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PERMUTATIONS OF CINEPHILIA:
AESTHETICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Permutations of Cinephilia:

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In this dissertation I investigate the role played by cinephilia both as a moving historical force behind film reviewing and as the engine behind several contemporary developments in the way we think and write about cinema. To do so, in the first chapter I evaluate the major attempts to theorize cinephilia and identify certain defining trends. In the second chapter, I examine the output of film reviewers in the United States with the premise that their work is evidence of the practical workings of cinephilia. In order to broaden the traditional focus on Anglo-European contexts, in the third chapter I study cinephilic film reviewing in Cuba, where social consciousness sometimes emerges with greater force. Finally, in the fourth chapter I survey the latest stage in the development of cinephilia, in which savvy film reviewing melds with technological developments. I conclude that the DVD, digital paratexts, and the blogosphere have dramatically changed both the face and reach of film studies.

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Introduction

This project was born out of a desire to justify a lifestyle: I sought to demonstrate the validity of the ideas generated by a cinephilic approach that brought passion back into the realm of writing about film. It was only after my research began that I noticed certain problems and tensions within the discourse of cinephilia, and these opened up new venues to be explored.

Throughout the history of writing about film, cinephilia has been a presence that burns brightly, fades and reappears with amazing consistency, even though the term itself has seemed to lack a concrete definition or a clear epistemology. Therefore one of the first issues to be addressed is: what is cinephilia? The cinephilia that I study in this dissertation is an attitude that influences the way cinema is distributed, enjoyed, and perceived, while providing an equally valid alternative platform for discerning theoretical as well as historical concerns regarding film. This attitude manifests itself in different ways that range from basic list-making processes to the complex theorization of compelling filmic moments that purportedly reveal the seams of the entire scaffolding of cinema.

The study (if not necessarily the practice) of cinephilia has until recently been relegated to the background, disavowed by film studies and ostracized by Grand Theory's claims of objectivity and scientific rigor, which had no room for emotional evaluation. The climate, however, has begun to change, as cinephilia has returned to the film studies spotlight in a stronger and more organized way. The number of conference papers and articles devoted to the topic has increased dramatically since the 1990s, and it claims a respectable niche in film studies in general. The attraction

of certain strains of cinephilia has perhaps been aided by the development of affect studies within the humanities. While cinephilia releases the critic from the burden of restraining emotions and demands a more personalized and individual approach to film, it also provides a framework for studying the affective impact of the medium's formal qualities.

Although the practice and theorization of cinephilia have begun to move to the fore, there are still major lacunae. For example, the bulk of the theoretical and evaluative work being produced belongs to an Anglo-American (and to a somewhat lesser extent) French tradition. The highest-profile cinephile writers hail from the U.S. and Europe, and while the films they discuss often originate from many points on the globe, they tend not to engage with cinephilic traditions outside of their own sphere. Furthermore, there is no single extended study dedicated to exploring how technological developments have altered the manifestations, rationalization, and marketing of cinephilia. The advent of home video technologies has radically transformed the way we perceive cinema as well as the parameters of the secondary "literature" regarding the medium. The purpose of this dissertation is to chart some of these different paths and tendencies of cinephilia over the course of a century.

My study consists of four chapters that encapsulate different points of entry into the concept of cinephilia and detail the diverse spheres affected by its influence. The first chapter charts a range of theories about cinephilia. I focus mostly on theories produced in the United States, although I certainly refer to the overwhelming influence of work from France and to the cross-pollination between the two countries. In order to grasp this elusive concept, I undertake a historical mapping of the main strains of

cinephilic writing within these two contexts, and identify four approaches to the medium. The first two revolve around elitist reception practices and the association of cinephilia with cult consumption. The third entails the theorization of the fragment as the single most important contribution to the dissection and theorization of cinema, which has served as the basis for a non-linear approach to re-writing the history of cinema. The fourth privileges the technological developments that have triggered what some critics refer to as the second stage of cinephilia, or the advent of a more democratic age in film distribution and reception (a tendency I return to in the final chapter).

In the second chapter I explore a major traditional outlet for cinephilic writing: film reviewing. I argue that the first practical manifestation of a spirit akin to the cinephilic impulse could be found in the pages of newspapers. To prove this point I survey the historical development of the profession in the United States, taking into account, not only thematic and stylistic developments, but also the influence of external forces (such as the arrival of French cinephilic writing or German silent film). I also explore the interplay between cinephilia and social consciousness among American film journalists.

In the third chapter I move into a consideration of cinephilic journalism in another national context: Cuba. I have chosen Cuba in part because, while the island's market was saturated with Hollywood productions, the shifting political climate over the course of the middle decades of the twentieth century facilitated the emergence of a robust, politically-engaged strain of cinephilic writing. In order to trace out the contours and limits of this tendency, I compare and contrast two iconic Cuban literary

figures who spent a great deal of their careers writing about cinema: the poet Mirta Aguirre and the novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Although they are in many ways polar opposites in their approach to writing about film, both of these writers articulated systems of thought that stem from cinephilic reflections.

My fourth and final chapter investigates the impact of the development of different technologies for disseminating and enhancing the cinephilic experience. Starting with the home video revolution in the late 1970s, I consider how a variety of innovations changed the way spectators consumed cinema but also, and most importantly, how we think about the medium. With the advent of DVDs, the walled-off tradition of academic writing about film has been breached, and a group of crossover writers who often combine the rigor of scholarly research with the passion of cinephilia have flooded both the critical sphere and the market where specialized companies cater to this particular taste. A new way of writing about cinema has emerged: blogging. I analyze the production of two film blogs, *Girish* and *Self-Styled Siren*, looking at their approach to dissecting historical and contemporary film production as well as their theoretical writings about cinema.

With this dissertation, then, I aim to provide a more synthetic view of the history of cinephilic practices within the U.S. and (to a more limited extent) in several other Western contexts, as well as a survey of major critical and theoretical approaches to the phenomenon. I also endeavor to foreground the ways in which technological innovations have altered both popular and scholarly cinephilic approaches to the film medium, and drawn these two spheres closer together.

Chapter One:

The Origins and Projections of Cinephilia

Cinephilia is the basis of my theoretical and practical project. In this first chapter I will deal with the multiple deployments of the word cinephilia as well as some of the practical problems that the concept generates. This will set the necessary scaffolding to support the rest of the investigation.

When dealing with a word like cinephilia several difficulties arise.

Etymologically, cinephilia is love for cinema, but what is the nature of this love?

There are as many definitions of cinephilia as there are theories about cinema since very few seem to agree on the manifestations, requirements, and limitations of this elusive term. Is cinephilia a feeling towards cinema, or is it a trend or a lifestyle? Is it mainly an indicator of movie-going habits throughout history, or a more epistemological endeavor? My research begins from the point of view that cinephilia is not about general movie-going statistics but about an attitude about film in general, an attitude that is often manifested through some form of writing. In this chapter, I will begin to trace the development of this form of cinephilia from a theoretical, historical, and practical point of view. To do so, first I will focus on some of its European as well as American expressions.

Although cinephilia is an international phenomenon, I will begin by considering the origins of cinephilic practices in the nation typically associated with the birth of cinema: France. The French stand at the forefront of this type of approach to cinema thanks to an impressive body of writing about the subject, produced almost uninterruptedly since the medium's public launch there in 1896. Early writers, from

casual commentators from the literary field such as Remy de Gourmont and Colette to influential filmmakers such as George Méliès and Abel Gance, endeavored to ascertain the value of cinema as well as legitimize it, seeking to transform it from a vaudeville attraction into an accepted higher art. They also registered the profound emotions they experienced, stirred by the astonishing spectacle of images on a screen. In his anthology *French Film Theory and Criticism* Richard Abel refers to the work of these pioneers as “fragmentary and unsystematic,” but he recognizes the importance of having access to the first impressions that cinema caused in the cultural establishment of Paris. Abel calls these writers “flâneurs, strolling here and there and cobbling together a variety of idioms and social practices” (xvi). He believes that the best French film writing of the time usually appeared in published reviews of films. Maurice Raynal on *Fantômas*, Colette on *The Cheat* and Delluc on *The Outlaw and his Wife* were not only enthusiastically commenting on those films but also attempting to define the fabric of cinema according to their very particular interests. For example, Lionel Dandry begins his assessment of Marcel L’Herbier’s *El Dorado* by noting, “Once the language of the cinema has stabilized and people are searching retrospectively for those who most contributed to that stabilization, no one will be able to deny the illustrious part played by M. Marcel L’Herbier in the formulation of its vocabulary” (qtd in Abel 246). This introduction to an article published in the magazine *Cinéa* in 1921 is a clear illustration of praise for a filmmaker, but most importantly, it is an acknowledgement of the state of cinema, as well as an interesting reference to cinema as a language in need of a particular vocabulary. An Italian working in France, Riccioto Canudo, in his enthusiasm for the medium calls it “the

Seventh Art,” and in 1923 he anticipates terminological debates by referring to the study and appreciation of the new art as “Cinegraphy, cineology, cinemania, cinephilia and cinephobia, cinepoetry and cinoedia, cinematurgy, cinechromism” (Abel 297). Some of the debates generated during these years go beyond questions of nomenclature and reactions to films. Among some of the arguments these critics developed and fought over, we find an early enunciation of auteur theory, questions of reality and social expression, and ‘photogenic,’ a concept essential to some later cinephiles. Although Louis Delluc did not coin this last term, he gave it cinematic currency by employing it as the title of his only book of theory. Unfortunately rather than define the term he was content to mention what it did not signify (Williams 97). Jean Epstein, following Delluc, calls it “any aspect of things, beings, or souls that is enhanced by filmic production” (Abel 314) For his part, Abel defines it as something “that makes us see ordinary things as they had never been seen before” (100), comparing it to the Russian Formalists’ defamiliarization. Paul Willemen and Christian Keathley also embrace the connection between these early formulations of ways of looking and the cinephilic moments to be discussed later (Keathley 101). The enthusiastic publications of Epstein, Veullermoz, Canudo and others reflected the first stage of cinephilia and constituted a vibrant apology for the survival of cinema as an art form, which would be echoed later on by other groups. One of the questions that I will address throughout this dissertation is the possibility that cinephilia is one of the most significant forms of writing that rises to the occasion whenever the essence of cinema is questioned or threatened.

After the groundbreaking and defining cinephilic movements of the teens and twenties, in the thirties critics and filmmakers alike were busy fighting a war in favor of or against the rise of sound technology. But this was also a time of political turmoil in France: first the formation of the Popular Front and later the reactions to the expansion of National Socialism in Germany. By 1939, all attention was directed to the outbreak of armed conflict. The war, with its blockades and prohibitions, together with the German occupation, made it very hard to focus on cinephilia. Moreover, in a measure orchestrated by UFA's¹ French satellite, Continental Studios, the flux of American films stopped and in their place a flood of German films entered the country (Williams 255). From 1939 to 1944, the Germans heavily controlled film production, although some controversial masterpieces were able to sneak past the censors.² It is only in the late stages of the war that a group of people considered that saving the French film legacy was important enough to risk one's life. One of those people was André Bazin. After the end of the war, Bazin started writing for several magazines, engaging Jean Paul Sartre in a polemic against *Citizen Kane*, canonizing Roberto Rosellini, Orson Welles and Jean Renoir, exploring the ontology of cinema, and fostering Catholic Cinephilia (de Baeque 39). Finally, one of his most important contributions was the creation of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which could be considered the first professional cinephile publication (de Baeque 22).

Under the tutelage of Bazin, a group of critics, commonly referred to as the Young Turks, who would later become the directors of the French New Wave,

¹ Universum Film Aktien Gessellschaft.

² Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* was labeled as anti-German. Ironically, after the war it was considered anti-French and almost cost Clouzot his life.

injected more energy into *Cahiers*: Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jean Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol, among others, filled the pages of the yellow-covered journal with comments about their favored movies, publishing best film lists, championing a canon of favorite directors, and eventually developing “la politique des auteurs,” *Cahiers*’ most influential product besides the New Wave films. It involved, in part, a reappraisal of the tribulations and techniques of the Hollywood masters under the rigors of the studio system. As John Caughie explains, the auteurists argued that “a film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director; in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist a film is more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director’s films” (9). This approach served, on the one hand, as inspiration for the French filmmaker’s individual careers, and on the other, as the groundwork for their candidacy as auteurs; most importantly it established a way of thinking about film that fostered one of the strongest manifestations of cinephilia.

Meanwhile, in the United States, American critic Andrew Sarris borrowed and developed the *Cahiers* versions of auteurism to craft his personal cinephilic reflections. Sarris belonged to an Anglo-American tradition that already included important writers such as James Agee and Otis Ferguson, and that later will comprise such important film critics as Pauline Kael, Robin Wood, and Manny Farber, among many more. In his attempt to define the role of the cinephile critic, he questions his own place in the canon of great American film critics. In the introduction to his 1969 book, *Confessions of a Cine-Cultist*, he writes, “The cultural rationale for our worthier

predecessors—Agee, Ferguson, Levin, Murphy, Sherwood, et al.—was that they were too good to be reviewing movies. We, on the contrary, were not considered much good for anything else. Like one-eyed lemmings, we plunged headlong into the murky depths of specialization” (Sarris 11). Whether this is sincere or not is irrelevant; what is important is that Sarris considered the critic less than a writer and more like a fan, a specialized and devoted fan. This division between professional critics and infatuated writers would be passionately debated in the following years. My second chapter will explore in depth the relationship between cinephilia and film criticism in an attempt to establish the parallelism and incongruences of the two writing lifestyles.

So far I have briefly discussed the early writers and reviewers in the teens and twenties, the French cinephiles of the *Cahiers* mode in the fifties, and the American generation of film critics and reviewers in the sixties. The attempts to distinguish between cinephiles, film reviewers and academic critics may lead to confusion and a great deal of negotiation. While cinephilic American film criticism flourished in major publications like *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic* and others, writing about cinema was about to enter a new stage. Fostered by the combative spirit of the 1960s, critics developed a new approach to film writing, in an effort to move closer to scientific thought and away from the early musings of the pioneer *Cahiers* critics (Caughie 123-9). A wide variety of theoretical methods and the ever-present “objective” desire to join the pantheon of “serious” arts replaced cinephilia, leaving very little room for the subjective drive that fueled its fire. Facing the dual attack of Christian Metz’s semiotic systems and Laura Mulvey’s dismantling of the gaze, together with the rise of Marxism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis and other theoretical approaches, cinephiles

were forced to purge themselves of pleasure for pleasure's sake (Mulvey 57). Cinephilia was a love that needed to be denied, or to use Baumbach's phrase, "a love that dare not speak its name" (37). In France, even *Cahiers du Cinéma* participated in this revolution. Long gone were the Young Turks who were busy now with their careers as filmmakers. The magazine was taken over by Maoist critics who were not only willing to alter the traditional look (the yellow cover disappeared), but who also changed the content to the point that at one time it ceased to discuss cinema and focused exclusively on politics (Bickerton 51). Meanwhile in Great Britain, many attempts were made to formalize the inclusion of film studies within the higher education system. Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey explain how this radical change came about as part of a left-wing reaction to Hollywood politics. (Grieverson 217). In the United States, too, during the eighties cinephilia remained underground while Film Studies became a stronger presence on campuses across the nation.

But a new revolution was underway. In the late seventies, the Video Home System (VHS) was developed in Japan; it would transform the face of cinephilia and Film Studies forever. Previously, a limited number of people could afford a 16mm projector to screen movies at home; the costs were prohibitive for the general public. That changed dramatically with the introduction of VHS and the competing system Betamax. Video clubs spread across the United States and other nations, and the market for video consumption grew. In the late nineties the introduction of Digital Video Discs (DVDs) accelerated the emergence of a new breed of spectators, and with them cinephilia returned to the spotlight (Klinger). While the appearance of VHS and DVD technologies facilitated the teaching of film, it was the spread of film collecting

that actually repositioned cinephilia. Movies were re-released in the latest formats, and soon everyday cinephiles would create their own personal and eclectic cinematheques (Klinger 55).

The next stage in the cinephilic comeback happened once the Internet became one of the principle platforms for streaming, discussion, and writing about film. While a majority of paper-based film publications quickly established an online presence, it was amateur critics, expressing their ideas about movies through blogging, who redefined the nature of cinephilia. Free from the constraint and pressure of publishing houses and editors, bloggers were able to write about the object of their love without restraints. But they didn't stop there; expanding even more, some bloggers challenged the rigid academic establishment, landing contracts to publish their online work in book form. Chapter Four deals with how these new critics/bloggers became a moving force in the Digital Humanities as well as very active voices in changing the landscape of film criticism and reviewing.

Now that I have established some elementary groundwork concerning the historical origins and development of cinephilia, I will turn to an exploration of some of the central debates concerning the *practice* of cinephilia. I will focus on four major areas of tension or disagreement: Elitism, Cult, the Fragment, and New Technologies.

Elitism

So far I have briefly addressed the history of cinephilia without actually trying to define it or the majority of the specific practices that it involves. While I considered the writing of the photogénie group and other practitioners in the twenties as essential to the understanding of cinephilia, perhaps the most famous form of cinephilia took

form in the fifties and sixties and it is closely associated with the Cinematheque Française and the *Cahiers* group. The type of cinephilia generated in this atmosphere is referred to by Thomas Elsaesser as “take one” or “classic” cinephilia (Elsaesser 27). According to the German critic, this particular brand of cinephilia is characterized by the identification of auteurs, the organization of screenings and debates of their works, and an interest in location. One of the earliest manifestations of this fascination with place was the surrealists’ unusual practice of watching bits and pieces of different movies, jumping from one cinema hall to the next without paying attention to plot or names (Lowrie 21). Later on, the *Cahiers* cinephiles will present similar interests by drawing their viewing space into the serious discussion of the movies they loved. Their fetishism of place included seating positions in relation to the screen. Commenting on the state of this ceremonial cinephilia in her notorious essay “The Decay of Cinema,” Susan Sontag lamented the demise of these practices, dramatically declaring that “No amount of mourning will revive the vanished rituals--erotic, ruminative--of the darkened theater” (60). The sensual nature of cinephilic love is emphasized in Sontag’s piece, which is not only an attack on multiplexes, but especially a jab against home video. However, Sontag’s essay is also a defense of cinephilia. She notes that “Cinephilia itself has come under attack, as something quaint, outmoded, snobbish. For cinephilia implies that films are unique, unrepeatable, magic experiences” (2). The key word here is snobbish. Cinephilia as a whole has constantly been under attack by those who consider it an exercise in elitism. Baumbach sees this elitism as something that needs to be “understood within the broader context of a culture that had tended to reject cinema as art” (Baumbach 51).

As I have mentioned, almost as soon as cinema was born, there were efforts to distance the medium from its popular origins, in a reprisal of the ongoing opposition of high or so-called legitimate art to popular entertainment. Many writers have mourned the disappearance of small cinemas, which face extinction with the rise to dominance of the multiplex and the home theater experience. Sontag's untimely declaration of the death of cinema stems from her view that independent cinema halls are the only appropriate venue for film viewing--that is, only by those who had the privileged access to these centers. Melis Behlil strongly reacts against the idea that cinephilia can only flourish in a metropolitan environment. According to Behlil, "people living outside of a handful of western metropolises did not have the chance, until recently, to see non-mainstream fare, on or off the screen" (Behlil 112). What about those cinephiles who were born and grew up within the context of home exhibition video and multiplexes, or those that lived all their lives away from the big cities, depending exclusively on VHS and DVD to satisfy their cravings? How do they compare with the previous avatars of cinephilia?

As I've just mentioned, one of the distinguishing features of cinephilia is the importance of space: the mystique of the locale, the architecture of the building, the seating selection. Elsaesser asserts that "cinephilia meant being sensitive to one's surroundings when watching a film, carefully picking the place where to sit, fully alert to the quasi-sacral feeling of nervous anticipation that would descend upon the public space, however squalid, smelly or slipshod, as the velvet curtain rose and the studio logo with its fanfares filled the space" (Elsaesser 29). For traditional cinephiles such as Elsaesser, this feeling was imparted by specific viewing locales, and has now

disappeared with the advent of new technologies of screening and distribution. The site of screening becomes the lost object of affection. Similarly, the large screen of cinema halls is another vanished entity. Yet large screens make a rather limited appearance in the projection history of cinema. From vaudeville to nickelodeons and storefront theatres, film never had an image of grandeur until the ephemeral rise of the movie palaces of the late teens and twenties (Bowser 121). These majestic and colossal structures reinforced the idea of an alternative experience, a total immersion in the story that unfolded on gigantic screens. Elsaesser's melancholy and Sontag's mourning, their brand of cinephilia, are the swan songs of a different age of movie watching in which exclusive groups attended select theaters; it is a practice that persists in greatly diminished form, and that is but one stage in the never-ending cycle of projection possibilities.

This melancholy contrasts radically with Jonathan Rosenbaum's enthusiastic embrace of the new cinephilia and its technologies. Rosenbaum also identifies two cinephilias but without the nostalgic overtones of Elsaesser. Rosenbaum seems to be eager to engage the new generation and novel approaches to cinephilia. While he constantly refers to himself as an older cinephile, he has in fact served as a moderator between earlier and later modalities. An example of this is *Movie Mutations*, a collection of essays, letters and notes that includes two rounds of ground-breaking discussions between Rosenbaum, Adrian Martin, Kent Jones, Alexander Horwath, Nicole Brenez, Quintín, Mark Peranson and Raymond Bellour, about cinephilic reflection, among other things. A letter written by Rosenbaum on April 7th, 1997 initiates the exchange by discussing the nature of cinephilia. This letter is important

because it sets the tone of the exchange and it marks the passing of a baton from the old guard (Rosenbaum, like Elsaesser, was born in 1943) to a new generation of blog-oriented cinephiles. Rosenbaum lauds the latter's "familiarity with the paradigms and master theories of the past combined with a willingness to update and alter them according to current needs" (*Movie Mutations* 2). Most of them were born during or slightly after the great debates of the sixties and seventies, and they are familiar with the designs and rigors of film theory.

While the Internet seems more inclusive, enabling video streaming and transnational communication, it may also facilitate the creation of exclusive groups on a global scale. In the course of the letter exchange in *Movie Mutations*, Martin states that while he is opposed to any kind of elitism, he remains attached to the 80s' subcultural creed: "that all interesting, innovative movements in culture are small in number, fiercely partisan in character, and capillary in their social action" (Rosenbaum, *Movie Mutations* 181). Rosenbaum, far from denying the elitist nature of cinephilia, quickly dismisses the issue as "less a danger than as a fragrant possibility that's hovered since our correspondence began and one that I'm more inclined to embrace than repudiate" (*Movie Mutations* 186). He suggests with this statement that the elitism that characterizes the old cinephilia has been inherited by the new guard. How is this new wave of elitism manifested? Re-deployment of the auteur theory, the creation of canons and best film lists, and even the simplest choices in individual or collective film watching have always been manifestations of a certain tendency to close ranks and narrow the field. Debates around *photogénie* and the "Politique des Auteurs" in France, and the fierce rivalry between American critics

Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris in the U.S. are some examples of these territorial battles. Cinephiles often prefer to communicate with a closed group of enthusiasts that shares the same whims and guilty pleasures. Adrian Martin in his “Cinephilia as War Machine” argues that the charge of elitism bothers cinephiles because they consider themselves to be cinema’s democratic beacons, or in Martin’s words “more like the people than the people themselves” (222). Martin confirms the charge of elitism when he declares that taste is the ultimate standard of cinephilia. However, he is careful to clarify that he refers “not [to] good taste, not [to] cultivation or sophistication, not [to] a canon of films--but [to] a war over what is to be seen, what must be seen, and even more, what we can get to say in public about what we have seen” (223). Here it is not clear how Martin differentiates the list of must-see films he proposes from a traditional canon. Are certain movies to be seen just because they are marked by the traces of an auteur? Moreover, when Martin refers to auteur movies that are so bad that they need to be seen, doesn’t he move closer to the realm of cult film? This brings us to our next problem: how is cinephilia different from cult?

Cinephilia and Cult

Ernest Mathjis and Jaimie Sexton’s definition of cult begins by juxtaposing the religious and the sociological conceptualizations of the term. I am particularly intrigued by their focus on deviation from the standard doctrine and the fact that cult is “less concerned with universality of belief” (1). Furthermore, the authors emphasize that reception- and textual-focused approaches allow us to understand the characteristics that turn particular films into cult “as part of their passage through markets” (6). This is especially relevant for the brand of cinephilia that I will be

focusing on in Chapter Four, a cinephilia that for some critics is pre-packaged and caters to certain select audiences. Finally, their interest in an aesthetic approach stems from the desire to read films in their uniqueness, so much so that they “defy interpretation, and operate purely on the affective and visceral level.” For his part, Marc Jancovich notes of cult that it is “not defined according to some single unifying feature, but rather through a subcultural ideology in filmmakers, films or audiences seen as existing in opposition to the mainstream” (Jancovich et al. 1). Cultists seek to establish not a canon but a counter canon, and sometimes the targets of their enshrining processes are selected not because of their quality but precisely because they lack it. Elena Gorfinkel also explores this counter canon strategy. She mentions that cultists and “cinéphiles are joined together in their adulation and preoccupation, not with the ‘good’ but with the ‘bad’ movie” (Gorfinkel 33). She goes on to trace the development of both terms, adopting a historical as well as an aesthetic approach, carefully highlighting the moments when they overlap as well as some essential historical differences. Gorfinkel concludes:

It seems that the cultist and the cinephile have in the present become indistinguishable from each other, through the overlaps between their broadening span of tastes and the ways that technological, rather than geographical, spaces have afforded or delimited such widening. The present situation however, threatens the absorption of the cinephile in the now larger, because commercially redefined, category of cult (37).

