

Cinephilia – Film Studies – Cultural Studies¹

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That the question of (European) film studies as a possible field of research *can be asked* is a tribute to the success which in the 1980s and 1990s assured film (and television) studies in the universities something of a privileged place, as a young, innovative and provocatively hybrid discipline, and one of the few so-called ‘growth areas’ in the humanities. That the question *has to be asked* today means that past success as well as present (dis-/re-)orientation have to be seen in context. I shall sketch one such context – that of film studies in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s – as it has shaped and affected my own work, and then conclude with some speculations on the possible convergence or divergence of film studies and cultural studies today.

Following the call for a “white-hot technological transformation” by the then Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, Britain in the 1960s underwent major expansion in its higher education system, with the foundation of the so-called ‘new universities’, which included both Sussex and East Anglia, the universities I studied and then taught at. There, the setting up of new disciplines and interdisciplinary work, especially in the humanities, was being actively encouraged. At the same time, from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, several internal ‘revolutions’ at the British Film Institute were taking place, resulting in a specially set up Education Department, a new publications policy, and an active programme of supporting schools and universities to teach film as an academic subject. As a consequence, Britain in the 1970s and 1980s emerged as the most vibrant country in Europe with respect to film studies, producing a very diverse film culture that acted as a conduit for ideas between Paris and the United States. The diversity of the British film culture can be measured when remembering that it ranged from promoting the structuralist avant-garde to Hollywood cinephilia, from archival research on ‘early cinema’ to work in television and popular culture, from studies of ‘national cinemas’ to feminism and psychoanalysis, from conferences on realism and Bertold Brecht to debates about ethnographic film and documentary. Among the journals, it is *Screen* that is most often cited as the centre of all this activity, but as I shall argue below, it was by no means the only film magazine of note, the diversity being a vital aspect for the ‘ecology’ of this film culture and its robustness. Finally, among the active individuals were figures like Robin Wood, Victor Perkins, Sam Rohdie, Ben Brewster, Richard Dyer, Simon Field, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Andi Engel, Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe.²

On Post-war Origins of Film Studies: Cinephilia – 1960s Style

My own involvement in this London film culture started around a university film club in Brighton, which in one sense was a natural follow-up to my affiliation with a film club in my teens in Germany, devoted to European ‘realism’, whether Italian neo-realism or in the form of psychological realism of the Bergman or Kurosawa variety. The Brighton film club I joined in 1963 was quite different: it defined itself in the mirror of French cinephilia of the late 1950s and worshipped Hollywood auteurs. My new friends attacked my German middle-class taste and eventually browbeat me into

¹ This article is an extract of a chapter from the forthcoming book by Thomas Elsaesser: *The Persistence of Hollywood* (Routledge, 2008).

² Also a remarkable number of couples could be added to this list: Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Rosalind Delmar, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, Richard Collins and Christine Gledhill, Pam Cook and Jim Cook, John Ellis and Rosalind Coward.

agreeing that Bergman's *The Silence*, despite its sexual frankness and existential 'angst' was not as important for the cinema as John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. I was ready to agree that Jean Luc Godard was the most exciting director in the world, but that a Western with John Wayne should be more serious than *Wild Strawberries* or *The Seventh Seal* seemed inconceivable to the aesthetic orthodoxy I grew up with.

What was so special about French cinephilia, and why was it important for what became film studies in Britain? Antoine de Baecque has defined it as "a way of watching films, speaking about them and then diffusing this discourse". De Baecque judiciously includes the element of shared experience, as well as the need to write about it and to proselytize, alongside the pleasure derived from viewing films on the big screen. The cinephilia I became initiated into around 1963 in Brighton and London did include dandified rituals strictly observed when 'going to the movies', either alone or, less often, in groups. Cinephilia meant being sensitive to one's surroundings when watching a movie, carefully picking the place where to sit, fully alert to the quasi-sacral feeling of nervous anticipation that could descend upon a public space, however squalid, run-down or rowdy, as the velvet curtain rose and the studio-logo with its fanfares filled the space. But cinephilia is also a gesture towards cinema always already framed by nostalgia and other retroactive temporalities, by pleasures tinged with regret, even as they register as pleasures. Without cinephilia, there would not have been film-studies, certainly not for my generation in Great Britain, but film studies – some would say – was also the grave-digger of cinephilia.

