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# A Universe of New Images

By Girish Shambu

What exactly is the relationship between *cinophilia* and *criticism*? It turns out there is no easy answer to this question. In the mid-70s, Laura Mulvey, in her landmark essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” (1) pitted one squarely against the other. For her, cinophilia reached its apotheosis at especially those moments when the movement of the film seemed suspended - when the narrative was stilled - to permit the spectacle of the woman to emerge, so she could be “looked at”. With the viewer lost in the spectacle, and unaware of its political implications, the critical enterprise collapsed, killed by cinephilic pleasure. Cinophilia had moved inward - but it remained there, without moving outward.

30 years later, in her book *Death: 24x a Second*, (2) Mulvey returned to this opposition between movement and stillness - but this time with a radical reorientation. DVD technology now allowed the flow of a film to be halted, but it enabled the viewer to both *move into* the image (scan every inch of it, temporarily lose oneself in it) but then, spurred by critical reflection, *move out* into the larger, surrounding world of social and political realities. This is not to say that such a process of halting followed by critical reflection was impossible in the pre-video era - we haven't forgotten Raymond Bellour's micro-level shot-by-shot analyses. But by putting this ability into the hands of the ordinary cinephile, it gave film culture at least the potential for an enhanced criticism.

While I believe that DVD- and Internet-era cinophilia doesn't *automatically* result in a deeper, more penetrating criticism, it can, at its best, help generate a wellspring of new and richly suggestive material on the Net for the curious and searching scholar.

To take one example: Kansas Sire is the pseudonym of a cinephile based in Cadiz, Spain. She can be found on the Internet at Facebook (where her admirers include filmmakers and critics like Jose Luis Guerin, Pascal Bonitzer and Alain Bergala) and [at Tumblr](#). Daily, she posts still images, well chosen for their mystery and evocativeness, from little known or unknown films. Here is a small sample of films whose arresting and memorable images I discovered on her Facebook page one week: *La Corruzione* (Mauro Bolognini, 1963), *Tomorrow is Another Day* (Felix E. Feist, 1951), *Kriminal* (Umberto Lenzi, 1966), *The Easiest Way* (Jack Conway, 1931), and *Sudden Rain* (Mikio Naruse, 1956). Let alone seeing them, I had not heard of any of these films!

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Kansas Sire may not be “doing criticism” in the traditional sense, but she is involved in a kind of work that conflates the cinephilic and the critical. Her image-posts suggest correspondences, provoke speculation, and spur our cinephilic curiosity, all of which are necessary for new criticism to be born. This is why such cinephiles – and there are many on the Internet – can be of value to the large, international project of film studies.

Recently, Sire posted a haunting still from Michel Deville’s *Le voyage en douce* (1980), an unpopulated frame in which we see a neatly made bed, in a corner of the room, with a painting hanging above it. “I said: “I was lost,”” read the subtitles at the bottom of the image, translating (we assume) an offscreen voice. Falling into a reverie, I stared at this sharply evocative still image for a while, and then read the Facebook comment immediately below, by Bonitzer: “Sometimes there is more cinema in one photogramme than in the movie from which it is extracted...”

### **Endnotes:**

(1) First published in *Screen*, 16.3, Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18.

(2) Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

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