

theories and
methodologies

A Phantom Discipline

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IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF CINEMA, AS IN OTHER KINDS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSES, ONE OF THE MOST COMMONLY ENCOUNTERED questions these days tends to be some version of the following: Where in this discipline am I? How come I am not represented? What does it mean for me and my group to be represented in this manner? What does it mean for me and my group to have been made invisible? These questions pertain, of course, to the urgency and prevalence of the politics of identification, to the relation between representational forms and their articulation of subjective histories and locations. This is one reason the study of cinema, like the study of literature and history, has become increasingly caught up in the study of group cultures: every group (be it defined by nation, class, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation), it seems, produces a local variant of the universal that is cinema, requiring critics thus to engage with the specificities of particular collectivities even as they talk about the generalities of the filmic apparatus. According to one report, for instance, at the Society of Cinema Studies Annual Conference of 1998, “nearly half the over four hundred papers (read from morning to night in nine rooms) treated the politics of representing ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” (Andrew 348).¹ Western film studies, as Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams write, currently faces its own “impending dissolution [. . .] in [. . .] transnational theorization” (Introduction 1). How did this state of affairs arise?

To explore this question within the five-thousand-word limit allowed for the present essay, I would like to revisit a few key moments in the theorization of film that have had significant impact on the way we think about the cinema today. While my choices will undoubtedly come across as eclectic, I hope that the ensuing discussion will nonetheless raise some useful general questions.

When film captured the critical attention of European theorists in the early twentieth century, it did not do so in terms of what we now call identity politics. Instead, it was film’s novelty as a technological invention, capable of reproducing the world with a likeness hitherto unimaginable, that fascinated cultural critics such as Walter Benjamin, Siegfried

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Kracauer, and Ernst Bloch. Unlike photography, on which film and the early theorization of film depended, cinema brought with it the capacity for replicating motion in the visual spectacle. But as the motion picture ushered in a new kind of realism that considerably expanded on that of still photographic mimesis, it also demanded a thorough reconceptualization of the bases on which representation had worked for centuries. In this regard, few studies could rival Benjamin's oft-cited essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in its grasp of the challenge posed by film to classical aesthetics. Along with his work on Charles Baudelaire's lyric poetry, this essay defines that challenge by describing the decline of what Benjamin calls the aura, the sum of the unique features of artworks that is rooted in the time and place of the works' original creation. For Benjamin, film's thorough permeation by technology, a permeation that led to its apparent semiotic transparency, meant that a new sociological attitude, one that associates representation much more with reproducibility than with irreplaceability, would henceforth shape expectations about representation: the repeatable copy, rather than the singular original, would now be the key. Benjamin viewed this fundamental iconoclasm (or irreverence toward the sacredness of the original) as a form of emancipation. No longer bound to specific times, places, and histories, the technically reproducible filmic image is now ubiquitously available, secularized, and thus democratized.

In retrospect, it is important to note the kind of emphasis critics such as Benjamin placed on the cinematic spectacle. This is an emphasis we do not seem to encounter in contemporary cinema studies. For the critics of Benjamin's era, film's faithful yet promiscuous realism—it records things accurately yet also indiscriminately—announced the triumph of the camera's eye over human vision. The origins of cinema, they understood, are implicated in a type of inhumanism even as cinema serves the utilitarian end of telling human stories. This inhumanism, rooted in the

sophistication, efficiency, and perfection of the machine, was seen in overwhelmingly positive terms in the early twentieth century. By expanding and extending the possibilities of capturing movement, registering color, rewinding time past, and enlarging, speeding up, or slowing down the transitory moments of life, cinema was regarded first and foremost as an advancement, an overcoming of the limitations inherent in human perception. As in the theorizations and practices of early Soviet filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, and Lev Kuleshov, in Benjamin's thinking the cinematic was a power to transform what is visible—to enhance, multiply, and diversify its dimensions. Cinema enabled the emergence of the optical unconscious—the surfacing of the optical that had hitherto been unconscious, on the one hand, and the surfacing of the unconscious in optical form, on the other.