Ever since I was 16, I had been drawing up lists of the films I 'needed' to see, and I usually took copious notes immediately after the screenings of those that I did manage to catch at a local movie-theatre or the film club. But what galvanized all of this, and made my cinephilia so completely distinct from other juvenile obsessions, such as stamp collecting or drawing up the weekly top-ten hit parade was the encounter with the films of Godard. Mesmerized by *A Bout de souffle* in 1960 and *Vivre sa vie* in 1962, baffled by *Le petit soldat* in 1963, it took *Le Mepris* in 1964 to make the idea of 'film studies' an urgently felt necessity, because I desperately needed to know what made film and cinema so vital as an art. If someone had asked me at that time André Bazin's famous question from 1958 "*qu'est-ce-que c'est le cinema*", I would probably have answered: "cinema is whatever Jean Luc Godard happens to be doing *right now*." But Godard not only shocked me into a new awareness of the power of the moving image, he also made me curious about American directors quoted in his films, like Sam Fuller or Vicente Minnelli, especially when Michel Piccoli in *Le Mepris* wore a hat at all times, only because Dean Martin did so in Minnelli's *Some Came Running*. It was Godard, who propelled the wish to reflect on the cinema, but he did so in a dramatic/ traumatic way. He lodged the desire for a theory of cinema through the cinema itself, but his films foreclosed that very possibility, because the standards he set were so far in advance of everything else that happened in the cinema up to that time.

Film studies, then, as far as I was concerned, was initially born from the wish to catch up with Godard, and from the realization that words (that is, our training in literature) was all one had. The experience was so traumatic, and Godard became so emblematic, I think, because his films fostered the illusion that writing about films was already halfway to making them, and that making films was the most authentic manner of being engaged in the world, in fact, of transforming the world: not only one's own, but that of one's culture and society. Hence the fatal ambition to become a

film activist, which meant to write for and edit a film magazine, which I eventually did in 1968.

My preparatory reading for this task, after my conversion to Hollywood, was different from what had first informed my understanding of cinema. Originally, I thought about cinema from an ethnographic-anthropological perspective, inspired by Edgar Morin's *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (1956) which gave me a broadly cultural-historical grounding, reinforced by my university studies in European literature, art history and 20th century politics.³ But now I had to rethink: besides devouring *Cahiers du cinéma* every month, I took out a subscription to *Movie Magazine*, which started appearing in 1961.⁴ Sometimes regarded as a mere clone of French magazines like *Présence du cinéma*, it was admired by us for its intransigent militancy vis-à-vis other positions, notably that of *Sight and Sound*, the house journal of the British Film Institute. Realism, for instance, was not attacked by *Movie* because it was an aesthetic of the cinema that privileged its mechanical reproduction over its expressive-constructivist uses (André Bazin's theory), nor did the editors object to British 'kitchen sink' cinema because of its manifestly middle-class 'angry young men' (rather than authentic working-class heroes). *Movie* abhorred the realist credo because its rival magazine *Sight & Sound* believed in it, for whom realism meant the victory of good taste over cult and camp, and pragmatism over passion: a prescriptive, well-meaning, understated consensus of those who enjoyed the cinema, but in moderation, and who, when given the choice, would prefer a good novel, or an evening at the theatre.

