

The Invisible Beauty of Cinema

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### Summary

The beauty of cinema consists not in the Physical image, but on a Metaphysical level in the story. By the Paragone problem, Aesthetic Metaphysics was lost, while the Stimulus Theory became superior instead. Especially Metz, denying Typage and Langue, reduced cinema to the enumeration of images. However, the meanings of images postulate the Genre as Cinema Langue in advance. After that, it is modified by the audience's Doxa and at last corrected by the film story itself. Although we cannot see the Practical Idea directly, we catch the glimpse of the beauty negatively, refutatively or ontologically. The moved cinema experience not only clarifies the true meaning of things in the film, but also crushes down our distorted prejudice in the Reason, so that it is able to convert even our whole daily life.

### Introduction

Under the name of a "beautiful" film, we tend to think that the images should be of course beautiful. Nevertheless, the images of actually "beautiful" films are not necessarily beautiful. Far from that, they are often ugly and dirty. Even the strongest hero is barely standing dingly with cuts and bruises at the climax.<sup>1</sup> Where is the beauty? What is the strength? Why does such an ugly and dirty scene move us?

It is, however, no surprise. Many stories follow the process of death and rebirth like Alchemy. Only after what we can see with our eyes has been subjected to the crucible, something really important is reborn inside of our heart. It is the invisible beauty of cinema.

## 1. The Seventh Art vs. Materialism

"Ut pictura poesis," poetry like picture. This is a famous phrase in Romanic Horace's (65 B.C. -8 A.D.) ARS POETICA (361). Although it had described how to taste poetry, the original meaning was forgotten, and misunderstood as if it were the poetic ideal. Thus, a picture wishes for lyricism and a poet looks for depiction after that. In the background of this misunderstanding, there was Aesthetic Metaphysics transcending all categories of art media, the Idea of Platonic beauty.

However, comparing the ancient sculpture of Laocoon discovered in Rome in 1506 with Vergil's (70-19 B.C.) poetry AENEID, Lessing (1729-81) made the point in LAOCOON (1765) that there is a deep divide between "Tempo Arts" which copy the time arrangement as the sign-single-line and "Space Arts" which copy spatial arrangement as the sign-spreading. According to him, sculptures and pictures are Natural Signs and are absolutely spatial, while words are Arbitrary Signs. The latter does not copy the temporal nature directly by phonemes, but transforms the whole into "Eusynopton (ευσύνοπτον, something easily visible together)," which gives us an overview perspective. For this reason, words also can express spatiality somewhat, but that has a limit naturally depending on the nimbleness or intuitiveness of words. On the other hand, if Space Arts dare to tell the temporality, it would lose the original nature as the spatial signs.

The contrast between picture and poetry is called the "Paragone (comparison) Problem." Henceforth, arts were divided strictly by two categories; the Space Media or the Tempo Media. The beauty of arts came to be discussed as the harmony with the substance of each of the media. Thus, Aesthetic Metaphysics transcending the kinds of the arts media was lost, and the beauty of arts was disparaged as what were just in the materialistic dimension.

When cinema appeared, Canudo (1877-1923) wrote THE SEVENTH ART DECLARATION (1911) and praised it. He thought that should certainly unify Tempo Arts (music, poetry and

dance) and Space Arts (construction, sculpture and pictures). But when he would name it “the brand-new seventh art” a question arose; where has the theatrical art gone in which temporal and spatial arts have existed in unity since the ancient times? In fact, the many early films were only the theatrical plays filmed as they were. Canudo could not explain the importance of Aesthetic Metaphysics of cinema well. He said at most that cinema should be not the extension of theater and that cinema should express something immaterial.

At the same time in theater, although Stanislavski (1863-1938) in Russia was groping for the naturalistic direction making a point of the interiority, Meyerhold (1874-1940) was influenced by Symbolism and got power in the mainstream of the Materialistic theater movement in Soviet Union after the revolution. According to Meyerhold, the actor’s performance should be only the element to stimulate the audience, so that it should not need any of the interiority which Stanislavski asks for. He said that the interference by the individuality of things that really exist should be suppressed to a minimum as pure signs.

