The decorative surface of the screen in *Moulin Rouge!*
(dir. Baz Luhrmann, Australia/US, 2001)

Pretty: Film Theory, Aesthetics, and the History of the Troublesome Image

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The Paradoxical Pretty

Interspersed throughout the narrative of Catalan director Joachín Jordá's 1967 avant-garde film *Dante no es únicamente severo* (*Dante Is Not Only Severe*, Spain) are several explicit shots of a surgery performed on the eye of a beautiful woman. Jordá has described the film as a provocation of the audience and the surgery images as an attempt to counter what he terms "aesthetic drowsiness."[1] The shots are certainly arresting, but more striking is Jordá's contention that a visually unpleasant or ugly image is necessary to fend off the seduction of the aesthetic. For him, the visually attractive image can only work against true radicality, and this danger—overtaking his own film, even—must be countered with violent measures against the image itself. This filmic example crystallizes a mode of thought that is all too common in film theory. Jordá's claim, in one form or another, runs through the history of writing on film, intertwining an often implicit aesthetic judgment with a usually explicit political critique. And, as this exam-

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ple makes plain, the unspoken aesthetic judgment hardly lacks for political implications. In subjecting its fashion model protagonist to on-screen dissection, *Dante* reminds us of the old gender trouble of the avant-garde—once again, slicing up eyeballs is necessary to guard against the aesthetic danger of women.[2]

In this essay, I want to effect a little dissection of my own, to open up the body of film theory and look, like Stan Brakhage in *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (US, 1971), at the colors and patterns of its insides. If all of this talk of bodies and blood seems far from pretty, this is indeed the point. The rhetoric of film theory has insistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical and locating truth and value instead in variants of Jordá's uglified film body. This impetus is naturally not universal—there have been significant exceptions to the denigration of the aesthetic surface, particularly from feminist and queer theoretical approaches that I will later discuss—but the suspicion of "prettiness" nonetheless remains strangely resilient. We might think, for example, of the commonplace of "empty spectacle" as a figure of critique in film writing from journalism to theory.[3] I would suggest that this critique itself must be interrogated. That is, in positing the pretty as an aesthetic field in cinema, I am not so much selecting a body of texts or techniques to be placed alongside a transhistorical Kantian schema of beauty but proposing a method of reading that troubles this rhetorical history. The pretty, I would claim, is already present in film theory, naming the often unspoken bad object of successive critical models. In naming it, we can trace a thread, a structuring assumption about the relation between form and content that institutes aesthetics as a problem in and for cinema. By staking a claim on the pretty as a category, we might thus reimagine the contested terrain of aesthetics and politics and open up film histories that have been hitherto unassimilable by the critical canon. And if rendering this discourse visible might involve cutting, reading the pretty demands a less bloody mode of critique.

In evoking the seduction and shallowness of the aesthetic image, we locate film theory within a philosophical history that dates from Plato's separation of idea from image. For many read-

ers of Plato, the word or idea is primary, with the image at best a copy incapable of articulating philosophical reason and at worst a deceptive and dangerous cosmetic.[4] This foundational language of Western aesthetics is not only logocentric but, as a corollary, iconophobic, and it finds the image to be secondary, irrational, and bound to the inadequate plane of the surface. Dudley Andrew has connected this philosophical tradition to film theory, pointing to "the more passionate diatribes of Marxists and feminists, who have to be counted among the chief iconoclasts of our era."[5] So how do we reconcile a medium based on images with a critique based on iconoclasm, the tearing down of images?

For the art historian Jacqueline Lichtenstein, the image, banished by Plato from the realm of metaphysics, "was never effectively suppressed, for it has haunted philosophy ever since, as the dead man's figure haunts a criminal: just a shadow."[6] With this dramatic figure, she instigates a hauntology of the image, tracing the secondariness that follows the image from the realm of philosophy and into art history. Since art history is obliged not to reject the image altogether, it reframes the debate in terms of *disegno* and *colore*, prizing the line's signifying properties and relegating color to the lesser realm of emotion.[7] Furthermore, as David Batchelor points out, the Latin *colorem* is connected to *celare*, "to conceal," and, in art historical terms, the binary is not simply a description of "design" versus "color," as we often think of these terms, but implies that an image begins with a meaningful but colorless structure to which a surface application is added.[8] Color does not merely supplement line but conceals its truths; the problem of the image itself is thus refigured as a problem within the image. To this genealogy I would add film studies. If classical aesthetics created a binary of word versus image, then I hope to show how its modern elaborations both inherited this suspicion of the image itself and replicated the hierarchy within the image. Writing on film thus very often polices line and color, or narrative and mise-en-scène, as avatars of, on one side, purity and reason and, on the other, primitivism and deception.

We witness this axiomatic suspicion of the image and its visual allure in every period and every branch of writing on film.

To see the influence of art historical discourse on film studies, consider this claim, by the nineteenth-century French critic Charles Blanc, that color is dangerous for painters of historical battles: "In passionately pursuing the triumph of color, the painter runs the risk of sacrificing the action to the spectacle."[9] This concern for (active) meaning over (passive) spectacle surely resonates with cinematic discourse. For example, in a nearly perfect repetition of Blanc's critique, Anton Kaes argues in *From Hitler to Heimat* that the battle scenes in German war films attempt to present an anti-war narrative but that "moral messages evaporate when up against visual pleasure and spectacle."[10] And Kaes is not alone in this evaluation of aesthetic appeal. Across the major strands of film theory, this impulse works to exclude certain categories of film as cosmetic, or overly visual, while others may be redeemed by their linguistic elements or by linguistic critique. For instance, we might consider Christian Metz's focus on cinematic language as a case of the latter and Michel Chion's attack on what he terms the "neogaudy" style of postclassical cinema as one of many cases of the former.[11] For Chion, the neogaudy film uses a surface play of colors and glossy cinematography—for example, in the French *cinéma du look*—to replace an older engagement with the world itself. In other words, surface replaces depth, images replace meaning, aesthetics replace politics. In his demand for a less pretty image, Chion's text takes as read the identity of less pretty and more significant.

Of course, in proposing this inheritance, I do not mean to suggest a wholesale identification of film theory with Platonic aesthetics. The diversity of scholarship on cinema precludes any universalizing claims. But, as I hope to demonstrate in this article, the problematic association of the image with the cosmetic and therefore the inferior is complexly and persistently intertwined with the history of film theory. Denigration slides from the image as such to specific kinds of images (too colorful, too seductive, too cosmetic), in each case modeling the image that is too imagistic for its own good. These slippages make the pretty hard to discern: it emerges in the gaps between values or as an unspoken counterpoint to critical assertions. Some of its resonances have explicitly countered aspects of the anti-image heuristic model; for example,

feminist arguments for the critical value of the surface or the detail and queer theories of drag and the performative are all significant antidepth epistemologies to which I will return as models for transforming dominant regimes of value.[12] But my focus here is on why the denigration of the image nonetheless remains such a standard critical practice, how it comes to be received wisdom for theorists who do not agree on much else, and, indeed, how the radical revisions of feminist and queer theories have reenacted this aesthetic tradition as often as they have countered it. This terrain is one that film theory typically concedes before it begins, producing the pretty as the necessary exclusion of successive claims on a meaningful image.

One might ask why it should be desirable to read for the pretty. Given the suspicion that many film scholars have for *any* form of aesthetic inquiry, it might seem perverse to focus on such an apparently trivial and unintellectual category. Sianne Ngai has responded to similar questions in her work on the cute, in which she argues for the historical reevaluation of "minor taste concepts."[13] Ngai argues that, "while prestigious aesthetic concepts like the beautiful, sublime, and ugly have generated multiple theories and philosophies of *art*, comparatively novel ones such as *cute, glamorous, whimsical, luscious, cozy,* or *wacky* seem far from doing anything of the sort, though ironically, in the close link between their emergence and the rise of consumer aesthetics, they seem all the more suited for the analysis of art's increasingly complex relation to market society in the twentieth century" (811–12). Like Ngai's minor terms, the pretty is undoubtedly imbricated in the consumer aesthetics of both popular and art cinema, not to mention industrial design, art, tourism, and so on. As Ngai goes on to make clear, it is not enough to simply condemn these categories as co-opted or secondary. By mapping the rhetorical opposition of the sharp and pointy avant-garde to the soft and infantile cute, she draws out, for example, a political analysis of Gertrude Stein's babbling language in terms of gender, sexuality, and modernity. What is important here is the claim that a minor category might be particularly suited not only to rereading specific texts but also to generating theories of an art form as such. Like the role that she assigns to the cute

in lyric poetry, I would claim that the pretty emerges as uniquely relevant for thinking cinema's aesthetic terrain.

