

Introduction: Cinematic Identifications

Elizabeth Reich and Scott C. Richmond

Today, we all know the well-worn story of film theorists' wholehearted embrace of apparatus theory—and their subsequent, equally wholehearted, rejection of it. This story narrates the history of our (often frustrated) efforts to reconcile our field's political and theoretical investments into one, overarching description of how audiences experience the moving image. With the goal of revisiting and revitalizing the most enduring aspects of apparatus theory, we open this issue by retelling, in broad strokes, this story. Apparatus theory's two major exponents, Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry, each drew a picture of the cinema as a generative technology, one that not only projected moving images but also constituted spectating subjects. These two overlapping but distinct functions were supposed to inhere in the cinema's technological base as structural effects of the cinema itself.

It now appears that such a theory, however productive it may once have been, came at the steep price of an incorrect (at best) or toxic (at worst) generalization of the cinema's viewers. On the one hand, Metz's and Baudry's scheme presumed an apparently monolithic and historically unchanging idea of the cinema's technology and its functioning. Film historians of various stripes have successfully

challenged the assumption of representational, narrative cinema on which these accounts seemed to rest.¹ Furthermore, and perhaps more negatively, apparatus theory postulated a monolithic bloc of viewers, undifferentiated by sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, age, class, nationality, historical moment, or any of the other factors that make people different from one another in structural ways. Today, of course, we know better.

Central to this embarrassing episode in the history of film theory was the notion that a process of *identification* lies at the intersection of cinema's two overlapping technological functions, projecting representations and producing subjects—a notion to which many of us have remained committed, despite our disagreements with apparatus theory more generally. In this account, by enjoining its viewers to acts of identification, the cinema demands that, as viewers, we take leave of ourselves, and of any critical distance or agentive awareness we may have. Instead, we come to inhabit an idealization emanated by the film text and organized by the cinematic “apparatus.” Inevitably, ineluctably, the cinema organizes for us an ideologically-freighted subject position—a position we are obligated to occupy or assume by virtue of our presence in a cinema—as a precondition for appreciating, enjoying, or even comprehending the spectacle onscreen.

Feminist film theorists were the first to subject this account to criticism. Their critique was both quick and devastating, as feminism spoke a psychoanalytic language similar to that of Metz and Baudry. Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, Theresa de Lauretis, and many others showed that the compensatory and illusory subject position of apparatus theory was emphatically masculine and organized by misogyny—in the service of what Mulvey memorably called the “neurotic needs of the male ego” (209 in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*; the last page of the essay). They showed that the cinema's idealized subject position not only proffers, as it does for Baudry and Metz, the pleasing and compensatory illusion of a unified subject, it also endows that subject with an impervious if appetitive masculinity, organized by a fantasy of phallogentric mastery over women. (Today, we would add, it also includes white supremacist fantasies of mastery over racial others, ableist fantasies of supremely and willfully capable action in a world organized for our benefit, and many other hegemonic fantasies besides.) They also showed that female spectators were trapped between a masochistic identification with the misogynistic

fantasy of a masculine (or masculinist) subject position, or a disidentification with it that introduced an alienated and alienating distance between viewer and image. This trap sundered the possibility of occupying the cinema as a “proper” subject; each possible (even necessary) position was untenable. Thus, according to feminist film critics, female spectatorship remains, as Doane has put it, a “locus of impossibility” (29). We will return to these critiques below. For now, we want underscore how feminist film theory shows that identification is a conflicted, compromised process for female viewers.

This observation is crucial because it introduces the idea that identification is a process that may not proceed as seamlessly as we often think it does. Our basic position—and the position that animates the five remarkable essays in this issue—is that cinematic identification is a more complex, contradictory, labile, plastic, and frankly weird process than our disciplinary just-so stories about it have told us. Film history has demonstrated that the technological arrangement, social norms, and aesthetic uses of the cinema are not monolithic (nor even particularly stable), and cultural studies grounded in identity politics have shown us how film audiences are not homogenous. Collecting these essays together, we hope to show that the processes of identification that the cinema can animate are themselves neither monolithic nor homogenous. In fact, they are highly variegated. We cannot, of course, account for all the different modes of identification the cinema deals in, nor do we aim to. We present this issue on cinematic identification instead as a starting point. We hope at once to open up inquiry and to demonstrate the value of attending not to a single process of cinematic identification, but to the messy manifold of psychic, social, and aesthetic procedures we group together under the heading of *cinematic identifications*.

To introduce these essays, we turn to the primal scene, as it were, of an originary differentiation between modes of cinematic identification: Metz’s well-known distinction between two complementary processes of identification, which he calls *primary* and *secondary* cinematic identification. Below, we address these in turn; many of the authors in this volume do so as well. One of our shared goals is to make *The Imaginary Signifier* speak anew, while holding in mind the criticisms to which Metz’s scheme has rightly been subjected. Of course, we do not all agree on what is at stake in such a return (and, indeed, neither do the editors). What we do agree on, however, is the continued productivity of this scheme, with all its evident problems and difficulties.

