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See table of contents

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Film is not like a dream because we can control our experience; we can close our eyes; we can choose to look at part of the screen, go into the lobby, look at our watches. Inversely, if watching something is like dreaming, says Carroll, we must also be having dream-like experiences when we go to a hockey game or listen to a teacher speak in a classroom.

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Since the mid 1970's the film studies community, in both North America and Europe has experienced a form of intoxication with film theory. In many circles, it is considered a mark of intellectual impoverishment to discuss a film without couching one's arguments in theoretical terms. Film studies conferences are awash with panelists making reference to "The Absent One," "interpellation," "the lack," "suture," and "the Symbolic." There is a continuous flow of books and articles in which (to use Noel Carroll's phrase) "Psycho-Semiotic Marxists" incorporate such concepts to substantiate their declarations about film. In fact, film as a medium often takes a back seat to theorizing, as witnessed in the recently published *Technologies of Gender* (Teresa de Lauretis) and *The Acoustic Mirror* (Kaja Silverman).

Contemporary film theory emerged as an outgrowth of the politicization of education in the late 1960's. This factor was coupled with the importance of film culture for the baby-boom generation, weaned on "old movies," on television and in repertory cinemas. These circumstances fueled the impulse to legitimize the study of film and to introduce an ideological dimension to the discipline. In response to the humanist, impressionistic criticism of *Cahiers du cinéma* and subsequent auteurists, the generation of film scholars that followed sought an alliance with more established, "scientific" domains, such as anthropology, linguistics, psychology and sociology. Currently, the "contemporary film theoreticians" (as Noel Carroll dubs them) form the new hegemony in film studies, and Carroll's book *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporay Film Theory* is the first book-length study that sets out specifically to debunk the principles on which these theories are based. Carroll's book also reflects and challenges the shift in intellectual thought from the Cartesian cogito to the post-structural position which holds that subjective knowledge of the self is formed by external discourse.

Mystifying Movies is preoccupied with the dominance of "the second semiology," rather than the by now largely discredited semiotics based on Saussurean linguistics. Carroll deals with the precepts on which contemporary film theory is based: psychoanalysis (as first incorporated in the works of Baudry and Metz); the conflation of Marxism and psychoanalysis (as prescribed by Al-

thusser and Lacan); the cinematic image ("illusionism," the masking of discourse by story, the "subject effect" of perspective); narration (the hidden ideological effects of film, the absent enunciator, notions of the identificatory process, the ability of narrative to create a "unified," "centered" subject) and finally, cinematic narration (which unlike narrative itself is the activity of formal filmic processes that "bind" the spectator into the discourse).

Carroll is careful in his introductory remarks to disengage himself from a critique of feminism. He bifurcates feminism in film studies thusly: first, "the study of the image of woman in film," and second, "feminists in film studies who work explicitly within an Althusserian-Lacanian theoretical framework." He applauds the project of the former, while arguing that the deficiencies of the second type of feminist analysis reside in their utilization of the wrong-headed presuppositions of all contemporary film theoreticians.

With graduate degrees in both film studies and philosophy, as well as a masterful understanding of psychology (both the Freudian and cognitive-perceptual models), Noel Carroll is ideally suited to the task at hand. Carroll proposes "to contest (...) what [he] takes to be the central tenets of contemporay film theory," and to present "rival accounts" for the film phenomena that "contemporary film theorists," purport to analyze. (The nomination "contemporary film theorists," like Carroll's use of the term "Psycho-Semiotic Marxists," is a mild form of censure.) Carroll underscores the point that he is not anti-theory—as many critics of contemporary film theory are—and in fact, considers himself a film theoretician. But he is nonetheless "suspicious of (...) big picture theory," i.e. theory that uses inductive methods and offers totalizing theories to account for all film effects.

Carroll's rendering of the foundational precepts of contemporay film theory is an invaluable guide to the less than cogent arguments proffered by the original theoreticians; *Mystifying Movies* should be mandatory reading for students engaged in the process of deciphering the works under discussion. Carroll explicates the basic ideas with lucidity, care and sometimes acerbic humour—no small feat. The primary structure he follows is to present the argument, break down the assumptions of the argument, and, as the debates become more directly enmeshed with film, Carroll offers competing theories of the same phenomena.