Spirited Eisenstein (1898-1948) thought that Meyerhold’s Constructivism would be better realized especially in Montage of cinema. Therefore, he tried Typage, the technique to use a typical thing which can serve as “pars pro toto (a part for the whole)” as the Image Sign.<sup>ii</sup> Here, a film does not copy the temporal circumstances directly, but each image is the same Arbitrary Sign as a word, and it gives films Eusynopton (overview perspective) by the Montage. In fact, even how often the cinema at the time used to use close-up, the image quality without sound was so bad that it had no way to express such interiority, as will and feeling, but by the superficial signs like exaggerated gestures and countenances. Therefore, the Good had to look good, the Bad look bad, and the Beauty be beautiful.<sup>iii</sup>

## 2. Metz’s Spectacle Signifié

After the World War II, young Metz (1931-1993) thrust himself into the cinema theory with

Saussure's General Linguistics. He took up the Paragone Problem in cinema again as if it were a quite new problem. According to him, a film is the “Spectacle Signifié (shown exhibit)” as Langage (speech act). He said that the Signifiant (what is shown) is obviously ‘itself.’ In order to develop this opinion, he first distinguishes the layer of the “Discours Imagé (image narration or pictorial statement)” and the one of the “Discours Filmique (film narration or Montage statement).” On the other hand, he denies Typage and Langue (cinema language system). (Le Cinéma: Langue Ou Langage? 1964)

He says that Discours Imagé consists of raw images and that the Signifiant (what shows) and the Signifié (what is shown) are ‘here sticking each other’ so that we can understand it ‘self-evidently.’ This would be the same as the Natural Sign that Lessing named for Space Arts. Nevertheless, he dislikes Typage which Eisenstein put forward. He says that Discours Imagé is ‘un-discrete;’ namely it has the wide range of expression not digitally but analogically. According to him, each shot is already an Image-Sentence of Parole (utterance). There does not any fixed Image-Word element of Langue (language system) which is indispensable. No image is dependent on a Paradigm (the table of examples). We need a new invention of “Image-Hapax (ἄπαξ, the unique word used only once)” each time a story is presented by cinema.

Metz supposes as well that there is no Signifié apart from the Signifiant also in the layer of the Discours Filmique. For example, if we picked up only the image of the third dog of the three, it could not anymore have the Signifié that it is the third. It is because the Montage Signifiant (the showing montage) is always bearing the Montage Signifié (what the Montage shows). That is, the connotation (the potential indication) of Discours Filmique gets always already together with the denotation (the concrete object) on the layer of the Discours Imagé. However, the expression on the layer of the Discours Filmique is much opener than the Discours Imagé. He says that there is the room of art as Langage (speech act) just here.

In short, by insisting the sameness of Signifiant and Signifié and of Denotation and

Connotation in cinema, Metz's concept of the Spectacle Signifié reduces all films to only the visible images. His denying Typage and Langue aims to eliminate the metaphysical universal representation in cinema. He wants to call a film as Langage for only once with the term of Hapax or art, since his cinema theory has been tracing just the way of the argument of Nominalism (the thesis that universal is only the commonality of thing's name and that there is no Idea which should be the ideal for things commonly) in the mediaeval Problem on Universals. With this operation of the exclusion of Cinema Metaphysics, he believes vainly that there were in cinema nothing but the images or nothing more than the images and that we could study all of cinema only by analyzing the images.

### 3. Genre as Cinema Langue

However, Metz's premise that image is the same as seeing and that the Natural Sign is clair et distinct is philosophically too naive. In PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS part II (1951), Wittgenstein (1889-1951) mentions Jastrow's Rabbit-Duck as an example in order to make an issue of the fact that Intuition of our Sensitivity has already ruled the aspect of Understanding. That is, while called a 'rabbit,' it seems to be a rabbit, but if once called a 'duck,' it will look like a duck instead. Thus, he has assumed "Language Game (Sprachspiel)" as what supports the aspect making it seem to be XX. Hanson (1924-67) is also discussing "Theory-Ladenness" (1958).<sup>iv</sup> What a scientist sees as certain specific chemical experiment equipment seems for a layman to be only bits and pieces of bottles and pipes of glass.