Animating this return to Metz is our conviction that cinematic identification has yet to be taken as seriously as it ought. On the one hand, we can state this as we did above: identification is a far stranger, far more diverse process than we have been able to account for, and this diversity is worth attending to, if only to get a better grip on the phenomenon of spectatorship. On the other hand, however, we also mean to suggest that even Metz's concepts of primary and secondary cinematic identification themselves have yet to be addressed as seriously as they deserve, in part because primary cinematic identification has remained too obscure, while secondary cinematic identification has seemed rather too obvious. Our goal in this introduction is to complicate the latter and clarify the former.

Secondary Cinematic Identification

Let us begin with the second. Perhaps because it seems so transparent, Metz's concept of "secondary cinematic identification" has been all but passed over by scholars. Metz himself devoted very little discussion to the idea in his writings on spectatorship. Nonetheless, "secondary cinematic identification" does more than simply complete Metz's scheme: it also provides a theoretical framework in which what we might call "subject positioning" or, more crassly, identity politics, can be thought alongside psychoanalytic theories of identification. Perhaps most significantly, it offers a lens—if a cockeyed one—with which to look critically and creatively at "primary identification," preparing the way for a reconsideration of primary *cinematic* identification, and through which we might begin to see the process of cinematic identification anew.

In part because it is indeed so secondary to his concerns in *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz hardly bothers to describe the process of secondary cinematic identification. In his clearest articulation of it, he writes: "Identification with one's own look is... *primary cinematic identification* proper... As for identifications with characters, with their own different levels..., they are secondary, tertiary cinematic identifications, etc.; taken as a whole in opposition to the identification of the spectator with his own look, they constitute secondary cinematic identification in the singular" (56). For Metz, secondary cinematic identification is a catchall phrase that includes any identifications in which the spectator participates beyond the technical operation of the cinema—and not only with characters. Because these "secondary"

identifications engage the social and political dimensions of cinemagoing in ways that primary identification does not, it has been through mining the concept of secondary identification that feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race studies scholars have found ways of either rejecting or reformulating Metz's theorization. Their concerns, in general, have focused on what they take to be Metz's assumption of a universal, presumptively white, male, heterosexual viewing subject for both primary and secondary cinematic identification, as well as the asociality of the processes of identification—especially primary—in which this subject engages. As Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis put it in their discussion of cinematic identification, “considering the film-text as a process of production of subjectivity means incorporating a notion of spectator-positioning into the analysis of a film *and* tracing the possible ways identification might be engaged”—and thereby addressing the apparently “secondary” concerns of the concrete encounter between viewers and films, and moving beyond a process of subject-formation at a technological level (155). The viewer they describe, identifying not only with his gaze but also with dimensions of the film itself, is always-already historically conditioned, with values, politics, and identity shaped by the social.

In fact, this historical subject is not incompatible with the Metzian project of cinematic identification. Metz registers concerns about the sociality of the cinema and the historical specificity of the viewing subject, insisting in a complex series of metaphors and similes, “chain of many mirrors, the cinema is at once a weak and a robust mechanism: like the human body, like a precision tool, like a social institution. And the fact is that it is really all of these at the same time” (51). Unfortunately, he does not go on to describe the *work* of the cinema as “like” a social institution, or the ways in which its relationship to the social might reflect or affect its spectators; or the potential effects of spectators' relations to the social in the viewing experience. Rather, Metz's focus on the technological nature of the cinema, and spectators' identification with its technics (which we describe in detail below), has opened his work to the feminist, antiracist, queer, and postcolonial critiques that have troubled its reception these last forty-some years.

In particular, Mulvey, Doane, and other feminist scholars have argued that the teleological nature of Metz's theorization, which positions primary identification as both primary *and* first in a “chain of many mirrors” (Metz 51), at once obviates the role of the social *and*

(seemingly unintentionally) emphasizes its importance. Metz insists on the priority of the mirror stage in enabling primary cinematic identification, and the primary process in creating the conditions for the secondary one. As both Mulvey and Doane argue in their seminal responses to Metz, Metz relies on the Lacanian doctrine that subjects, by virtue of being subjects, must integrate *misrecognition* as recognition. Mulvey writes,

The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognized is conceived of as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others. (201)

In Metz's scheme, any "primary" cinematic identification can only come after a more primary identification, that of the subject with its own image in the mirror. Mulvey argues that the primary identification in the mirror stage is in fact something like secondary cinematic identification, identification with a screen image that is two-, rather than three-dimensional and at once like and unlike the self. Doane extends this line of argument: "in this description, the first secondary identification can be traced to the 'primary' identification of the mirror phase and the opposition between primary and secondary is collapsed" (29). Following Mulvey's and Doane's line of reasoning, the entire project of cinematic identification rests upon the viewing subject's ability to recognize him- or herself in the characters depicted on screen. Indeed, this critique lays bare a significant problem for the female or minority spectator, who, at least in commercial filmmaking, either finds herself represented as only the object of the look, rather than its agent—or whose likeness (in the case of black and brown cinemagoers) may never appear at all. Or, as Doane puts it, the Metzian spectator "mistakenly identifies discourse as history, representation as perception, fiction as reality" (27). Because the "mirror effect" is not primary in cinematic identification but rather historically conditioned

and changeable, it is the “after-effect of a particular mode of discourse which has been historically dominant but will not always be so” (28-9).

