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Saper - Of Spectacularization - JCRT 4.2
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Theories and histories of modern spectacles and media-inundated society have recently shifted from ideological analyses (i.e., analyses that see through an illusory spectacle world to manipulative apparatuses of social control) to synthetic analyses that use spectacles' structure as a basis, or lens, for writing. The former approach read media as texts. These textual theories created a tidy methodology for critics to use in reading and deciphering sounds and images as codes for sociopolitical meanings.

3. The latter generative strategies suggest the emergence of post-textual theory. These post-textual theories appear to emerge from the same foundational theories as the ideological cultural analyses, or textual theories of code systems, but these synthetic, or post-code, theories go in a different direction. They investigate how to produce counter-, or artificial, communication using strategies borrowed from modern forms including scandals, spin, family drama, etc. As soon as artificial, or infidel, borrowing starts, parody appears.
4. Combining the earliest and last works of the influential cultural theorist, Roland Barthes, the alternative seeks ways to intervene in, and redirect (as parodies), well-known (and well-worn) codes of communication.
5. After the mid-60s, critical theory gained a new importance for a diverse audience of students and scholars. Among scholars in the humanities the conglomeration of linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy became known simply as "theory." Something about the spectacle and drama of theory began attracting not just attention but love and repulsion. These theories examined how twentieth century spectacles reinforced social control through a system of self-surveillance.
6. Scholarship on spectacle emerged as an interdisciplinary field after the publication of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. Many scholars and critics before Debord had criticized mass media's hegemonic influence over the modern citizenry. Debord's achievement was to coin phrases for his provocative title and many other sound bites and slogans suitable for graffiti during the 1968 student rebellions in France. He produced a theory not only about how the world of mass media exerts social control, but also about how to intervene in the society of the spectacle using strategies similar to graffiti. He produced a manual on producing counter-spectacles opposed to the usually one-way state or corporate sanctioned spectacles. His phrases and slogans soon became vulgarized in media reports just as he would implicitly predict in his work. In that sense he initiated the spectacularization of critical analysis. That strategic side of his Situationist politics remained dormant in critical theory until the last decade of the twentieth century. Before that shift occurred, media theorists shared only his suspicions and distrust of media spectacles. Debord's severe critical apprehension of mass media's spectacles reached a pinnacle in the work of contemporary film and cultural theorists writing from the late 1960s to the late 1980s.

7. In the 1990s, as the century came to a close, those interested in code systems began more explicitly employing the mechanisms of spectacle. They combined Pop artists' attitudes toward mass media and popular culture with the Situationists' pragmatic approach (for example, in detoured media communications). They also added the Surrealists' counter-intuitive use of mystification as a critical tool.
8. At least since the 1960s, the two scholarly approaches, critical apprehension versus spectacularization as a theoretical strategy, overlapped and intertwined. The theories that sought to unmask the spectacle created their own spectacular controversies and resulted in theorists-as-stars. By the close of the twentieth-century, scholars began investigating how to use strategies borrowed from popular culture, like narrative, in their analyses of media codes.
9. The story begins with film theories arrival in the United States from France and a francophilic English journal called *Screen*. Film scholarship had little impact in American universities until the early 1970s. That situation changed dramatically between 1970 and 1975 as film studies burgeoned to include some 30,000 degree-seeking students.¹ By the end of the 1980s the number of film students had quadrupled. Journals started. Publishers created film divisions. This spectacular rise in academic interest spurred the search for rigorous film theories. Soon explanatory methodologies eclipsed previous attention to great directors and histories of filmmaking. Because of translations and applications of articles from *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the British journal *Screen*, ideology-criticism gained wide and enthusiastic acceptance in American media studies. It became difficult to separate film studies from this dominant school of criticism. Infused with the revolutionary zeal and frustrations of the late 1960's and early 1970's counter-culture, film theory rejected an explicit aesthetic in favor of a political polemic. It initiated the shift from studying film as an aesthetic object to analyzing spectators *as* sociopolitical effects. By describing subjectivity as a sociocultural construction rather than as a natural and universal property of humanity, theorists could focus on the social construction of reality. Specifically, film theory allowed for an explanation of how particular forms of social organization created a *manipulated* consensus. According to this model, cinema, especially Classical Hollywood narrative cinema, creates subjects (subjects of, for example, patriarchal-capitalism) to maintain and reproduce existing relations of socioeconomic production. Spectators reconstruct themselves as individuals, undetermined by history and social formations, free to choose commodities and life-styles by "misrecognizing" themselves as separate from others." The fulcrum of this theory depends on an epistemological reversal of humanism: from subjects-as-cause to subjects-as-effects. Make a note of this.'
10. This enormously *influential* theoretical approach (now known as ideology-criticism, post-modern theory, or political modernism) spurred much brilliant and provocative scholarship and productive enthusiasm throughout the 1980s. Its amalgam of Lacanian psychoanalytic feminism, Althusserian Marxism, Barthesian cine-semiotics, and Derridean deconstruction and demystification resembled the earlier Frankfurt School's pessimistic criticisms of both mindless conformity and the hegemonic power of the consciousness industry.² The ideology-criticism argued that creating conformity, or making someone an unwitting subject of a social order, involved a complicated and tenuous process. To understand that process, scholars needed to study how aesthetic form (for example, editing techniques and other film making conventions) interacted with visual comprehension, personal desires and identifications, and

