

CHAPTER ONE



Moving the Center: The Reconfiguration of the Moving Image

Those who expect this text to be a polemic exercise will be at least, I hope, partially disappointed. Although I wish to seriously examine the condition of cinema at the crossroads of interfacing with the next generation of imagistic recording, reproduction, and distribution (the net, the web, digital tape and discs, cable and satellite, videotape, LaserDiscs, and new systems not yet known but certain to be invented, not the least of which may be a simple chip encoding all the information necessary to reconstruct the sounds [images of a "feature film"]), I do not believe that cinema as a medium is defunct, although these days it seems almost fashionable to assert that it is.

I could argue that the cinema as we now know it is dying, rendered moribund by the rise of alternative imaging systems and reproduction/storage methods, including but not limited to CD-ROM technology, the web, and the Net, and the concomitant rise in production costs of traditional features films. When low-budget breakthrough films are made today, such as *El Mariachi* (1993) or *The Brothers McMullen* (1995), their makers hope to graduate immediately to large-scale Hollywood films, thus rendering the independent cinema nothing more than a poten-

tial proving ground for future masters of the dominant cinema. I could also argue that the model of theatrical feature filmmaking foregrounding the director as auteur is similarly obsolete, as directors now serve merely as "traffic cops" (no matter how stylish their technique) for producers whose interests are solely directed to the bottom line. Though borderline "personal/commercial" films continue to be made, such as *Everything Relative* (1996), *Paris Was a Woman* (1996), or *Champagne Safari* (1996), these more adventurous films seldom achieve national distribution, and concomitantly national impact, because their release patterns are confined to major United States and foreign cities (New York, London, Berlin, Paris). Seldom are films such as these allowed the luxury of a "wide break" (opening in one thousand theaters or more), which is so essential to both the critical and commercial reception and/or impact of a contemporary theatrical film. These "Indie" films must thus earn back their production and exploitation expenses in limited release patterns, despite favorable reviews in major metropolitan journals. The financial risk on even the most modest of these productions runs into several hundred thousand dollars; even a truly fringe effort such as Lisa Rose Apramian's *Not Bad for a Girl* (1996), a documentary on such pioneering feminist rock bands as L7, Babes in Toyland, Hole, Lunachicks, and others, costs nearly a hundred thousand dollars in production and post-production expenses, even with much of the initial image gathering for the project being accomplished through the relatively inexpensive medium of video.

THE DEATH OF THE AVANT-GARDE FEATURE FILM

The days when Ron Rice could direct *The Flower Thief* (1960) for less than \$1,000 to final 16mm optical track print are long gone, as are the production methods that rendered *The Chelsea Girls* (1966) possible (direct sound recording on film with an Auricon camera). In their place has come a wave of video-produced films such as *Jupiter's Wife* (1994) (but even this low-budget "documentary" video was made with the express intention of being presented as a Showtime original movie, with its own

interest in being both safe and profitable). The cost of cinema production has made even a seven-minute film (shown in color negative) run to \$7,000 or so for even a modest production, with the demise of reversal film technology and the relative death of 16mm for more convenient, but image-degrading, formats.

Video represents the future, with every person having access to a Camcorder; we are provided with images of events such as the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square, the Rodney King and Reginald Denny beatings, and other events that demand to be recorded as part of the zone of visual justice. But the truly terminal nature of the theatrical cinema experience is perhaps best exemplified by the opening of a multiplex theatre in August, 1995, in Valley Stream, Long Island, where the patrons must pass through metal detectors and body searches to get to their assigned seats, and are repeatedly warned by a recorded tape played through the public address system that they are under surveillance at all times. The shared communality of the theatrical cinema experience is thus rendered an obsolete social contract, as movies on video encourage us to stay within the social sphere of our own home. The commercial cinema, as Godard predicted in *Le Mépris* (1963), is dead. It remains only to bury the corpse in an avalanche of \$95,000,000 genre thrillers, where even the most compliant and creative directors are hard pressed to create an individual signature in the face of ever-tightening narratological requirements.

