Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes

by Todd McGowan

Film theory's encounter with Jacques Lacan has focused on the identification of the spectator with a gaze of mastery. This article argues that this involves a misreading of Lacan's concept of the gaze, and it focuses on the gaze as an instance of the object petit a.

No one theory predominates in film studies today. What is more, different approaches no longer seem to vie for hegemony but instead seem to accept a peaceful coexistence. Followers of cognitivism, phenomenology, and historicism (among others) are increasingly content to make local, specific claims about film—and hence tend not to step on each other's toes. Amid this contemporary landscape, a universal and totalizing theory of the filmic experience seems outdated. As the editors of *Post-Theory* put it, "Film studies is at a historical juncture which might be described as the waning of Theory."[1] This "waning" has occurred largely in response to the universalizing pretensions of the film theory of the 1970s and 1980s, especially the theory associated with psychoanalysis and Jacques Lacan. In fact, because of its universality and its hegemony over the field of film studies, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll simply label Lacanian film theory "the Theory."

The Critique of Lacan. According to its detractors, the primary problem with "the Theory" is that Lacanian concepts have been applied to the cinema without regard for the specifics of the cinematic experience itself. That is to say, Lacanian film theory fails to account for recalcitrant data, for empirical evidence that the theory cannot explain. Carroll claims that "the Theory has been effectively insulated from sustained logical and empirical analysis by a cloak of political correctness,"[2] and Stephen Prince argues that "film theorists . . . have constructed spectators who exist in theory; they have taken almost no look at real viewers. We are now in the unenviable position of having constructed theories of spectatorship from which spectators are missing."[3]

For opponents of Lacanian film theory, its adherents attempt to account for everything on the level of theory alone, without empirical verification. In short, traditional Lacanian film theory goes too far in its claims and extrapolates too much from its theoretical presuppositions. In this analysis, what makes Lacanian film analysis vulnerable to critique is the very breadth of its claims—its theoretical universality. It is my contention, however, that traditional Lacanian film theory

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became a target for these attacks not because of the grandeur of its claims but because of its modesty. The proper response, therefore, is to expand Lacanian analysis of the cinema—making it even more Lacanian.[4]

Traditional Lacanian film theorists stand accused of rigidly and dogmatically applying the tenets of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of the cinema. We can see this, according to Prince, most emphatically in the theorization of spectatorship, which relies heavily on Lacan's notion of the gaze. Traditional Lacanian film theory understands the gaze as it appears in the mirror stage and as it functions in the process of ideological interpellation. That is, the gaze represents a point of identification, an ideological operation in which the spectator invests her/himself in the filmic image. As Christian Metz puts it, "The spectator is absent from the screen *as perceived*, but also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even 'all-present' as *perceiver*. At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress."[5] Being absent as perceived and present as perceiver affords the spectator an almost unqualified sense of mastery over the filmic experience. In this sense, the filmic experience provides a wholly imaginary pleasure, repeating the experience that Lacan sees occurring in the mirror stage. Jean-Louis Baudry makes this connection explicit, pointing out that "the arrangement of the different elements— projector, darkened hall, screen—in addition to reproducing in a striking way the mise-en-scène of Plato's cave . . . reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the 'mirror stage' discovered by Lacan."[6] The gaze in the mirror stage, according to Lacan, provides an illusory mastery for the child, a mastery over her/his own body that the child does not yet have in reality.[7]

According to Lacanian film theorists, film, like the mirror stage, is an imaginary deception, a lure blinding us to an underlying symbolic structure. The gaze is a function of the imaginary, the key to the imaginary deception that takes place in the cinema. Hence, the task of the film theorist becomes one of combating the illusory mastery of the gaze with the elucidation of the underlying symbolic network that this gaze elides.[8]

The problem with this theoretical program is not its unquestioning allegiance to the precepts of Lacan but, on the contrary, its failure to integrate fully the different elements of Lacan's thought. By focusing entirely on the relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic order, Lacanian film theory overlooks the role of the Real—the third register of Lacan's triadic division of human experience—in the functioning of the gaze and in the filmic experience.[9] This omission is crucial, because the Real provides the key to understanding the radical role that the gaze plays within filmic experience.[10] In short, the *Post-Theory* critique of Lacanian film theory has not really addressed a properly *Lacanian* film theory.

Locating the Gaze. Although in his essay on the mirror stage Lacan conceives of the gaze as a mastering gaze, he thought of it in precisely the opposite way later on— as the point at which mastery fails. In Lacan's later work, the gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it becomes an objective, rather than a subjective, gaze. As he put it in *Seminar XI*, "The *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze."[11] The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at

which the object looks back. The gaze thus involves the spectator in the image, disrupting her/his ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema.

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan's example of the gaze is Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533). This painting depicts two world travelers and the riches they have accumulated during their journeys. But at the bottom of the painting, a distorted, seemingly unrecognizable figure disrupts the portrait. The figure is anamorphic: looking directly at it, one sees nothing discernible, but looking at the figure downward and from the left, one sees a skull. Not only does the skull indicate the hidden, spectral presence of death haunting the two wealthy ambassadors—a *memento mori*—but, even more important for Lacan, it marks the site of the gaze. The figure is a blank spot in the image, the point at which the spectator loses her/his distance from the painting and becomes involved in what she/he sees, because the very form of the figure changes on the basis of the spectator's position. The gaze exists in the way that the spectator's perspective distorts the field of the visible, thereby indicating the spectator's involvement in a scene from which she/he seems excluded. The skull says to the spectator, "You think that you are looking at the painting from a safe distance, but the painting sees you—takes into account your presence as a spectator." Hence, the existence of the gaze as a stain in the picture—an objective gaze—means that spectators never look at the picture from a safe distance; they are in the picture in the form of this stain.

