

Spectacles and Narratives: The Illusion of the Cinema in *Singin' in the Rain*

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Abstract:

This essay argues that *Singin' in the Rain* collaborates narrative and spectacle to investigate and embody cinema's core illusion. Building on Tom Gunning's "Cinema of Attractions," this analysis demonstrates how musical set-pieces and cinematic practices serve as modern attractions that are narratively motivated rather than plot-disruptive. Through Rick Altman's concepts of dual focus and audio/video dissolves, the analysis demonstrates how sound and image transit from diegetic realism to idealized fantasy, most vividly in the title number's audio dissolve and the "Broadway Melody/Veil Ballet" passage's visual dissolve, so viewers feel the transition without losing orientation. Drawing on Michel Chion, the essay reads the disastrous *Dueling Cavaliers* test screening and the curtain-pull finale as lessons in sychresis and de-acousmatization, revealing how fragile and yet potent audiovisual editing can be. With André Bazin's emphasis on deep-space staging and long takes, the "You Were Meant for Me" sequence reveals the visible machinery that manufactures romance while sustaining the illusion of belief. Synthesizing Geoff King's claim that spectacle is most powerful at narratively heightened moments, the essay concludes that acknowledged illusion is not deception but a vehicle for emotional truth and transformation. *Singin' in the Rain* lets us immerse in its artificial illusion, showcasing its spectacles, and, paradoxically, deepens our enchantment — presenting cinema's value in fostering optimism and resilience.

Keywords: Cinema of Attractions (Tom Gunning), Audiovisual illusion, Sychresis (Michel Chion), De-acousmatization, Audio dissolve (Rick Altman), Video dissolve (Rick Altman), Deep-space mise-en-scène (André Bazin), Long take, Depth of field, Diegetic, Non-diegetic sound, Montage

1. Introduction

When the moving picture was first exhibited by Louis Lumière in 1895, films were designed to show and display rather than tell stories. However, with the advancement of film culture and technology, cinema shifted toward narrative, and films began to oscillate between spectacle and storytelling. In his essay “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant Garde,” Tom Gunning, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Art History and the Committee on Film and Media at the University of Chicago, states that:

“To summarise, the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle — a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. The attraction to be displayed may also be of a cinematic nature ... trick films in which a cinematic manipulation provides the film’s novelty.”^[1]

Gunning argues that early film first defined itself through the act of showing and exhibiting. Audiences were directly invited to marvel at motion, tricks, and shocks, with any narrative serving as scaffolding only. This is the “cinema of attractions,” where the core pleasure is spectacle, novelty, and the thrilling illusions that cinema can stage.

“The period from 1907 to about 1913 represents the true narrativization of the cinema ... devices of cinema are transformed from playful ‘tricks’ — cinematic attractions — to elements of dramatic expression ... However, it would be too easy to see this as ... narrative strangling the nascent possibilities of a young iconoclastic form of entertainment ... the system of attraction remains an essential part of popular film-making.”^[2]

From 1907 to 1913, production and viewing habits shifted more towards continuous storytelling, a trend that continued into the 1920s. Devices like substitutions or reverse motion are repurposed as tools of dramatic expression. Yet attractions never vanish. They persist in avant-garde practices, and particularly in genres that welcome display, such as musicals. The history of film is therefore not a clean break from spectacle to story; rather, spectacle begins to integrate organically with narrative.

Singin’ in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) is exemplary of this integration. *Singin’ in the Rain*’s narrative and spectacle collaboratively investigate the illusion of the cinema. There are parts where spectacle (or the display of attractions) serves as a narrative device to explore the illusion of cinema, such as the contrast between public and private personae that characters adopt, the dynamic of “fake” and “real” voices, and how the fragility of screen “truth” is exposed through synchronized sound. In other scenes, at the level of style, the narrative in *Singin’*

in the Rain serves as a device for showcasing spectacle, demonstrating how illusion is constructed and perceived in cinema. The film immerses viewers in spectacle by using audio dissolves (a term from Rick Altman’s book *The American Film Musical*), the transitioning of sounds between the borders of onscreen and offscreen, video dissolves that drift from the film’s “reality” into a fantasy space, and dance choreography staged in deep space that provides the kind of direct presentation of attractions that Gunning describes in early film. The plot gives these spectacles shape and momentum, while the spectacle amplifies the plot’s themes by demonstrating the wonder of cinematic trickery. The film does not choose between story and display. It unites them, using musical set-pieces as the modern descendants of the “cinema of attractions” to deliver the awe-inspiring illusion of the cinema. One of the most important messages of *Singin’ in the Rain* is that the cinema is a mirage, and thus its spectacle is quite literally an important part of the narrative.