This argument has a great deal of support from both theoreticians and practitioners within cinema/video. Certainly the "independent cinema" (whatever this term might mean) is locked into a period of serious retrenchment. Even a seasoned producer such as Ted Hope, co-president of the New York Production Company Good Machine, whose credits include *The Brothers McMullen* (1995), *Safe* (1994), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and Hal Hartley's later film *Flirt* (1995), flatly asserted in an article in *Filmmaker* that "Indie film is dead" (indeed, this is the title of the text). Hope goes on to claim that

The marketplace is nasty and brutal[,] remembering only the latest successes and never forgetting its failures. It allows no room for taste beyond the mainstream. Truly

unique films cannot get screens, let alone hold them for more than a week or two. There is virtually no American audience for art films, political films, or non-narrative films. The specialized distributors have morphed into mass marketers, not niche market suppliers. Monopolistic business practices drive most corporate strategies. (18)

Thus, under Hope's model, although the mainstream cinema continues to proliferate, and mainstream, mass-audience films such as *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Liar, Liar* (1997) capture huge theatrical audiences, the cinema itself is going through a period of radical change at the end of its first century, coexisting with CD-ROM interactive "movies," video cassette and LaserDisc distribution, cable television, satellite television, video games, and a host of competing sound/image constructs. While such films as *Virtuosity* (1995) demonstrate the limitations of interactive video systems rather than herald a seemingly limitless figurative horizon, the 1995 production of *Mortal Kombat* is a spin-off of a wildly popular video game, and owes whatever temporal popularity it achieved to its source material. The *Wayne's World* films (1992 and 1993) are spin-offs from characters created for the television comedy series *Saturday Night Live*; *Super Mario Brothers* (1994) is yet another non-interactive version of an interactive original. Low-budget films such as *The Brothers McMullen* (1995), *Clerks* (1994), *Go Fish* (1994) and other fringe enterprises may momentarily capture the public's fancy, but in every case these productions are now seen as stepping-stones to larger-scale Hollywood films rather than individual achievements in and of themselves. The exponentially rising cost of film production (not to mention distribution and publicity) helps to ensure the hegemony of the dominant industrial vision in the middle-American marketplace, and the super conglomeration of existing production, distribution, and exhibition entities further assures the primacy of the readily marketable, pre-sold film, as opposed to a more quirky, individualistic vision.

Theatrical distribution, the mainstay of motion picture distribution for more than a century, is obsolete. Target audiences are increasingly younger, and these viewers perceive the experi-

ence of seeing a film primarily as an escape from the mundanity of their pre-packaged communal existence, as witness the popularity of such lowest-common-denominator films as *Clueless* (1995), *Dumb and Dumber* (1995), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Operation Dumbo Drop* (1995), and others too numerous to mention. European films are no longer distributed in America; they are remade in Hollywood, in English, with American stars—and then distributed overseas in this revisionist format. The few foreign films that attain moderately wide release in the United States are lavish costume spectacles. As we approach the millennium, it is apparent that people today go to the movies *not* to think, *not* to be challenged, but rather to be tranquilized and coddled. This means that more thoughtful, introspective works are increasingly pushed beyond the margins of moving image discourse into the phantom zone of commercial limbo. In response to an interviewer's suggestion "that combining both educational and spectacular elements would give you a wider audience," Roberto Rossellini responded, "spectacular in what sense? Sensational? Sensationalism is the first lie. You can't arrive at the truth through lies. I think we must evolve to a new kind of spectacularity, and what greater spectacle is there than knowledge?" (di Bernardo, 151). And yet for audiences without any historical context, films must be devoid of anything that threatens, or any referent to a past (forgotten) historical event. Films such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935) have been replaced by *Volcano* (1997), *Anaconda* (1997), *Dante's Peak* (1997), and other films that operate in the eternal present, assuming no familiarity with any historical referent other than contemporary popular culture, identifiable by a single word as to intent and content.

Sequels, particularly, are safe bets for exploitation, provided that the original film performs well at the box office; it is for this reason alone that nearly every mainstream film today is designed with an open ending, allowing the film to be franchised if the parent of the series captures the public's fancy. Television has become a wilderness of talk shows and infomercials, with time so precious that even the end credits of series episodes are shown on a split-screen with teasers from the upcoming program, to dissuade viewers from channel surfing, which is never-

theless rampant. Much new television programming is simply advertisements for upcoming movies or television shows; the *E* Entertainment channel regularly runs a program entitled "Coming Attractions," composed of nothing but the theatrical "trailers" (or "previews") from upcoming feature film releases. The host of the program blandly assures the audience that the show is devoted to "the best part of going to the movies . . . the previews," a direct acknowledgment that the previews are often better edited, better produced, and certainly more interesting than the films they profess to announce. The content of contemporary mainstream films is almost incidental to the production/distribution/exhibition process, since cinema patronage is essentially a non-refundable experience. All that is required is to get the audience into the theatre; once delivered, the audience need not be satisfied, only satiated.

