Subjectivity is a constant in the human mind; our brains are composed of our memories, which can only be created subjectively. A memory is the re-creation of reality to help our minds understand the world around us and further the progression of our lives. Memory and cinema are identical in form; both are a phenomenon comprised through a series of images. Although they take completely different procedures to exist as memory is cerebral and cinema is the capturing of light to film, memory and cinema are profoundly connected. For example, there is no cinema without memory, because there is no cognitive thought without memory. Moreover, much like memory, the film's sole purpose is to record the past. The indistinguishable similarity between the making of memories and the making of cinema creates a great question. If memories are compiled completely through one person’s perception and have a completely subjective outcome, then would film be completely subjective also?

If the world as we know it can only be comprised of what we create from the knowledge of our memories, then it would appear that everything is subjective. Film theorist Andre Bazin would disagree. His sole belief in film was that someday it would “re-create the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time” (Bazin 20). Using Henri Bergson’s metaphysics of perception and memories, I will attempt to theorize against the many objective claims that Andre Bazin made about cinema.

Andre Bazin was a great film theorist and critic; he contributed immensely not only to the French new wave movement but also to
cinema as a science. Although he had a knack for reading films, many of his metaphysical claims of cinema were utterly false. Bazin believed that the actual idea of cinema entered the world before there was any empirical evidence of it. He also claimed that objectivity was not only a possibility for cinema, it was the sole goal of film. He believed that film would eventually surpass its ability to merely recreate a similar reality to recreating reality in exact likeness. Whether or not the meaning behind Bazin’s theories was literal or metaphorical, he does inspire many interesting metaphysical problems.

My initial encounter with Bazin came about through reading his famous essay *The Myth of Total Cinema*. A short time after that, I was introduced to Bergson’s analysis of *The Possible and the Real*. I then recognized that Bazin’s claim was quite simply impossible. Bazin states in his essay, “The cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed so to speak fully armed in thief minds, as if in some platonic heaven” (16). Bazin believed that the idea of cinema preceded its existence. Bergson would argue something only becomes possible once it is achieved. Bergson states:

> As reality is created as something unforeseeable and new, its image is reflected behind it into the indefinite past; thus it finds that it has from all time been possible, but it is at this precise moment that it begins to have been always possible, and that is why I said that its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once the reality has appeared. (Bergson 279)

The only reason present-day thinkers may claim cinema has been a myth in ancient minds is because we now have the presence of it. This concept makes sense when you consider that 300 years ago the myth of cinema would have been impossible because the concept would be comparing ancient practices to an idea that did not yet exist. We cannot have the myth of cinema without actual cinema itself, which essentially disputes the entire claim. Further, in his essay Bergson gives a great comparison to his idea:
It is as though one were to fancy, in seeing his reflection in the mirror in front of him, that he could have touched it had he stayed behind it. Thus in judging that the possible does not presuppose the real... Pure illusion, one might as well claim that the man in flesh and blood comes from the materialization of his image seen in the mirror. (Bergson 279)

The idea or need for cinema as Bazin claims does not exist before the actual practice of film. It seems that instead of understanding the history of scientific cinema, Bazin is attempting to give reason for the human need to re-create and remember life, which is an entirely different thing altogether.

Bazin believed the science of film will eventually recreate an objective reality, a complete duplicate of the real. The reason we will never have true reality in film has nothing to do with our lack of advancement in science and has everything to do with the actual functioning of the human brain. We cannot recreate objectivity out of a visual outlet that can only be conceived by a mind that processes subjectively. For Bazin, the major flaw in current film is that it is unable to remove the artist’s interpretation from its result. On the other hand, Bergson recognizes a flaw in Bazin for wanting to remove the artist at all; he would not see a need or a possible outlet to remove the human mind from the process. Bergson explains the problem with objectivity in Memory of the Present and False Recognition:

Our perceptions and our sensations are at once what is clearest in us and most important for us; they note at each moment the changing relation of our body to other bodies; they determine or direct our conduct. Thence our tendency to see in the other psychical facts nothing but perceptions or sensations obscured or diminished. (179)