As well in cinema, the audience who has not ever seen Spaghetti Western could not distinguish the hero and the villain for instance. Both seem dirty and what both do is also dirty. Their appearances are quite similar. However, we know which is which from the beginning, far from it, before going to the movie. The top star is familiar to us by the other films in the same Genre. The Genre of films gives our Sensitivity a certain aspect in advance. It defines what is what we see on the screen. Without the Genre, we cannot judge even what it

looks like. Genre is the Language Game of cinema that Wittgenstein proposed and that supports our aspect for many films as the aesthetic theory or framework.

Based on many actual films, we should say that each film belongs to some Genre as Language and that each shot or Montage is also understood only under the Genre. That is, any image of a film is able to be interpreted not by the image itself but by referring the Genre or Cinema Metaphysics. For example, as image (on the layer of Discours Imagé), even when a cat is thrown at the wall and gets flat, it in Cartoon is what we should laugh at, although it in Psycho-Thriller would terrify us. Similarly as Montage (on the layer of Discours Filmique), even when a person suddenly sings out and starts dancing, we understand it in Musical as an expression of an upsurge of feeling, but it in Serious Drama shows the insanity of the character. Even the trans-genre film needs the name of Experimental to understand as trans-genre.

In the first place, a feature film has to complete the story in 120 minutes. For this reason, it has to invoke a lot of Typage established already in the Genre. By the support of them, what seem to be XX becomes what is XX without the explaining episode. We recognize it to be XX since we know the Genre of the film and since it is ruled in the Genre that what looks so should be XX. For Example, in an Action film a box with the complicated wiring and the time up counter should be a time bomb, although we have never seen such a thing really but in other Action films. That is, it is not that every image is the Signifiant as a Natural Sign that means the Signifié to be XX directly, but the very Genre as Cinema Language makes each image be a Signifiant as an Arbitrary Sign that means the Signifié to be XX from outside of the film. Therefore, we should name it "Cinema Metaphysics."

Cinema Metaphysics exists not in any film itself, but on the side of the audience. What the image is is decided by what it looks like for the audience with the Genre or the TPO. Therefore, any image itself is not the image of anything without the audience. A picture in a film is only a fragment of physical light. If the filmmaker wants to express XX with some

image, he begins with the premise of the audience's expectations of the Genre and use the image that the audience should recognize as XX by the Genre. Thus, the filmmaker's way to express by image is provided only by the Genre as Cinema Languge on the audience' side. This is Gadammer's (1900-2002) Fusion of Horizon, and Jauss's (1921-97) Reception Aesthetics is also born here.

In a Genre, each Typage where it looks like XX makes the image have the meaning that it is XX. However, this is not its only function. The Typage suggests further the existence and the expanse of the world consistent with it. If it looks like a door, then it should be a door and there should be the outside world as well. Thus, the fragmental things shown as images in the film build up a big world to an extent never shown in the film. We understand not only the fragment but also the whole world they suggest. Therefore, a film is the "Grand Spectacle Invisible," exceeding the Spectacle Signifié by far.

For example, the most important turning point like a murder scene or a bedroom scene, etc. often jumps without the actual images. Nevertheless, we understand by the world-consistency what is not presented explicitly. The blank makes the meaning more impressive. What is shown as image is in fact only the temporary scaffold for understanding the building of the film. We see not the visible image, but the invisible whole world by the Gestalt Inversion of the figure and the ground.

#### 4. Theme-Intentionality of the Story-Dynamics

However, the world is not the story. Even when Typage could weave up the world of the film, the story in it is open yet. The meaning of each thing in the film is prescribed not only by the Genre as Cinema Languge, but also by the whole of the film, and the latter is superior to the former. Nevertheless, the whole of the film is never given, until the film has ended. Therefore the meaning is prescribed tentatively by the Genre of the film and, as the story develops, it

should be defined again more strictly by the story of the film itself. In addition, the first meaning and the true one are often quite contrary. A man who looks like good in the beginning is often, in fact, bad. However just for the reason, the story rather has the significance to bother to tell.

