THE CINEPHILIAC MOMENT

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'Cinema is the art of the little detail that does not call attention to itself.'
-- François Truffaut, in a 1954 letter to Eric Rohmer

Near the beginning of his delightful autobiography, *My Life and My Films*, Jean Renoir recounts his first visit to the cinema, in 1897, when he was just two years old. Renoir and his beloved cousin, Gabrielle, were paying a visit to the Paris department store Dufayel when, Renoir reports, a man asked us if we wanted to see the 'cinema.'

> Scarcely had we taken our seats when the room was plunged into darkness. A terrifying machine shot out a fearsome beam of light piercing the obscurity, and a series of incomprehensible pictures appeared on the screen, accompanied by the sound of a piano at one end at at the other end a sort of hammering that came from the machine. I yelled in my usual fashion and had to be taken out (1974: 18).

Renoir then comments, quite appropriately, on the irony that his first encounter with the medium that would become the love of his life was a complete failure. But before leaving the scene, Renoir notes, 'Gabrielle was sorry we had not stayed. The film was about a big river and she thought that in the corner of the screen she had glimpsed a crocodile' (1974: 18).

While this scene may at first seem merely amusing, on closer consideration it can be seen to condense several of the key theoretical issues that have recently preoccupied film scholars interested in the cinema's relationship to the general conditions of modernity. To borrow some of the terms common to those writings, one could suggest that, while the *shock* of this first cinematic experience provoked fear in the child Renoir, in the adult Gabrielle it provoked the *distracted*, anaesthetic state that Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer described as a basic condition of modernity. It was this state and its effects on habits of visual perception that facilitated Gabrielle's glimpsing of the crocodile in the corner of the frame. But in addition, it could be argued that Renoir's story is, more specifically, about an encounter with early *cinephilia*, for the anecdote perfectly characterizes that disposition's defining mode of vision: panoramic perception.

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In a much-discussed 1996 article entitled 'The Decay of Cinema,' Susan Sontag wrote that, while it has recently become commonplace to lament the burning out of some fire in the life of cinema, what has in fact faded out is not the cinema itself, but a certain kind of intense loving relationship with the cinema that goes by the name 'cinephilia.' Beginning in the post-

war period in France and the UK, and carrying over to the US and elsewhere by the 1960s and 70s, the cinema was the most urgent and important art form going, interacting in extraordinarily diverse ways with its cultural and historical moment. Thanks in large part to the writings of passionate cinephile critics, the movies achieved a widespread cultural respectability. As a result, even 'average' moviegoers developed a respect and appreciation for cinema as the art form for the times, and they happily accepted the challenges offered by ambitious, personal, unconventional films. But, Sontag laments, those days are over. One hardly finds anymore 'the distinctive cinephilic love of movies that is not simply love but a certain taste in films (grounded in a vast appetite for seeing and reseeing as much as possible of cinema's glorious past). Cinephilia itself has come under attack as something quaint, outmoded, snobbish. For cinephilia implies that films are unique, unrepeatable, magic experiences' (1996: 61).

Sontag's essay stimulated a number of American critics (David Denby, Stanley Kauffmann, and others) to pen their own considerations about the life and alleged demise of cinephilia, and in Europe, too, the topic of cinephilia was preoccupying film lovers of various stripes. Both *Vertigo* number 10 and *Cahiers du Cinéma* number 498 featured dossiers on cinephilia, and in March 1995, Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Frémaux organized a conference, 'The Invention of a Culture: A History of Cinephilia,' at the Lumière Institute in Lyon. In Europe, however, the discussion has been marked less by a gnashing of teeth over cinephilia's alleged demise than by a more measured consideration of what exactly cinephilia was - what defined it, what forces brought it into being, and what effects it had. Coincident with the Lyon conference, de Baecque and Frémaux published a statement about their project that is representative of the differences between US and European considerations of cinephilia. De Baecque and Frémaux propose to treat cinephilia as an historical object of study; that is, they see cinephilia - which they define as 'a way of watching films, of speaking about them, and then of diffusing this discourse' (1995: 134) - as designating a cultural phenomenon defined by various practices including (among other things) individual and collective relationships with the cinema, bodies of critical writings in both the specialized and general press, certain conditions of distribution and exhibition, intellectual and political currents, and so forth - all of which coalesced during a specific historical period, roughly the two decades from the immediate post-war period until the events of '68. Cinephilia, they argue, was no common subculture, but rather one that tranformed the cultural status of cinema and profoundly altered 20th century culture in general, both high and low.

Of its various elements, de Baecque and Frémaux note, 'The first object of cinephilic study is its cultural - we could almost say cult - practices. The dark cinema has often been compared to a temple, and it is true that cinephilia, although it is carried out in the most secular of spaces, is marked by a great religiosity of its ceremonies' (1995: 134). Like most religious ceremonies, the cinephilic experience is both collective and individual, rational and emotional. Paramount among these ceremonies are the particular viewing practices of individual cinephiles; for them, 'everything comes to depend on how one sees films, from where in the audience, in what position, according to which individual framing' (1995: 134). Jean Douchet has described his own viewing practices in detail.