Black cinema scholars, most notably Manthia Diawara, Anna Everett, bell hooks, and Paul Snead, have taken up similar concerns in their work on black spectatorship, arguing that black cinemagoers find ways into the film-texts that often involve actively refusing identification. Diawara theorizes a “resisting spectator,” Everett describes a “recalcitrant gaze,” and hooks writes,

Black female spectators actively chose not to identify with the film’s imaginary subject, because such identification was disabling. Looking at films with an oppositional gaze, Black women were able to critically assess the cinema’s construction of White womanhood as object of phallogentric gaze, and choose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator...creat[ing] a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of ‘woman as image, man as bearer of the look’ was continually deconstructed. (275)

Describing potential problems for black, female viewers with both primary and secondary identification, hooks theorizes a process of identification/disavowal with both the gaze and the images on screen that is at once compromised and reworked, but which cannot produce (nor proceed from) Metz’s putatively transcendental subject. By replacing Metz’s universal spectator with a black viewer, hooks’s intervention also suggests a relationship to spectatorship itself mediated through the social and political dimensions of subjectivity. Where the onscreen reality does not accord seamlessly with the self-concept or privilege of subjectivity, hooks argues, identification cannot simply proceed, but is rather ruptured, interrupted, and rerouted. Although neither Diawara nor Mulvey offers sustained or specific descriptions, both theorists lead us to acknowledge the ways in which problematic engagements with secondary cinematic identification for minority and female spectators might interrupt or destabilize primary cinematic identification—and even point to an instability inherent in Metz’s elaboration of the concept of primary cinematic identification itself.

One way to characterize this instability is to describe the cinema as a site of psychic play.² It is a sphere of sociality and connection with other bodies and subjectivities. Even given its entanglement in the

social, this site of play can be theorized productively in psychoanalytic terms, as James Snead does in attributing to spectators—particularly minority spectators—an “oscillating gaze.” He writes, “It is not true that we identify only with those in a film whose race or sex we share. Rather, the filmic space is subversive in allowing an almost polymorphically perverse oscillation between possible roles, creating a radically broadened freedom of identification” (23). Snead’s intervention is significant not only for a theorization of minority spectatorship, but as a revision of psychoanalytic frameworks (Metz’s and Mulvey’s, in particular) for understanding spectatorship as well.

With the phrase “polymorphically perverse,” Snead refers to Freud’s *Three Essays*. This reference is crucial, since it allows us to rethink cinematic identification as a pre-Oedipal *experience* rather than an Oedipalized (or Oedipalizing) *process*. In other words, rather than identifying primarily to fill a phallic lack, as Mulvey and, before her, other psychoanalytic and (post)structuralist theorists have proposed, Snead’s spectators engage in a looking that is driven as much by libido or drive as by object-choice. Transposing Snead into Baudry’s or Metz’s or Mulvey’s (or so many others’) Saussurian-Lacanian teleologies, then, we find that the apparatus does *not* simply recreate the entry into the symbolic that accompanies the mirror stage, and with it primary and secondary identification, but rather allows for a mobile, labile, polymorphically perverse experience of the film world and the self that does not necessarily insist on a discrete self or the fantasy of becoming a transcendental subject. In other words, Snead rejects a one-to-one relationship between identity and film images, thus opening the experience of spectatorship he describes not only to subjects whose capacity for transcendence is inhibited but also to those in always already shifting relationships to their own identities and subjectivities.³

Such internal shifting can arise as well from audiences’ experiences of the cinema as a *space*. Not only a scene of identification in which “the social” is embodied in the consciousness of the spectator him- or herself, the cinema is also a site of encounter in which engagement with the surrounding seats, aisles, people, and even location of the movie theater itself can transform the subject’s identifications. Both Miriam Hansen (in *Babel and Babylon*) and Jacqueline Stewart describe such encounters in early (immigrant and black, respectively) cinemagoing audiences. Their theorizations

imagine processes of identification that are at the same time spatial, physical, physiological, and phenomenal. While neither engages specifically with Metz—or his concept of secondary cinematic identification—both Hansen and Stewart demonstrate ways in which Metz's scheme can be useful in understanding minority spectators' processes of cinematic identification.

