

Untitled

Laurent Jullier

1. There is first a problem with the French word “cinophilia,” which, as Genevieve Sellier¹ and Noël Burch have shown,² is a modernist, formalist, and masculine attachment to cinema—and not at all, thus, the equivalent of the love of cinema. The “cinophilia” of De Baecque (whose book is an “essay,” and not the rigorous ethnological study of a behavior), is a Parisian version of this cinophilia. And it has not varied since the time of *Cahiers du cinéma* (the 1950/1960s): there is still a cult of Great Men (the “Auteurs”), esotericism, aestheticism, sexism, and especially a “disgust for the taste of others,” in the words of Pierre Bourdieu. One sees it clearly when one talks to a Parisian critic:³ he/she conforms still to the Baudelairian model of “the one who knows” (how to appreciate Modernity), above the “vulgar taste” of the public. It is amusing, in this sense, to read the petition that Jean Douchet wrote at the time of the bad financial press about *Cahiers*, titled “For the future of *Cahiers du cinéma*,” which was published in various journals in April 2008: “The cinema concerns us all in a pressing way: artists, philosophers, writers, filmmakers, critics, actors, directors of festivals. . . .” It lacks only one category of people: those who are not part of this “little world,” that is to say, common mortals!

2. Then, there is the love of cinema, which is, alas, called in France “popular cinophilia” (while it is the cinophilia à la De Baecque that would have to be called “elitist cinophilia,” in order to leave the term “cinophilia” to refer alone to the love of cinema). This love has existed for a very long time, and was always organized as a personal or collective cult, whether by the “reader responses” of the film magazines from the 1930s or the cine-clubs of the 1940s.⁴ Today, in France, it is found still in the magazines (*Première*, *Studio*,

Framework 50, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring & Fall 2009, pp. 202–5.

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and all the specialist revues, like *Mad Movies*, for gore, which prints every month as many copies as the *Cahiers du cinéma*, or *HK Magazine*, for the films from Hong Kong). But there are new practices added now: the discussion sites and forums on the Internet, which make more or less public the debate of fans around their favorite films, and the screening (also more or less collective) of DVDs, their loan, and their exchange. The passage from the theater screen to the TV screen also bears a sociological importance, since one no longer has to live in the center of a large city to see rare films. However, these new technologies do not change fundamentally the *esprit de culte*, which remains the same as in other spheres of art.⁵

3. The central paradigm of *cinéphilie* is always the same. In the “elitist *cinéphilie*,” it is always the Kantian aesthetic, based on intuition, the ineffable, the immediate sense of dealing with an Artist or an Artwork.⁶ In the “popular *cinéphilie*,” it is always the *expertise*. An expert is someone who has experience: he has seen many films and discusses especially qualities of one in relation to qualities of the other. For example, to make a sociological observation in the manner of Becker,⁷ one can learn to love the films of kung fu only after having seen some hundreds of kung fu films, so that one can detect the small differences that confer value on one film and mediocrity on another. Otherwise, one remains a philistine, not a *cinéphile*. But the technological changes of these last twenty-five years favor largely this paradigm of expertise: it has effectively become easy (either legally, or illegally) to see entire filmographies. One can order or pirate on the Internet some thousands of films once impossible to find, and acquire an enormous culture in several months. As for the miscegenous character of the “new *cinéphilie*,” whose members like equally films, TV series, and video clips, that is not new either: the “young Turks” of the *Nouvelle Vague* were obsessed by literature, almost more than by the cinema.

4. This changes something for the history of styles. Thanks to the multiplication of cable stations, the television spectator can acquire more encyclopedic competence than the authors of “official” histories of cinema, who wrote at a time when it was difficult to see everything. Everyone can see today that the “History of Cinema” (with a capital H), such as it is taught in France in high school but also in a large part of the world⁸ (as Gilles Deleuze drew on it to write his books), is more an artificial construction based on the subjective tastes of the *Cahiers du cinéma* than a scientific analysis of all films produced. I remember the day when, newly subscribed to cable television, I discovered on Turner Classic Movies the film that Fred Zinnemann made for MGM in 1948, *The Search*. I saw before me some aesthetic practices belonging to an entirely different tradition from that of the Hollywood classicism of the 1940s, and I understood that the history of styles that I had been taught was just another “Grand Recit” in the postmodern sense.

5. The institutional aesthetic of cinema, in France, has hardly taken into account these changes. As that aesthetic has continued to ignore popular cinema, it has narrowed its methodological purview to two main approaches, with on the one side a historiographical orientation (toward the history of art) and on the other a critical orientation (these are often former professional critics who have converted themselves into teachers and remain convinced that the university is a place for training the taste of students more than a place for rational thinking). The result is that the question of cinephilia, and especially of that which focuses on objects which do not belong to High Art,⁹ has been abandoned by the aesthetic in favor of two other areas of the Humanities: sociology (with scholars whom I have cited, such as J. M. Leveratto and F. Montebello, but also Emmanuel Ethis),¹⁰ and the “sciences of information-communication.” Gender and cultural studies also offer excellent tools to study cinephilia (as least if one retains the ethnographic approach of the Birmingham School from which they derive), but France rejects them (as the already cited G. Sellier and N. Burch, the two best-known representatives in France of that approach, repeatedly lament).

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Notes

1. “Gender Studies et etudes filmiques,” collectif *Les mots sont importants*, <http://lmsi.net>, September 2005.
2. “Cinéphilie et politique/Cinéphilie et masculinité,” *De la beauté des latrines* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 65–88.
3. See my interviews with some critics of *Inrockuptibles*, the “news culturel français”: with Serge Kaganski (May 2003), www.canal-u.education.fr (*Profession: critique*); with Jean-Baptiste Morain (December 2007); L. Jullier, *Interdit aux moins de 18 ans* (Paris: Armand-Colin), 132–41.
4. See Fabrice Montebello, *Le cinéma en France* (Paris: Armand-Colin, 2006).
5. See Jean-Marc Leveratto, *Introduction à l'anthropologie du spectacle* (Paris: La dispute, 2006). One learns there that the current telephile practice of giving to the newborn child a name of a hero or heroine, for example, comes from the world of the theater at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

6. See L. Jullier, “La critique de cinéma entre raison et je-ne-sais-quoi,” *Esprit* no. 319 (November 2005).
7. Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders. Etude de sociologie de la déviance* (Paris: Métailié, 1985) (French translation of *Outsiders*, 1963).
8. See how the French choices have been transmitted to the United States in David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
9. See, for example, on James Bond, Fabien Bouilly (dir.), *James Bond (2)007, Histoire culturelle et enjeux esthétiques d'une saga populaire* (Paris: Belin, 2007); or on *Star Wars*, my own essay, *Star Wars anatomie d'une saga* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005) (complete version in German: *Star Wars. Anatomie einer Saga* [Universität von Koblenz, 2007]).
10. *Sociologie du cinéma et de ses publics* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

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To quote this interview, please refer to the definitive publication *Framework* 50, Nos. 1 & 2 « What is being fought for by today's cinephilia(s)? », Spring & Fall 2009, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan, pp. 202–5.