Commercial cinema certainly privileges a kind of prettiness, creating visual pleasure out of the desirable bodies of young stars and the aspirational locations in which their stories are set. Meanwhile, film criticism has over and again dismissed what it sees as too pretty—empty spectacle, surface without depth, the mass ornament. In the crucible of these discourses, we might view the pretty as the aesthetic concept that best describes cinema's articulation of visual culture and twentieth-century capitalism. The sense of pretty as an inferior, superficial, or too-easy aesthetic links the cinema both with historical critiques of mass culture and with those scholars who have revealed the gendered nature of those associations. The pretty evokes a patriarchal fear of cinema's popular pleasures and its uncontrollable audiences. But although it intersects with the notion of "mass culture as woman," the pretty also cuts across the high/low divide.[14] While popular films such as Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (Australia/US, 2001) have been widely criticized as too pretty and insufficiently authentic, political cinema and art films are often rejected as too pretty and insufficiently difficult.[15] Thus the pretty names those excluded images that both high theories and more popular institutions have found difficult to admit. It speaks both of the received wisdom about cinema and the exact place where its aesthetics become a problem. In this apparent contradiction lies the pretty's reflexive ability to draw attention to the nature of the cinematic image: a recurrent taste category *in* cinema, it also speaks directly to the question *of* cinema. The pretty bespeaks a theoretical anxiety about the modern image, but it also names practices of image making that trouble aesthetic dogma.

How, then, can we separate the places where prettiness guarantees capitalist inclusion from those that articulate aesthetic or political exclusion? This double-edged sword precisely figures the pretty's unique relation to cinema: no other aesthetic category assumes such dominance at the same time that it delineates such a diverse history of rejection. To understand this paradox, which is precisely what interests me in the category, we might begin by

describing as pretty certain formal strategies in cinema. With-out reifying an aesthetic category, it is nonetheless useful to list the kinds of images that we are talking about: colorful, carefully composed, balanced, richly textured, or ornamental. Clearly, it is not the case that all films that use these techniques are radical in any way. Just as not all self-reflexive, disjunctively edited, or nar-ratively ambiguous films are automatically politically transgres-sive, so could most "pretty" films easily be claimed as reactionary, complicit, or generically uninteresting.[16] I do not think any formal choices guarantee politics; much less could they do so across the global array of film cultures and practices. Yet what this grouping does demonstrate is how certain kinds of films are often viewed as automatically bad (politically, aesthetically, representationally) and that this recurring tendency to dismiss the pretty tells us something about where and how we are willing to find meaning and value.

In questioning this dismissive tendency, the political stakes of the pretty become visible. The same dominant modes of aesthetic judgment that set the terms for which bodies could have access to beauty also defined what forms could be meaningful. Previous counteraesthetics have promoted versions of the ugly or plain, a reversal of aesthetic value that has undoubtedly been important for post-1968 Marxisms and identitarian politics in refusing the terms of hegemonic thought. Given this way of thinking, the pretty might evoke exactly a figure of dominant values, the straight white starlet, supposedly desired by all the right people. However, as I hope to show, many oppositional aesthetics are grounded in the same iconophobic logics as the dominant model that they hope to overthrow, and this structural flaw limits their ability to encompass pretty images as political. Looking beyond the body of the starlet, we might orient ourselves differently to the aesthetics of the pretty across the visual field.[17] To address the pretty qualities of the image is to face cinema's anxieties about its own value, even, or especially, in the face of received wisdom about what films are good, serious, or political.

In what follows, I address this contention in three sections. First, I trace briefly the history of this rhetoric of exclusion in classi-cal and postclassical film theory, identifying the logic that subtends

apparently disparate accounts of cinematic value. In these examples, both the positive terms and the evaluative regimes are quite different; what counts as valuable in classical, realist, Marxist, and poststructuralist theories is often radically at odds. Across these contestatory theoretical models, my aim is not to force parallels but to reveal the surprising commonality in this one regard. The incommensurability of these theories makes their shared enmity toward the pretty image all the more curious and suggestive. The essay's second section locates the rhetoric of the pretty in modernity, analyzing its historical articulation of aesthetics and politics and considering those theories that engage most complexly with its structuring assumptions. The third section argues for the political use-value of the pretty and points toward how the perspective of the pretty makes us read film differently.

Film Theory's Aesthetic Eye

Classical film theory might seem exempt from the Platonism identified by Lichtenstein and Andrew, since its concern for cinematic specificity lends itself more easily to iconophilia than to iconoclasm. Yet, even in its more idealist variants, the pretty appears as an operator of judgment. In *The Film: A Psychological Study*, Hugo Münsterberg argues, "To imitate the world is a mechanical process; to transform the world so that it becomes a thing of beauty is the purpose of art."[18] The explicit contrast is between the mimetic and the beautiful. However, he immediately supplements beauty with a counterexample of the pretty: "The so-called beautiful landscape may, of course, be material for a beautiful landscape painting, but the chances are great that such a pretty vista will attract the dilettante and not the real artist who knows that the true value of his painting is independent of the prettiness of the model. He knows that a muddy country road or a dirty street or a trivial little pond may be the material for immortal pictures" (62). Here, true value and transformative beauty are located in the modest, the ugly, the inconsequential, while the pretty, by contrast, connotes the vacant, unserious, and false.

 If there is a clear echo of Plato's cosmetics here, there is a stronger investment in a Kantian notion of beauty as value. Münsterberg insists that art must be separated from the world itself and finds it lessened when it is connected to "interest." Jacques Aumont points to a similar structure at work in Béla Balázs, glossing, "If female movie stars must be beautiful . . . it is because, in cinema, appearance is not *pure decoration*, but already an interiority. The stars' beauty, in film, is simple beauty, that symbol of good hoped for by Kant—because beauty is a physiognomic expression" (my emphasis).[19] For Balázs, too, true and meaningful beauty is exactly a Kantian good, a form of purely cinematic expression that is located not in the surface arrangement of the female star's face but in an invisible interiority. And we see how important it is for Aumont to separate this effect from "decoration." These debates on cinematic specificity depend on locating value in the image, and, in order to do so, the term *image* must be peeled away from its connotations of decorative surface and aligned instead with meaning and depth.

 Münsterberg's rejection of the pretty on the grounds that it is too realistic to make good art is radically overturned by critics such as Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin, who both locate value precisely in cinema's capacity to capture the real. But Münsterberg's contemporaries also deployed ideas of medium specificity to forge theories of value. The concept of *photogénie*, for instance, demonstrates vividly the impetus away from painterly composition and toward the profilmic real. Louis Delluc writes, "Since we discovered the possibility of beauty in film, we have done everything possible to complicate it and weigh it down instead of always striving to simplify."[20] For classical writers on film aesthetics, as for the canonical theorists of realism, revelation is to be opposed to any form of overt construction in the image. The true film artist reveals beauty, whereas the dilettante can only construct a pretty scene. Aumont historicizes this binary in terms of painting when he maps cinematic vision onto the shift from the picturesque *ébauche*, or composed study, to the nineteenth-century *étude*, the modern glance that captures an impression of reality.[21] This discourse

enables a historical claim to underwrite aesthetic judgment: the composed image is not modern and therefore not cinematically valuable. For theorists of realism, the pictorial or composed image takes on the status of pretty and its rhetoric of impurity, secondariness, and untruth.

We see this effect clearly in Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, where the uncinematic formative tendency takes on the mantle of the pretty. Thus his description of *The Red Shoes* (dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1948): "Moira Shearer dances, in a somnambulistic trance, through fantastic worlds avowedly intended to project her unconscious mind—agglomerates of landscape-like forms, near-abstract shapes, and luscious color schemes which have all the traits of stage imagery. Disengaged creativity thus drifts away from the basic concerns of the medium."[22] This is a rich passage, containing many of Kracauer's critiques of the formative: fantasy, dreamscape, theatricality, lack of concern for camera-reality. We also see color—something in which Kracauer, like Münsterberg, avows a lack of interest but that erupts, unbidden, in both of their discussions of troublesome films. Color, or *colore*: the other of logocentric line. And the word "luscious" hints at a feminizing rhetoric of seduction that has been at play in Kracauer ever since he evoked the wonderfully fetishistic "girl clusters" to exemplify the ideological work of the mass ornament.[23] For Kracauer, cinema's potential for truth is always obscured by ornament.

