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Respondent: "Untimely Bodies: Towards a Comparative Film Theory of Human Figures, Temporalities, and Visibilities"

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In his massively disappointing book *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida nonetheless has one marvelous invention. Speaking of ghosts and specters – especially the ghost of Hamlet's father and the specter that is haunting Europe in the *Communist Manifesto* – Derrida coins the word *hauntology*. This neologism combines *haunt* with *ontology* (it works better in French, where *hantologie* and *ontologie* are pronounced nearly the same) to indicate the being of that which is not manifest, not there, not present. Deeper than any ontology, deeper than being, deeper than what *is*, there is that which haunts being, spectrally, without being reducible to it. Derrida, as is his wont, presents hauntology as an absence which underlies, and disrupts, any assertion of presence. But, of course, this formulation is reversible; it just as well designates a continuing subsistence, or insistence, at the very heart of death and absence. Something that has died, something that is in the past, nonetheless refuses to go away. Or something that is not yet born, something that is in a potential future, casts its premonitory shadow even before it has arrived. In either case, something that is invisible and impalpable fails to be simply absent, simply *not there*. Rather, it insinuates itself within the very present that excludes it, or haunts the corporeality to which it cannot be reduced. It is an excess, or a residue. This is a configuration of non-presence that cannot be characterized as (Lacanian) "lack."

The speakers on this panel all point, in one way or another, to the hauntological dimension of the movies. They testify to the ways that -- as Gilles Deleuze puts it in a different context -- the cinematic image is never simply in the present: for it contains, rolled up within it, virtual dimensions of pastness and futurity. But beyond this, they suggest that film is itself the hauntological art *par excellence*. It is not just that a certain practice of cinema might be described as hauntological; but more importantly that hauntology itself, in its evanescent yet more-than-real spectrality, is inherently cinematic. Film does not capture and reproduce the real, so much as it always already haunts reality, sapping its apparent solidity from within. Film is implicitly an art of specters: of what Brian Wall calls "spirit," and what Chika Kinoshita designates as "the passive regime of the image." The presence of the movie star involves an uncanny doubling of physical presence and ghostly evanescence, of fiction and lived experience, as Prakash Younger shows in his discussion of the career of Meena Kumari. In the most general sense, and from its nineteenth-century origins to its twenty-first century actuality, cinema is most essentially what Tom Gunning describes as a phantasmagoria of "invisible bodies" and "intangible images."

Critics have long discussed the innovative soundtrack, and the unusual use of voice, in Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*. Brian Wall pushes these discussions further, by considering how the disembodied or acousmatic voice resonates with and against the materiality of the bodies whose physical sufferings and mortal limits are visually displayed onscreen. The sound of breathing or panting, the cry of terror, the mutterings that come out under the influence of sodium pentothal: in all these cases, "the voice always seems an effect without a proper cause." These sounds arising from the depths of bodies are part of a continuum that ranges from the stentorian acousmatic utterances of the film's villain, all the way to the strange vocalizations that emerge from the glowing radioactive matter that is the film's "Great Whatzit." Wall shows us how the excess of these sounds implies both a violent literalization, a

hyper-materialization of affect, and, at the same time, an irreducible excess of spectrality or spirit, as if the interiority buried in the depths of bodies were also that which renders them impalpable, forever beyond our grasp. I think that this account could be extended to mechanically reproduced sounds (voices on the radio, the sounds of traffic, etc.) as well as to the sounds that seem to emerge directly from bodies. In Wall's powerful reading, spectrality would seem to be the very heart, not just of human subjectivity, but of matter itself on the subatomic or quantum level.

Chita Kinoshita's account of the images of pregnant women in Mizoguchi's films offers us another way to think about the supplemental, hauntological dimension of cinematic experience. Mizoguchi's images of women often indicate the state of pregnancy only through some oblique details. Also, these images of pregnancy are generally presented in the course of long takes or sequence shots. This means that our vision of the woman's pregnant body is always enfolded in an experience of duration, a thickness of temporality that cannot help but refer us, beyond the present instant, to an experience of the *before* and the *after*. Kinoshita links this thick duration to Mizoguchi's effort to depict the condition of pregnancy as an experience in its own right, unsubordinated to the teleology of motherhood and the family. The point of view is not that of the fetus or baby-to-be, but rather that of the woman's own experiences of fatigue, anticipation, and biological process. In this way, Mizoguchi's films slide from the expression of hegemonic power relations through the mechanism of the gaze, to a less familiar "passive regime of the image," in which such power relations are not actually negated, but at the very least suspended or put aside. This suspension is the dimension of haunting or spectrality, in which (in Deleuze's terms) the sensori-motor circuit is interrupted, so that a proper experience of intensity can emerge. The result is not to escape in fantasy from the realm of gender hierarchies and power relations (which remain central concerns of Mizoguchi's), but locate a spectrality that always already haunts this realm itself.