Thus, Bergson explains that objectivity in the human mind is impossible due to our personal perceptions, which are essential for us to make sense of the physical world. For example, two people in the exact same room looking at the exact same film screen will have a subjective perception of the image shown. This is due to the
basic fact of where they sit in the room since one is closer to the left side of the screen, one is closer to the right, one of the men may be taller than the other, one may be closer to the screen. But if both people were to see the same image objectively, they would need to be in the exact same place with the exact same mind with the exact same perception; doing so would eliminate their personal identity. Even something as simple as our position in space and time can diminish objectivity.

Although Bergson cannot imagine a universal objective reality, he is not completely dismissive of the re-creation of reality; he refers to it as an absolute resurrection of the initial perception through a remembrance perception. Bergson notes, “Those, indeed, among us who resist this tendency, who believe thought to be something other than a play of images, yet have some trouble in persuading themselves that the remembrance of a perception is radically different from the perception itself” (179). Bergson acknowledges that a re-creation of a perception can exist and even refers to it as a play of images, like a roll of film, but he is very clear that the re-creation is not an identical or original creation. The actual film, just like the memory, is a mere re-creation of an actual moment that has passed, it cannot be the actual moment. Bazin believed we actually can create a visual effect where reality can be duplicated in exact likeness.

If Bazin is right, then film, or memory in Bergson’s case, must be achieved without sensation or perception, essentially removing the subjective view. This could only be possible if the film or memory rejects the mind entirely and is somehow created simultaneously through the image and stored away. The image, object, or moment would be captured simultaneously even though these elements are conceived as completely different things. Imagine that reality and time are a red string made up of two different strands of thread. As you pull the string apart you get two separate threads, the threads separate equally at the same time and the same length. However, it is clear that there are two separate threads. If we then take this metaphor and reflect it into Bazin’s theory of cinema, the string is still present reality in time. As you pull the threads apart, one
thread is the filmed footage and the other is the continued actual moment; they are “being created” at the same time. As they are pulled apart, one thread disappears and the other continues to grow. If we consider the metaphor through Bergson’s analysis of “memory and time,” we see that there is only one actual string and that string is being dragged next to a mirror. The mirror shows the exact same red string but it is only an illusion of the red string, it is merely virtual. There is a string and a mirror image of the string and that is all.

In Bazin’s theory, he makes the mistake of believing that there are two threads separate in time and space but equal in dimensions and value and numerically the same. This is not so; film needs a reality separate from itself to exist. Bergson reflects on this theory in his essay:

The object can be touched as well as seen; acts on us as we on it; is pregnant with the possible actions; it is actual. The image is virtual, and though it resembles the object, it is incapable of doing what the object does. Our actual existence then, whilst it is unrolled in time, duplicates itself all along with a virtual existence, a mirror-image. (181)

But just because it reflects that reality does not make it equal. Bergson further proves his point when he breaks down the most important features of an object and relates it back to its virtual image, demonstrating the apparent differences.

An object and identical image could only be possible if the film or memory reject the mind entirely and is somehow created simultaneously through the object and stored away. In this case, the obtainment must be through an operation on the image or memory and not the mind. However, something must be changing to produce this image because it is not the first image but a new remembered image. The image will be able to re-create reality without altering its meaning or diminishing its value. Bergson then goes through a process of reasoning to determine what exactly this operation could be and how it is actually creating a weaker image. Bergson realizes that the quality between the actual object and the visual image
cannot be altered because the sole purpose of memory or film is to represent the past to us without altering it. The quantity may not change either, for the image consists of a certain number of parts with a certain degree or force. Bergson then reaches the conclusion that the operation in which the remembrance is being affected is the actual intensity of the image, memory, or film. Moreover, because this intensity is not increasing, it must be reducing. Bergson states, “Such is the instinctive, scarcely conscious dialectic by which we are led, from elimination to elimination, to see in the remembrance an enfeeblement of the image.” (180). When we see an object in reality it is clear and full of natural existence.