Psychic hotlines offer spurious counsel at \$3.99 a minute; shopping channels commodify the images we see into discrete, marketable units; "no money down" real estate brokers hope to dazzle us with their varying formulae for success. The cable movie channels run only current fare, or thoroughly canonical classics, avoiding subtitling and black-and-white imagery (with rare exceptions) at all costs. Revival houses screen films in only a few major cities, particularly Paris and New York, and even these are closing (witness the firing of curator Fabiano Canosa from the Public Shakespeare Theatre Film program, and the closing of the Film Theatre itself, Taubin, 8-9; Canosa has since found a new home with Anthology Film Archives as a curator of film exhibitions, at least for the present). Indeed, it seems very much as if the first century of cinema will now be left to the often fugitive ministrations of museum curators and home video/LaserDisc collectors, rather than remaining a part of our shared collective cultural heritage.

With mainstream contemporary films so banal, it is any wonder that more adventurous viewers/auditors are turning to the Internet, e-mail, the nascent world of cyberspace, in search not only of a cheap medium of expression, but also human contact? For this last is what the cinema inherently denies us; sealed in a can, projected on a screen, we watch it, and it watches us, but the connection between viewer and viewed is

gossamer thin. CD-ROM and cartridge games offer a more concrete, though still synthetic connection to the spectacle witnessed by the viewer/participant—an illusion, in fact, of control and interactivity.

THE INSULARITY OF SPECTACLE

The limits of this insular spectacle are striking, and the technology at present is clumsy and expensive. But the experiential horizon is there, and the strip of film that runs through a conventional 35mm projector is an archaic *aide de memoire* of an era of puppet shows and magic lanterns. To satisfy us, the spectacle must engulf us, threaten us, sweep us up from the first. The “plots” of most interactive games are primarily simple—kill or be killed. These games achieve (at home and in the arcade) a wide currency among viewers bored by the lack of verisimilitude offered by the conventional cinema. And because of this lack, the cinema, many argue, is dying. Laura Mulvey asserted that the Hollywood studio system film

. . . is really a thing of the past—I mean, it’s like studying the Renaissance. But at the same time I think perhaps, like the Renaissance, it’s something that doesn’t go away and still stays a source of imagery and myths and motifs . . . although we could say that the studio system is dead and buried, and that Hollywood cinema, however very powerful it is today, works from very different economic and production structures, at the same time, our culture—MTV images, advertising images, or to take a big obvious example, Madonna—all recycle the images of the old Hollywood cinema, all of which have become points of reference, almost as though they’ve become myths in their own right, which are then taken over, absorbed, and recycled every day in the different media. (Súarez and Manglis, 7)

And yet, it seems to me, an equally strong case can be made for precisely the opposite contention: the cinema is not dead, but rather reconfiguring itself, emerging from the chrysalis of

variant new technologies to reassert itself as the dominant form of image manipulation/discourse, no matter what delivery system is ultimately employed for these images. Nor is Mulvey alone in this view. In his 1995 article, "The Eternal Return," Michael Atkinson argued that although we now have unprecedented access to "a full century of cinema . . . on video, on cable, [and] in revival houses," the "serious revivalism" of cinema is imperiled by the closing of theatres that cannot compete with the inroads Blockbuster Video has made into mainstream American consciousness (4). Further, as Elliott Stein notes, when films are screened theatrically, even in a major metropolitan center such as New York, print quality is so variable as to vitiate the film-going experience, offering patrons "one day, a great mint print of a classic; the next day, a beat up 16mm print, fit for junking . . ." (5). Even commercial houses in New York's Chinatown that specialize in foreign "action" imports from Hong Kong are closing due to the impact of near-instantaneous (and often illegal) videotape competition (Wice, 14). What can we offer to counterbalance this grim view of the collapse of the classical cinema?

Firstly, we must embrace the future of cinema/video representation and reproduction, rather than seek to ignore and/or avoid it. As has been necessary through time with sound-on-film, color, CinemaScope, television, and the more recent technological developments previously mentioned, we should above all welcome these changes in the medium we share as scholars and practitioners. Cybertechnologist Bert Deivert published a superb commentary in *Cinema Journal* on film research on the Internet, detailing a variety of visual and/or textual research materials readily available through the net and the World Wide Web (see Deivert, 103-124, for further details). Anna Everett notes that to secure our collective future within the world of cyberspace "we must become programmers, software developers, and whatever else it takes . . . a whole new lexicon has emerged" (10) in the study of cinema through computer-aided access. And video cassettes and LaserDiscs give us as scholars, researchers, or casual viewers wider and cheaper access to cinema/video moving image constructs, both old and new, than ever before.