¹Monaco, 3.

²For a discussion of the distinction between American and British cultural studies, and the apparently more pessimistic attitude of the American critics see Caughie, 156-171, 158-159).

political processes. They not only studied how the system worked smoothly, but they also exposed the tensions and failures in the otherwise “invisible style.” This ambitious set of goals has provoked constant and vehement opposition since its emergence, especially in the journals where the debates first appeared, first in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and then in *Screen*. In spite of the attacks, this type of contemporary film theory slowly gained begrudging acceptance in America among scholars interested in studying the socio-political implications of the cinema.

11. By the mid-eighties, theory began examining problems and solutions to forming new disciplines, like “cultural studies.” Theorists did not merely want to extend ideology-criticism’s scope of explanation beyond cinema studies. They wanted to find a more stable and powerful institutional home in American universities. Film scholars often legitimated their discipline by reference to the theoretical foundation of their criticism. In doing so, they inadvertently made the value of cinema studies depend on the relevance of foundational theories (for example, Lacanian psychoanalysis). Once scholars re-evaluated and criticized how theorists *applied* psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, some scholars merely abandoned any effort to theorize film, while others sought to patch-up the obvious problems. Film studies, threatened institutionally by its offspring, cultural and television studies, and theoretically by widespread dissatisfaction with its methodologies, also had to contend with conservative attacks on its importance for college students.
12. For media and cultural theorists themselves, the productive enthusiasm surrounding ideology-criticism had faded by the early 1990s. Indeed, as the right wing began their dated attacks, many media scholars had already moved on to other theoretical approaches. Media theorists began writing about the cracks in the edifice of ideology criticism. In spite of the corrections, vulgarized versions of media theory spread throughout the humanities into museums and public schools and into the angry minds of conservative critics. The theory had become conventionalized to the point of stultifying cinema studies. The situation was so predictable that an influential cultural critic half-jokingly fantasized that a *computer* in some publisher’s office was covertly responsible for churning out these formulaic articles and books on contemporary media and culture. One could easily guess the outcome of a cine-semiotic analysis: “the representations of gender, race, or class are naturalized by an invisible style and conventional narratives.” The problem was not that speculations lacked progressive political positions, but that their predictability muted their message. Theory had finally lived up to its worst critics’ claims: it was boring–boring in the sense that it neither highlighted the otherwise unnoticed, nor allowed for new connections.
13. Even in this apparently moribund state, media theories have to answer ever-increasing demands to explain a wider set of phenomena including the events of September 11th. This situation created a pressing need for work that continued to highlight the pitfalls of previous theories and applications. Many Parisian theories imported into American media studies had as much authenticity and accuracy as a Pepperidge Farm croissant.³ David Rodowick, Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek, Mary Ann Doane, and others would take film theory to task for its inaccurate (and misleading) use of Parisian theories. In the 1970s and 80s, film theorists sought to analyze the relation between cinema and ideology. Many film scholars initially greeted “apparatus theory” with productive enthusiasm.⁴ Times have changed. Studying

³For a slightly different version of this comparison see Elaine Showalter, 222.