These early theorizations of the cinematic spectacle had to account in some rudimentary way for spectators' response. And yet, although early cinema was closely affined with representational realism, it was not necessarily accompanied by the stability of viewer position, as Tom Gunning writes:

[T]he appearance of animated images, while frequently invoking accuracy and the methods of science, also provoked effects of astonishment and uncanny wonder. Innovations in realist representation did not necessarily anchor viewers in a stable and reassuring situation. Rather, this obsession with animation, with super-lifelike imagery, carries a profound ambivalence and even a sense of disorientation. (326)

Again, it is necessary to remember how such spectatorial ambivalence and disorientation were theorized at the time when cinema was seen predominantly as a technological advancement. Even though the audience was in the picture, as it were, its lack of stability tended to be configured as a generalized experience rather than in specific histories of reception. For this reason, perhaps, Benjamin made ample use of the notion of

shock, the high-modernist sensibility he identified with montage and traced back to the artistic work of Baudelaire and the analytic work of Freud (among others). While other critics saw cinematic shock in more existential-aesthetic terms, as a product of the abruptness, intensity, and ephemerality of fleeting moments,² for Benjamin shock had a determinedly political significance. As is strongly evident in his discussion of Bertolt Brecht's epic theater (in "What Is the Epic Theatre?" and *Understanding Brecht*), in which the equivalent of cinematic montage can be located in the theatrical tableau (the moment at which ongoing gestures and movements are interrupted and suspended by the entry of a dispassionate outsider in such a way as to become a frozen spectacle), Benjamin relies for some of his most suggestive insights on a certain capacity for defamiliarization inherent in aesthetic form, a capacity to which he attributes the purpose of critical reflection. (His notion of the dialectic image in the unfinished *Arcades Project*, arguably, belongs in this repertoire of visual figures for mobilizing historical change as well.) It was thus by engaging with film as shock—a quality of the cinematic spectacle that, by extension, he associated with the spectators' general response—that Benjamin wrote of film as a forward-looking medium.³ He was, of course, deeply aware of the political danger that this entailed—by the 1930s film just as easily lent itself to manipulation by the Nazis and the Fascists—but his emphasis remained a utopian one, whereby the cinema stood for progressive possibilities.

By contrast, André Bazin, writing in France in the 1950s, was not drawn to the elusive and shocking effects of the cinematic spectacle but instead theorized the filmic image in terms of its ontology, its function as a preserve of time: "photography [. . .] embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. [In film,] for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were" (*What Is Cinema?* 14–15). If the cinema was in an earlier era associated with time as

progress, Bazin's theoretical emphasis was decidedly different. The cinema was by his time no longer a novelty but a mundane fact of mass culture, and the political potentiality of cinematic shock that energized the theorists in the 1930s gave way in Bazin's writings to phenomenologically oriented reflections, which are, paradoxically, also about the arrest and suspension of time. But whereas the filmic image as halted time provides Benjamin an impetus for historical action, for Bazin it signals rather retrospection, the act of looking back at something that no longer exists. The hopefulness and futurism of the earlier film theorizations are now superseded by a kind of nostalgia, one that results from the completion of processes. Accordingly, because time has fossilized in the cinematic spectacle, time is also redeemed there.⁴

In spite of his critics, Bazin's understanding of the cinematic image as time past does not mean that his film theory is by necessity politically regressive or conservative. Indeed, his grasp of the filmic image as (always already) implicated in retroaction enabled Bazin to analyze astutely how it was exploited in the Soviet Union for a political purpose different from that of capitalist Hollywood ("The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema" [1950]). Describing propaganda films in which Joseph Stalin always appeared not only as a military genius and an infallible leader but also as an avuncular, neighborly friend, filled with personal warmth and eagerness to help the common people, Bazin observes that the cinematic spectacle had become, in the hands of Soviet filmmakers, a completed reality—a perfect image against which the real-life Stalin must henceforth measure himself. Although Stalin was still alive, Bazin writes, it was as though he had been rendered dead; beside his own glowing image, he could only live nostalgically, attempting in vain to become like himself over again. The real-life Stalin had become a poor imitation of the Stalin image. Interestingly, in this cynical but perceptive account of Soviet propaganda, Bazin's theory of the cinematic image is derived