2. Narratives

With cinematic practice spectacles such as montages, songs, and dances as modes of dramatic expression, *Singin’ in the Rain* utilizes its characters’ duality to expose the gap between the fabricated reality Hollywood presents to the public and the true identities characters reveal in their private lives. In describing how American musicals have a “dual focus” structure, Rick Altman writes in *The American Film Musical*,

“The typical Hollywood musical character is not only double, he or she is something of a hermaphrodite, internalizing the basic dichotomy that characterizes the male/female opposition within the musical.”^[3]...“As a preliminary formulation, we can thus state not only that each character is double, made up of both a surface and repressed personality, but the surface personality of each member of the couple corresponds to the repressed personality of the other.”^[4]

Altman argues that characters in musicals always perform a surface self, usually a carefully constructed image, which masks a hidden, submerged self that creates the character’s duality or “dichotomy.” Furthermore, musicals thrive on pairing characters; they design partners in the movies as complements, where they contrast or complete the other characters’ personas.

“This dilemma is resolved by the introduction of a mode in which certain types of conscious behavior are accorded a special status which frees them from the frightening spectre of accountability. In all of these ‘make-believe’ modes—dream, performance, and role-playing are the most common—an individual gains the right to ‘play out’

personal fantasies without submitting to the judgments normally associated with conscious behavior. The character can say and do what he/she pleases and yet in the eyes of his/her psychic censor it is as if nothing had either been said or done.”^[5]

Altman points out that film utilizes spectacle such as song and dance, stylized montages, and diegetic “dream” sequences to create a safe, “make-believe” space in which those repressed layers can reveal themselves without shattering the character’s public image.

For instance, at the start of the film, Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) addresses an interviewer, proudly recalling that his persona has always been defined as “dignity, always dignity.” In contrast, a synchronized flashback montage while Don speaks on the red carpet shows the opposite. He claims that when he was a kid, he was “allowed to accompany Mom and Dad to the theater...to watch Shaw, Molière, the finest of the classics,” yet instead we see him sneaking into cinemas with his best friend Cosmo to watch Hollywood genre films. He continues, “To this we added rigorous musical training at the Conservatory of Fine Arts. Then we rounded out our apprenticeship at an exclusive Dramatics Academy. And at all times, the motto remained, “dignity, always dignity.” However, the montage reveals the two boys growing up performing in smoky bars and clowning in vaudeville venues. This intentional mismatch of voice-over and image, utilizing the spectacle of montage against the narration, sarcastically and entertainingly dramatizes the “dichotomy” between Don’s polished screen persona and his raw, private origins, underscoring how the devices of cinema can reveal the truth behind a carefully fabricated persona, whereas later we will see how cinema can also obscure it.

This duality plays out in reverse for Kathy. In private, when she first meets Don, she presents herself as the thoughtful, noble actress who believes “acting means great parts, wonderful lines and glorious words, like in Shakespeare. The stage is a ‘dignified profession,’ but Don is just ‘a shadow on film,’ without ‘flesh and blood.” Yet at the evening party later on, her public self emerges—she comes out of a giant cake in a pink ballet dress and performs “All I Do Is Dream of You” to entertain the guests. *Singin’ in the Rain* uses this singing and dancing spectacle as a dramatic expression to ironically contrast the earnest artist Kathy claims to be in private. It’s the perfect opposite, or the “pairing complement” in Altman’s aforementioned terms, for Don’s arc across the film, since he has a flawless public image hiding a scrappy, ‘undignified,’ and publicly unknown origin. Through spectacle dramatizing this duality, *Singin’ in the Rain* interrogates its own artifice, inviting us to see both the mask and the person behind it.