As cited by Scott Heller, Henry Jenkins of M. I. T. declared that "we [in academe] are paying a tremendous price for our intellectual and aesthetic conservatism . . . there is enough work [in the new media environment] to keep us all investigating and theorizing . . . for decades to come" (A17). The newest phenomenon in moving image distribution is the use of the World Wide Web as a cheap, global disseminator of short films from Africa, China, and other Third World and/or Asian countries. Hollywood has jumped on the web bandwagon eagerly: nearly every new film now released has a web site of its own, displaying the trailer and other promotional materials for each new release. The web may indeed be the place where 1960s experimental cinema is re-invented, as it is cost effective, pervasive, and readily accessible. The introduction of Netscape 3.0 makes downloading films to your computer hard drive relatively quick and efficient; saved as simple text documents, a fifteen-minute film can be downloaded in roughly that same amount of time. MPEG videos offer even greater quality, and a number of new programs are experimenting with the dissemination of full-screen MPEG imagery with sound (such as the "Toob" format). Undoubtedly, the ease with which one can access full-screen moving images on the web will increase almost daily; it will probably be less than a year before films can be routinely distributed in this manner.

THE "NICHE" FEATURE

Despite claims to the contrary, "niche" features are a growth industry for a variety of reasons. When Arnold Rifkin took over as head of "the William Morris Agency's motion picture division . . . he set up a special division . . . to stitch together the sort of movie projects that top Hollywood agencies traditionally disdain" (Bart, 89), developing films such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), David Twohy's *Shockwave* (1995), Desmond Nakano's *White Man's Burden* (1995), and Kevin Spacey's *Albino Alligator* (1995). One of Rifkin's top lieutenants, Rick Hess, noted that "despite what anyone may tell you, there's a voracious appetite for niche product out there" (Bart, 94). As

testing grounds for newer talent, or zones of rejuvenation for actors or directors who have had a few box-office failures (Bruce Willis sought out small but flashy roles in a variety of niche films after the failure of *Hudson Hawk* [1991] at Rifkin's suggestion), these modest and compact films are one manifestation of the future of cinema. More women are making films today than at any time since the silent era, with such directors as Julie Dash, Kathryn Bigelow, Jane Campion, Amy Heckerling, Patricia Rozema, Mira Nair, Chantal Akerman, Marta Meszaros, Allison Anders, and many others making feature films, on both modest and grandiose budgets. Gregg Araki, Hal Hartley, Abel Ferrara, and Jim Jarmusch create low-budget films with regularity and rapidity, assuring their careers while simultaneously operating at the margins of commercial cinematic discourse.

CD-ROM films are another new medium whose potential has barely been tested. Confined in the past to interactive "shoot and kill" games, the medium may be moving into the zone of true narrative signification, as stars such as Margot Kidder, Tim Curry, Christopher Lloyd, Donald Sutherland, and Christopher Walken venture into the ever more plot-driven, yet still exceedingly low-cost, medium (\$2.5 million is considered a lavish budget; Steinberg, 114). The routine use of computer-generated imagery is becoming so prevalent, and cost-effective, that sets, costumes, locations, and even supporting players can be conjured up with a whisk of the electronic paint box. All of these new technologies raise serious questions about their use and/or reception by practitioners/viewers, but these are precisely the areas that we should seek to explore in the coming years—indeed, this new territorial domain of the cybervisual is one of the most vital fields of contemporary cinema/video/moving-image research.

And yet, there is much information that can easily be cited to chronicle the actual *death* of the cinematic image experience as we have to come to appreciate it. Like the movie palace theatre seats in Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), which electrocute patrons during the projection of a film and then unceremoniously dump their lifeless bodies into a disposal pit below, the theatrical cinematic experience of the past is being replaced by the glow of the twenty-first-century hearth, the video terminal/television screen. In an oft-cited opinion piece, "The Decay of Cin-