The intellectual ferment of London notwithstanding, for anyone interested in the cinema in the 1960s, the pull of Paris was irresistible. No sooner had I finished my first university undergraduate degree and begun a doctorate, I enrolled at the Sorbonne. I did not take any courses, but spent my daytime hours at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the evenings – usually from 7 pm to midnight, at the Cinémathèque. Later, during the heady days of May '68, devotion to the cinema found its natural extension in the street battles, or the occupation of the Sorbonne and the Odeon Theatre. Altogether, I must have seen six hundred films in the eight months I spent in Paris, and filled several spiral bound notebooks with comments scribbled in the dark. No sooner had I returned to England and re-established contact, I went ahead and started a university film magazine in late 1968, the *Brighton Film Review*. Its slightly better known, but also relatively short-lived successor was *Monogram*, begun in 1971. The fact that *Monogram* promoted Hollywood in the early 1970s, at the height of anti-Vietnam protests and in the wake of May '68 was an act of faith in the guise of a provocation: instead of writing about Glauber Rocha or Michael Snow, we published articles on Michael Powell and Raoul Walsh, Sam Peckinpah and Robert Aldrich.

Film Theory as Screen Theory: Mourning Work for Cinephilia?

One always thinks one's experience is unique, and that the choices one makes are self-directed and premeditated. Thus, I did not ask myself why it was that during the

³ Besides Morin, it was Robert Warshow's *The Immediate Experience* (1962), and especially Parker Tyler whose essays I devoured, written mostly during the 1950s but collected in the 1960s as *The Hollywood Hallucination*, and as *Sex, Psyche, Etcetera in the Film*. What had prepared me for Tyler were the occasional pieces by the English critic Raymond Durnat, whose iconoclasm was generously spiced with Adou Kyrrou's and Robert Benayoun's brand of surrealism, which had survived in the pages of *Positif*, the Parisian antagonist of *Cahiers du cinéma*, and a magazine that notably hated Godard.

⁴ *Movie Magazine* (London) since 1961, originally edited by Ian Cameron.

same years that I founded a film magazine in Brighton, there also appeared in London *Afterimage*, *Cinemantics*, *Cinema Rising*, *Enthusiasm*, *Cinema* (Cambridge University), and a little later: *Framework* (University of Warwick) and *Filmform* (Newcastle University). They all kept their distance from, but certainly felt the gravitational pull of *Screen*, refounded in 1971, and dramatically reversing the decline of the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT). Nor did I realize at the time that pilgrimages to Paris similar to mine had been undertaken a few years earlier (as well as to Rome) by Peter Wollen, Laura Mulvey, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Jon Halliday: all regular writers for *Screen* and major figures in the emergence of film studies in Britain. These parallels and coincidences focus attention on the conjunctural dynamics that led from French-inspired cinephilia and auteurism to film studies in Britain.

Screen's intellectual lineage was also in Paris: not so much formed by *Cahiers du cinéma* and Henry Langlois' Cinémathèque, but inspired by the journal *Communications* and Christian Metz' and Roland Barthes' seminars at the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, which were attended by Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe, two of the intellectual engines behind the new *Screen* offensive. Their essays are now generally identified under the name of 'Screen theory', by which is meant a volatile blend of Saussurean linguistics, Levi-Straussian structuralism, Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which together elaborated a theoretically very sophisticated, but for their opponents hermetically sealed and tautological critique of bourgeois (psychological) realism, patriarchal modes of gender representations and the 'realist effect' of the 'cinematic apparatus'.⁵ More specifically, terms such as 'suture', 'interpellation', 'subject-construction', 'mirror-stage' and 'the gaze' are identified with *Screen* theory, which developed the early insights of Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Greimas in the direction of a theory of gendered subjectivity and vision, which has had an enormous influence on film theory, feminism, visual culture studies and art history.

Were one to analyze *Screen* theory from within its own theoretical premises, one might quite plausibly detect a dynamic of desire and its disavowal. Given the common 'cinephile' origins of almost everyone in British film culture in the 1960s and 1970s, the subsequent ambivalences shown vis-à-vis Hollywood films⁶ could lead one to conclude that what was at stake were the painful dichotomies of a lover's discourse, as conjugated by Roland Barthes: "I have loved and love no more"; "I love no more, in order to better love what I once loved". In this sense, *Screen* theory's decade-long deconstruction of Hollywood can be seen as a kind of extended funeral service or mourning work for cinephilia, where the very loss of the once loved object intensifies the effort to master this loss by a theory of 'subjectification' and 'interpellation'.