This meaning change is the Story-Dynamics. Since Metz has reduced a film to a series of still images unjustly without the audience as if it were a sort of Space Arts, he has overlooked the experience of the audience where the meanings of the various things are changing as the story progresses. It is why he has misunderstood that all meaning of images in the film were Hapax, because he has considered it only in the still form of a film that has already ended or the mode of Entelekheia (έντελέχεια, state in goal). It is a matter of course that the meaning of the story is only revealed at the end of the story. For the very purpose to define the common meaning uniquely, the story has to be told until completion.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) discusses in POETICS as follows. A tragedy must be an "imitation of the completed act" (1449b). The act must be "the one whole with unity" (1451a) as a story (μῦθος). The unity that gives the beauty to the story has to have the order of the parts and the volume of the whole where the fate of the protagonist must convert from happy to misery or from misery to happy in a reasonable way (1450b). In order to be able to recognize this conversion, the whole must be Eusynopton or what gives us the perspective view from the beginning till the ending (1451a).

However, how do we who live always only in the present time get the Eusynopton of the temporal whole story?<sup>v</sup> Augustine (354-430) describes this problem in CONFESSIO (398), the 11th vol. that neither the past nor the future exists. He says that we are however able to have these only as the present memory (Meminit) about the past and the present expectation (Expectat) about the future (28.37). Based on Pseudo-Aristotle's RHETORIC TO ALEXANDER and Leibniz's (1646-1716) Possible World Theory, Baumgarten (1714-62) says in AESTHETICA (1750) that when the audience has the similar examples already on his



own side, he believes it and gets the expectation (Anticipationes) based on the examples (484).

However, in the beginning of the film we do not know what the story is, so we would not be able to find any similar example of us. Nevertheless, at least we know the Genre of the film. If not so, we would not even want to see it. We choose a film by the Genre. Therefore, we invoke other films in the same Genre as similar examples and we can get the expectation even in the beginning of the film. As the original story of the film progresses, we revise our expectation uniquely and get the accurate meaning at length in the ending.

Metz claims that cinema should be Langage (Speech Act). An act has the aim generally. In the case of Speech Act, the aim of the act i.e. the reason to tell is expressed as the told content itself. That is, a film has a theme which the maker is trying to tell with the film. However, what is the reason to bother to make a film or the theme of the film actually? Referring the existing films to this day, it seems to be so-called Plato's Practical Idea; life, love and good; freedom, courage and justice; friendship, family and peace, and so on. Probably, to be a father, a mother, a politician, a lawyer, a detective, a doctor, a teacher, a soldier, etc. are also a sort of Practical Ideas as well.

In the beginning of the film, the audience understands images of things in the film provisionally based on the Genre or the other existing similar films. However, the audience finds after a while that the story of the film has an original aim to tell a certain theme or to discuss a certain Practical Idea. Now, the audience invokes his own Doxa or prejudice on the Practical Idea in order to understand images and to make an expectation. However, the twisted result of the story in the ending exposes the distortion of the audience's Doxa and shatters original expectations. From here, he rather gets the breakthrough-pass to a brand-new aspect of the Practical Idea. With it, every image in the film is reread in the correct meaning. Not only that, the new aspect makes the audience's whole life change.

As the conclusion of AESTHETICA, Baumgarten approves of the fictionality as Possible World and hews out the way to quest the truth by Poetics (Literary Arts) in fiction as well as by theories in knowledge (505-613). Although he ranks Sensitivity below Reason as “Analogon Rationis (imitation of Reason)” according to Plato-Leibniz’s schema, the Sensitivity is rather superior to Reason in Kant’s meaning, because a sensitive story, especially a film, intends Practical Idea of the highest rank ruling even Reason. The beauty that we catch the glimpse of in the ending of the film not only makes us understand the true meaning of things, but also makes our philosophy, or our way to see and think of things, change radically. It is the resulting moving experience that impacts and changes the principles by which we live.

##### 5. Strategy to visualize the theme of cinema

It would be indeed better when there is the Image-Beauty in cinema or the visible beauty on the layer Discours Imagé. But, even if so, the Image-Beauty for the pleasure of the sense is only secondary to the Story-Beauty as art. The Story-Beauty is transcendental over all categories of arts, so that it can be kept even when it is translated and adapted to other languages or medium of arts. A good story is also good in any language and in any form of novel, film, or radio drama.

However, by the nature the Story-Beauty, or the true figure of the theme, lacks such visible Natural Sign as we can show as ‘this’ directly. It is the eternal unreachable aim that films try in vain. Although cinema is a visual art, the theme it tries to show is not a visual existence. This critical dilemma shifts the aesthetic position of cinema radically. While the beauty of the Space Arts and the Tempo Arts are only subjects on the senses, the beauty of cinema is essentially not a sensuous problem.