What we are left with then is a reconsideration of secondary cinematic identification that at once gives us a productive challenge to received accounts of primary identification and, most importantly, a concept of the embodied, historical subject who is changing not only with the social but with the concrete constitution of the theater itself. As John David Rhodes shows by turning to the work of radical lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer, the process of identification in the cinema not only takes place in concrete places and times, at specific screenings and with the literal co-presence of bodies and subjects, but also inevitably opens outward toward the more abstract and ideal spaces of the public and political spheres. Thus we can no longer conceive of the cinema as articulating a single, monolithic subject position with which we must identify. Rather, the cinema becomes a scene or a site for psychic, aesthetic, and political negotiation, conflict, and play. Spectators engage in processes of identification at times to shore up lack, and at other times identify, as Gaylyn Studlar has proposed, with lack itself. They may practice an oscillating identification (Snead) or be positioned/hailed by the cinema to identify variously and work with the film text through a process of "reconstructive spectatorship" (Stewart, Reich), in which they rebuild the film text and its meaning, in collaboration *with* the cinema: the institution, the auditorium, the audience, the film, and their interleaved and conflicted histories. Or, they may fail to identify at all, not only with the diegetic world of the film, but with the fullness of the gaze it offers them as well—turning instead to a few ongoing conversations on their iPhone while glancing at the screen from time to time to note the progress of a plot they find ridiculous and will pan later in a conversation with friends. In short, a study of secondary identification undoes Metzian (Freudian, Lacanian) teleology and reminds us that identification always occurs incompletely, non-, anti-, or a-linearly, and oftentimes as much through misrecognition as recognition. And it brings us again to the importance of understanding the cinema as a social institution that tutors us in how to see and feel the self and its relationship to others; that changes with changing notions of the self and its sociality.

Primary Cinematic Identification

Although primary cinematic identification may hold a higher film-theoretical pedigree, it is nevertheless misunderstood nearly as often as it is invoked. This is partly because it is not as intuitively obvious as the seemingly much more straightforward process of secondary cinematic identification—in its received reading, parsed as identification with characters as something like other people—that various films deploy as textual effect. Nonetheless, Metz's account of primary identification is, or can be, deceptively straightforward. As both James Hodge and Damon Young show in their contributions to this issue, primary cinematic identification is not the property of a text, but rather a property of the cinema as a technical system (that more recent name for “the apparatus”): the spectator identifies with the camera, as a technological perceiver of the world. (What we might mean by “technological perceiver” in this phrase is precisely at issue in both essays, albeit in very different ways.) According to Metz's scheme, to perceive a world onscreen at all, we must identify with the camera, its point of view in that world, and its technological processes of recording its perception.

This point, however, has been difficult to grasp in a discipline often organized by treatment of individual films. Grasped at Metz's very high level of abstraction, primary cinematic identification has very little analytical, explanatory, or interpretive value when it comes to individual films. (Indeed, the explanation ought to run in the other, more properly theoretical, direction, from individual text to the cinema as a technical system.) Perhaps because of this sterility, and perhaps to remedy it, film theory has often confused two distinct forms of identification under the heading of primary cinematic identification: the properly primary technical and technological identification that Metz articulates; and the specifically secondary identification with an implied narrator as an imaginary or ideological locus of enunciation for the film text. Claims for the structural misogyny or racism of the cinema (qua cinema) have often made this conflation (or taken their generalizing force from it), but it is a mistake to do so. And indeed, it is an obvious mistake given Metz's own text.

Across several well-known pages, Metz describes what he will come to call primary cinematic identification at some length. In his account, the spectator regresses (if only fantasmatically) to an infantile and indeed “primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the

non-ego" (46). He achieves a fantasy of ubiquitous perception, "all-perceiving as one says all-powerful" (48). The spectator's presence in the cinema "often remains diffuse, geographically undifferentiated, evenly distributed over the whole surface of the screen" (54). But then, in the sentence following this, Metz suddenly pivots, without much fanfare and under the vaguely bewildering heading of "On Some Sub-codes of Identification," to secondary identifications: "in other cases, certain articles of the cinematic codes or sub-codes (which I shall not try to survey completely here) are made responsible for suggesting to the spectator the vector along which his permanent identification with his own look should be extended temporarily inside the film (the perceived) itself" (54). His first example of such "sub-codes" include the various ways films might "express the viewpoint of the filmmaker" (54). Metz's second example, more famously, is the alignment of characters' looks (e.g. in eyeline matching and the sorts of film mechanics Kaja Silverman has extensively theorized in her work on "Suture"). And indeed, his text goes on to emphasize identification with characters as the paradigm of secondary cinematic identification (56). Nevertheless, from its very moment of articulation, secondary cinematic identification includes not only identification with characters, but any identification-effect whatsoever that is operative at the level of an individual film: with its directors, implied narrators, ideological perspectives, political agendas, unconscious impulses, and so on. This expanded field of secondary cinematic identifications—not only with characters, but with the whole complex and conflicted process of encountering film texts in space and time—is precisely the field of spectatorial play that we describe above.