ema" in *The New York Times Magazine*, Susan Sontag mourned the death of "cinephilia," an unrestrained, auteurist-driven passion for the classical, narrative cinema which flourished in the critical discourse of the '60s and '70s. In many ways, Sontag's assertion is correct. The Sarrisian model of film appreciation fueled by such early cinema-based texts as *Film Form* and *Film Sense* has been replaced by a new teleculture which embraces the entire panorama of moving image studies—including film, video, and images transported through cyberspace on the World Wide Web. At the same time, cinema study (seen in the most reductive sense of that term) has experienced a proliferation of texts and new critical methodologies, as alternative fields of study prove their efficacy in analyzing the moving image construct. Concomitantly, we are also witnessing a move away from European/American dominated modes of visual discourse, and an embrace of African, Asian, and Queer Cinema practice, even as national and international boundaries crumble in the wake of Internet image dissemination. Finally, the archival hegemony of the traditional Hollywood cinema is being challenged by a post-New Wave movement of feminist and Third World moving image practice, although the major studios still seek to maintain their stranglehold on the international theatrical box office. One studio executive predicts that while four thousand prints (on average) of a hit movie such as *Braveheart* (1995) may suffice for international distribution in the current marketplace, entirely new mechanisms of image delivery will increase the demand to eight thousand prints by the turn of the twenty-first century, as new markets (primarily in Asia and Africa) are penetrated by the neocolonialist project of the traditional Hollywood narrative cinema. That is, of course, assuming that alternative methods of visual reproduction are not already in common use by that time; today 35mm film, tomorrow digital videotape, or finally, a computer chip encoded with all the glyphic data necessary.

CONTEMPORARY MOVING IMAGE THEORY

An entirely new set of values and concerns mark contemporary moving image critical discourse. Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and*

Machines argues for the primacy of the inextricably laced link between the human corpus in motion and the task/objective of the motion picture apparatus. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's *Women Film Directors* persuasively and exhaustively chronicles the thorough marginalization of the works of women filmmakers in the traditional cinematic canon. The previously under-appreciated work of the German cinéaste Valie Export has been documented in the critical study *Valie Export: Fragments of the Imagination* by Roswitha Mueller. In *Risking Who One Is; Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature*, Susan Rubin Suleiman argues that it is the "self" that is at risk when one contemplates the cultural project of contemporary visual discourse. David Curtis has compiled a directory of previously marginalized British cinema and video practitioners (*A Dictionary of British Film and Video Artists*) that highlights the work of Susan Collins, Steven Dwoskin, Sandra Lahire, Juliet McKoen, Pratibha Parmar, and others. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha interrogates the cultural hegemony of moving image production and dissemination as practiced by the West, thus ensuing the erasure of textual/visual practice, and discouraging the creation of self-identity in the Third World. A group of American independent theorists/practitioners have gathered their critical writings and manifestoes in a document entitled *Angry Women*—a platform for the post-feminist discourse of such artists as Avital Ronell, Susie Bright, bell hooks, Sapphire, Karen Finley, and other media practitioners who work at the frontiers of corporeal visual image discourse. Simultaneously, markers of the decline of Hollywood's domain over the collective imaginations of the transgendered spectator constructed by the hegemony of the dominant cinema may be observed in essays such as Michiko Kakutani's "Designer Nihilism." In this essay Kakutani persuasively argues that the contemporary viewer has lost faith in traditional patterns of narrative closure, and, in the age of AIDS, believes only in the finality of self-annihilation, configuring the zone of the living as a location of pain and self-denial rather than a site of possibility and pleasure.

As cinematic/moving image practice thus becomes more reflexive and self-referential, audiences who desire only an escape from the predestined patterns of their shared communal-

ity embrace films that are airbrushed and digitally manipulated to artificial perfection (*Forrest Gump* [1994], *Jurassic Park* [1993]), and choose the mindless reductivism of *Happy Gilmore* (1996) over the chic cynicism of *Leaving Las Vegas* (1996). (Kakutani correctly identifies *Leaving Las Vegas* as the logically fatalistic plague-era extension of Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* [1945]. That film ended with Ray Milland resurrecting himself from the self-destructive cycle of alcoholism through the agency of a heterotopic union with a "redemptive woman"; in contemporary critical/practical discourse, we seek only a collective exit from the zone of corporeal existence, as Nicholas Cage demonstrates in *Leaving Las Vegas*. Both actors, it should be noted, won Best Actor Academy Awards for their respective performances. If one seeks a discrete symptomatic display of the loss of hope as a shared cultural conceit in the repressive, neo-Victorian social climate of the late 1990s, this consensual, canonical certification of Cage's relentlessly self-loathing fictive construct might well serve as a unique example.) The gritty, yet blender-processed imagery of *Leaving Las Vegas* (the city itself being a spectacular site of Western cultural decay and commodification) is counterbalanced in Hollywood discourse by films such as *Father of the Bride II* (1996), *Happy Gilmore* (1996), *Sgt. Bilko* (1996), and other paeans to the established, though collapsing, social order, in which all threats to the established locations of American culture are comfortably burlesqued, thus ensuring the final and inevitably artificial re-establishment of the patriarchal social order.