Mathijs and Sexton also complicate things by asserting that cinephilia and cult overlap much more than what Jancovich or Gorfinkel claim. According to their analysis, the conversion of cinephilia and cult is exemplified by France’s Macmahonists, a group that gathered at the MacMahon Theater and “championed film because they went against what was deemed respectable” (52). Hoberman and Rosenbaum identify the

following members: “Claude Chabrol, Jean Luc Godard, and Francois Truffaut, as well as the somewhat older Jean-Pierre Melville (and the somewhat younger Luc Moullet) [are the] early apostles of the MacMahonist faith” (26).

One thing that cinephilia certainly shares with cult is the concept of a group of fervent people who worship at their temple, follow their prophets and describe their experiences with religious language. Cinephiles sometimes imply, for example, that they are members of a chosen group. This variation on the elitism discussed earlier occurs when a particular group of cinephiles thinks that it possesses skills that transcend those of normal spectators. Many critics have identified this as a remnant of Romanticism, and Paul Willemen calls this tendency epiphanic (235). Louis Skorecki goes so far as to label cinephilia a sin that needs to be confessed: “Yes. I have been, perhaps still am, a cinephile” (qtd in de Baeque 233). According to the majority of its practitioners, then, cinephilia is simply not an ordinary or normal discourse; it rather manifests itself as a revelation. Rather than attack it, most critics try to legitimize, disguise or simply preach this cinematic gospel. For example, Peter Wollen, writing in memory of Serge Daney, comments on the nature of this “unnatural” state of mind:

Cinephilia seemed a “sickness,” a malady which became a duty, almost a religious duty, a form of clandestine self-immolation in the darkness, a voluntary exclusion from social life. At the same time, a sickness that brought immense pleasure, moments which, much later, you recognized had changed your life (5).

According to Wollen, cinephilia is not only a religious duty but also a malady.

Cinephiles share this dubious characterization with clairvoyants and mystics.

When cinephilia is not described as a mystical manifestation, it is sometimes labeled as a childlike, immature behavior. Baumbach argues that “cinephilia was born

of a desire to claim that pleasures that could be written off as childish fantasies actually had lasting values” (Baumbach 51). Rosenbaum also subscribes to the idea of a child’s point of view that defines the essence of cinephilia, noting that it enables the film enthusiast “to remain a child and a grown-up at the same time, individually as well as collectively” (*Movie Mutations* 187). This desire to remain in a pre-adult state of mind, to “play” with cinematic “toys,” is the natural state of the cinephile.

If the cinephile is a mystic, what are some of the characteristics of this religious experience? How are they manifested? If cinephiles are like children, what are their favorite toys? Many critics agree that the fragment is the central unit of all cinephilic endeavors, whether it is conceived of as a toy or a godhead.

The Fragment

Keathley, Wollen and Daney are some of the critics who moved away from the worshipping of location that the first cinephilia embodied (Elsaesser’s “take one”) and into a more universally accessible form of cinematic experience: the moment or the fragment, which is defined by some critics as triggered when the image offers information that is in excess of the representation on screen. The cinephilic moment depends on the spectator’s subjective state; a fragment of a scene that is usually independent from the central diegesis of the film prompts in the viewer an emotional response that generates a chain of associations or allusions, and often the desire to communicate this epiphanic experience to others.

Willemen was among the first critics to formulate cinephilia as the experience of moments that can be theorized rather than just perceived. Nevertheless his language is still embedded with remnants of the mystical emphasized by the cinephilia

mentioned above. Taking into account that of all the arts cinema is probably the closest to death and mourning, it is possible to consider every single act of viewing as a mass for the dead, but at the same time, to view the figures flickering on the screen as phantoms or “apparitions.” Cinephilic moments are brief instances of loving communion between the dead and the living.

Willemen highlights, then, one of the core elements of cinephilia: “the capturing of fleeting, evanescent moments” (232). But what are these fleeting moments? While the moment subtends the technology of cinema, it also resembles the way in which memories are stored in our brains. Moreover, according to Willemen, cinematic moments “spark something which then produces the energy and the desire to write, to find formulations to convey something about the intensity of that spark” (235). This is not limited to just a flash on the screen; it includes a chain reaction that triggers many actions that can range from collecting, to sharing (with all the online implications that the word carries) to various forms of writing such as listmaking, indexing and commenting (239). Willemen is among the first critics to pay attention to this drive that moves beyond the tasks described by “old school” cinephiles, who seem more focused on worshiping locations and determining the relative status of films and auteurs. Even so, Willemen does not seem to believe that their theory is devoid of the spark of cinephilia, at least in the context of *Cahiers* critic-filmmakers like Truffaut and Godard. In their case, theory is cinephilia rationalized, historicized and politicized.

One problem remains: what is the nature of this spark? What in the texture of the cinematic image prompts these reactions to what otherwise might be deemed as random images? Willemen reaches two conclusions about the nature of the cinephilic

moment: cinephilia depends on a flash of revelation and the revelation is based on something subjective, brief and unstable that is triggered in each individual viewer (239). This subjective revelation needs to be contextualized and it only surfaces when exposed to the fabric of the personal. Something in the film when combined with what Willemen refers to as “local history and personal neuroses” (234) generates an emotional response: something clicks and the image on the screen gains a significant value for the spectator. This means that we should surrender any attempt to circulate our cinephilic moments, since given their subjective and ephemeral nature, they are impossible to comprehend by someone other than the original or first receptor.

Taking up Willemen’s ideas, Keathley tries to furnish some structure and provide for the circulation of this subjective experience as an alternative form of writing about film. To do so, Keathley borrows several key concepts from *New Historicism: Revelatory Experience, the Real, the Way of Looking, and the Challenge of History*. Revelatory experience, according to Keathley, is described by historical theorists in almost cinematic terms: a luminous detail that is independent from any element other than the telling of its contained truth. This could be connected to the epiphanic nature of the cinephilic moment, discussed above: random details of the film, not necessarily related to the plot, reveal new layers of experience to the spectator. For example, the color of an image or the presence of a certain resonant item or a sequence of gestures, if only marginally related to the diegesis, could allow viewers to explore the frame in a more personal manner. Cinema also provides a unique opportunity to witness a slice of “real” life with a certain level of independence from what was originally intended in the representation. The peripheral detail

provided by the screen is a fertile ground for collecting the real, particularly within the quasi-documentary nature of many early cinemas. For example, when filming on location the camera could be interested in guiding the spectator's attention in a certain way but nothing prevents the viewer from looking elsewhere in the frame, outside of the focus of the story: buildings, people and other elements that lie dormant in the background are suddenly reassessed by the curiosity of the liberated eye. This is what Farber refers to, in a different context, as "the unheralded ripple of physical existence, the tiny morbidly life-worn detail" (17). The flâneur's Way of Looking--vaguely scanning the horizon but not with a deliberate aim (Benjamin 4:326)—may also be taken up by the film spectator, whose eyes rove the screen in search of, "moments, details and gestures that excite his imagination" (139). A very popular example of this is the case of Cary Grant's socks in *North by Northwest*, or even better, the little girl in D.W. Griffith's *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*. In the latter case, the girl appears for a few seconds of screen time and yet her piercing eyes, her posture, the way she faces the camera, create a distraction completely unrelated to the diegesis but worth exploring nonetheless (Paulus). Finally, Keathley emphasizes how for New Historicism, "the anecdote disrupts traditional discourses of history" (139); in many cases, the anecdote/cinephilic moment cannot be easily assimilated into existing narratives, (it is neither part of the film's story nor of cinema's history) thus prompting the construction of an alternative path that can run parallel to or even antagonize "official history." This new approach will reassess the strategies of canon formation and provide for new ways of exploring both obscure items as well as more popular

examples in film history. Keathley's approach, in sum, provides for an alternative to the traditional, chronological and linear approaches to the history of cinema.

The question that remains is: how does one write about the cinephilic moment without fundamentally altering the nature of this eminently subjective experience? Keathley leans heavily on associations based on metonymy, personal memory, and the uncanny. He believes that the cinephilic moment triggers a chain of metonymic associations that allows for free intuitive play and exploration before finally combining with interpretation to offer new and exciting meanings. Keathley notes that, according to Cavell, a hypothesis achieves confirmation when it predicts an outcome and the evidence for that is clearly stated. Intuition, by contrast, does not rely so much on evidence but nevertheless reaches a form of understanding; in other words, truth is achieved without following logical or scientific steps (Keathley 144). Here it is necessary to reject the customary separation of emotion from reason. If the concern of post-1968 film theory was to isolate the critical apparatus from the enthusiasm and overwhelming sense of elation brought by the enjoyment of cinema, cinephile theorists such as Keathley instead advocate for a return to some of the early stages of film writing first deployed by the surrealists and the "photogénie" group.

Keathley also explores cinema's relationship to personal memory. He describes cinephilic moments as deeply embedded in memories whose value is only made evident after reflection (145). This echoes earlier poetic manifestos like William Wordsworth's theory of inspiration: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (17). If this is so then the cinephilic moment is first witnessed but not recognized as such; it is only at a

later date, when, reflecting upon the movie, the image returns to the spectator's mind with a new rhizomatic force that is ready for connection and expansion while at the same time resisting interpretation or assimilation. Gilbert Adair's *Myths and Memories*, which is dedicated to the unsystematic recollection of elemental memories associated not only with film but also with cultural marginalia, exemplifies this process. Keathley discusses Adair's approach as it relates to the cinephilic quest, noting that it is based on "recollection, scanning panoramically beyond anything related to plot or theme" (146). He connects this type of personal mapping with anamnesis, which he defines, quoting Barthes, as "the action--a mixture of pleasure and effort--performed by the subject in order to recover, without magnifying it or sentimentalizing it, a tenuity of memory"(qtd in Keathley 147). While somewhat "loose" and lacking the rigidity of traditional theory, Keathley's approach is still a valid way of recording and disseminating encounters with cinema.

Keathley draws upon Adair and Barthes to show how cinephilic moments can be collected, but a question still remains: how may we process these instances of personal memory into something meaningful for others? Keathley answers by engaging with Walter Benjamin's writings on memory and history. Benjamin was obsessed with how memory worked in relation to the construction of history. His most ambitious enterprise, *The Arcades Project*, is an attempt to reconstruct the history of 19th century Paris through fragments and reflections. Using memory's creative force, the historian arranges cultural flashes of history into a pattern that works against the mainstream historical flow. These flashes are similar to what the cinephilic moment represents to the careful spectator. Keathley suggests that Benjamin's writings on

Proust, with their particular attention to the relation between voluntary and involuntary memory, are the key to theorizing the cinephilic moment, but he also recognizes the dangers of this proposition: “Though the flash must be developed at least partially in order to have a generalizable knowledge effect, it must remain a fragment in order to retain its illuminatory power, and also in order to resist co-optation into yet another historicist-style narrative” (Keathley 149). The obvious problem here lies in the fact that any cohesive narrative that integrates cinephilic moments and attempts to interpret them risks forming another solidified history that closes the door on other readings. Keathley does not identify any alternative to this fossilization which seems to be the by-product of most historical discourse.

With his appropriation (or perhaps misreading) of Freud’s concept of the uncanny, Keathley also explains how cinephilic moments may create in the spectator a feeling of déjà-vu, or unfamiliar repetition. This then triggers an unconscious series of metonymic reminiscences that can be both personal and historical, a process that is exemplified in Wollen’s “An Alphabet of Cinema” and Paul Auster’s *The Red Notebook*. These metonymic wanderings last until a second uncanny moment is discovered, that is, when spectators finally realize why the discrete scene caught their attention in the first place. This then motivates spectators to share their insights through scholarly publications or other forms of written dissemination (Keathley 151). Unfortunately, Keathley’s approach comes close to summoning again the “ideal” cinephilic spectator, one who is above normal viewers, who are deemed unable to react to the stimuli of these images.

Is it possible to escape the extreme subjectivity of these models? To a certain degree, all the theories discussed above are indebted to the Romantic conceptualization of the extraordinary human being who is uniquely capable of perceiving and deciphering texts. As Adrian Martin notes, “the figure of the cinephile is almost mythologically inflated by being associated with, on the one hand, the artist (creatively remembering and rewriting the fragments of culture) and, on the other hand, the supposedly ordinary, average spectator” (“Fragments” 31). Martin questions, not the existence of cinephilic moments, but the notion that only especially sensitive viewers will be able to translate them into a plain language accessible to the rest of the spectators. Martin attempts to theorize a structure for cinephilic reflection. He begins by charting the traditional divide between academic film studies and cinephilia, analyzing a line from Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier*: “The intellectual task was, as [Metz] saw it, to lay to rest the cinephile within, while recalling (without nostalgia) the kind of fascination one felt in that younger, more naïve state” (“Fragments” 31). Metz is, in simpler terms, rejecting emotion as a valid critical tool. Martin wants to reinstate it, but not without providing some framework to facilitate theorization. Although he acknowledges the importance of Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, he resents their unrestrained influence on film criticism. According to Martin, under their influence, “the experience of cinema becomes a matter of negotiating and combining pieces, ruins, sensorial memories of elements disconnected from the initial textual logic or system that contained them” (31). What he wants is to employ cinephilic moments to produce the proper theoretical apparatus that would both foster and fend off the emotional elements of these subjective moments. Martin returns to Willemsen’s idea of

the fragment, but rather than focusing exclusively on the subjectivity of the spectator, he takes the *affective excess* or the experience of epiphany and turns them into aesthetic questions (32; emphasis on the original).

In order to explore the phenomenon of cinephilic moments, Martin draws upon figural analysis by William Routt and Nicole Brenez, among others. The figure is understood as an element that is not only relevant inside the film but that is also connected to different manifestations of cinema through parallelisms and equivalencies. Martin adds that this type of analysis, “pays close attention to narrative structure and motif [but] it has virtually no interest in three-dimensional character psychology and eschews all conventional engagement with the inner motivation or implied feelings of fictional beings” (42). The codes which traditional narrative analysis depends on are not discarded but their importance is minimized. Instead, rather than using them individually, the critic transforms them into semiotic signs that are open to further combination and renewal (43). Martin performs a figural analysis by focusing on the film’s archive of motifs that are borrowed from genre films but re-contextualized. As an example, Martin refers to Brenez’s work on Haneke’s *Funny Games*. In her analysis Brenez begins by examining a cluster of domestic tropes in Kazan’s *The Visitors* (a house, a nuclear family unit, an outside threat). Brenez, then arrives at *Funny Games* establishing a connection on the level of atypical representations of violence. Eventually her exploration moves her away from Kazan’s action/reaction pattern and into Haneke’s use of white to exemplify anticipations of violence on an insistence/persistence scheme. These associations differ from traditional motif in as much as the color is a

“systematization of an almost primal cinematic force (the bright light that alternates with darkness, in a ceaselessly flickering pulsation in the *defilement* of any celluloid strip), and the ‘forms of insistence and persistence’ in which it is elaborated [that] also have a drive-based, psychoanalytic energy” (“Fragments” 45).

Martin believes that all representations of space, place, objects and figures (both animal and human) form part of these codified system of relations that lurk behind all films.

Martin considers cinephilic moments as the spectator’s reaction to these highly-coded system responses. Taking advantage of the independent nature of these moments, which have been severed from the traditional narrative structure of the film, the critic may identify a pattern of figures across multiple films. This is manifested in a web of precursors (as is the case of Kazan’s *The Visitors*) as well as through mapping for possible modifications or as Martin argues, “[e]ach filmmaker has the possibility of radically renewing a historic figural question by rearranging its elements, inverting them, posing them in a new way, in a new relationship” (43).

Technology

Finally, cinephilia and its theorization have been dramatically affected by technological change. Elsaesser posits two historical stages of cinephilia, the previously discussed “take one” and a more recent “take two.” He further subdivides the latter into two additional categories, first describing a cinephilia that “has kept aloof from the university curriculum and kept its faith with auteur cinema” (33). Then he addresses another type of cinephilia that “has found its love of the movies take very different and often enough very unconventional forms, embracing new technologies, such as DVDs and the internet, finding communities and shared experiences through

gender-bending Star Trek episodes and other kinds of textual poaching” (33). This is the mode of cinephilia that I will turn to now, and that will be of central interest in the remainder of my dissertation.

It is worth noting that the idea of community, which featured extensively in the earliest formulations of cinephilia, remains an essential element in the most recent, technology-oriented incarnations of the concept. In this sense, “take two” cinephilia retains but transforms the significance of community by reformulating the latter’s use of space. Rather than seeking out that special seat in an indie theater, the new cinephiles migrated to internet communities: blogs, forums and chat rooms designed to foster exchanges concerning the latest auteur’s oeuvre as well as news about hard-to-find DVDs. In his analysis of these virtual communities, Elsaesser stresses the importance of three practices that he identifies by adapting the jargon of “techno-savvy” cinephiles: re-mastering, re-purposing, and reframing.

Elsaesser defines re-mastering as a cinephilic strategy to capture and control films. Cinephiles embrace their emotional entanglement with films by taking it one step further. DVD companies are well aware of the demands of cinephiles and they cater to their tastes by promoting midnight movies, and collector’s editions. Cinephiles celebrate these efforts but they also re-appropriate them. Elsaesser characterizes this re-mastering as “the ultimate ‘negotiated’ reading of the consumer society as it is within the regime of universalized or commodified pleasure that the meaning proposed by the mainstream culture and the meaning ‘customized’ by the cinephile coincide” (37). For Elsaesser, this is an important characteristic of the new cinephiles: they unpack and re-appropriate cinematic texts while being subjected to the market

economy of acquiring them. Re-mastering carries the sign of struggle: the hegemonic drive of the culture industry clashes directly with the re-appropriating resistance of cinephile culture.

According to Elsaesser, repurposing is “the industry term for re-packaging the same content in different media, and for attaching different uses or purposes to the single product” (37). Movies once released in theaters gain new life when re-released as DVDs, and then again when companies later on attach bonus materials in order to create special editions. Elsaesser complains about the narrow targeting of these new releases: “the critic--cinephile, consumer guide, enforcer of cultural standards, or fan--is already part of the package” (37). He complains that this “ready-made cinephilia” forecloses on processes of discovery. However, I would grant more agency to contemporary viewers than does Elsaesser; if anything, “take two” cinephilia has facilitated new findings and connections, particularly when it enables “negotiated” readings that counter corporate control and ideological hegemony (Brookey and Westerfelhaus). Moreover, prior to the DVD boom, cinephiles’ discoveries were circumscribed by the norms and priorities of film distributors, festivals and film archives; today’s cinephiles have a vast array of films to choose from. It is true, however, that there are still market efforts to set limits. In addition to the editorial choices made by DVD companies, regional codes are an attempt to limit accessibility and restrain choices in order to maximize profits. But this technology luckily can be circumvented with multi-region software and hardware, as well as through other less legal methods (hacking/decrypting programs).

Curiously, Elsaesser finds fault with the possibility of total availability, which he asserts would facilitate anachronistic “re-framings” of films. Rosenbaum, by contrast, disputes the supposed overwhelming availability of cinematic texts by bringing in statistics: the fact that only “3.64 percentage [of all films are] on video and DVD still provides a sharp and bracing rebuke to the popular mantra that ‘everything’ on film is either now available to us lucky home-video consumers or is about to be” (“Global”). Total availability is not only a myth but also an impossible dream, especially with respect to silent film, given the amount of material that has been lost and the rather limited market in terms of sales. It is true, however, that the sense of urgency that sometimes accompanied classic cinephilia seems to have diminished: missing a screening does not necessarily mean waiting years for the film to resurface. In the past, cinephilic desire was channeled towards the experience of the moment, that fleeting opportunity of viewing a film before it moved on to another location in the festival circuit or disappeared into the relative obscurity and unavailability of archives. The emotion of the soon-to-be-lost, together with the mystique of the locale, is an important characteristic of classic cinephilia. For the new cinephile the life of film has been extended; films take less time to appear on the different available formats (DVD, streaming technologies, and even film sharing in the form of friendly bootlegging). Recently, even some festivals have begun broadcasting films over the internet to reach the widest possible audience. The desire of watching a movie before it disappears has been replaced by the discovery of hard-to-find films, and the constant expectation of the rediscovery of a long lost classic, or, as in the case of silent film, of the appearance of more complete prints.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between “takes,” Elsaesser closes his argument with a more optimistic appraisal of the new possibilities generated by “take two” cinephilia. Rather than focus on the conflicting notions of pleasure and desire (heavily politicized concepts, an inheritance of the film theory of the 1970’s), Elsaesser shifts his attention to memory. He notes how we attempt desperately to freeze time in some way—including through photographs and video--in order to reaffirm the here-and-now-ness of the present: “It gives the cinephile experience take two a new role--maybe even a cultural status--as collector and archivist, not so much of our fleeting cinema experiences as of our no less fleeting self-experiences” (40). Cinephiles, for Elsaesser, are archivists: collectors of fragments who attempt to assemble a subjective history of film as well as create a communal space of sharing that equals the sacred space of classic cinephilia.

As I have shown in this chapter, cinephilia does not simply characterize a certain type of film fan; it is also a valid tool for approaching film history and analysis from a different point of view. Less rigorous than formal theory according to some critics, it nevertheless showcases the affective and experiential as well as critical power behind the new revolution in film criticism.

Chapter Two:

American Film Reviewing: Cinephilia and Social Consciousness

In Chapter One, I discussed the historical emergence of cinephilia as well as some major trends in its theoretical consideration. In this chapter as well as in Chapter Three, I will analyze the development of writing about film in several specific contexts. In the following pages, I will investigate film reviewing in the United States, one of the top three largest producers of cinema and the greatest producer and exporter of cultural hegemony in the world (“Nigeria”). Chapter Three will be devoted to film reviewing from one locus of resistance to this hegemony: Cuba. I will pay careful attention, not only to the impact of cinephilia on the development of professional film reviewing in both countries, but also to the varying degrees to which social and political consciousness were also deemed essential aspects of the genre.

Silent Cinema Reviews

From very early on in the history of cinema as an art form, American film reviewers managed to cultivate an audience of readers and establish a place for themselves within the public sphere. In the first part of this chapter, I will evaluate the work of a number of the first American film reviewers, emphasizing how they developed the template of a standard review, and how, by their inclusions and omissions, they fostered the creation of the practice as it is known today. The first question that needs to be answered is: what is a film review? In the American context, the earliest writings about film were descriptions for exhibition catalogues; they mostly included a basic plot summary and some technical information regarding the

length of the reel. Relatively quickly, however, a new type of writing emerged which consisted either of virulent attacks or passionate apologies for the new medium. Charges of obscenity and perversion of youth were circulated as well as claims that the young form of entertainment fell short of what the other arts produced, relegating cinema to only a form of entertainment. Some art critics, especially those in charge of theater columns, led the charge to circumscribe cinema as a low amusement for the masses. Some saw film reviewing as a springboard to more prestigious jobs reviewing “higher” forms of art. Some writers, however, switched sides, as is the case of Alfred Kuttner, who began as a strong antagonist of cinema and partisan of censorship, and eventually became a passionate defender of the new art form (Lounsbury 49). Within the group of enthusiastic apologists, some tried to justify the candidacy of film as an art by analyzing the medium, commenting on the construction of plot as well as on the different technical conditions that distinguished cinema from the other arts. Early on it was established that if film were to be respected, its advocates would need to prove that film was a valid art and that film reviewing was more than simply advertising.

Film critics and historians have differed regarding the question of who wrote the first film review in the United States. Anthony Slide makes the case for Harry Tyrell’s striking one-line piece on Edison’s 1896 *The Kiss*: “A formidable challenge to the legitimate drama, as represented by Olga Nethersole in *Carmen*” (qtd in Slide 54). While it is only one sentence, it already contains certain elements that anticipate the rhetoric of early film writing. For example, it establishes cinema as a challenge to theater, although placing the younger as the lesser of the two arts. Also, by direct allusion to Nethersole, a popular and controversial actress of the time, this review

opens up a morality debate since she was arrested for public indecency while performing *Sappho* on Broadway, slightly before *Carmen* was released (Callis 2). The issue of indecency is a fixture in film reviewing even today.

Jerry Roberts supports the candidacy of Frank E. Woods as the first movie reviewer to be both recognized as such—as early as 1909, when he wrote under the pseudonym “The Spectator”—and to have his own regular column (17). Woods managed a great degree of consistency and an extensive body of work, although he lost some credibility when he became a screenwriter for D.W. Griffith, the subject of many of his glowing reviews. As a reviewer Woods helped to establish Griffith’s position in the American canon, bolstering Griffith’s self-promoting machine that worked to make him the towering giant of the American early silent period, a position that has recently been challenged by many critics. In this way Woods reinforced American production values not only in the United States but also in other film cultures around the world.