Meanwhile, *primary* cinematic identification, then, operates at the level of the cinema as a technical system. The sorts of things theorists have read into (or out of) Metz's "apparatus theory," especially its apparently regressive ideological content, have largely followed from a conflation of the cinema's properly technical dimension with political and ideological forces that animate Hollywood, mainstream, or other commercial cinema (i.e. properly "secondary" concerns—although we hasten to add that by stressing "secondary" here, we emphatically do not mean imply a hierarchy of importance). This is not, in fact, to claim that this technical dimension must somehow be divorced from political concerns, whether these be feminist, antiracist, queer, or postcolonial. It is rather to specify the level at which this

technical dimension might become political. As Young argues, this dimension is itself queer. Moreover, the importance of recognizing that, in Hodge's words, "primary cinematic identification is more properly primary *technical* identification" (72) lies in part in how we might understand the work of primary identification in a much wider variety of film—and technical media—than the typical, parochial reading of Metz suggests. Metz's scheme has received much less attention than it ought in the domains of media theory that borrow from film theory or cinema studies. This is unfortunate because this concept of Metz's is, ultimately, one of our most important accounts of how the cinema works as a site of an encounter between a spectator and a technical system. In other words—and as Hodge demonstrates—Metz can also help us in our efforts to attend to the cinema's technical dimension, beyond the apparently dead letter of "apparatus theory" and the noisy anxiety about digital technology of the cinema.

The primary cinematic process is one in which my ordinary boundedness and self-possession are dissolved, captured and organized for a while by the cinema itself. Metz famously likens the cinema's image to Lacan's mirror: the cinematic image is like a mirror that does not reflect me. And, as Young points out in his contribution, in this Metz's claim resembles Cavell's claims in *The World Viewed*: the cinema makes a world present to me from which I am absent. For Cavell, this entails a dual release from the burdens of being a subject. On the one hand, I am relieved of the ethical burden of bearing responsibility to the world: I cannot act in this onscreen world. On the other, the cinema allows me to suspend the metaphysical burden of my contaminated and contaminating subjectivity: I can believe in this onscreen world. Cavell, borrowing from Bazin, argues that I can believe in this world before me onscreen because the cinema's photographic technology ensures the basic objectivity of the image of the world. It is not haunted by doubt nor tainted by subjectivity.

Metz describes this metaphysical release differently, giving it the somewhat misleading name "transcendental." The spectator takes on a form of subjectivity not bound to the emplacement of an "empirical" subject. Metz notes the relief of Cavell's ethical burden by saying the spectator becomes "all-perceiving" (48). In the cinema, perception is decoupled from action: it becomes a "passion for perceiving." In the throes of this passion, "the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception" (49)—a pure act of perception

free from the ethical burden of acting, and free also from the spatial emplacement of a bounded subject. The screen is like the mirror: it reorganizes the subject's sense of being a bounded self. If the mirror is the prosthesis for achieving a sense of oneself as a bounded, emplaced *here*, what Lacan calls an "orthopedic totality" (78), the screen is a prosthesis for unwinding this boundedness. Because the spectator's body is *absent* from the screen, primary cinematic identification effects a proprioceptive unbounding. Thus Metz's spectator receives the "gift of ubiquity"; the spectator's ego becomes "diffuse, geographically undifferentiated, evenly distributed over the whole surface of the screen" (54). Primary cinematic identification is identification in this post-Freudian sense: for the time I am in the cinema, I find myself *disorganized* by my encounter with this technical other.

In other words, Metz's primary cinematic identification is the name for a process by which the spectator's encounter with the technics of the cinema effects a temporary unwinding of the subject's ordinary self-possession. It is a disorganizing process, proprioceptively and affectively. It sets the stage for the possibility of secondary, tertiary, and quaternary (etc.) identifications organized by an array of others figured on the screen: not only Hollywood protagonists, not only those characters focalized by the textual tactics of suturing shot/reverse-shot figures, not only, as Belinda Smail shows, even by human others. Coming into the cinema to come undone, "regressing" (as it were) to a point before the mirror stage's bounded subjectivity, I may find any number of identificatory anchors along the way. In this way, such secondary identifications can come to be compensatory. But even if they are, I have already taken leave of myself. Every cinematic identification, primary or secondary or beyond, insofar as I confuse myself with an other—human, animal, or technical—stages a return to the "primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego" (46). Described in this way, we can begin to see a crucial intertwining of primary and secondary identifications in the cinema. Primary cinematic identification effects a "regression" to an infantile stage before the differentiation of the ego, before a Symbolic or even Imaginary subject positioning, before the fixing of the subject by Oedipal processes. In short, primary cinematic identification prepares the way, is even required by, the polymorphous, queer, libidinous, playful, pre- or non-Oedipal identification that Snead teaches us to see in secondary cinematic identification.

