

# Exploring Aesthetic Transitions: *The Interplay of Painting and Cinema*

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**Abstract:** *There is a fundamental difference between cinema and painting. In cinema, the image is mobile, whereas the painted image is static. Painting captures the world and brings it home; it achieves this through its static and immutable nature. "In cinema, images are in motion, they transport us from the place where we are to the scene of the action. (. . .) Painting brings us home. Cinema takes us somewhere else".<sup>1</sup> Regarding this, today we reflect on the influence of cinema on painting, that is, showing its desire to reflect movement and the search for new frames. For this work we place three explicit characteristics in cinema and that are transposed in painting, namely, the artificial management of light, framing and the possibility of reflecting movement,<sup>2</sup> and which are our fundamental premise, along with the necessary recognition of cinema as one of the fine arts, just as painting, music, sculpture and literature would be. Thus, it is of our interest to address two significant areas, the path that goes from the advent of cinema, with I. - The precision and ephemerality of its acts, the transition II. - Of the light that illuminates. . . , that fleeting moment and random, until the unprecedented gesture. Thus, we establish a permanent dialogue between cinema and painting, we propose a first exercise that addresses key works of painting for this dialogue, we interweave the presence of some painters and explain their contributions, we go from romanticism to impressionism, to finally rehearse a brief closing action. This article aims to explore the artistic dialogue between painting and cinema, emphasizing their shared pursuit of capturing movement and ephemeral moments.*

**Keywords:** cinema aesthetics, painting and movement, fine arts evolution, art history, interdisciplinary analysis

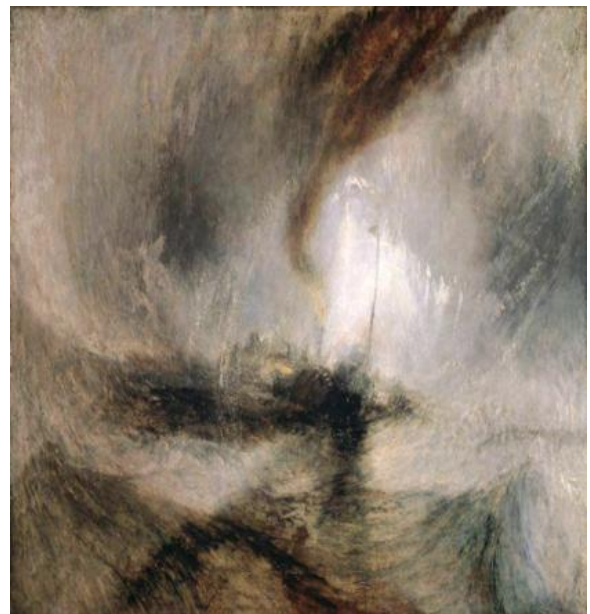
The precision and ephemerality of his actions.

There has always been in artists – and in the history of art – the desire to achieve the representation of movement. The methods used were limited and somewhat naive, constrained by the dominance of space over time. And, whether known or not, painting, as the two - dimensional art par excellence, had already managed to create the illusion of three - dimensional space.

We are facing a challenge, "the specific reality of cinema as an artistic value lies in being an expression of movement. Historically, all art forms aspired to convey movement through static elements".<sup>3</sup>

With the arrival of the 19th century, the industrialization process and scientific - technological development, the reconfiguration of daily life, art and painting will play a relevant role in the new scenario. It will be the impressionism of a Monet or a Degas and others, which would end up crystallizing in an insatiable current and great determination in the search for the transience of the moment. William Turner will be the one who achieves it, thus sowing the seed for the advent of a whole current of thought that is founded on his work. Turner takes a significant step through a general blurring of the scene, creating the incredible illusion of movement, see: *Blizzard - Steamboat at the entrance to the port*, a painting in which the stable horizon of the conventional landscape disappears, to become a whirlwind of light and color, here a whirlwind of wind and large waves are represented that make a ship spin frantically. You will notice

that the absence of horizontal and vertical lines produces in the viewer an effect of agitation and a potential shipwreck.



**Figure 1:** *Snow Storm: Steam - Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, c.1842, oil on canvas, Tate Britain Joseph Mallord William Turner

It is read on the Tate Gallery website, as a curious anecdote, that this work was exhibited with a poster that said that the artist had been tied to the mast of a ship called Ariel during the night of that storm, in order to be able to see the effects of the storm. However, beyond that fable, we can say that the

<sup>1</sup> Berger, John, *Cada vez que decimos adiós*, Ediciones de la Flor, 1997, pp. 24-34

<sup>2</sup> One of the artists who has best reflected the weight of cinema in painting has been Francis Bacon, an admirer of Eisenstein and Buñuel, who has used the typical shot-reverse shot of cinema on the canvas and tries to reflect movement. Borau, José Luis, *La pintura en el cine. El cine en la pintura*, Madrid, Ocho y medio, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Camón Aznar, José, *La Cinematografía y las artes*. C.S.I.C. Instituto Diego Velázquez, Madrid, 1952, p. 41.

painting shows us an exteriority, a façade that becomes more and more attenuated, causing the ship to merge with the nature that surrounds and absorbs it.