Bazin's advocacy of realism implicitly expands on this schema, with the contingency of the profilmic locating cinema's meaningful gesture always away from the composition implied by the ornamental. On Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Journal d'un curé de campagne*, France, 1951), Bazin writes, "Nostalgia for a silence that would be the benign procreator of a visual symbolism unduly confuses the so-called primacy of the image with the true vocation of the cinema—which is the primacy of the object."[24] The language of Christian iconoclasm is here, of course, deliberate, replacing the false god of images with the theological vocation of the meaningful world. Bazin, to be sure, is well aware of the historical weight of his aesthetics. But if we proceed further in this realist iconoclasm, reading with what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has

called "constructive complic-
ity," we begin to glimpse the
significant place of the pretty
outside of the discourse of the
good.[25]

If Bresson allows Bazin
to trope realism in theological
terms, then the endpoint of
this rhetoric is the film's final
screen, blank but for a graphic
cross.[26] That Bazin lauds this
image in the context of cine-
matic realism is at first glance

Refusing the pretty image in *Diary of
a Country Priest* (dir. Robert Bresson,
France, 1951)

paradoxical, since it does not refer to a profilmic space at all. How
can such an image encapsulate cinema's essential realism? It can
do so precisely because, for Bazin, cinema's vocation is to strip out
the problematic imageness of the image, to whittle it down, remove
what is surplus to requirements. He reveals his aesthetic hand by
lauding not a uniquely representational scene but one that trumps
representation with visual purity. Thus he appeals to the sublime
as a secular category of aesthetic transcendence: "We are experi-
menting with an irrefutable aesthetic, with a sublime achievement
of pure cinema."[27] The sublime, for Immanuel Kant, is that which
interrupts or moves radically beyond the boundaries of imagina-
tion, and hence Bazin is able to tie cinematic purity to a screen that
refuses the image altogether. That this refusal is a specific value
of the cinematic image becomes clear in "Painting and Cinema,"
in which Bazin contrasts the centripetal impulse of the painting,
attested to by the "baroque complexity of the traditional frame,"
with the centrifugal nature of the cinematic screen, "prolonged
indefinitely into the universe."[28] The quality of the cinematic, then,
is measured by how much a film invokes the offscreen world or
by how little it creates internally composed spaces. This quality is
always in flux, yet what negates it is concretely named: the flagrant
rejection of aesthetic purity found in Baroque ornamentation.

Bazin elaborates the importance of this exclusion in "The
Ontology of the Photographic Image," where he avers, "The aes-

thetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities."[29] Reversing Münsterberg's understanding of cinematic beauty as that which transforms the world, he nonetheless locates images of value in similar places: "a reflection on a damp sidewalk . . . the gesture of a child" (15). The everyday and the ephemeral again locate the cinematic at odds with the decorative or the composed. Bazin goes on to describe the experience of cinematic seeing, in which the lens strips from the object "that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it," presenting it "in all its virginal purity" (15). The religious implications of virginity for a gender critique should be all too clear, but, even leaving these aside, we find in clarity and purity the rational vision of the Western eye. In Richard Dyer's terms, the transparency of cinematic light inscribes Whiteness as both ground and figure, and this mechanical clarity of vision, the objectivity of the camera, connects Bazin's phenomenology of cinema to the clear, White rationality that underwrites both art history and philosophy.[30] In Bazin's dust and grime, the decorative image is refigured as a degradation of both subject and object.

In contrast to classical theory, post-1968 film theory specifically and deliberately refuses the language of beauty, working to replace aesthetic judgment with an analysis of ideology. However, this shift does not remove the Platonic structure of thought. W. J. T. Mitchell has described a "growing collection of iconoclastic polemics" in modern criticism, locating the source of this "rhetoric of iconoclasm" in interpretations of Karl Marx's description of ideology as a camera obscura, or false image.[31] Such suspicion of the image is well documented in Marxist cultural critique, from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* to Fredric Jameson's dig at the visual as "essentially pornographic."[32] As this word choice implies, even twentieth-century iconoclasm echoes its religious predecessors by figuring the false idol as feminine, fetishistic, and sexually perverse.[33] These echoes are not limited to deliberately iconoclastic readers of Marx. Rather, the retention of anti-image structures of thought within postclassical theory creates a systemic relationship to aesthetic ideas, an underlying tendency that persists, albeit in widely varying degrees, across disparate theories. Semiotic and structuralist film theories thus require aesthetics in order to make

claims on the workings of ideology. Explicitly or implicitly, they frequently reveal a view of the image as cosmetic, deceitful, and feminine. And they need a category of the deceptive pretty, albeit one rewritten in terms of political power.

Hence, in the degree zero of ideology critique, Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni's *Cahiers du cinéma* manifesto, "Cinema, Ideology, Criticism," we find a central association of bourgeois humanism with "depiction."[34] While the narrative economy of classical Hollywood is certainly at stake, the "whole conservative box of tricks" is summed up in terms of picturing, the process of rendering the world in images (26). Comolli and Narboni's claim, like that of Georg Lukács, is ostensibly on mimesis, the illusionism on which both commercial cinema and bourgeois ideology depend.[35] Nonetheless, this claim contains within it an assumption about aesthetics, an implication of what kind of ideological work certain images might perform. Their canonical location in opposition to realism neatly illustrates how we cannot collapse the various antipretty positions onto one another: what is valued in anti-illusionism has little in common with what is valued by Bazin or even Münsterberg. But if we bracket momentarily the evaluative binaries set up by these theories, we can discern their strange aesthetic proximity. According to ideology critique, the composed images of classical Hollywood link aesthetic smoothness to dominant discourse, and, when outlining the ideological forms that political filmmakers might attempt to strip away, Comolli and Narboni cite, along with traditional narrative, an "emphasis on formal beauty."[36] Here, beauty is not a Kantian value but codes an excessive formalism, an overly pleasing construction that produces aesthetic drowsiness. This line of reasoning leads to their famous taxonomy, in which modernist countercinema is taken as exemplary of cinema's potential for political critique.

It is important to note here that Comolli and Narboni's text does not make political critique dependent on a rejection of the aesthetic image. It merely demands that the political film work on the signifier as well as the signified, and it goes on to assume that only modernist strategies of unpleasure can do this work. It would be quite possible to retain a Marxist approach while attending to the work of the excluded, pretty image. Indeed, we might read the

tensions inevitably created by the Marxist rejection of the pretty in the enormous popularity of Comolli and Narboni's category "e" film in general, and Douglas Sirk's work in particular, despite their spectacularly unsuccessful attempt to persuade their readers that this category was a minor one.[37] Sirk's highly constructed and color-saturated images are ideologically significant, in these analyses, precisely because he has no other way to speak, trapped like his housewife protagonists in an American bourgeois prison. Sirk becomes the exceptional case because of his political background; the same is true of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. But the colorful and composed mise-en-scènes of other filmmakers are rarely so well received.

Marxist film theory is thus built on a structuring ambivalence: a claim on the work of the signifier should not, a priori, exclude any formal strategy, and yet the aesthetic discourse that silently props ideology critique demands exactly this gesture of exclusion. Comolli and Narboni rehearse this ambivalence, and their interlocutors have identified the problem of purity that lies within iconoclasm. Colin MacCabe sums up the logic of antiaesthetic documentary thus: "If cinéma verité opposed Hollywood, this opposition was in terms of the effacement of style, where a pristine representation, an authentic relation between film and fact, was contaminated by arrangement and conscious intervention."[38] MacCabe opposes this position, of course, for its attempt to deny the work of mediation. What is striking here, though, is his language, which forcefully condenses the rhetoric of deception and untruth on which iconoclastic theory depends. Film must be pristine (not sinful) and authentic (not false), and its pretty Hollywood other will be arranged (by trickery or sophistry) and contaminated (by disease or sin, figuring ornament itself as a rash on the smooth white skin of representation's body). In this brief assessment, MacCabe rehearses a whole corporeal lexicon of film aesthetics.