An early review that appeared on November 27, 1909 is one of the most striking of those written under his pseudonym. In this piece, Woods ratifies the art of film reviewing, defusing a popular argument against films that condemned them as simple “articles of manufacture” (qtd in Kauffman 37). To defend cinema and his job, Wood employs two arguments. First, that film is an act of entertaining the public and that as such it belongs to the same realm of public discussion as plays and other forms of collective amusement. Much more interesting though is Woods’ claim that motion pictures “have improved since criticism was inaugurated” (37). Woods asserts that criticism is essential for maintaining the quality and honesty of the movies, so much

so that without critics, movies would fall into a pattern where “defects will never be noticed” (38). This piece—together with many others--corroborates Myron Lounsbury’s assessment that one of Woods’ greatest contributions was his “prolific defense of the new popular medium.” He cleared the way for later critics with his approach, which far from being only an apology became an “exploration into a number of important and aesthetic issues” (28). Moreover, while Woods’ early film writing might not merit the cinephilic tag, almost all the cinephilic critics that followed him will echo the arguments that Woods and his peers employed in their defense of cinema.

As films transitioned from two reels into longer, more complicated pieces, the role of written commentary also grew. While still not universally recognized as an art, film was certainly a strong business and as such the press coverage it received was bound to expand. In his *American Movie Critics* anthology, Philip Lopate marks the beginning of serious writing about film with the longer, more theoretically oriented works by Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg (xiii). The studies by Lindsay, a poet, and Münsterberg, a psychologist, certainly provided some respectability to the medium in the United States. While there is strong merit in the work of these two figures, I have excluded them from my own analysis because their publications are in book form and do not function as reviews.

Stanley Kauffmann champions Woods as one of the important early critics as well, but he also singles out the writings of Louis Reeves Harrison, W. Stephen Bush and Robert Sherwood, among others. Lounsbury, for his part, names Harrison as a contemporary and continuer of Woods’ approach, as they both dealt with the

conservative attacks on cinema (8). Harrison wrote for *Moving Picture World*, an influential movie magazine published from 1907 to 1927. While the reviews featured in this magazine were often simply prose versions of the plot, sometimes they were more involved. For example, W. Stephen Bush's review of the Helios production of *Dante's Inferno* is an elaborate analysis of the film based on comparisons to a previous version released by Milano films. Bush appraises the Helios version of the *Inferno* in terms of production values and acting and concludes with the following indictment: "This work is a base and clumsy imitation of the magnificent product of the Milano Films Company.... With two exceptions every scene has been 'borrowed' from the Milano Films Company and invariably spoiled by the borrowing" (23). Bush then proceeds to compare the scenes mentioned, stating how the Milano production stands out, while bad acting and cheap cinematography degrade the other version. The problems of adaptation and originality were dividing issues in the early stages of cinema. Copyright laws were either fluid or nonexistent, allowing for greater freedom of adaptation as well as straightforward stealing. Bush's writing draws attention to this problem and established parameters for discussing it. In 1915, Bush's review of *The Birth of the Nation* demonstrates how the perception and writing about film was becoming more nuanced; his piece is clearly organized, and includes sharp commentary and sociological contrast. Bush first presents the details of the film with a simple summary and then highlights elements of the *mise en scène* and cinematography. He concludes by addressing both the controversy surrounding the film as well as the spectators' reactions. Bush's valuable contribution provides a contemporary portrait of the effect of the film on an audience, by bearing witness to

reactions in a crowd that was already favorably predisposed, or as he calls it “most friendly,” to the movie. Bush remarks “there were hisses mingled with the applause. These hisses were not, of course, directed against the artistic quality of the film. They were evoked by the undisguised appeal to race prejudices. The tendency of the second part is to inflame race hatred” (Kauffmann 88). Other critics of the time were much less affected by the racial hatred promoted by Griffith. For example, Henry Mac Mahon’s review lavished the movie with praise, swiftly avoiding the racial themes by focusing on the pictorial design and technical insight (Kauffman 93). While Bush’s reviews showcase a style akin to many of the late twentieth century reviewers, when compared to other American political reviewers of the 30s and 40s or to the “enshrined” critics like James Agee and Pauline Kael, they still lack the acute criticism of the former and the minute detailing of the latter.

One more distinguishing characteristic of early American film reviewers is their discussion of foreign films’ influence on American cinema, especially that of German Expressionism. I believe that some of the great shifts in the American approach to film reviewing stem from the infusion of cinephilic rapture prompted by an innovative wave of foreign film. For example, critics in the 1920s saw in films like *The Golem* and above all Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* the best way to demonstrate the artistic nature of film. Lounsbury mentions how, after the publication of positive reviews by Gilbert Seldes, Lindsay and others, the praise of German film was quickly echoed by many major publications (90). But perhaps the most relevant point discussed by Lounsbury is how *Caligari* sparked the enthusiasm of the editor of *Exceptional Photoplays*, Alfred Kuttner, who started “sponsoring private screenings of

films unlikely to have wide distribution” (134). This is probably one of the first instances of a cinephilic desire to counter the commercial nature of film exhibition and foster the enjoyment of cinema not only as mass entertainment but also as art, or at least as the object of cult following. The reaction to *Caligari* also extended to numerous fields. For example, poets and other artists seemed drawn to this film, commenting upon the transgressions of the newcomer, which appropriated and transformed elements from the other “more established” arts. Another important issue is that the waves of anti-German sentiment that were still felt by people in general were softened by *Caligari* and other movies that re-opened the American market to German cinema (Thompson 17). Movies like Wiene’s *Caligari* allowed for a communal space where the spectator’s opinions about the nature and value of film art were reevaluated.

In order to examine the influence of *Caligari*, I will compare and contrast the reviews of the German film by the poets Carl Sandburg and Blaise Cendrars as well as by several other film reviewers. Although Cendrars is not an American film reviewer, his status as a poet and a contemporary of Sandburg provide a unique opportunity for a comparison. At such an early stage it is difficult or perhaps impossible to find outspoken declarations of cinephilia, and yet by contrasting the different attitudes and methodologies deployed by these film reviewers it is possible to identify the elements that anticipate later developments in cinephilia, and that contribute to the emergence of strong hegemonic film reviewing styles and canons.

Sandburg’s review, first published by the *Chicago Daily News* on May 12, 1921, is a laudatory piece about the German film. In his approach, the Chicago poet

focuses less on the plot or scenario and more on the impact it had on the audience, comparing it to the way “a sea voyage affects a shipload of passengers” (Lopate 19). He also recommends that audiences be cheerful when attending the screening since the movie’s sadness could be overwhelming. This first review is characterized by the use of poetic images to bridge the gap between the visual medium and the written word. Also, it displays an interest in the viewer’s response. This approach probably inspired Sandburg to undertake a second viewing of the film in order to further investigate the spectators’ responses. On the 21st of May, Sandburg published his second review of *Caligari*, this time enumerating three types of reactions in the audience: those who do not understand it, those who think it is a joke, and finally, those who believe that it is art. Sandburg admits that this last group is small but fervent (Sandburg 68).

Sandburg’s reviews represent the positive reaction of an American poet to the German film. Also, they demonstrate that the fields of inquiry regarding the cinematic were already expanding beyond the basic plot elements into a consideration of more complex issues such as reception. By contrast, Cendrars penned a devastating review of the film in the form of a poem, briefly but meticulously enumerating all the elements of *Caligari* that betray the nature of cinema. His strong reaction is based on his conceptualization of avant-garde aesthetics. He considers that associating the ramblings of a madman to the cubist style is to discredit a movement that intended to highlight “equilibrium, tension and mental geometry” (Abel 271). He also claims that the so-called novelty of the spectacle presented is not cinematic because “the distortions are not optical and do not depend either on the camera angle or the lens or the diaphragm or the focus” (Abel 271). This diatribe against *Caligari*’s design is not

only featured in Cendrars' poem, it is also echoed by other critics, for example, Potamkin. The contrasting vision of two poets, one emphasizing the effect of the work of art on the public, the other using poetry to attack the film, are innovative ways of approaching film, certainly very different from standard reviews.

Creativity was not the exclusive prerogative of the poet critics. Other film reviewers of the time, while certainly less poetic than Sandburg and Cendrars, nevertheless tackled with great imagination the German film in an attempt to clarify the national and artistic boundaries of the cinematic. For example, Sherwood, an avid supporter of Wiene, provided another excellent reaction to the German film by calling it an example of "artistic radicalism in its more rabid form" (Kauffmann 121). While he addresses the issue of design, which he calls post-impressionistic instead of cubist, he focuses his review on the atmosphere and the acting. He lauds the movie as "Poesque" and claims that no American director would have been able to produce something like *Caligari* with the exception of Maurice Tourneur (122). It is important to emphasize that Sherwood, who would later on become a famous playwright and screenwriter, wrote two reviews of *Caligari*. The first one, published in *Exceptional Photoplays* in March 1921, is a longer and more detailed piece than the one he wrote for *Life* on April 28, 1921. Nevertheless, while they share many characteristics, surprisingly there is no repetition, as is the case with many other critics who wrote for different outlets. Sherwood states that while some of the film's strengths derive from the creativity of the plot, most of all it depends on the combination of acting, scenario and storyline, or what he calls "the perfect fusion of its elements" (124). The enthusiasm displayed by Sherwood for the medium goes beyond that of the average

spectator or even the regular reviewer; it becomes a steady force in his interpretation of the film and distinguishes him as one of the earliest critics who approaches the zeal that will be displayed by later cinephiles.

In an anonymous review published by *The National* the author falls in line with the contemporary opinions. Once again the film is praised although this time the enthusiasm for the artistic nature of the play is less consistent than in the previous reviews. The writer praises *Caligari* for its expressionist, Dadaist, and gothic as well as other styles. It seems unlikely that the concatenation of artistic styles was meant to highlight the ambiguity of the origin of Wiene's artistic vision. It seems more likely that the sole intention was to place *Caligari* in conversation with other artistic products, in other words, to legitimize the German film and by extension cinema as an art form.

The film reviewers from the silent period sampled above share some of the enthusiasm usually attributed to the cinephile, but most importantly they are also the first American examples of the development of a distinctive style and writing practice as well as of the ideological building blocks of the American canon. The majority of early film reviews by Americans were short plot summaries designed to guide the consumer, or longer apologetic pieces hoping to establish the validity of the medium. Nevertheless, some critics like Bush and Sherwood shaped their reviews into more artistic, coherent, and independent works by combining minimal summarizing with anecdotal and other subjective commentaries, as well as by occasionally revealing insight into the politics of filmmaking. This tendency will only grow stronger with the advent of sound and will eventually reach its heyday after the cinephilic explosion in the late 50s and 60s.

Early Sound (Bakshy and Potamkin)

Once film producers and studios noticed the great commercial advantage generated by a new product, the advent of sound was inevitable. With the spread of this technology, new critics emerged as well as new debates. The battles for cinema's inclusion as an art were less virulent, since the debate shifted to the quarrels between silent and sound enthusiasts. Many critics believed that silent film was the artistic incarnation of the medium; silent film purists saw sound as an act of surrender to commercial interests and a capitulation in favor of the supremacy of the theatrical. One of these critics was Alexander Bakshy. On February 20th 1929, Bakshy published an article titled "The Talkies" in which he defended the new medium as art and condemned those who characterized sound as the next vulgar development (Kaufmann 214). Bakshy, who was a theater critic as well as an acknowledged translator of Russian plays and novels, wrote reviews about foreign and domestic films focusing on the expansion of sound technology (Roberts 48). Bakshy's curiosity about the dynamics of cinema's international exchange, evident as early as 1915, combined with his well-developed notions regarding the importance of camerawork, lent greater sophistication to his film reviews. His approach highlighted the plasticity of films as well as their musicality and choreography, while paying less attention to plot lines and other traditional concerns of earlier film reviewing. For example, in his review of Rene Clair's *Sous le Toits de Paris* he begins by praising Clair's artistry and subject matter, in contrast to the works of "Hollywood robots" (Kauffmann 246). He goes on to describe a turning point in the film: "By introducing a slight action, so slight that it is almost entirely confined to an exchange of glances between the peddler and a

prowling pickpocket, the artist sets off the vital force” (Kaufmann 246). Bakshy’s attention to the punctum of the scene is remarkably close to what Keathley and others have identified as the cinephilic moment: an instance that could very well be invisible to many spectators but that was essential for others, who perceived that it had some meaning independent of language. Regarding political issues, Bakshy preferred to subordinate social content to form. For example, his review of Dovzhenko’s *Arsenal* begins with the claim that the movie “transcends its immediate political message” (Kauffman 230). He acknowledges the clear ideological content of the film, but instead focuses on the “purely cinematic treatment of rhythm.” This is consistent with Bakshy’s predilection for comedies and musicals, influenced by his attention to cinematic composition and exquisite production details. Bakshy prefers to concentrate his reviews on auteurs such as Lubitsch, and the only Marx he mentions is the one associated with *Horse Feathers*, not the author of *Capital* (Kauffman 267). Once again he circumvents the political issues of World War I in his review of *All Quiet on the Western Front*; Bakshy commends the movie for exposing war as horror and madness, but avoids any deeper discussion of causes and effects in the political sphere. His lack of social commitment, however, does not take away from the elaborate nature of his film reviewing. His enthusiasm for musicals and his attention to the soundscapes of film place him in a category apart from all the reviewers discussed before.

Bakshy’s other interests eventually moved him in a different direction and he quit movie reviewing (Roberts 49), though not before serving as an inspiration to a new generation of reviewers. Bakshy’s greatest admirer was also an important film critic, Harry Alan Potamkin. In a piece published by *The National Board of Review*

Magazine on September 1927, Potamkin praises Bakshy for his pioneering statements about the artistic nature of cinema and his extensive writings on the style and musicality of film (Kaufman 191). Potamkin also notes that Bakshy was a pioneer in discussing the negative influence of commercial interests in the development of film. Potamkin follows along this path. Early on, his criticism is invested in formalistic concerns; later, he will unleash a ferocious Marxism on the banality of Hollywood productions. Both tendencies locate Potamkin's film writing as distant from cinephilia's tendency to foster individualism and auteurial critique.

Potamkin's early reviews stand out because of their in-depth reflections on the cinematic medium. Potamkin eschews emerging tendencies such as the one-film review; his reviews also avoid the attention to disembodied detail that characterizes the cinephilic moment. Articles like "Tendencies in Cinema," "The Montage Film," and "The Future Cinema," are excellent examples of his approach. Even in his early stage he held a profound sympathy for Soviet cinema, a sympathy that while strong never prevented him from also criticizing it when it echoed Hollywood's maladies. However, Potamkin is at his strongest during the second stage of his career. In his article "Motion Picture Criticism," Potamkin declares that American movies and criticism are both immature (49). On numerous occasions Potemkin launches an attack on both Hollywood and film criticism in general. For example, in "Film Novitiates, etc.," he claims that his contemporaries are paid to regurgitate old arguments first formulated by critics who were also paid by film producers to justify cinema (573). He substantiates this conclusion by examining how film reviewers deify certain directors or performers (in this case Chaplin). This statement would have set

Potamkin, had he lived long enough, on a direct collision path with the future auteur-oriented cinephiles. In “The Bourgeois Movie Critics” he expands his criticism to highlight the general ignorance of some American critics who refuse to not only acknowledge the greatness of Russian cinema but also to even consider discussing it in a symposium (577). What he proposes instead is criticism as a way to dig deep into society and away from “disassociated aesthetics” (50). Potamkin advocated a dialectical criticism that entailed a focus on form as well as social consciousness; he cites the cinema of Eisenstein and Pudovkin as the best examples of this unity (50). Potamkin also can be considered among the most progressive film critics working in the thirties, as evidenced in his essays on women directors, on “African American” cinema, and his sociological considerations. For example, in his approach to African American cinema it is possible to detect a certain degree of anger in his writing when dealing with the inaccurate representation of blacks in Hollywood films. He considers Hollywood’s attempts to lighten the black race by showcasing “mulattos” as an effrontery. However, he also claims that, although there are exceptions, blacks have not shown a strong tendency to create their own cinema. Is it possible that he is right? In most histories of American cinema there is very little mention of African American production during the 1930s (179). Of course, Oscar Micheaux is probably one of the exceptions that Potamkin has in mind (although he fails to mention him or anyone else by name or work). Potamkin should have questioned the reasons why there was such a dearth of African American productions, which was probably more related to economy and capital than to talent or disposition. However, a valid point that Potamkin raises is the fact that at the time of his article there was an inevitable vogue

in the Negro film (179). Potamkin argues that film was trying to catch up to literature and theater where there was already a significantly larger representation of African American culture. However, this resurgence that was only bound to increase in the next two decades, would, according to Potamkin probably further interfere with the development of a true African American cinema by crowding the field with ready-made products made by white people (184).

Potamkin's reviews are seldom dedicated to only one film. Usually he refers to common denominators like genre or theme. Moreover, when he discusses directors he is usually dismissive, occasionally calling them "generals," even if in his reviews he frequently praises a group of directors who repeatedly captured his attention. One of the few movies that deserved a focused individual review was Dreyer's *The Passion of Jeanne D'Arc*. Potamkin praises the director's stern execution but also the absence of a rigorous plot, a detail that frees Dreyer to pursue vivid images with rapturous simplicity (453). He does not engage in social criticism in this piece; instead he is closer to Bakshy (whom he quotes) in his unpacking of Dreyer's visual style and plastic arrangements (452). However this is an exception rather than a trademark of Potamkin's late criticism.

One of Potamkin's main concerns was the representation of war. In eighteen months, he penned at least six short reviews of films connected to war issues. Beginning with an article titled "The Film and the War," Potamkin deploys his critical apparatus to identify the reasons why these war films fail, such as the juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy that effectively drains movies of the necessary pathos. Potamkin also condemns the subtle justifications of war that are essential for the continuation of

capitalism, referring to Soviet and French cinema, which for him include positive examples of war cinema. He suggests that war films should avoid sentimentality and the fascination with battles and focus instead on the non-military aspects of war (471). “Hollywood Looks at War” expands the critique of war films by including references to Hollywood’s relentless anti-Soviet propaganda that Potamkin identifies in movies like *The Last Command* and *The Spy* (494). The end result of the combination of anti-Soviet feeling with the praise of capitalist ventures is a type of film that Potamkin refers to as “gooey with every vile sentimentalism calculated to influence a simple minded and uninformed audience” (494). Potamkin’s writing style and his personal politics bring him closer to the Cuban critics to be discussed in the following chapter than to his contemporaries or almost anyone within the tradition of early American film reviewers. His reviews take an anti-auteur stance that makes him stand out when compared to later critics like Sarris.

1930s and 1940s (Ferguson and Agee)

The passionate reviews of Potamkin’s contemporary, Otis Ferguson, are a step closer to the cinephilic impulse that the French will exhibit in the 50s, although they differ in terms of priorities and subject matter preferences. His style is characterized by a casual, informal tone that distinguishes him from all the critics discussed so far. His colloquial style is best expressed in lines like, “My modest system of cataloguing has got to be extended, I see, because it is impossible to sit through a film like *Stand up and Cheer* and then just file it away in the ordinary drawer labeled Stinkers” (35). Lounsbury makes a similar assessment when he compares the high-art elitism of Bakshy and William Troy with Ferguson’s style (395). Notwithstanding the folksiness

of his style, Ferguson was a strong defender of the artistic qualities of cinema and was the United States' first cinephile reviewer. His pieces feature both plot summaries and discussion of technical developments, film composition and direction. Above all he had an eye (and ears) for revelatory small details, as in this excerpt of his review of Hitchcock's *The Secret Agent*: "something should be said for the use of sound, which is not equaled anywhere else; the music in the church, the howl of the dog, the disembodied voice in the rhythm of the train wheels (he mustn't, he mustn't, he mustn't), the deafening factory and steeple-bell noises, etc." (139). Lounsbury refers to this passage as Ferguson's "brilliant orchestration" (396) because by concatenating all these descriptions of sounds with no further explanation, Ferguson achieves an onomatopoeic allusion, that is, an effect similar to the one achieved by Hitchcock's use of sound in his film. This is the essence of cinephilic criticism and reviewing, an approach that is open and based on free associations, one that is as creative as the object it studies.

Ferguson, who was also a very accomplished jazz critic, achieved a prose style that could sometimes be as melodious as the music he described. This also made him especially sensitive to Hollywood musicals, to which he dedicated many reviews. For example, in the article "Words and Music," published on October 2 1935, Ferguson launches into a stern critique of the Hollywood musical. While he concedes that the U.S. has all the elements to make astonishing musicals (the best jazz bands, legions of popular songs and resources), he resents the fact that the studios resort to formulaic arrangements of limited imagination. Like Potamkin, Ferguson does not focus on only one film but carefully selects samples from many emblematic musicals. He combines

broad generalizing strokes (the comedy in musicals, the semantics of Fred Astaire) with careful dissection of the lyrics of particular songs (94).

In this curious take on populism, Ferguson chooses not to foreground the type of class and society represented in Fred Astaire's films. However, it is important to note that on the same day he published his vindication of Astaire (October 2 1935), he also published an editorial on the movie *Red Salute*. Ferguson thought that the movie was so dangerous that it deserved an extra column and in the space of less than a page he managed to dismantle the movie's message and address the hegemonic machinery that made it easily accessible to gullible audiences. For example, Ferguson begins by unpacking the first shot of an American flag descending over a demonstration on an unnamed American campus. Ferguson describes this film as nothing more than a "made-to-order attack on radicalism in the colleges" (96). By combining description of several shots, the disclosure of the movie's dubious agenda and a sharp criticism of the intended audience's reaction, Ferguson is able to expose the film's anti-labor propaganda. Ferguson does not limit his commentary on films about labor conditions to *Red Salute*. Previously he had also addressed the issue in his review of the *Black Fury*, a film about a strike in a mining town. However, Ferguson identifies in *Black Fury* elements that should be praised and that according to the American critic surpass any Soviet attempts. Ferguson criticizes the Soviet films for their lack of "suppleness of personal development" and praises *Black Fury* for its portrayal of the "suffering in the life of a single man" (73). It seems Ferguson is sidestepping one of the essential characteristics of Soviet cinema, one that privileges collective over individualized characterizations. Even the grandiose figures of Soviet Socialist Realism partake in the

nature of the collective (Hagener 197). But Ferguson seems to suggest that an individualized hero such as *Black Fury*'s is more accessible to identification by the spectator, even if, as he admits, that film's strike scenes are "phony" and the act of villainy is not correctly attributed to the owners of the mine.

As I have demonstrated, Ferguson does not eliminate the possibility of a political or social reading of films, but unlike Potamkin, he limits this critique to a very small number of films, and even when he does indulge in this type of commentary, he seldom allows it to take center stage in his discussions. At the same time, he is willing to dedicate valuable print space to directors and films that otherwise would remain the subject of specialized magazines or left-wing political journals, as in the case of the work of Joris Ivens, to whom Ferguson dedicated three full reviews in less than a year. Ferguson manages to identify most of the essential elements of Ivens' documentaries, but at the same time he avoids any direct mention of the politics behind them. For example, when reviewing *Industrial Symphony* he carefully alternates between a description of Ivens' precise eye for detail and the great beauty of the glass-blowing shots, and a foregrounding of the sharp commentary that is silently achieved by presenting the stress that such type of endeavor leaves on the human body. Since according to Ferguson Ivens' film achieves its criticism by taking a strongly neutral position in its photography, the reviewer's echoing of these attitudes serves the review well. However, in a film like *Spanish Earth*, considered by many a propaganda film, the same neutrality does not work. Is it possible that Ferguson is engaging in self-censorship? The name of the film is not even mentioned in the review, and Ferguson does not make explicit its message, although it can be inferred.

For example, he ends his review with a strong but indirect statement: “the film does not have to raise its voice to be undeniable, its report a plain testimonial to the way men can be lifted clear beyond themselves by the conception of and full response to the epic demand of their time” (192). A close reading of this conclusion and partial knowledge about the context of this film are enough to understand where Ferguson’s sympathies lie; however, the fact remains that there is never a direct mention of any of the issues of the Spanish Civil War. According to Christopher Robé, the exhibition of *Spanish Earth* was extremely important to the development of leftist film criticism in the US due to the positive reactions of audiences. Robé identifies the efforts to reshape “left documentary cinema into a more commercially friendly form” as decisive in this change of direction in the American public. He also cites Ferguson’s embracing of the film as evidence of the positive reaction in the popular media. It is to Ferguson’s credit that he immediately identified the value of Ivens’ documentaries and was quick to promote them. He also dedicated space to reviewing Soviet films, although his comments were not always positive, as was the case with *Potamkin*. Sometimes Ferguson uses humor to articulate his criticism, as in his review of *Three Songs for Lenin*. Burnett points out that his mockery is not addressed to the film’s politics but to the techniques employed by the filmmakers.

Ferguson’s social commentary reached its height by the mid-1930s, when he started discussing the war films that were being produced in increasing numbers. Ferguson reviewed many war films with the same zeal as *Potamkin*, but channeled his critique in a different direction. For example, *Potamkin*’s treatments of the war film, stemming from his attempts to expose the capitalist machinery that motivated and

profited from the war efforts, focused almost exclusively on charting the diegetic patterns of the story. Ferguson's reviews occasionally are filtered through a critique of capitalism that is similar to Potamkin's in intent but different in intensity. Some of the best examples of this are Ferguson's reviews of the documentary *Dealers of Death* and William Wellman's *The President Vanishes*. Ferguson utilizes the background story of the production of *Dealers of Death*, which focused on weapons manufacturers, to highlight the level of interest that certain segments of the government and private business might have in controlling the content of films. However, in this case, once the interested parties saw the movie they were satisfied with its tame content, as it timidly refused to name the real culprits in the international distribution of weapons. Ferguson attributes this timidity to one sole factor: business. This documentary was not meant to be a serious exposition; rather, it was a product that needed to be sold. He calls this type of film "muckraking" (61). The antidote to this was, according to Ferguson, a fiction film like *The President Vanishes*. While admitting that it is a flawed film with a "naïve and oversimplified" plot, he also concedes that "any peacetime influence on the national susceptibility can be healthy enough to matter anyway" (62). The importance of this film is quite simple for Ferguson: it exposes the profit motive behind wars convincingly enough to create reasonable doubt in more receptive spectators. By hiding a social commentary inside a Hollywood fiction film the message could reach a wider audience.