Likewise, *Rain, Steam and Speed - The Great Western Railway* (1844), is another of Turner's paintings, in it a horizon is also blurred that is lost behind the color that floods the entire composition. For Turner, Nature is a power in permanent movement, in Through his works we live in the eternal moment, we should ask ourselves: Is there anything more fleeting than the light inside the eye? In the painting, vapors are discovered, in a landscape of yellow tones under the cloudy sky and the falling downpour, a black figure, a railway, is seen advancing diagonally towards the lower right of the scene, over a bridge that appears to be made of brick with the impression that it will soon move out of the frame as it approaches us. A glow of fire stands out from the black of the locomotive, a sign of the intense activity of the boiler. Meanwhile, on the left, some figures can be seen on the river bank, as an expression of a rural and natural life, which is broken by that dark spark of metal that tears the landscape with its dynamism.



**Figure 2:** *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London. Joseph Mallord William Turner.

The painting recovers a representative symbol of the first Industrial Revolution, that is, the railway, as a central device of the idea of progress that has been socially implemented and confronted with nature. This is how the steam horse is positioned, challenging the natural elements and becoming an emblem of the conflict between the power of man and nature. John Berger writes in his work, *Ways of Seeing*, that Turner's paintings are “the stage on which capitalism, social life, and the life of each individual developed”.<sup>4</sup> Turner shows us the world of progress, speed as human strength and its futuristic fascination. In this regard, Rafael Argullol will tell us that in Romanticism: The landscape “becomes tragic, because it excessively recognizes the split between nature and man. In front of the Rococo Garden, measured and pastoral, the proportions expand through an asymmetrical vertigo. Faced

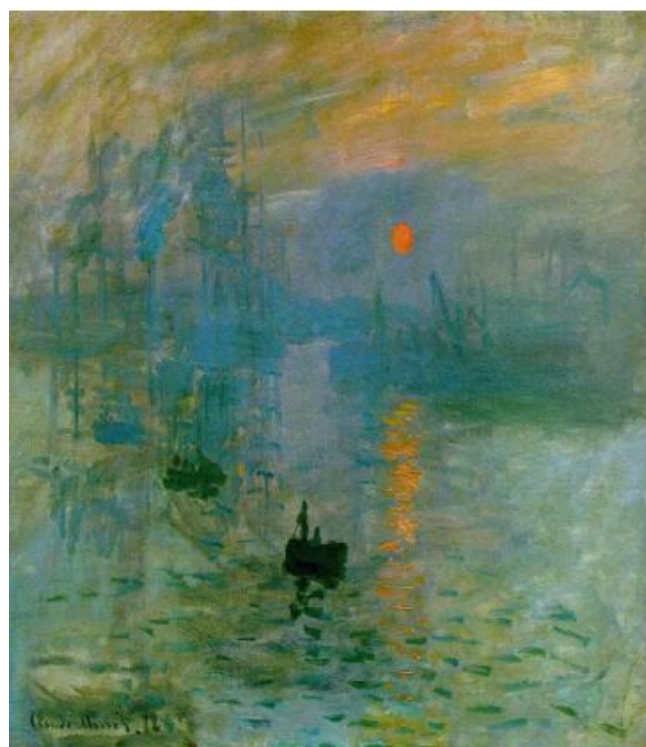
<sup>4</sup> Berger, J., *Modos de ver*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1975, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> Argullol, R., *La atracción del abismo. Un itinerario por el paisaje romántico*, Barcelona, Plaza y Janés, 1983, p. 17.

with the limited and reassuring scenario, the horizons open towards Everything and towards Nothing with the abrupt alternative of a heroic symphony”.<sup>5</sup> We can see a significant rupture between the traditional forms of man's relationship with nature and with each other compared to the new forms of relationship derived from the dynamics of capitalism.

Of the light that illuminates. . .  
that fleeting and random moment

Definitely a series of historical conditions allowed the emergence of aesthetic manifestations that place an unconventional idea of art on the stage. These conditions facilitated the emergence of modern art in the late 19th century. The temporal location and historical context of the works refer to a time in which culture was focused on the city and the artificial landscape, consequently, the natural landscape went almost unnoticed by the majority of



**Figure 3:** *Impression Sunrise*, 1872, oil on canvas, Marmottan Monet, Paris.

### Claude Monet

Claude Monet's contemporaries. Thus, the impressionists promote the appreciation of the natural landscape, of the ephemeral and fleeting nature of reality, of the changing and relative conditions of the world. But the one who radicalizes the vision is Monet, he is “[...] the one who, tired of the sticky inks of the Impressionists, looked for the answer to his concerns in the colors of the solar spectrum”;<sup>6</sup> By changing the vision of the landscape, he established the scaffolding that served as a pretext for surprising symphonies that delve into reality under the label of, Impression, rising sun, The Sainte-Lazare station, The Princess Garden, among other names for his works.