As Peter Wollen has pointed out with regard to Jean-Luc Godard, the post-1968 attack on narrative has its roots as much in a philosophy of the dissembling nature of appearances as in Marxist thought per se. What Wollen describes as "the impossibility of reading an essence from a phenomenal surface, of seeing

a soul through and within a body" produces a slippage from the critique of realist narrative to a critique of the cinematic image as such.[39] For Wollen, this claim underlies Godard's Marxism, but it also tends to contradict it. The image must be capable of political labor for countercinema to be possible, an ability that iconoclasm would deny. The pretty is required to cover over this potential gap: a scapegoat image whose pleasurable excess of visibility stands in for the dissembling appearance and thus enables the counter-cinematic image, by contrast, to signify something other than its own nature.

Comolli implicitly addresses this question in "Machines of the Visible," in which he performs an ideological analysis of visual-ity, engaging the imbrication of Enlightenment subjectivity, light, and vision.[40] Here, again, there is also an older rhetoric of vision at play. Comolli concludes, "Yet it is also, of course, this structuring disillusion which offers the offensive strength of cinematic repre-sentation and allows it to work against the completing, reassuring, mystifying representations of ideology. It is that strength that is needed, and that work of disillusion, if cinematic representation is to do something other than pile visible on visible, if it is, in certain rare flashes, to produce in our sight the very blindness which is at the heart of the visible" (141). Like Jordá, he sees the countercin-ematic as the antiaesthetic image capable of redeeming cinematic vision. The image itself is an aesthetic problem, and cinema must work against its visible nature to create those rare images that evade deceptive illusion. Illusion is the category of ideological vision and disillusion its repair; we must split apart the seductive surface, com-bat the rhetorical excess of visible piled on visible. We must slice; we must cut; we must reach the film body's blind, avisual core.

The Pretty Body

The pretty, then, is a discourse of bodies, and I want to turn to the ways in which these bodies are named by aesthetics and film the-ory. Of course, they are first of all feminine: Plato's Pharmacia was a nymph, and femininity is written into this originary critique of the cosmetic and colorful image. In its modern incarnation, the

femininity of this image is overlaid with orientalism and with insistent allusions to queerness and sexual perversity. For instance, in her work on the aesthetics of the detail, Naomi Schor traces the neoclassical critique of "Asiatic" style, which condemned visual and linguistic detail as "degraded, effeminate, ornamental."[41] Dovetailing this exclusion of Asianism with a contemporaneous disparagement of female ornament as artifice, Schor concludes that "neo-classical aesthetics is imbued with the residues of the rhetorical imaginary, a sexist imaginary where the ornamental is inevitably bound up with the feminine, when it is not pathological—two notions Western culture has throughout its history had a great deal of trouble distinguishing" (45). As we know from *Stella Dallas* (dir. King Vidor, US, 1937), feminine adornment and bad taste are archetypal mistakes in film.[42] And the degraded figures of "Asianism" are no less present in the canon formations of modern cinema. The problem *of* film (its visual language) becomes a problem *in* film, whether it is a rhetoric of indecent adornment that performs the work of exclusion (say, the intense production design of Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* [*Fa yeung nin wa*, Hong Kong/France, 2000]) or, even, as in *Stella Dallas*, the problem of decoration narrativized.

This structure leads to a particular problem for feminist film theory, for it builds an antipatriarchal account of film on a fun-

"Asianist" rhetoric in *In the Mood for Love* (dir. Wong Kar-wai, Hong Kong/France, 2000)

damentally patriarchal theory of the image. To take the most influential of examples, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" folds a feminist reading of the image that lies (because ideology distorts gender) into an iconophobic one (in which the image lies by definition).[43] This move is troubling because the latter idea is an example of the former, replacing "image" for "woman" as the object of gendered disdain. For example, Mulvey writes that "the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men . . . always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified" (205). We can take the phrase "woman as" out of this sentence and find that it reads just as well as a statement on the feminine threat of the icon as such. Mulvey's argument, as with many arguments in feminist film theory, depends on the gendering of the icon but must deploy it circularly in a critique of itself.

Of course, much feminist theory post-Mulvey took on this gendering of the image as an explicit problem, and significant models of contemporary critical theory have emerged from feminist engagements with the image's "femininity," surface, and visual appeal. In important ways, the positive valuation of women's genres and spectatorial practices, as well as scholarship on surface, masquerade, and pleasure, grounds the intellectual formation of this project. The pretty is nothing if not a feminist account of the cinematic image. Consider, for instance, how Mary Ann Doane, when speaking of the veil in cinema, refers to the visible as "a lure, a trap, or a snare."[44] Unlike Jordá, Doane uses this gendered language quite deliberately, ventriloquizing Freud to make visible the relationships among spectacular images, vision, and power. We see a cognate impetus in queer feminisms, as in Elspeth Probyn's claim that the surface is a mode of belonging: "For the surface is not another metaphor nor yet another fad within intellectual circles: it is a profound reordering of how we conceive of the social."[45]

Yet while these engagements with sex, gender, and the image are in sympathy with my own politics, I find that the circularity of Mulvey's political aesthetics recurs as an obstacle in otherwise highly productive critiques. Whereas psychoanalytic theory articulates the political stakes of using the master's tools, the implications of this patriarchal *aesthetic* foundation have not

been so rigorously explored. Thus Janet Bergstrom concludes in her 1979 essay "Enunciation and Sexual Difference" that the task of understanding cinema's mechanisms involves "coming to terms with our relationship as spectators and film analysts to it and to the seductiveness of the image in general."[46] More than a decade later, Probyn values the surface but also warily writes that "the image is always up to something."[47] As these examples suggest, feminist debates over spectatorship and pleasure in the image underwrite political ambivalence about patriarchal culture with a patriarchal rhetoric of suspicion of the image itself.

Linda Williams, in her oft-cited essay on *Stella Dallas*, takes up Doane's idea of the masquerade, arguing that Stella's (Barbara Stanwyck) blatant spectacle demands to be read as a produced image. For Williams, following Doane, "one way out of the dilemma of female over-identification with the image on the screen is for this image to act out a masquerade of femininity that manufactures a distance between spectator and image."[48] While the masquerade locates political critique on the surface (of the subject), the underlying logic of this argument is still the tearing down of images. We must be distanced (not seduced) by the image, keeping our distance and distancing ourselves. The image in its imageness is the problem, a seductive surface that cannot be trusted unless it can be made to speak against itself. Only by keeping our distance can we be rational, make readings, be masculine. The problem of the image therefore reverses the radicality of the feminist gesture and threatens to suck the debate into a losing vortex. Williams recognizes this danger and seeks to avoid it, calling not for a masculinist distance but for a juggling of "all positions at once" (317). However, by grounding the discussion in a suspicion of the image per se, this debate allows all orientations except that of being political *in* the image.

The cinematic image itself structures the same castration problem that the woman's image does for Mulvey: it is the presence that always harks back to absence, the excess that covers a dangerous gap. This double bind may explain the notorious difficulty this theoretical model has had in locating an alternative to the patriarchal image. Recent feminist theory has attacked this

problem head-on, attempting to reconceptualize the status of the image. Catherine Constable, for instance, uses Michèle Le Doeuff's writing as a way of breaking apart the logocentric hierarchy:

Le Doeuff's work challenges a long tradition within Western philosophy, beginning with Plato, in which images are viewed as either textual decorations that do not add to the overall argument, or examples that serve to translate complex ideas into a more accessible form. In contrast to these constructions of the image as a more or less useful form of decoration, Le Doeuff argues that imagery is integral to philosophy, serving as the means through which concepts are created and expressed.[49]

This approach suggests promising directions for future research: while Constable's own analysis ultimately remains mired in locating "positive images," the impetus to think the double bind itself suggests the unexplored centrality of gender in reading the image, quite separate from any female characters represented.[50]

However, the bodies created by the image are not only gendered. Barbara Stafford, analyzing the aesthetic debates of eighteenth-century Europe, identifies an emergent Protestant insistence on purity, neoclassicism, and an evacuation of the sensual, rejecting what was seen as an Oriental Catholicism marked as fetishistic, effeminate, and sinful.[51] Arguing for the continuing influence of this aesthetic attitude in contemporary art and scholarship, Stafford claims that "not much has changed since eighteenth-century *philosophes*, echoing Plato's fear of *mimesis*, condemned the 'Oriental despotism' of the eye and the superstitious gaze of pagan idolators."[52] The rejection of the Oriental goes hand in hand, as I suggested earlier, with a prescription of masculine style. Thus neoclassicist aestheticians revived classical thinkers like Quintilian, who held that "ornament must, as I have already said, be bold, manly and chaste, free from all effeminate smoothness and false hues derived from artificial dyes, and must glow with health and vigour."[53] To this disprized Oriental and queer body, late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing on color adds an explicitly racial discourse. Goethe, in his *Theory of Colors*, claims that

"savage natives, uneducated people, and children have a great predilection for vivid colors."[54] This perception helped precipitate controversy over polychromatic antiquities, in which the discoveries of colorful decoration in Greek and Etruscan architecture led to an anxiety about the whiteness and purity of the European heritage.[55] The archaeologist and aesthetician Antoine-Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy found surface color on statues to be monstrous, and the historian David Van Zanten tellingly characterizes Quatremère de Quincy's attitude less as outright rejection and more as a "morbid fascination" with the primitive and exotic.[56] This anxiety recurs across modern European aesthetics.