Grasping the gaze as objective rather than subjective transforms our understanding of the filmic experience. Instead of being an experience of imaginary mastery (as it is for traditional Lacanian film theorists), it becomes—at least potentially—the site of a traumatic encounter with the Real, with the utter failure of the spectator's seemingly safe distance and assumed mastery. The crucial point here is that not only is this failure of mastery possible in the cinema, but it is what spectators desire when they go to the movies.[12]

Consider the case of Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). On the one hand, this is a traditional detective story that enables spectators to move from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge—to achieve mastery through the acquisition of knowledge. Surely, this accounts for part of the film's appeal. On the other hand, the film thwarts this sense of mastery by cultivating Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) as a desirable figure. By enticing spectators to desire Lecter, the film impels them to acknowledge their affinity with a serial killer, thereby disrupting any sense of spectatorship from a safe distance. This bond with Lecter becomes especially apparent when Lecter, in the final line of the film, tells Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), "I'm having an old friend for dinner." What Lecter means here is that he is preparing to devour the doctor who has been his (oppressive) jailer for many years—and yet this line invariably meets with cheers from the audience. Some of the pleasure certainly derives from the pun, but the line also makes manifest the spectators' investment in Lecter's desire. Far from retreating from this investment, spectators embrace and enjoy it; this is one of the most enjoyable moments in the cinema. It represents a point at which spectators can notice the gaze and recognize their own involvement, through their desire, in what they see on the screen. But because traditional Lacanian film theory conceives of

the gaze solely as a subjective, mastering gaze, it focuses almost exclusively on spectators' identification with this gaze. What this leaves out is the spectators' relationship to the gaze as object—a relationship not of identification but of desire. By eliding the role of desire to emphasize identification, traditional Lacanian film theory fails to see the cinema's radical potential.

For exponents of traditional Lacanian film theory (especially Jean-Louis Baudry and Laura Mulvey), film—especially classical Hollywood cinema—represents an ideological danger insofar as it demands spectator identification with the gaze of the camera. Baudry contends that identification with this gaze has the effect of controlling the spectator. As he points out, "The spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay."[13] According to Baudry, accepting this identification, the spectator fails to notice that the perspective of the gaze is symbolically situated. Although the cinematic experience provides a sense of imaginary mastery, identification with the camera's gaze also hides the functioning of the symbolic order.

Mulvey extends this analysis to the filmic construction of gender relations while sustaining the fundamental premise. For Mulvey, identification with the male protagonist supplements identification with the camera. The filmic spectator is thus provided with a sense of mastery over the gaze's female object. Mulvey claims, "As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence."[14] Identification with the male protagonist—like identification with the camera—provides a sense of complete mastery. Spectators accept and even pursue identification with this cinematic and male gaze because they are looking for mastery; for traditional Lacanian film theorists, this desire for mastery is *the* desire governing human behavior.

The Illusion of Mastery. Although Lacan claims in his essay on the mirror stage that imaginary identification produces the illusion of mastery, he does not see desire as desire for mastery. It is in associating desire with mastery that traditional Lacanian film theory has failed to be Lacanian enough. Its conception of desire actually has more in common with Nietzsche and Foucault than it does with Lacan, which is one reason why Joan Copjec claims that "film theory operated a kind of 'Foucauldinization' of Lacanian theory."[15] For both Nietzsche and Foucault, power wholly informs desire. Nietzsche insists again and again that our fundamental desire is not the desire to survive but to attain mastery. As he says in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation, and at least, at its mildest, exploitation."[16] In this view, rather than being something enigmatic or uncertain, the goal of our desire is clear: we want mastery over the other or over the object; we want to possess the alien object and make it a part of ourselves. And as Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish*, the gaze serves as the perfect vehicle for this mastery—especially a gaze, as in the cinema,

in which the subject remains obscured in the dark while the object appears completely exposed on the screen.[17]

From this perspective, the desire for mastery is an active rather than a passive process: the desiring subject actively takes possession of the passive object. In this sense, desire is ipso facto "male." As Mulvey points out,

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.[18]

The cinema thus establishes sexual difference through the ways that it caters to male desire: male subjects go to the cinema—they *desire* to see films—because the cinema provides them with an active experience, a way of mastering passive objects. To take the most obvious example, spectators desire to see a film like Andrew Bergman's *Striptease* (1996)—if they do—because it enables them, through the gaze, to achieve mastery over the female object on the screen (Demi Moore). From the safe distance of their seats in the darkened theater, spectators seeing Demi Moore's exotic dance routine take possession of her image in their fantasies.[19] According to Mulvey, this desire to attain control of the image of the female object informs spectatorship not just in *Striptease* but in the majority of classical Hollywood narratives. The filmic experience is thus an experience in which we gain power over the object, and when we desire in the cinema, we desire to dominate.

One of the most well-known attacks on traditional Lacanian film theory responds directly to this conflation of desire and power. As Gaylyn Studlar points out in "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," the desire for mastery is not the most primordial or fundamental human desire; a masochistic, preoedipal desire precedes the "oedipal" desire for mastery. Studlar claims:

> Current theory ignores the pleasure in submission that is phylogenetically older than the pleasure of mastery—for both sexes. In masochism, as in the infantile stage of helpless dependence that marks its genesis, pleasure does not involve mastery of the female but submission to her. This pleasure applies to the infant, the masochist, and the film spectator as well.[20]

Studlar's position is that another kind of desire precedes the desire for mastery. To conflate desire and mastery, to see desire as only an active process, is to miss the importance of a much more radical kind of desire—the desire to submit to the Other. Studlar insists that, because the filmic experience involves submitting to images of the Other, our experience of the cinema is more of a masochistic, passive desire than a mastering, active one. This leads Studlar to turn away from psychoanalysis and toward the thought of Giles Deleuze as a way to understand the filmic experience. For Studlar, "Many of the assumptions adopted by film theorists from Freudian metapsychology or Lacan seem inadequate in accounting for cinematic pleasure."[21] What she is actually objecting to, however, is not Lacanian psychoanalysis itself but the deformation it has undergone in becoming Lacanian

film theory. Studlar rejects the idea that the spectator's desire is for mastery, which is precisely what Lacan rejects as well. In fact, Studlar's conception of desire in some respects resembles Lacan's, which is quite distinct from the Nietzschean/ Foucaultian twist it receives from traditional Lacanian film theorists.

