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The Vicarious Look, or Andy Warhol's Apparatus Theory

Damon R. Young

> "I really do think movies *should* arouse you, should get you excited about people, should be prurient."
>
> —Andy Warhol, interview in *Vogue*, 1970

> "In the traditional cinema, the spectator identifies only with the 'seeing,' his own image does not appear on the screen... All that remains is the fact of seeing... without features or fixed position, vicarious..."
>
> —Christian Metz, "Histoire/Discours," 1975[1]

After its scandalous rise to prominence in the 1970s, the film-theoretical concept of voyeurism fell out of fashion as quickly as a child star whom puberty has suddenly stripped of his infantile charm. Probably that fall was inevitable: voyeurism, and the "primary identification" with the camera once said to sustain it, were central to the theoretical account of the "cinematic apparatus," a term designating a set of technological and spectatorial relations that may no longer be paradigmatic within a heterogeneous media culture, but to which, I will be arguing, it is worth returning our attention—with fresh eyes, as it were.

Let us summon up, from the near but quickly-receding past, the situation of the body in the classic analyses of apparatus theory: this is a body immobilized in a darkened room, for which vision—as a heightened sense—mediates a relation to the world that is, in Jean-Louis Baudry's terms, "transcendental," freed from the empirical constraints (and identitarian fixity) to which it is bound in the natural world.[2] This liberating vision becomes the support for a "subject position" that corresponds to (and identifies first and foremost with) the

position of the camera, situated at the vanishing point of the spectacle that exists to be seen by this all-seeing, unseen subject. The process of *primary identification* with the transcendental position of the look (and its technological prostheses in the camera and the projector) in turn sustains the subject's "illusion of voyeuristic separation" from the world onto which he has visual access, as Laura Mulvey put it, notably inserting gendered pronouns into the account (9). The impetus of these analyses was, of course, critical. Baudry claimed that the cinema equipped the "idealist" subject of Western metaphysics with a technological, prosthetic support, and Mulvey leveled at that spectating subject the charge Simone de Beauvoir had leveled at its metaphysical counterpart, namely that its claim to "universality" depends on, and sustains, a rigid structure of sexual difference that its putative "universality" also serves (ideologically) to conceal.

The critical passion and conceptual brio of these arguments might seem as anachronistic today as the spectatorial conditions they described. (And it may be as much for the first of these reasons as for the second that apparatus theory is today condemned to the dusty bins of the "history of film theory.") In any case, it seems clear that the "silent [and] motionless" spectator described by Baudry, Mulvey, and Christian Metz (96) is no longer paradigmatic: as Caitlin Benson-Allott has recently put it in a study of home video technologies, "the spectator has left the theater" (36). The cinema, wrote Metz, is a technology of the "senses at a distance" (60), but today's spectator (now more properly thought of as a user/consumer) is increasingly in direct bodily contact with the screen and, moreover, just as frequently transformed into spectacle himself. The 1980s remote control described by Benson-Allott, but also the 1990s mouse, the 2000s touch screen, motion sensor console, and Google Glass are technological prostheses that respond directly to the body in its real, not merely ideal, orientation in space. Spectatorship has become embodied not in the still-metaphoric sense of a "haptic visuality" or of a "tactile eye": today, in an increasing range of contexts, the spectacle solicits and responds to *actual* touch.[3]

The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk, wrote Hegel, who also taught us that a paradigm does not simply disappear so much as it is incorporated, sublated, preserved even in its falling into obsolescence. Indeed, our post-cinematic cultural present is precisely post-*cinematic*,