not so much from its effect of shock, potential for transformation, or hope for the future as from its effect of stability, permanence, and immobilization. The cinematic image here takes on the status of a monumentalized time, which compels one to look retroactively at something better, larger, and more glorious that no longer is. The remarkable lesson offered by Bazin is that, as much as the futurity imputed to the cinematic image, nostalgia too can be a profoundly political message; it too can inspire action.

These continental European negotiations with temporality as implied in the cinematic image, negotiations that tended to concentrate classically on film's relation to the world it represented, shifted to a different plane as film gained status as an academic subject in Britain and the United States in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. As a field of intellectual inquiry that sought institutional legitimation, film had to elaborate its own set of disciplinary specificities. At one level, it was, of course, possible to continue with the more abstract theorizations of the cinematic spectacle: as semiotics acquired critical purchase, film was accordingly rendered as a type of signification. Christian Metz's works, notably *Language and Cinema* and *Film Language*, led the way for the kind of inquiry that asks if film can be seen as a language in the Saussurean sense and, even if not, what its governing logic might be. The point of Metz's project was to configure the perceptual possibility of a structuration, a network of permutations, that had a materiality all its own, a materiality that was not to be confused with the "vulgar" materiality of the flesh. From Benjamin's and Bazin's adherence to the visual spectacle, then, with Metz and his followers theorization moved rigorously into film's internal principles for generating and organizing meanings. As such theorization became increasingly idealist and rationalist, film critics, including Metz himself (in *The Imaginary Signifier*), eventually found themselves returning to psychoanalysis as a remedial means of gauging the more intractable but undeniable issues of hu-

man fantasy and desire, and with them the politics of sexuality, to compensate for what had typically been left out of the semiotic explication.⁵ In retrospect, it is tempting to see semiotics and psychoanalysis as two inward turns—and disciplining moments—symptomatic of a process in which the study of film was caught up in its own identity formation. Be it through the labor of the filmic signifier or the labor of subjectivities interpellated around the cinematic apparatus, film studies was seeking its "mirroring," so to speak, by the profession at large.

This is the juncture at which the old question of time, at one point debated in terms that were more or less exclusively focused on the cinematic image, splintered. Time could no longer be grasped in the abstract, as the future or the past, but demanded to be understood in relation to the mental, cultural, and historical processes by which the seemingly self-evident cinematic image was produced in the first place. Accordingly, the givenness of the cinematic image was increasingly displaced onto the politics of spectatorship. In Anglo-American studies of film in the 1970s and 1980s, such as those published in the influential British journal *Screen*, the continental European focus on the cinematic image was steadily supplemented, and supplanted, by modes of inquiry that were concurrently informed by Marxist, structuralist and poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic writings (the master figures being Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser). But it was feminist film theory, described by Dudley Andrew as "the first and most telling Anglo-American cinema studies initiative" (344), that brought about a thorough redesign of the European focus.

In her groundbreaking essay of 1975, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey turns the question of the cinematic image (and its implications of time) into a story, one that, she reveals, is far from being sexually neutral.⁶ Instead of treating the cinematic image as a single entity, Mulvey approaches it in a deconstructive move, in which what seems