Carroll initially tackles Baudry, Metz, Althusser and Lacan as the figures who exert the most profound influence on contemporay film theoreticians. He finds the reasoning of these "founding fathers" faulty and largely untenable. Carroll begins his critique with a look at the adaptation of psychoanalysis in the seminal essays

of Baudry and Metz. At base, Carroll questions their experiential data on the process of watching a film, and further, the analogy both writers make between watching a film and having a (day or night) dream. He casts Baudry's dream/film equation into doubt on the level of common sense. Film is not like a dream because we can *control* our experience; we can close our eyes; we can choose to look at part of the screen, go into the lobby, look at our watches. Inversely, if watching something is like dreaming, says Carroll, we must also be having dream-like experiences when we go to a hockey game or listen to a teacher speak in a classroom. The "impression of reality" Baudry claims to be dream-like is similarly disavowed by Carroll. Films are accessible to the general public; dreams are not. Films can be repeated exactly, unlike dreams. I can turn to my neighbour and verify information at the movies; I cannot do so when I am dreaming.

Carroll writes even more disparagingly of Metz' appropriation of psychoanalytic concepts. He considers the major points in *The Imaginary Signifier* concerning: presence and absence, the use of the Lacanian mirror stage, identification with the camera and the crucial notions of voyeurism, fetishism and disavowal—all of which become cornerstones for later theoreticians. Short of summarizing Carroll's precise rebuttals, it is important to note the two essential problems he locates in the application of psychoanalytic concepts to film. Carroll finds fault with Metz' reasoning by analogy, using dreams as the explanatory term. In order to understand the logic of reasoning by analogy it is necessary to know *more* about the part of the analogy used for the purpose of illumination. If dreams are the analog that explicate the workings of film, we should know more about dreams than about film. But, as Carroll insists, this is not the case; we probably have much more empirical data about films than dreams. Second, Carroll asks, what is the point of enjoining psychoanalytic concepts to explain film, when psychoanalysis is designed to conceptualize irrational behaviour? Isn't making a film the product of a rational mind? Why embrace a discipline inherently so ill-suited to the purposes advanced? Carroll, in his work on the horror film (to be anthologized in a forthcoming volume) is an enthusiastic advocate of psychoanalytic interpretations of film; he considers psychoanalysis to be the *lingua franca* of the horror genre. Where themes of the unconscious, the irrational, the nightmare and pathological sexual subtexts reign, psychoanalytic theory has superior powers of illumination. The specific application of psychoanalysis to a particular body of work is a good example of the "bottom-up" approach that Carroll recommends for film theory.

Carroll proceeds to dismantle the scaffolding of Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He finds that Althusser, unlike Marx, allows for no possibility of social or political growth. We are all unknowing "subjects" formed and dominated by ideology not of our construction. If we believe that we have free will, it is because we misrecognize our acts as free acts. How then, can we hope to refuse negative ideology? There is a tacit assumption in much contemporary film theory that audiences are unable to distinguish "politically correct" films from ones which are not, and that moreover, the ideological power of films is so effective that it is capable of "subjecting" unsuspecting audiences to a form of ideological brainwashing. Luckily, as Carroll ironically points out, contemporary film theoreticians are not subject to these same effects and are able to avoid the ideological traps that threaten to dominate the "average" audience. Carroll argues that because we are subject to the laws of human society, it does not follow that we are not free to choose within that society. Carroll, with typically wry humour, reveals the faulty Althusserian position as presented by Kaja Silverman (a model Althusserian-Lacanian) in *The Subject of Semiotics*:

> Within the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, the individual is said to be invested with the belief that she is autonomous, but this is a false belief in the service of ideology. But why does the contemporary theorist deny autonomy to the individual? Earlier we read Silverman offering as a reason that the subject's discourse is constrained by the rules of language; it can only speak by means of a pre-existing linguistic system. However, the assumption, in this argument, of what freedom would have to be, were there such a thing, is too extravagant. For this argument appears to presuppose that no speaking subject is free unless it creates the language it speaks. But this is absurd. If I have a hammer and I *can* use it to build a house, or a hobby horse, or simply use it to pound the ground, then it seems to me that I am free in what I hammer. And if I hammered someone who annoyed me—while certifiably sane—I would be responsible for my act since it was free. But Silverman's argument, by logical analogy, whould have it that I am not free because I did not invent hammers. This idea of freedom, however, is unacceptably exorbitant, and any argument that uses it as a standard of what freedom is is unsound. As Silverman's argument exemplifies, there is a presumption amoung Althusserian-Lacanians that if human actions have certain structural conditions, they constrain human action in a way inimitable to autonomy. Languages have both syntactical rules and semantical rules. But it is strange to think of these as constraints that preclude autonomy. For these very features of language are what enable the speaker to speak—to, for example, denounce capitalism. If the language lacked these structural conditions, nothing could be said, which would in fact be a real blow to the possibility of human autonomy. (78-79)