> I have to enter the auditorium by the right-hand stairway and aisle. Then I sit to the right of the screen, preferably in the aisle seat, so that I can stretch my legs. This is not just a matter of physical comfort, or the view: I have constructed this vision for myself. For a long time, at the Cinémathèque, I sat in the front row, in the middle, with no one in front to disturb me, in order to be completely immersed in the show, always alone. Even today, it's impossible for me to go to the cinema with anyone, it disrupts my emotion. But over the years and after many films, I've drawn back a bit, off to the right, and I've found my axis toward the screen. At the same time, I've positioned my spectatorial body with minute care, adopting three basic positions:stretched out on the ground, legs draped over the seat in front of me, and, finally, my favorite but the most difficult position to achieve, the body folded in four with the knees pressed against the back of the

> seat in front of me. (1993: 34).

While tracing the emergence of specialized journals and ciné-clubs or describing the development of a key critical position might be easily charted in a traditional history, an account such as Douchet's, with all its particularities and peculiarities, would seem to escape conventional historiographic practices. But if we are to embark on a history of cinephilia, such specifics must be faced - especially since so many cinephiles describe experiences that are similar, yet uniquely their own, and because it is the individual's relationship with the cinema, more than anything else, that defines cinephilia. De Baecque and Frémaux argue that a history of cinephilia must itself seize hold of the passion that so marks cinephilic experience; indeed, it is the very place to begin. There are, of course, any number of rituals or activities of the cinephile that would be appropriate starting places for one part of a history of cinephilia. I'd like to propose the following.

The Cinephiliac Moment

In a 1994 dialogue with Noel King, Paul Willemen noted that in the varied body of critical writings associated with cinephilia there exists a recurring preoccupation with an element of the cinematic experience 'which resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks' (1994: 231). Willemen and King locate this resistant element specifically in the cinephile's characteristic 'fetishising of a particular moment, the isolating of a crystallisingly expressive detail' in the film image (1994: 227). That is, what persists in these cinephilic discourses is a preoccupation or fascination with what the various writers 'perceive to be the privileged, pleasure-giving, fascinating moment of a relationship to what's happening on screen' in the form of 'the capturing of fleeting, evanescent moments' (1994: 232). Whether it is the gesture of a hand, the odd rhythm of a horse's gait, or the sudden change of expression on a face, these moments are experienced by the viewer who encounters them as nothing less than a revelation. This fetishization of the otherwise ordinary details in the motion picture image is as old as the cinema itself. Indeed, as the story goes, the viewers of a century ago who watched the Lumière Brothers's *L'Arrosuer arossé* (1895) were delighted less by the scene being staged for their amusement than by the fact that, in the background, the leaves were fluttering in the wind.

In these 'subjective, fleeting, variable' moments (1994: 235), Willemen claims, 'What is seen is in excess of what is being shown': the cinephiliac moment 'is not choreographed for you to see. It is produced *en plus*, in excess or in addition, almost involuntarily' (1994: 237). Writing elsewhere about *photogénie*, which he regards as another name designating the experience of the cinephiliac moment, Willemen argues that such an encounter:

> pertains to the relationship between viewer and image, a momentary flash of recognition, or a moment when the look at . . . something suddenly flares up with a particular affective, emotional intensity. The founding aspect of cinematic quality . . . is located not in the recognition of an artistic sensibility or intentionality beyond the screen, as it were, but in the particular relationship supported or constituted by the spectatorial look, between projected image and viewer (1994: 126).

In a sense, the cinephiliac moment may be understood as a kind of *mise-en-abyme* wherein each spectator's obsessive relationship with cinema is embodied in its most concentrated form. Willemen cites his own fascination with 'the moment when the toy falls off the table in *There's Always Tomorrow*' (1994: 235), while Noel King notes that his cinephiliac moments regularly consist of 'dialogue performed via bodily gesture, a mixture of vocality and *mise-en- scène*': for example, in the famous dropped glove scene from *On the Waterfront*, King states, 'I tend to notice the number of times Eva Marie Saint tries to retrieve the glove and the things Brando does to delay this happening' (1994: 237). Other cinephiliacs have their own cherished moments. For example, of director Nicholas Ray, critic David Thomson writes, 'it is as the source of a profusion of cinematic epiphanies that I recall him: Mitchum walking

across an empty rodeo arena in the evening in *The Lusty Men*, the wind blowing rubbish around him; that last plate settling slowly and noisily in *55 Days at Peking*; . . . the CinemaScope frame suddenly ablaze with yellow cabs in *Bigger Than Life*' (1994: 614). Lesley Stern describes one of her favored cinephiliac moments in detail:

> There is an extraordinary moment in *Blade Runner* when Pris, like a human missile, comes somersaulting straight toward us. One moment she is immobile (in a room full of mechanical and artifical toys she appears to be a wax doll); the next moment she is galvanized into life, her body moving at the speed of light. The force of her somersault charges the air; reconfiguring space and time, her bodily momentum is transmitted and experienced in the auditorium as bodily sensation. My stomach lurches. It is always surprising this moment, this movement, always and without fail it takes me aback. Yet what can it mean to yoke these incommensurate terms--*always* and *surprising*? Let me just say, at this point, that I am both surprised and haunted by this cinematic moment. I can't quite put my finger on the feeling it evokes, though there is a phrase of [Jean] Epstein's that resonates: 'On the line of communication the static of unexpected feelings interrupts us' (1997: 350).