visually obvious and unified is taken apart by the reintroduction of narrative. The part of the narrative that determines how specific images are looked at while remaining itself hidden and invisible Mulvey calls the gaze. Most critically, Mulvey gives the temporal differential between image and gaze the name of patriarchy, so that, in classical Hollywood melodrama at least, she suggests, masculinist scopophilia underwrites the imperative of gazing, while women are cast, as a result, as passive, fetishized objects, as beautiful images to be looked at. Mulvey is clear about her goal: "It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article" ("Visual Pleasure" 16). As Maggie Humm writes, "Mulvey's essay marked a huge conceptual leap in film theory: a jump from the ungendered and formalistic analyses of semiotics to the understanding that film viewing always involves gendered identities" (17). By arguing that cinema is irreducibly structured by (hetero)sexual difference, Mulvey succeeded in doing something that her fellow male critics were uninterested in doing—prying the filmic image open and away from its hitherto spontaneous or reified status and reinserting in it the drama of the ongoing cultural struggle between men and women, the drama of ideology and of narrative coercions.⁷

In its justifiable distrust of the cinematic image as deceptive and usurpatory and in its courageous effort to forge a politics that would prevent the woman spectator from completely collapsing, at her peril, into the cinematic image of femininity produced by men, was feminist film theory, in spite of itself, an unwitting ally to an intellectual tradition that is, to borrow a term from Martin Jay's study of modern French theory, iconophobic? I tend to think so, but it is necessary to add that this iconophobia was a theoretically and institutionally productive one.⁸ It was precisely its negative momentum, manifested in the belief that the cinematic image had repressed something existing beyond it, that became the characteristic motif with which the

study of film has since then spread—first to English departments, in which film is often accepted as pop culture; then to foreign language and literature departments, in which film becomes yet another method of learning about "other" cultures; and finally to the currently fashionable discussions of so-called global media in social science as well as humanities programs across the university. Feminist film theory, in other words, inaugurated the institutional dissemination of cinema studies in the Anglo-American world with something akin to what Michel Foucault has called the repressive hypothesis, whereby the conceptualization of what is repressive—together with its investment in lack and castration—is reinforced by the multiplication and proliferation of discourses. (It was no mere coincidence that the "political weapon" on which Mulvey relied for attacking phallocentrism was Freudian psychoanalysis ["Visual Pleasure" 14].) But what is unique in this instance is that the repressive hypothesis has been put to work in the visual field and takes the form of iconophobia and that the implied agent of repression (and thus the source of lack) is, paradoxically, none other than the (plenitude of the) cinematic image itself.⁹

Because it is underwritten with the force of the repressive hypothesis, the paradigm shift in the cinematic visual field to the study of narrativity and ideology has led to consequences that go considerably beyond film studies. Academically speaking, such a paradigm shift logically made way for the study of differences. In the decades since Mulvey's essay was first published,¹⁰ film and cultural critics have extended the implications of her work (often in simplified terms) by devoting themselves to problematizing the naturalness of the cinematic image. Rather than on the image itself, its magic, or its tendency toward monumentalization, the focus of film theory and analysis has increasingly been on identifying and critiquing the multiple narrative and ideological processes that go into the image's production. Bill Nichols sums up

this general trend succinctly: “The visual is no longer a means of verifying the certainty of facts pertaining to an objective, external world and truths about this world conveyed linguistically. The visual now constitutes the terrain of subjective experience as the locus of knowledge, and power” (42). Whereas feminist critics like Mulvey steadily refine feminist modes of interrogating patriarchy, other critics, equipped with other types of social queries, would complicate that differential between gaze and image in terms of class, race, ethnicity, nation, and sexual preference to expose the repressive effects of dominant modes of visibility and identification. (Think, for instance, of the numerous critiques in postcolonial studies of orientalist representations.) Concurrently, they also theorize the ambiguities inherent in various forms of spectatorship and, by implication, in various forms of seeing and subjectivity.