and cinema as predominant cultural medium of the twentieth century has surely laid the ground for the new technologies that may or may not supersede it. We will need fuller accounts of the spectatorial-interactive dynamics that attend those new technologies, hopefully ones that do not dispense with apparatus theory's central concern with politics, ideology, and critique. But as well as looking forward, theory advances by looking backward. (Critical theory, Walter Benjamin once wrote, should not leave history to the historicists!) With that in mind, the present essay, following Scott Richmond's recent lead, returns to the paradigm of properly cinematic apparatus theory for three reasons. The first is provided by Richmond, who convincingly argues that the (phenomenological and psychic) dynamics that animate cinematic identification also organize, in variously modified and modulated ways, our experience of "newer" screen media. But where Richmond proceeds by attempting to liberate apparatus theory, as it were, from its dependence on psychoanalytic concepts, I maintain that an account of cinematic identification must grapple with the meaning and structure of what Mulvey called "visual pleasure," fundamentally connected, in her analysis, to voyeurism. My second reason for reopening apparatus theory's can of worms, then, is that the concept of voyeurism that was so central to it has been too-hastily dismissed as well as consistently misunderstood, including by apparatus theorists themselves, who frequently conflated it (in the manner of films like *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho* [both 1960]) with sadism. But in psychoanalytic theory, voyeurism and sadism are categorically distinct, and where the first, I will argue, is inherent to the technological structure of the "cinematic apparatus," the second is not.

Mulvey is often accused of constructing a model of cinematic spectatorship that, in spite of its avowed specificity, generalizes in the same manner as the psychoanalytic theory on which she draws. To make a theory, however, *means* to generalize. Apparatus theory (and this is the third reason for revisiting it) demonstrated the critical value of pursuing the fundamental structural conditions that materialize in specific technological and cultural forms. (Mulvey's aim was, of course, to change those conditions, which, though they may be fundamental, are clearly not immutable.) But where Mulvey extrapolated a theory of the look from an analysis of classical Hollywood narrative, this was, for that reason, a theory that hinged on the operations of what

Metz called "secondary identification" (identification with a screen surrogate). What happens if we turn instead to the work of a seemingly "marginal" filmmaker—Metz's contemporary, Andy Warhol—whose early work tends to suspend operations of secondary identification, and thus the norms that operate at the level of narrative? In minimizing the interventions of any "filmic narrator," Warhol's proto-structural films isolate the operations of "primary identification"—an identification with the looking position constructed by the camera—and disclose its fundamentally voyeuristic structure. Whereas voyeurism is typically taken to be a stigmatizing term (one the most sensitive readers of Warhol have understandably sought to distance him from), I argue that Warhol's voyeurism not only restores to primary identification a sense of its *erotic foundation,* it also exposes that foundation as—far from normatively heterosexual—suffused with a queer latency that belies every attempt to contain it.

For this reason, Warhol does not figure in my analysis as a minoritarian or subcultural filmmaker. On the contrary, I will argue that the formal ingenuity and anomalousness of Warhol's films of the 1960s, in minimizing the operations of secondary identification, felicitously disclose something *essential* to the non-reciprocal, voyeuristic structure of cinematic looking. In their alternation of eroticism and boringness, absorption and distraction, Warhol's films also presciently anticipate post-cinematic modes of spectatorship (and it is no surprise to learn that he spent the last years of his life working in television.) I thus approach Warhol as himself an apparatus theorist whose quirky films teach us something in general about the structure, and the appeal, of cinematic looking—a structure and an appeal that continue, in ways that remain to be fully unfolded, to exert their force on 21st century technics.

The Carnally Dense Spectator

I offer this polemical preface in solidarity with—but also to adumbrate certain reservations about—Richmond's recent attempt to redeem some element of Metz's thought by recruiting it to a phenomenological account of spectatorship, via a brilliant reading of *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002).

Richmond returns to Metz's distinction between secondary and primary identification (respectively "identification with one or several characters" and "identification with the camera and its point of view" [131]), which he ingeniously maps onto Roger Caillois' concepts of