While it is clear that some of the moments identified above are not accidental or marginal, but rather carefully designed and choreographed, the emphasis the viewers places on them is greater than their visual quality or narrative importance should provoke. It is thus important to make a distinction here between Willemen's cinephiliac moment and more common memorable filmic moments, such as the ones described famously by Walker Percy in his novel, *The Moviegoer*:

> Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in books. I too once met a girl in Central Park, but it was not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach*, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man.* (1960: 7)

While I would not want to deny for a second the extraordinary pleasure that filmic moments such as these bring to both the cinephiliac and the ordinary movie fan, they do not qualify as cinephiliac moments as I am using that term because they are precisely designed to be memorable; and they are memorable because they are both visually striking and narratively important. A recent cover article in *Entertainment Weekly* focused on 100 such memorable movie moments from 1950 to the present, such as the shower scene from *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchock, US, 1960) and Marilyn Monroe's billowing skirt in *The Seven Year Itch* (Billy Wilder, US, 1955) - moments everyone remembers (1999). The moments in which I am interested are those which achieve this level of memorability - especially if only subjectively - even though that are not designed to. I will return to the relationship between cinephiliac moments and memory/memorability later. In the meantime, I want to again stress the subjectivity which results in the cinephile giving some incidental moment what Roger Cardinal has described as a 'wholly "unreasonable" priority and value' (1986: 114).

Cardinal, another critic who has written suggestively about the fascination with marginal details, argues that the identification of privileged moments is not just a subjective activity, but a 'self-reflexive' one. In 'Pausing Over Peripheral Detail,' he explains, 'What I notice, or elect to notice, is necessarily a function of my sensibility, so much so that a list of my favorite details will equate to an oblique mirror-image of myself, becoming more noticeably idiosyncratic the longer it extends' (1986: 118).

> Who else but I will have taken note of the black glasses worn by the man who sounds the curfew horn in Robison's *Warning Shadows* (1923); Lauren Bacall's

> hand clutching and unclutching at the back of the chair in the background in a tense scene in Huston's *Key Largo* (1948); the painting on A's bedroom wall of the mad Ludwig II of Bavaria out for a nocturnal sleighride, in Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1963); and of the author's name ("Juan Luis Echevarria") on the pink book shown to the camera at the climax of Ruiz's *Letter from a Library Lover* (1983)? (1986: 119).

It is, of course, possible that one or more of a viewer's privileged moments may be shared by another. For example, James Naremore has noted the curious number of other people who have remarked in print on one of his own favorite cinephiliac details: the color of Cary Grant's socks in the cropduster sequence from *North by Northwest* (1988: 214-215). But even held in common with others, such details remain one's own, no doubt in large part because the initial encounter was a private one, even though it occurred in the public space of a darkened theater. Cardinal notes, 'While any one of these collector's items could figure in someone else's inventory, the fact of their being grouped by me implies a characteristic angle of vision governed by my individual tastes and fetishes' (119). Lesley Stern, who links the feeling produced by such encounters to the euphoric experience of the uncanny, echoes Cardinal's argument about self-relflexivity, identifying these moments as 'a strange and unexpected meeting with yourself' (1997: 348).

For both Willemen and Cardinal, an important precedent for the fascination with marginal details in photographic images is Roland Barthes's 'The Third Meaning' (1977) and *Camera Lucida* (1981). In both these works, Barthes worked to identify that element of photographic representation that exceeds semiology's capacity to assign meaning. In the essay, he dubbed points of excess 'third' or 'obtuse' meanings; in the latter, making a clearer distinction between public and private, objective and subjective, he chose a different term: the *punctum*. The *punctum* is a site which, for Barthes, disturbs or punctures the unity of the *studium*, which he defines as the culturally/ideologically determined meaning communicated in a photo (a combination of denotation and connotation), one shared by the photographer who snaps a picture and the public who receives and recognizes it. The *punctum* is a detail which attracts him, which reaches out and pricks him: a boy's bad teeth or a woman's strapped pumps. Specifying its status as objectively present, but only subjectively provocative, Barthes writes that the *punctum* 'is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*' (1981: 55).

Importantly, Barthes concludes, the power of the *punctum* comes from its status as the mark of a prior presence. Barthes determined that, unlike language and other symbolic systems, which operate according to an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signifed and which banish the referent from consideration, the photographic sign is never arbitrary and, furthermore, always carries its referent with itself--both iconically and indexically. Because of the privileged relationship it possesses with what it represents, a photograph is the trace of a moment of life that was, in passing, captured by the camera, and then lost to time. 'What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once; the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially' (1981: 4). Emphasizing its close proximity to death as well as life, Barthes concludes, 'Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead' (1981: 32).