By exposing the misuse and fragility of synchronized sound in cinematic practice during the famous test screening scene, *Singin’ in the Rain* utilizes this flawed audiovisual illusion as a device to serve the narrative of the film, highlighting the fragility and precarity of cinematic illusion. In his book *Audio Vision*, Michel Chion states, “By added value (audiovisual illusion) I mean the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the impression ... that this information ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen.”...“The phenomenon of added value is especially at work in the case of sound/image synchronism, via the principle of synchresis, the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears. Most falls, blows, and explosions on the screen, simulated to some extent or created from the impact of nonresistant materials, only take on consistency and materiality through sound.”^[6]...“For the spectator, it is not acoustical realism so much as synchrony ... that will lead him or her to connect a sound with an event or detail.”^[7] Chion defines audiovisual illusion as “added value,” where sound enriches a given image, making its meaning or origin seem to “naturally” belong to what we see it synchronized with onscreen. This effect is best shown in “synchresis.” A masterful synchronization of sight and sound can make on-screen “falls, blows, and explosions” feel materially real.

“Only an acoustic identity: that of a sharp, high, slightly uneven vibrating that both alarms and fascinates. It is also, however, a very fragile effect, which the slightest thing—bad sound balance, a spectator’s loss of confidence in the audiovisual contract due to a fault in production—suffices to compromise.”^[8]

Crucially, he adds that viewers connect sounds to images by synchrony rather than realism, and that this effect is “very fragile,” easily broken by bad balance or any production fault.

In *Singin’ in the Rain*, the test screening of Don and co-star Lina Lockwood’s film *The Dueling Cavaliers* (their first “sound” film) demonstrates how the misuse of synchronized sound can disrupt the cinematic illusion. The pearls around Lina’s neck sound like a “thunderstorm” when she handles them (as studio executive Mr. Simpson describes); then Don steps into and dramatically tosses his cane on the ground, causing a massive, explosive sound, which makes the entire audience burst out laughing. Next, when Lina’s character expresses her love toward Don’s character, her voice goes from very loud to almost inaudibly quiet, due to her head’s movement from left to right, as the crude early microphone technology only catches her voice when she speaks directly into it. As Chion describes, audiences are convinced by the audiovisual illu-

sion through synchrony, not necessarily realism. While the loud and unbalanced sounds are the actual sounds captured by the microphone as made by objects and voices, the mishandling and imbalance of the synchronization between what we see and what we hear causes the illusion to break. The technical problems of the sound recording make the microphones apparent in the scene. The narrative uses the technical flaws of the projected sound onto the image by the *Dueling Cavalier*'s production team to reveal the fragility of cinematic illusion, since the audience cannot immerse themselves in the story due to the unnatural, ridiculous synchronization of sound and image. This slippage highlights how spectacle serves the narrative by investigating and ultimately exposing the illusion. In *Singin' in the Rain*'s final act, the narrative employs the dynamic of "real" and "fake" voices to expose the illusion of cinema further, allowing the audience to notice the difference between on-screen and off-screen diegetic sound. Chion writes in his book *Film, A Sound Art*, that, "Onscreen sound is diegetic and visualized, offscreen sound is diegetic and acousmatic..."^[9]

"The passage from offscreen to onscreen—what I call de-acousmatization—is much more likely to be used to dramatic effect than the other way around."^[10]

Chion claims that if the source is visible, the sound is onscreen and diegetic; if the source is hidden but still within the story world, it is offscreen-diegetic and acousmatic. The key is that these statuses exist only in relation to the image and can flip as the shot changes. Revealing the hidden source of a sound that moves from offscreen to onscreen builds a dramatic moment, as the transition unveils the suspense.

In the film's finale, Lina stands at center stage, her face onscreen as she lip syncs to the song "Singin' in the Rain," while Kathy provides her real voice from behind the curtain. By foregrounding an offscreen diegetic voice where we expect an onscreen one, the sequence invites us to notice the mismatch between image and sound rather than automatically presenting and assigning the voice to the body we see. When Don, Cosmo, and Mr. Simpson pull the curtain to reveal Kathy, the hidden source is revealed, a clear case of "de-acousmatization" that utilizes offscreen transitioning to onscreen passage for dramatic effect, showcasing the cinematic illusion. In addition, the trick collapses Lina's carefully maintained public persona, exposing the private, flawed voice her image has been concealing.

