

## Eleven Theses for Breaking Away

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1- Let's lose our "I"s and become "we"s. Becoming plural is a way of opening up identity—perhaps, for some, of losing it—or at the very least of recognizing that everyone is already an assemblage, spreading and undoing any stable notion of the "I" that the modern, Western history of the individual generated. The "we" opens up to the world of collectivity and collaboration. Let the praxis and theory of film be collective and collaborative.

2- Let's lose our possessive individual authorship. Film is always already a collaborative practice, coauthored by multiple makers of sound, light, images, script, performance, and so forth. Yet the single directorial figure has garnered the spotlight and recognition. Let's make the collaborative an explicit collective form of film authorship. Collectivity acknowledges that no thing emerges out of nothing—that every being, every thought, every image, every word carries within it an invisible archaeology and is the result of wide-ranging encounters. Collectivity acknowledges that thought and creativity are always already plural, making of that truth an explicit form of being and making. Collectivity undoes the thrust toward self-management and progress into which neoliberal reason forces us. But collectivity is not consensus. Collectivity intensifies antagonism, it is unruly and motley, and it is precisely this diversity and heterogeneity of the collective that potentiates creative dreaming. The collective creative force will lose the precious possessions of order and rationality that constitute the core of the neoliberal individual. Dispossessed of individual ownership, "dispossessed of the sovereign self,"<sup>1</sup> we will be free.

3- Let's lose our entrepreneurial professionalism. The way we live our daily lives, relate to the work that affords us our material means of sustenance, even pursue our passions in these extreme neoliberal and debt-driven times is increasingly bound to entrepreneurial models of professionalism. As filmmakers and theorists, we are cornered into becoming entrepreneurs modeled by and as businesses—administrating,

executing, promoting, speculating, investing—if we want to survive. As entrepreneurial professionals, we are obliged to be accomplished, polished, skilled, rated, and, above all, competitive experts, leading a life ever more secluded, isolated, and alienated. This, of course, is not specific to the world of film and media. It is a marker of our present, increasingly so since the 1970s. Let's instead be amateurs, creating forms of amateurism that afford all a dignified material life, dissociating amateurism from the realm of the unpaid hobby. Let's instead associate amateurism with the unleashing of the potentially wild nature of the collective that is bound together by a shared desire, passion, and love. Collective and wild, we will not just survive, but live the lives we dream.

4- Let's lose our silos and fields. As true collective amateurs, our praxis and theory of films—and of life—will be moved by the passion of love, not by the demands of the markets, nor will they be commanded through the skill sets of the certified professional, academic, and critical subfields of specialization. This collective amateurism will push film practitioners and film theorists to collaborate more, as each loses their distinct, safe, and walled-off ground. We must open a transversality that allows and builds paths for our proximity, to potentiate approaches for engaging the existing worlds and imagining others. Let's all be practitioners and let's all be theorists.

5- Let's lose our idea of the thinking subject that has reigned over, and destroyed, much of the planet since it placed itself—some very few versions of that self—as sovereign in command and control. Let's instead acknowledge and embrace that thinking happens in numerous sites, bodies, and matter. Film is a machine that thinks—as are, of course, other artistic forms and objects. Scholars and critics tend to think films need them for thought to emerge from the moving image, as though films were the raw material for the production of their ideas, concepts, and paradigms because they, the critics and theorists, as knowing subjects, are the ones who are capable of giving meaning to images, delivering them to knowledge. But the truth is that images do not need us to make thoughts.<sup>2</sup> It is, instead, we humans who have needed them to be able to think. Images are appearances, and as such, are imagination. It is as appearing and disappearing manifestations of imagination's *potency*, unstable and flickering, that images invent, create, and reconfigure the world. Images appear and disappear, they inevitably pass. But they always return, and it is that movement and fragility that endows them with the power to give form and radiance—in

light and darkness—to the planet’s immanence. Let’s acknowledge their unsettling and creative power, their capacity to craft and shape what is yet to come—that which we call future. Let’s embrace an imagination that decenters the subject.

6- Let’s lose our academic stiffness. In this moment of the undoing of the public mission of education at all levels, it is the task of the academic scholar to deinstitutionalize and de-academicize their writing. Scholarly pursuit has become, for many, an increasingly precarious and dangerous activity. Instead of fighting expectations with metrics and data science, scholars should allow their writing to become precarious, lose its disciplinary grounding, and become explorative, experimental, creative, collective, collaborative. This will allow the scholar to recognize the intellectual and critical practices being exercised daily by a myriad of beings with differing approaches, outside academia. If the result of the evolution and progress of academia is truly that all critical intervention is now to be measured by scientific, quantifiable, and rationalist criteria, then the time has come to regress.

7- Let’s lose our compass. Let’s create new, much-needed forms of collectivity and collaboration, of image making and thought making that can be enacted only by displacing the sites of dominant visibility—created by the historical process of accumulation via dispossession, extraction, and exploitation—and placing the peripheral sites in the so-called South at the center of a new ecosystem. Possessive individualism is one of the consequences of the history of colonialism, slavery, modernity, and progress. It is that history that organized the world into visible and invisible sites and bodies, that geographically and symbolically organized the planet into so-called Souths. Once dispossessed of our possessive individualism and engaged in interdependent forms of social and environmental life, we will be able to achieve truly “relational modes of existence.”<sup>3</sup> Rejecting it through our collective, dispossessed critical approach to the making of images and thoughts must necessarily occur through the collaboration of a shared worldly vulnerability, led by the social, spiritual, and aesthetic practices of the so-called South.

8- Let’s lose time. Entrepreneurial neoliberalism tells us that we need to produce time where and when there is no time, in order to be more efficient and productive subjects. Let’s collectively produce and experience a different sense of time. Let’s recover a sensuous and material—not metric or abstract—dimension of time. Let’s create the material conditions to slow down, to brush time against its historical and economic grain. Let’s deregulate the universal time of Western modernity as



The sensory appeal of J.P. Sniadecki and Joshua Bonnetta’s *El Mar La Mar* (2017).

orchestrated through its technologies. Even in its new digital present, film continues to be intimately tied to the regulated, sequenced, discrete, cumulative, forward-moving notion of time. The infamous twenty-four frames per second have now been replaced by a 24/7, episodic experience of the moving image equally embedded in the universal time of Western modernity. The digital era has, in fact, only accelerated the cementing of abstract time. Let’s imagine forms of temporality where collective, collaborative imagining can occur. Experiencing, imagining, creating, and inventing new forms of temporality will allow us to explore other forms of knowledge and life.

9- Let’s lose the primacy of the scopic regime. Cinema has been exploring ways of undoing its work as part of a scopic regime and has sought to explore other senses as a way of acknowledging the long history that ties power to the optic field, trying to untangle the cinematic experience from the scientific and objective characteristics that configured its conception. Let’s make and think new images through “sense work.”<sup>4</sup>

10- Let’s lose genres. Socially created categories that become conventions over time function to codify our critical and creative imagination. Other forms of knowledge, acquired and presented through a more complex spectrum of sensorial possibilities, will almost necessarily appear as messy and wild if seen from both the vantage point of our professional, entrepreneurial, and possessive individualities and the rational subject. “Unmanageable, undomesticated and politically unruly,”<sup>5</sup> let’s strive for film theory as film praxis and film praxis as film theory. Thus will we be able to produce opacity, retaining the intimate and perplexing character of what remains unprofessional and indefinable.

11- The political, societal, and planetary crisis of our present calls for a new form of creative-critical approach: collective,

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.