A theme of a film cannot be shown as any individual thing. However, as Metz mentions, a

film can show only an individual thing. How is this dilemma solved in the actual works? Citing Magritte's work for the material, Foucault (1926-84) plays again with the Paragone problem between picture and language in a magazine paper "This Is Not A Pipe (Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe)" (1968). He points out here that we have confused as what is actually XX with only what is seemingly represented as XX. (The 5th Speculation<sup>vi</sup>)

What seems to be XX is not always XX. Although the most parts in a film are subject to the rule of the Genre and Typage, the most important thing i.e. what concerns the theme of the story is rather not what it seems to be. What seems to be good may be in fact bad and what seems to be bad can be, at last, good.

Concerning the Practical Idea, cinema uses the story to ultimately examine what seems to be XX. This method resembles Socrates's Dialectic (διαλεκτική, the way through conversation) which Plato pictured. So, we will call this way of cinema "Diaistortie" (διαιστορτική, the way through story). This would be just the Demonstration of Beauty which Baumgarten was asking for.

First, Diaistortie often takes the Negative Strategy. This is the way to deny what seems to be the Practical Idea but is ultimately not, and to show the genuine plainly as what remains. It may be the so-called 'alchemic' story of death and rebirth. The way is like engraving a sculpture by carving out parts of redundant stone. It can be further divided to the following three:

- A) Lack, Miss or Search of what should be the true Practical Idea
- B) Conflict at the diverging point: Which is the true way to the Practical Idea?
- C) Pathetic Comedy by pursuing the imitation of the Practical Idea

Second, there may be the Refutative Strategy of Diaistortie. In order to break a Doxa (prejudice) that all the crows are black, it is enough to show only one refutative example of an existing white crow. A film never can show the whole of a kind with the image. However,

the counterevidence is individual, so that it can be the very proper material for a film. The story tries to prove that what does not seem to be XX is also just XX in fact; a father who is not like a father, a policeman who is not like a policeman and a sweetheart who is not like a sweetheart may in fact be. It breaks our Doxa (δόξα, prejudice) that what is XX should seem to be XX. It makes clear that the essence of being XX does not depend on whether it seems to be XX. Simultaneously in the process of the proof, it gives a glimpse of there being something more important in order to be XX truly than to seem to be XX, although it never specifies what it is.<sup>vii</sup>

The third is the Ontological Strategy of Horror, Comedy and Action films. Many of semiological cinema researchers dislike and despise these Genres as trifling. It is however because these Genres will deny the ground of the semiologicality of things before the problem whether these are a Natural Sign or an Arbitrary Sign, so that a semiologist can never treat them. What is shown is in fact the “Thing Itself (Ding an sich),” before any human Reason in Kant’s (1724-1804) meaning. Normal things are positioned according to the usage in the Nomos (νόμος, norm) of Dilthey’s (1833-1911) “Life Linkage (Lebenszusammenhang)” as Heidegger’s (1889-1976) “Familiar Thing (Zuhanden).” However, the key existence of Horror, Comedy and Action interrupts the Life Linkage as a raw Physis (φύσις, nature). It is not what we can recognize as something, but the purely existing thing and we never know what it is.

The third Ontological Strategy is the most important for cinema, because it is particular and peculiar to cinema. The Negative Strategy and the Counterevidence Strategy are possible also in novels and the like using Diaistortie. However, novels have already been depending on the semiologicality, so that it cannot treat the thing that has not been named yet. For example, just when we have called something a ‘monster,’ then it is already the so-called common monster tamed in the Nomos or the human daily world. On the other hand, only cinema can show what is incomprehensible absolutely as it is.

Using this advantage as the breakthrough, cinema can express Horror of Anxiety where there is no certain object. Since every image should be “pars pro toto (a part for the whole),” a thing without semiologicality or what is incomprehensible as anything will also project the incomprehensible world where the Nomos has been broken. In here, not only the aspect for understanding things, but also further the understanding framework becomes uncertain, so that even the meanings of all other things fall into suspense.