Schematically, we might sort theories of identification into two tendencies, a Lacanian structuralism and an anti-structural impulse that is manifest in objection-relations theory and post-Freudian theories. Most film theory takes a Lacanian position, in which identification is referred in the first instance to an outcome of the Oedipus complex. We all know the homily: identification names a relation of *being* (or wanting to be); desire, a relation of *having* (or wanting to have). Which is just to say: the little boy must, by the end of Oedipus, come to *identify* with the father (and, prototypically, men) and *desire* the mother (read: women). This scheme, of course, is manifest in much feminist film theory, interested as it is in sexual difference. Mulvey's famous essay encapsulates (or initiates) this tendency. In fetishistic scopophilia, the spectator *desires* the woman whose image interrupts the narrative; it is the disorganizing intensity of this desire which demands such an interruption. Meanwhile, to mitigate the intensity of this desire as well as the terrifying threat of this woman—utterly desirable yet castrated and castrating—the spectator *identifies* narcissistically with the protagonist (sadistic and controlling as he is). Identification, in other words, is the compensatory process that stabilizes the male subject unmoored by his unaccountable desire for the woman (and, of course, always also terrorized by her castration). It is also, importantly, an identification with an *idealization*, a narrativized fantasy of masterful and controlling masculinity (of the father, of the Hollywood protagonist). Cinematic identification of this kind both presumes and depends upon the specifically male resolution of the Oedipus complex.

And yet, as we have been arguing, this Lacanian account is not the only meaning of identification we might find (or read into) Freud. A revisionist psychoanalysis might not emphasize identification's compensatory dimension, but rather the way in which identification is itself always disorganizing. Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have shown how in Freud's *Group Psychology*, with its invocation of *Einfühlung* (or feeling-into, a concept borrowed from philosophical aesthetics), identification takes the form of a departure from oneself and from the stability of identity. When I identify with somebody, when I feel with (or even into) them, I feel emotions that originate outside of me. For a time, I am dispossessed of myself, my experience organized by something or someone that is not-me, beyond me, other. Identification in this sense is destabilizing, an unmooring, an

unbounding—and a far cry from film theory’s compensatory version. As Steven Shaviro argues in *The Cinematic Body*, it is a mistake to presume that we go to the cinema for compensatory stability. It is also a mistake to presume that identification—primary, secondary, or otherwise—in the cinema insures such stability.

None of this is to say that the forms of identification that solidify the organizing work of an idealization are more—or for that matter, less—important than the forms of identification that disorganize the subject. It might be worthwhile to see these as poles of a dynamic process (although that is what is really at stake in the post-Freudian account). For a time, my identity is dissolved, but the cause of this dissolution is my temporary organization by something or someone outside me. In primary cinematic identification, this something is the cinema itself, as a technical system. And, in secondary cinematic identification, it may be any number of “others”—one or several characters, an implied narrator, a political position, or something much more vague like a feeling or mood—that may be engaged for a time (or not) in mobile, playful, conflicted, and complex ways organized (but not determined) by place and time; politics and history; a particular film, auditorium, audience, identity, or person.

Cinematic Identification Beyond Oedipus

Perhaps the most important common theme in this issue—in this introduction and in the contributors’ essays—is that cinematic identification proceeds in multiple directions, registers, and experiential domains. In other words, we are all proposing a model of the phenomenon quite different than those we find in, as we might put it, Freud-and-Lacan. The goal, it seems to us, is not to undo or undermine Metz’s scheme, but rather to get free of the teleologies of the Freudian and Lacanian models underpinning much of 1970s and 80s film theory (or at least the received readings of them). The more open, labile, and nonlinear experiences of identification theorized across this issue might be better understood by turning to various “alternative” forms of psychoanalytic theory and practice: queer theory’s emphasis on polymorphous perversity and infantile sexuality, for example in the work of Leo Bersani; or various “post-Freudian” emphases on the porousness and plasticity of the subject, which we might find in the work of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, but also Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Diane Davis; or in object relation theory’s insistence on the centrality of *relations* to any account of the subject.

For object relations theory's best known proponents—Otto Rank, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott (and many others)—the psyche is thought to develop in relation to others-as-objects. This development takes place in a psychodynamic space, rather than along the more narrative, linear path prescribed by traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. Object relations theory describes a subject for whom pre-Oedipal and phenomenal experiences are as salient and enduring as Oedipal ones. This subject does not simply move through stages of experience and identification, but can engage processes of identification a-temporally and simultaneously. Winnicott's basic position is that "in object-relating, the subject allows certain alterations of the self to take place, of a kind that has caused us to invent the term cathexis." In this cathexis, "the subject is depleted to the extent that something of the subject is found in the object" and the object is taken in by the subject (88). If we think about the cinema in these terms, we can imagine it as a space and process of identification unbounded, in which the spectator engages in multiple, often conflicting or contradictory cathexes not structurally organized or demanded by the cinema nor the film on the screen, but nevertheless occasioned by them. That is to say, we can begin to describe a spectator who identifies *dynamically* across the filmic experience, technics, and text. It is this dynamism—essential to the polymorphous perversity of the pre-Oedipal Freudian subject; for Snead's spectator's oscillating gaze; in the multilayered world of Ming Wong's work detailed in Homa King's contribution; and for the lesbian women themselves figured onscreen in Hammer's films that Rhodes describes—that our volume hopes to capture.

