

amateur, unprofessional, exploratory, imaginative, untimely, wild, and multisensorial. Our creative-critical approach is summoned by an urgency, by the resulting need for an immediate response, and by an attention to the multiple forms of life that have the right to live. The emergent creative-critical approach insists on the singular and the seemingly minute, paying attention at a microscopic level to those multiple life-forms, multiple worldviews, and multiple imaginations. Such a myopic approach is many times rushed and speedy, driven by the imminent and constant threats of our present, pushed to be reactive. We need a temporal framework that is expansive, macro, and multilayered—one that will emerge from a belief in the deep geological time that is our only truth and our only means for livable lives.

Notes

1. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, e-book (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013). In the closing sentence of the book's preface, Butler and

Athanasiou write: "And so we take up the question of how to become dispossessed of the sovereign self and enter into forms of collectivity that oppose forms of dispossession that systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice."

2. See particularly chap. 5, "Destructions?" in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles* (Paris: Minuit, 2009). Didi-Huberman in turn is elaborating these thoughts on the "passing intermittences" of the image from his close reading of Walter Benjamin's work on the dialectical image.
3. See Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, chap. 1, "Aporetic Dispossession, or the Trouble with Dispossession," last paragraph.
4. The term comes from Francine R. Masiello, *The Senses of Democracy: Perception, Politics, and Culture in Latin America* (Austin: Texas University Press, 2018).
5. Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o, "Introduction: Theory in the Wild," in "Wildness," special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (July 2018): 453. Their introduction has been fundamental to the development of these theses.

MANIFESTO

For a New Cinephilia

Girish Shambu

1

The old cinephilia is the cinephilia that has dominated film culture for the last seventy-five years. Its origin story recounts its rise in post-World War II France, its auteur worship, and its cult of *mise-en-scène*. Over the years, this story has made a profound mark on Euro-Western film culture, and has come to be installed as the hegemonic narrative of movie love, period. A magic trick: the local has quietly become the universal.

The new cinephilia recognizes two things about this origin story: that it is simply one narrative of movie love among innumerable in the world; and that it has been authored mostly by one minority group: straight white men. In response, the new cinephilia wants to multiply a diversity of voices and subjectivities, and a plethora of narratives about cinephilic life and experience. The new cinephilia, which lives comfortably both as URL (on the internet) and IRL ("in real life"), is a

self-conscious cinephilia, in that it foregrounds the social situatedness—the subject positionality—of the cinema lover. Therefore, I must add: I write these words as a straight male cinephile of South Asian origin who lives in the U.S.A.

2

The pleasures at the heart of the old cinephilia are predominantly aesthetic. The new cinephilia has a broader definition of pleasure: it values the aesthetic experience of cinema, but it demands more. It finds pleasure, additionally, in a deep curiosity about the world and a critical engagement with it. Cinema teaches us about the human and nonhuman world in new and powerful ways. Traditional cinephilic pleasure is private, personal, inward; it is also what Laura Mulvey, in her landmark manifesto, wished to destroy. The new cinephilia radiates outward, powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will to social and planetary change. It is no coincidence that so many filmmakers valued by the new cinephilia—women, queer, indigenous, people of color—have an interest in activism, and view cinema itself as part of a larger cultural-activist project. It is equally no coincidence that comparatively few straight white male filmmakers share this trait.

3

Central to the old cinephilia is the act of evaluation. List making, rank ordering, the creation of hierarchies and levels—these activities, widely acknowledged to be a male propensity, are important to the old cinephilia. (One of its sacred texts, Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema*, definitively illustrates this impulse.) In film culture, value flows from pleasure, and since the old cinephilia privileges aesthetic pleasure, it has long been the key criterion of value for films. For the new cinephilia, with its expansive notion of pleasure and value, films that center the lives, subjectivities, experiences, and worlds of marginalized people automatically become valuable.

4

Auteurism is a cornerstone of the old cinephilia. By holding the position (as François Truffaut did) that the worst film by an auteur is inherently more interesting than the best film by a non-auteur, auteurism became an ingenious mechanism for ceaselessly multiplying discourse on a limited number of filmmakers, mostly male. Auteurism, in other words, became a manspreading machine. The myth of scarcity that auteurism long cultivated and deployed regarding films made by nonmale directors is finally being exploded by the new cinephilia. The attitude of the new cinephilia toward auteurism is ambivalent: although it has heavily favored men directors until now, there is nothing necessarily male essentialist about auteurism. It can as easily be put to use as a fertile method for generating analysis, writing, and conversation about, especially, female and nonwhite male filmmakers.