Ferguson's critique does not stop at war films and documentaries; actually these two occupy a fraction of his criticism. Most importantly his love of films makes him extend his reviews not only to the ever-increasing number of social films in the

1930s like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Black Fury*, and *They Won't Forget* but also to musicals and Disney productions. One example of Ferguson's combination of cinephilic attention to detail and social consciousness are his reviews of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Fantasia*, *Pinocchio*, and *Dumbo*. Ferguson's enthusiasm for Disney is undeniable. His interest in these films is overwhelming although he still identifies some of their negative elements, most notably regarding *Fantasia*. He is particularly impressed by the attention to detail, especially with respect to the representation of the natural world. For example, in his review of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* he describes the animators as "zoological." His praise is based on the meticulous attention dedicated to the animation of the deer. Ferguson describes in detail all the movements that are captured in the film, including the elaborate representation of tense muscles, instincts and reactions that do not contribute to the plot but that are essential for the credibility of the natural elements of the film (209). This level of enthusiasm is once again echoed in his review of *Pinocchio*, although here Ferguson adds that there seems to be little story behind the episodic nature of the film. The only comment that could be remotely considered social is his brief criticism of the intended message of being a "good boy" (289).

The most experimental and fruitful of these films according to Ferguson's readings is *Dumbo*. Ferguson praises the inventiveness and nonsensical beauty of the pink elephant dance, and even claims that this movie embodies a higher form of art than some of the pieces displayed in museums. However, certain aspects of the work seem to escape Ferguson's eye for social sensibility. For example, the notorious black crow scene, in which the birds are obvious avatars of African Americans (Reising

300)--usually the targets of Disney's racist politics (carefully delineated by Cuban film reviewers, among others)--is interpreted by Ferguson as "done with affection" (393). How could Ferguson have missed the racist connotations when the leader of the crows is named Jim, and what is even worse, ascribe them to an innocent feeling of affection?

However, like many other critics, his attitude towards Disney was not altogether positive. His review of *Fantasia* is the only one in which Disney's methodic design is questioned. While he does not pen a wholly negative review, Ferguson sets the tone by referring to the film as Disney's first mistake, or simply as "hollow fakery" (317). Unfortunately the reasons for this criticism are questionable at best. Ferguson seems to resent the fact that Disney studios tried to incorporate a different type of soundtrack than what Ferguson refers to as Music with a capital letter. Because he believed that the original soundtracks were a strong component of Disney's productions, he thought it was unnecessary to rely on Stravinsky, Mozart and other classical composers to create the soundscape of the film. Ferguson also favored well-crafted, character driven stories, and he argued that *Fantasia* lacked story, motion, and interest (317). Even so, Ferguson was sympathetic to Disney's innovations in sound and his general enthusiasm for the films remained undiminished for the rest of his career.

While Ferguson is most certainly the highest point in American film criticism prior to World War II, effectively combining colloquial language, attention to detail (especially musical elements) and social commentary, in the following period James Agee might be viewed as the greatest of American film reviewers, at least when the

quality of writing is emphasized. Manny Farber, Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris rival him in sharpness of wit and popularity, but they could not match the elegant prose that he employed in his pieces written for *The Nation*. To attest to this, the poet W.H. Auden wrote a letter to the editors of *The Nation* praising Agee's regular film column. While Auden confesses that he seldom watches movies, Agee's writing compels him to return over and over again to the column for what he considered "the most remarkable regular event in American journalism" (Agee 3). Agee also rivals the French cinephile writers in popularity and influence due to his enthusiasm, self-doubt and intuitive allusion.

Agee started his career working for *Fortune* magazine and writing the legendary book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* about the life of Southern families during the Great Depression. Then he became the film reviewer for *Time* and eventually *The Nation* before becoming a successful freelance writer with award-winning screenplays and even a posthumous Pulitzer Prize (Agee 4). Agee inaugurates the tradition that will be reprised later on by Sarris and others, calling himself an "amateur" (35). In the first article he wrote for *The Nation*, Agee declares his ignorance about movie production and names as his only virtue a deep interest in the movies (Murray 6). Why did Agee choose to represent himself in this way? Charney argues that Agee desires to distance himself from the existing community of critics by relocating himself within the "non-specialist community of filmgoers" (117). Another reason for Agee's rhetorical approach was that previously film reviewers were either critics who had retired from previous prestigious professions, or writers who were waiting for a more prominent position to become available (for example, theater critic

or music reviewer). Agee, while having previous experience as a writer, approached the profession as an outsider, and he seems to take great pride in his status as amateur (34). The contemporary cinephile-critic echoes this amateur relationship, especially those working in the era of blogging, where the only remuneration is sharing deeply personal views as well as the cultural capital of disseminating ideas, as I will detail in the final chapter of this study.

Agee's personalization of reviews was such that he dedicated miniature crusades to defend the films that appealed to his taste or that in his opinion were of great value to humanity. One of the best examples of this was written in defense of Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. So impassioned was Agee about the subject that to deal with his topic he requested and was granted the space of three columns on May 31,st June 14th, and June 21st 1947. In the first column he begins by throwing the gauntlet at other film critics, stating that readers should "disregard virtually everything [they] may have read about the film" (294). Then he proceeds to systematically enumerate and dismantle the negative comments made about the film. But it is in the second column that the true cinephilic power of Agee's writing emerges. At first he describes Chaplin's use of close-ups, but rather than doing so in technical terms with elaborate descriptions or examples, he uses a simile, comparing them to "the notes of a slow, magnificent, and terrifying song, which the rest of the film serves as an accompaniment" (296-7). Agee's descriptions come close to poetry and eschew objectivity or theoretical implications; they are based almost exclusively on aesthetic principles. Agee's approach to Chaplin's film is also fueled by humanistic concerns. His focus is strongly anchored in *Monsieur Verdoux*'s portrayal of civilization and its

ailments, and Chaplin's use of cinematography to highlight this through close-ups. Perhaps this is where Agee's cinephilia differs from the French cinephilia of the 50s. Rivette, Truffaut and the other Young Turks were vaguely concerned with humanist themes in the films they reviewed, but their main preoccupation was to trace the auteur's presence through analysis of the *mise en scène*.

Roberts regards Agee as the bridge between the pre-WWII writings of Otis Ferguson and the post-war Manny Farber. But most importantly, Roberts argues that the real unifying quality of these three critics was their "abiding love of the movies," and their personal approach to the effects and semantics of films (121). An essential part of what makes cinephile criticism distinctive is its subjective quality, which foregrounds the writer's own emotional investment in a film. Agee was a master at this. However, while many praised his style, others found fault in his protean statements. Agee sometimes struggled in his reviews; it was a battle that left to the reader the task of deciding the worth of the film discussed. Roberts characterizes this as a Jekyll and Hyde quality, according to which Agee's opinions are formed, deformed and reformed in the course of a review. Bordwell claims that this is a characteristic of many reviewers of the 1940s such as Farber and Parker Tyler, calling it a criticism of fault and beauty (par. 27). But this is also part of a very pure spirit of cinephilic discourse. The review is performative and encapsulates the state of mind of the reviewer; rather than providing a definitive interpretation, the reviewer exposes the process of "weeding out," which runs parallel to the ways in which ordinary spectators may choose from multiple voices in a film.

Interestingly enough, Farber seemed to distrust Agee's approach; he was very critical not only of Agee but also of his followers and imitators. Farber's investment in setting a clear-cut difference between his style and Agee's went to such extremes that he published not one but two articles dedicated to the subject. In the first, titled "Nearer My Agee to Thee," published three years after Agee's death in 1958, Farber sets out to dismantle Agee's mythopoeia. The first issue that Farber tackles is the personality cult that seems to be a great part of Agee's fame (498). However, for Farber the issues of writing style, thematic approach and genre were much more relevant. For example, Farber claims that Agee's prose style was flamboyant and contained "excessive richness." He seems to be overly critical of Agee's "middle-brow" taste as it comes across in his language. Even so, Farber is well known for his own elaborate prose style, caught between academic structure and metaphor-heavy figurative language. Cinephilic writing tends to be more florid than other types of writing about film. Farber also dislikes Agee's preference for big Hollywood productions at the expense of small budget films, asserting "Agee was a brick wall against pretense in small movies" (500). This is an issue of great relevance for Farber since he was a champion, not only of the underground film but also of mavericks and B-movie productions. Farber displays as much fervor for the testosterone of Hawks, Fuller, and Mann as Agee did for Verdoux.

However, there is much more to Agee than is evident in the characterizations of his apologists and detractors. A strong sympathy for social progress is evident in some of his early work, which according to Hugh Davis is the result of his engagement with Marxist and socialist circles in the 1930s. Davis' thesis is that those

in charge of preserving Agee's legacy had agendas that required the effacing of any trace of Marxist leanings in Agee's writings. Davis even claims that Agee's editors "concealed or overlooked Agee's engagement with left-wing politics and the international avant-garde" (xiii). For example, he argues that there are numerous omissions in the collected works, among these his Marxist poems and a review he wrote of Gertrude Stein's book for *New Masses*. In this review, Agee quickly makes his general position very clear, one that he will maintain for the rest of his career although with certain variations: his criticism of apolitical forms of experimentation. He was always suspicious of formal excess, something that Bordwell characterizes as a keenness to "keep watch over self-conscious artiness." Later in the article, Agee praises what he considers the true experimental art, mentioning among many examples the films of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Dovzhenko as well as the Austrian Pabst; all of them display characteristics that are usually valued by left-wing critics (Davis 65). However, close examination of Agee's collected reviews reveals that he dedicated very little space to the directors he praises here as masters. While there are references elsewhere to the greatness of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, Dovzhenko and Pabst are almost completely absent from his writing. The only review he devotes to these filmmakers treats Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible Part I*; Agee ultimately endorses the movie, albeit not without commenting on Eisenstein's current status as a "willing prisoner" of the Soviet Union's political system.

Nonetheless, there are still some moments where it is possible to discern traces of Agee's earlier revolutionary persona, as is the case of his reviews of *Zero de conduite* and *Man's Hope*. In the first case Agee's striking confession sets the tone for

the review: “I happen to share a good deal of Vigo’s peculiar kind of obsession for liberty and against authority” (304). He praises Vigo’s experimentation as well as his expansion of the cinematic vocabulary that according to Agee has been frozen since 1925 (305). Another case of this is his review of Malraux’s film about the Spanish Civil War, *L’Espoir*. Agee opens by avowing that the best heroic or tragic films are almost exclusively made by leftist filmmakers. Immediately after, however, he notes: “those like me who trust only the individual in art [...] tend automatically to dismiss all political and propagandistic art” (277). How can these two assertions be reconciled? Previously, Agee praised political movies but now he is distancing himself from them. The rest of the review continues to exemplify Agee’s fluid positioning, as he constantly praises the film for its leftist values as well as for certain technical elements like the soundtrack (279). Agee’s writing echoes Ferguson’s take on Ivens’ *Spanish Earth*, but he expands the scope by dissecting some scenes in terms of their reality effect (amateur actors, sense of immediacy and despair) as well as their poetry—a poetry that is directly associated with the tragedy of the defeat of the leftist cause.

Agee does not follow in Ferguson’s and even less in Potamkin’s footsteps. He embodies a new style of film reviewer, one who is concerned with humanistic themes and above all with the aesthetic elements of cinema. While Agee’s strong attention to directors also makes him a precursor of the auteur theory (Bordwell par. 12), the fact that the social element is not as strong a preoccupation as it was for his immediate predecessors is a surprise given his background. In a way he is the first in a long line

of American film reviewers who will trade the social consciousness exhibited by earlier reviewers for a more aesthetic and cinephilic approach

The influence of Agee and of the eclectic Farber and the exuberant Tyler were not the only reasons for the paradigm shift in the U.S. The French writers who took over *Cahiers du Cinéma* and reinvigorated approaches to film also became essential to the transformation of American film reviewing in the 50s and 60s. As De Baeque argues with respect to this phenomenon, “le rôle de la cinéphilie aura finalement été légitimer ce cinéma américaine classique, vif, actif, tonique, excitant, extravagant, considéré à l’époque comme un spectacle de pur divertissement, et craint d’abord pour cela par l’ensemble du cinéma français d’après-guerre” (18). I want to highlight this transatlantic cross-pollination that impacted the impulse to write about film.

Previously, I demonstrated how German and French cinema of the 1920s, with *Caligari* as an outstanding example, fostered impassioned statements from early American film reviewers. Barely two decades later, French critics developed a new approach to film writing by focusing on American cinema. As I detailed in Chapter One, French cinephilia became heavily invested in the figure of the auteur, starting with Hitchcock and then identifying a pantheon that included but was not limited to, Howard Hawks, John Ford, Otto Preminger, Robert Aldrich, Vicente Minnelli, and Samuel Fuller (De Baeque 27). Eric Rohmer’s cinephilic devotion, Jacques Rivette’s acute and precise dissecting of films, François Truffaut’s belligerent canon-making policies, and Jean Luc Godard’s political cinephilia constituted the core of the second French cinephilic invasion. It is also important to mention that some of these writers represented a political position to the center and right of the political spectrum. French

reviewers' passionate enthusiasm for Hollywood returned, like a boomerang, to the US. The auteur theory, in particular, constituted the core of a debate that expanded beyond newspapers and magazines and reached universities, where film studies programs were starting to gain recognition. In the last part of this chapter, I will chart the influence of French cinephilia in the U.S., and examine the stylistic and social contributions of Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael.

American Cinephilia (Sarris and Kael)

After Agee, American criticism experienced an increase in popularity. Established critics like Bosley Crowther were joined by a new generation of reviewers who were open to the international film market and to the changing nature of American cinema. The face of film reviewing was rapidly changing. The most prominent figures of the movement, based on personality, popularity and belligerence were Sarris and Kael. Both reinvigorated American film criticism, making it controversial and engaging as well in personal wars that to some extent fueled the expansion of this aspect of the American public sphere. They were also the first critics to engage with French cinephilia head on.

Sarris referred to himself as a “cultist,” a term that when examined closely may be considered equivalent to “cinephile.” In the foreword to his book, *Confessions of a Cultist: On the Cinema 1955/1969*, Sarris echoes Agee's “amateur” claim by comparing himself with what in his opinion were the greatest critics: Agee, Ferguson, and Sherwood, among others. In 1962, while serving as associate editor of *Film Culture* and contributing frequently to *Village Voice*, Sarris published his infamous

essay “Notes on Auteur Theory,” in which he adapted and disseminated some of the ideas about auteurism first established by the writers of *Cahiers*. Sarris defines the auteur approach as concerned with three concentric circles: “the outer circle is technique; the middle circle is personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning” (Murray 41). While technique could be studied through the examination of camera work, acting, direction, and editing—presumably more objective processes—an exploration of personal style and interior meaning required reviewers to filter their understanding of the film through their own subjectivity. In practice, this often entailed the identification and elaboration of the cinephilic moment.

Sarris’s reviews—both positive and negative--reflected his promotion of the three-circle theory. For example, in his May 3, 1962, review of Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim*, his writing follows the template charted above: after a schematic summary of the plot, he enthusiastically praises the acting and cinematography and studies the film’s allusions and relationship to other films. The initial focus falls on Truffaut’s vibrant style as a manifestation of romanticism, which is also best conveyed through Moreau’s powerful, hallucinatory acting. Sarris’s review is intensely personalized through his treatment of love, especially when discussing the ménage à trois and the possible American reading of a French definition of love. Sarris claims that Truffaut tried to achieve this by “equalizing the intensities of masculine friendship and heterosexual love,” something that worked in France, while in the U.S. “complex and conflicting relationship are invested with Freudian overtones” (43). Another instance of Sarris’s approach is his review of Kubrick’s *Lolita*, where he relegates Nabokov to the background, focusing instead on the difficulties created by what he considers an

inappropriate casting that cannot be redeemed by Shelley Winters's "hilarious," performance and is instead doomed by James Mason miscast in a role that required a dark humor that he cannot provide (61). He dismisses the film as a cold project, not only due to casting mistakes but also because of its poor execution. Cinephilic reviewing can be very devastating; while some critics, after years of reflection, recant their positions, sometimes they are forever judged by the harshness of their tone and perspective. Nevertheless, sometimes even destructive criticism can have positive outcomes, when it creates a ground from which other critics and viewers can form their own opinions.

While Sarris's work might be considered more distinctive in terms of its personalization and stylization, the sociological or political aspect that blossomed with Ferguson and Potamkin, and that was already on the decline with Agee, is perhaps less effective. The reviews collected in *Confession of a Cultist* are almost exclusively focused on the aesthetic elements of cinema, and when Sarris indulges in polemics they tend to be more personal in tone. Comparing his approach to that of earlier reviewers, Sarris revisits some of the films that they found to be high points with very different results. For example, while Ferguson praised Ivens' *Spanish Earth*, Sarris intensely disliked it because he believed it sentimentalized the peasants (318). Sarris's ambivalent reading of *Monsieur Verdoux* is heavily anchored in a partial dismantling of Agee's enthusiastic reviews. His criticism of the Chaplin film is mixed with a faint admiration for the director's position in cinema's history. Nevertheless he is relentlessly dismissive of Chaplin's style, and above all of his politics. He argues that the movie is caught between two currents--the Hollywood dream factory, and Italian

humanist neo-realism--and that it fails on both fronts. One of Sarris's strategies is to compare the controversial nature of the plot with the reaction of the audience when it was first distributed in 1947 as well as in 1964 when it was re-released. According to Sarris in both cases the result is unacceptable; first because the plot is too incoherent or later because it might make contemporary audiences laugh. Sarris discards Chaplin's political content and subtly censors it based on the cruelty it deploys. While Sarris's review is not completely negative, in this case his praise is only used as an excuse for further excoriation of Chaplin's film (144), as well as to showcase Sarris's self-conscious competitiveness by sarcastically contextualizing the film's revival as directly related to Agee's championing of the film. Nevertheless, almost ten years after his review of *Verdoux*, while reviewing *The Godfather*, Sarris briefly mentions Chaplin's film as a successful example of criticism of an American family beset by destructively acquisitive individualism (*Politics* 31).

In 1978 Sarris collected a number of reviews in a volume titled, significantly, *Politics and Cinema*. In the introduction, Sarris vehemently declares that he is a centrist film reviewer. While acknowledging his sympathy for the leftist leanings of earlier film reviewers such as Ferguson and Agee, Sarris's criticism remains in a safely centric position. For example, in the previously mentioned review of *The Godfather*, Sarris focuses extensively on the aesthetics of the film, but occasionally he uses this approach to arrive at political commentary. An example of this can be found in what Sarris calls "plastic realism," a tendency to avoid real location shooting in favor of a reconstruction of the scene that lacks the hustle and bustle of a New York Christmas in 1945; Sarris criticizes this as a sociological distortion. To Sarris,

Coppola's timid representation of the Mafia fails to connect it to the growing tenacity and voraciousness of American capitalism (*Politics* 30). Another example occurs when Sarris calls the use of zoom in Claude Jutra's *My Uncle Antoine* a political act, one that expresses "the difference in size and emotional focus between the huge waves of individual memory and the small ripples of continental history" (*Politics* 160). While these are certainly not calls for revolution, it is this subtle combination of aesthetics and politics that lifts Sarris's film reviewing to new heights.

Sarris, however, is perhaps best known for his skirmishes with Pauline Kael. To many critics, Kael was the most powerful (and feared) film reviewer of the 60s. Murray praises her caustic wit and flair for the polemic (110) while Roberts concedes that she was a grand agent provocateur and a mistress of verbal mayhem (154). Kael's first book, *I Lost It at the Movies* became an instant best seller. Like Sarris, she had a keenly personal aesthetic sense, and she also had a tendency to engage not only movies but also with other critics. Early in her reviewing career, she established her credentials as a pugnacious cinephilic reviewer: "We are movie addicts. We are all night people, and we can pick each other out of crowds. We are a special breed of nut" (Murray 111). Her prose combines all the savvy of Sarris with the linguistic punch of Farber in an original style that was as richly textured as it was controversial. Her tenure as a writer started in a decade during which critics and studios engaged in power struggles, a decade that saw Bosley Crowther ousted from his prestigious job as head film critic of *The New York Times* because of his negative review of *Bonnie and Clyde*. Kael herself lost her reviewing job at *McCalls* for attacking *The Sound of Music* (Murray 112).

Kael's argumentative style is evident in her review of Claude Chabrol's *Les cousins*, as she first unpacks reviews of the film by other important critics like Crowther and Robert Hatch. She is particularly critical of the language they employed, words like "gloomiest" or "depressing" that were meant to keep the reader away from the films. Instead, she reverses the polarities of the reviews, highlighting the film's spirituality as well as the "oblique view" of decadence that it presents (134). Immediately after defusing the other reviews, she moves on to the aspects of the film that she finds most appealing, targeting elements as diverse and difficult to measure as the beauty of the actors or the commercial viability of the film. She opens many possible points of entry into the film, a characteristic that also distinguishes many types of cinephilic blogging. Nevertheless, Kael exhibits a preference for acting as an evaluative category. This is also evident in her review of *La Grande Illusion*, in which she discusses how the acting style of Jean Gabin and Pierre Fresnay established an important characterization that adds strength to the film while pushing the film closer to an elegy for the death of an old aristocracy, a point she stresses by emphasizing the humanity of Renoir's characters, in contrast with Eisenstein's caricatures of military officers in *Potemkin* (Lost 109).

Kael gained instant notoriety because of her ability to trigger incendiary debates. For example, in her famous essay "Raising Kane" she attacked Orson Welles's standing as an auteur by proposing that Herman Mankiewicz was the true author of *Citizen Kane*. This reflects her agenda to destroy Sarris's influential version of the auteur theory. Similar to the French proponents of auteurism, Sarris claimed that certain repetitions or patterns in the works of directors are only revealed because the

auteur is trying to express his artistry in a less than conducive environment. Kael counters him by arguing that such repetitions are obvious, and that no theory is needed to understand that some people try to hone their skills by reworking previous material (*Lost* 294). She strongly opposes theory, and in this case she calls auteurism anti-art. Kael claims that the genesis of the auteur theory was in the French ability to find in American movies elements that their own works lacked. She then claimed that Americans failed because they turned towards their own American roots rather than replicating the French move of looking elsewhere for “inspiration.”

Though she was a professional contrarian, Kael occasionally championed new sensibilities in spectatorship. The best way to chart this is by comparing her review of *Bonnie and Clyde* to those of Crowther. Crowther’s first review, a short piece, was published on August 14, 1967 and focuses on the film’s unruly combination of comedy and violence, which did not appeal to Crowther. He calls the movie a “cheap piece of bald-faced slapstick comedy,” while also dismissing the acting and condemning the omnipresence of blood. The second, longer review, published on September 3, 1967 is a reaction to the wave of criticism against his review. His attack on the film was not well received by fans and they wrote letters as well as their own reviews praising the film. Crowther strikes back by criticizing the “mannered play acting,” concluding that the film is “grossly romantic, sentimental and arbitrary setting up a collision of comedy and violence, which spews noise and sparks but not much truth.” Crowther, by contrast, is concerned with verisimilitude. He wants the movie to directly refer to the real Bonnie and Clyde; this is why he goes to great lengths to dismantle the performance of Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway. Surprisingly,

Crowther cites two news articles published by *The New York Times* and *The New York Daily News* to contradict the depiction of the anti-heroes in Arthur Penn's film, and attack the press release that marketed the movie as the true story of the famous gang. Of course, the framing or marketing of a text as truth is a convention that has lasted for hundreds of years in literature as well as other arts. But Penn's movie opens the door to a new society, heralding the rise of cynicism and the questioning of morality and other humanist values. Crowther's review—similar to those of Agee and many others before him—is much more focused on the humanist tradition. However, unlike Agee, who passionately defended the story of a killer like Monsieur Verdoux, Crowther is unable to see past the pastiche of violence and comedy. This inability to adapt and find a common ground between his own beliefs and the new sensibility cost him his job.

In reaction to Crowther's reviews as well as to other negative appraisals of *Bonnie and Clyde*, Kael unleashed a 6,000-word essay, one that Roberts calls "one of the most important pieces of film writing" (164). Kael deliberately echoes Crowther's language selection in her defense. For example, Kael highlights the fact that American movies have always "made entertainment out of the anti-heroism of American life" (*The Age of Movies* 155). Then she unpacks this anti-heroism as a reworking of romanticism and sentimentality, two key ingredients in Crowther's attack. At this point, Kael deploys her cinephilic arsenal to defend Penn's film. First, she situates *Bonnie and Clyde* in the American film landscape, highlighting its cinematic pedigree while noting that film as an art form is never isolated but part of a polyphonic conversation. Kael begins by establishing the genealogy of Penn's film: Nicholas

Ray's *They Live by Night* and Joseph Lewis' *Gun Crazy*, both hard-hitting film noirs and perennial favorites of the French New Wave. Her cinephilic matchmaking continues as she creatively free-associates. For example she mentions that both echoes of Clyde Farley found in the previous films, Farley Granger and John Dall, had played friends in Hitchcock's *Rope*. Later on she connects *Bonnie and Clyde* with films by Truffaut and Howard Hawks, Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, and even Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. Kael does not historicize these connections; she does not consider how these films related to the societies that produced them. Yet for the true cinephile, this is not merely name-dropping but the creation of a network of references that offer endless permutations and possibilities for future engagement.