⁴For the most influential examples of apparatus theory see Baudry. For a similar argument about the apparatus see Comolli. For the foundation of feminist apparatus theory see Mulvey. For a more sophisticated version of feminist apparatus theory see Rose. For the version of apparatus theory which Mulvey reacts against see Metz, 1982; cf. Metz, 1978;

contemporary film theory may look to some like flogging a dead horse. There is increasing agreement about the inadequacies of contemporary media theory. Even Laura Mulvey, discussing the future of cinema studies, writes that the great challenge for film theorists is “to move to something new, *from creative confrontation to creativity*” [emphasis added].⁵ The shift from confrontation to creativity already exists in contemporary theory. A review of those theories using this approach highlights this otherwise discounted or ignored potential.

14. In the last decade of the twentieth-century, a diverse group of scholars working independently from each other began outlining a new research paradigm in film and media studies. While individual scholars present peculiar nuances in their approach, they share a weariness with contemporary film theory, a continuing interest in theoretical speculations, and a desire to perform these speculations as media actions and cinematic essays. They also share an iconoclasm that makes an inclusive list difficult to construct. Any list of participants in this new paradigm would have to include writers openly critical of others working with this new research paradigm. Nevertheless, a pattern emerges when one takes a step back from the individual works and notices similar research strategies. Any list cannot pretend to identify everyone working in this area; a list of works might suggest notable cases with which other scholars, suspecting that their (future) works belong in this new research paradigm, can find similarities, models, problems, and guides. After the turn of the twenty-first century, this mismatched hodgepodge of experimental scholarship may begin to resemble a trend. Some writers describe aspects of an alternative method of research and presentation without yet completely attempting this type of work, while others attempt spectacular actions and cinematic essays without explaining their methodologies. In the last years of the twentieth-century, some scholars have begun to self-consciously recognize and demonstrate the strategies of this new research paradigm. These efforts found that the analytic use of theory in, for example, cinema studies had discounted or ignored the way theories might function as models of a new kind of intervention. This artificial or speculative scholarship does not have neat boundaries nor consensus among the practitioners. Some of these scholars invent neologisms for their particular practice. Some refer to their work as a break with conventional critical practices. Some connect their work to specific readings of deconstruction or psychoanalysis. They might not see themselves as linked, but collectively their work hints at an emergent practice of the post-textual film theory.
15. In constructing a list of scholars experimenting with these alternatives, one might mention as precursors any one of the influential theorists associated with *Tel Quel* who experimented with alternative presentations of scholarship (see also Kauppi). One would have difficulty compiling a definitive list of *cultural* and *media* scholars because any list of film and media theorists would contain glaring contradictions. Lacanians would find themselves included on a list with theorists influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Philosophically

Augst, 1980. For good summaries of apparatus theory see MacCabe, 1986. cf. Heath, 1981. For the most famous, if tedious and pretentious, debate about apparatus theory see Carroll, 1982; and, Heath, 1983; and, Carroll, 1983. To understand the psychoanalytic foundations of apparatus theory see Miller, 1966. This essay was presented to Lacan's seminar on 24 February 1965 and translated as “Suture (Elements of the logic of the signifier)” in *Screen* 18, 4 (Winter 1977/78): 24-34. For an early application of psychoanalysis to a proto-apparatus theory see Oudart, 1969; Oudart, 1977/78; see also Oudart, 1970; this article elaborates on some of the concepts around suture; see also Daney and Oudart (December 1971-January/February 1972); this article offers comments on the “unsutured” quality of contemporary cinema. For the most influential version of “suture” in apparatus theory see Dayan, 1974; see also Eberwein, 1978; this article is a discussion of Dayan and others; cf. Heath, 1977/78; see also Silverman, 1983; chapter 5 of her book deals with suture; see also Rothman, 1975.