Thus, the intellectual brilliance and theoretical difficulties of *Screen* theory both covered over and preserved the fact that ambivalence about the status of

⁵ A good account of *Screen* theory can be found in the introductions and texts assembled in Phil Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

⁶ This ambivalence is demonstrated by the translation of *Cahiers du cinéma*'s Lacanian deconstruction of John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*, Stephen Heath's massive two-part essay on Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's debate on Ford's *The Searchers*, Laura Mulvey's feminist critique of voyeurism in Hitchcock and Sternberg, Colin MacCabe's article on *American Graffiti*, all of which make Hollywood at once the target of relentless deconstruction and yet the obsessively chosen object of desire disguised as critique.

Hollywood as the good/ bad object persisted, notwithstanding that the 'love of cinema' was now called by different names: voyeurism, fetishism and scopophilia (Heath; Mulvey). Such terms, beyond their technical meaning within Freudian discourse, make it evident that by 1975/1976 the cinephilia, to which this generation owed its knowledge of the cinema, had been dragged out of its closet, and revealed itself as a source of disappointment: the magic of the movies, in the cold light of day, had become a manipulation of regressive fantasies and the place for masculinity to protect itself from castration anxiety and sexual difference. Pleasure, consumption and popular culture did become political issues in Britain for Cultural Studies, but not for *Screen*, whose writers maintained a very explicit commitment to the dogmatic Marxism of the French Left, and to the anti-aesthetics of Modernist avant-garde art.

By the mid-1980s, a certain turning point was in evidence. *Screen*'s policy of (mainly French) high theory certainly paid off, when one considers the BFI Education Department's goal: to provide the 'texts' and set the intellectual agenda that enabled one part of this diverse film culture of the 1960s to enter into the university and establish the British version of film studies. But the insistence on this particular theory, which defined films as a language system, and the spectator as subject to mis-cognition and ideological interpellation also set the scene for a number of divisions. By then, many of the independent film-magazines (including *Movie*, *Monogram*, *Cinema*, *Cinema Rising*, and *Filmform*) providing differing perspectives had either ceased publication or appeared only very infrequently, partly because the superior clout of *Screen* – intellectual and institutional – had overshadowed their attempts to evolve alternative approaches to cinema. *Screen* had also split the filmmaking communities, some of whom did not feel enabled or empowered by high theory, while others, among them a number of women's filmmaking collectives (notably the London Women's Film Co-op, the Sheffield Film Co-op and the Berwick Street Collective) did benefit from the high profile that *Screen* had given to feminist issues and the politics of gender, while not necessarily following the theoretical line of *Screen*'s more famous contributors.

Film Studies in the University: A Trojan Horse?

In 1976, an initiative was started from within the BFI (led by Ed Buscombe) that was aimed at encouraging universities to formally establish film studies by offering them funding for a three-year appointment which the university was subsequently to take on and make permanent. I was myself directly involved in the scheme at my own university of East Anglia, where I regarded it as an ideal opportunity to extend the teaching of film by adding another colleague. In the end, five posts were filled, all at 'new universities': Robin Wood went to Warwick University, Richard Dyer was hired at Keele University, Ben Brewster at the University of Kent, Peter Wollen at Essex, and Charles Barr at East Anglia. Of the five, only Keele and Essex did not make their posts permanent, and to this day, the three others – Warwick, Kent, East Anglia – are recognized as the leading Film Studies departments in the country, having substantially expanded in size and produced, over the past three decades, the majority of the graduates and doctorates that currently teach film & media in Britain. While film studies is now successfully established at most universities in Britain, Oxford and Cambridge have so far resisted, and even the Colleges that make up London University have found it difficult to catch up on the ten-year lead that the three 'provincial' universities were able to build up.