Colin MacCabe (1997) has noted the remarkable similarities between Barthes's last book and André Bazin's cornerstone theoretical statement, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image.' In that essay, Bazin analyzed photography's unique place in the history of image-making practices, all of which have sought 'the preservation of life by a representation of life' (1969: 10). Emphasizing its indexical status, Bazin compares a photograph to a death mask - the Shroud of Turin or the Veil of Veronica - a representation produced by direct contact with an object or person. This characteristic, in combination with the automatism of production, results in 'the irrational power' that the photograph has over us (1969: 14). Thus, Barthes's *punctum* or Willemen's cinephiliac moment - which Willemen links explicitly to Bazin's

photographic ontology (1994: 243) - is the site where this prior presence, this fleeting moment of history, is felt most intensely or magically. The experience of such revelatory moments, Willemen stresses, is an experience 'of relating to something that is dead, past, but alive in memory,' thus his choice of the term 'cinephiliac' over 'cinephilic,' because of the former's overtones of necrophilia' (1994: 227). Your moment of revelation 'may be different from the person sitting next to you, in which case you may have to dig him or her in the ribs with your elbow to alert them'; nevertheless, he concludes, 'There is a theory of the cinema implicit in the dig of the elbow into the ribs just as much as there is in Metz's work' (1994: 237). And perhaps, as we shall see, a theory of the *history* of cinema as well.

Panoramic Perception

While the encounter with cinephiliac moments may be a defining experience for the movie lover, locating them requires a different spectatorial posture than the one assumed and prescribed by dominant cinema. In contrast to that cinema's correctly disciplined viewer is one who, as Roger Cardinal writes, possesses a 'wilfully perverse gaze' (1986: 118), one that actively resists the congruity forced on images by the continuity system and instead seeks out the details not categorizable as *studia.* Cardinal explains:

> A distinction thus emerges between two divergent strategies of viewing. The first is the 'literate' mode in which a single-minded gaze is directed towards the obvious *Gestalt* or figure on offer; where the artist has centred or signalled his image in accordance with the conventions of representation, the viewer's gaze will be attuned to the focal message and will ignore its periphery. [. . .] The second mode is one which focuses less narrowly and instead roams over the frame, sensitive to its textures and surfaces--to its ground. This mode may be associated with 'non-literacy' and with habits of looking which are akin to habits of touching. The mobile eye which darts from point to point will tend to clutch at fortuitous detail or to collect empathetic impressions of touch sensations (1986: 124).

Paul Willemen has described this alternative spectatorial activity in a similar way, calling it a 'critical trawling operation' (1994: 238), and Kaja Silverman, writing about Barthes's *punctum*, has dubbed this alternative method of watching a 'productive look.' Driven by 'an appetite for alterity,' she writes, productive cinematic lookers are drawn to those moments which lie outside of, exceed, or are marginal to the 'given-to-be-seen' of the film at hand (1995: 181).

This alternative mode of looking and the discoveries it makes are similar to what Wolfgang Schivelbusch, in his book *The Railway Journey*, calls 'panoramic perception' (1986: 61). Prior to the railway, Schivelbusch explains, the fastest and most common method of long-distance travel had been the horse-drawn coach; but with the development of the railroad, it became possible to triple the amount of distance traditionally covered in a given period of time. This dramatic increase in the speed of travel had a profound effect not only on people's concepts of space and time, but also on their habits of visual perception. As the rail traveler, in his common posture, sat gazing out the window of the compartment, watching a landscape from which he was disconnected roll past, he would fix on some object or detail in the tableau he viewed - a particle that might have, under different circumstances, gone unnoticed - and would follow it for the brief moment that it was in his field of vision. Schivelbusch cites the nineteenth century travel journalist Benjamin Gastineau, who wrote that this 'novel ability,' this capacity 'to perceive the discrete, as it rolls past the window indiscriminately,' was best described as '"la philosophie synthétique du coup d'oeil" ("the synthetic philosophy of the glance")' (1986: 60).

Numerous film scholars have explored the link between Schivelbusch's description of the rail traveler gazing out the window and the experience of the viewer before the cinema screen, and, indeed, Schivelbusch himself describes panoramic perception as 'filmic.' But most

scholars have focused on Schivelbusch's point that, due in part to the 'frame' of the railcar window, travelers experienced a feeling of separation from the landscape they observed, and that this separation provoked a different perceptual posture. A comparison is then made, for example, between the passive traveler-spectator gazing out the window and the passive moviegoer-spectator gazing at the cinema screen. While this is no doubt a crucial component, Schivelbusch is clear about what he means by the term. 'What, exactly,' he asks, 'did this new perception that we are referring to as "panoramic" consist of?' His answer is clear: '*the tendency to see the discrete indiscriminately*' (1986: 61). While scholars have been inclined to articulate the general analogy between the viewing circumstances of the rail traveler and the movie viewer, they have focused less energy on exploring what Schivelbusch himself clearly identifies as this defining feature of panoramic perception: the inclination to fix on irrelevant details in the landscape (or images) that pass before the viewer's eyes.