⁵Mulvey, 1989, 162.

rigorous scholars would appear next to those more interested in popularization. Some might see themselves entrenched in ideological criticism, not opposed to it. Others might have an interest in experimentation and didactic manifestoes rather than analysis and cultural criticism. Some might claim that their personalized experimental work will resist efforts to make it into a model. Some will already see themselves in a later generation able to offer performative theory without elaborate justifications. Perhaps no one would find a comfortable fit in the outlines of an alternative research paradigm. Highlighting a way of working creates a context for using cinematic essays in film theory. This paradigm does not merely apply a new schema of analysis to films or other media. It reverses the relationship between films, art, and performance and theories. A filmic or performative sensibility might open up unexplored avenues of a theory.⁶

16. In the "Afterword" to R'da Bensma'a's *Year of Passages*, Tom Conley explains that "the shape of the text hardly resembles a memoir. It is more like a Vertovian montage of rushes or 'dailies' of an autobiography shown being spliced together in a cutting room."⁷ The first step, then, in understanding these works is to read them as something like scripts or cinematic essays. So, the post-textual does not read the film as a text, but as an opportunity 'a literal reading. The analogy to Dziga Vertov's vertiginous montages also highlights the effort to provoke and stimulate readers rather than merely describe or explain a theoretical argument. Conley goes on to explain that in all Bensma'a's work on film theory, "the transitional areas of film and writing—montages, special effects, lap-dissolves—bristle with expressive combinations of languages and images . . . all over the surface, be it that of a screen or a page of printed text."⁸ The use of cinematic effects occurs on the page of a printed text. Conley continues later to explain that "the text is composed as a storyboard or a script with autonomous sound and image tracks—is used to project single 'takes,' photographic shots, that turn the representation of speech into something that might be called a 'becoming-image'."⁹ The work in this new paradigm resembles storyboards and scripts with multiple tracks or, as Avital Ronell explains in reference to her *Telephone Book*, it resembles an "overloaded switchboard" more than a traditional book.¹⁰ This statement would not seem so crucial if others had not independently explained their own experimental work in the very same terms. Greg Ulmer, discussing Derrida's use of multiple columns in *Glas*, argues that one can read this type of experimental theory as a television script with multiple tracks. Robert Ray discusses using rap music's mixing of tracks to create a hybrid scholarship. Houston Baker demonstrates this "immigrant, sonic (twenty-two languages) hybridity produced by an internationally accessible technology . . . the new and very, very sound game of rap."^[11] What is startling is not just Baker's virtuosity in speaking a scholarly-rap sound – he is an accomplished poet as well as a scholar – but that he describes his work in the same terms as these otherwise very different media theorists. The writers wanted to use rap not simply as an object of study, not as a symptom or indicator of postmodern society, but rather as a model for writing scholarship. In doing so, they strategically parodied both media theory (i.e, they imagined what usually dry and hermetic theory would sound like, or literally read like, if a Rap performer or television script doctor wrote the essays)." Rap. Agit-prop. Writing. Make a note. Reading the media as a

⁶McKenzie, 2001; Ray, 1995 / 2001; Conley, 1995; Conley 1991; Kipnis, 1995; Ronell, 1989; Marcus, 1989; Shaviro, 1993; Zizek, Enjoy; Hart; Ulmer, 1985; Minh-ha, 1991; Mellencamp, 1990; Baker, Hybridity; see also Brunette and Wills, 1989 & 1994.

⁷Conley, 1995.

⁸Conley, 1995, 142.

⁹Conley, 1995, 144.

¹⁰Ronell, 1989.

literal text also became a crucial part of this parodic strategy.