Although Lacan does not see desire as fundamentally masochistic à la Studlar, he does see the desiring subject as placing her/himself in the service of the object. Desire is motivated by the mysterious object that the subject posits in the Other— the *objet petit a*—but the subject relates to this object in a way that sustains the object's mystery. Hence, the *objet petit a* is an impossible object: to exist, it would have to be simultaneously part of the subject and completely alien. This is why Lacan says that "desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the *jouissance* of the other."[22] The subject posits the *objet petit a* as the point of the Other's secret jouissance, but the *objet petit a* cannot be reduced to anything definitively identifiable in the Other. To paraphrase Lacan, this object is in the Other more than the Other. The jouissance embodied in this object remains out of reach for the subject because the object exists only insofar as it is out of reach. Lacan describes this process at work in the visual drive: "What is the subject trying to see? What he is trying to see, make no mistake, is the object as absence. . . . What he is looking for is not, as one says, the phallus—but precisely its absence."[23]

Rather than seeking power or mastery (the phallus), our desire is drawn to the opposite—the point at which power is entirely lacking, the point of total jouissance. As Renata Salecl says, "That which arouses the subject's desire . . . is the very specific mode of the other's *jouissance* embodied in the object *a*."[24] This appeal that jouissance has for us explains why power fails to provide satisfaction. No matter how much power one acquires, one always feels oneself missing something— and this "something" is the *objet petit a*. Even those who are bent on world conquest feel the allure of the hidden jouissance of the Other, and they locate this jouissance at the point where power seems most absent. According to Lacan, this explains the master's secret envy of the slave. In an experience of absolute mastery, the master imagines that the slave has access to a jouissance that power cannot provide.[25] It is the Other's seeming jouissance, not its mastery, that acts as the engine for desire.

Imagining that the *objet petit a* is linked to mastery rather than to jouissance involves a fundamental, and a potentially dangerous, misunderstanding of desire. To see more fully the misstep involved in seeing desire in terms of mastery, consider Roman Polanski's *Ninth Gate* (1999), which depicts a near-perfect example of this kind of misunderstanding and its ramifications. Here, a used-book dealer named Boris Balkan (Frank Langella) attempts to unlock the secret of Satan by bringing together a series of ancient illustrations purportedly done by Satan himself. Balkan believes that by unlocking this secret—hidden in the Other—he will be provided with ultimate power. Balkan believes, in short, that uncovering the *objet petit a* will enable him to attain absolute mastery, "absolute power to determine [his] own destiny," as he puts it.

What Balkan finds when he unites the illustrations is not power but a horrible jouissance. When he finally uncovers Satan's secret, Balkan lights himself on fire, thinking himself omnipotent. But Balkan's body in fact burns, and the

flames indicate that he has encountered the Other's secret jouissance: he is now burning with enjoyment. Balkan is, of course, surprised to find himself ablaze. He had believed that the path of desire was the path of power, but he discovers that it is a path organized around jouissance. Traditional Lacanian film theory makes precisely the same mistake that Balkan makes in *Ninth Gate*. For both, the image of an active desire mastering and possessing a passive object obfuscates a much more traumatic alternative: the object drawing the subject toward a traumatic jouissance.

According to Lacan's conception of desire, the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision. As Elizabeth Cowie put it, "The gaze is the inverse of the omnipotent look, which is the imperial function of the eye."[26] In other words, the gaze is a blank spot in the subject's look that threatens the subject's sense of mastery in looking because the subject cannot see the spot directly. The subject looks for the gaze—it is the *objet petit a* of the visual drive—and yet it cannot be integrated into the image. This is because, as Lacan points out, the *objet petit a* "is what is lacking, is nonspecular, is not graspable in the image."[27] Even when the subject sees a "complete" image, something remains obscure; the subject cannot see the Other at the point at which it sees the subject. The gaze of the object gazes back at the subject, but this gaze is not present in the field of the visible.

Encircling the Gaze. Even though the gaze is not part of the image, we can grasp the absence of the gaze—its nonspecular nature—as it manifests itself filmically. This is, for instance, what continually frustrates David Mann (Dennis Weaver) in Steven Spielberg's first feature, *Duel* (1970). Mann is driving from Los Angeles to Northern California on a business trip. Along the way, he encounters a mysterious truck driver who torments him and eventually tries to kill him. Throughout this ordeal, the identity and the desire of the truck driver remain completely obscure. Mann incessantly asks himself the fundamental question of desire, "What does he want from me?" But because the gaze is a blind spot in the field of Mann's vision, he cannot answer this question; he cannot attain a sense of mastery over this recalcitrant object-gaze. The film contains multiple shots of Mann trying to see the face of the truck driver (either directly or through his rear-view mirror), but the truck driver's face always remains obscured in shadow, hidden behind the truck's seemingly opaque windshield (fig. 1). Mann never meets the truck driver, and he never identifies him. What is more, Mann never figures out why the truck driver wants to kill him. In this way, Spielberg uses the filmic image itself to reveal the workings of desire—how desire emerges in response to the indecipherable gaze.

Not only does Spielberg depict the resistance of the gaze to Mann's vision within the film, but he also enacts the same dynamic with the spectator. Like Mann, the spectator never sees the identity of the truck driver. The truck driver's gaze remains a blank spot in the field of vision, a spot that resists all signification. Even the spectator does not know what the truck driver wants from Mann or what Mann did to trigger the duel. The film sustains this depiction of the gaze even in its

Figure 1. David Mann (Dennis Weaver) is caught in the loop of desire in Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1970). Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art New York.

denouement: after Mann finally defeats the truck driver by luring him into driving his truck over a cliff, the gaze remains as obscure as ever. We neither see the identity of the truck driver nor learn the nature of his desire. As *Duel* ends, neither Mann nor the spectator can encounter the object-gaze.

With *Duel*, Spielberg creates an exemplary film of pure desire. The film sustains its fidelity to the logic of desire because it never reduces the gaze to the field of the visible. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan describes the gaze in the same way, in terms of its irreducibility to vision: "In our relation to things, insofar as this relation is constituted by way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze."[28] *Duel* makes this elusiveness of the gaze the point of the movie. The film continually brings the spectator to the point of encountering the gaze and then makes the viewer retreat from it. Each time Mann seems on the verge of discerning the identity of the truck driver, something thwarts his efforts. This is precisely the way that Lacan sees desire as functioning. The *objet petit a*—the gaze in the case of the visual drive—motivates the subject's desire, but this desire is not a desire to encounter this object. On the contrary, desire wants to sustain itself *as* desire. As Bruce Fink notes, "Desire is an end in itself: it seeks only more desire."[29] *Duel* never abandons this logic, which finds its fullest articulation in the films of Orson Welles.