Kael acknowledges the importance of the film and defends it with zeal, but she is not blinded by it and she critiques the film on many fronts. Surprisingly, while many critics raged against the hardness of the film, she claims that it should have been even harder. For this she blames Penn's attempt to copy Truffaut's re-coding of the American gangster. According to Kael, Penn should have been inspired by Truffaut to look to the original 1930s gangster films, rather than to French "tenderized" versions (*Age of the Movies* 162). She is also critical of Dunaway, but she departs from Crowther's or Farber's objections to the performance by signaling the weak character development and the inappropriate fluctuation of emotions (167).

Ironically, it seems that in political terms Kael occupies the same space as Sarris, her nemesis. While at some moments she seems to be a defender of populist taste and slightly inclined to the left, on many occasions her views swung to the right of the spectrum, falling just short of advocating censorship. She praised liberating

violence in *Bonnie and Clyde*, and called *Straw Dogs* a fascist work of art and masterpiece, but rejected the American inclination towards freely dispensed violence. Kael's best piece on politics is "Morality Plays Right and Left," in which she dissects the connections between melodrama, advertisement and hegemony. In the first part of the essay Kael attacks the Manichaeism rampant in American life by pointing out how popular melodrama vilifies clear-cut enemies in accordance with the necessity of the time (first the Nazis, then the Soviets). However, Kael considers the other side of the ideological coin in the second part of the essay, when she examines Soviet propaganda and the anti-art of social realism, reviewing the 1953 film *Salt of the Earth*. She claims the film is a vehicle, not to praise communism but to destroy American values, by creating parallelisms between capitalism and fascism. She frequently quotes from the dialogue in order to expose its trite and pedagogical tones. Here Kael's discourse resembles Sarris's criticism of *The Spanish Earth*. She also sees the proletariat as sentimentalized and claims that artistically, the movie is a total failure. By attacking both sides equally, Kael establishes a central position where any deviation to left or right of the political spectrum becomes a glorified morality play (although she still saves some praise for socially-conscious films like Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* and De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*).

On the one hand Kael and Sarris unleashed a new kind of personal reviewing, one that influenced many generations of film reviewers from Renata Adler and Vincent Canby to Roger Ebert and Manohla Dargis, among others. Likewise, with the rise of the Internet a new generation of bloggers will also follow these models, launching impassioned crusades to defend movies based solely on their aesthetic merit

(or their lack thereof). For some, however, the rise of the cinephilic approach entailed a loss of the edge that was best embodied by Potamkin and Ferguson, as more “superficial” and impression-based ways of writing about film were institutionalized. A leftist approach to political themes is seldom present in these film reviewers; their occasional indignation is easily aligned with the politics of the center and in some cases even swings towards the right side of the spectrum. This does not reduce the value of the aesthetic principles they emphasize, but unfortunately it leaves a great deal outside the discussion. Here we might ask: is it possible to generate a style of film reviewing that is both truly cinephilic in approach and also political in content? In order to answer this question, Chapter Three is dedicated to the work of Cuban film reviewers, who were able to meld the passions of cinephilia and of left-wing political commitment.

Chapter Three:

Cuban Cinephilia: Two Film Reviewers Survey the Light and Shadows of Hollywood

Although cinephilia has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention over the last decade, most studies focus on the Anglo-European (and especially North American and French) cases. Cinephilia, however, is a near-global phenomenon. In this chapter, I aim to explore how cinephilia may be differently inflected elsewhere, by exploring its expression in one intriguing but little-studied context: Cuba. In her dissertation on film reception in Cuba, Megan J. Feeney has noted that while American reviews circulated on the island, “Cuban readers preferred the unique interpretive sensibilities of their own cultural arbiters, as suggested by the fact that every major Havana periodical had a film critic on the payroll” (202). In order to scrutinize the nature of those “unique interpretive sensibilities,” I will examine the production of two celebrated Cuban film reviewers--Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Mirta Aguirre--whose writings roughly coincide with the genealogy of American film reviewers established in the previous chapter. This chapter will investigate the development of style, structure and politics in the work of these two figures, in order to identify patterns and classify their contribution to the international poetics of film reviewing. It is my belief that the relationship between left wing reviewing and cinephilia is much more marked in the case of the Cuban reviewers, and I will investigate how compatible these two modes of operation are within a single film community.

Cabrera Infante

One thing that clearly unites these two critics is their preoccupation with Hollywood. According to Feeney, U.S. imperial hegemony in Cuba was manifested in the promotion of U.S values and this included preferential treatment for Hollywood films (17). However, their approach to American cinema varies greatly. Notwithstanding their undeniable cinephilia, at different moments they recognized the invasive power of the American dream machine, and dealt with it in divergent and idiosyncratic ways, as I will explain in the remainder of this

chapter. The first critic whose work I will consider is Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a remarkable example of the confluence of different traditions in Cuban film criticism under the shadow of the American empire. In the mid-1950s, he began publishing a regular film-reviewing column for *Carteles*, a Cuban cultural magazine. Later on he became one of the chief contributors to the newspaper *Revolución*, where he coordinated the short-lived cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución* from its initial release in March 1959 to the final number in November 1961 (Luis). As a film reviewer, Cabrera Infante showed unrestrained enthusiasm for the Hollywood product. A compilation of the film reviews he wrote under the pseudonym Guillermo Caín, *Un oficio del siglo XX*, features 110 film reviews: 65 dedicated to Hollywood or British films; 17 to French and 10 to Italian cinema; and 3 each for Mexico, Spain, and Japan, with the rest scattered between Argentina, Poland, the Soviet Union and Sweden. Cabrera Infante's spectatorial geographies and aesthetic concerns place him in line with several American cinephile reviewers like Agee and Sarris.

An example of Cabrera Infante's effervescent cinephilia can be found in his tendency to draft lists, as for example his top-twelve list included in the section called "Nondescript manuscript found in a bottle ...of milk" (167). While the list was compiled after the publication of his *Carteles* reviews, the fact that it is strategically located in the center of *Un oficio del siglo XX* points to the importance of cinephilic strategies to Cabrera Infante's approach. The list includes American, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Indian, and Japanese films and is uncannily similar to the *Sight and Sound* 1960 poll (181). The cinephile's obsession with list-making provides researchers with a valuable tool to gauge the taste of specific individuals or groups during a particular time. While some of Cabrera Infante's selections are permanent fixtures in more recent polls as well (*Citizen Kane*, *Vertigo*), others exemplify the fluctuation in cinematic taste and the ephemeral nature of "universal" recognition (for example, *Ivan the Terrible* and *Monsieur Verdoux*). His fondness for the auteur theory is also demonstrated by the long reviews dedicated to figures who were

recognized and canonized by *Cahiers du Cinéma*: Chaplin, Welles, Hitchcock, and Bresson along with Tati, Powell & Pressburger, Wilder, and Kubrick, among many others.

However, the Cuban intellectual landscape started to change after the success of the revolution in 1959. The contributors to *Lunes de Revolución*, which boasted a circulation of 200,000 copies, were largely Marxist in orientation. Even so, as Amaya notes, their avant-garde aesthetics got them into clashes with the official party line represented by Alfredo Guevara, the director of the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), who believed the masses needed to be educated first before being exposed to experimental cinema (12). Moreover, while both *Lunes* and the Party's ideologues maintained a strict anti-imperialist agenda, the *Lunes* writers sometimes represented Hollywood in a positive light or engaged in criticism of Soviet cultural products. Furthermore, the official censorship of the documentary short *P.M.*, co-directed by Guillermo Cabrera Infante's brother Sabá (and which provided an unvarnished glimpse of Havana's nightlife, including public drunkenness), aggravated the already deep chasm between the approaches of ICAIC's critics and filmmakers and the writers of the newspaper *Revolución* in the immediate post-revolutionary period (Chanan 136). Upon the closing of *Lunes* all the cultural manifestations of Cuban intellectuals became centralized under the UNEAC (National Union of Cuban Artists and Writers) (Luis).

During his six-year tenure as resident critic in *Carteles* from 1954 to 1960, Cabrera Infante published his reviews as Guillermo Caín. Much more than a pseudonym, Caín became an alter ego. When these reviews were published in book form in 1963, Cabrera Infante added a series of prologues, epilogues and glosses written with the goal of further fictionalizing the figure of Caín. As Jason Borge argues, these add-ons not only help establish a biographical background for Caín, but they also "reinforce cinema's elevation to the status of literature" ("High Anxiety" 349). Here it is important to note that during this same period Cabrera Infante moved into fiction writing as well, and would come to be associated with the Latin American Boom writers. Some of the supplements he included in his film review anthology

consist of fictional notes, letters and other forms of exchange between Cabrera Infante and Caín. The glosses include lower-capped commentaries in which Cabrera Infante criticizes Caín's unpredictable reviews by focusing on inclusions and omissions; in this clever way, the Cuban revises his previous writings. The glosses range from the humorous--"Caín believed in generosity; therefore he was a pedant" (148)—to literary allusions--"a roll of the drums will never abolish Caín" (315)—to the more directly critical--"Caín said, at the end, and so suddenly, that 'suddenly' was a masterwork: I have absolved him for his last exultation: I took out the line" (310). This device also allows Cabrera Infante a second chance to expand on subjects that perhaps were unavailable to him during the time of original publication, due to the political climate.

As was mentioned earlier, Cabrera Infante's multiple styles and interests bring him closer to some American reviewers discussed in the previous chapter, because his cinephilic enthusiasm encompasses all forms of cinema and his love of language takes his reviews beyond the mere journalistic and into a more creative terrain. However, Cabrera Infante's style pushes the boundaries even further than does that of the Americans, as when he moves into the realm of ludic and self-reflexive fiction (so characteristic of the Latin American Boom writers). Moreover, Cabrera Infante's brand of enthusiasm drives him to destroy as well as praise films, sometimes by unleashing the most virulent criticism or even worse, reducing them to nothing in devastating one-liners. For example, in "Snorting at the Bulls," Cabrera Infante dismisses the movie *The Magnificent Matador* in barely forty words. For the reader, there might not be much value in a review where the only argument is that Morpheus will close the spectator's eyes (59). However, it stands as a document of a particular and historical taste even in its brevity. Luckily there are only a few reviews as dismissive as the previous example. His medium-length pieces often combine praise and criticism, while his longer pieces are mostly dedicated to the directors in his personal canon, and occasionally to a

particular movie like the *Sweet Smell of Success* or *Rio Bravo*. Some of these longer pieces offer a microcosm of his theory of reviewing. For example, in Cabrera Infante's take on Howard Hawks's classic western *Rio Bravo*, the Cuban writer approaches the film on several fronts: as a western, a Howard Hawks film, a John Wayne film, a genre-bending film and even as a self-parody. The end result is a flawless review that smoothly navigates from one theme to the next with precision. While there is some plot summary, it is not exhaustive. Instead, Cabrera Infante zooms in on fragments that then allow him to expand out to a consideration of larger issues. For example, his summary of some of the scenes that Dean Martin shares with John Wayne enables him to discuss Wayne's legacy and his zeal to outperform his co-stars. He approaches biographical commentary but only so he can focus on the acting. Cabrera Infante performs a brief close analysis of the pantomime acting in the opening scene with special attention placed on the gaps of silence and the body language as an alternative and very effective method of displaying the plot structure of a film. Later on, Cabrera Infante employs this close analysis as a bridge to his breakdown of Howard Hawks' style, which he labels as self-parody, comparing the movement of *Rio Bravo*'s opening sequence with similar scenes in other Hawks films like *Scarface*, *Red River*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *To Have or Have Not*.

Cabrera Infante's reviews also contribute to auteurism; although he never labels them as auteurs, he targets and prefers particular directors that comprise his personal canon. An example of Cabrera Infante's auteurial reviews is "Mr. Tati's Holiday," published in *Carteles* on April 29, 1956. Once again, Cabrera Infante deploys multiple points of entry into the film with the intention of creating a niche for Tati in the pantheon of comedians. Here he departs from the smooth fluidity of the Hawks review, dividing his five-page review into ten different sections that together compose a hagiography of the film's auteur. Combining the biographical and historical with the sociological, Cabrera Infante links Tati with great comedians like

Chaplin, Linder and Lloyd, as well as with some less obvious influences such as *The New Yorker* cartoonists (74). In this way, Cabrera Infante transcends the cultural boundaries of cinema and reaches out to other arts to contextualize Tati's work. Another important element appears between parenthesis four paragraphs into the review: Cabrera Infante deals with the issue of different languages and how movie distributors and exhibitors address this problem. He complains about the use of distracting subtitles for the sporadic French dialogue that accompanies the mostly silent *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. He contrasts the Cuban decision to translate the dialogue with the English-language version, which leaves the dialogue as background noise. While a French spectator will be able to discern the meanings of the French dialogue in the case of this particular Tati film, the dialogue is not essential to understanding the form or the content of the film, according to Cabrera Infante, and for that reason the subtitles detract from the film's aesthetics.

Cabrera Infante also takes it upon himself to dissect many film comedies, looking at how they work within a larger context, and legitimizing them along the way. A clear example of this is his review of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*. The review, titled "Dorado Eldorado," is one of Cabrera Infante's longest, and it encapsulates both his admiration for Chaplin and his attempt to situate *The Gold Rush* among the best movies of all time. To achieve this purpose, Cabrera Infante first highlights Chaplin's traits as an auteur: his reluctance to abandon silent film, his autobiographical tendencies, and finally, his idiosyncratic directing style, which Cabrera Infante compares to Von Stroheim's. He examines how almost all Chaplin's films feature autobiographical elements in order to dismiss the claim that this is a distinguishing characteristic of *The Gold Rush*. He studies how Chaplin chooses to focus on a particular social message but surrounds it with comic elements in order to make it more attractive for his audience; in the case of *The Gold Rush*, Chaplin unleashes a critique of the voracious competition engendered by capitalism that is encapsulated in slapstick comedy as well as in D.W. Griffith-styled melodrama (127). Another distinguishing characteristic of this review is

the enumeration of seven scenes that Cabrera Infante considers as exemplifying Chaplin's comic genius, and that also reflect the comic interests of the reviewer. Finally, in his review of the 1942 re-release of the 1925 film, Cabrera Infante draws his readers' attention to Chaplin's commentary voice over, which he describes as an opportunity to know what "Chaplin the author thinks about Charles Chaplin the character" (129). This analysis is significant in itself, but also because it mirrors what Cabrera Infante does with his own lower-capped glosses of Caín's reviews, which enable the Cuban writer to revise his thoughts and display his literary pyrotechnics.

Cabrera Infante's reviews also stand out because he strongly favors genres that are usually less valued by the average "serious" reviewer: comedy and musicals. When reviewing these genres, he once again shows favoritism for certain directors, such as Billy Wilder. In his review of *Some Like It Hot*, Cabrera Infante argues that the movie uses humor to dismantle masculine sexuality in the United States. Cabrera Infante is so taken by the dialogue that he reproduces a full page of it in order to make a point about the strength of language in this film. He also explores the gender-bending techniques that Wilder deploys. For example, Cabrera Infante acknowledges that the core of the film owes a lot to Mack Sennett's films with car chases, peripatetic policemen and similar running gags (266), but Cabrera Infante believes that Wilder deliberately unfolds a second layer, that of the screwball's double entendre where language is exploited to its fullest potential. For example, Cabrera Infante reproduces an extended dialogue in which the two male protagonists discuss the difficulties for one of them to marry a millionaire man. While one of the characters is obviously concerned about same-sex marriage, the other plays around the issue by focusing on different challenges like garnering the approval of the millionaire's mother (265). Cabrera Infante also argues that the movie deliberately parodies other Wilder titles, with a satire on the romantic comedy (*Love in the Afternoon*), or even on classic gangster films like *Scarface*, borrowing codes from the serious genre (the revenge and chase settings) and using them to trigger the comedy (266).

With his statements compacted into an eight-paragraph review, Cabrera Infante unpacks the characteristics of a genre- and gender-bending comedy, canonizing it as a valuable piece of American cinema. This approach, according to which comedy is praised not only for its entertainment value but also for its deployment of genre distortion, which expands the intertextual playing field, legitimizes and promotes film comedy as a valid and potentially quite rich art form.

Another example of Cabrera Infante's interest in musicals and comedies is his review of *Funny Face*, a 1957 musical featuring Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn. In this piece, Cabrera Infante presents positive and negative points--some of which are even contradictory--in order to create a new perspective about the film. For example, Cabrera Infante argues that the movie is a success, but not because it is a musical but rather due to its relationship to the world of photography, as a result of the close collaboration between the director, Stanley Dornn and Richard Avedon, a famous fashion photographer. However, Cabrera Infante also blames this proximity for the film's lack of cinematic innovations. Moreover, Cabrera Infante believes that the movie ultimately fails because of Donen's problematic rendering of his masters, Gene Kelly and Vicente Minnelli. Cabrera Infante argues that Donen fails to find his own voice, and is caught in a cycle of little homages to films like *Our Town* or *An American in Paris*. Cabrera Infante considers the movie a caricature, one that is occasionally effective but that eventually collapses under the weight of the history of cinema--the total opposite of Wilder's film, which succeeded by creating a firm structure with shards of Hollywood's history.

When analyzing the visual aspects of cinema and their relation to the written word, in most cases Cabrera Infante adopts a position similar to that of a screenwriter. One excellent example of this is his review of *Tea and Sympathy*. In this piece, Cabrera Infante comments on the vicissitudes of screenwriting, especially when adapting a play with a controversial subject. In the case of *Tea and Sympathy*, that subject is homosexuality. Rather than focusing

exclusively on the visuality of the adaptation, Cabrera Infante is more interested in the negotiation that takes place to reduce the controversial themes into images that the censors will tolerate. He analyzes the particular changes effected in the script, comparing them to the parallel scenes in the original play, and exploring how certain images were “softened” to garner the censors’ approval. For example, a scene that featured a strong suggestion of a sexual encounter between a younger and an older man is transformed into a passive scene of a boy sewing with the man’s wife. Notwithstanding Cabrera Infante’s rejection of this representation of homosexuality, he is not without prejudice in the way he characterizes homosexuality as “a problem as old as man but new to literature” (113). Nonetheless, he praises the overall film as an example of Vincent Minnelli’s excellent direction. Be that as it may, the real significance of this review is revealed when Cabrera Infante turns his attention from the changes in the script to a discussion of two cinephilic moments, which he calls “poetic instants.” While both scenes are relevant to the plot, Cabrera Infante argues that what matters is how they are wordlessly constructed by exploring the intensity of the interconnectivity of visual metaphors (rain, windows, etc.). Cabrera Infante ends his review by emphasizing that these poetic instants are not in the play; rather, they are the creation of Minnelli and his team (115). This is not the first time that Cabrera Infante’s cinephilia manifests itself in the discussion of purely visual cinephilic moments, but this is the only place where he actually acknowledges the existence of these independent poetic instants, although he never theorizes about them. These reviews are good examples of Cabrera Infante’s cinephilic film reviewing, a practice that features a passionate reconnaissance of the musical and comedic landscape, and that is heavily anchored in the histories of genres and the auteurist classification system.

Contrary to what might be expected from someone writing before, during and right after the Cuban revolution, Cabrera Infante rarely dwells on political criticism or issues of ethnic representation. One such instance, however, can be found in his review of *Something of*

Value (1957), a film that Cabrera Infante indicts as an example of hypocritical racial politics. Even though he praises the photography, music and acting, in an uncharacteristic move, Cabrera Infante launches into a critique of imperialism in order to claim that the film is flawed: according to the Cuban writer, the work refers to the history of colonialism in Africa only in order to entertain and shock the audience. It is perhaps Cabrera Infante's strongest attempt at presenting a political worldview, but as such it fails because it displays a conciliatory attitude similar to that of the film itself, trying to accommodate both the cinephilic and the political.

When confronted with problems regarding the historical film, Cabrera Infante's approach lacks social consciousness. For example, in his review of the movie *La rosa blanca* (The White Rose), he unpacks the problems of producing a historical film about a figure such as Cuba's national hero José Martí. He argues that it would be plausible to do so with a figure like El Cid, the medieval warrior protagonist of Spain's epic poem, but with someone like Martí he believes all efforts are due to fail, since many of the most important acts in Martí's career were intellectual and political, and lacked the action that is necessary in more romanticized historical films. Cabrera Infante recognizes the excitement in reconstructing the past through cinema, and asserts that a highly emotional register is needed for such an enterprise to be successful, something that *La rosa blanca* lacks. On the other hand, Cabrera Infante commends the Hollywood production of *Viva Zapata*, even when the Pancho Villa constructed is not an accurate historical figure, because the emotion it generates impacts the audience with the force of a real historical event. Cabrera Infante goes even further when he recommends "a little less formal and historical rigor and a little more emotion" (34). It is somewhat surprising that Cabrera Infante recommends this type of mythmaking and political blindsiding; Hollywood has excelled at taking such historical licenses, from darkening the history of other countries to whitewashing North American heroes. Later on, I will

demonstrate how other Cuban critics, by contrast, criticized this particular tendency of Hollywood cinema.

While it is possible to find an occasional mention in Cabrera Infante's reviews of troubling racial representations, this is never a priority for him. For example, in his discussion of *Carmen Jones*, Cabrera Infante begins by praising the movie's acting and energy. However, Cabrera Infante's review also contains two dissonant moments that perhaps reflect the Cuban writer's divided opinion regarding Hollywood and race. For example, he calls the movie "the most exciting experiment with black performers made in Hollywood since the days of King Vidor's *Hallelujah*" (46). Cabrera Infante's choice of the word "experiment" is unclear. Does he seek to reflect ironically on the relative lack of African-American protagonists throughout the history of Hollywood cinema? Or does he wish simply to underline the film's broadly innovative character? Moreover, by connecting *Carmen Jones* with *Hallelujah*, a 1929 film, Cabrera Infante bypasses other films, such as *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*, that belong to the genealogy of African-American cinema and that other Cuban critics such as Mirta Aguirre—treated below--will cite in their attacks on Hollywood bias. Is it possible to read this deliberate exclusion as indicating Cabrera Infante's disapproval of the racial politics of those two films, or does he omit them for purely aesthetic reasons, deeming them as less worthy examples of the Hollywood black musical? A possible clue can be found at the end of the review, when Cabrera Infante shifts his tone and refers to the anguish of segregation as a more tragic subject than Carmen's fictional one (47). To further contextualize his views, in the anthology this review is immediately followed by his take on *Gone with the Wind*. Between these two reviews, Cabrera Infante, in his role as Caín's editor, writes: "The theme of racism escaped Cain: *Gone with the Wind* is also a monument to the segregation of the races" (47). This shows Cabrera Infante's *a posteriori* reflection on the disturbing lack of attention to racial representations in his reviews. However, a small editorial note certainly does not

counter the effect of these frequent omissions, even though it reveals a certain degree of consciousness about the racial tensions at play in some Hollywood films.

Labeling Cabrera Infante as a political film reviewer would be a gross misrepresentation; however, in contrast with the core of his contemporary mainstream American reviewers he exhibits slightly more political range. The reviews of two films particularly stand out: Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd*, and *McCarthyism in New England*. In the first one, Cabrera Infante investigates and dismantles the American hegemonic discourse in the Kazan film as well as in *The Sweet Smell of Success*. For example, his strongest criticism states: "It is curious that the American popular heroes have turned out to be, each in their own way, reactionary soldiers" (190). Cabrera Infante deplores the North American propensity for conveniently creating and marketing "heroes" in order to suit their ideological needs; it is a strong indictment of U.S. society and somewhat surprising given Cabrera Infante's advocacy of historical mythmaking. He continues by weaving in references to McCarthy's witch-hunt in his dismantling of the plot to magnify the impact of his criticism upon his readership. His discussion of *A Face in the Crowd* includes a vicious attack on television but also and most importantly on advertising when he states that T.V. "sells trash to an eager audience by convincing them that the worst is the best by dint of repetition" (191). Cabrera Infante's use of Kazan's movie to unleash a withering critique of the American ideological system is effective in reaching a wider audience since he does not discount the movie's value as entertainment; he agrees with the topics it presents and effectively repurposes them to launch his condemnation from a more cinephilic point of view.

An analysis of Cabrera Infante's work as a film reviewer reveals that the strong cinephilic strain is not exclusive to the United States or France, and that it can flourish in more politicized environments like 1950's Cuba. Indeed, the Cuban context also demonstrates that cinephilia and ideological criticism can coexist. While for his part Cabrera Infante was mostly unconcerned with political issues, occasionally the blunt messages circulated through

Hollywood films prompted him to adopt a more ideological stance. Other Cuban reviewers, however, were much more committed to exploring and dismantling the Hollywood propaganda machine, while being no less cinephilic in their approach. One of these reviewers was Mirta Aguirre.