17. In his own book on cinematic writing, Tom Conley explains “how the viewing of film can be an act of reading and, more cursorily, of writing. [It] entails rewriting and reworking the medium for the sake of creative interpretation.”¹¹ He wants to read films for the sake of creative interpretation – that is, to write on film – to contest “strategies of control” in films *and* film theory. In other words, his work wants to identify places marginal to the dominant modes of film theory where one can write. To creatively contest strategies of controlled reading is a good definition of parody. His efforts to distance his work from contemporary film theory even as he continues to offer bold theoretical speculations also resemble many works in this new research paradigm. Steven Shaviro, disturbed by the “suspicion, disavowal, and phobic rejection” found in contemporary film theory, argues that we cannot “free ourselves from illusion (or from ideology) by recognizing and theorizing our own entrapment within it.”¹² In all of these works, the theories have a parodic criticism of film theory’s efforts at rigor. The alternative ruined theory would have more appeal and perhaps more persuasiveness. Shaviro wishes that Metz “allowed his self-analysis to contaminate and ruin his theoretical project.”¹³ Shaviro pushes against dominant film theory because he wants to “accentuate the crisis in film theory to help blow the paradigm apart.”¹⁴ The alternative he examines in his book depends on a “subversive micropolitics of postmodern cinema.” This “theory of cinematic fascination” would follow images in their “seductive drift away from any such truth.”¹⁵ He claims that “cinematic images are not representations, but events.”¹⁶ Instead of demystifying the cinema with a film theory, he proposes to “surrender to and revel in cinematic fascination rather than distance” himself from it. Pleasure in this model does not necessarily indicate mastery over the object. Parodies never pretend to master the objects of imitation and criticism. They work through the constraints.
18. Like Shaviro, the video artist Laura Kipnis wonders why film theory seems suspicious of pleasure. Kipnis, working with both video and print, draws remarkably similar conclusions to other theorists interested in experimentation. In spite of the fact that she has forcefully attacked many involved in experimental media and cultural theory including my previous work, her theory and methods and even her insistent iconoclasm define her work in terms of the paradigm this essay seeks to define. In her arguments against more traditional media theorists, she explains that “theorists had little considered the implications of their particular theories for aesthetic practice . . . how audiences received my work.”¹⁷ From her dissatisfaction with the dominant film and media theories, she develops a political-aesthetic practice. Like others working in this paradigm, she seeks to produce work not as representations or criticisms of representations, but as events, actions, and as translations of her pleasures with popular culture. She does not want to analyze culture. She wants to produce pop-culture with a twist. Her practice uses “an essayistic form, a m’lange of dramatic and documentary sequences, and an appropriation of forms and idioms of popular culture.”¹⁸ Again, this description could apply equally well to a number of works that appeared toward the close of the twentieth-

¹¹Conley, 1991.

¹²Shaviro, 10.

¹³Shaviro, 11.

¹⁴Shaviro, 13.

¹⁵Shaviro, 23.

¹⁶Shaviro, 23.

¹⁷Kipnis, 2.

¹⁸Kipnis, 5.

century. Her work also reacts against the “self-righteous, humorless, and pietistic” in film theory and “grapples with the problem off how to be popular and critical, popular without, at the same time, being simpleminded.”¹⁹ She writes, “I only know that I don’t particularly want to be a part of a movement that sees its task as crushing fantasy and patrolling desire.”²⁰ In one of her scripts and films she has parodies of *Sesame Street*. Although these segments have humorous allusions to very adult sociopolitical issues, these segments also suggest a new way to approach cultural literacy. One could easily interpret her versions of *Sesame Street* as lessons for reading and writing culture rather than as criticisms of children’s television. She makes a *Sesame Street* for adults.