Nevertheless, the difficulties that film studies initially faced in these universities were considerable. Most academics in the humanities distrusted a subject

so obviously popular and pleasurable, yet without either a list of recognized classic authors, canonical texts or a secured and proven method for studying them. Here, French cinephilia proved invaluable, because it permitted one to propose a curriculum set up in the mirror image of literature. *Cahiers du cinéma*'s and Andrew Sarris' pantheon auteurs⁷ and undisputed masterpieces⁸ served us well in establishing introductory courses. At the same time, the French passion for mise-en-scène criticism allowed us to conduct the kind of close textual reading familiar to students of poetry and the modern novel. But as indicated, 'out there' in the world of politicised film theory and the cut-and-thrust of intellectual debate, these very authors, canons and methods were shown to be deeply flawed ways of understanding the cinema and its political-ideological role in perpetuating bourgeois individualism and gendered subjectivity. This very split between cinephile auteurism and *Screen* theory's ideological assault on Hollywood, worked in favour of film studies inside the academy, because it answered to literary studies' own crisis in its methodological self-understanding, as well as its own doubts about canon-formation. Film studies' ability to draw on Barthes' structuralism, Saussurean semiology, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derrida's deconstruction made it not only a useful ally for a younger generation of literary theorists, it also raised the intellectual stakes generally, because the study of a 'low' medium turned out to require 'high theory' from its practitioners and thus gave film theorists a special advantage in the 'identity wars' that began in the early 1980s. It is in this sense that one can speak of film studies as having been the 'Trojan horse' of these wars, because internally they polarized the existing subjects and areas of expertise, while nonetheless providing powerful impulses for departmental renewal and cross-disciplinary cooperation.

Film Studies: A Victim of its Success?

In some sense, then, this is a double success-story. An emerging interest in the serious study of the cinema in the 1960s was able to focus itself for a decade around film-magazines, an enlightened public institution, and a generation of politically committed, polemically gifted and intellectually hungry men and women, many of whom (and this is the second part of the success story) were able during the next decade – the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s – to find teaching positions in institutions of higher education, where their theoretical sophistication often gave them the vanguard role just mentioned, with respect to older, more established disciplines.

But this success could not disguise a certain paradox or a-symmetry. As an academic discipline, film studies constructed its object according to the rules that obtain within the humanities. These are, as indicated, largely set by literary studies and its realist or modernist discourses, rather than, say, by communication studies, sociology or economics. But the cinema also exists in the culture and the economy at large, as one of the great popular arts and entertainment forms of the 20th century. The cinema's existence as an industry and the films' presence in society as popular culture are shaped by a dynamic in which academic work plays virtually no part. Our essays and books rarely attracted the general reader, while working film critics had little time for film theory, which they found abstruse, elitist and patronizing. Furthermore, what is striking about the disciplinary conception of the cinema as a

⁷ E.g. Orson Welles, John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls, Howard Hawks, and Kenji Mizoguchi.

⁸ E.g. *Citizen Kane*, *La Règle du Jeu*, *Sunrise*, *Modern Times*, *The Big Sleep*, *Vertigo*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