Blanc, arguing for the secondary role of color to drawing, explicitly connects the former to the feminine, the primitive, and the Oriental.[57] The evocation of *disegno* over *colore* is familiar, but more telling is the primitivist rhetoric that characterizes discourse on the decorative supplement. Blanc complains, "Our colorists go to the Orient, to Egypt, Morocco, Spain, to bring back a whole arsenal of brilliant objects; cushions, slippers, nargilehs, turbans, burnous, caftans, mats, parasols" (169). In addition to making visible an anxiety of seduction and infiltration, this orientalist litany of accessories is reminiscent of the lines from Heinrich Heine that Freud famously appropriates in his essay "Femininity."[58] As this connection reveals, the discourse of aesthetics conflates femininity, orientalism, and deviance in the image of the luxurious decorative object. Thus Blanc argues, "But the taste for color, when it predominates absolutely, costs many sacrifices; often it turns the mind from its course, changes the sentiment, swallows up the thought. The impassioned colorist invents his form for his color, everything is *subordinated* to the brilliancy of his tints. Not only the drawing *bends* to it, but the composition is *dominated, restrained, forced* by the color" (emphasis mine).[59] This rhetoric proposes a scene of perverse seduction, in which color as dominatrix upsets the natural order by restraining masculine line. Therefore, at the emergence of modern aesthetics, the feminine, effeminate, and non-Western are a triple threat to the good, the beautiful, and the Greek.

In these debates, color centers the problem of the cosmetic: meaningless in itself, it bespeaks a veiling or an even more anxiety-

provoking lack of the pure White body. Batchelor has linked chromophobia to iconophobia, describing two modes of cultural rhetoric on color:

In the first, color is made out to be the property of some "foreign" body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological. In the second, color is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic. In one, color is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other, it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration. Color is dangerous or it is trivial, or it is both.[60]

The pretty is not limited to the colorful, but these qualities describe precisely the formal labor of antipretty discourse in cinema. There is a striking convergence—identity almost—between the terms of abuse directed at both. While film historiography has frequently addressed gender and race as issues of representation, these ideological or ethical engagements are undermined by the structural exclusion of the pretty as a condition of cinematic significance.

Following Batchelor, we can isolate two modes of cinematic chromophobia: the attribution of color to foreign, often raced (and sexed) bodies and the relegation of color to a cosmetic and inferior aesthetics. This separation serves an explanatory purpose, as well as signposting important distinctions in how and where race is mobilized by film scholars; however, I would argue that both modes depend on racialized thinking and that they are, ultimately, part of a single aesthetic history. In other words, the anticolor and antipretty discourse of film aesthetics derives from and depends on a logic of raced bodies. To begin with the more direct version, consider how closely Rudolf Arnheim echoes Goethe when, citing H. Baer, he argues that "children, peasants and primitive peoples demand the highest degree of bright coloring. It is the primitives of the great cities who congregate before the film screen. Therefore film calls in the aid of bright colors."[61] The association of color with supposedly inferior racial and class categories moves rapidly from a judgment on cinema's audiences to a way of distinguishing aesthetic value in the films themselves.

It comes as no surprise that structures of aesthetic value are raced. The modern linkage of the colorful with the non-Western can be at least partly traced to Kant's repeated usage of non-Western bodies as limit points for the universal ability to discern the beautiful and the sublime. If, as Spivak argues, the Kantian schema is based on a colonialist attribution of subjectivity, then the cinematic inheritors of aesthetic discourse also took on an implicitly and sometimes explicitly racist ambit of bodily and figurative value. As with the white light of cinematic purity that Dyer critiques, the post-Kantian definition of beauty and nobility in terms of whiteness involves an articulation of aesthetic rejection with racial difference. But whereas Kant's references to non-European peoples are marginal traces, barely speakable imprints of the colonial encounter, cinema's twentieth-century ethnography ensured that the descendents of Kant's foreign bodies were not faintly imagined natives but a major attraction of the medium.

Fatimah Tobing Rony has assessed the importance of ethnographic vision to cinema, focusing both on "the masses' voracious appetite for . . . images of peoples of color" and on the construction of exotic spectacle as a colonial aesthetic.[62] The popularity of non-European bodies on film—especially in the cinema's first decades—demonstrates a dynamic market for an image that could be enjoyed as colorful (in all senses), sensual, and foreign, but was clearly marked off from the nobility and beauty that was reserved for the white subject. Josephine Baker is an example of this figure: massively popular and lauded for her style and modernity, Baker was nonetheless widely evaluated in terms of physical performance rather than talent and viewed as fascinating rather than beautiful.[63] It is not hard to locate or condemn the racism of critics who could only imagine Baker as a lovely animal or a primitive child, but more subtle, perhaps, is the influence of this aesthetic model across the visual field. The denigration of marked and colored bodies is not simply a representational politics within the image (in the sense of "images of" criticism) but a structural exclusion from the pure and valuable image itself. Race (or gender) is not the same category for film theorists as it was for Kant, but the rhetoric of cinematic value inevitably conjures the other of aesthetic universality as a structural

as well as a representational problem. Elizabeth Ezra writes that "Josephine Baker is usually considered part of the décor of interwar French culture but hardly ever the main attraction," and, in this figuration of Baker's supplementarity as decoration, Ezra pinpoints the way that the rhetoric of decor correlates at the level of form to the problematic raced quality of the image.[64]

This question brings us to what is nominally the second aspect of cinematic chromophobia, the formal denigration of color as cosmetic. Traces of this discourse abound in film theory and criticism. We have seen how color emerges when Münsterberg, Arnheim, and Kracauer attempt to police the boundaries of proper film aesthetics and how it centers Chion's attack on postclassical style. Kracauer's examples are Powell and Pressburger's films, which have often been read as "flamboyant" and un-British in their dedication to saturated color palettes, a critical tendency that suggests that in Europe, at least, the orientalizing impetus of color remains in force.[65] Powell and Pressburger's Technicolor fantasies, like the queer tableaux of Terence Davies, stand outside the gritty masculinism of the more canonical British kitchen-sink realists. Moving outside Europe, we might consider the critical reception of Zhang Yimou's international hit, *Hero* (*Ying xiong*, Hong Kong/ China, 2002), whose richly toned mise-en-scène has been widely interpreted as veiling a lack of meaningful depth, a refusal of political speech, or an outright endorsement of authoritarianism.[66] As these examples suggest—even in film criticism that focuses on color as form—race, gender, and politics continue to underwrite the rhetoric of value.