Aguirre

Aguirre was an important feminist thinker, communist and poet who strongly established her presence in Cuban as well as Latin American arts and politics from the 1930s until her death in 1980. In 1936, after a three-year exile in Mexico for her participation in communist and anti-imperialist demonstrations, Aguirre returned to Cuba where once again she engaged in political activity. From 1944 to 1953, she wrote cultural articles for *Hoy*, formerly known as *Noticias de Hoy*, a newspaper founded in 1938 with the blessing of Cuba's president, Fulgencio Batista, who at the time was trying to gain the support of the Communist party (Lister). After the 1959 revolution that toppled Batista and brought Fidel Castro to power, Aguirre quickly stood out again in cultural circles; she was part of the heated cultural exchange between the ICAIC, filmmakers and the writers from *Revolución* (Zayas), and thus might be considered Cabrera Infante's nemesis during that time period. Consistently throughout her career as a film reviewer, Aguirre occasionally praised Hollywood's films and filmmaking, but more often she advocated for a cinema of gender, race, and class equality, focusing on themes that other contemporary film reviewers tended not to foreground. Even so, her work can be easily linked to that of Potamkin in terms of commitment and subject matter.

Aguirre's reviews from 1944 to 1948 have been anthologized in *Crónicas de cine*, which provides an excellent introduction to her approach to film. Out of the 160 reviews included in this volume, 119 are focused on English-language films. Most of these deal with Hollywood products, although there are some British films included. The rest are Mexican (16), Argentinian (6), Soviet (5) and French (5), with at least one review each dedicated to

films from Poland, Italy, Sweden, and Cuba. As is also true of Cabrera Infante's reviews, this imbalance is not simply a reflection of Aguirre's taste but also more importantly exemplifies film distribution schemes within Cuba, where Hollywood was dominant but works produced by the American continent's largest Spanish-language industries (Mexico and Argentina) were also popular. Aguirre's reviews range between five and ten paragraphs and are not dominated by plot summaries. Instead, she varies the structure by including commentaries on the music, acting, characterization and cinematography of the works in question, occasionally performing close analyses of particular scenes. She does not digress from her framework of discussion, and she also avoids any personal commentary other than her political statements. She certainly does not display a persona different from her activist self, and unlike Cabrera Infante she does not deploy a pseudonym, much less an alter ego like the latter's Caín.

When it comes to Hollywood movies, Aguirre's enthusiasm is as relentless as are her political commentaries. One example of a movie review that illustrates Aguirre's cinephilia is her treatment of Arthur Ripley's *Voice in the Wind*, one of the very few films that earns Aguirre's label of "extraordinary." First, Aguirre analyzes the film's cinematography and mise en scène, especially commending the sobriety of the scenery and the effectiveness of the audio motifs, a combination that she describes as achieving a poetic effect. Even characteristics that sometimes prompt her to dismiss a film are lauded here, such as the camera's obstinate immobility or the slow dialogues, which she argues contribute to the resonant atmosphere (50). She continues by praising the acting, music, and theme, and regrets that she does not have more space to discuss the latter as deeply as the movie deserves. Of course, the movie also presents a strong political message about the collective character of heroism in the face of a threat like Nazism, but nevertheless Aguirre pays equal attention to formalist devices. Another individual film that deserved her praise was *Jane Eyre* (titled *Alma rebelde* for its Cuban release). Aguirre declares that the great deal of plot compacting is effective because, unlike other versions of the Bronte novel, more attention may then be dedicated to the

childhood of *Jane Eyre*. Although far from pronouncing the film a masterpiece, Aguirre thinks it is an achievement in its use of several techniques to enhance the spectator's experience. For example, sound is used not as a realist device but as a bridge between the ongoing action and future events. She also describes the effective use of shadows to add tension to the meeting of the characters (70). Focusing once again on a combination of cinematographic techniques, outstanding acting and *mise en scène*, Aguirre is able to recommend the film without revealing much about the plot

Aguirre's cinephilic tendencies are evident in her preference for a robust and independent aesthetic style. She takes a strong position against adaptations that lack visual flair and that depend heavily on the written word to get their ideas across. For example, in her review of *Lazos humanos (A Tree Grows in Brooklyn)* Aguirre laments that the film is not more visually and aurally layered, and censures its lack of cinematographic rhythm. In her opinion the vitality of the literary text has been lost, replaced with an unbearable melodramatic slowness (104). In her discussion of Lawrence Olivier's *Henry V*, Aguirre praises certain production values, noting, surprisingly, that they favorably compare to Disney's visual plasticity and Russian-inspired montage, but she nevertheless claims that the final result is little more than photographed theater; it is thus an "anti-cinematographic" film (170). Another example of Aguirre's position regarding visuality may be found in her review of Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend*; here she chastises the production team for not exploiting the cinematographic possibilities of the film to their fullest potential. Aguirre then focuses her attention on one particular scene in which the main character hallucinates. In her opinion, the film could have featured a more cinematic representation of those visions, through a "subjective, impressionistic and poetic use of the camera" (136). Aguirre is not opposed to the adaptation of literary texts, but she argues that to make the transition from word to image, the

production team needs to embrace the visual essence of cinema and avoid relying exclusively on the power of the written word.

Overall, Aguirre favors the well-acted drama and melodrama, especially if it features a strong female performance, as is the case in many films starring Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. Among her reviews, Aguirre analyzes four films each with Crawford and Davis in a span of three years. Her Crawford reviews (*Mildred Pierce*, *Above Suspicion*, *Humoresque*, and *Daisy Kenyon*) center on the actor's command of her art, but also emphasize that her talents are not always on full display. For example, Aguirre claims that *Mildred Pierce* is an ineffective blend of genres, torn between a melodrama and a detective film. Aguirre asserts that the latter is much better developed than the former, and that this affects the development of the acting in the film. Regarding Crawford, Aguirre highlights her impeccable attire and the way she moves on screen, but claims that her acting betrays an apparent lack of interest (128). Aguirre implies that banal plots are not a challenge for Crawford, and thus result in a somnambulant performance. Aguirre has a similar opinion of *Daisy Kenyon*, although in this Preminger film Aguirre attributes the lackadaisical performance to the emptiness of Crawford's character when compared to those of the male leads. *Humoresque*, on the other hand, receives high praise on three counts. First, Aguirre admires the musical environment of the film, praising the overall technical composition and the way in which the director seamlessly weaves into the plot the classical music selections from Rimsky-Korsakov, Lalo and Wagner, among others. Secondly, while admitting that the plot lacks novelty, Aguirre focus her attention on the accurate portrayal of the artist protagonist as an egocentric creature. This leads to the third and final point Aguirre makes about the film: Crawford's impressive acting. Aguirre analyzes, for example, a number of close-ups in which the camera frames Crawford's intense and nearsighted eyes (a trait that strengthens the film's psychological landscape), as well as an impressive monologue that according to Aguirre manages to redeem

the movie. Crawford, according to Aguirre, melds her lush delivery of the dialogue with revealing gestures and body language to present a complete portrait of acting as an art form. All in all, Aguirre exalts Crawford and praises the strength that her characters exude even in less favorable circumstances.

With respect to Bette Davis, Aguirre's comments are even more cinephilic, and they come close to Cabrera Infante's enthusiastic iconophilia. All of the Davis films discussed by Aguirre—in contrast to Crawford's noir-melodrama hybrids--can be considered textbook examples of pure melodrama, thus allowing Aguirre to focus on the development of a single genre. Her first review of a Davis feature centers on *Old Acquaintance* (1944), a film that Aguirre praises for its acute psychological portraits—accomplished through excellent acting and dialogues—and for its anti-war propaganda. *Mr. Skeffington* (1944) is another example of a performance that redeems a theme that would not be as interesting if it were not expanded to include a veiled criticism of western vanity, according to Aguirre. The critic lauds the film's apt cinematography, which successfully captures particular moments of the isolation of the characters (60). For example, Aguirre argues that the most accomplished moment in the movie is the ending, when in a low angle shot the desolation of the Davis character is framed by her luxurious home. It is this type of discussion that illustrates the cinephilic attention to detail characteristic of Aguirre's reviews. The excellent acting, poignant music and precise use of cinematography to convey emotion that Aguirre admires in the Davis melodramas continue in *Deception* (1946), but in Aguirre's opinion the plot is weak and is only redeemed by the strength of the ensemble led by Davis, together with her co-stars Claude Rains and Paul Henreid. Aguirre claims that while not a typical mediocre vehicle, it lacks the maturity of the previous Davis features. The only Davis film that disappoints Aguirre is *Winter Meeting* (1948), and there are several reasons for this. First, Aguirre claims that *Winter Meeting* lacks cinematographic distinction, overtly depending on a narrator to move the plot along. Secondly, a shallow psychological portrait sabotages the development of the main character (282). But

Aguirre's enthusiasm for this work is perhaps most tempered by her increasing belligerence against Hollywood products, which is most notable in her reviews dating from the end of the 1940s and later (this piece is from October, 1948). Even so, Aguirre's impassioned cinephilia almost always prompted her to find something to like in Hollywood films.

Aguirre's cinephilic traits are undeniable, but the main focus of her reviews is on social commentary; she produces sharp critiques that constantly seek to dismantle Hollywood's hegemonic discourses. She frequently treats issues of racism, discrimination, and imperialism in the cinema of the U.S as well as others. For example, regarding the deployment of racism in Hollywood films, she often exposes the deliberate misrepresentation of ethnic minorities and failed or misguided attempts at portraying African American characters and situations. Most of her reviews, when they deal with a Hollywood effort at a historical representation of the "Other," feature Aguirre's studied efforts to unpack errors in characterization. Examples of this can be found in her discussions of historical epics made in Hollywood like Mitchell Leisen's *Masquerade in Mexico* (1945) or Henry King's *Captain from Castille* (1948), and also in Latin American productions like Emilio Fernández's *Las abandonadas* (The Abandoned Women; 1945) and Julio Bracho's *El monje blanco* (The White Monk; 1945). In the case of Leisen's film, Aguirre targets the reduction of Latin Americans to a few types like the gigolo, the horse thief or the fool, comparing these characterizations with the representation of African Americans in U.S. films (145). For example, Aguirre criticizes the role played by Arturo de Córdova, whom she considers an excellent actor, but who in *Masquerade in Mexico* is reduced to a simple one-dimensional portrait of a toreador (146). *The Captain of Castile*, while showcasing stronger performances by actors with Latin American or Spanish roots like César Romero and Antonio Moreno, miscasts Tyrone Power as the protagonist Pedro de Vargas, and represents the Aztecs as a savage tribe straight out of an American Western film. Aguirre admits that the intention of the film was not to be historically accurate; nevertheless, she criticizes the reduction of the trauma

of the conquest to an adventure story. Both reviews are fair in their description of these U.S. films as highly effective entertainment pieces, notwithstanding the shortsightedness of the plot. While in Hollywood films the misrepresentation of other countries and their citizens facilitates the dissemination of racist politics, the Mexican productions serve a different purpose, according to Aguirre. For example, in *Las abandonadas* the Cuban reviewer chastises the production team for limiting the Mexican revolution to a unilateral portrayal of a couple of episodes starring false generals and scoundrels, although Aguirre also suggests that dullness is the movie's greatest crime (116).

Regarding the representation of minorities, Aguirre considers that Hollywood films in the 1940's are problematic, even when they strive to improve upon previously established models of discrimination. For example, Aguirre reviewed two musicals, *Cabin in the Sky* (1944) and *Stormy Weather* (1944), both considered by critics to be good examples of Hollywood's openness towards African American issues and culture. However, Aguirre finds *Cabin's* overall approach condescending, given that its comedy is based on a "satiric spirit" that depends on stereotypes and superstitions and can only be truly enjoyed by those who believe in the superiority of the white race (15). The strategy employed by Aguirre to expose these racial undertones is to explore not only the source of these comedic moments but also to unpack the film's folkloric core. To prove her point she quotes extensively from Dalton Trumbo, mentioning recent examples of negative portrayals of blacks in the cinema of the United States. She also employs the review to extend the criticism to Cuba, a country she does not consider exempt from similar racial policies and attitudes. Indeed, Aguirre remarks on the effectiveness of the racist comedy of *Cabin in the Sky* in Cuba, as revealed by the reactions of the audience in Radio Cine, a popular cinema in Havana (16). Aguirre effectively combines film reviewing with spectatorship studies, a strategy she continues in her review of *Stormy Weather*. In this case, she recognizes that the film is an improvement over *Cabin in the Sky*, but nevertheless points out that some stereotypes, albeit toned down, remain the source of

comedy or antagonism in the plot. She uncovers one more aspect of what she considers a secret racist agenda: the cast is all black and not a single white performer can be seen. Aguirre accuses Hollywood of going the opposite way with racial profiling. Instead of showcasing lazy and vicious African Americans, as was the norm, the film foregrounds characters that are talented, but only in singing and dancing (37). Even so, Aguirre claims that *Stormy Weather* represents an improvement, essentially because it acts as a bridge, helping the (presumably white) audience members become familiar with the cast of outstanding black performers.

Aguirre also combines her critique of racial stereotypes with an attack on Hollywood's constant export of capitalist ideology and imperialist hegemony. Feeney claims that "Aguirre's reviews reflect a trend in much mid-century Cuban film criticism: the critic's self-consciousness about her role as Gramscian intellectual, engaged in a 'war of position'—snatching and reshaping the messages of a foreign medium" (222). In some cases, Aguirre's critique of capitalism is focused on the films' deployment of subtle messages. For example, Aguirre believes that one of the best ways to preach the gospel of capital is with movies for children (189). In her review of *The Yearling* (1946) she finds the perfect example of this. Aguirre claims that these works are particularly dangerous because they appear to be simple and moving but they promote a reactionary program based on quiet resignation, on passively accepting the bitterness of life; everything is conveniently flavored with the most saccharine melodrama (190). Aguirre's political reading of the film undermines its communication of a prevalent social order, questioning its validity. While her analysis does not stop her from appreciating the performances given by Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman, in general she dismisses the film as an example of "the insufferable inanity of Yankee cinema" (190).

She deploys the same strategy in most of her reviews of films by Disney, a company that mobilizes an extensive and highly effective promotional machinery, often to sell a cinema of ethnic/racial discrimination and capitalist ideas. Two examples that illustrate Aguirre's attitude to Disney films are her reviews of *The Three Caballeros* (1944) and *Song of the South*

(1946). In her discussion of *The Three Caballeros*, Aguirre offers a candid review of Disney's imaginative power and humor. She then redirects her critique to focus on Disney's "rumpled tourist brochure" approach to Latin American issues. Aguirre is particularly resentful of Disney's pigeonholing approach to the representative music of Mexico and Brazil (77). However, she still recommends the film as an enjoyable one. This is not the case with her review of *Song of the South*, published two years later. This review is similar in approach to her treatment of *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*. She refers to *Song of the South* as a film "made by whites for whites" (220). She notes that it takes much more effort to uncover the hidden racist tropes in a supposedly well-intended film, and Aguirre zooms in on the characteristics that make *Song of the South* an example of such a work. For example, all the black characters are represented as sympathetic. According to Aguirre, this demonstrates the slave owners' dream of the ideal African-American: humble docile, and always smiling (220). Once again the harsh criticism does not prevent Aguirre from praising several aspects of the film, such as the use of Technicolor and innovative sound techniques. But in the case of *Song of the South* (in marked difference from *The Three Caballeros*), she expands her attack beyond the movie discussed and into Disney's decline and fall into reactionary filmmaking. Her last paragraph is one of the most incendiary of all of her reviews. Here she dismantles Disney's subtle imperialist racism that is manifest in minute details like naming a dog Bolívar. Aguirre's sympathy for Disney's early features had diminished by 1948. She stresses that the original intent of Disney's cartoons was deeply rooted in folkloric and humoristic taste, thus rendering them incompatible with bourgeois mentality. Aguirre claims that movies like *Song of the South* are a clear sign of a departure from these popular sympathies and herald the adoption of a reactionary filmmaking style (221).

Aguirre's Disney reviews showcase her growing disenchantment with Hollywood products. In 1944 she still sounds upbeat about *The Three Caballeros* but later on her approach becomes bitter and her tolerance for Hollywood mediocrity is greatly diminished.

Nowhere is this more evident than in her discussion of the Cuban reception of Arthur Ripley's *The Chase*, and in the three reviews she dedicates to the film *Iron Curtain* and the events surrounding its exhibition. The two films in question are the object of Aguirre's most virulent attacks, which culminate in a change in the style and intensity of her reviews. United Artists distributed *The Chase* in Cuba under the title *Venganza* (Revenge). Aguirre's scalding review is motivated by the film's depiction of Cuba as a "brothel-like harbor with gaslights, horse carriages and people dressed in rags" (165). Aguirre breaks with the usual structure of her reviews, completely sidestepping the plot or any other possible redeeming quality of the film, and addressing instead the reaction caused by the film and its eventual censorship. It is important to mention that Aguirre's endorsement of the censorship of the film is not based on notions of morality; instead, it is grounded in her belief that the film promotes hatred against races and nations. While Aguirre's strong reaction to *The Chase* is understandable, it pales in comparison to her reviews of *Iron Curtain*. The first installment, published on May 23, 1948, is more than a description of the reaction to the movie's New York release, which according to Aguirre met with picket lines (237). This piece is related to her review of *The Chase* because according to Aguirre, *Iron Curtain* also violated the UN resolution that condemns the use of a belligerent tone when addressing other nations. Her essay ends with a call to arms, with Aguirre inviting viewers to boycott the film. Aguirre returns to the topic on October 1, 1948, right before the film's premiere in Cuba. She repeats some of the points included in her first review, such as her reference to a lawsuit filed against the film by a quartet of Russian composers including Shostakovich (238, 280), and the fact that *Iron Curtain* was only one in a series of movies destined to influence public opinion against the Soviet Union (237, 281). However, in this second piece Aguirre also invokes other critics like the *New York Times'* Bosley Crowther, and Arturo Perrucho from the Mexican film magazine *Cartel*. Their opinions--particularly those of Crowther, whom she calls anything but a leftist--are marshalled to demonstrate to the reader that the film deserves condemnation on ethical as well as political

grounds. However, one of the most significant problems regarding these first two reviews of *Iron Curtain* is that Aguirre acts and reacts against a movie she has not yet seen. This issue is resolved with her third and final review of the film published on October 8, 1948. After carefully mentioning that the film was released in five different establishments in Havana, she continues her brutal attack on the film. She addresses the plot very briefly but remains focused on blasting the movie as a propaganda vehicle devised by the United States Department of State to promote aggression against the Soviet Union. According to Aguirre, this is achieved by reducing important Soviet historical figures to trivial characters as well as by disseminating erroneous information.

Aguirre's three reviews published against *Iron Curtain* signal the culmination of a series of heated arguments against the Hollywood propaganda film, but they by no means signify the end of her appreciation for U.S. films. Barely seven days after the final review of *Iron Curtain*, Aguirre praises the film *I Remember Mama*. Her enthusiasm, however, does not stop Aguirre from pinpointing the elements that are detrimental to the pure enjoyment of the film. For example, she hails the acting, cinematography, and sound design, stopping to examine the use of sounds and silences to recreate a rural landscape that is both realist and aesthetically pleasing. Nonetheless, she finds the film's development too slow and resents a point of view that deliberately deprives the spectator of insight into the opinions of the mother. While shaken by the United States' acts of cinematic aggression, Aguirre's cinephilia remains strong and she continues to appreciate many qualities of Hollywood film.

In the previous pages, I have analyzed the types of reviews produced by Cabrera Infante and Aguirre. While Cabrera Infante was interested in musicals and comedies, Aguirre had a predilection for political dramas and melodramas with a strong female performance. Despite these differences, and notwithstanding the chronological disjuncture between their reviewing careers, they occasionally wrote about the same films. I will now examine one example in order to further compare their cinephilic and political approach.

One of the films reviewed by both Cabrera Infante and Aguirre is Jules Dassin's 1948 *Naked City*. Aguirre enjoys the direction and cinematography but above all recognizes the validity of the film as an example of "capitalism in its highest stage" (241). She justifies her claim by listing all the elements that make the movie a social document, such as its depiction of a perfect police organization and houses where no one is born and no one dies, a catalogue that reflects the symptoms of the capitalist system at its most advanced point (241). Aguirre does not focus on the plot or even on the acting; instead she uses the documentary space created by a film shot on location to explore the construction of capitalist needs, something that is achieved by eliminating "the falsehood of painted cardboard" (241). Aguirre also points out the connection of this film to the investigation conducted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, based on the participation of Albert Maltz, a blacklisted screenwriter (241). This review is emblematic of Aguirre's style, an effective combination of cinephilic eye for detail and political commitment to both the elements of the plot as well as the historical and social conditions surrounding the film's production.

Cabrera Infante, by contrast, is more interested in pointing out discrepancies in the plot, which he dismisses as a crude mixture of melodrama and a detective film, typical of the B movie but not significant enough to leave a mark on the genre. In terms of cinematography, Cabrera Infante criticizes the location shooting as amateurish; for example, he believes that the exterior shots, the basis of the film's "realism," are merely backdrops and as such not very original ones (194). There is not even a reference to the representation of social strata that captivated Aguirre's critical eye. Although he admits that *Naked City* left a positive impression on him the first time he saw it, Cabrera Infante finds the use of location as an unnecessary and unprofessional distraction. Finally, Cabrera Infante's take on *Naked City* showcases his usual blind eye to political matters. Although he acknowledges the connection between the director, producer and screenwriter of the film and the Committee of Un-American activities, he makes no effort to explore the social issues surrounding the film.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that film reviewing in Cuba presents a rich tradition of writing in Spanish that matches the English counterpart with respect to the variety of issues treated and the social consciousness that occasionally emerges. I have also shown that cinephilia does not necessarily exclude the development of reviewing as a political force. Aguirre's social commentary echoes the best political moments of *Potamkin*; Cabrera Infante's creativity, wit and cinephilic credentials are similar to those of Sarris and Agee. The parallel histories showcased in my second and third chapter, then, present an alternative way of approaching film in the age of print. However, the dawn of the age of the Internet marks the twilight of that of traditional periodicals, bringing to the foreground new technologies for disseminating new voices and new paradigms. The next chapter deals with the adaptation of the cinephilic *modus operandi* to the changes brought by the World Wide Web.

Chapter Four

The Rise of Technological Cinephilia

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the reformulation of cinephilia in the late twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first due to the development of new technologies for consuming and commenting about film. This chapter examines two different projections of this technological expansion. The first part charts the home theater experience, identifying the different manifestations of cinephilia, and finally postulating the figure of the collector as the embodiment of the cinephilic drive. The second part discusses the profound impact of the internet on the proliferation and dissemination of cinephilia, presenting the blogger as the internet counterpart of the collector.

The home movie phenomenon dates back to the expansion of 16mm and 8mm systems, but it was only after the introduction of VHS (Video Home System) in 1975, and to a lesser extent laser discs in 1978, that the home became a space of massive film consumption (Klinger 58). The economic power generated by home theater cannot be underestimated given a profit that even at an early stage surpassed the input of regular theatrical exhibition (Tryon 20).

Home Video Exhibition

Starting in 1896, the first years of film exhibition were unstable as creators and producers sought to establish a regular commercial outlet for their invention. One-reel films were exhibited as part of larger programs that also included variety shows, live performances and music. However, with the raise of nickelodeons, film exhibition was quickly consolidated and by the mid twentieth century, cinema was mostly confined to

theater halls (Musser 417). Since then movie halls, from small independent cinemas to the multiplex, have had almost complete control of the cinematic habits of spectators, giving rise to the cult of cinephilia as well as to the massive lines of the blockbuster. The first outbreaks of cinephilia occurred in intense but geographically limited cultural environments, usually associated with metropolitan spaces like Paris and New York, where venues like film centers, archives and museums as well as small indie cinemas proliferated. However, the advent of VHS radically changed this arrangement by altering the economics as well as the ontology of cinema. The introduction of home theater led to a significant shift in cinematic reception options, which have consistently mutated from the early VHS format to more portable devices and dissemination practices like DVDs and recently, streaming. By consuming cinema in these new, more accessible formats that are less dependent on archives and exhibition schedules, spectators have acquired the power to organize their viewing preferences. This by no means challenges the omnipresence of film industries and their distribution networks; on the contrary, it empowers them, creating a new market that allows for the circulation of old materials as well as new venues for works that otherwise would not receive a wide release like direct-to-video films (Robson). Home theater allows cinema to reach previously disconnected audiences, expanding the scope of film appreciation and analysis but also impacting business practices. Cinephiles are no longer considered isolated groups of film buffs but are an important target market for media industries that see great profits in catering to their interests.

When was this market opened? Film collecting has existed nearly as long as the medium itself, but given the costs of 35mm and 16mm prints it did not reach the

average consumer. Institutions like studios, museums, and archives were in charge of the bulk of collecting with a reduced but nevertheless significant percentage of individual works in the hands of private collectors. However, these types of collecting were never the real targets of the film industry. Overzealous of their products, studios were too focused on controlling their own exhibition schemes through vertical integration (Grieverson and Kramer 273). However, the rise of home theater technologies allowed studios to produce and distribute controlled versions of the films they owned on a much wider scale. First VHS tapes, and then most especially DVDs, were instrumental to the repackaging of films to increase their profitability. Some critics argue that special editions of films are above all the best strategy employed by industries to lure collectors into buying more copies of the same works. For example, Barbara Klinger contends that one of the most successful repackaging practices is the combination of the re-mastered edition of a film with extras such as director's cuts, audio commentaries, and documentaries (60). The repackaging of a movie depends, among many other factors, on the consumer that is targeted. Klinger discusses two groups of collectors: high- and low-end. High-end collectors, or technophiles, are mostly concerned with investing in expensive and high quality playback technology. The quality and clarity of image and audio reproduction are essential characteristics for the high-end collector according to Klinger. On the other hand, low-end collectors are more interested in obscure titles, even if this means less than optimal playback conditions; in some cases the poorer the image quality, the more pleasurable the item becomes (62). There are countless internet websites that cater to these collectors, selling VHS bootlegs as well as DV-R copies of out-of-print titles.