Figure 2. The final representation of the impossible object, the Rosebud sled, in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941). Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art New York.

Welles was the master of the film that sustains desire. *Citizen Kane* (1941), like most of his films, continually revolves around an impossible *objet petit a* (suggested by the signifier "Rosebud"). The film repeatedly brings the spectator close to an encounter with this object, but each time the encounter is waylaid. We see different accounts of Kane's life, and each account adds elements to the total picture. The film explores multiple perspectives, but none can render the object visible; Kane's desire, his gaze, remains absent. Even though the film's conclusion seems to offer the viewer respite from this desire as we watch Kane's childhood sled being engulfed in flames, it nonetheless remains clear that, as Lacan says of the *objet petit a*, "that's not *it*." At the end of *Kane*, Welles does not solve the question of desire but instead leaves the viewer with its fundamental deadlock (fig. 2).

But one must understand the precise nature of this deadlock. The perspicuity of both *Duel* and *Citizen Kane* lies in the fact that they reveal that the gaze as *objet petit a* constantly eludes our grasp not because it is a transcendent object, existing beyond all signification, but because it gives body to a void. The great secret of the Other—the Other's hidden jouissance—is that there is no secret. That is, even the Other does not know what it wants. In this sense, the epigraph that Welles uses in *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) could apply to all his films: "A certain great and powerful king once asked a poet 'What can I give you, of all that I have?' He wisely replied 'Anything sir . . . except your secret.'" Exposing the Other's secret reveals that the

Other is hiding nothing—that desire merely circulates around a void. *Duel* and *Citizen Kane* avoid betraying the circulation of desire because they recognize that there is no secret to the secret of the *objet petit a*.

The radicality of these films derives from their fidelity to the idea of the gaze as fundamentally nonspecular—as absent in the picture. The gaze is the object-cause of the spectator's desire, but the spectator never encounters the gaze. Like the films of Welles, *Duel* sustains the gaze as *objet petit a* rather than providing the illusion that we can actually see the gaze in the image. In other words, the film allows the desire of the Other to remain completely unapproachable, never reducing it to a verifiable presence. The subject apprehends the gaze indirectly, grasping the way that it disrupts the image. Films such as *Duel* and *Citizen Kane* make us aware of the Real, the gap within the symbolic order, as they encircle it. They expose the Real of the gaze through its absence.

The Turn to Fantasy. Unlike *Duel* and *Citizen Kane*, most films do not sustain the logic of desire throughout the narrative. Instead, they retreat from the deadlock of desire—sustaining the gaze in its absence—into a fantasmatic resolution. Fantasy provides a screen in front of the gaze, allowing the subject to avoid its trauma. If the gaze presents the subject with an impossible question, fantasy provides a solution. Through fantasy, the subject imagines a scenario in which the desire of the Other, the *objet petit a*, becomes clear. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek explains:

> Fantasy functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question "What does the Other want?," it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time incapable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation, into a mandate with which to identify.[30]

That is to say, in the place of the question of desire that results in a perpetually dissatisfied subject, fantasy offers the possibility of satisfaction, albeit on the level of the imaginary. Instead of suffering the perpetual uncertainty of desire, fantasy allows the subject to gain a measure of certainty. As Žižek puts it, "Fantasy provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us."[31] Fantasy provides a way of staging desire that gives the subject access to the *objet petit a*, placing this object within a scenario that seems to unlock its jouissance.

The price, however, for unlocking the secret of the *objet petit a* through the turn to fantasy is that one reduces the object to the level of an ordinary object, eliminating its Real, traumatic dimension. Fantasy is thus a way of avoiding the Real of the gaze. Contrary to the claims of traditional Lacanian film theory, the ideological dimension of classical Hollywood film lies not so much in the way that it employs a mastering gaze but in its use of fantasy to domesticate the object-gaze. Classical Hollywood film does this by staging a fantasy scenario that solves the impossibility presented by the gaze. This turn from the problem of desire to a

fantasmatic answer is a fundamental gesture of ideology. And yet no film, even the most vehemently anti-Hollywood movie, can avoid fantasy altogether. In its very form, film necessarily involves recourse to fantasy. However, films do vary in their relationship to fantasy because film is not equivalent to fantasy but rather employs it. Hence, the ideological valence of a film depends not on whether or not it employs fantasy—one cannot entirely opt out of it—but on its relationship to fantasy. Films like *Duel* and *Citizen Kane* stand out because they work to avoid allowing fantasy to solve the deadlock of desire completely.

The difficulty with films of pure desire, those that sustain the nonspecular gaze without retreating into fantasy, is that few can sustain desire in this way. Welles, of course, had incredible trouble finishing his films because studio heads and preview audiences so often found them disturbing. The case of Spielberg is altogether different, yet the trajectory is similar. After *Sugarland Express* (1974), Spielberg's films begin to provide fantasmatic resolution that domesticates the desire of the Other as manifested in the gaze. Spielberg transitioned from being a filmmaker of desire to being a filmmaker of desire's fantasmatic resolution. In this way, he joined Hollywood as such. This blending of desire and fantasy—presenting spectators with the gaze and then domesticating it, the characteristic operation of Spielberg's later films—is the fundamental ideological program of Hollywood cinema.