19. Greg Ulmer’s essay, “Handbook for a Theory Hobby” also attempts to use children’s popular culture as a humorous parodic primer for electronic literacy. These writers offer models and jokes about learning how to read and write (culture). The works function as media actions or events rather than as representations of a particular situation. Instead of shying away from the spectacular as a supposed veil over some lackluster truth, they use popular culture as a tool or parody for theoretical speculations. While contemporary film theory analyzes representations, these scholars use their imagistic work as events and performances. One cannot simply read their work as representations. The works in this research paradigm depend on replacing a concern with representation with an appreciation of performance and context. They want, as Kipnis explains, to make popular theory rather than theories merely critical of popular culture.
20. Gregory Ulmer’s “Handbook for a Theory Hobby” literally demonstrates how we might begin to construct a popular theory; his alternative theory functions as a craft or hobby.²¹ In this setting, the “entertainment industry will replace the universities as the principle source of cultural invention and innovation.” Like Kipnis, he wants to translate a specialized knowledge into a popular idiom. He explains that “translation would not simply pass from one language into another on the basis of a common core sense, but would pass through all languages at once, cultivating their associative syntheses instead of avoiding them.”²² Instead of editing out the links connected with each term, the translation allows for many associations much like Bensma’a’s Vertovian montage essay seeks to increase overlaps between specialized knowledge, autobiography, and popular culture.
21. The performative media essays found in this new paradigm relate directly to the concern for producing pleasure. The shift from alienated thought to carnivalesque events occurs by exploiting the indirections of metaphors, images, and key words employed in theoretical explanations or meta-languages. Ulmer’s “Handbook” offers instructions on how to write an allegory from the discourse of knowledge. This allegory collapses the possible image and word choices into the theory’s explanatory narrative.
22. The problem of translating specialized theoretical arguments for public use “resembles the status of Egyptian hieroglyphics ... originally intended (in their ancient context) for public communication, even for popular (politico-religious) messages, they became indecipherable, esoteric, unreceivable and hence occult as the ability to read them was lost.”²³ To release the

¹⁹Kipnis, 5.

²⁰Kipnis, 7.

²¹Ulmer, 1989.

²²Ulmer, 1981.

²³Ulmer, 1981, 53.

encrypted knowledge, to present the humanities to non-specialists and amateur theorists, Ulmer works through “complex, inaccessible objects or images.”²⁴ This translation requires the exposure of the encrypting process. That process makes knowledge specialized and cryptic. Before or simultaneous to the popularization of theory, the amateur must expose the process of repression. Otherwise, traditional pedagogy’s representation of knowledge will keep the boundary between the popular and the theoretical intact. Traditional pedagogy represents knowledge as a specialized and often esoteric discourse. It identifies the popular with “mere entertainment” or “leisurely distractions.” Like Shavero, Ulmer speculates using Deleuze and Guattari’s work as a guide. He borrows the term rhizome. A rhizome is an assemblage characterized by proliferations, crossings, overlaps, and deterritorializations without underlying structures or deeply rooted connections. These assemblages follow accidental changes. They do not follow changes in any single unit, nor do they depend on a trunk or stem. The assemblage responds to a change in structural relations that alters the direction of the whole assemblage. Instead of arborescent models, we might adopt rhizomatic models for thinking. Lewis Thomas’ description of termite behavior highlights important aspects of rhizomatic thinking: “They all simply ran around, picking up pellets at random and dropping them again. Then, by chance, two or three pellets happened to light on top of each other, and this transformed the behavior of everyone.”²⁵ Ulmer’s “Handbook” demonstrates the relationship between the rhizomatic and the arborescent models. He exposes the process of making knowledge specialized and un-receivable and foregrounds the process of repression. In this way, he subverts traditional pedagogy’s separation between the popular and the theoretical or the instant and the accumulated. This orientation of theory toward thinking rather than information allows us to translate a specialized knowledge into a popular idiom.

23. In a series of articles and in a provocatively titled book, *Andy Hardy Finds the Avant-Garde*, Robert Ray has offered manifestoes and demonstrations of work in this emerging research paradigm. He distrusts the often boring predictability of contemporary film theory. He advocates using popular culture as a guide rather than merely as an object of study. He favors a lucid prose style and montages of small sections to create a more accessible and popular theory. He also rejects the efforts to dismantle illusory fascinations. Instead, his work attempts to make the experience of appreciating film and reading film theory more fascinating. He explicitly refers to his practice as an effort to write cinematic essays, and the result produces a pleasurable parody of academic research (i.e., lots of fragments often surreally, or at least counter-intuitively, connected into a speculative argument).
24. In his chapter on “The ABC’s of Visible Theory,” Robert Ray demonstrates how the opposition between the visible and the theoretical dissolves when we examine what Marshall McLuhan called the “inventory of effects” available in print. Ray’s encyclopedic essay describes the interrelations between typography, language, and thought. Other essays have attempted to list effects, but those lists never go beyond formalism; limited to lists of techniques they tell us little about typography and design as cultural practices (see for example Mayer; see also Wolf).²⁶ Ray’s “ABC” connects the “paraphernalia of the text” with every cultural association he can bring to bear on these practices; he uses historical, fictional, scientific, and other discourses. Categories of discussion include: electricity; font types; strategies; saints, book, journal,

²⁴Ulmer, 1981, 54.