Prakash Younger recounts how the life and legend of film star Meena Kumari resonate both with and against her most celebrated movie roles. This leads to a powerful ironization of melodramatic affect – but one that operates in a somewhat different way from how socio-political irony functions in the films of Douglas Sirk, and in Western or Hollywood melodrama more generally. For Kumari does not just dramatize patriarchal victimization and the familiar compensatory masochism with which well-to-do women internalize their situation. Such a configuration is only "the simplest term of a complex masquerade." More deeply, Kumari plays with, reflexivizes, and overturns, this very double-bind situation. Younger describes how this works in terms of the social codes of Islamic-Indian culture, both in the traditions of the nineteenth century, and in Kumari's mid-twentieth-century reinvention of them. Hauntological supplementarity here is a function of the unstable relation between Kumari's screen presence and her actual biography. Her metafictional lucidity regarding the constraints of gender oppression coexists with her persona's subjection both onscreen and in "real life." Life and screen work mutually to haunt one another, producing an excess which neither alone can contain.

I discuss Tom Gunning's talk last, because it engages in a more general consideration of the issues that the other three panelists raised in relation to specific films. Gunning traces the ways that spectrality has been crucial to film from its very beginnings. The familiar concern with vision and the gaze, with the powers of surveillance and visual control, has always been doubled and undermined, within the cinematic apparatus itself, by the play and display of a resistant opacity. The very thickness of material reality disrupts the perspectival organization

of the world by the gaze. Material density and embodied vision find their correlates in “a rhetoric of invisibility and a very complex form of disembodiment.” This is less paradoxical than it might seem at first. For the depth of bodies – and one might also say the sheer givenness of matter, or of what we characterize as “objects” – exceeds and exhausts the capacity of even the most phallic and penetrating gaze. Or to make the same point in an entirely different register, the temporality of the body-as-image is irreducible to the spatializing logic of “the model of vision as total transparency and surveillance.” which Gunning rightly dismisses as an “ultimate fantasy of totalitarianism,” but never an actuality.

What's crucial to Gunning's account, as to those of all the speakers on this panel, is the way that invisibility, impalpability, disappearance, and disembodiment are by no means opposed to an insistence, not just upon the materiality of the film itself, and of the cinematic apparatus, but also upon the embodiment of the spectator, and the materiality of the images or bodies or things that appear onscreen. That is to say, spectrality is not an effect of “lack,” or of the supposed gap between representation and its referent. Rather, we encounter the specter at the very heart of materiality and presence. Or – if a phenomenological manner of speaking be preferred – spectrality is a supplemental dimension of manifestation and appearance themselves. Cinema is not a Platonic cave of illusions, as the old-style film theory would have it, but a hauntological apparatus, a machine for raising ghosts.

I conclude with three final comments, or questions. The first is just to note that any serious critical consideration of film will necessarily involve us in ontological, or metaphysical, issues. This is something that Deleuze insisted upon, and I think it remains true even when the ontology or metaphysics that we discover in film, or in a particular film or group of films, is not a Deleuzian one. The second is to ask what happens to the hauntological dimension when we move from film to the post-cinematic media that envelop us today. This is not a question of reverting to the cinematic, or of claiming that film is in some way more vital or authentic than the media which are now supplanting it. But it does involve thinking about the media mutations we are currently living through, and working out how these mutations are in process of reconfiguring our experiences, not just of the body and of our regime of vision, but of haunting and invisibility as well. The third is to suggest that hauntology is not just a matter for human bodies and minds, and for so-called “subjective” experiences. It is also something that happens on the side of matter itself, of supposedly mute and passive things, of everything that belongs to the realm of what we call “objects.” It is time to think more about how cinema's power of both objectification and haunting relates, not just to the appearance and disappearance of the human image (as Gunning says), but also, as the philosopher Graham Harman puts it, to those of “oceans and diamonds and earthquakes... fireworks, grasshoppers, moonbeams, and wood.” For Harman, “if the human perception of a house or tree is forever haunted by some hidden surplus in the things that never becomes present, the same is true of the sheer causal interaction between rocks or raindrops.” Is it not in these terms that cinema – as Bazin, cited here by Gunning, puts it – benefits from the absence of “man”?