As John Frow argues in his study *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, "the formation of the knowledge class characteristically takes place around the professional claim to, and the professional mystique of, autonomy of judgment; this forms the basis both for the struggle over the organization of work and for individual self-respect (that is, for a particular mode of subjectivity) grounded in this relation to work" (125). Thus what is at stake in cultural studies in the late 1990s is the right to self-actualization and the creation of alternative forms of self-representation in direct opposition to the "normative" identity constructs proffered with increasing insistence by the hegemonic mainstream cinema. The proliferation of video cameras, more than any single other

factor, has assisted the individual in reclaiming a personal space of self-representation within the sphere of visual/social identity. The Camcorder has brought us detailed documentation of the Rodney King beatings, of the riots in mainland China, and of the relatively recent disastrous satellite launch in that same country which resulted in the destruction of a large civilian living area (these images were suppressed by the Chinese government, only to be recorded and then smuggled out of the country by a visiting Israeli engineer). Yet it is not surprising to note that programs such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* seek to undermine this creation of an alternative self through the same medium—real-time, synchronous sound, portable home video cameras—by reducing common daily experience to a series of embarrassing, discontinuous incidents “excerpted” from the flow of temporal human existence. At the other end of the scale, such TV shows as *Cops* revel only in the most grotesque and violent images culled from several days of surveillance by a professional video crew. In these shows, life has become the zone of buffoonery or brutality to the exclusion of all else. In *Hegemony and Power*, Benedetto Fontana holds that the “opaque quality of the culture and consciousness of the people implies that political knowledge, when related to the life and practice of the masses is a knowledge whose function it is to mask—*velare*—the technique and science [of political discourse]” (159). It is the “opaque quality” that makes self-actualization through the visual so problematic, lacking any “solid ground” of shared telecultural space, and yet simultaneously calls our collective attention to the desperate urgency of this project, in the face of numerous competing social and commercial imagistic discourse models, all of which seek to erase the individual in the service of the global economy of image production and exchange.

It is the project of international cultural displacement that makes the potential work of the Internet and the World Wide Web so inherently crucial to twenty-first-century moving image production, dissemination and reception, and simultaneously signals why governmental agencies on an international scale so desperately seek to control the international flow of information afforded by this medium of cultural exchange. We are in the dawn of a re-invention of the moving image construct, either as

a narrativist methodology, or a conglomeration of individual glyphs that seek to form a separate self-identity through the medium of cyberspace. Static web pages, much like early "magic lantern" projection systems of the late nineteenth century, are already perceived as passé by even the least sophisticated auditors of the Net; Shockwave imagery, still in its infancy, must be compared to the zoetrope—a device that prefigured the invention of paper "roll film" by George Eastman in the late 1880s—in its infancy. As the Internet moves from telephone lines to fiber optic transmission cables, and the quality of QuickTime and/or MPEG video/cinema imagery improves (particularly with the new MPEG "Toob" format, a pioneering attempt to present full-screen sound/image 30fps video through the existing ethernet facilities), one might persuasively argue that the large-scale computer screen may well replace the traditional configuration of TV/cable/satellite/digital dish delivery, as passive viewers are replaced with individualized, self-constructed auditors who select, modify, and program their own schedules of narrative/glyphic imagistic discourse. The primary concern in this area, however, is the cost factor, which is prohibitive—as it was in the early days of conventional broadcast television. Yet it seems inevitable that mass production and the global embrace of these new technologies will bring the web within the reach of nearly everyone who now owns a conventional television receiver, and the stage will then be set for the central site of cultural struggle in the century to come: that is, who will control the images that are created, and "published," on home pages throughout the Internet. While commercial web sites are now commonplace on the web, it is the personal/educational "home pages" where the truly important disruptive and discursive work of the Internet is being accomplished, and it is for this reason that the hegemonic social order finds these individual sites of social expression so disconcerting and threatening.