²⁵Thomas, 157.

²⁶Wolf *visually* catalogues the effects available to advertisers and designers; he includes: unexpected combinations, strange combinations, strange perspective, repetition, motion, manipulated symbols, scale, type as design, Homage, color, collage, improbable settings, humor, celebrity, and more.

painting, and article titles; language systems; ontology; names; technology; utopia; psychic states; newspapers; games; clichés; fictional animals; typescripts; rules; emotions; institutions; sociological categories; art movements; history; and self-reflexive comment. This enormous web of associations usually remains unnoticed in typographic effects and if we followed every association mentioned in this ABC, we would have to contend with the reservoir of our entire culture. Ray's essays explain how his cinematic theory works and list the benefits of this kind of research practice. The essays also demonstrate how the visual effects function not merely as ornaments to a theory but as key components of theoretical speculations.

25. The montage aphoristic lay-out of his ABC "argues" for alternative visio-typo-theories. Ray notes that the typesetter usually functions in much the same way as the "continuity girl" in classical cinema; the dominant mode of typography and design, the invisible style, hides the constraints of construction within the rules of technique. Just as Constructivism foregrounds the industry involved in designing art and poetry, a visible theory varies texts' parameters to break our habit of reading ideas and structures and culture as fixed, given, or natural instead of made or invented, and therefore changeable. Ray does not want to analyze popular culture. He wants to produce popular theory. In that sense, his work makes more sense as an event or performance rather than as a criticism of representations. Ray includes Dziga Vertov's diary entry, "Everything except the boring," as a guide for this type of research practice. Games, questionnaires, and childhood memories make the enormous amount of conceptually related materials resemble inter-active fiction or a puzzle rather than an extended definition or a comprehensive list. The temporal shift from "this is how it is" to "guess how it can be put together" transforms the solitary reader into a game-player in the way someone watching a parody has to put together the allusions for the pay-off. His strategies attempt to forestall readers' boredom, "anticipating it, heading it off, knowing that at any moment, the book (or magazine, or newspaper, or journal, [or case, or allegory, or meaning]) may be closed." This effort to avoid boredom, what Roland Barthes calls "panic boredom," leads to a way to represent the instant of invention; the problem concerns "the tedium involved in expressing plainly what occurred to them [inventors] suddenly." The fragmentary style avoids the tedium of justification. On the one hand, the context of justification seeks to prove the Truth value of an invention or a variation. Using this type of context forces one to select and arrange details as moments in a progression toward true ideas and theories. It discounts the fragment in favor of the law, it ignores sociopolitical or cultural determinants, and it effaces discontinuities among details. On the other hand, in Ray's "ABC" the jolts between fragments reproduce and encourage the unpredictable accidents in making new connections. Comparing pieces of knowledge (true, false, fictional, personal, political, etc.) offers an image of truth as experiment. It allows history to serve as something else besides a justification of the present. By enabling this criticism of the present, it offers an alternative to contemporary film theory. Ray produces a model of experimental writing and story telling *as* critical theory.
26. Not satisfied with the received notions about what counts as legitimate knowledge about movies, Ray proposes to examine movies as "a site, a crossroads traversed by communicative highways continuously re-routed by external, extratextual circumstances."²⁷ This use of scenes as sites for theorization allows for work that makes entertainment values and writing style crucial elements in producing theories about the spectacular world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To dismiss, ignore, or to merely attempt to look behind the veil of spectacularization misses how it functions. To experiment with narrative, anecdote, fragmentation,

²⁷Ray, 1988, 173.

montage, and other cinematic strategies leads to a richer understanding of how the society of the spectacle actually functions. The sections in this training manual seek to use a range of strategies to find the sites, those crossroads traversed by communicative highways, and to reroute communication strategically. Good luck.

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Notes

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