3. Spectacle

Many commenters criticize that in Hollywood musical films, the narrative is neglected while spectacles of sing-

ing and dancing are overused, or too sudden and performative, making people lose track of the plot. However, in *Singin' in the Rain*, the movie employs spectacle to create immersive, illusory experiences, further strengthening the message that the narrative explores—the nature of cinematic illusion. Geoff King, in his essay "Spectacle, Narrative, and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster," states that,

"What, though, of narrative in the spectacular blockbuster? It is common parlance in both journalistic criticism and some academic writing to assume or to assert that the emphasis on visual spectacle is at the expense of narrative. "Impressive effects, shame the same effort wasn't put into the plot," is a standard response."^[11]

"Outbursts of spectacle and special effects are narratively situated; they serve narrative purposes. Such celebrated sequence...gain their full impact also through their location at narratively heightened moments of tension."^[12]

People often say that blockbusters prioritize effects over plot, claiming they have great visuals but weak stories. King argues that in well-made blockbusters, the dazzling effects belong to the story. These stunning spectacles are motivated by narrative and character goals, and they are placed at high-stakes narrative turning points, when characters are in jeopardy, or lead to significant revelations. That narrative placement is what gives spectacle its emotional hit; we care because the scene advances the plot and raises consequences, not because it is merely eye-catching.

Singin' in the Rain not only explores the motif of cinematic illusion through its narrative, but also allows the audience watching the film to experience and participate in the illusion of cinema. In addition, the movie employs these spectacles as a way to advance and dramatize several pivotal events in the narrative. Gunning, in *Viewing Positions, Ways of Seeing Film*, recalls the experience of first seeing a moving picture as "I know, but yet I see." The real issue is not gullibility, but how illusion and awareness coexist in pleasure.^[13] *Singin' in the Rain* delights in this cinema of attractions, where we are both aware of the artifice and feel its joy. The message of cinematic illusion that the narrative is expressing arises not despite of artifice but because of it; the movie keeps us just aware enough of the illusion to admire the craftsmanship that makes belief possible. In what follows, I will examine how several spectacle scenes in *Singin' in the Rain* employ masterful cinematic techniques to create the illusion of cinema, inviting the audience to experience immersive spectacle.

Singin' in the Rain utilizes what Altman calls the "audio dissolve," a cinematic technique that naturally transitions a dialogue scene into singing and dancing, allowing the audience to experience cinematic illusion and further dra-

matizing moments, such as when Don reaches his epiphany. Altman writes in *The American Film Musical*:

“By breaking down the barrier separating the two tracks, the musical blurs the borders between the real and the ideal.”...“The audio dissolve superimposes sounds in order to pass from one soundtrack to another. The most common form of audio dissolve involves a passage from the diegetic track to the music track through the intermediary of diegetic music.”^[14]

“The diegetic track reflects reality, while the music track lifts the image into a romantic realm far above this world of flesh and blood.”^[15]

The diegetic layer reminds the audience of tangible circumstances, while the non-diegetic music layer elevates mood, emotion, and meaning beyond the plot itself. These two sounds usually are in separate lanes, keeping everyday reality distinct from emotional and dramatic commentary. However, music deliberately breaks this wall. For instance, a song can start as a character performing, then when the audience still sees the on-screen source, non-diegetic orchestration gradually fades in and eventually replaces it. This smooth audio transition leads the character(s) and the audience from real-world sound into pure score without jarring cuts.

In the climactic scene of Don singing the film’s title song, his performance seamlessly integrates diegetic sounds and the music track, easing the audience into the audio illusion of seamless transition between “natural” sound and dramatic non-diegetic sound. The scene begins after Don, Kathy, and Cosmo come to a solution for employing sound in *The Dueling Cavalier* (making it a musical to save its prospects). Don says an affectionate goodnight to Kathy, then strolls down a nighttime street as a sudden downpour begins. Diegetic sounds come with rain hitting pavement and Don’s footsteps splashing through puddles, and he starts humming the “Singin’ in the Rain” tune. As the humming and the rain “grows more and more rhythmical, the scene introduced an orchestral accompaniment”^[16] (a light-hearted, non-diegetic music track). Typically, in other films, when music is introduced both vocal and instrumental elements are non-diegetic, added solely to dramatize the event. But in musicals like *Singin’ in the Rain*, the vocals are sung by Don onscreen, a character in the movie’s world.