In Comedy, everything betrays the Nomos or our expectation of the function of it more positively.<sup>viii</sup> Ignoring social rules, these things play freely as Physis. It is however the raw world lurking behind our mockery of the reality. Showing such a truth, Comedy flows out our over-expecting Doxa as Catharsis and liberates us from the prison of the stiff thinking and living.

Furthermore, the hero in the Action film is living on the basis of Physis. He is an incomprehensible existence foreign to our Nomos. Although the Nomos threatens him over and over, he cuts his way out by the Bricolage to find the extraordinary application that the Nomos has never assumed.<sup>ix</sup> It is the “Creative Destruction” that Nietzsche advocated.<sup>x</sup> The fresh aspect revives not only the hero in the film, but also us the audience. It gives us the courage to break our daily slumber and to confront the hiding crisis.

Conversely, when our actual life is filled with unidentifiable anxiety, stories also reflect the chaos. However, such chaos is burned out in the story, while only something immortal will be shown there negatively. Although it is never able to be depicted with any image, we get the conviction that there is ‘it’ certainly.

Anyway, a story makes a room for Practical Idea in Reason as well as Kant did in thought. A story is people’s philosophy to live. Guided by the direction of the invisible loadstar, we can go on firmly even among a lot of phony in the disorder of the real world.

## 6. Conclusion and View

To be sure, cinema is made of images. However, the meanings of images consist in Cinema Metaphysics existing outside of the images. Thus, the meaning of each image in a film becomes clear gradually; in the beginning by the Genre of the film as Cinema Langue, then by the audience's Doxa on the theme of the film as the reason why the filmmaker wants to tell something with the film, and in the ending by the true figure of the theme itself solved through the story.

However, the Practical Ideas set as the themes of cinema are not individual things. Therefore, it cannot be shown with any image. We can only catch the shadow by the Negative, Counterevidence or Ontological Strategy to examine what it seems to be ultimately through Diaistortie.

The true figure of Practical Idea implied by the film not only clarifies the meaning of images and things in the film, but also changes our whole daily life, moving our heart deeply, dispel our old Doxa and cutting our way into a new fundamental aspect to live. It modifies the meaning of everything in the daily life, furthermore even the significance of our own existences.

Especially the Ontological Strategy of Horror, Comedy and Action films impacts us. Inversely using the limit that every image in a film has to be "pars pro toto" (a part for the whole), it dares to show just one of what is not anything but only exists and upsets our idle life. The odd thing collapses our prison of Nomos and lets us go home in Physis. We recognize that our daily life is rather just a shadow and find that there is something more important.

The aesthetic impact is never the stimulus for our Senses as the Image Beauty but the

challenge against our Reason as the Story Beauty. In this meaning, Sensitivity is superior to Reason. Even in cinema the Story Beauty is more essential than the Image Beauty as well as in a novel. In addition, it can show the row existence without name differently from the novel. The experience where the structure of our Reason changes drastically is the invisible beauty of cinema that sincerely charms us.

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<sup>i</sup> For instance, see *ROCKY* (1976). The hero loses the game, but we realize the beauty of the true strength at the yet standing hero.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, his essay; “Through Theater To Cinema,” 1934.

<sup>iii</sup> However, Meyerhold whom Eisenstein respected came into conflict with Stalin’s regime and was executed in 1938, while Stanislavski, rather, was nationally authorized.

<sup>iv</sup> Hanson, Norwood R.: *PATTERNS OF DISCOVERY*, 1958, ch. 1.

<sup>v</sup> Because of this temporal difficulty also Aristotle had to reword Eusynopton as “Eumnemoneuton (εὐμνημόνευτον, something easily memorable).” (1451a)

<sup>vi</sup> However, this sentence was deleted in the book version in 1973.

<sup>vii</sup> For example, the father in *LADRI DI BICICLETTA* (*THE BICYCLE THIEF*) is poor and cheap without any social dignity as a father, but he is the very father who has the firm love and trust with his child.

<sup>viii</sup> In Keaton’s comedies, every stone rolls down, every branch breaks down and every wall falls down.

<sup>ix</sup> Consider *FIRST BLOOD* (1982) for instance.

<sup>x</sup> Strictly speaking, there is not the term “Creative Destruction (Schöpferische Zerstörung)” in Nietzsche’s works, although it characteristically represents his thought all the same.