mimesis (an imitative and projective form of identification with the other as physical image) and *ilinx* (the vertiginous pleasure of spatial disorientation, such as the kind we experience on a roller coaster). Ilinx/primary identification, in Richmond's reformulation, concerns the cinema as a technology of "proprioceptive modulation" (131), which is to say it depends on the camera's motion; it corresponds, in *Spider-Man*, to the "dizzying, giddy vertigo of the illusion of our body's movement through an alleyway, up a wall, down Fifth Avenue" (123). Mimesis/secondary identification is produced through reaction shots, which "suture" us into the diegetic world, as film theorists used to say, in this case via our identification with Peter/Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) as a character. (It is worth mentioning here that Richmond's comments on *Spider-Man* are applicable to a wide range of—arguably all—films which alternate so-called "attractions" with narrative.) Richmond's larger aim is to show that identification is not only *psychic* and not only produced through narrative techniques, like the famous shot/reverse shot of the aforementioned "suture"; it is also physiological and proprioceptive. Moreover, its usual associations aside, identification does not shore up our sense of "boundedness" or subjective coherence; on the contrary, as the emphasis on vertigo and disorientation suggests, Richmond reads identification instead as a process of "becoming unbounded" (131). This in turn has ethical consequences, presumably because boundedness is idealist, ideological, and also no doubt masculinist, and because unboundedness opens us to the experience of our profound "exposure to others," *bound up*, so to speak, in our "exposure to technics" (137).

Richmond's admirable essay, and the larger project from which it derives, stand among the most promising "post-cinematic" contributions to film and media theory. Yet for all its suggestiveness, this repurposing of Metz, eagerly brushing the theorist's work "against the grain" (131), nevertheless neglects to brush *Spider-Man* the same way, accounting for the pleasures it affords in the very terms most ostentatiously proclaimed by the film itself (what I am tempted to call the "red-blooded," boyish exhilaration of the action scenes). Consider Richmond's description of our spectating bodies beholding Maguire/Peter's "feats of acrobatic athleticism" as he runs, leaps, and swings his way up Fifth Avenue (123). Here we are not what Metz called a "self filtered into pure vision" (Metz 96) but rather "giddy,

voluptuous, dizzy, and carnally dense" bodies, worked on or over perceptually by Peter's own "athletic, powerful, impossible, out-of-control, diaphanous, laboring, and nearly ethereal" body (Richmond 123). This overabundance of adjectives evokes intense modes of affective communion between our spectating bodies and Peter's lithe but muscular body on display as it powers its way through the illusory cinematic world into which we are also, by a kind of proprioceptive empathy, enfolded.

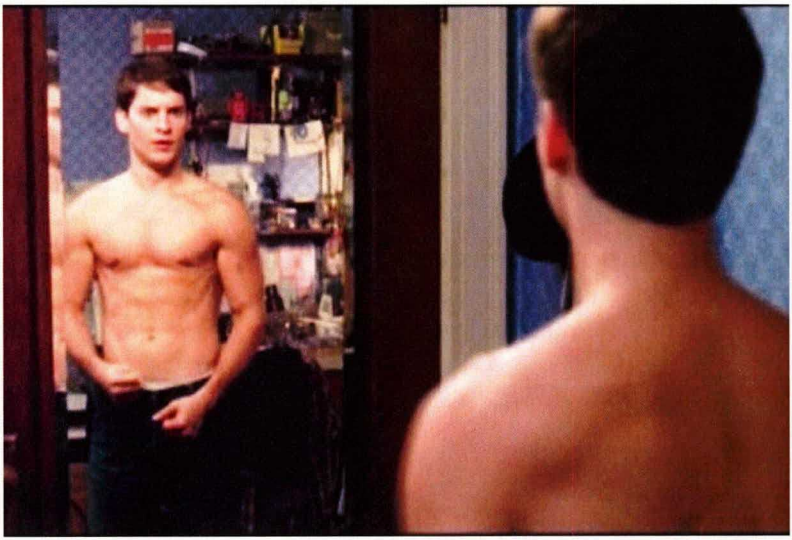


Fig. 1: Spider-Man's mirror stage. In *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002).