MOVING THE CENTER OF CULTURAL DISCOURSE

When we speak of "moving the center," we are discussing not only the displacement of American/European culture from the

center stage of moving image studies; or the ascent of the video/chip image over the traditional photographic medium of 35mm film; or the explosion of cultural artifacts in the form of critical texts that seek to explicate the word obtained by the domain of the visual over our contemporary telecultural existence. We are also speaking of the rebirth of the individual vision, of the potential for self-actualization through the creation of a series of visual constructs that reposition the creator/viewer at the center of imagistic discourse, and the subsequent (and consequent) "freeze" of Hollywood cinema into a ritualistic medium of operatic self-referentiality, seeking to support itself through the rule of the look alone.

As Henry A. Giroux argues in *Disturbing Pleasures*, "a pedagogy of representation [within academic discourse] would give students the opportunity not simply to discover their hidden histories but to recover them" (89), thus educating spectators on how to both analyze and respond directly to the fictive constructs that have unanswerably dominated our spectatorial consciousness since the invention of the theatrical motion picture. Steven Shaviro (in *The Cinematic Body*), Bill Nichols (in *Blurred Boundaries*), and Steve Redhead (in *Unpopular Cultures*) have all argued for a new aesthetic that views the cinema as a site of primary cultural discourse, a being possessed of its own phantom authority and corporeal resonance. Cinema, they have contended, simultaneously signals and interprets the landscape of popular culture in a mimetic medium that derives its primary authority from the continual oscillation between the figurative and the physically constituted domain of corporeal discourse; the moving image becomes a living being, transmitting and translating the circumstances of our proscribed existence into the shared domain of the transcultural glyph. Moreover, as I have argued in *It Looks at You: The Returned Gaze of Cinema*, the cinema/video image (particularly as constituted through cyberspace, where each auditor of a given image is in turn addressed, indexed, and reciprocally watched by the image she/he views) creates in contemporary culture a zone of societal control and panopticonic dominion as an ineluctable coefficient of its presentation/reception to all members of its intended audience. Futurists Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, particularly in

their works *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies* and *Hacking the Future: Stories for the Flesh-Eating 90s*, argue that the body has transcended the traditional corporeal dimensions of gender constructs and fleshly existence to enter the zone of the cyberbody, in which the human and the technological are virtually wedded in an ecstatic, all-encompassing fusion of the post-cybernetic corpus. Indeed, as the texts collected in *The Last Sex* persuasively argue, contemporary culture has moved of its own accord beyond the artificially fixed ground of societally sanctioned sender constructs into an "interzone" of transgenerational expression and corporeal reconstitution, in which we construct for ourselves the bodies and cultural identities we wish to possess. This idea is also expressed in the anthology *Cruising the Performative*, which deconstructs gender and the cultural signification of such personal accouterments as clothing, hairstyling, the use of rings and body piercing, as "interventions into the representation of ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality" (as declared by the subtitle of the text itself). Robyn Wiegman's *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* proceeds along similar lines, seeing both contemporary and canonical social discourse as a clash between the exigencies of individual identity, and the concerns of a society that seeks to de-gender and virtually disempower the authority of the human versus the controlling interests of an inherently corporate social order.

Nor is this work new. A renaissance of intense interest in the work of Andy Warhol (as seen in Shaviro's *Cinematic Body*, as well as the cultural texts *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* and *Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars* [this last text linking Warhol's "subversive" gay films of the 1960s with the pioneering work of queer cinéastes Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith]), who sought to disrupt not only traditionally received notions of gender construction and authorial discourse, but also to undermine the primacy of the "humanist" in the plastic arts by declaring himself a "machine" engaged in the replication of still and moving images for popular consumption. Warhol's factory may be seen as one of the earliest sites of cybernetic moving image discourse, in which the bodies of Warhol's performers/subjects were ineradicably linked with the mechanistic processes that reproduced them (either Warhol's silk-screen painting method, or his

use of a static 16mm movie camera, most often loaded with 1200' of film for an uninterrupted thirty-five minutes of reproduction). This embrace of the mechanistic and mundane extension of the human corpus into the domain of the cybernetic machine was shared by Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Ernie Gehr, and other "Structuralists" of moving image production in the 1960s through the present.

In *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* by Ivone Margulies, and *Landscapes of Resistance; The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* by Barton Byg, the authors argue that this linkage of the human and the mechanical is an inherent coefficient of the moving image production/exhibition/reception process, and that in their films from the 1960s to the present, Straub/Huillet, Akerman and other "Postfilm" (to use Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's term) practitioners are signaling the collapse of the filmic narrative and the ascension of the real-time machine-generated construct as the dominant mode of moving image discourse, and simultaneously creating a new model of unparalleled economy in the creation of post-narrative cinema, as befits films that acknowledge their intrinsically mechanical nature with each frame of their flickering, fugitive existence. These films, the authors argue, are sites of sexuality and loss, of pleasure denied and transformed; they are zones for the reconfiguration of gender roles and the increasingly rigid normative standards espoused by a political hegemony desirous of masking its own bid for authority, while seeking to assure an international viewing (and voting) constituency that the repression of desire, and the substitution of despair and loss for the pursuit of individual reconfiguration, are necessary to uphold the existing visual hegemonic order, and to deny the sexuality of human experience.