Additionally, his steps and splashes provide percussive beats, so technically only the instrumental orchestration serves as the non-diegetic layer, expanding the space into a musical fantasy. At the number’s climax, Don kicks through puddles and famously swings around the lamp-post, holding the post as he turns while the orchestral track plays behind. The rhythm now seems to initiate the movement rather than just accompanying it. Using an au-

dio dissolve, the scene carries Don and the audience from street realism into romantic celebration at the moment of his epiphany. The shift feels completely natural, since what begins as environmental noise (rain and puddles) and Don’s humming transitions seamlessly into a rich orchestral soundtrack, dissolving “realism” into musical fantasy and bringing us, noticeably yet gently, into a dream-like space that remains connected to reality just enough to not feel too jarring. By merging narrative reality with idealized spectacle, the film invites the audience to participate in this joyful cinematic illusion.

Not only does *Singin’ in the Rain* employ audio-dissolve techniques, it also incorporates long takes and deep-space mise-en-scène staging to integrate its narrative message into the spectacular song-and-dance sequences. These visual strategies allow audiences to appreciate the choreography while remaining aware of the film’s message about cinema’s illusions, because these strategies help ground the film in reality. As film theorist Andre Bazin writes in *What Is Cinema?*:

“Depth of field is not a camera technique like filters or lighting styles but a seminal contribution to mise en scène... it affects not only the structure of film language but also the viewer’s intellectual relationship with the image.”^[17]

“In a single take, the dramatic effects once provided by editing derive here from the movement of actors within a single composition.”^[18]

Bazin argues that when a director keeps the whole depth of the set visible and lets a scene play out in long-take shots, the frame itself has a storytelling function. With multiple layers remaining legible at once, the viewer must choose where to look, becoming an active interpreter rather than a passive recipient of guidance from “analytical” editing. Additionally, with long takes replacing fast cutting, instead of alternating shots to build tension or direct attention, the drama unfolds in uninterrupted real-time continuous space.

For example, in *Singin’ in the Rain*’s “You Were Meant for Me” number, Don leads Kathy onto an empty soundstage and, step by step, builds a cinematic romance around her using the machines of cinematic illusion. First, Don turns on a light machine, which softly illuminates the painted pink sky backdrop with a gorgeous sunset. Then, he switches on a smoke machine, which blows out a gentle hazy mist. After that, he turns on other light sources, “flooding” Kathy with “moonlight” and “stardust.” Lastly, he switches on a large fan that creates a breeze in the twilight scene. As the studio space is transformed, he sings the gentle ballad and dances with Kathy across the set, turning raw equipment and make-believe scenery into an intimate romantic fantasy space. The build-up to this

spectacle is presented through long takes that track Don's movements around the set, lending the process a palpable realism that reminds us this is all just an illusion, that this is how films are made. Deep-space staging enhances the effect, as Kathy pauses on a ladder in the foreground while Don roams the middle ground, adjusting machinery and the dream-like backdrop, with more equipment visible in the background. Although the scene does not have the fully sharp "depth of field" effect that Bazin lauds in *Citizen Kane*, its layered arrangement in deep space honors Bazin's principle of enriching the foreground, middle ground, and background simultaneously. Actors, props, and scenery occupy different planes, allowing action to progress both side-to-side and in depth. Through these techniques, even as the film brings us into surreal fantasy, these cinematic practices keep us immersed in a world that feels tangibly real. At the same time, the visible spotlights, wind machines, and ladders leave traces of artifice, gently reminding us that the romance fantasy before our eyes is a lovingly crafted cinematic illusion. Occasionally, the artifice disappears from a shot, and we are fully in the illusion.

Singin' in the Rain further utilizes visual spectacle to explore the cinematic illusion, employing video dissolves that naturally transition from reality into a fantasy space. In *The American Film Musical*, Altman states that:

"The notion of 'video dissolve' will apply to any visual device bridging two separate places, times, or levels of reality...used to connect diegetic space of a realistic nature to an idealized space"^[19]..."The characteristic style of the American film musical involves a merging of the real and the ideal; the video dissolve superimposes in the viewer's mind two radically different landscapes."^[20]

Altman explains that a video dissolve is a visual transition that allows the camera to slip seamlessly from everyday, story-bound reality into heightened dream worlds without an obvious break. Video dissolves collapse barriers of time, place, and plausibility, embodying the genre's core impulse to make fantasy feel continuous with lived experience.