There is, I am tempted to say, a symptomatic elision organizing this striking list of adjectives, one that each of them risks betraying as a secret connotation. Voyeurism being the one term of Metz's that appears nowhere in the essay, Richmond's discussion of the "giddy, voluptuous, dizzy, carnally dense" spectating body cannot help but recall the story of the analysand who begins by telling his analyst: "*Nothing* I am about to say has *anything at all* to do with my mother!" ("How to Look at Superheroes," indeed!) Of course, Peter's "impossible" body with its "augmented capacities" (115) is not just a body in action but, unlike ours, a body *on display* precisely *as body*, in the idealized masculine form that would be the materialization of those capacities; a body whose muscles, enframed as form by the skintight covering that at once conceals them and reveals their

every contour, spring into action as it leaps, runs, and swings through space, and moreover does these things *for our look*, fulfilling its destiny to-be-looked-at. To this hyper-visibility and hyper-activity of Peter's "athletic, powerful" body corresponds, as its necessary complement, to our own invisibility and inactivity. If this radical asymmetry produces the effect of an "intense, embodied intimacy and identification with Peter" (123), it does so only on the condition that the imaginative (and proprioceptive) traversing of the polarity will also preserve it absolutely. Maguire/Peter's idealizing combination of ephebic adolescence with phallic muscularity, sensitivity and agility with strength and power, attains that ideality in the glow of our necessarily invisible look, as the *spectacle* of a (sensitive-yet-powerful) masculinity that he himself first assumes, mirror stage-like, by encountering it, precisely, as spectacle (figure 1).

Maguire's CGI-enhanced body thus delivers *both* of the kinds of visual pleasure that Laura Mulvey divided along the axis of sexual difference in her essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In the first place it is a "figure in a landscape," an "active male figure" whose movements organize a "three-dimensional space" (12-13)—a principle whose intensification here produces the "dizzying" results Richmond notes. (Mulvey adds: "Here the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception," but as Richmond's analysis reveals, it is also to play with and disrupt those natural conditions.) To this active, spatialized, ostensibly masculinist pleasure is counterposed another one that is not oriented in time and space nor tied to narrative, and that therefore functions neither through what Richmond calls *ilinx* (vertigo, spatial disorientation) nor what he calls *mimesis* (identification with a character). For her part, Mulvey associates this other pleasure with the figure of woman, though *Spider-Man*'s relentless interest in the "augmented capacities" of Maguire/Peter's spectacular body would seem to trouble that association. This second dimension of visual pleasure, drawing the spectator into a "no-man's-land" outside space and time, is of course the dimension of the "erotic look." That look does not conduce to the stabilization of a particular *identity* (does not, that is, position the male spectator as gay or the female spectator as straight, since *identity* would be the residue only of secondary identifications). Rather, this is an erotic look *at the level of the primary identification, the apparatus itself,* an eroticism

inherent in the (technologized) act of looking at bodies, and one that I will argue is neither heterosexual nor "male" so much as inherently perverse. Although the recognition of its erotic component tends to be suppressed within "mainstream" films organized, like *Spider-Man*, around the spectacle of men's bodies in action, that erotic component is also not entirely sublimated. (Spider-Man's skintight costume, as I have suggested, transforms the active male body into erotic spectacle, eroticizing, as it were, its entire surface.) The structural dynamics that Warhol, as we shall see, distills and reduces are not ones specific to subcultural or "queer" cinema. Instead they pertain to an eroticism that is somehow bound up in the asymmetrical and vicarious structure of looking produced by and as the cinematic apparatus. That the specific modality of that apparatus is *voyeuristic* seems a good place for an account of cinematic identification to begin.

Technological Prurience, or, Non-Reciprocity

Clearly not all films transform the body into erotic spectacle as relentlessly as does *Spider-Man.* Nevertheless, that there may be something inherently voyeuristic about the cinematic apparatus is a thought that has not only occurred to Christian Metz. André Bazin seemed to suggest as much when he wrote, in 1957, that "[i]t is of the cinema alone that we can say that eroticism is there on purpose and is a basic ingredient... even perhaps an *essential* one" ("Marginal Notes" 170, my italics).[4] In a 1923 piece on Asta Nielsen, Béla Balàzs advanced a similar formulation, opining that "the erotic is film's very own theme, its *essence*" (87, my italics). What is this essence, this essential ingredient? Bazin, unable or unwilling to pursue the consequences of his own observation, ends by admitting his bemusement. Balàzs, for his part, takes refuge in a dubious syllogism: film is the medium of "visible man" (*der sichtbare Mensch*) and eroticism is "always a bodily experience... and therefore visible" (87).