All of Spielberg's later films turn away from the gaze and toward fantasy, in clear contrast to the way that *Duel* sustains the movement of desire around the gaze. It is almost as if Spielberg's entire career as a filmmaker represents a flight from the trauma of the gaze as manifested in his first film. In *Schindler's List* (1993), for example, Spielberg depicts what has become a standard motif in his movies: an initial confrontation with a traumatic gaze, followed by a fantasized depiction of a father figure who solves the enigma of the gaze. Throughout much of the film, Spielberg depicts the gaze much as he did in *Duel*. In one of the film's great scenes, Nazi commandant Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes) embodies this object-gaze as he arbitrarily shoots Jews from the veranda of his quarters above a concentration camp. The gaze here is not, as traditional Lacanian film theory would have it, the mastery involved in Goeth's look over the compound. We do not experience the gaze when we share his look; instead, we experience it when we must confront his desire. Spielberg depicts much of this scene from Goeth's perspective, but his look is not the gaze. When Goeth searches out his first victim, Spielberg uses a point-of-view shot and pans across the compound to indicate the movement of Goeth's eyes over possible targets. However, this shot is merely preparatory to our experience of the gaze, which occurs when Spielberg cuts from Goeth's seemingly omnipotent look to a series of objective shots from ground level in the camp. After Goeth fires his gun the first time, we see the camp at ground level (rather than from the veranda above), and Goeth appears as a barely recognizable blur in the background; we do not see Goeth himself but the veranda from which he fires. As in *Duel*, it is these brief shots of the absent point in the Other that manifest the gaze. The camera looks up at Goeth, but the shot does not capture his gaze. The spectator cannot experience mastery here but must instead endure the indecipherable desire of the Other.

Figure 3. Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes) as the traumatic object-gaze in *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993). Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art New York.

Here we have the gaze in all its traumatic horror: Goeth shoots, and we have no idea why he is shooting or why he shoots whom he does. Just before the shooting spree, one camp inmate says to another, "The worst is over. We are workers now." It is precisely at this moment of seeming calm and respite that the gaze manifests itself, disturbing the stable picture. When Goeth fires his first shot, it unleashes a whirl-wind of frenetic activity within the camp. The inmates begin to run and to work at an increasingly rapid pace. Spielberg even uses a hand-held camera to shoot this por-tion of the scene, thereby conveying the frantic movement that Goeth's gunshot oc-casions. This accelerated pace on the ground represents an effort to avoid becoming the subject of the lethal gaze. Those in the camp have no idea what this unseen gaze wants from them; hence, they turn to frenetic activity and work in hopes of finding the answer and appeasing the gaze. What terrifies in this scene is not Goeth's total domination and mastery over those in the camp but the Real of his desire: why does he decide to shoot those whom he shoots? As one watches, it is clear that no one, not even Goeth himself, could answer this question.

But Goeth's gaze does not remain an impossible object throughout the film. Through the figure of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), Spielberg domesticates this gaze and thereby deflects its trauma. With subterfuge and payoffs, Schindler is able to figure out the desire of the Other—even the desire of Goeth—and make it bearable. Instead of continuing to confront us with a lethal gaze, Goeth accom-modates Schindler, freeing more than a thousand Jews from certain death. Schindler is thus a fundamental fantasy figure—a father strong enough to protect us from

the traumatic Real. In *Schindler's List*, Spielberg takes us to the point of an encounter with the Real of the gaze but then turns away, shielding us from the Real through the enactment of a fantasy. This is precisely the ideological dimension of Spielberg's later films: by replacing the encounter with the Real with a fantasmatic construction and thereby covering over the gaps in ideology, his films leave viewers securely within the structure of the dominant ideology. In this way, Spielberg exemplifies Hollywood's relationship to fantasy.

This fantasmatic dimension of Hollywood film and its nefarious effects have not, of course, gone unnoticed. In fact, the critique of fantasy is one of traditional Lacanian film theory's chief critiques of classical Hollywood cinema. Baudry claims, for instance, that cinema's "precise ideological effect" involves "creating a fantasmatization of the subject."[32] This comment focuses on how cinema's investment in fantasy serves to hide the social structures that produce that fantasy. As Mulvey points out, "In *reality* the phantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it."[33] Clearly, both Baudry and Mulvey recognize the ideological effects of fantasy. But neither is concerned with the way that fantasy marks a retreat from the gaze. In fact, they see fantasy as working hand in hand with the gaze (because they see the gaze as an illusion of mastery) rather than screening it. For Baudry and Mulvey, and for the traditional Lacanian film theorist as such, the problem with filmic fantasy lies solely in the fact that it blinds the spectator to the cinematic apparatus—to the process of production.

In this sense, the danger of film—especially classical Hollywood cinema—lies in its presentation of itself as real, in its "reality effect." Film creates this effect by hiding the act of production through the fantasmatic relationship it establishes with the spectator. As traditional Lacanian film theorist Daniel Dayan points out in his discussion of the use of suture in classical Hollywood cinema, "The film-discourse presents itself as a product without a producer, a discourse without an origin. It speaks. Who speaks? Things speak for themselves and, of course, they tell the truth. Classical cinema establishes itself as the ventriloquist of ideology."[34] The pleasure that we derive from the filmic experience is thus a deceptive pleasure, for it situates viewers within ideology and mutes any efforts at questioning the truths that that ideology proffers. The only political alternative then becomes the destruction of this imaginary pleasure—a task that Mulvey foregrounds in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." As she puts it, "It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it."[35] Mulvey hopes that by destroying the fantasmatic pleasure of cinema spectators will be able to see the working of ideology for what it is. Understanding filmic fantasy as a retreat from the gaze makes a different approach possible. Rather than simply viewing fantasy as blinding us to ideology, we might instead grasp what fantasy enables spectators to see.

Beyond the Limits of Fantasy. Because of its initial misconception of the gaze, traditional Lacanian film theory's critique of cinematic fantasy focuses only on the relationship between fantasy and ideology (fantasy and the symbolic) rather than on the relationship between fantasy and the gaze (fantasy and the Real). Thus, fantasy has a purely negative value, and spectators' pleasure in it is one of the

dangers of film that theorists must work to counter. But when we focus on the gaze as *objet petit a*, fantasy ceases to be simply negative. Fantasy, for Lacan, has a double role in the experience of the subject. On the one hand, fantasy domesticates the gaze by locating it within a scenario or structure of meaning; on the other hand, fantasy threatens to expose the limitations of the ideological edifice that employs it. This is why the turn to fantasy—the turn that obscures the gaze in the filmic experience—does not always work in the service of ideology. The very fact that film employs fantasy reveals an opening within ideology. Through the recourse to fantasy, ideology shows itself to be fissured, to be in need of support through fantasy for it to function effectively. If ideology and the symbolic order were not haunted by a Real—that is, if they were self-enclosed structures—there would be no need for fantasy to keep subjects within them. In this sense, even the most ideological film testifies to the point of failure of ideology, of its need for a fantasmatic supplement.