In these collective destructions of the pleasurable and beautiful image, what has happened to the problematic of time? At one level, time is infinitely diversified and relativized: as every group of spectators comes to the filmic image with its own demands, interrogations, and political agendas, one can no longer speak of the image as such but must become willing to subject the image to these processes of re-viewing, reimagining, reassembling. This is perhaps the reason there are so many publications on filmmaking and the reception of film in different cultures (Brazilian, Chinese, French, German, Hong Kong, Indian, Iranian, Israeli, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish, just to name some commonly encountered examples). At the same time, in this culturally plural way of theorizing the filmic image, one cannot help feeling that a certain predictability has set in and that despite their local differences, the theoretical moves made by different cultural groups vis-à-vis the cinematic image often share a similar, or coeval, critical prerogative. This prerogative may be described in this manner: “The rise of distinct cultures to a condition of visibility accompanies a

radical shift away from democratic ideals of universalism (equality under the law for all regardless of gender, color, sexual orientation and so on) toward a particularism that insists on equality precisely in relation to differences of gender, color, sexual orientation and the like” (Nichols 40). “[D]ifferences of gender, color, sexual orientation and the like,” it follows, all generate research agendas, competition for institutional space and funding, and self-reproductive mechanisms such as publications and the training and placing of students. The questions of identity politics with which I began this essay are then, arguably, some of the (temporal) outcomes of the proliferating and disseminating mechanisms that characterize the repressive hypothesis as it operates around the cinematic visual field.

Ironically, however, despite the intellectual enthusiasm it has generated,¹¹ film studies has remained relatively marginalized in the teaching of the humanities at most universities (when compared with English, history, or comparative literature). Have the attempts at professionalization since the 1960s failed? Is the specialization of the discipline for which its theorists have been striving a phantom? There are at least two ways of responding to these questions.

If, instead of attaining centrality, film has remained phantomlike as an academic discipline, it is because it is inextricably linked to every other type of knowledge production. Teachers of the humanities nowadays may include movies or clips of movies in their teaching as a matter of course, whether or not they are film specialists. Similarly, a steady stream of publications flows from amateurs (such as myself) who love film but who have had no formal training in cinema studies and often continue working in other disciplines. To the extent that cinema tends to reside in the gap between, on the one hand, tangible and archivable products (which necessitate specialized documentation and institutional accommodation) and, on the other, the enthralled but transient experiences of generations

of moviegoers (for whom film is integral to the texture and fabric of petty bourgeois life), it will perhaps always remain an ambiguous object of study with unstable, open boundaries—but therein may lie its most interesting intellectual future. And although critics like Gledhill and Williams have characterized the current moment (also) as one of “the impending dissolution of cinema within globalized multimedia” (1), it is, I think, too early to declare that film has lost its future to the new media. Instead, this uncertain moment presents a valuable opportunity to reassess the impact of cinema in terms drastically different from those that are prevalent.

This brings me to my second point and to another sense of *phantom*. Marx taught us that it is precisely as a phantom that the commodity achieves its greatest power. By that he meant the reversal of a certain semiotic hierarchy, a reversal by which what was hitherto presumed to be a mere image and representation, secondary to the real thing, is steadily taking over society with a contagious primacy: the simulacrum that is the commodity usurps, is mistaken for, the original that is human labor. When feminist film theory alerted us to the cinematically fetishized status of women, its iconophobia shared important affinities with the moral charge that accompanied the political activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, which called for an end to military violence and for the granting of civil rights to disenfranchised populations. Yet precisely also because, like the mass protests and demonstrations self-consciously staged during that era, feminist film theory derived its energy from the logic of a certain repressive hypothesis, it simultaneously delivered another message. This was the message that the politics of gender and sexuality (together with the politics of race, class, and ethnicity) *was* the politics of media spectacles.¹² Indeed, the determination with which feminist critics sought to subvert the widespread fetishized images of women suggests that the politics of the simulacrum was assuming center stage—that these mechanically and then elec-

tronically produced images were henceforth going to be the actual, ubiquitous political battleground. From the beginning, thus, feminist film theorists were faced with contradictory tasks. On the one hand, they had to dislodge the cinematic image (or the visual field) as it was mimetically (re)produced on the basis of the phallogentric gaze; on the other hand, they must try to reappropriate the cinematic image (or the visual field) by saturating it from within with an alternative set of gazes, histories, and purposes. While repudiating the agency of one group of image makers, they must at the same time celebrate agency as it was placed with those who were previously denied it. If the cinematic image was a false representation of women, it was nonetheless only by actively producing another representation—indeed, by actively competing for the right to own and manage the visual field, to fabricate the images of women, to broadcast their stories—that feminist film theory could fulfill its political goal of liberating women.¹³