Klinger's categories are helpful for determining some of the problems that emerge from the different priorities that DVD consumers present. The high-end or technology-oriented cinephile that Klinger discusses has a strong presence on the internet on websites like DVDBeaver.com. Led by chief editor Gary W. Tooze, this site features reviews of multi-region DVD and Blu-ray releases as well as the software and hardware that allow cinephiles to bypass region restrictions in order to view discs from other countries. A typical review highlights several types of information aimed at satisfying the most demanding technically-minded cinephile. For example, their review of *Oldboy* briefly summarizes the plot and discusses the relevance of the release in a style very similar to the American film reviewers. This is followed by an analysis of the technological elements of the DVD (bit rate, anamorphic screens, type of audio, etc.) comparing them to other DVD releases of the same film. Finally, the site evaluates the extras included on the disc: commentaries, featurettes, and deleted scenes, among many more (SyLOW). These technophile/cinephile reviewers sidestep questions of film content and form in order to focus instead on issues such as the quality of the transfer (Klinger 81, 84). On the other hand, websites like moviesunlimited.com as well as countless DVD outlets cater to low-end collectors. For example, Alpha Video is a DVD company that markets public domain films in unrestored, low quality editions that don't seem to bother collectors ("Message Boards"). The value of such editions is that items that would otherwise be only available in archives now can be enjoyed and studied in a home environment; while in some cases the quality leaves much to be desired, most of them are at least watchable.

However, the picture is incomplete unless a third category is introduced to complement Klinger's high- and low-end collectors. This category is comprised of the cinephile collector-consumers that are the target of large outfits like the Criterion Collection, Flicker Alley, and Kino in the U.S., Masters of Cinema in the U.K., Edition Filmmuseum in Austria, and Intermedio in Spain. The mission of these companies is to procure rare and "classical" titles, digitally restore them, and finally, combine them with scores of extras to create a remarkable (and usually expensive) package. Tim Page compares the Criterion Collection to the Louvre, The Modern Library and the Norton Critical Editions (2). Klinger states that since 1984, the Criterion Collection has been instrumental in popularizing the use of extras in their marketing of films (60). Starting with the 1984 release of Criterion's first laser disc (*Citizen Kane*) and their first audio commentary (*King Kong*), the New York-based company has become the stalwart leader of cinephile-oriented companies, not only because of their eclectic selection of important and obscure films but also because of their development of a market niche for paratexts or extras. These paratexts are occasionally limited to biographical information and trailers but more often than not they become an essential compendium of scholarship, in many cases exclusively produced for the specific film release. These companies generate a new type of collecting where low- and high-end collectors meet, looking for excellent prints and playback quality but also obscure titles and hard to find items.

Paratexts

One of the most important characteristics associated with these companies and their paratextual expansion is their canon-formation power: inclusion in their DVD

rosters could mean instant canonization for a particular film. However, their selection policies rely upon much more than a presumed artistic meritocracy. The issue of licensing is as important as the cultural capital that might be at stake in the selections. Each company must negotiate rights for individual films with the studios that own them. If a studio decides to discontinue the license then the DVD can no longer be released; this leads to an increase in value for the out-of-print item (Kendrick 130). According to James Kendrick, some of these companies avoid relying exclusively upon “dominant social or cinematic foundations” and aspire to a greater inclusivity (135). However, a quick look at any of their catalogues will show their marked preference for Anglo-European auteurs, while the filmmaking of whole regions like Africa and Latin America is grossly underrepresented. Since the 1998 release of their first DVD, *Grand Illusion*, the Criterion Collection has released approximately 590 movies. The vast plurality are from the United States (184 films), followed by France (129), and Japan (70). Further investigation shows that categories are not free from controversy. For example, there are 77 “Asian” DVDs, but once the 70 Japanese films are subtracted, the remaining 7 include only 4 from Hong Kong, 2 from India, and one each from South Korea, Taiwan and China. Moreover, the “Chinese” offering is questionable: it is *The Last Emperor*, directed by the Italian Bernardo Bertolucci. Similarly, Criterion has released just four films from Latin America; all were produced in Mexico and two were directed by the Spaniard Luis Buñuel (“Films”). Notwithstanding the geo-cultural biases of their lists, the importance of these companies should not be underestimated. Their efforts to assemble and even commission a wide array of scholarly and film historical documents contribute to both

cinophilic pleasure and the dissemination of the academic study of film to a wider audience.

Those paratexts may bridge the gap between academic and popular discourses. Typical paratexts include audio commentaries, director's cuts, deleted scenes, trailers, and making-of documentaries. In what follows, I will focus on the audio commentary in particular as an indispensable tool for the cinophilic collector. Initially, DVDs included a small booklet that featured basic information about the release (cast, crew and credits) and often, a short essay or liner notes (Bertellini and Reich 104). The essay might be exclusively commissioned for the release, or an excerpt of a previously published piece; in some cases an excerpt from an out-of-print book could make the release more valuable, as in the case of Jean Pierre Melville's *Le cercle rouge*, (released by the Criterion Collection), which includes a fragment from Rui Nogueira's *Melville on Melville*. However, the most influential element was the addition of a commentary track to the audio menu. Instead of listening to the audio of the movie, the consumer may access the reflections of the director, editor, actors or historians/critics of the film. Companies can incorporate multiple commentaries into a single disc, since they occupy little data space (Barlow 111). The ramifications of this development are enormous. First, the marketing of film has always centered on a limited range of possibilities. Stars and directors were not highlighted in advertising during the very early stages of filmmaking, but once they became the focus of distribution, they monopolized marketing to the point that star vehicles and auteur theories are still today the most popular methods of classifying and promoting films. In some ways, audio commentaries expand the hegemony of the star and director, a

development that is viewed positively by some critics (Grant 103) and negatively by others; Alison Trope, for example, argues that the majority of audio commentaries, especially those released by commercial companies, “fetishize the director and echo traditional auteur studies” (364). Some lament the ways in which auteurist commentaries in particular may close down meaning-making. But Chuck Tryon argues that DVDs may also invite debate by including material that contradicts the authorial discourse. For example, the documentary *Capturing the Friedmans*, according to Tryon, includes paratexts that open up the discussion that the film intended to close by expanding the definition and the effects of media on the family unit (29). Directors may also deploy commentary tracks to draw attention to the contributions of other members of the crew and cast. South Korean director Park Chanwook recorded three different tracks for the Tartan release of *Oldboy*: one by himself and one each with the cast and with the director of photography (SyLOW). There are many examples of commentaries recorded by cinematographers (Christopher Doyle on *The Last Life of the Universe*), editors (Walter Murch on *THX1138*), film reviewers (Roger Ebert on *Citizen Kane*), and academics (Richard Koszarski on *Lonesome*), which promote other points of entry into film criticism and evaluation. This technology expands the spectator’s horizons by providing multiple perspectives on a given film. The key to these paratextual or framing devices is their convenient format and their reach. For example in an annotated edition, readers need to take their eyes off the main text to consult footnotes or endnotes; however, an audio commentary is a simultaneous annotation that runs parallel with the visual text it discusses. In the case of audience, while most commentaries are aimed at the amateur

who is viewing the film for the first time, they may also be of interest to the professional critic, since in many cases the commentators are cinema scholars.

It is precisely this professionalism that is the subject of mockery in one particular audio commentary. The Coen brothers have both re-affirmed and parodied the ways in which audio commentary may ratify authorial perspectives: the Universal Studios release of *Blood Simple* includes a commentary track recorded by “Kenneth Lorrington,” a fake film historian invented by the brothers themselves. Voights-Virchow discusses how the Coen’s fake commentary manipulates the conventions of the mode, exposing them to ridicule. For example, the fake commentator professor Lorrington unpacks the most insignificant details (the creation of a CGI dog or the use of trained birds), while skipping the most important aspects of the movie (Voights-Virchow 135). At the beginning the commentary tries to establish verisimilitude but as it progresses Lorrington’s claims become more outrageous, and it is hard for any audience to take it seriously. Nevertheless, the parody is useful since it prompts us to consider the essential qualities of the audio commentary genre.

What, indeed, constitutes a good audio commentary? Giorgio Bertellini and Jacqueline Reich state that companies look for commentators with sufficient critical credibility to attract cinephiles, and who are compelling enough for the average consumer (104). Douglass Pratt asserts that commentaries should differ from traditional written essays, and suggests that the best ones manage to convey the commentator’s emotional response while re-watching the film. Pratt mentions film historian Dana Polan’s audio commentary for Michael Curtiz’s film *Angels with Dirty Faces* as one of the best of the genre, since it features the “right balance between the

traditional academic interpretation of motion picture dynamics and the enthusiastic joy of experiencing the movie” (18). In some cases, the commentary track constitutes the recording for posterity of a conversational exchange, an echo of what used to take place in cafes and cinemas during earlier periods of cinephilic culture. Caroline Millar and Ginette Vincendeau argue that the audio commentary is an important development in performative scholarship, fomenting “knowledge transfer between the academic, the canon, and the general public” (Bennett and Brown 118). I would reframe that argument by affirming that audio commentaries facilitate the creation of a hybrid space between high and low culture. The commentaries enable collectors (who may or may not be “average” viewers) to gain access to academic discourses that would otherwise be outside of their reach (Barlow 132). Moreover, the medium is simple enough for average viewers to cultivate on their own. In February 2002, Ebert wrote a short column titled “You, too, can become a DVD movie critic,” in which he invited amateurs to create their own commentary tracks and publish them on the internet. Not surprisingly a large group of people joined the initiative and the results are archived on the webpage “House of Commentaries”; while the quality of the commentaries is mixed, the site exemplifies the accessibility of this paratextual medium (Ebert).

Based on the specialization of their performers, audio commentaries can be divided into two main categories: production- and criticism-focused. The production-focused category includes commentary by directors, editors, and actors as well as any other member of the crew. This type of commentary is usually technical, anecdotal, and centered mostly on events experienced during the filming itself and the specific decisions taken during that period that influenced the finished film. For example, the

audio commentary for *Walkabout* features director Nicolas Roeg and actor Jenny Agutter. Each contributor was recorded individually and then those narratives were mixed to create what seems like a dialogue between the two. The commentary is mostly dominated by Agutter's recollections of the demands of the filming schedule, and how they were particularly tough on the then fourteen-year-old Australian actor. For his part, Roeg provides a guide to his directorial decisions as well as his opinion on the ways the studio changed his film (Roeg and Agutter). While this is typical of production-centered commentaries, there are exceptions to this rule. Some directors or other personnel work to contextualize their film and offer an entertaining as well as a critical view. For example, Martin Scorsese delivers his commentaries like a film historian and passionate cinephile, as is the case with the Criterion Collection's release of *The Thief of Baghdad*—or of his own films.

The criticism-focused audio commentary consists of recordings made by film historians, reviewers, cultural historians and other types of critics. This form of commentary typically offers a more objective overview of the film. My own evaluation of a number of examples has led me to establish two sub-categories of criticism-focused audio commentaries: the straightforward essay, and the audio-visual commentary. In the former, the commentator simply reads a traditional essay regarding the film. The essay bears almost no relation to the images, and is composed of a combination of historical data, analysis and trivia. By contrast, in the audio-visual commentary, the cinema specialist discusses the images as they appear on the screen, expanding the visual experience by relaying a combination of historical facts and close analysis. Vincendeau has argued that the hardest part of concocting an audio

commentary is avoiding the structure of a traditional scholarly article. She explains that an academic paper about film first shows and then explains. The text of a good audio commentary must limit the description of the visual in order to avoid the obvious, while nevertheless making reference to the images through deep analysis (Bennet and Brown 124).

The criticism-focused commentary is an essential tool for collectors that allows them to access the history of cinema as well as of academic discourses. In the paragraphs that follow, I will further seek to theorize this form of audio commentary by analyzing in greater detail and comparing several additional examples.

The Criterion Collection's DVD of Jean Cocteau's 1946 *Beauty and the Beast* contains two commentaries, one by film historian Arthur Knight, recorded in 1991 for the laserdisc release, and another by the cultural historian Christopher Flaying, which was recorded in 2001 for the DVD release. Knight begins by directly addressing the spectator in a manner similar to most of the early audio commentaries, which tend to draw attention to the novelty of the medium. By contrast, Flaying immediately begins to comment on the scenes with no introduction whatsoever. Knight's commentary belongs to the straightforward essay type: he makes no references to the images on screen, delivering his speech in a quick but manageable pace, and leaving practically no gaps or silences for the spectator to reflect or process the information. On the contrary, Flaying's commentary is constantly interrupted by seconds of silence, and overall it gives the impression of spontaneity, a characteristic that has come to distinguish audio-visual commentary. During the first few minutes of the film both Knight and Flaying coincide in their attention to the décor of Belle's house, noting the

influence of Vermeer and other painters on the mise-en-scène. However, Flaying also discusses the historical events that were happening at the time of Cocteau's production of the film: the Nuremberg trials, the reconstruction of France, and the trial of Pierre Laval. This type of socio-economic contextualizing exemplifies Flaying's wider interests and effectively combined with close analysis provides a great tool to unpack the different nuances of a cinematic text. On the other hand, Knight's narrative focuses instead on the film's cultural background, especially on the influence of other films and paintings. He also emphasizes the impact of Cocteau's surrealism and his other works, particularly his screenplay for *L'Éternel Retour*; he rounds out his discussion of the film by focusing attention on the construction of sets, shots and props, and the creation of the beast's mask. Knight's commentary is much more aligned with production, design and visual style. While it is certainly valuable Knight's scope is somewhat limited when compared to Flaying's. On a structural level, Flaying's narrative pays more attention to the construction of the scene. For example, his discussion of the introduction of the character of Belle revolves around the issue of reflection and how mirror surfaces are a constant theme in Cocteau's oeuvre. In the final part of his commentary he spends some time tracing a genealogy of the monster-woman love angle that begins in the earlier silent versions of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and includes recent films such as *Edward Scissorhands* and Disney's version of *Beauty and the Beast*, a movie he calls a post-feminist version heavily influenced by Cocteau's. Finally, Knight's style flows like exquisite historical gossip. He takes a point of departure and from it he weaves an impressive quilt of stories that are as informative as they are irrelevant to the film discussed. For example, halfway through

the movie, Knight quite abruptly draws a comparison between Noel Coward and Cocteau focusing on their approach to art, fashion and homosexuality. Once the sexual orientation of both writers is established, Knight proceeds to enumerate some of their notorious lovers that accurately include Jean Marais, the protagonist of *Beauty and the Beast* as well as many other Cocteau projects. Differences notwithstanding, these two commentaries include a noteworthy amount of overlapping information, perhaps suggesting that a mixed edition of both would have been the best option to follow.

Another variation on the theme of criticism commentaries is presented by film historian Bruce Eder in his commentary for *The Lady Vanishes*, which begins with him mimicking Hitchcock's trademark "Good Evening" line, setting the tone for an informative as well as vivid commentary. He balances scene analysis with historical commentary, greatly enhancing the overall experience of the listener. For example, Eder is especially interested in the development of soundtracks. This is evident from his comments on Hitchcock's use--or the lack--of music in the film. It is worth remarking that scholars typically foreground their specific areas of expertise in their construction of the film commentary. This often improves the commentary, but in some cases it may also cloud the overall experience, if that specialization is privileged at the expense of other important elements of the film. Sometimes the subjectivity of the commentator surfaces in unexpected places. For example, Eder's commentary stands out for two important and related facts: first, Eder originally recorded the commentary for the 1998 edition of *The Lady Vanishes*. His commentary was used again for the re-edition of the film in 2008. Eder also recorded new sections that were integrated into the older track. It is easy for the listener to pinpoint where the new

comments are added since there is a fluctuation of sound. But the most important factor is that one of those additions is a fairly strong political statement that dramatically ties his commentary to a specific historical moment. When Eder discusses the characterization of two tourists, he suddenly refers obliquely to the US war in Iraq in order to underline the (presumably) relatively innocuous image of Americans abroad in 1937: “In a time when the United States is wrecking Middle Eastern countries by mistake, it’s good to remember that in the period in which ‘Lady Vanishes’ was made, Americans were considered nothing more than an annoying group of rival tourists.” The capacity to revise or amend commentaries allows for the gauging of shifts in public opinion over time. At the same time, discussion of contemporary themes may date a particular commentary and place it beyond the comprehension of future listeners. As the theorization of audio commentaries continues to evolve, this is a phenomenon that will merit further consideration.

Another example that further validates the DVD commentary as a valuable tool for the cinephile collector may be found on the three-disc edition of *Seven Samurai*. The commentary is structured to partially echo the movie: five critics for *Seven Samurai*, critics David Desser, Joan Mellen, Stephen Prince, Tony Rayns, and Donald Richie, who form a varied collection of active and retired professors of cinema as well as filmmakers and journalists, comment on the film, each with their individual approach and focus. Some repetitions aside, the extraordinary length of the film (207 minutes) does not affect the commentary’s fluidity. Unfortunately, the critics do not discuss the film together; instead each critic examines a forty-minute slice of the work. This commentary is emblematic since it offers five very different approaches to the

craft, not only because of the different personalities of the commentators, but also because of their distinctive styles and delivery. For example, Prince unleashes a barrage of information especially focused on the historical background, and pays special attention to the use of sound in some close analyses. Desser discusses Kurosawa as auteur and some of the social conditions during the time of production. Tony Rayns changes the approach of the first two commentators, who were very precise at combining cultural criticism with close analysis. Rayns is much more interested in biographical elements as well as the humanistic approach Kurosawa deployed in the film. Donald Richie pushes Rayns's biographical line even further by incorporating anecdotes of his own meetings with Kurosawa. Finally, Joan Mellen contributes a rounded analysis that introduces some political elements absent from the other commentators.

The audio commentary as a popularizing device for transmitting academic discourse to the average viewer proves to be essential for the development of a new approach to cinema. Millar argues that the best means of crafting a successful audio commentary is to have both textual and contextual analysis tightly woven into a seamless whole (Bennett and Brown 124). There is consensus that depending on the target audience most commentaries, at least of the academic variety, will feature close analysis of scenes and shots (an approach that at best is limited by the running time of the feature) and historical or biographical contextualization that is deployed to fill the gaps between the "relevant scenes." One of the problems is how to encapsulate the analysis of a significant scene while the film keeps marching along, a problem that the video essay attempts to fill with slowing-down methods and a more condensed style.

As for the relevance in terms of film history and cinephilia, as was previously discussed, audio commentaries empower the collector; they bring academic praxis into what was traditionally considered (correctly or incorrectly) a passive reception environment: the home.

Blogosphere

I have argued thus far that the audio commentary is one of the best technological developments ushered in by the DVD, one that marshals cinephilia to reformulate approaches to film history and analysis. However, the most significant and perhaps revolutionary technological development is the blog. Blogs have adopted the spirit of cinephilia and amplified it beyond the reach of earlier cinephile clubs.

A blog is a space on the internet where authors exchange, discuss and challenge ideas and above all link them to other blogs (Jenkins 222). Cultural critics view blogs as particularly significant because of their grassroots potential and their ability to stimulate cultural flow (Tryon 126). The importance of the blog for the development of cinephilia as well as for the expansion of ways of thinking about cinema is enormous. The cinema-related blogosphere started with a few scattered individuals who began writing about their taste, usually in the form of brief posts in the spirit of traditional film reviewing. Film studios and media conglomerates noticed the trend, and began to court those bloggers with some circulation and influence. At the same time, newspapers, along with film critics, began a massive migration to the web. Many affiliated as well as independent professional film critics transitioned to the web with no problems. Some continued to write for their newspaper-employers while also keeping a personal blog where they posted original versions of articles that

had been modified by the newspaper editors (Rosenbaum). But the shift in priorities also provoked the elimination of a noteworthy number of important film reviewing positions (Sterritt). Many newspaper editors and managers decided that, given the rise of “amateur” film reviewers on the web, it did not make sense to keep a staff member exclusively dedicated to the medium. Blogging has not affected academia in the same way; it is doubtful that any professor would be replaced by a blogger. However, the blogosphere has had a major impact on film studies in general. Film scholars such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Catherine Grant, Scott Higgins, and Ethan de Seife, have created blogs where they not only upload theoretical posts and expand upon their publications, they also post more subjective musings. Some bloggers in the spirit of what Jenkins terms “collective intelligence” have organized blogathons: collective blogging about a pre-determined topic (star, director, film, etc.) set up in a limited time frame (Tryon 137). In some cases, bloggers sponsor blogathons to raise money for film preservation efforts. For example, the blogathon organized by the contributors to *Ferdy on Film* and *Self-Styled Siren* raised \$30,000 for the National Film Preservation Foundation (Ozols).

In order to illustrate the individual mechanics of cinephilic blogging and how they relate to both traditional film criticism and cinephilia in general, I will study two examples in detail: Farran Smith Nehme’s *Self-Styled Siren* and Girish Shambu’s *Girish*. Nehme is not as prolific as other bloggers, who in some cases post on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the 566 posts she has logged from April 2005 until May 2013 are no small feat. On a structural level, Nehme’s blog features several convenient widgets (some of which are optional features of the hosting site, Blogspot) that allow for

simple navigation. For example, there is a standard calendar that links to each month's or year's entries, as well as a thematic list of links, most of which are auteur-oriented. The site includes a blog roll, and links to the people, blogs and websites that the author recommends, classified into unorthodox categories such as "reader favorites," "old acquaintance," and "prix de beauté."

On April 9, 2005, Nehme posted her first entry, 310 words long, defining the basic tenets of her blog. According to Nehme, the blog allows her to present her opinions on film issues "with no pesky reminders that the store is about to close" ("Let me pick"). With this playful wink at the then almost-extinct video store culture, Nehme contrasts hurried consumption to the more "flaneuristic" browsing that characterizes her approach to film. In terms of content, she almost exclusively focuses on classical Hollywood from the 1930s to the 1960s. She divides her entries into two very subjective categories: good days and bad days. On the bad days she will post about issues that bother her, mostly mainstream Hollywood and special effects-driven films, combined with an occasional political rant. On the good days, she dedicates her blog entries to directors, actors, screenwriters, and other creative figures, together with fashion talk and commentaries about books ("Let me pick"). The resistance to any form of traditional cinematic taxonomy, exemplified in her site, is one of the striking features of cinephilic bloggers and writers alike; rather than accommodating predetermined structural notions, they develop subjective ports of access to create very personal histories of cinema.

Nehme's blogging style can be traced, in part, to some American film reviewers. Contemporary reviewers and bloggers often refer to Kael and Sarris as the

most influential personalities in film reviewing; however, Nehme proposes Agee as the figure closest to the blogger aesthetic. In an elegant post about Agee's film reviews she raves about the accuracy and intimacy of his prose. A particular strain of cinephilic blogging stems from Agee's approach by interlacing treatment of a particular topic with deeply personal anecdotes, making the driest of subjects suitable for cheerful or offbeat reminiscences. With a stream of examples, Nehme illustrates how personal Agee's prose can be, a tone he achieves by showing the human side of the business of reviewing. Nehme is not referring exclusively to Agee's humanist reviewing style but also the subjectivity of writing about films. This entails agreeing and disagreeing with others, and also contradicting himself. She concludes by stating "When he's wrong, James Agee is forcefully, intelligently wrong. When he's right, his writing can conjure a pleasure so acute it comes close to watching the movie itself" ("An Amateur"). Like Agee, Nehme sometimes also appears to debate with herself; however, the comment section of her blog functions as a place where opinions can be reformulated or polished based on the input of fellow bloggers and frequent guests. Another aspect of Nehme's writing, one that distinguishes her from Agee, is her sharp sense of humor. For example in her post "Just let me pick the movie, damn it," she begins by talking about gender-biased movie choices but she does so with an anecdote about renting movies; while she wanted *Rules of the Game* she always had to deal with *Batman Returns*. This type of cinephilic humor and her sharp prose are some examples of the newest type of criticism associated with cinephilia.