Instead of lamenting the fantasmatic dimension of the cinema, we should view it as an opportunity for an encounter with the gaze—an encounter with the Real—that otherwise would be impossible. As Žižek points out, "In the opposition between fantasy and reality, the Real is on the side of fantasy."[36] It is in the very turn to fantasy that it becomes possible to experience a traumatic encounter with the gaze—to experience the Real. Whereas desire always keeps the gaze at a distance, fantasy can act as the vehicle to lead the subject to an encounter with the gaze. Fantasy, unlike our sense of "reality," is always incomplete; it breaks down and loses its consistency at its edges. Even though it screens the gaze, because of the constitutive incompleteness of fantasy, it also allows for an experience of the gaze that would otherwise be impossible to come by. When film employs fantasy but at the same time reveals the limit that fantasy comes up against, it takes us to an encounter with the traumatic Real.

Thus far, we have seen how films can sustain desire in order to reveal the gaze as an impossible object or turn to fantasy to obscure the gaze. But film can also employ both desire and fantasy in order to enact an encounter with the Real of the gaze. Whereas *Duel* sustains the logic of desire and *Schindler's List* retreats into fantasy, the films of David Lynch depict both the realm of desire and that of fantasy. However, unlike Spielberg's later films, which resolve desire into fantasy and merge them together, Lynch's films hold desire and fantasy apart as wholly separate. They thus allow for a momentary experience of the gaze that occurs when the worlds of desire and fantasy intersect. Keeping desire and fantasy separate allows Lynch to depict the point at which they interact, and it is at this point—the edge of desire and fantasy—that the gaze manifests itself. Hence, Lynch's films (and any films that separate desire and fantasy in this way) uniquely facilitate an encounter with the gaze, even though this encounter is only ever momentary.

Such an encounter occurs in Lynch's most discussed film, *Blue Velvet* (1986), which depicts a split between two equally fantasmatic worlds: the excessively ordinary public world of the town of Lumberton that coexists with a similarly exaggerated underworld, populated by Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) and his associates. One of the salient features of the film is the extent to which Lynch keeps these two

worlds separate; our "normal" experience of social reality is one in which the two blend together seamlessly. By depicting them as distinct, Lynch lays bare the structure of fantasy.

But *Blue Velvet* does not confine itself to depicting these fantasy structures. Between the two competing fantasy structures, Lynch inserts a space of desire, which he locates in and surrounding the apartment of Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini). The fundamental divide in the film is thus not, as is often thought, between the proper public world and its criminal underside—they are two sides of the same coin. Rather, Lynch contrasts both with the space of desire in the area of Dorothy's apartment. Prompted by his discovery of a detached ear, Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle McLaughlan) sneaks into her apartment because he believes that Dorothy has some connection with the mystery surrounding the ear. As he enters, Jeffrey steps into a different world, one of desire bereft of fantasmatic resolution.

The mise-en-scène of the apartment is distinct and conveys an overwhelming sense of desire. Whereas both the Lumberton public world and the underworld are depicted as colorful and full, Dorothy's apartment is a world of empty spaces and dark voids. The scene in which Jeffrey enters the apartment using a stolen key was shot with very little light. Jeffrey thus walks around the apartment in near-total darkness. Even after Dorothy returns home and turns on the lights, the lighting remains dim, leaving dark spaces within the mise-en-scène. Just before she discovers Jeffrey hiding in her closet, Dorothy moves into one of these dark spaces: we know she is in the apartment, but she appears to be in the middle of a shadowy void. The lighting suggests a world of desire where nothing can be known.

As he leaves Dorothy's building after witnessing Frank assault her, Jeffrey emerges out of a dark void as he comes toward the outside world. Then, immediately after Jeffrey leaves the building, we see a brief montage: a face distorted by being horizontally stretched across the screen; Frank silently screaming; a candle burning out; and finally Dorothy saying to Frank, "Hit me," followed by his blow to her face and her scream. Each of these images indicates an obscure jouissance that haunts Jeffrey. As Dorothy screams in the final moment of this montage, Jeffrey wakes up in his bed, safely in the world of fantasy. But the montage appears when it does because it reveals the traumatic Real that exists between the world of desire and the world of fantasy. It is in the movement between these worlds that one encounters the gaze, the Real of the Other's desire. This is why the final scene of the montage is of Dorothy asking Frank to hit her: for Jeffrey, and for the spectator, her desire is the fundamental stumbling block of the film.

Jeffrey confronts the gaze in the figure of Dorothy. The film centers around her desire and her status as an embodiment of that gaze. Throughout *Blue Velvet*, it is completely unclear what Dorothy desires, or if she desires anything at all. As Jeffrey tells his fledgling girlfriend, Sandy (Laura Dern), after his encounter with Dorothy's desire, she seems to desire nothing but death. He says, "I think she wants to die. I think Frank cut the ear I found off her husband as a warning for her to stay alive." In this sense, Frank's violence is an attempt to arouse Dorothy's desire—to motivate her to desire something. Like Jeffrey and like the spectator, Frank experiences the trauma of encountering Dorothy's gaze as well as the horror of her desire, and he

Figure 4. Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) confronts the desire of Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986). Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art New York.

uses violence to provide a solution to this traumatic desire. This is why the spectator can find some degree of pleasure in the character of Frank, despite his disturbing violence. Frank is a fantasy figure and thus offers relief from Dorothy's desire through the fantasy scenario that he stages for her. As Michel Chion notes, Frank attempts to prevent Dorothy "from becoming depressed and slipping into the void . . . by beating her, kidnapping her child and husband, and then cutting off the man's ear."[37] In this light, all of Frank's extreme behavior can be seen as an effort to domesticate the gaze that Dorothy embodies. Even his sexual assault of her—the film's most famous scene—allows us to avoid the trauma of this gaze and is, therefore, far from the most disturbing scene in the film. Frank wants to give direction to Dorothy's desire, to force her to make clear what she wants. But his solution fails; even after the kidnapping and Frank's sexual assault, Dorothy's desire remains irreducible to any fantasmatic identification. While Dorothy remains in her apartment—in this space of desire—she continues to embody the gaze as an impossible and unapproachable *objet petit a*.