5

The old cinephilia claims to be open and eclectic. Its adherents have long taken satisfaction in casting their net wide to encompass both commercial and art cinema, contemporary and older movies, domestic and international films, and a broad span of genres. Though this is an admirable impulse, in reality it has not delivered on its promises of inclusiveness. Traditional cinephilia privileges the form of the narrative fiction feature. Other valuable forms, such as serialized television, short films, web series and videos, experimental work, and even documentary films are not accorded the same pride of place. Filmmakers from marginalized groups—that is, nonwhite or nonheterosexual male—face significantly higher barriers

in making fiction feature films and therefore gravitate to other sectors and platforms. This has meant that the non-dominant moving-image forms in which these artists often work receive less attention.

The new cinephilia takes up So Mayer's call for "representational justice," aiming for a *true* inclusiveness, and embracing the broadest possible variety of moving-image forms and artists.¹ This does not mean devoting equal attention to all filmmakers and all work, for that would be the kind of tepid, liberal gesture that allots an "equal voice to all sides." Instead, because the old cinephilia has long privileged filmmakers belonging to certain dominant social groups, the new cinephilia throws its weight behind socially and politically marginalized artists, as well as the institutionally marginalized cinematic forms that are most hospitable to them. Each cinephilic act of speaking, writing, citing, and curating must also be an act that intervenes in an unequal world.

6

A certain tendency of the old cinephilia: it has a conservative, nostalgic streak. Cinephilic experiences (especially from childhood and young adulthood) are treasured, sacralized, held close throughout one's lifetime. As Sarah Keller has argued, cinephiles often experience an anxiety, a defensiveness, when their investments are imperiled, their pleasures threatened.² To take a well-known example: when feminists have issued calls to turn away from, to reduce critical and cinephile attention to, the work of figures such as Woody Allen and Roman Polanski, they have encountered a powerful, reactionary resistance to any such suggestion that arises in the ranks of film (especially auteurist) culture.

The new cinephilia recognizes the inherent instability of value judgments about artists and their work. The worth of a film may rise and fall over time, depending not just on formal criteria, but also on ideological ones. We must forever be open to the possibility of reevaluating or even renouncing our objects of previous adoration in light of new knowledge, new consciousness, new imperatives. At this present moment, the entire corpus of cinema looks different to the eye of the new cinephile in a #MeToo world.

7

The old cinephilia is endlessly fascinated by representations of male bad behavior: obsessive, dominating, abusive, violent.



Rooney Mara in *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015), a film prized by the new cinephilia.

Film criticism has aided and abetted this proclivity, putting at its service an admiring language to endorse, encourage, and enshrine it. “Dark,” “twisted,” “provocative,” “edgy” are words used much more frequently to characterize cinema made by (and about) men than women. The new cinephilia is both wary and weary of this overrepresentation, which it counters by proposing a cinephilia of refusal. The new cinephile feels no desire to continue subjecting herself to the cinema of male pathology.

8

You shall know the old cinephilia by the sounds of its worrying: film culture these days is “too PC,” too “morality driven,” and “all about identity politics.” Supposedly fragmented and atomized along identity lines, the community of cinema lovers is no longer unified the way it once (allegedly) was.

For the new cinephilia, however, this unity of film culture is a figment of nostalgic fantasy, a fiction propagated and sustained by the imposition of a false universalism. Only by privileging certain identities (white, male, heterosexual) over others has Euro-Western film culture historically been able to construct its illusion of wholeness and coherence. What is truly being mourned by the old cinephilia is the (tiny) loss of cultural authority and influence for its dominant identity groups.

9

The old cinephilia and the new cinephilia are not only practices; they are also ideologies. Each cinephilia has its values and beliefs—ways in which it views the world—from which flow its tastes and sensibilities. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the two cinephilias do not form a simple, either/or binary system. Instead, they both live, whether in degrees small or large, in every individual cinephile.

10

“Life organized around films” is one widely accepted definition of traditional cinephilia. But at this moment, when the world is in turmoil and the planet on the edge of catastrophe, such a conception of cine-love seems irresponsible, even narcissistic. What we need now is a cinephilia that is fully in contact with its present global moment—that accompanies it, that moves and travels with it. No matter how ardent and passionate our love for this medium, the world is bigger and vastly more important than cinema.

Notes

1. So Mayer, *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
2. Sarah Keller, “Cinephobia: To Wonder, to Worry,” *LOLA*, no. 5 (November 2014), www.lolajournal.com/5/cinephobia.html.