Linda Williams has set this connection between cinematic technologies and the visible body they take as their object in a historical frame. For Williams, Muybridge's proto-cinematic studies of bodies in motion in the late 19th century, even as they register a "scientific" interest in the body's movement through space, are seared with a certain voyeuristic supplement that produces a (perverse, non-functional) pleasure in looking alongside or in excess of their putative scientific use-value (figure 2).[5]

For Williams, whose approach is genealogical and Foucauldian, it is not that some pre-existing voyeurism of an ahistorical human subject finds a new outlet in the cinema. Rather, "the cinematic magnification and projection of human bodies" towards the end of the nineteenth century "*produce[d] a new kind of body*" (45, my italics). Williams makes two important remarks about this new body produced through modern technologies of the image. First, she writes, it is "*ideally visible*"; it is a body tending towards its own magnification and self-display (arguably this impetus towards self-display will later find its further consummation in the contemporary culture of the "selfie"). Second, Williams emphasizes the non-reciprocity of the cinematic display of bodies. "Although on display for the viewer," writes Williams, the body on screen "goes around its business as if unaware of being watched" (45).

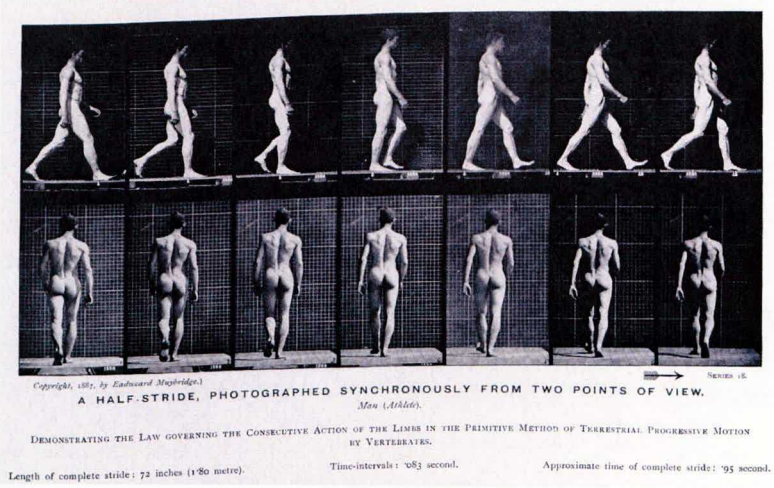


Fig. 2: Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion Vol. 1* (1872-1885), Plate 1.

I will return to the first of these formulations, but let us consider the theoretical consequences of the second. Stanley Cavell, in *The World Viewed* (in 1971), describes this non-reciprocity as part of the "ontology" of the medium; for its part, the "ontological status" of the cinema spectator, is "invisibility" (45). Movies reproduce the world magically, writes Cavell, "[n]ot by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen" (40). Cavell calls this "displacement": watching a film, "we are displaced from our natural habitation within [the world]," which is at once a distancing

from that world and an "overcom[ing of] our fixed distance" (41). Put differently, the screen ruptures the ("natural") phenomenological chiasm between seeing and seen, the reversibility that constitutes what Merleau-Ponty in his late work calls the "flesh" of the world. The cinema spectator is not (*pace* Vivian Sobchack) a part of the "flesh" of the world he observes; it is precisely his "displacement" from that world, his *in*visibility within it (thus not a seeing that reverts into being-seen, a polarization rather than a chiasmus) that cinema technologically facilitates.[6] The spectator is no doubt still a part of the flesh of some world—she does not cease to be a body—but in relation to the world on the screen, her condition is displacement; she is indeed a "self filtered into pure vision," to return to Metz's formulation. It is the *non-reversibility* of the look, the technological interruption of the chiasmus of normal worldly experience, that defines her "ontological status," per Cavell, precisely as *spectator*.