A particularly strong example of this is Nehme's post on the film *The Letter*. In this post, published on March 3, 2008, Nehme presents her formal criticism of the

film but accompanies it, first with an anecdote about Pauline Kael, and then with a personal introduction in which she comments on her disagreements with other “fans” of the film. According to the anecdote, Kael broke off a relationship because of a disagreement over her partner’s admiration for *West Side Story*, a movie Kael hated. Nehme’s ice-breaking anecdote carefully opens the exposition on two fronts: first, she highlights the importance of taste in a cinephilic environment; and second, she positions herself as more tolerant than Kael, yet equally passionate about the significance of asserting taste. This preamble is followed by a vigorous defense of the movie *The Letter* (1940), not so much from its detractors, but from those who admire it for “the wrong reasons.” This reaction was prompted by the comments on the International Movie Data Base (IMDB), a flawed but serviceable webpage that lists information about movie releases and hosts a public space for social interaction not unlike Facebook or Mubi. The external reviewers defended the importance of the movie as a Bette Davis vehicle or a classic melodrama, among other things. However, for Nehme their comments missed the status of the movie as a masterpiece due to its treatment of colonialism and gender as well as its aesthetics (*The Letter*). She dedicates 2385 words to unpacking the movie by engaging in close analysis, introducing historical elements and exploring thematic conventions. For example, Nehme studies the tracking shot that opens the movie, focusing on how William Wyler and the director of photography Tony Gaudio glide over the set in a majestic establishing shot. In her description of the tracking shot, Nehme pauses to mention the way it captures the bodies of the Malaysians, confirming her interest in a colonial reading of the film, as well as other thematic elements. Although Nehme notes that in

many ways the film's portrayal of East Asians appears to affirm the racist stereotypes of Hollywood films of the 1940s, she also argues that *The Letter* presents an alternative reading of the colonial subject. In order to prove this point Nehme performs what could be called micro scene analysis, zooming in on particular almost-invisible details to reinforce her arguments. One of the best examples is her dual reading of what could otherwise be an overlooked background. Nehme comments on how the rubber that "drip, drip, drips into a bucket" could be read sexually but also as a metaphor of the tedious and monotonous working conditions on the plantation (*The Letter*). Nehme argues that the image undermines the monolithic colonial representation of the film; it is a detail that is easy to overlook, but that carries the strength of a cinephilic moment. Later on, focusing on another detail, Nehme comments on the nature of Bette Davis's character's hobby: lace-making. Nehme corrects Grunes and other critics (Sarris among them), who refer to the lace as needlepoint, and moves on to pinpoint the importance of this activity for the movie's symbolism. Nehme argues that lace making reveal a character trait of the protagonist. While being interrogated, Bette Davis claims to have a terrible memory, at the same time that she is pulling away her lace handkerchief. This reminds the spectator that lacemaking demands "a great deal of precision, concentration, and memory." In this case visual elements underscore the spoken word. It is this attention to detail that makes cinephile bloggers like Nehme stand out.

For Nehme, as well as for many other cinephile critics and bloggers, writing about cinema is not about building theoretical cathedrals, but about exchanging information, arguments and personal points of view. For her, criticism and reviewing

are bridge-building dialogues. She calls a good critic “someone whose company you relish” (“An Amateur”). As was mentioned before, blogging becomes a web of communication that extends beyond the boundaries of the main article. Like many blogs, Nehme’s features a specific section where readers can respond and develop long conversations with no temporal or spatial restrictions. The piece on Agee generated seventy-two comments, thirteen by the blogger herself and the rest by different readers who engaged her on the topic (one of the interlocutors is the film critic David Ehrenstein). The article on *The Letter* received thirty-nine commentaries. These comments range from praise for the article to disagreements with some of Nehme’s points. The conversation sometimes swerves to include other topics like the poet Frank O’Hara (“An Amateur”); in the case of *The Letter*, a multifarious net is cast that includes references to other Wyler and Davis films as well as connections to a previous version of the film made in 1929 with Jeanne Eagles. Such polyphony might initially seem aimless to in-depth research critics, but to cinephiles it presents an opportunity to expand their knowledge through exposure to rhizomatic connections.

While her post on *The Letter* features a close analysis-driven focus, not all of Nehme’s blog entries are structured in this way. In other entries, she frames her thoughts with contextualizing quotations from criticism and reviewing, and creates subcategories to fit her taxonomic needs. For example, her commentary on *Ball of Fire* begins with an Agee-like ambivalence, calling the movie a “two-hander,” because while on the one hand she loves it, on the other, she is very aware of the many problems the movie presents. It is important to note that Nehme generally avoids blind defenses of films, even when they are blatantly acknowledged as her favorites. In the

case of *The Letter*, for instance, she condemns Wyler's decision to use Gale Sondergaard to portray an East Asian woman. *Ball of Fire* is no exception, even if her approach differs greatly from the structure of *The Letter*'s post.

Once again she introduces her analysis with an anecdote about the production, in this case citing the reasons why Howard Hawks and Billy Wilder ended up working together. Then she quickly establishes her preliminary categories, centered on four negative points about the film: the slow pace, Richard Haydn's manner of speaking, the lack of chemistry between Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck, and Greg Toland's cinematography. Here Nehme appeals to genre conventions. For example, in order to discuss pacing Nehme contrasts the slow unfolding of *Ball of Fire* to the expected accelerated narrative and rapid-fire dialogue of a traditional screwball comedy like *His Girl Friday* ("The Siren by Request"). The comedy of the screwball genre, whose origin is usually attributed to Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), depends precisely on this accelerated pacing. There is another consideration of genre in the treatment of Toland's cinematography. For Nehme, the cinematography in *Balls of Fire* is too heavy-handed for a screwball comedy, and this steals the viewer's attention, re-directing it from the interaction of the players to the depths of a background that has no intrinsic meaning.

A strong trend in cinephilic blogging and reviewing (as indeed in cinephilic musings over many decades) is the emphasis on actors/acting as a critical category. Nehme's blog, as well as others like *Nitrate Diva* and *The Sheila Variations*, are perfect examples of this tendency. It perhaps originates in the cult of personality characteristic of a certain type of fandom that may fuel cinephilia. These acting-

oriented blogs are populated with myriad subjective examples of taste that often take the form of rankings or unsupported opinion. For example, when Nehme comments on the lack of chemistry of the two stars, Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck, she does not strengthen her point with counter-examples of couples that do sizzle on screen (something she does do, by contrast, in her posts on Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra or even Charlton Heston).

Later on, Nehme expands her taxonomy to include four positive elements she identifies in the Hawks/Wilder/Toland collaboration. The symmetrical structure of her positive and negative commentaries helps her readers consider alternative visions of the film, allowing them enough room to form their own opinions. These commentaries, however, fall even deeper into subjectivity, and once again acting takes center stage. This time the emphasis is on the powerful charisma of Oscar Homolka. Nehme focuses on Homolka's presence, humor and accuracy, while she also admits that his sex appeal has influenced her appraisal. However, she devotes even more laudatory comments to Barbara Stanwyck. Stanwyck ranks high in Nehme's pantheon, appearing sixteen times in the blog's labels. In her discussion of Stanwyck, Nehme also reveals her most passionate obsession: biographies. In a recent conversation with Peter Labuza for the latter's podcast blog *The Cinephiliacs*, Nehme states that as great as her love for movies is, it is almost eclipsed by her voracious reading of actors' and directors' biographies. This is where Nehme displays her erudition by summoning anecdotes about star formation, casting choices and the like. In the case of *Ball of Fire*, she limits her commentary to a casting anecdote and a detailed outline of Stanwyck's sex appeal. Finally, along the lines of her praise of Homolka, she also

admires the honest representation of intellectuals, which avoids the usual condescension and instead highlights the way in which the professor characters contribute to the film's "sweetness." Here Nehme opposes *Ball of Fire* to the legion of American films that condemn intellectuality and reduce it to mockery, a phenomenon that has only increased in recent years. Her focus on acting and the anecdotic might be easily dismissed as superficial; however when combined with perceptive close analysis it provides readings of interest to both the casual observer and the more serious critic.

The last point that Nehme discusses in her appraisal of *Ball of Fire* is the language and above all the slang used in the dialogue. What is truly remarkable about Wilder's use of language, according to Nehme is that he not only uses existing slang but also seems to invent it with such naturalness that by the end of the movie spectators will find themselves repeating phrases as if they had always already belonged to the American lexicon. There are plenty of studies about film as language, and yet not as many about the use of language in film. Nehme bridges that gap briefly by evoking the florid style of Wilder's language.

Self-Styled Siren and other blogs that deal directly with classical Hollywood are valid vehicles for film study, precisely because they not only unearth long-forgotten films but also because they have the space (and audience) to dedicate time to aspects of film deemed too superficial to be the object of serious study. One of the most important contributions of cinephile blogs is that they manage to reframe obscure films, directors or actors, bringing new attention to them. Nehme's post about Miriam Hopkins is an excellent example of this phenomenon, as well as of the many technical

advantages of the medium. In the introduction to “The Memorable Miriam,” Nehme notes that film actors are subject to “fashion”: they can fall in and out of style, sometimes depending on the shelf life of their movies. Her main example is Audrey Hepburn, who according to Nehme was practically forgotten until the 1980s. Nehme also disagrees with those who have enshrined *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* as Hepburn’s best film, noting parenthetically “I don’t think so,” and citing four counterexamples (*Roman Holiday*, *War and Peace*, *The Nun’s Story*, and *Two for the Road*). Here Nehme makes clever use of the interactive nature of blogging. The titles of these four films do not appear in her main text; rather they are hidden as hyperlinks inside the phrase “I don’t think so,” with each word linked to an individual film entry on the International Movie Database website. The strategy in Nehme’s post is to challenge a fossilized canonical position not by imposing a particular counter-reading but by encouraging readers to formulate their own perspectives. This makes *Self-Styled Siren* a curious hybrid that, while it is thematically linked to the rigidly-canonical classical Hollywood era, manages to clear a space for the effective discussion of new interpretations. It also provides an alternative to the auteurism that continues to dominate much existing film criticism by opening the field to a lively discussion of actors as well as set designers, make-up artists and choreographers, among others. At the same time, Nehme also touches on a broad range of issues of concern to film scholars, from marketing techniques to the cinema’s role in gender construction. In the Miriam Hopkins post, for example, she weaves in brief and humorous references to the strategies stars (or others) may use to prolong their bankability: biographies; postcard sets; fan websites; TCM Star of the Month; box sets of their films.

Commenting on these canon-formation tools, Nehme exposes the highly arbitrary nature of the star-making process.

In addition to rediscovering faded stars, Nehme also re-evaluates the distinctive characteristics of more enduring stars. In her essay “On the Manliness of Montgomery Clift,” she seeks to “rescue” Clift’s manliness from critics and other actors who have questioned it. As in many of her posts, here she relies heavily on biographical information, but her piece also reflects, in a very accessible way, the insights of gender and sexuality theories: Nehme questions the critics’ definition of manhood. One by one she lists Howard Hawks, John Wayne, and Edward Dmytryk as some of those who made fun of Clift’s sensibility and refusal to play by the rules of traditional manliness. She exposes the glaring homophobia of Clift’s co-actors such as John Wayne, but also sweeps aside the widespread cultural prejudices (real men must engage in activities like hunting and war; they must hold their liquor; they must pursue “legions of women”) that have condemned Clift as “unmanly.” Instead, Nehme focuses on the actor’s “inner strength.” To do so she performs a study of Clift’s intensely introspective acting style that could go so far as to intimidate older, more established actors (“On the Manliness of Montgomery Clift”). Nehme praises Clift’s acting style because he deploys his body and movement instead of relying on words to convey his well-crafted characters, and cites as examples his performances in *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *Red River*, as well as his less successful ones in *The Misfits*. However, the core of her argument stems from the questioning of certain standard definitions of manliness. Hollywood codes, according to Nehme, granted space for homosocial activities for which Clift’s “upper-class background” failed to

prepare him. Here it is striking, however, that Nehme's otherwise-perceptive analysis of gendered representations involves a problematic reading of class; one stereotype is perhaps replaced by another.

While Nehme's posts engage indirectly with theoretical issues, she does not dialogue directly with academic scholarship; she is much more focused on acting and socio-historical commentary. By contrast, Girish Shambu explicitly engages theoretical texts in *Girish*, one of the most successful cinephilic blogs, and one that Nehme herself refers to as the "Internet coffee house for the best cinephilic minds around" (*Three Strangers*). In terms of structure, *Girish* features lists similar to Nehme's blog roll, linking to several bloggers and websites of interest to the cinephile. However, the substance of their lists is very different. Nehme's blog roll includes similar sites like *The Sheila Variations* and *The Nitrate Diva* as well as other cinephilic blogs with a journalistic touch like *Some Came Running* and *The Evening Class*. Shambu's list is shorter but it includes academics such as David Bordwell and Steven Shaviro, highlighting *Girish*'s commitment to theoretical debates. Another major difference between *Girish* and *Self-Styled Siren* is that *Girish* features frequent posts about international festivals like the Toronto International Film Festival, Cinema Ritrovato and others. The type of posts produced for these occasions are a combination of travel narrative and film criticism, where Shambu and other bloggers meet to discuss the screenings as well as the structure of the festivals they attend. Another distinguishing structural feature of the *Girish* posts is that they are heavily linked. Each entry includes a coda where Shambu lists annotated links to his most

recent readings, indicating why they might be valuable to his readers, and sometimes including excerpts.

Girish's first post, "Lumière," published on September 3, 2004 (the author's birthday), exhibits a hesitant and initially restrained style, for example, when he declares "I am a moviefreak" but fails to elaborate. *Self-Styled Siren* was quite the opposite: like the mythical Minerva, Nehme arrived at the blogosphere fully armed and wearing armor. However, in *Girish*'s third entry, posted two days later, he begins to establish a cinephilic agenda. The author comments on his nostalgia for the films made in the 1970s in the United States, a decade he considers "the last great era of American movies," a statement followed by examples: *Easy Rider*, *Two-Lane Blacktop*, *Medium Cool* ("Klute"). With these films, Shambu establishes a genealogy of taste akin to the emblematic list-making of the most hardcore cinephiles. List-making is essential for both the cinephile blogger and the collector; lists function as a letter of presentation as well as excellent sources for many discoveries and the communication of taste (Keathley 140).

Girish provides a perfect example of the hybrid space between academia and cinephilia. Shambu is a professor at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY, but his area of scholarly expertise is marketing and he has no formal training in cinema. His writings range from purely subjective and impassioned reviews to carefully researched articles. He also adds to the equation a first-hand experience of the festival circuit and working knowledge of the theoretical texts of film studies, a point he made in a recent interview conducted during a roundtable on cinephilia at the Cinema Ritrovato festival in Bologna (Reggen). Another tendency of Shambu's work is his affinity for exploring

new technologies of disseminating knowledge (such as the video essay) and overlooked formats (DVD booklets, program notes), and for promoting them as valid forms of film writing. For example, when discussing program notes Shambu praises the work of James Quandt, which he argues is cinephilic because of its overarching efforts to contextualize film within the surrounding arts and to chart thematic concerns across several films, what Shambu calls “networks” (“Program Notes”). Like Nehme, Shambu usually ends his posts with an invitation to his readership to expand on his work by commenting on the issue. “Program Notes” generated only fourteen comments but they were posted by critics like Adrian Martin, Peter Nelhaus, a blogger from *Coffee, Coffee and More Coffee*, and Peter Labuza, who hosts a podcast blog, *The Cinephiliacs*, among others. As I noted above, cinephilic blogs can promote engaging conversations that echo the nostalgia-driven discussions of earlier cinephilia(s), while also leaving behind a form of documentation that others may follow and study.

Shambu’s philosophy of cinema appears scattered throughout numerous entries; however, it is economically displayed in his entry “Some thoughts on SCMS.” Shambu states that he is interested in two features of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conferences: the discussion and analysis of individual films; and the treatment of theory. Shambu concedes that for him the core of film studies lies in an effective combination of both, which leads him to conclude that “Doing either criticism or theory exclusively, without close and constant relation to the other, seems insufficient and unappealing to me.” In his own writings, the subjectivity of his taste, his list-making habits and his off-hand approach to cinema commentary is effectively

melded with his sharp theoretical musings and philosophical preoccupations. Upon further inspection his blog reveals certain tendencies that distinguish it from other examples of the medium like *Self-Styled Siren*. For example, a great deal of his blog entries, especially in the last three years, are dedicated to readings in cinephilia and theory as well as to his festival travelogues. An analysis of his 2013 posts reveals that in the last ten months, from January to October, Shambu has published roughly one post a month. More important, however, is the content of these posts. Three of the ten posts were dedicated to events (the SCMS conference and the Toronto International Film Festival), while two focused on the internet magazine he co-edits with Adrian Martin (LOLA). Of the remaining five entries one was dedicated exclusively to his discovery of cinema websites (“Recent Online Discoveries”) and the rest exemplify *Girish*’s more recent interests. “Teen Films,” “Vulgar Auteurism,” and “On Thinness and Thickness in Cinema,” are meditations on questions of genre, the auteur theory, and general issues of cinematography and mise-en-scène in contemporary Indian cinema. These posts combine cinephilic curiosity and reflections on the power of theory. For example, in “On Thinness and Thickness in Cinema,” published on February 4, 2013, Shambu discusses the erosion of the documentary value of some types of cinema. His examples are borrowed from a recent Indian film *Kahaani* (2012) as well as from *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). He exposes the hyper-editing style as detrimental to the experience of location, along with the virtual non-existence of mediating space/time, a practice that, according to Shambu, Bordwell has defined as “intensified continuity.” Shambu refers to this as the thinning of the pro-filmic reality of location against the thickening of time due to the documentary strength of the

image. According to Shambu, some strains of contemporary cinema are advertised as realist representations of particular locations, when actually they become reductions and oversimplifications of space. This is an example of how Shambu's cinephilic interest is expanded by philosophical and theoretical concerns.

Girish is also concerned with genre and the deployment of its conventions, especially for those genres that are either marginalized or simply not recognized as valid. For example, Shambu is particularly interested in teen films. Unlike Nehme, whose posts are mostly focused on acting within a given genre, Shambu here discusses the genre itself and how it resonates with his own private cinephilia. To do so, he connects his personal experience as an immigrant with his fascination with the American teen film through the Hindi films of the 1970s ("Teen Films"). In his post, Shambu identifies three main symmetries between these two types of cinema: energetic speed, the pairing of low-culture aesthetics with high-culture concerns, and the use of popular music. With each category, Shambu examines different exemplars from both cinemas that are as widely varied as *Clueless* and *Pretty in Pink* on the American side and *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Deewar* on the Indian one. Shambu closes his argument with links to an issue of the Spanish magazine *Transit* in which he along with several other critics discuss their selected teen film. Shambu's choice is *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, a film that to him manages to negotiate the gap between culturally-produced expectations and banal reality through music and montage. The value of such a post lies in the opening up of the canon of established genres that deserve critical attention. Also, by means of his comparison between two otherwise distinct and seemingly unrelated cinemas such as Indian cinema of the

1970s and American teen films of the 1980s, Shambu establishes a new dialogue worthy of further study.

Shambu is also interested in new technologies that are used to disseminate knowledge about cinema. As was mentioned before, he is a strong advocate of the video essay. However, perhaps his most interesting contribution is to foster the re-evaluation of the DVD booklet. In a brief paragraph, Shambu, in a very cinephilic style, simply praises the format, offers some samples, and invites his readers to discuss the issue. Cinephilic writing works sometimes in an associative way. Rather than imposing a theory or a particular reading of the subject, the authors proceed to compile lists of examples that suggest a possible interpretation without subjecting the reader to only one avenue of exploration. In this case, the post generated twenty-three comments, some by Adrian Martin, Jonathan Rosenbaum, and Peter Nellhaus. The exchange is anything but one-sided. For example user “Laurent,” the author of the blog *Serge Daney in English*, discounts the importance of the booklets by raising an important question: “has there been a text on a DVD booklet that has left its mark on film criticism?” Martin expands the subject by commenting that DVD booklets “somewhat bridge the ever-widening gap between academic writing and the ‘serious’ magazine press.” The booklets are thus important for the same reason that the cinephilic blogs are: they foster the circulation of ideas about cinema and ease viewers into an accessible and lively dialogue about film culture.

Finally, the next logical step in the development of technological cinephilia has been the emergence of the digital video essay, or Videographic Film Studies (Grant and Keithley). This new fusion of technological tools and cinephilic vision enables

film specialists to transcend the limitations and linearity of writing. By turning to the archive of images provided by millions of digitalized films, these critics are able, not simply to reference and illustrate points they have articulated through verbal language, but to visualize ideas, in some cases almost completely bypassing the written text. During the early stages, these videographic essays were wordy, featuring extensive titles and voiceovers, and functioned more like filmed conference presentations. However, as the tools and concepts have expanded, the written has given way to a new style dependent on playful juxtapositions and visual puns. Moreover, some critics suggest that the visual essay is more a tool of discovery, one that allows for a form of “material thinking.” For example, Grant, a pioneer in the field of videographic film studies, refers to her earliest video essay, a study on Chabrol’s *Les bonnes femmes*, as an experiment in re-editing the film’s visual and soundtracks by utilizing tools like looping, freeze framing and re-framing; she found that through this process, the more she worked over the original text, “the more new knowledge about the film I seemed to produce” (“Shudder” 53).

The new media texts I have discussed in this chapter stimulate the cinephilic drive, opening the door for future in-depth studies. Cinephilic blogs and digital video essays are also situated on the vanguard of a new form of film studies collaboration. This is not to say that blogging and commentaries will supplant professors and scholars, or that DVD companies will take over film studies. What is happening is a widening of a field, the development of a space where many different communities participate in the creation of knowledge. Both the collector and the blogger are cinephilia’s contribution to the expansion of the cinema world. As a result of their practices, cinephilic

networks have spread across the globe, and are slowly being incorporated into a plural discourse about film.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have aimed to explore previously undertreated issues within the field of writing about cinema, especially cinephilic writing. I have explored three main areas: 1. The different conceptualizations of cinephilia including how scholars manage their positive and negative associations regarding the film medium. 2. The impact of cinephilia on the formulation of evaluative arguments and critical perspectives within the traditional realm of film reviewing, including the interplay between cinephilic and socially-conscious approaches. 3. The emergence of new critical and evaluative strategies grounded in technological developments that democratize and expand the reach of film and film criticism.

I began in Chapter One by undertaking a general mapping of cinephilia, compiling and evaluating the different definitions and theorizations set forth by scholars, and identifying four major tendencies. For example, cinephilia, as we have seen, often entails elitism. Given its investment in systems of evaluation and classification, cinephilia advocates for exclusion as much as inclusion. One of the end results of the cinephilic process is the creation of a canon of exalted films and directors. Most writers are not only aware of this tendency but are proud of it, occasionally postulating it as one of the central unifying principles of cinephilia. My first chapter also explored the intersection of cinephilia and cult fandom; the cinephilic obsession with the epiphanic experience of the fragment; and the transformation of cinephilia as a result of new technological developments (a topic that I expanded upon in Chapter Four).

My second chapter focused on the role of cinephilia within film reviews produced in the United States from 1896 to the 1960s. I traced the evolution of the film review, demonstrating how writers expanded their thematic concerns, even as their spaces of expression and audiences were more limited. I also analyzed the bursts of social consciousness in film reviews during the 1930 and early 1940s. While some of these progressive or leftist essays were published in highly specialized environments, as was the case of Harry A. Potamkin's publications in the avant-garde magazine *Close Up*, others, like work by Otis Ferguson and James Agee, appeared in more mainstream environments. Unfortunately as the decades passed the level of commitment from the leading film reviewers diminished as their interest in pure cinephilic elements increased, which led me to the partial conclusion that there seems to be a divide between cinephilia and social consciousness, at least in the United States film reviewing studied in this chapter.

Following on the premises previously established, in the third chapter I expanded the study beyond English-language production and the socio-economic and political coordinates of film reviewing produced in the United States. I argued that Cuba is an ideal space for an investigation into the possibility of a socially-conscious cinephilic writing. As the subjects of my study I selected Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Mirta Aguirre. Their careers followed parallel paths and yet their output, outside of a few isolated contact points, could not be more different. Cabrera Infante exemplified full-blown cinephilic writing, adopting an auteurist approach while self-consciously playing with his own authorial identity; he usually avoided political content in his reviews. On the other hand, Aguirre developed a scathing critique of

Hollywood's hegemonic practices, ranging from the industry's colonial mentality to its mistreatment of minorities and foreign nationals. However, her hardened political stance did not prevent her from developing a strong cinephilia that is manifested in her passionate reviews. Aguirre presents the most active combination of social consciousness and cinephilia, developing both on an equal level, unlike many of her counterparts in the mainstream press of the United States.

In the final chapter, based on an exploration of the technological developments that catapulted contemporary cinephilia to the forefront of studies about film, I claimed that there has been a shift in the way knowledge about cinema is harvested and produced. For example, the transfer of treasures from the studio vaults onto VHS tapes and then DVDs for domestic consumption broadened the audience base and transformed the performance of critical analysis. The paratexts developed as DVD extras truly opened up a new space for disseminating knowledge; this is an instance of marketing techniques enlarging the research field. For example, audio commentaries, an enormous and still growing phenomenon yet to be comprehensively classified by any research work, provide an outlet for simultaneous discussion of visuals with critical analysis, and have been well employed by both academic and cinephilic critics.

Finally, I argued that the most significant paradigm shift was the development of a cinephilic blogosphere, an Internet area where many writers could develop coherent theories as well as aesthetic evaluations grounded in the meticulous analysis of cinematic texts without constraints of space, censorship or bureaucratic norms. I analyzed two of these blogs, *Girish* and *Self-Styled Siren*, looking at the different ways in which they disseminate information on a variety of film topics that range from

classic Hollywood to international film festivals. I argued that these blogs continue the tradition of the film review while incorporating discussions of paratexts and other technological developments to create an innovative outlet for creative evaluative and critical responses to film.

In conclusion, this dissertation carefully maps out several tendencies of cinephilia, investigating the possible combinations of cinephilia and social consciousness, asserting the opening of new venues of knowledge dissemination through paratexts, and establishing connections between traditional film reviewing and blogging, and academic study and fandom. While this project is far from an all-encompassing study, it appears at a singular moment in the history of film studies, in which traditional journalistic and scholarly approaches are converging with new ways and modes of thinking about cinema.

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