But unlike Spielberg in *Duel*, Lynch does not leave the gaze in this unapproachable position. Toward the end of *Blue Velvet*, Dorothy, her body naked and beaten, appears in the fantasmatic public world of Lumberton. Just as Sandy's former boyfriend Mike prepares to fight Jeffrey for stealing Sandy from him, Dorothy gradually enters into the side of the frame. She seems to appear out of thin air, and at first no one notices her. When the other characters do notice her, however, they become completely disoriented. As an embodiment of the *objet petit a*, Dorothy intrudes into

this fantasmatic realm and completely disrupts it, ripping apart the fantasy structure. Mike quickly abandons any notion of fighting with Jeffrey because he correctly concludes that Dorothy's presence changes everything. The threat of the fight suddenly seems absurdly insignificant in comparison with the trauma of the gaze. The fantasy screen suddenly breaks down because Dorothy's body has no place within the fantasmatic public world. The form in which she appears—publicly naked and begging for Jeffrey's help—reveals the spectator's investment in the fantasy and demands that the spectator confront Dorothy as object-gaze. She does not fit in the picture, which is why the spectator becomes so uncomfortable watching her naked body in the middle of the suburban neighborhood. When Jeffrey and Sandy take Dorothy into Sandy's house, Dorothy clings to Jeffrey and repeats, "He put his disease in me." Dorothy's presence is unbearable both for the characters within the diegesis—Sandy begins to break down, and her mother retrieves a coat to cover Dorothy—and for the spectator.

Here the realm of desire intersects with that of fantasy, forcing an encounter with the Real of the gaze. The fantasy structure of Lumberton's public world can remain consistent only as long as it excludes desire. When Dorothy's desire intrudes into this structure, she shatters that consistency, and at the same time she shatters the spectator's distance from what is happening. As a foreign body in the mise-en-scène, Dorothy embodies the gaze, and our anxiety in seeing her indicates our encounter with it, revealing that we are in the picture at its nonspecular point, the point of the gaze. Here, the object looks back at us. As in each of Lynch's films, *Blue Velvet* strictly separates desire and fantasy so as to depict the traumatic point of their intersection.[38]

Conclusion. This ability to enact an encounter with the gaze by depicting the limit of fantasy means that film, even popular film, does not have to be the tool of ideology. Even though fantasy is a retreat from the gaze and a screen obscuring the gaps in the symbolic order, cinema has the ability to employ fantasy in a radical way. Like fantasy, film is a knife that cuts in both directions: it can provide crucial support for ideology, filling in the blank spot within the structure of ideology, but it can also—and this is what traditional Lacanian film theory missed—take us to an encounter with the gaze that would otherwise be obscured in our experience of social reality.[39] The potentially radical dimension of the filmic experience—even in the case of a classical Hollywood movie—is what Lacanian film theory has historically elided. In the translation from psychoanalytic theory to film theory, the concept of the gaze underwent a complete transformation, and this transformation had the effect of narrowing and simplifying the relationship between subject and object, between spectator and the images on the screen. The failure of traditional Lacanian film theory to employ Lacan's own concepts condemned its adherents to analyses that never saw the traumatic nature of the gaze in the cinematic experience.

For the opponents of Lacanian film theory, the latter fails because it casts too wide a net and explains too much—because it is too rigidly Lacanian. How should the partisans of Lacanian analysis respond? When we meet with critique, our immediate reaction is often one of toning down our position, hedging our

claims. Such a gesture would seem, at the outset, a way of accommodating psychoanalytic film theory to the exigencies of a "post-theoretical" world, of winning back respect from the contributors to *Post-Theory*. But as I have tried to show, the central problem of the appropriation of Lacan for film theory has not been its proclivity to universalize Lacan's insights; instead, Lacanian film theory has consistently sought to dilute these insights, to read Lacan through a Nietzschean lens. Hence, in response to complaints about the overly Lacanian nature of film theory, the point should be made that film theory is not yet Lacanian enough. Rather than minimizing Lacan's influence, we should proffer a genuinely Lacanian film theory.

Notes

1. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, "Introduction," in Bordwell and Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 1.
2. Noël Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment," in Bordwell and Carroll, *Post-Theory*, 45.
3. Stephen Prince, "Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator," in Bordwell and Carroll, *Post-Theory*, 83. Prince's critique here is a response to a genuine problem with traditional Lacanian film theory: its conception of the spectator does indeed miss the mark. However, Prince quickly moves from a justifiable dissatisfaction with the prevailing conception of spectatorship to an attempt to eliminate all conceptualization in the study of spectatorship. He argues that, although there are areas in which film theory can be properly speculative, spectatorship is not one of them. As he says most emphatically, "Spectatorship is an area for empirical inquiry" (83).

    In their call for empiricism in the analysis of spectatorship, Prince and others fail to see that empiricism in no way avoids the pitfalls of abstraction. The problem with empiricism, as Herbert Marcuse once said, is that it is never empirical enough; it always smuggles concepts into its analysis. When film theorists analyze "actual spectators," they inevitably approach them with at least some minimal amount of conceptualization. In fact, even the elementary operation of positing causality in the relationship between a film and a spectator involves a conceptualization that goes beyond mere empiricism. As Hegel points out, "Empiricism . . . labors under a delusion, if it supposes that, while analyzing the objects, it leaves them as they were: it really transforms the concrete into an abstract." G.W.F. Hegel, *[Lesser] Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 63. With its call for an empirical account of spectatorship, *Post-Theory* reveals itself as pre-Kantian.
4. Although the contributors to *Post-Theory* lament the privileged status of psychoanalysis in film theory, their attack comes about twenty years *after* the height of its popularity. Given the current position of psychoanalysis in film theory, *Post-Theory* is flogging a dead horse. In fact, it is psychoanalysis's very *lack* of popularity—its weakened, degraded state—that has occasioned this attack. One attacks an authority not for its strength but for its weakness, for its failure to be fully authoritative.
5. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 54.
6. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 531–42.

7. Lacan notes that "the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given him only as *Gestalt*, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted." Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 2. Lacan's point here is that in the mirror stage, the gaze allows the child to anticipate and assume an illusory control while lacking this control over her/his real body; the gaze in the mirror stage is a mastering gaze.