The five essays collected here rethink cinematic identification not only by theorizing new modes and models of spectatorship, but also by reconsidering the scenes and stakes of identification. Damon Young's "The Vicarious Look, or Andy Warhol's Apparatus Theory" and James Hodge's "The Gift of Ubiquity" both engage directly with Metz, carving out of his writings new theories of identification. Taking the proverbial bull by the horns, Young reassesses Mulvey's seminal critique of Metz and Hollywood cinema, finding in Mulvey's account of voyeurism a misappropriation of Freud's original theories of sadism and perversion. Turning Mulvey rather inside out, Young argues that the cinema encodes within it a structure of voyeurism that is at once inherently erotic and non-teleological, one that is, by Freudian standards, "perverse," or what today we might call queer. In

so doing, he demonstrates that Metz indeed “gave film theory a body that was more than a bundle of affective and perceptual capacities, the disorienting and dis-unified source of drives whose pulsion and compulsion pushes it precisely beyond physiology; beyond, that is to say, the pleasure principle” (39). And, in so doing, Young suggests, Metz gave film theory a spectator that was more than monolithic and transcendental, beyond a subject positioned by the apparatus. Rather, he gave us a spectator undone by its very encounter with the cinema.

Meanwhile, reading Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013) alongside Metz, Hodge shows us a spectator undone in a different way. By dissolving the divide between subject and object, atmospheric cinema and digital media deliver audiences the gift of ubiquity in registers beyond the visual. Insisting that, today, “the task of sorting out the dynamics of primary cinematic identification in the age of digital media requires abandoning Metz’s privileging of vision and turning to the latent promise of his felicitous if underdeveloped notion of the cinema being simply *more perceptual* than other media,” Hodge reconceptualizes Metzian ubiquity as an affect of sensory and technical connection—one that defines our experience of contemporary digital media (63). Both Hodge and Young resurrect Metz’s writings through their rereadings, offering by way of his psychoanalytic framework new interpretations of primary cinematic identification.

Pursuing an altogether different approach, John David Rhodes, Belinda Smail, and Homay King explore the various sorts of phenomena that can now come under the heading of secondary cinematic identifications. Each attends to the ways in which the cinema enables us to experience identities anew—our own and others’. Their focus on scenes of identification does not return them to Metz, nor to psychoanalysis, for that matter. Rather, they concern themselves with the stakes of identification across various cinema venues, genres, and audiences. In particular, all three of these authors provide important elaboration and development of our general point in this introduction, that identification as it operates in the world is playful, dynamic, and labile.

Belinda Smail describes the complex and conflicted set of identifications that operate in “new food” documentary filmmaking. The spectator of these documentaries, such as *Food, Inc.*, *King Corn*, and *The Moo Man*, is a consumer, a citizen, an eater—and a human beholder who experiences anthropomorphic identification with nonhuman, animal others. In her essay, she turns to three exemplary,

and particularly fraught, sites of identification in these documentaries, “exploring how the viewer is asked to engage with the intimate sensory process by which ‘things’ become edible or inedible; empathize with the human body of the consumer; and identify anthropomorphically with animals” (82). Importantly for Smaill, each of these moments of identification refracts and inflects the others. To put this otherwise, her “citizen food consumer” is not oriented by a single identification—say, by the epistemophilic subject of documentary knowledge or as an abstract member of the public. Rather, her declension of this citizen food consumer necessarily passes through multiple nodal points, in a dynamic process of empathetic, imaginary, symbolic, political, and epistemic identifications.

Meanwhile, Homay King explores the palimpsestic work of Ming Wong’s film, video, and performance works that rework and deform cinematic master texts. Wong’s works, including King’s major case, *Persona Performa*, “do not simply advocate on behalf of diversity, inclusiveness, or even hybridity. Rather, they define identity as a time-based work in progress” (102). In King’s words, “*Persona Performa* renders identity impersonal and collective: by tracing a looping circuit through the 1966 release of *Persona* and back again, so that its past and future courses are altered by new bodies, languages, and images in the present moment” (111). For King, Wong’s work dramatizes not only how identification often goes strange—queer and brown (borrowing José Estéban Muñoz’s term)—as it moves across bodies other than the presumptively white and straight spectator of film theory, but how it necessarily does so *in time*. Which is to say, for King and for Wong, identification takes place not only by resonating across multiple potential nodal points, but also across tenuous, overlaid, intersecting, and weirdly looping temporal frames whose relation goes far beyond mere succession, taking the form of dynamic and palimpsestic overlay.

Finally, Rhodes argues for a concept of cinematic action—here understood as *judgment* in the Kantian sense, by turning to Hannah Arendt—that is explicitly opposed to identification. He writes, “action... endows us with a non-identity: it resists identification, resists fixity, and thus throws us into an experience of non-sovereignty that is both thrilling and terrifying” (118). Like Kant’s aesthetic judgment, Arendt’s action cannot be performed according to a rule nor even a concept: it cannot be known in advance, and it dissolves identity.

In Barbara Hammer's radical lesbian filmmaking from the 1970s, Rhodes finds a specific sort of filmic action: judgment that is itself an action, or an action that is itself a judgment. Rhodes opposes this to identification in two senses: the fixity of the "spectator position" with which cinematic spectators must ostensibly identify; and identification with or as the known-in-advance category of "lesbian." In Hammer's films, Rhodes finds a mode of cinematic engagement that resonates with, if it is not identical to, the sense of identification we have been arguing for in this introduction: non-teleological, playful, contested, anti-identitarian, surprising.