The attempt to find oneself properly imaged, mirrored, and represented (on the screen as well as off) as the definitive way of anchoring one's identity is, in this light, a newly fetishistic reading in an ever-expanding phantom field. Moreover, this fetish and its various simulacra, in the form of a belief in the struggle for identity, subjectivity, agency, and so forth, are no longer confined to gender politics but are repeated and reproduced widely across the disciplines, in which the rebuke of images often goes hand in hand with the massive generation and circulation of images—be those images about persons of different classes, races, nations, or sexual orientations.

Albeit postmodern and thus fashionable, the trend toward identity politics may, in the historical context of the cinematic image I schematically outline here, be politically retrogressive. By insisting that artificial images somehow correspond to the lives and histories of cultural groups, identity politics implicitly reinvests such images with an anthropomorphic realism—the

very thing that the iconoclasm of film, as its early theorists observed, undid. If we, however, remember that what are on the screen are not people but images, the conventional, identity-politics-driven understanding of cinematic identifications will have to be abandoned. Accepting these images as artifice would, I contend, liberate us from the constraints of literal, bodily identification, while reminding us of the undertheorized relation between economics, on the one hand, and fantasy and identity, on the other. A good case in point is the recent western European and North American fascination with East Asian cinema:¹⁴ should we try to direct such fascination back at some authentic Asianness lying beyond the alluring cinematic images, or would it not be more pertinent to see Asianness itself as a reproducible phantom, an exotic yet consumable commodity, made tantalizingly accessible not only by the filmic genres of the martial arts romance, action comedy, love story, and historical saga but also by an array of multimedia discourses (cuisine, fashion, herbal medicine, sex trade, child adoption, model-minority politics, illegal immigration, etc.) that at once are sustained by and contribute to the global flows of capital? How do we begin to theorize this state of affairs without putting East Asian cinema once again through the repressive hypothesis ritual, without iconophobically stripping its images of their fabulous surfaces and insisting on returning them to a kind of prerepresentational real?

If cinema has a privileged relation to questions of identification in modernity, it is because, as a medium, it has been teaching us about interactivity-cum-commodification¹⁵ since before the notion of interactivity became packaged, homogenized, and tightly locked into a keyboard-clicking relation with the computer screen. Between the artificial and the human, between the glamorous and the banal, between the lure of utopianism and the debasement of vulgar entertainment, the cinematic image has, for a century, popularized and disseminated modes of such interactivity, in which any identification has to be

the result of the risky meshing of human contents, senses, and emotions with machinic and economic processes. We have yet to come to terms with the radical implications of cinema's interruption of the human as such—indeed, with its conjuring of human beings as phantom objects.

NOTES

I wish to thank Michael Silverman for inspiring the title of this essay as well as for his helpful comments and criticisms.

¹ This information is part of an erudite discussion of the history of cinema studies.

² An example is the French filmmaker and film theorist Jean Epstein's notion of *photogénie*, the essence of film that he defines as beyond verbalization and definition. See Charney 285–88 for an informative discussion.

³ Benjamin's contemporary Bloch developed this forward-looking potential into a principle of hope, and his utopian argument about film and mass culture influenced subsequent generations of cultural theorists, such as, notably, Fredric Jameson. (See Gaines's discussion of this genealogy.) Kracauer is another contemporary of Benjamin's who wrote substantially on film.

⁴ In this regard, Bazin, like many early film theorists, still conceptualizes the cinematic in terms of its affinity with and dependency on photography. For a discussion of this tendency, see Gunning 322–25.