In making this comparison between the cinephile spectator and Schivelbusch's rail traveler, I do not want to suggest that the cinephile simply forsakes the primary, attentive viewing mode Roger Cardinal describes for its alternative, the panoramic. Rather, like that prototype of the modern spectator, the *flâneur*, the cinephile engages with both modes - absorption and distraction -simultaneously. Tom Gunning has explained that, 'As an observer *par excellance*, the *flâneur* attempted to assert both independence from and insight into the urban scenes he witnessed' (1997: 28). Similarly, the cinephile is, on the one hand, focused in the way that the film's makers would want him or her to be. But as the most 'literate' of film viewers, able to 'read' what's on offer with comparatively little effort, the cinephile has a certain amount of perceptual energy left over. This energy is then devoted to a posture which facilitates the panoramic scanning of the image, or even the entirety of a film. The cinephile thus supplements the absorbed gaze of the classical-era spectator with the distracted glance of the early-era movie goer. Writing about his viewing of films from the transitional teen years, Cinémathèque Français director Dominique Païni states that he found himself in just this divided position. 'I installed myself in a *flânerie* comparable to that posture which has been well known since Baudelaire, one between lassitude and perception. . . between being captive and distanced.' Distracted from the narrative, Païni found himself noticing 'the micro-events of existence recorded on film,' such as 'reflections of crowds in store windows, "veduta" [Italian for 'view' or 'sight'] of a street in the background' (1996: 57). Christian-Marc Bosséno has written that the history of cinephilia is marked by a 'simultaneous immersion and distancing' (1995: 153), and Jean Douchet offers further confirmation, saying that he 'began to sit off to the right' in the theater in order to 'sweep the screen with my eyes quickly.' He explains, 'I find that this position to the right allows for an oblique angle which facilitates this sweeping vision' (1993: 34).

The comparison between the *flâneur* and the cinephile continues. Gunning writes that the *flâneur*'s 'leisurely observation,' undertaken with a certain 'epistemological confidence,' is disrupted when he encounters something or someone which does not 'conform to any established typology' (1997: 28). This provocative illegibility, Walter Benjamin argues, pushes the *flâneur* into one of two alternative positions: either he loses his detached individuality and is absorbed into the crowd, becoming a *badaud* (gawker), one of the city's unthinking horde; or else he actively investigates what he cannot read so as to render it legible like everything else in his gaze, and he thus becomes an amateur detective (1973: 69). For the cinephile-*flâneur*, however, such encounters provoke not anxiety, but rather intense pleasure, and instead of either being paralyzed into passive illiteracy (suggesting sudden incompetence as a visual reader) or active hermeneutic investigation (suggesting an intended 'meaning' behind what he sees), the cinephile suddenly becomes that other Benjaminian figure, the collector. Willemen writes, 'the notion of collecting is not a bad analogy in the sense that you are talking about discrete objects, moments, which are being serialised in your mind into collections, which is how Walter Benjamin talked about it. In the end, perhaps, the moment of cinephilia has to do with the serialisation of moments of revelation' (1994: 233).

Although panoramic perception emerged out of the experience of rail travel, it was also a spontaneous and, more importantly, a *productive* response to the distracted state provoked by

the modern technology, for this mode of vision was a way to recover the loss of sensuous experience that so marked the individual's experience of the modern world. Walter Benjamin has written that the individual who is subjected to the barrage of stimuli that characterizes modernity develops an anesthetic shell, or what Freud called a 'stimulus shield,' to protect himself from the repeated perceptual 'shocks' to his neurological system. This individual lives in a state in which ordinary sense experience is cut off from cognition. Susan Buck-Morss has explained that, for Benjamin, the key task facing the individual - especially the artist - in modernity is 'to undo the alienation of the corporeal sensorium and *to restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self-preservation*, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by *passing through* them' (1992: 4-5).

Rail travelers engaged in panoramic perception, Schivelbusch suggests, have found a way to do just this. He writes that the 'intensive experience of the sensuous world,' which had been so thoroughly dulled by the excessive stimuli of modernity, 'underwent a resurrection' in the rail traveler's development of a panoramic style of perception (1986: 63). Schivelbusch further notes that around the same time, this recovery of sensuous experience also found a site in photography. Making an explicit link between panoramic perception and the perceptual idiosyncracies of the mid-nineteenth century people who gazed at the first photographs, Schivelbusch cites Hans Buddemier, who wrote that the public was at first fascinated 'Not by the taking of a picture of any specific object, but by the way in which any random object could be made to appear on the photographic plate' (1986: 62). Describing 'how intensely the first photographs were scrutinized, and what people were looking for,' Buddemeir writes:

> For instance: looking at a picture of a building across the street from one's own window, one first started counting the roof shingles and the bricks out of which the chimney was constructed. [. . .] Tiny, until then unnoticed details are stressed continuously: paving stones, scattered leaves, the shape of a branch, the traces of rain on the wall (1986: 63).

This account of attention to photographic details recalls Barthes's *punctum*, especially in the way that the experience of them extends beyond the realm of the 'visual-metaphoric' and into what Roger Cardinal dubbed a 'tactile-metonymic dimension' (1986: 124). The encountering of cinephiliac moments, then, marks another such recovery of sensuous experience resulting from a passage through the technologies of modernity. Indeed, crucial to Cardinal's comparison of the two types of viewers is that the individual who views panoramically experiences what he or she encounters not just visually, but in a more broad sensory way, even a bodily way. Lesley Stern underscores the 'sensory affect' produced by the moment she describes (1997: 361), and Cardinal reminds us that what is strongest in Barthes's response to the *punctum* is its 'physical aspect. The recognition is an event which "stings" and engages his entire body' (1986: 124). At the 1995 Lyon conference on cinephilia, Sylvia Harvey argued that crucial to Bazin's preoccupation with the photographic image's ontological staus was his experience of 'the specific sensuous quality of the medium' of cinema (1996: 235).