Moreover, these aesthetic genealogies are not only a prehistory for cinema, a source of indirect or residual influence. Latenineteenth- and early-twentieth-century debates on art played a significant role in shaping the emerging accounts of cinema as an art form. By this time, art historical contestation had developed an opposition of the modern to the decorative. For example, in his pioneering work on the history of ornament, the art historian Alois Riegl writes of the "enormous resistance to making 'mere ornament' the basic theme of a more ambitious historical study."[67] His research draws heavily on the work of archaeologists in Egypt,

Iran, and Mesopotamia, so that while beauty can be claimed as a Greek concept, based on clean lines and simple forms, ornament's origins betray a taint of exoticism. This hostility reaches its apotheosis in Adolf Loos, the Austrian author of *Ornament and Crime*, who argued that "the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use."[68] Reserving his strongest venom for art nouveau, Loos compared the movement to criminals or degenerates daubing walls and to Papuan tattoo practices. Here, the ornamental surface connotes not only a lack of meaning but primitivism, decadence, and, as the tattooed Papuan suggests, an unruly, eroticized body.[69]

Classical theorists of cinema such as Kracauer, Münsterberg, and Walter Benjamin certainly read Riegl and Loos, and their debates on film, politics, and aesthetics took up the idea of ornament as a superfluous and excessive supplement to the image. Benjamin cites Loos, alongside Paul Klee and Bertolt Brecht, as avatars of a destructive modernity, while Kracauer's "mass ornament" adapts Loos's critique of decoration to a Marxist account of commercial film style.[70] While none of these critics evince Loos's fairly extreme cultural prescriptions, we can nonetheless discern, in his connection of purity to the stripping of the decorative, a logic closely tied to that of cinematic modernity. For Loos, aesthetic excess is strongly connected to death, decoration is figured as "death-in-life," and a carefully policed discourse on the other underwrites his positive values of life and openness.[71]

This aesthetic model recurs across film scholarship's engagement with modernity, which frequently counterposes openness and endlessness with decadent theatricality. Kracauer, for example, contrasts the "allusive indeterminacy" of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, USSR, 1925) with what he sees as Eisenstein's failure to reflect "transitory life" in *Alexander Nevsky* (*Aleksandr Nevskiy*, USSR, 1938). For him, the famous ice-battle scene is too constructed, so that, "even assuming that the Battle on the Ice were cinematically on a par with the episode of the Odessa steps, these patterns which spread octopus-like would nevertheless corrode its substance, turning it from a suggestive rendering of physical events into a luxuriant adornment."[72] In counterposing

transitory life with luxuriant adornment, Kracauer echoes Loos's healthy, proper, and progressive nature, as opposed to the stifling sensuality of excessively ornamented Oriental sets. This aesthetic hierarchy repeats and abstracts the more explicit racial discourse of ethnographic spectacle, in which the fashion for non-European bodies in early cinema etched racist models of vision into the realist aesthetics of the everyday. Today, the same model ironically often valorizes the foreign, underlying the work of canon formation around film movements that emphasize transitory life, such as Italian neorealism and Iranian art film. Just as, for Loos, the art nouveau house means "living with one's own corpse," for film theory, the pretty names the unnatural and overcomposed form that, by its exclusion, defines the cinematic as coextensive with value, truth, and life.[73]

Reading the Pretty

To read the pretty image is to answer a call, to respond to a question traced across the body of film history. Such a call is many-faceted: it must engage the broad history of aesthetics that grounds modern visual theories and at the same time situate film form and style within local economies of place, time, and culture. As I hope to have shown in my historical analysis, the emergence of neoclassicism and theories of visual purity suggest a *longue durée* of antipretty discourse in modernity, complexly imbricated in the period's encounters with its primitive racial and sexual others. Close reading of difficult-to-categorize, noncanonical, or aesthetically problematic film texts will determine the stakes of this process and its potential for resistance at the local level. To focus on this history is a political act, rereading bodies of film as well as the politics of the film body.

What, then, does a pretty reading look like? Most important, I do not seek to reverse the Platonic binary and find value only in the image. While the humanities have seen an often conservative return to aesthetics in recent years, the pretty does not oppose ideology with regressive models of beauty, femininity, or moral good. Quite the contrary. Instead, I mobilize *pretty* as a polemical term,

as a way of queering the discourse of aesthetics in film theory. That such a polemic is necessary can be evidenced by the persistent conservatism of those cultural critics who might at first glance appear aligned with my argument. For instance, in *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images*, Stafford acutely diagnoses the historical trajectory of iconophobia, but her critique of Marxist and poststructuralist thought tends to throw the political baby out with the rhetorical bathwater. Her call to reenchant images feeds a reactionary humanist project whose aesthetic centrism lauds critics such as Dave Hickey, while simply condemning as "disturbing" and "debasing" cultural practices that for many critics have nourished lively political debate, such as copyright infringement and pornography.[74]

The affiliation of Stafford's antiporn feminism with this aesthetic resurgence does not seem to me to be coincidental. Wendy Steiner, another major humanities scholar to take up the banner of contemporary aesthetics, valorizes feminine beauty against what she sees as the sexual and political affront of modernism. Her claim, in some important ways, is coextensive with my own: she identifies gender as the stake in a seemingly unfashionable question of aesthetics, and she considers a phobia of the feminine to be at the heart of the matter. However, when Steiner unpacks modernism's cultural denigration of the feminine, she proposes as an alternative a conservative model of gendered value that embraces the woman as muse, the domestic and reproductive spheres, and the heterosexual family.[75] Feminist theorists therefore join misogynist artists as aesthetic bad objects: from Mary Wollstonecraft's work to Mulvey's, any critique of how women have been limited by the requirement of beauty is anathema to Steiner's project. She centers her argument in a rejection of the Kantian sublime, which, she contests, dominated modernism to the detriment of the homely pleasures of the beautiful woman. Thus she lauds Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for demonstrating that "Kantian aesthetics seem to be responsible for a dehumanization of women that has certain parallels to Sade's violent pornography," concluding that "the pure abstraction of Kant and the pure pornography of Sade were to become the two faces of the twentieth-century avant-garde" (16–17).

Figures of sexuality, and particularly images of bodies engaged in perverse, violent, or proscribed acts, recur throughout this history. While Jordá's surgical violence promises a shoring up of the spectatorial body against the charms of the cinematic image, both the antipretty polemics of Loos and Blanc and the apparently iconophilic revisions of Stafford and Steiner imagine the dangerous misuse of images in terms of sexual representation. This curious iteration of perversity pinpoints the difference of reading for the pretty. Such a practice does not trope sexuality as that excluded from meaning or value (however the latter are defined) but, rather, explores the coincidence of aesthetics, sexual deviance, and the modern image. We might look to Pier Paolo Pasolini's elaboration of bodies and spaces, in which ornament, excess, and decay trouble the rhetoric of beauty and disturb geopolitical and gendered fixities. Or Derek Jarman, whose work has explored the pornographic body, the queer politics of color, and the radical potential of art history. Having been frequently marginalized by critical and national-cinematic institutions, these examples point to the canon-forming labor of antipretty discourse. A reading focused on the cinematic pretty would be better placed to synthesize such texts' intertwined articulations of materiality, politics, and mise-en-scène.

Catherine Opie's photography provides a cognate example from contemporary art practice. Her "Self-Portrait/Pervert" (1994) features a Regency fabric, which cites a history of decorative aesthetics and hangs behind Opie, while Opie herself is elegantly posed wearing a leather mask, with dozens of thick needles arranged symmetrically through her arms and a leaf-motif cutting across her chest, spelling "Pervert" in an art nouveau style. The image is definitively pretty as I have discussed it, deploying color, composition, and art history in a way that demands that we do not read its subject in terms of violence, ugliness, or confrontation. Judith Halberstam has made a similar defense of Opie's photographs of BDSM and masculine dykes, arguing that their rich color and stylization—constructing their subjects as "positively regal in their opulent settings" and "photographic glory"—actually prevent what some critics decried as a voyeuristic structure by forcing viewers "to

A queer BDSM pretty in "Self Portrait/Pervert" (Opie, 1994).
Courtesy Guggenheim Museum

be admiring and appreciative rather than simply objectifying."[76] I find this example important, because Opie's photographed bodies are precisely not the ones a patriarchal aesthetics would find pretty. If pretty is to be a polemic, it is decidedly not a polemic for traditional, white, hetero femininity. Color, opulence, excess, and style are aesthetic weapons for queer bodies also.

The pretty does not always thematize sexuality, of course, but this example demonstrates both its method of political critique and its potential for historical analysis. While the denigration of the pretty is a constant feature of modern aesthetics, what styles, films, and movements are so categorized is historically and geographically contingent. A reading of Jarman's experimental work, for instance, could situate his layered and colorful screen textures in tension with British materialist film, drag, punk, and England's incipient heritage culture. Rey Chow demands that we see the films of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige not as orientalist fantasies for the Western spectator but precisely as engagements with the problem of modern vision from the perspective of the East.[77] These regimes of influence are diverse, but they share a deconstructive aesthetic gesture. The radicalism of the pretty lies in its historical development as a space of exclusion. It names the troublesome bodies—gendered, sexed, raced, and geopolitically inconvenient—that modern aesthetics must expel in order to construct the pure form of beauty or value. Thus it should come as no surprise that the texts that draw on the pretty are those whose claims on cultural value are similarly contested.