body of 'texts' (the canonical masterpieces, made up of the *oeuvre* of recognized directors and a few discoveries in archival vaults) is the degree to which it 'privatizes' the film experience and aligns it with reading a book, not least in order to give the cinema the degree of (modernist) autonomy and (medium) specificity required by works that aspire to be recognized as 'art' in the 20th century. By contrast, what is striking about the cinema as a public art and popular practice has been the *loss of autonomy and specificity* that individual films have undergone over the same thirty years, a process which also began in the mid-1970s, when Hollywood was able to revive its economic success with a new kind of film-experience, namely the blockbuster, combining a different sound-space with spectacle values, such as special effects and thrilling action sequences. As movie theatres became showcases for new products of the ever-growing media entertainment industries, and these products (mainly event-movies and blockbuster spectacles) came to be seen as 'content' that could be packaged around different 'platforms' and thus exploited by other media industries (above all, by television, the videogame market and the music business), the films themselves, while still the prime experience, had difficulty in retaining their status as either 'texts' or individually 'authored' artefacts: with DVD releases, directors' cuts and bonus packages they no longer command the space of singularity and closure we traditionally expect of a 'work (of art)'. Not only have the sequel, prequel or series become almost the norm of mainstream film production; the other aggregate states of the cinematic event just mentioned make up the major part of a film's economic potential, whose commodity status appears further confirmed by the DVD, with its slick packaging and ubiquitous marketing. This loss of autonomy and specificity, critics (and filmmakers) have lamented as the 'decay' or even the 'death' of cinema.⁹ It is a debate that not only touches the transfer from photographically based images to digitally shot and edited film, or signifies the 'death' of the referential bond that the celluloid based moving image has with reality. It also alludes to the sheer ubiquity and total availability of film, depriving us of the sense of event and occasion that traditionally was associated with 'going to the movies' – and with cinephilia.

Cultural Studies in opposition to Screen Theory

In the 'identity-wars' of the 1980s, *Screen* theory was not the only intellectual resource. On the contrary, its emphasis on subjectivity and gender seemed to foreclose other important markers of difference, such as class, ethnicity and community- or peer group-identity. The continuing vitality of British film studies into the 1980s and its extension into media studies in the 1990s, I would argue, depended on both: on the philosophically trained, often very abstract French system thinkers, translated and transmitted by *Screen*, and the more empirical, historically informed and politically more tough-minded scholars around what eventually came to be known as 'cultural studies' or the 'Birmingham School'. The intellectual agenda of the latter – the study of popular culture on a broader front and the nuanced valorisation of its pleasures – has often been interpreted as a reaction to *Screen* theory's reliance on psychoanalysis and 'apparatus theory', which concentrated on the textually constructed spectator,

⁹ Susan Sontag. "The Decay of Cinema." *New York Times*, 25 February 1996; Godfrey Cheshire. "The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema." *New York Press* 12 (1999); Michael Witt. "The Death(s) of Cinema According to Godard." *Screen* 40 (1999): 333-45; Paolo Cherchi Usai. *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age*. London: BFI, 2001; Stefan Jovanovic. "The Ending(s) of Cinema: Notes on the Recurrent Demise of the Seventh Art, Part 1 & 2." Online at: http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/death_cinema.html.

defined as passive', subjectified and a-historical. But it is important to recall also what *Screen* theory and the Birmingham school had in common, before identifying their differences. Both put the focus on reception and the spectator, rather than on the artist-creator-author. Both drew on Marxism, even if on different 'schools' of Western Marxism¹⁰, and both had a common heritage in Levi-Strauss and Barthes, and considered films to be analysable in terms of 'text', 'signs' and as a species of 'language'.¹¹

Cultural studies, which thus emerged (methodologically) in parallel to film studies, and (politically) in opposition to mass-communication studies, devoted itself to a new definition of the popular arts and entertainment industries, trying to take aboard a certain 'democratic' understanding of the motives, desires and pleasures among those who 'use' the mass media for their own group-identification (youth-cultures), self-differentiation (sub-cultures) and self-definition (fans). In line with reception studies in literature, cultural studies can also be understood as a way of mapping the fields of film and media history in a new way, by speaking about specific 'texts' in a manner that shows how these are embedded in the wider (social) histories of popular entertainment, life-styles and consumption, domestic leisure and the 'public sphere'. More specifically, cultural studies has also tried to define for the popular a specific form of aesthetic production (formula, the stereotype, pastiche, intertextuality, irony), exploring subcultures' relation to style, and returning to Levi-Straussian 'bricolage' as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'carnival' and the 'dialogical' with respect to popular culture – regardless of its commercial origins and commodity status.