In the "Broadway Melody" spectacle sequence, we experience a dream-within-a-dream—"The Veil Ballet." Don's surrogate character once again meets mysterious beauty Charisse at a formal dinner party (he is now a famous performer, no longer penniless as he was when they first met) at a casino, with a sudden push-in shot. At this encounter, Don and Charisse's surroundings blend and dissolve into a surreal, pink, cloudy space. In this spectacle, Charisse, now barefoot in a simple white dress, wears an absurdly long white silky veil that flutters in the sky in the wind. Don partners her dancing in this romantic stage; each of their movements sends the veil sweeping around them,

sculpted by the air into circles and comet tails. In response to the camera never breaking the shot's momentum, the realistic social space and the fantasy dream space naturally merge in the viewer's perception, as the real setting lingers as a reminder that the images presented are pure idealization. The sequence demonstrates how the movie transforms cinema's illusion into a seamless, continuous space between realistic experience and romantic imagination.

Additionally, in this scene, *Singin' in the Rain* not only utilizes a video dissolve but also reshapes our very sense of time. Within the pink-cloud fantasy, time seems to pass only for Don and Charisse, while the bustling casino outside is effectively, presumably frozen. The minutes that flow by in this dreamscape do not seem to affect time in the "realistic" world of the casino (which is itself another cinematic dream world in this extended "fantasia" sequence). By detaching the fantasy's temporal flow from the outside world concept of time, the scene heightens its sleight of hand and draws the audience even deeper into the cinema's seductive illusion.

4. Conclusion

Throughout *Singin' in the Rain*, the interplay of reality and artifice reveals a deeper philosophical stance: illusion, when openly acknowledged, is not deception at all, but a creative vehicle for emotional truth and transformation. The film delights in showing its own tricks, from visible stage lights to obvious set backdrops, yet this self-awareness doesn't break the delivery of the movie. Instead, it keeps us "just aware enough" of the illusion to admire the craftsmanship that makes belief possible, allowing the audience to receive genuine feelings of joy and wonder. By embracing its make-believe nature, the movie suggests that acknowledging an illusion can actually enhance its emotional impact. We come to see illusion not as a lie, but as a tool that can transcend mere fact to convey more profound truths, for both the characters onscreen and for the audience's own inner world.

This perspective reframes the value of cinema itself. The worth of a film, the essay implies, lies less in strict realism and more in its ability to enchant, to spark our imagination, and sustain our belief even while openly exposing its tricks. *Singin' in the Rain* exemplifies this paradoxical magic. By pulling back the curtain on how movies fabricate romance and spectacle, it invites us to both see the machinery and still wholeheartedly believe in the dream. In fact, the very act of revealing the illusion becomes part of the enchantment. We remain emotionally invested, laughing, dreaming, and hoping with the characters, precisely because the film earns our trust through honesty

about its artifice. It proves that knowing how the “magic” works does not dilute our experience; if anything, it deepens our appreciation, letting the emotional truth shine through the fantasy.

Ultimately, this philosophy lends *Singin' in the Rain* its lasting positive moral message. The film shows that cinema is a machine for transforming the ordinary, even the unpleasant, into felt joy and hope, and it does so by celebrating our willingness to believe. In the famous singing and dancing in the rain scene, Don's blissful dance in a downpour is more than just a well-choreographed number; it is an embodiment of optimism through illusion. The movie inspires us to believe in love and optimism, even as it reveals its artifice, affirming that there is no shame in embracing beautiful make-believe. Just as Don uses the “tricks” of the soundstage to conjure a perfect romantic setting for Kathy, we too can use the small “*illusions*” of life – imagination, art, friendship, and love – to transform our reality and carry us through hardship. In other words, acknowledging life's “storms” does not prevent us from “*singing and dancing through the rain,*” as long as we hold onto those enchanting illusions that give us strength. This is the essay's central insight: cinematic illusion (and by extension, any deliberate illusion in life) can be a profound source of truth, enchantment, and resilience, not by hiding reality, but by revealing a more hopeful vision of it, even as we recognize it has been artfully crafted.

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