The link between our current neo-Victorian society and the values espoused by the original Victorians in late nineteenth-century America and Britain is, indeed, a hot topic in current moving image cultural studies. The late Victorian era witnessed the "unfreezing" of the still image into the phantom sarcophagus of the infant form of the motion picture; in much the same way, as I have remarked, images on the Internet are now haltingly being brought to artificial life through a variety of

metanetric digital devices. As Carol Mavor notes in her discussion of the work of Julia Margaret Cameron in *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*, Cameron's images, phantasmally blurred daguerreotypes of mothers and their infant offspring (living and dead), map a zone of bodily recovery, memory, and sexual desire that constitutes the intrinsic domain of the human body, a domain that the nearly instantaneous medium of wet-plate photography allowed women and men to inhabit for the first time. As our corporeal selves are exposed to increasing risk through AIDS, fugitive viral infections, and the random exigencies of a social system in collapse, the artificial extraction of temporal/spatial moments of respite and repose from our collective existence becomes all the more pressing—indeed, it reveals that the primary function of the cinematographic apparatus is to enable us to remember, recapture, and vicariously re-experience selected zones of pleasure, fear, desire, and communal longing. It is this desire to confront the prison of our bodies through the medicine of the moving image which, above all, fuels the current discourse in moving image cultural studies. As we contemplate the transience of human existence, and beyond the fragility of our own corporeal being the delicate transience of even the most permanently engraved life-glyph, the study of the visual arts becomes a consideration of the physics of serial mortality, as our bodies are transubstantiated into filmic/video/digital simulacrum for the contemplation of a generation of spectatorial voyeurs as yet unborn, and the critical scrutiny of a society whose values will be wholly different from our own.

POSTFEMINIST CRITICAL THEORY

Signaling this shift in cultural perception, postfeminist cultural theory has entered a new phase of critical discourse, in which considerations of feminist text/image production are being re-evaluated in light of contemporary archival discoveries. Beverly Skeggs's *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production* offers compelling insights by a number of theorists on the values espoused by competing sites of social/cultural discourse, as

well as reconsiderations of marginalized figures in moving image history. Notable are Pat Kirkham's perceptive consideration of Ray Eames, the wife of designer/filmmaker Charles Eames, whose entirely *co-equal* contributions to the culture of visual literacy have yet to be fully assessed in the same volume, and Jackie Stacey's consideration of the shift in viewer perspective in postmodern feminist moving criticism in the concisely considered essay, "The Lost Audience: Methodology, Cinema History, and Feminist Film Criticism." Myra Macdonald's *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* explores how feminist discourse is decentered in the dominant contemporary commercial domain of televisual culture. In *Feminist Subjects, Multi-Media, Cultural Methodologies*, Penny Florence and Dee Reynolds have chosen essays that examine current totemic exemplars of supposed feminist discourse, including Jane Arthurs's properly skeptical critique of *Thelma and Louise* (1991) (which can be seen as espousing feminist self-actualization through ritual self-destruction), and Annette Kuhn's consideration of her own "gendering" through the guidance of her mother in a haunting autobiographical text, "A Credit to Her Mother." All of these critical investigations into the hegemonic power of the visual domain of the moving image significantly advance the constituted body of critical thought in this area.

This long overdue effort towards canonical expansion, or revision, or perhaps elimination, places feminist moving image practice within the body of received knowledge which has become identified as the collective corporeal output of the video graphic/cinema to graphic apparatus. In its totality, it signals what Kathy Acker has aptly termed "The End of the World of White Men," and what Third World theorists such as Manthia Diawara (in his classic study *African Cinema* and his feature-length video project, *Rouch in Reverse*, which feeds the work of the favored colonial ethnographer back upon itself to devastating effect), Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, and others argue for in their textual and visual projects. Even at the introductory level of moving image studies, basic survey texts now boast an inclusiveness and exhaustive attention to detail which was unimaginable even a half decade ago. Thompson and Bordwell's new film sur-