In this respect, cultural studies has been an invaluable ally for another counter-movement to 'high theory' also within film studies, namely the turn to 'cinema history' and 'media archaeology'. The history of cinema (as opposed to film history) became an academic paradigm in its own right in the 1990s under the heading of 'cinema and modernity' or 'cinema and visuality', drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel and Siegfried Kracauer. Now often also referred to as the 'cinema of attractions', this paradigm around visual culture, spectacle and display offers itself as another version of reception studies, and an alternative to the traditional emphasis in film studies on narrative and narratology, inspired by literary structuralism. Most of this work in early cinema takes a broadly 'cultural' rather than a 'medium-specific' approach, which is to say, it is more interested in the (trans-media, multi-cultural and media-historical) category of 'modernity' than in the (literary and art-historical) category of 'modernism'.

One can thus, by the 1990s, speak of two generations of (academic) film studies in Britain, at once related to each other and subtly opposed to each other. In contrast to the first phase of film studies, derived from (and ambivalent towards) cinephilia, the second phase of film studies, inspired by cultural studies has broadened its scope both synchronically (by taking in other manifestations of visual and popular culture) and diachronically (by extending its historical reach to include 'pre-cinema' and, I am tempted to add, 'post-cinema'). It is thus able to make good the demand to pay attention to the materiality and heterogeneity of media practices and media technologies, from a perspective that can also include the digital media, one of the

¹⁰ It can be signalled that *Screen* famously relied on Louis Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' while cultural studies preferred Antonio Gramsci and his idea of 'hegemony.'

¹¹ While *Screen* had followed Metz's route from Saussurean linguistics to Lacanian psycho-semiotics, Birmingham had adopted the more 'empowering' approach of Roman Jakobson.

distinguishing features of ‘media-theory’.

Conclusion

The itinerary that I have been trying to trace has, as indicated, a personal dimension, and thus cannot claim to be impartial or even representative. But it is one that is embedded in a number of institutional contexts, which in turn are part of the history of film and cultural studies in Britain, where ‘London’ (here exemplified by the British Film Institute and *Screen* magazine) exerted a gravitational pull, but one that was balanced by various regional forces, especially the ‘new universities’ that first established academic film studies, not forgetting cinephile retrospectives and specific debates (such as the Edinburgh Film Festival, with discussions on feminism, on Foucault, France and ‘popular memory’, etc.), and last but not least, by the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, which provided the most significant intellectual counterweight to *Screen* theory in the 1980s, with a world-wide response that by the 1990s had all but eclipsed what I called the first phase of British film studies. The ‘identity-wars’ and the ‘politics of representation’ around race, class, gender and sexual orientation have become such prominent features of academic discourse in the humanities across the disciplines that it would be fair to say that British cultural studies (by now critiqued, modified, adapted, and indeed ‘negotiated’ by local practitioners in the United States, Australia, and also in Northern Europe) has not only ‘subsumed’ and thereby thoroughly redefined film studies in many universities, but has also become something of a ‘hegemonic’ force in the way we approach the manifestations of all culture: be it high culture or popular culture, be it literary culture or media culture, be it the crass commercialism of television and tourism, or the slightly more subtle commerce of the art world and exhibition practice.

The question that poses itself at such a juncture is twofold. One: can film studies remain comfortable within such a broad brief, or does it need to extricate itself from this embrace and find its own redefinition? And two: can cultural studies, such as it is currently constituted, veritably assume the task that seems to have fallen to it, namely to provide instruments precise enough and sensors delicate enough to ensure the critical readability – for this what is at stake – of all that is now subsumed under culture? Or does the fact that ‘culture’ is no longer opposed to ‘nature’ (no more than ‘nature’ can be opposed to ‘technology’) not require also a major redefinition of cultural studies?