⁵ De Lauretis provides an illuminating historical account of the complicated tensions between semiotics and psychoanalysis in the theorizing of film. Drawing on the work of fellow feminist theorists such as Mulvey, she highlights the sexual politics inscribed in those tensions, and her own work provides a fine example of how the two models can be made to collaborate in film analysis. For other exemplary studies in feminist film theory during the 1980s that built on Mulvey's contributions, see Silverman; Doane.

⁶ Mulvey was not alone in her effort to theorize narrativity in relation to film. Among her fellow travelers were Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Stephen Heath, and Paul Willemen, who each did substantive work with film narrative during the same period, but Mulvey was the one who raised the issue of sexual politics.

⁷ See Humm for a thoughtful account that places Mulvey's essay in its historical context, the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s, when the British intellectual left encountered the burgeoning of feminist theory.

⁸ Among other things, it posed a crucial question in the politics of film production: how could one make a differently narrativized kind of film? Many criticisms of Mulvey's

polemical piece, including feminist criticisms of the 1980s, center on her point about destroying pleasure and, as a counterargument, attempt to recuperate the positive value of pleasure especially for women spectators. My argument is quite different in that it is about the intellectually and institutionally productive—that is, reproducible—nature of Mulvey's original negative move and how this is thought-provokingly bound up with the iconophobia of our (image-studded) culture at large.

⁹To the extent that one implicit aim of her criticism of classical Hollywood cinema was to eradicate Western images altogether, Mulvey's work can be seen as a British rejoinder to the political aspirations of the theorists (Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Roland Barthes, among others) who were associated with the French journal *Tel quel*, which in the 1960s and 1970s published critiques of Western thinking that often idealized Mao's China. Among the mid-twentieth-century European avant-garde fascination with the non-West as such, Anglo-American feminist film theory's adoption of Freudian psychoanalysis (to generate utopian alternatives), and Foucault's critique of the institutional productiveness of the repressive hypothesis (with its valorization of concepts such as lack and castration), an inexhaustible set of complexities awaits articulation. How would such articulation implicate the theorization of the cinematic visual field as it stands to date? Obviously, this enormous question will have to be taken up in a longer study, but I want at least to note it here.

¹⁰To her credit, Mulvey has, with historical hindsight, critiqued the binarism of her earlier polemical argument and revised her observations. See "Changes" (first published in 1985).

¹¹Numerous academic publishers currently offer entire book series on film—Indiana, Cambridge, Columbia, California, Illinois, Texas, Princeton, and the British Film Institute, to name just a few. Anthologies on film and related visual culture also keep appearing in bookstores (see the relatively recent volumes edited by Gledhill and Williams; Hill and Gibson; Shohat and Stam; Petro; Andrew with Shafto; Evans and Hall; and Tinkcom and Villarejo, for instance).

¹²As Armstrong writes, "[T]he sixties saw an important shift in the theater of political activism from the plane of physical action and conflicts that we persist in designating as real to the plane of discourse, representation, and performance, where conflicts determine how we imagine our relation to the real" (42). Her essay offers a provocative discussion of the linkage between the iconophobic legacy of Victorianism and the so-called cultural turn set off by the media-oriented activist events of the 1960s in the United States.

¹³Heterosexual pornography, which participated in the origins of film and shares in its naked fetishization of female bodies for commodified ends, is a paradigmatic case of the challenge that the politics of representation continues to pose, with controversy, to feminist theory. For an astute analysis, see Williams.

¹⁴See, e.g., Tesson; Kehr. Apart from being featured at film festivals around the world, where they have received major awards, East Asian films, directors, and actors and actresses have also steadily made their way into mainstream cinematic venues in western Europe and North America. Recent interesting books on this subject include Bordwell; Erlich and Desser; Yau; and Yoshimoto.

¹⁵As Gaines points out, although film has always been associated with capitalist consumerism, what constitutes the commodity that is film remains ambiguous and requires further thinking (105–06).

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