term imaginative resistance is somewhat misleading, since what is meant by imagination is far from merely entertaining a proposition as fictional. Instead, by 'imagination' people have in mind a more complex engagement with the thought of fictional worlds, a form of engagement that is much closer to immersion. By immersion, I mean interested, focused attention on a fictional world. Affective reactions are often the product of immersive fictions, and affective reactions in turn help increase immersion, since they help focus attention. In *Film as Film* Perkins has something similar in mind when he says "Emotional reactions may be strongly invoked but intellect and judgement are never completely submerged" (p. 140). The primary way in which a film becomes incredible is when intellectual distractions threaten emotional engagement, or immersion.

Why we are willing to imagine some situations and not others is an arid, uninteresting question. What we are really concerned with is why some situations are more effective when imagined than others. For instance, why are

thoughts about flying up and hitting your head on the ceiling of the Guggenheim so much less effective than thoughts about falling off one of the upper levels?¹¹ Perkins' grapples with this problem, often by reverting to a vague notion of belief. Yet the central issue in the development of the criterion of credibility is, why are some fictions so much more effective at provoking emotional responses than others?

Perkins provides a causal account a few levels deep, but never cuts to the root of the issue. When a viewer is drawn out of the fiction, they cease imagining, in a broad sense of the term. Rather than engaging with the fictional world, they are put in a position to reflect on the construction of the fiction. When viewers surface from fictional engagement, the fiction becomes less effective at provoking affective reactions that benefit from an interested spectator. Perkins sees immersion, or what he calls belief, as necessary for the functioning of the fiction. He goes on to catalogue the various ways that the narrative fiction film can de-immers, or surface the viewer. What may seem like a failure on Perkins' part to supply a unified theory of the devices antithetical to immersion is actually a feature of his book. *Film as Film* presents a significant problem of imaginative resistance, in that it presents engagement with movies as a multifaceted phenomena—robust in some strange ways and fragile in others.

Why is it that "the camera can do nothing to lessen the viewer's belief in the fiction" (p. 122) and that the "image will underwrite our belief in the sound," (p. 95) but that expressive coloration can disrupt immersion and musical numbers often do not? The problem is complex and Perkins' has a better grasp

of the complexity than do many current theorists. For example, Walton¹² and Currie pay little notice to the manner in which fictions present the story-world; instead, they focus on the content of the fiction. *Film as Film* gives us a few reasons, but each needs to be developed further.

One significant feature of his analysis is that it recognizes familiarity and style as key ingredients to the puzzle. Of course, Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein will never look realistic, but characters in the middle of a drama can burst out into song without giving viewers a moment's pause. Most significantly, this has nothing to do with our beliefs about the fictional world. Much of the writing on the problems of imaginative resistance has focused on viewer's inability or unwillingness to imagine certain story worlds, but what *Film as Film* shows us is that the problem is much broader. Imaginative resistance is not merely the product of the particular content of a story world, but also results from how a fiction conveys the story world.

The central interpretive puzzle of Perkins' book—how is it that musicals are credible but Eisenstein's lions are not—highlights the importance of the means of conveyance. In most musicals, it is not fictional that the characters are singing, but merely talking. The songs are usually just expressions of the emotional intensity of the situation. The same is true of Eisenstein's lions and Antonioni's fruit stand, but the lions and the fruit have a jarring effect and most musical numbers do not. Although we have not explored the details, Perkins has done much to explain the contrast, but more importantly, he raises the issue, thereby revealing the scope of the problem of imaginative resistance.

Conclusion

Perkins' criteria are applicable if one wishes to avoid Brechtian distancing or modernist highlights of the techniques of the artist. However, living up to the demands of functional credibility certainly would cramp the evolution of technique, perhaps more so than the standards of either of the two classical film theoretical traditions he criticizes. Perkins is not just saying what is good for the medium; in addition, he suggests that what the medium has become is what is good.

I have identified three seemingly incompatible notions of credibility and seen how Perkins trades on an ambiguity between them. I attempted to bring the three notions together into an idea of functional credibility, but found that this notion has a limited scope. Not only is the concept difficult to apply, seemingly amounting to anything but a clarification of standards, but the application blindly rules out cases of acknowledged excellence. Perkins leaves the value of spectator immersion, and why it should be, relatively unsupported. As a result, the composite notion works against Perkins' statement of intent. Rather than criteria of evaluation, Perkins has presented us with a rough analysis of the power of convention, and how it relates to a vague notion of belief required for spectator immersion. Nevertheless, *Film as Film* exposes the complexity of the problem of imaginative resistance in regard to the art of the moving image.

Notes

¹ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* [1972] (London: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 7. Further references to this work will be in the text.

² I've tried to stay clear of summarizing and rehashing Carroll's comments. Part of my reconstructive effort has been to defend Perkins from some of the criticisms Carroll makes of his notion of credibility. I develop two additional forms of credibility found in Perkins' text, in addition to the two developed by Carroll. See Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

³ *Philosophical Problems*, p. 226.

⁴ This is not to say that convention is wholly arbitrary, but it is out of scope to discuss the basis of perceptual patterns and training. For present purposes, it is enough to note that Perkins thinks that convention is radically constrained by photography.

⁵ See *Film as Film*, pp. 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 83, 86, 94, 95, and 122 for some of his more important comments on the role of belief.

⁶ See Chapter 1 of Gregory Currie's *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷ Perkins explains a bit more about what he means by "the film-dream" (p. 140).

⁸ Although undeveloped, it should be noted that Carroll briefly proposes a similar interpretation of credibility as that which is not jarring.

⁹ The inability of Perkins' criteria to pick out cases of acknowledged excellence in cinema is one of Carroll's major complaints. Carroll argues that the consistency requirement would rule out *Duck Soup* (Sam Wood, 1933) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (Luis Buñuel, 1972) (*Philosophical Problems*, p. 229). I've attributed to Perkins a composite notion of credibility that could possibly stand up to this criticism, if his consistency criteria could be waived in cases where spectator immersion was not threatened. However, the goal of spectator immersion itself potentially rules out many similar cases, and Carroll's overall

objection stands.

¹⁰ Kendall Walton, "On the (So-Called) Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance" (forthcoming in Shaun Nichols, *The Architecture of the Imagination*, Oxford University Press).

¹¹ I develop this question as a problem for the thought theory of emotional response in Aaron Smuts, "Haunting the House from Within: Disbelief Mitigation and Spatial Experience," in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophical Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), pp. 158-173.

¹² Kendal Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Harvard UP: London, 1990).