8. Metz clearly articulates this as the goal of psychoanalytic film theory: "Reduced to its most fundamental procedures, any psychoanalytic reflection on the cinema might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province." Metz, *Imaginary Signifier*, 3.

9. With the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989, Slavoj Žižek, by focusing on the importance of the Real, introduced a new understanding of Lacan to the English-speaking world. As a result of this book and the many that followed in its wake, he is, of course, the pioneer in the dissemination of this "Real" Lacan—a grasp of Lacan that captures the latter's radicality as a (political) thinker in ways that no one prior to Žižek ever imagined. Žižek even brings his version of Lacanian theory to bear on film. However, Žižek's numerous discussions of cinema often focus on filmic content rather than on form or spectatorship. Hence, according to some critics, instead of using Lacanian theory to facilitate a new way of approaching cinema, film seems to be, for Žižek, nothing but a source for fecund examples that demonstrate the truths of Lacanian theory. But if Žižek has not fully elucidated the importance of the emphasis on the Real for film theory as such, its significance is nonetheless implicit throughout his work. In this essay, I aim to make it explicit.

10. Michael Walsh notes the neglect of the Real in favor of the symbolic and imaginary among Lacanian film theorists. However, his attempt to reclaim the Real for film theory does not focus on the gaze. For Walsh, taking the Real into account is important because it allows us to grasp more fully the psychotic or hallucinatory dimension of the filmic experience, a dimension that film theory has ignored. Walsh claims that "studies of cinema influenced by psychoanalysis remain more or less comfortably identified with the neurotic, and have been less willing to engage in the more difficult (in some sense, impossible) project of identifying with the psychotic." Walsh, "Returns in the Real: Lacan and the Future of Psychoanalysis in Film Studies," *Post Script* 14, nos. 1–2 (1994–1995): 23.

11. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 105.

12. Walter Davis makes a related claim about the theater, arguing that the ultimate appeal of drama lies in its ability to "get the guests." See Davis, *Get the Guests: Psychoanalysis, Modern American Drama, and the Audience* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

13. Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," 540.

14. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, 310. In her critique of traditional Lacanian film theory, Elizabeth Wright notes that it assumes that the subject's immersion in the imaginary occurs without a hitch. Lacan, in contrast, insists that no imaginary illusion, no matter how powerful, ever fully captivates the subject. As Wright puts it, "The speaking subject can never be wholly trapped in the imaginary, as earlier feminist film theory believed." Wright,

Lacan and Postfeminism (Cambridge, U.K.: Icon Books, 2000), 49. For a related critique of Mulvey and her concept of the gaze, see Robert Samuels, *Hitchcock's Bi-Textuality: Lacan, Feminisms, and Queer Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

15. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 19. My discussion of the misunderstanding of the gaze in traditional Lacanian film theory is indebted to Copjec's extraordinary work.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 203. What differentiates Nietzsche from those who take up his conception of desire—namely, Foucault and traditional Lacanian film theory—is that rather than attempt to counter the desire for mastery in some way, the entire effort of Nietzsche's philosophy consists in conceiving the ethical dimension of desire.

17. According to Foucault, of course, this conception of this gaze—a hidden subject and an exposed object—reaches its apotheosis in Jeremy Bentham's conception of the panopticon. The panopticon functions precisely like the cinematic apparatus insofar as it enables the viewer to see without being seen. And seeing without being seen is, for both Foucault and a traditional Lacanian film theorist like Mulvey, the ultimate form of power.

18. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 309.

19. This is undoubtedly why Bruce Willis, Moore's spouse at the time (and a would-be disciple of Laura Mulvey), suggested that theaters charge moviegoers an additional fee, a one-time surcharge, for the privilege of viewing Moore in *Striptease*. At the normal ticket price, they would be able, according to this line of thought, to possess the image of Moore's naked body on the cheap.

20. Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," in Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, 610.

21. Ibid., 616.

22. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 183.

23. Ibid., 182.

24. Renata Salecl, *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* (New York: Verso, 1998), 64.

25. We can see this same dynamic in teen fashion, where it informs the popularity of gang clothing in affluent suburbs: upper-middle-class teenagers look to the underclass for fashion role models because they posit a secret jouissance in the underclass.

26. Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 288.

27. Jacques Lacan, "The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962–1963," unpublished ms., May 22, 1963.

28. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 73.

29. Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26.

30. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 114–15.

31. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 32.

32. Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," 540.

33. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 308.

34. Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 451. Traditional Lacanian film theory devoted so much time to the concept of suture because of the role it plays in producing fantasy. The suturing effect of a shot/reverse shot works to

eliminate the spectator's grasp of the productive apparatus. Prior to a suturing reverse shot, the spectator is able to perceive the productive apparatus at work in its framing of the shot. According to Jean-Pierre Oudart's classic essay, after an initial experience of the jouissance of the image, the spectator "has discovered the framing. Suddenly, he senses the space he cannot see, hidden by the camera, and wonders, in retrospect, why such a framing was used." Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977–1978): 41. For a moment, the spectator becomes aware of the productive process, but through the effect of suture, this awareness almost instantly dissolves into a fantasmatic pleasure in the sense of closure that the reverse shot provides.

35. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 306.
36. Slavoj Žižek, The Fragile Absolute, or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For? (New York: Verso, 2000), 67.
37. Michel Chion, *David Lynch*, trans. Robert Julian (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), 95. My discussion of Dorothy's desire in *Blue Velvet* owes much to Chion's path-breaking interpretation of the film.
38. This separation of the worlds of desire and fantasy reaches its apotheosis in Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1996). See Todd McGowan, "Finding Ourselves on a *Lost Highway*: David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy," *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 2 (winter 2000): 51–73.
39. Because film can take up multiple positions toward fantasy, it is impossible to discover the political valence of a film—even a classical Hollywood film—a priori. One must always look and see. Certainly, cinema can often work to disseminate ideology and even to provide a fantasmatic support for ideology, but it also has the power to do the opposite. It can undercut this fantasmatic support and thereby eliminate the hidden underside that all ideology needs in order to function. Although it enacts fantasy itself, film can provide an avenue for the traversal of fantasy. But film can accomplish this only if we first accept its initial turn toward fantasy. Only by initially succumbing to fantasy can we ever escape it.