It is in these moments of revelation that the cinema achieves that doubling effect so valued by Walter Benjamin (1978). As Michael Taussig has explained, for Benjamin, mimesis in its most desired form involves not only a visual copying or imitation, but also 'a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived' (1993: 21). These two features in combination - 'copy and contact' - are, of course, what characterize the photographic image. Like Bazin, Benjamin linked modern mimetic machines to ancient or 'primitive' mimetic practices, both in process and effect. A representation bears a certain visual similarity to its model, but is also produced by physical contact with it (eg, Bazin's "death mask"); this combination of features, in turn, provokes an analogous set of responses in the viewer: recognition of visual copy and stimulation of sensuous response, as if by physical contact. These characteristics result, Benjamin wrote, in the photograph's ability to give 'its products a magical value' that 'a painted picture can never have' (1979: 243). Like Barthes, Benjamin found this doubling effect registered most powerfully in the details which

are mark a prior presence: 'No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search the picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has seared the subject' (1979: 243). Like both those later theorists, Benjamin gave special attention details that bore the strongest physical sense of the indexical mark of the referent.

A Cinephiliac History?

While this recovery of sensuous experience achieved by passing through the machines of modernity is in itself a valuable thing, there is more at stake in all this. Susan Buck-Morss, elaborating on Benjamin's theory, has explained that, under the extreme sensory stress that the individual faces in modernity, the synaesthetic system - that apparatus where 'external sense-perceptions come together with internal images of memory and anticipation' - breaks apart: 'The ego employs the consciousness as a buffer, blocking the openness of the synaesthetic system, thereby isolating present consciousness from past memory. Without the depth of memory, experience is impoverished' (1992: 16). Conversely, without sense experience's connection to cognition, the individual is cut off from history and memory. Thus, cinephiliac moments mark not only the recovery of sensuous experience; they also mark the possibility of the recovery of history. That is, in the very technologies which precipitate the obliteration of history, one finds, to use Siegfried Kracauer's terms, the possibility of its redemption.

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer claimed that film possesses a unique ability to disclose the sensuous and ephemeral aspects of the material world. Identifying film's basic property as its ability to record the particulars of reality - and most powerfully the 'unstaged,' the 'fortuitous,' and the 'indeterminate' (1997: 60-74) - Kracauer further argued that while a photograph is a record of a moment of history, it is also an annihilation of dominant discourses of history, for the filmic image reveals instead the residuum of nature that, as Heide Schlüpmann has written, 'challenges the ideology of historical omnipotence' (1987: 103). By directing our attention to 'nature' - which may be understood in Barthesian terms as whatever cannot be contained by the concepts of 'culture' and 'ideology' - film directs our attention to the relativity of any historical account, especially those which make claims on any objective, encompassing truth. In its concrete but ephemeral material details, film shows most vividly what the discourse of history is 'constantly evading and continuously passes over: the remnants of nature in it' (1987: 103). These remnants exist as phantoms of multiple other histories - uncontainable by the contextualizing discourse in question - which are waiting to be written.

If Kracauer noted the limits that film revealed for modern historiography, it was his colleague, Walter Benjamin, who saw the necessity of experimenting with alternative historiographic forms. The approach he took could indeed be described as 'photographic' or 'cinematic' because it was both focused on and generated out of the kinds of material details - the ephemeral cultural detritus - that photography so effortlessly illuminated. For Benjamin, the individual encountering the world and the images of its past in a distracted state could suddenly be seized by the power of one of those images or by some detail in it - an experience he compared to Proust's description of the *memoire involuntaire*. As the most powerful of sense memories, beyond 'the promptings of memory which obey the call of attentiveness,' the *memoire involuntaire* - an image we have never seen before we remember it - was for Proust a signal that 'the past is "somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), though we have no idea which one it is"' (1969: 158). Cinephiliac moments could be described similarly. As Lesley Stern's essay makes clear, we remember cinephiliac moments and anticipate them with excitement on subsequent viewings, but such moments also have the quality of involuntary memories in our initial encounters with them. Edward Casey has written that, in watching a film, 'we are in a strange no-man's land in which past and present are not clearly distinguished - opening up a new space in which we can quasi-remember. It is very much as if we were remembering what is being presented to us in

images: as if it were familiar enough to be genuinely recognized by us' (1981: 261). Similarly, Barthes writes that the *punctum* often reveals itself to him not on first seeing a photo, but rather in his recollection of it; further, the *punctum* itself provokes a vague experience of recognition, of memory (1981: 45).

Although the image which flashes up before one person may not be recognized by another, it is nonetheless a potential link to a broader history. Thus, unlike most Marxist influenced film theory - which, as Sylvia Harvey has written, has thoroughly 'secularized' film studies (1996) - Benjamin retained a belief in the encounter with revelatory moments; but he also believed that while such moments involve the personal, they can also function as doorways opening out beyond it, into the social, the cultural, the historical. 'Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word,' Benjamin wrote, 'certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past' (1969: 159). Such image-moments where past/present, individual/collective intertwine need simply to be discursively developed. 'In the field with which we are concerned,' he wrote, 'knowledge comes only in flashes. The text is the thunder rolling long afterward' (1983-84: 1). Richard Wolin quotes Benjamin as saying that, in this new historiographic text, 'The eternal would be the ruffles on a dress rather than an idea' (1982: 130).