<sup>6</sup> Duret, T., *Historia de los pintores impresionistas*. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1953, p. 18.

With the same attitude, of blurring the entire scene to achieve the sensation of movement, Claude Monet became Turner's heir. *La Gare Saint - Lazare* (1877) also achieves that illusion of a fleeting and chance moment.



**Figure 4:** *La Gare Saint - Lazare*, 1877, oil on canvas, Orsay, Paris. Claude Monet

Furthermore, in the *Garden of the Princess, Louvre*, we will find a more refined technique, the representation of traffic as movement. It is relevant to comment that the figures behind the garden fence show us the agitation of daily life; Even Paul Smith has asked himself: Is it possible to contemplate a scene whose movement and variety make it difficult to encompass it with a glance?<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 5:** *Garden of the Princess, Louvre*, 1867, oil on canvas, Allen Memorial, Oberlin. Claude Monet

There are certain paintings that achieve the illusion of an ephemeral, imperceptible or relevant moment, which is inherent to cinema. *Four Dancers* (1899) is a painting dedicated to dance and dancers; three annotations are relevant. First, if we consider exclusively the title of the painting, one can believe that we are facing a dance scene starring four different girls.



**Figure 6:** *Four Dancers*, c.1899, oil on canvas, National Gallery, Washington.

#### Edgar Degas

If we look more closely, we discover the closeness that exists between the three figures, with their body parts and clothing that overlap between them, the great similarity of physical appearance that they share and the slight change in gesture that exists between them, make the whole transmits a clear sensation of movement, it seems that we are facing the corporal and gestural sequence of a single character. The painting is the same dancer in four different postures, printing a diagonal that goes from the upper left corner to the lower right corner, simulating a long and decisive movement, it must be recognized that the dancer occupies the entire painting and our attention. Second, Edgar Degas creates a pictorial hybrid, that is, two ways of understanding the representation of movement that range from photography (compressed and digestible image) to painting, which allows him to become a reference when analyzing the representation of the movement. Third, the entire painting is mere suggestion, and this is only discovered when the painting is seen live, the dress has very few details, the visual understanding is not there – at first glance – and this is so, because the True experience of art is only available when you see the art – live – and not with a simple glance, but by actually seeing what the artist painted. In an aesthetic act and to the astonishment of the viewer, Edgar Degas deploys the game that allows him to rehearse lines filled with light, nuances and perspectives, which, before the astonished gaze of the world, become agile fleeting.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, using *The Garden of the Princess* (1867), Paul Smith comments on the sketching that he exhibits. Smith, Paul, *Impresionismo*, Akal, Madrid, 2006, p. 24.

### Epilogue

While it cannot be definitively stated that cinema has revolutionized painting, painting has undoubtedly had a significant influence on cinema; both cinema and painting – in a permanent dialogue – are leaving their mark on the path of art. A long list of films has been made from studying painters and their works at different times in history. A good number of paintings, as we have confirmed, have taken their inspiration from cinema. A passion that has mobilized many lives. The old artistic avant-garde manifested an unlimited willingness to be carried away by these influences. We can say, without fear of being wrong, that aesthetics, present in cinema and painting, have shown over time an intense passion for movement, in addition to being one of the most lucid and significant phenomena of contemporary art.

We have identified, throughout our journey, at least three elements. First, by showing some examples of the representation of movement it is possible to discover how this idea is expressed through the simple repetition of a given contour. By the way, it is worth saying that, in an even simpler but effective way, the futurists were doing the same. Second, faced with a new way of sculpting time and movement, we have found a subtle and powerful reading, which also shows us that it is no longer about deceiving the human eye with bursts or successive lines that simulate the movement of an arm or a leg, but rather to propose a kind of intellectual montage to a viewer previously seduced and well accustomed to the succession of cinematographic images. Third, that today we are presented with the opportunity to read the world in a more cinematic and pictorial way, to respond to this eternal and recurring dream of painters, that is, that, in an act of passion to represent movement, we can summon the transience of a moment having life as its own image.

In conclusion, the relationship between painting and cinema exemplifies the evolving nature of art forms, reflecting humanity's persistent desire to capture the ephemeral. By bridging these mediums, this study underscores their shared aesthetic ambitions and mutual influence.

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Fig 1. *Snow Storm: Steam - Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842
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Fig 2. *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844
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Oil on canvas, 91x121.8 cm. National Gallery, London. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rain\\_Steam\\_and\\_Speed\\_the\\_Great\\_Western\\_Railway.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rain_Steam_and_Speed_the_Great_Western_Railway.jpg)
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Fig 3. *Impression Sunrise*, 1872  
Claude Monet  
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Fig 5. *Garden of the Princess, Louvre*, 1867
- [30] Claude Monet

Oil on canvas

Allen Memorial, Oberlin, Ohio

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[31] Edgar Degas

Fig 6. *Four Dancers*, c.1899

Edgar Degas

Oil on canvas

National Gallery, Washington DC

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