In answer to the first question, one can note that ever since Gilles Deleuze’s cinema books, published in the late 1980s and widely read and discussed in the 1990s, the cinema, or rather ‘film’ has entered an entirely different space of reflexivity and conceptualization. More decisive in this philosophical turn than the possible exhaustion of the paradigms of ‘representation’ and the questions of ‘identity’ may have been the crisis into which the cinema has been plunged by digitization. Seemingly depriving it of its material basis in photography, the digital image alters the very ground of many of film’s key characteristics, both as a technical medium and an art-form, such as fiction versus documentary, realism versus illusionism, montage versus long take, movement versus simultaneity. But when film studies aligns itself with philosophy and when philosophy takes an interest in the cinema, many other issues of a non-technological nature are also at stake, affecting questions of evidence and epistemology, but also of ontology, ‘disclosure’ and ‘being’. One can thus be fairly optimistic that in the decade to come, film theory will re-invent itself, even if (or perhaps because) the cinema as we have known it for its first hundred years, has indeed passed away. Here, too, as with *Screen* and cinephilia, a (new) theory may be

the funeral of a practice.

The second question I find much more difficult to speculate about. There are different claims, for instance from art history, extending its ambitions in the direction of an image-anthropology, and to speak also in the name of moving images, and not only of the framed static image of painting and photography. From the side of media-studies, a generalized concept of medium seems to compete with a more specific idea of a 'technological ('cyber') culture', in which human beings and their symbolic (inter)actions (i.e. 'culture') are understood as the products of their information media and technologies, rather than vice versa.

From my perspective as a film scholar, I am somewhat skeptical about any of these claims when they come with totalizing aspirations, since I see them above all as staking out potential or actual territory in university departments and research allocations. Cinema's comparative insignificance as a 'serious' contender in major research funding exercises sometimes seems a blessing in disguise. Precisely because of its somewhat 'performative' position in the academy, hovering over several disciplines, such as literary studies, art history, philosophy or communication studies like a butterfly or hummingbird, film studies when called upon to construct for itself a viable history and theory, knows better than other disciplines that such self-definitions are largely the function of a process that in many ways has only just begun: the transformation of the classic humanities based primarily on written texts, their history and hermeneutics. In this process, dependent as it is on the overall space allowed to the study of culture, under pressure to legitimate itself vis-à-vis the hard and social sciences, and to prove itself 'useful', film studies is better off neither to strive for autonomy, nor to have imperial ambitions. While its 'place' in the curriculum seems largely secure – thanks to the double conjuncture of the moving image's popularity among students, and the perceived social and economic relevance of what is known as 'the media' – the 'space' (discursive, institutional, aesthetic) is, as I have tried to indicate, far from uncontested, which allows it to be experimental, curious, adventurous, bold and even promiscuous, in short: 'opportunistic', meaning that it can seize opportunities when they present themselves. This is how I have known film studies, this is how I have practiced it, and this is how I would like to remember it.

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Summary

In this article I want to look at a double conjuncture around an object of study - the cinema - which has itself only recently been accorded the status of a discipline: film studies. Precisely because of its somewhat 'performative' position in the academy compared to literary studies, art history or philosophy, film studies is constantly called upon to construct for itself a viable relation to history, theory and cultural studies, while at the same time knowing full well that disciplines such as 'art history' 'literary theory' and 'cultural studies' are themselves mediated and constructed by

other fields of force, not least by one that now calls itself 'media theory'. The positioning of film studies within these wider fields, where it is at times central, at times quite marginal, is thus the function of a process that in many ways has only just begun: the transformation of the classic humanities based on written texts, their history ['influence'] and hermeneutics ['interpretation'], within a different, more 'dynamic' and unstable media environment. Dependent on the space allowed and allotted to the study of images, representation and symbolic action in society at large, film and media studies is under constant and increasing pressure to legitimate itself vis-à-vis the hard and social sciences. This means that while film studies' 'place' in the university curriculum is largely secured - thanks to the double conjuncture of the cinema's popularity among the university's primary 'clients', the students, and the perceived social and economic relevance of what in the jargon is known as 'the media' in general - the place is far from uncontested, because in each case it is already fully-occupied by sitting tenants that are unwilling to cede territory.

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