As the model for a theorist and practitioner of an alternative historiographic form, Benjamin repeatedly cited Freud, and he regularly used psychoanalyis as a way to comparatively describe photographic images and their effects. 'The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses,' he wrote (1969: 237). Just as Freud's theories 'isolated and made analyzable things which heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception' (1969: 235), the photographic apparatus, Benjamin argued, similarly focused on 'hidden details of familiar objects,' revealing 'entirely new formations of the subject' (1969: 236). Through the practice of psychoanalysis, or the modern technologies of the railroad and the camera, figure and ground could be caused to suddenly shift places, and what was once ignored or unnoticed now registers with a striking, sensuous clarity. 'Evidently,' Benjamin concluded, 'a different nature opens itself to the camera than to the naked eye' (1969: 236).

The opening of this different nature in psychoanalysis can only be achieved through an alternative style of perception best described as 'distracted.' Freud believed that both dreams and the banal recollections fixed in our minds like snapshots are, in fact, emotionally-laden memories which contain, in a form radically reorganized by condensation and displacement, all a patient's crucial psychical information. Unlocking these dreams or 'screen memories' (as he called them) could only be carried through the patient's distracted free association/stream of consciousness monologue. Freud would advise his patients: 'You will be tempted to say to yourself: "This or that has no connection here, or it is quite unimportant, or it is nonsensical, so it cannot be necessary to mention it." Never give in to these objections, but mention it even if you feel a disinclination against it, or indeed just because of this' (1963: 147). Freud further provided a metaphor to help the patient adopt the desired approach: 'Say whatever goes through your mind. Act as though, for instance, you were a traveller sitting next to the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views you see outside' (1963: 147).

Freud was thus encouraging his patient to adopt a 'panoramic' approach to his or her past - like the passenger on the railway or the cinephile in the movie theater - productively distracted, selecting the discrete indiscriminately. Or at least *apparently* indiscriminately. For Freud, of course, those details generally regarded as marginal or irrelevant (dreams, slips of the tongue, forgetting) were crucial to the development of knowledge, understanding, insight. The key to composing this other history was in regarding that marginalia in the same way that details in photographs - paving stones, scattered leaves, the shape of a branch - were regarded by their early viewers. These details were the key to a history different from the one Freud's patients would give in an attentive frame of mind. In effect, Freud was telling his patients, 'If you talk to me in a rational, absorbed state, you will recount one story about

yourself; but if you adopt a posture of seemingly irrational distraction, we can construct an alternative history of your life.'

Thomas Elsaesser has recently encouraged the exploration of what he calls 'counter- factual' histories, that is, histories which would mine undeveloped or unconsidered points of entry into the cinema as object of study (1998: 47). Elsaesser argues that, in starting this project, the historian is wise to keep in mind the signs that appear at railroad crossings in rural France: 'Un tren peut en cacher un autre' ('One Train May Be Hiding Another'); in other words, Elsaesser suggests, the historian can easily become so focused on the discourse in front of him that he or she fails to see the other discourse of history which is passing immediately behind, showing through only intermittently, in flashes (1999). He writes:

> Such a counter-factual conception of history is not the opposite of a "real" history, but a view prepared to think into history all those histories that might have been, or might still be. [. . .] Film history is, strictly speaking, inconceivable if we cannot find in it the appropriate space that recognizes the cinema's place in our dreams as well as in our industries, but also its role in giving substance to all kinds of other possible universes and alternative histories which human beings have imagined and tried to make real (1998: 50).

De Baecque and Frémaux make a similar argument in their proposal for a history of cinephilia. Such a history, they write, would by definition be a 'reflexive' history, for rather than effectively repressing one's cinephilic identity in the way that Metz deemed necessary (1975: 15), and thus restricting oneself to addressing the social, generalizable elements of cinephilia, the cinephile historian would mobilize *both* the spectatorial experiences of the film worshiper in his temple: the collective and the individual, the public and the private, the shared and the secret, the intellectual and the emotional. For de Baecque and Frémaux, the model is the 'connoisseur' eulogized by Benjamin, one whose position 'falls halfway between the passionate practitioner and the intellectual' (1995: 142), one who holds both 'the proximity proper to the desire to tell a story, and the distance necessary to write a history' (1995: 142). Starting from the combination of public and private, the result would further be an intertextual history, one drawing freely from and mixing various voices and discourses, mirroring as it does the concatenation of forces that produced cinephilia, as well as the cinema itself. De Baecque and Frémaux argue, 'The historian must be literary critic, anthropologist, sociologist, political historian, and a cinephile him - or herself.' These shifting roles, as well as the variety of sources drawn from and combined, leads inevitably to 'very different ways of writing history' (1995: 136).

> The world of the film is not closed. It welcomes, it aspires to, alterity. Often the film is nothing more than an impure mediation, the necessary element, bubbling with culture, which leads from one source to another. This dialogue is important, because this is how the materiality of this history takes shape, which we could call the dense or compacted source. Even if it entails provocation, we must contend that while all sources are not born free and equal, nevertheless they all have the right to the same consideration, to being dissolved into a continuous but heterogenous whole (1995: 136).