Because Althusser incorporates Lacanian psychoanalysis into his account of social formations (in order to correct the perceived lack in Marxism of a psychoanalytic account of the working of ideology), Lacan's postulations are the next candidates for Carroll's condemnation:

> Since the construction of subjects possessed by the faith that they are free and unified is the foundational operation of ideology, contemporary film theorists will take as their central task the explanation of the ways in which film does this. Since Lacanian theory purportedly is best suited for analyzing subject construction, the film theorist will concentrate on the ways in which film engages the psychic mechanisms that stimulate subject production. In part, this involves triggering the psychic mechanism called the Imaginary which again and again rehearses its mirror stage performance by projecting the sense of subject unity on the basis of the apparent unities issuing from the other. The task of film researchers, then, becomes the isolation of the features of films that impart impressions of apparent unity. For these will be ideological levers that trigger the psyche to endorse the illusion of subjet unity. Some of these features of film, as ensuing chapters will elaborate, include the perspectival image, narrative structure, synchronized sound, point-of-view editing, and a panoply of other cinematic devices. The film researcher will also have to examine the way in which cinema engages the Symbolic in its process of subject construction, and this will involve, most especially, showing how, despite the intimations of difference and heterogeneity that comme with engaging the Symbolic, film, particularly of the sort called movies, contains the impression of heterogeneity in favor of the illusion of wholeness and homogeneity which promotes confidence in the supposed *sine qua non* of ideology: the unified autonomous subject. (72)

Carroll confronts Lacanian psychoanalysis with deep skepticism. He questions the methods by which Lacan has obtained his information. In Lacan's corpus, there is rarely any evidence presented regarding his development of ideas concerning the mirror stage, the Imaginary of the Symbolic. Lacan authoritatively discusses infant response in the mother's womb before birth and immediately after; one wonders where he acquired this information. Yet the "lost wholeness" of the womb is, according to Lacan, what precipitates thes quest for subjecthood, and it is the mirror reflection that provides the (mis) recognition of that lost plenitude and unity. The creation of this endless circle of desire to fulfill "the lack" of lost unity leads to a dependence on "the Other" to soothe these unpleasurable feelings of "difference." "The Other" is "the law," "the name-of-the-father," "the phallus"—the Symbolic, the anchoring concept through which meaning is made and understood. We are positioned as subjects by a power external to ourselves. Thus, whereas the Imaginary bespeaks wholeness and unity, the Symbolic is predicated on division and difference. These key concepts will be used *ad nauseum* by contemporary film theoreticians to explain

the process of spectating; it is the use of these concepts that Carroll finds troubling. The notion of "subject positioning" is applied indiscriminately to everything—to movies, to our relationship with our parents, to sentences. If there is virtually no clinical data that supports the existence of the Imaginary in the first place, how can it be used with such facility to explicate a vast array of different phenomena? As in the case of the dream analogy, the term being used for purposes of edification is poorly understood and documented. Moreover, Carroll complains, words such as "unity" and "homogeneity" are used interchangeably and often unintelligibly. How can the unity of a film, a body, a sentence and a landscape painting all mean the same thing? If the foundational concepts, i.e. the Imaginary and the Symbolic are poorly evidenced, then the so-called ideological effects that these phenomena are purported to have upon the viewer must also be suspect. And yet it is the primary task of contemporary film theoreticians to validate the working of the Imaginary and the Symbolic to position the viewer as a "unified autonomous agent" in relation to the "law" and language; every act of discourse serves to renew this relationship.

Once Carroll has established serious problems with the basic supports of contemporary film theory, he challenges the concept of the "unity-making" features which mask the real disunity between all discourse and its subjects. Carroll reserves his special animus for Stephen Heath. (This book is largely a reworking of Carroll's part in the Heath/Carroll debates in *October* in 1982-83.) In *Mystifying Movies*, Carroll makes a convincing case that Heath's arguments have an "imaginary" coherence only through the persistence of his rhetoric. Carroll exposes the obtuse grammatical constructions, vague metaphors and faulty reasoning on which Heath's arguments rest. Heath is employing the same explanatory process—that films "center," "position," and "bind" the spectator—to articulate and describe every filmic device and effect. Perspective (the organization of the frame), narrative (e.g. closure, causality and meaning), and suture (formal devices e.g. shot-reverse-shot, camera movement, etc.) are simply not the same thing and cannot be lumped together in the same category. Carroll finds that ultimately, by trying to explain all filmic phenomena using one all-encompassing explanation, contemporary film theory renders itself meaningless. In a passage on suture theory which might well be used to describe an entire array of "explanations" in film theory, he writes:

> If suture theory is threadbare as film theory, it is also impoverished as a putative scientific theory. Scientific theories are aimed at explaining *specific* variations in phenomena. But expanded versions of suture theory, in claiming that all discourse, including all film discourse, is to be explained in terms of suture, is rather like the theory

> that God makes everything happen. I ask why the flower died, the brakes jammed, and the sun rose, and I am told that in each case "God made it happen." I soon see that this kind of answer is going to get me nowhere in understanding the phenomena at issue, and I search for answers in terms of the more restricted fields of biology, auto-mechanics, and astronomy. Similarly, if I ask what makes a simple declarative sentence coherent, an offscreen sound intelligible, and a structuralist materialist film comprehensible, and I am told in each case that suture makes it happen, then I begin to suspect that the answer is more general than the question with which I am concerned.
>
> In order to avoid vacuity, a theory must not only explain why x is the case but also under what circumstances x would not be the case. If I attempted to explain why a certain flower would live and why it would die by saying that "God wills it," then my explanation would be vacuous. A scientific theory must not only explain how such and such a state of affairs came about but also how things might have been otherwise had the relevant conditions been otherwise. (196-197)

Carroll's alternate accounts of film phenomena are adduced by plausible, comprehensible and knowledgeable views of what makes movies powerful and appealing. He writes that movies are:

> (...) eminently transmissible between cultures and their transmissibility is not hindered by illiteracy. Clearly, this suggests an important feature of movies that accounts for their widespread accessibility across cultures and classes.
>
> Another feature of movies that accounts for their accessibility is that movies tend to be narrative, concerned primarily with depictions of human actions. For narrative is, in all probability, our most pervasive and familiar means of explaining human activity (...).
>
> Erotetic narration and the use of visual devices such as variable framing contribute to the special clarity of movies—to their heightened intelligibility when compared to the typical series of events we encounter is everyday life. Furthermore, this clarity, I submit, is the basis of our intense response to and engagement with movies. Movies appeal to our cognitive faculties by virtue of their forms. They answer questions that they vividly pose and they do this by means of potentially very economical devices for making relevant details salient. (210-211)

His theories of "movie narration" (i.e. storytelling), "cinematic narration" (the devices used to make narration intelligible), and "movie music" are cogent and compelling, relying (unlike most contemporary film theory) on a plethora of examples culled from a broad spectrum of film styles and history. Although these sections are brief, and may seem reductive to some, it must be remembered that Carroll's main objective is to unmask the fallacies of contemporary film theory. Carroll presents his own views in part, one

would think, not only to offer a way of looking at films based on deductive reasoning, but also to vitiate the unrelentingly negative thrust of the text.

There are a few problems with *Mystifying Movies*. One is Carroll's omission of a deeper discussion of auteurism and auteur-structuralism. He provides an interesting diachronic history of film theory in relation to photography, beginning with "The Realists" (Arnheim, Balazs, etc.) proceeding to "The Creationists" (led by Bazin) and ending with his main cast of characters "The Psycho-Semiotic Marxists." The movement from auteurism to cine-structuralism (or auteur-structuralism) marks a reaction against the philosophy of the self as central to the process of knowing and creating. This shift delineates a crucial step in film theory, because once cine-structuralism is found wanting, the locus of film theory moves away from a concentration on structure to one on operations and spectatorial activity. This trajectory needs greater documentation within the context of Carroll's project. It must also be remarked that Carroll's writing is dry, and when one reaches the second half of the text, the ideas become repetitious. On the other hand, theoretical writing is probably, by its very nature, an enemy of facility and Carroll *is* dealing with arguments that are largely based on circular (and circuitous) reasoning.

Mystifying Movies represents a serious and momentous occasion in the history of film theory. It is a provocative disquisition that will elicit anger and acclamation. Noel Carroll and several others, notably David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, are in the vanguard of a movement that proposes to re-evaluate and re-write film theory; it is work that needs to continue and flourish. Too many ideas by too few people have gone unchallenged for too long. Carroll's book redresses an important "lack" in the dominion of contemporary film theory.

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