When an image is taken of an object, the image loses intensity just like watering down a drink. The object’s image gets diluted the further it is from the actual moment. For example, if I were to look at an apple at 2:40 p.m. on Saturday, November 19, 2015, in my kitchen and at that exact same moment I was filming the same apple, Bergson believed there is a fundamentally different element of intensity between my immediate view of the apple and my viewing the apple later through my camera or my memory. When we consider the element of intensity on the object, we know that the intensity will not grow after the moment has gone because there is no moment to feed off of. Intensity must either grow or diminish, it cannot stay idle, especially when considering a moment in time concerning one object. So, the memory or film may be able to re-create the object through quality and quantity, but it will always fail to meet the exact intensity of that moment. This argument becomes even stronger when considering the subjective view of each human being.

Bazin refers to film as “The preservation of life by a representation of life” (9), but ignores a huge flaw in his argument: personal human perspective. Something as simple as the time of day you witness a film can disturb your point of view of the footage. Even if it is “reality based,” it is viewed outside of the time of its actual existence, which changes the way you view the image. Bergson attempts to explain how memories or, in our case film, have no choice but must be affected by subjective view in Memory
of the Present and False Recognition. “I have attempted to prove that the various memories are indeed localized in the brain, in the meaning that the brain possesses for each category of memory- images a special contrivance whose purpose is to convert the pure memory into a nascent perception or image” (Bergson 176). This is why film can only be subjective. Every image presented in a film reflects in the mind like a memory. We have a preconceived perception of every single object in the film, unless of course it is something we have never seen anything like in our lives. This is exactly what the film should hope for; we need our memories to guide us through the film.

Bergson goes on, “but if we go even further than this, and suppose every recollection to be localized in the matter of the brain, we are simply translating undoubted psychical facts into very questionable anatomical language, and we end in consequences which are contradicted by observation” (176). We have a preconceived notion of what we are currently observing and those preconceived notions allow us the freedom to recognize our surroundings and then progress. Consider how you would function without any way of forming memory. You could not function since you would be immobile. We need the past in order to comprehend our future, and each memory is subjective, even “facts” are linked with perceptions. Bergson continues:

The formation of memory is never posterior to the formation of perception; it is contemporaneous with it. Step by step as perception is created, the memory of it is projected beside it, as the shadow falls beside the body. But, in the normal condition, there is no consciousness of it, just as we should be unconscious of our shadow were our eyes to throw light on it each time they turn in that direction. (177)

Every memory you have is connected to a perception or a subjective view; there is no getting away from it. For example, when I look at an apple, I don’t simply see the apple as an object. I see a nutritious snack because I have been told that the object of an apple can be eaten and will provide me with energy. Bergson believed
that our mind works by fluctuating through the consciousness and the unconsciousness. He states in *Memory of the Present and False Recognition* “the transition from one to the other is so continuous, the limit between the two states so little marked, that we have no right to suppose a radical difference of nature between them” (176). In order for our brains to decipher the next image of a film, the current image must be pushed into the unconscious mind and formed into a memory. This is also where the perception is formed, and then the image will constantly float back between the two levels of consciousness to give a “clue” of what we are watching.

For Henri Bergson, the precise reason why film will never reach strict objectivity is due to the subjective view of the human mind. There is no way to guarantee that the object you reflect on a screen will be conceived by each audience member with the same effect. Furthermore, there is no possible way to express the intensity a person felt at the exact moment when the object appears on the screen. In order to do this, the film would have to take into account the change of historical views and personal growth. The human concept of time is divided into three categories: this exact instant, everything else that we remember in order to progress, and the future. Film has as much of a chance to duplicate the present moment as it does in filming the future; it will never create a perfect exact re-creation of reality because once that reality has formed, it can never truly form again. All we can hope to achieve is a very close mirror image, but the recollection is completely virtual. One can only be removed from subjectivity by removing oneself from the human mind, which would then remove them from existence. Our inability to re-create objective reality is a reminder of how valuable time and our human existence is.
Works Cited