But if we see cinephiliac moments as the flashes of another history, how to develop that history? Benjamin believed that although the photographic image may have a privileged relationship to the moment it represents, the task of the historian is not to re-present that prior presence, but rather to take possession of it for one's own use and for the construction of an expanded history. Benjamin notes that when Proust encounters a *mémoire involuntaire*, he immediately confronts it with a voluntary memory, 'one that is in service of the intellect,' and proceeds from there (1969: 158). Lesley Stern's provocative essay about her moment from *Blade Runner* is an excellent model. Rather than attempting a hermeneutic operation, assuming an intended 'meaning' behind her moment, Stern proceeds from the initial, revelatory moment metonymically (the term used by both Cardinal and Barthes), via

voluntary intellect (in the manner of psychoanalysis), associatively linking her moment to other similar ones from the history of cinema, expanding and developing its potential personal and historical or theoretical connections, producing an effect of knowledge while maintaining the mysterious, sensuous quality of the encounter. A collection of writing generated from such moments would be a memory book of cinema--our dream of the cinema, or the cinema's dream of us.

* * *

Bonnie and Clyde, Buck and Blanche, and CW are holed up in a motor hotel in Platte City, Iowa. They are ambushed by the laws, and a horrible, violent, painful, exhausting shoot-out ensues. They find refuge and rest in a field, but when the sun comes up, the shooting starts again. The gang climbs back into their cars and attempt an escape. They buzz in circles, randomly, as the posse fires at will. A medium close-up shot looking in the driver's side window: Clyde is at the wheel, the car hurtling along toward screen left. Suddenly, a shotgun blast hits Clyde in the upper arm, throwing him back into the car, away from us. The two powerful motions: the car racing forward, Clyde being thrown perpendicularly away.

I first saw *Bonnie and Clyde* on a re-release in the early 1970s. I did not see it again for several years, but when I did, it was this image of Clyde being hit by a shot-gun blast that provoked a *frisson* of involuntary recognition. Since then, every time I see the film, I wait for it with anticipation, and dread.

It's worth noting how many of the most violent scenes in *Bonnie and Clyde* occur not in the banks the gang rob, but in or near automobiles as they make their getaway. This is historically appropriate, for as Robert Benton and David Newman wrote in the preface to their screenplay:

> A few factors contributed to [Depression-ers gangsters'] flourishing. First, there were fast cars, and there had never been such fast cars before, cars that could do up to 90 mph. And so these southwest bandits replaced the horse of Jesse James and Billy the Kid with Fords, LaSalles and Plymouths. But otherwose, their style was the same.
>
> But the cars wouldn't have been much good without the roads. The early 30's brought the interstate highways to America. Smooth roads that were designed to keep things moving swiftly. Fast cars and fast roads to drive on - a bandit could rob a bank in one state, drive like hell, and be two hundred miles away from the scene of the crime by night (1972: 19).

The importance of cars and roads for the cinema is clear. Scenes of automobiles speeding along smooth roads have not only graced many movies, resulting in a genre beloved by cinephiles, but the auto industry itself gave the movie industry a method for production. With its division and specialization of labor, the studios achieved an equivalent to Detroit's assembly lines. But as Robert B. Ray has noted, the movie industry had to find a way to mass produce not an ascetic, functional product, but one that provoked enchantment (1998). And this it succeeded in an unprecedented way. But beyond the calculation of a sudden plot twist or a beautiful or striking image, the movies also give many of us something else: what we have been calling cinephiliac moments, encounters that are memorable beyond all apparent need or reason.

Of all the scenes involving cars and violence in *Bonnie and Clyde*, one of the most commonly memorable occurs when Clyde shoots in the face a bank manager who has jumped on the running board of the gang's car as they attempt to flee. The scene is memorable because the scene marks a sudden shift of tone in the film from Keysone Kops comic to brutally violent. Pauline Kael wrote in her original review that, 'During the first part of the picture, a woman in my row was gleefully assuring her companions, "It's a comedy. It's a comedy." After a while, she didn't say anything' (1968: 41). No doubt scenes like as the

death of the banker shut her up. Kael ended her review by writing that, in scenes such as these, '*Bonnie and Clyde* . . . has put the sting back into death' (1968: 58).

At my my first viewing of *Bonnie and Clyde*, I was probably about nine years old, much too young to be seeing it. I had been taken along with four siblings, all in their early teens, by an older, college age brother, Tim, and a friend of his, Cathy Reed. I had heard about the film's final massacre scene - I knew death was just up the road - and with the above-described scene functioning for me as a preview I was getting quite anxious. During the above-described shoot-out, Cathy, noticing my obvious discomfort, offered to take me out into the lobby until the film was over. I gladly accepted. It was for things like her extraordinary empathy that Tim's friend Cathy was a favorite of ours. We were always excited to see her driving down the street toward our house, and her car was easy to spot. She drove that most infamous of autombiles, the Chevrolet Corvair, which had been immortalized by Ralph Nader in *Unsafe at Any Speed*, his expose of the auto industry's criminal negligence in the deaths and injuries of thousands of people in car accidents every year. On the front of Cathy's Corvair was a license plate that sported her initials: C A R. My first screening of *Bonnie and Clyde* was the last time I'd ever see her. Two weeks later, Cathy was dead from meningitis.

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