The pretty demands a renegotiation of the historical values attached to visual forms, and it does so in ways that are raced and sexed at a structural, not just thematic, level. We can illustrate this process by stepping from the field of film culture to the nonrepresentational world of horticulture—perhaps an unusual but a very instructive example. Lisa Robertson writes on the decorative properties and modern history of *Rubus armeniacus*, the Himalayan blackberry. Analyzing the significance of a plant categorized as "invasive" and often seen as a nuisance, Robertson begins, "Illegitimate, superfluous, this difficult genus of frost-tolerant hermaphrodites seems capable of swallowing barns."[78] Unnecessary, voracious, and sexually confused, *Rubus* might remind us of the discursive construction of the pretty. Moreover, Robertson explains, "In late nineteenth-century America, *Rubus* enthusiasm was a faddish adjunct to horticultural orientalism—the identification and importation of Chinese brambles enriched the picturesque aspect

of shrubberies, pergolas, and pleasure-grounds" (126). Like the pretty in painting and later cinema, *Rubus* meshes picturesque style with a vague but insistent reference to the non-Western (Armenian? Himalayan? Chinese?). And the nineteenth-century *Rubus* fad is not only coterminous with the development of the modern spectacle, but, located in American public gardens and pleasure grounds, it is part of its material history.

For Robertson, *Rubus* instantiates an aesthetic of the surface. Thus, "The limitless modification of the skin is different from modernization—surface morphologies, as *Rubus* shows, include decay, blanketing and smothering, shedding, dissolution and penetration, and pendulous swagging and draping, as well as proliferative growth, all in contexts of environmental disturbance and contingency rather than fantasized balance. *Rubus armeniacus* is an exemplary political decoration, a nutritious ornament that clandestinely modifies infrastructural morphology. . . . This is the serious calling of style" (130). Could the skin of cinema, born from the same aesthetic environment, support such political decoration? A filmic Himalayan blackberry might look like Luhrmann's lush encrustations of antirealist drapery in *Moulin Rouge!* which proliferates textiles, props, and orientalist tropes in a mise-en-abyme of melodramatic gender politics. Or, perhaps it could take the form of the snails that proliferate, collect, and distort the surfaces of Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* (UK/Netherlands, 1985). Hermaphroditic, deconstructive organisms, their time-lapse takeover of Greenaway's pictorial screen stages mortality while punning drolly on the process of image making. In their own constructive complicity, these films perform a kind of aesthetic drag, mimicking and transforming claims on gender, culture, and difference. We might even return to Jordá, whose films belong to an avant-garde movement, the Barcelona School, which has been largely excluded from Spanish film historiography, in part because the films are too pretty to fit comfortably into a history of modernist countercinema.

These examples only scratch the surface of the pretty (to use a rather inapposite Platonic metaphor). Its rhetorical force con-

sists in its demand that we articulate the supposedly transhistorical discourse of aesthetics with the sociohistorical elaborations of particular images. I would like to close by pointing to the history of the word *pretty* itself, which traces the terms of such a political inscription. Derived from the Old English *prætt*, meaning "a trick," "a wile," or "a craft," pretty's earliest meanings involve cunning and art. One should not make the mistake of supposing this craft to be neutral, however, for its metaphysics is close to witchcraft. This sense is maintained in Kracauer, who conjures a hypothetical film, poorly made but realistic. "Nevertheless," he argues, "such a film is more specifically a film than the one which utilizes brilliantly all the cinematic *devices and tricks* to produce a statement disregarding camera-reality" (emphasis mine).[79] Such cunning tricks are very different from *beauty*, whose French origins always included nobility and truth. The beautiful, then, is a safe form of image to valorize, while the pretty is at once a lesser, feminine form and, like the Greek icon itself, structurally deceptive. It is here that we locate the unique value of the pretty for thinking about cinema. As an aesthetic category, the pretty contains within itself the ambivalence about the truth-status of the image that underwrites film theory. Moreover, the word bonds suspicion of the aesthetic image to the haunting political terms of its embodiment. For film studies, the pretty exerts a demand that images be read precisely at the point of their aesthetic exclusion, a practice that might reveal different shapes for the cinematic body.

Notes

1.　Joachín Jordá, quoted in Laia Manresa, *Joaquín Jordá: La mirada lluire* (*The Free Spirit*), trans. Andrew Stacy (Barcelona: Filmoteca de Catalunya, 2006), 154.

2.　Relevant feminist analysis of the avant-garde includes Patricia Mellencamp, *Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Linda Williams,

Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943 – 71* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

3. See, e.g., Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Transparency of Spectacle: Meditations on the Moving Image* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

4. There is, of course, a substantial philosophical literature on this topic. For the purposes of this article, I point merely to two major contemporary critical engagements with Plato's image: Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 67 – 185; and Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon (London: Continuum, 1989). Le Doeuff's analysis is particularly suggestive for its insistence on gender as intrinsic to the philosophical delegitimization of the image.

5. Dudley Andrew, ed., *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), viii.

6. Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

7. This debate is a recurring one in art history, with classical, Renaissance, and modern variants. Useful overviews include John Gage, *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Charles A. Riley II, *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996). See also Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Notes and Observations on Pictures: Chiefly of the Venetian School* (London: J. R. Smith, 1859); Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "The History of Ancient Art," in *Neoclassicism and Romanticism, 1750 – 1850: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), ed. Lorenz Eitner, 1: 13 – 19; and Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts décoratifs* (*Grammar of the Decorative Arts*) (Paris: Librarie Renouard, 1882). Brian Price and Angela dalle Vacche connect these issues to film studies in *Color: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

8. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 52.

9. Charles Blanc, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving,* trans. Kate Newell Doggett (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1891), 169.

10. Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 16. This example demonstrates the reach of the rhetoric: as a film historian, Kaes's project lies elsewhere, but we see how this theoretical issue underlies his interpretive model.

11. Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, trans. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); Michel Chion, "Quiet Revolution . . . and Rigid Stagnation," trans. Ben Brewster, *October* 58 (1991): 69–80.

12. See, e.g., Mary Ann Doane, "Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, nos. 3–4 (1982): 74–87; Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 45–61; Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Reorientations in Film and Video* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

13. Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005): 813

14. Tania Modleski, "Femininity as Mas(s)querade: A Feminist Approach to Mass Culture," in *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 23–34. The phrase "mass culture as woman" of course comes from Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986). Huyssen's periodization also suggests that a revaluation of the pretty might be a postmodernist move. While I am not sure how useful the term is to my argument, since I do not make historical claims on postmodernism, it does speak to an intersection of identitarian, aesthetic, and ideological debates that help frame the contemporary significance of the pretty.

15. José Arroyo, "*Moulin Rouge,*" *Sight and Sound*, September 2001, 50–51. Arroyo's review is a measured example of the discourse on *Moulin Rouge!* A more specific critique of the film's racial inauthenticity can be found in Mike Sell, "Bohemianism, the Cultural Turn of the Avantgarde, and Forgetting the Roma," *TDR: The Drama Review* 51, no. 2 (2007): 41–59.

16. There is an echo here of debates on drag, in which Judith Butler's claim on drag as a figure for the performative led to arguments over the degree to which drag was useful for a radical politics. While not focusing on identitarian issues in quite the same way, my argument shares with Butler a desire to locate the political elsewhere than in immediate representational issues. See, e.g., Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992), 145–56.

17. For more on orientation, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

18. Hugo Münsterberg, *The Film: A Psychological Study* (New York: Dover, 1970), 62.

19. Jacques Aumont, "The Face in Close-Up," in *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History*, ed. Angela dalle Vacche, trans. Ellen Sowchek (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 133.

20. Louis Delluc, *Photogénie* (Paris: de Brunoff, 1920), 8, trans. and quoted in Eugene C. McCreary, "Louis Delluc, Film Theorist, Critic, and Prophet," *Cinema Journal* 16, no. 1 (1976): 18.

21. Jacques Aumont, "The Variable Eye; or, The Mobilization of the Gaze," in Andrew, *Image in Dispute*, 232–34.

22. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 36.

23. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 76. I am indebted to Katy Hoffer for pointing out the resonance of this phrase.

24. André Bazin, "*Le journal d'un curé de campagne* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson," in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:138–39.

25. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–4.

26. We might also note Bresson's own iconoclastic theoretical writings on film, significantly in Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe* (*Notes on Cinematography*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

27. Bazin, "*Le journal d'un curé*," 140–41.

28. André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* 1:165.

29. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?* 1:15.

30. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

31. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 8–10, 164. Mitchell does not hold to a vulgar interpretation of ideology as a false image but, rather, details how the rhetorical history of image metaphors has allowed iconoclastic thinking to find its way into diverse intellectual histories.

32. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994); Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 6.

33. For a discussion of the afterlife of religious iconoclasm, see John Peters, "Beauty's Veils: The Ambivalent Iconoclasm of Kierkegaard and Benjamin," in Andrew, *Image in Dispute*, 10–32.

34. Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema, Ideology, Criticism," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols, trans. Susan Bennett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 22–30.

35. Georg Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

36. Comolli and Narboni, "Cinema, Ideology, Criticism," 28.

37. Comolli and Narboni argue that categories b and c constitute "the essential in the cinema" and "should be the chief subject

of the magazine" (ibid., 26). For readings of Douglas Sirk, see
Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on
the Family Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies
in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill
(London: BFI, 1987), 43–69; Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and
Melodrama," in Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 75–79; Sam
Rohdie, ed., "Special Issue on Sirk," *Screen* 12, no. 2 (1971); and
Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and
the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
1994).

38. Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and
Pleasure," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed.
Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 180.

39. Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter-cinema: *Vent d'Est*," in
Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 128.

40. Jean-Luc Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in *The Cinematic
Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York:
St. Martin's, 1980), 121–42.

41. Schor, quoting Cicero, in *Reading in Detail*, 45.

42. As Stella demonstrates, both her belief in this theory of
cosmetics and an awareness of its pathetic nature inevitably lead
to a reactionary politics. The often-cited feminist debate on the
film demonstrates that the politics of feminine decoration is a
sticky subject for film theory. See E. Ann Kaplan, "The Case of
the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*," in
Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 1990), 126–36; and Linda Williams,
"Something Else besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal
Melodrama," *Cinema Journal* 24, no. 1 (1994): 2–27. See also
Stanley Cavell, "Stella's Taste: Reading *Stella Dallas*," in *Contesting
Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1996), 197–222.

43. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in
Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 198–209.

44. Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory,
Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 45.

45. Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 34. Elizabeth Grosz asks, "Can feminist theory eschew the notion of depth?" Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 175.

46. Janet Bergstrom, "Enunciation and Sexual Difference," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 182.

47. Elspeth Probyn, "This Body Which Is Not One: Speaking as Embodied Self," *Hypatia* 6, no. 3 (1991): 114.

48. Williams, "Something Else besides a Mother," 317.

49. Catherine Constable, *Thinking in Images: Film Theory, Feminist Philosophy, and Marlene Dietrich* (London: BFI, 2006), 2–3.

50. I have made this claim in Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). I argue that Italian popular melodramas embed a gender critique in their historical engagement with landscape, despite their apparently sexist representations of female characters.

51. Barbara Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

52. Barbara Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 44.

53. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorio*, vol. 3, trans. H. E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1922), 8.3.6. Schor also analyzes this debate in *Reading in Detail* (45).

54. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colors*, trans. Charles Eastlake (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 55.

55. Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time: Essays on the Politics of Appearance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 39.

56. Antoine-Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres écrites de Londres à Rome, et addressées à M. Canova, sur les marbres d'Elgin, ou les sculptures du temple de Minerve à Athènes* (Letters Written from London to Rome, and Addressed to Mr. Canova, on the Elgin Marbles, or the Sculptures of the Temple of Minerva in Athens) (Rome, 1818); Quatremère de Quincy, *De l'architecture egyptienne:*

considérée dans son origine, ses principes et son goût, et comparée sous les mêmes rapports à l'architecture Grecque (On Egyptian Architecture: Considered in Its Origins, Its Principles, and Its Taste, and Compared in the Same Terms with Greek Architecture) (Paris: Barrois, 1803); David Van Zanten, *The Architectural Polychromy of the 1830s* (New York: Garland, 1977), 7–9, 28–30.

57. "Color . . . is the peculiar characteristic of the lower forms of nature, while drawing becomes the medium of expression, more and more dominant, the higher we rise in the scale of being." Blanc, *Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, 4–5.

58. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *The Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 7, *On Sexuality* (London: Penguin, 1991), 145–69. The lines "Heads in hieroglyphic bonnets/ Heads in turbans and black birettas/ Heads in wigs and thousand other/ Wretched, sweating heads of humans" are from Heinrich Heine, "Fragen," in *Die Nordsee* (*The North Sea*), second cycle, 7, 146.

59. Blanc, *Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, 168.

60. Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 22–23.

61. H. Baer, cited in Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 159.

62. Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and the Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 10. See also Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 289–300.

63. See discussion of Baker in Tobing Rony, *Third Eye*, 198–203. See also Terry Francis, "Embodied Fictions, Melancholy Migrations: Josephine Baker's Cinematic Celebrity," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 51 (2005): 824–46; and Ylva Habel, "To Stockholm, with Love: The Critical Reception of Josephine Baker, 1927–35," *Film History* 17 (2005): 125–38.

64. Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 98.

65. See, for instance, Roy Armes, *A Critical History of the British Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978); and Stephen L. Hanson,

"Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger," in *Film Reference*, www.filmreference.com/Directors-Pe-Ri/Powell-Michael-and-Emeric-Pressburger.html (accessed 15 November 2007). For an example of the historiographic turn in the 1980s by which this fantastic difference is celebrated, see Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent," in *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr (London: BFI, 1986), 98–119. Also striking is Powell's desire for a "composed cinema," in which, as Ian Christie describes it, "sound and image would be as closely integrated as they are normally in animation." Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 69.

66. See, e.g., Evans Chan, "Zhang Yimou's *Hero*: The Temptations of Fascism," *Film International* 2, no. 8 (2004): 14–23.

67. Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 7.

68. Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime,* trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1998), 167.

69. Ibid. On Loos, see also Rosalind Galt, "Between the Ornament and the Corpse: Adolf Loos and Classical Film Theory," in *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifonova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 229–44.

70. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, *1927–1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 733; Kracauer, *Mass Ornament*, 75–86.

71. Adolf Loos, "The Story of a Poor Rich Man," in *Adolf Loos: Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, ed. Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler (New York: Praeger, 1966), 223–25.

72. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 227.

73. Loos, "Story of a Poor Rich Man," 225.

74. Stafford, *Good Looking*, 5, 45, 69. Many contemporary theorists have revisited Max Weber's notion of the disenchantment of the modern world, calling, like Stafford, for reenchantment with a view to superseding modernist theories or extending

the parameters of aesthetic experience. See, e.g., Christopher
Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, eds., *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and
the Technologies of Enchantment* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); W. J. T.
Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Jane Bennett,
The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Some of
this work shares a critical impetus with my project. Mitchell,
for instance, mobilizes the enchanted image as a way out of
iconophobia; other scholars have associated disenchantment
with oppressive colonial aesthetics. Yet I find this discourse
troubling, and not only because of the avowedly conservative
critics who claim reenchantment in the name of an antisecular
revival. See, e.g., Gordon Graham, *The Re-enchantment of the
World: Art versus Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
The advocates of enchantment often present a false choice of
two undesirable options: ugly rationality or pseudoreligious
magic. Even for a critic like Bennett, who is careful to include
the secular in her nonrational space, the connotation of magic
is straightforwardly positive, as she seeks to reverse dominant
terms and value magical enchantment. However, just as I find
it impossible to subscribe to a feminism that favors seduction,
or feminine wiles, as a response to patriarchy, I am leery of
an ethics that responds to capitalist modernity by seeking to
reenchant the world. The pretty intervenes in this field by
insisting that we read aesthetic exclusions politically rather than
swap one oppressive paradigm for another.

75. Wendy Steiner, *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-
    Century Art* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

76. Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinities* (Durham, NC: Duke
    University Press, 1998), 35.

77. Chow has argued that scholars from both Asia and the West
    demonstrate a contempt for the visual and that, seen outside of
    philosophies of logocentrism, Zhang's work stages a new ethics
    of the image. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality,
    Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York:
    Columbia University Press, 1995); and Chow, "Towards an Ethics
    of Postvisuality: Some Thoughts on the Recent Work of Zhang
    Yimou," *Poetics Today* 25 (2004): 673–88.

78. Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Astoria, OR: Clear Cut, 2003), 125.

79. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 30.

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Baroque portraiture overlays punk aesthetics in *The Tempest* (dir. Derek Jarman, UK, 1979)