We hope this special issue is a beginning. Our impulse is at once curatorial and pedagogical. On the one hand, we present here work we feel reflects a substantial re-engagement with the problems of cinematic identification in the discipline. This is not yet a catalog of options in a field, but rather an attempt both to collect energies and to name them. On the other hand, we aim to unravel our disciplinary just-so stories about identification, to renew the problem of identification and to make it speak again to our contemporary moment, and to bring newfound attention to the diverse phenomena that we gather together with this word, "identification." This means two distinct, but complementary moves: to loosen the grip psychoanalysis has on the concept, and on speculation about it; and at the same time, to loosen the grip the teleologies of Freud-and-Lacan have on how we think about psychoanalysis in the cinema. The essays collected here attend to the technical and formal conditions of the cinema both as a (technological, institutional, economic) apparatus and as a dynamic and complexly invested psychic space. By considering these dimensions together in relation to changing technological conditions, these essays open new horizons for theoretical inquiry in film and media studies.

Notes

¹ This not only includes Tom Gunning's cinema of attractions and the work of other early film historians, but also historians of experimental cinema such as P. Adams Sitney.

² This is a figure which arises in a number of idioms and time periods in film theory which we cannot do justice to here. Most important for our purposes—beyond Snead's work—which we discuss presently is Miriam Hansen's articulation of play in reference to Walter Benjamin,

in “Room-for-Play.” In particular, Hansen shows how the notion of spectatorship-as-play refracts the social dimension of cinemagoing. We also hope to sound the resonance here with Winnicott’s take on object relations theory, which we also address below. Each of the editors have addressed the notion of spectatorship as play in their own work. See especially Reich’s “A Broader Nationalism” and Richmond’s “‘Dude, that’s just wrong!’” and “The Exorbitant Lightness of Bodies.”

³ On the various ways that subjects may be inhibited from transcendence, see for example Iris Marion Young and Frantz Fanon.

Works Cited

- Baudry, Jean-Louis. “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus.” *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 286-98. Print.
- Bersani, Leo. *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Print.
- Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect*. Trans. Douglas Brick and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.
- Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Enlarged Edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979. Print.
- Davis, Diane. “Identification: Burke and Freud on Who You Are.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38.2 (2008): 123-47. Print.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984. Print.
- Diawara, Manthia. “Problems of Identification and Resistance.” *Black American Cinema*. Ed. Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge, 1993. 211-20. Print.
- Doane, Mary Ann. “Misrecognition and Identity.” *Ciné-Tracts* 3.3 (1980): 25-32. Print.
- Everett, Anna. *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. Print.
- . *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. “The Fact of Blackness.” *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967. 109-40. Print.

- Freud, Sigmund. "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. Vol. 18. London: Hogarth Press, 1953. 67-143. Print.
- . "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. Vol. 7. London: Hogarth Press, 1953. 136-243. Print.
- Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde." *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986): 63-70. Print.
- Hansen, Miriam Bratu. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. Print.
- . "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with the Cinema." *October* 109 (2004): 3-49. Print.
- hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." *Black American Cinema*. Ed. Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge, 1993. 288-302. Print.
- Klein, Melanie. *Love, Guilt, and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945*. New York: Free Press, 2002. Print.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Ed. and trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. 75-81. Print.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, and Jean-Luc Nancy. "The Unconscious is Deconstructed Like an Affect (Part I of 'The Jewish People Do Not Dream')." *Stanford Literature Review* 6.2 (1989): 191-209. Print.
- Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Trans. Celia Britton et al. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 198-209. Print.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position." *Signs* 31.3 (2006): 675-88. Print.
- . "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *the Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*." *Theatre Journal* 52.1 (2000): 67-79. Print.

- Rank, Otto. *The Trauma of Birth*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993. Print.
- Reich, Elizabeth. "A Broader Nationalism: Reconstructing Memory, National Narratives, and Spectatorship in World War II Black Audience Propaganda." *Screen* 54.2 (2013): 174-93. Print.
- Richmond, Scott C. "'Dude, That's Just *Wrong*': Mimesis, Identification, *Jackass*." *World Picture* 6 (2011). http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_6/Richmond.html (last accessed January 16, 2015). Web.
- . "The Exorbitant Lightness of Bodies, or How to Look at Superheroes: Ilinx, Identification, and *Spider-Man*." *Discourse* 34.1 (2012): 113-44. Print.
- Shaviro, Steven. *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.
- Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.
- Snead, James. *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Stam, Robert, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis. *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Beyond*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Stewart, Jacqueline. *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Print.
- Studlar, Gaylyn. *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. Print.
- Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2005. Print.
- Young, Iris Marion. "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3 (1980): 137-56. Print.

Copyright of Film Criticism is the property of Film Criticism and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.