It is for this reason that I disagree with those theorists who have preferred to describe the film itself as a "subject of experience" (Sobchack 142), or a "body… [that] takes up its own intentional projects in the world (Barker 8)."[7] Such formulations redeem the asymmetry in Cavell's account by turning spectatorship into an ethically uplifting encounter, an intersubjective exchange. Cavell, by contrast, like Metz, emphasizes the *vicarious* quality of cinematic looking, the access it offers to a scene to which we are *not* accountable—precisely therefore *not* an experience of "intersubjectivity," nor an encounter that can be categorized as ethical. (For its part, the film may not be a "subject" but simply a *text*.) Freed from the natural reversibility of seeing/seen, touching/touched, the spectator "overcomes [his] fixed distance" from the world (41). This overcoming is a kind of power—the power of "omniscience" catachrestically attributed to the narrator of the 19th century novel (and the kind Metz refers to in his misunderstood description of the cinema spectator as "all-powerful, all-perceiving" [48]). But Cavell, crucially, points out that the wish the cinema fulfills is "not a wish for power over creation (as Pygmalion's was), but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens" (40). What he calls "displacement" thus corresponds to a freedom to travel through the (displaced) world unimpeded, but this is quite different from *mastery*, and the pleasure it affords is the pleasure of giving up agency (rather than its hyperbolization or hypostatization in the form of the subject). The cinema affords a *visual* relation to "the world viewed" unburdened of *responsibility*.[8]

"Watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other."

Cavell's decidedly non-psychoanalytic formulations help us resolve a misapprehension that has affected the inherited understanding of voyeurism in psychoanalytic film theory. In her account in "Visual Pleasure," Mulvey wrote that Freud "associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, *subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze*" (8, my italics). She describes the hypertrophy of this instinct that produces "obsessive voyeurs... whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, *in an active controlling sense*, an objectified other" (9, my italics). It follows logically that she should go on to refer to the object of that look as its "victim" (9) and that, in a famous move, she will associate voyeurism with sadism.[9]

The association Mulvey makes between voyeurism and sadism was one made by films themselves beginning in the late 1950s. Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* and Hitchcock's *Psycho*, mentioned earlier, would be paradigmatic examples, and Mulvey is right to point out that a voyeurism with sadistic overtones is frequently featured in Hitchcock. These films *thematize* voyeurism as sadistic—they make sadistic voyeurism their narrative object. For Mulvey, the visual pleasure afforded by narrative cinema is *itself* sadistic-voyeuristic. This means films like *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho* are singularly self-reflexive, accurately representing as narrative the sadistic-voyeuristic principles of the ideological machinery that animates them. However, as I suggested in my discussion of *Spider-Man*, there is a danger to believing the "story" films tell about themselves. (For a psychoanalytic theorist, Mulvey seems remarkably eager to take those stories at face value.) In *Spider-Man*, the figure of Peter/Maguire appears, in Mulveyan terms, as the spectator's idealized (male) ego, albeit himself something of a voyeur, peering through windows. But if his body is marked, at the level of narrative, as bearer of the look, at the level of the apparatus, that body is spectacularly on display, affording a pleasure (as technical as it is covert) that exceeds the pleasures of so-called "attractions" and those of secondary identification alike.

There is no theoretical reason to associate voyeurism with sadism, and in making that association, Mulvey seems to have superimposed two adjacent passages in her source text, Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.* In fact, Freud associates sadism not with the organ of vision but rather with anality (he refers to the "sadistic-anal" disposition). Moreover, he distinguishes scopophilia from the component drive he calls in that text the "instinct for mastery," which

will eventually inform a sadistic disposition. The latter is characterized by a pleasure in controlling the physical world—whereas the voyeur, unseen, is non-interventionist—and by "the absence of the barrier of pity" (193). In the Freudian schema, voyeurism and sadism are thus distinct "component drives," the former predicated on maintaining a distance from its object and the latter on overcoming that distance. Like the figure in the Pathé film *Par le trou de serrure* (1901), the voyeur positions himself in relation to a proto-sexual scene at which he is not really present, a participation that therefore does not move towards end-pleasure, towards release (i.e. towards genitality): for Freud, this is why it is a perversion.[10] A voyeuristic structure of relation, then, involves no approach, unlike, say, the desire to eat something whose gratification coincides with the disappearance—the incorporation—of the object. In the Freudian schema, voyeurism is classically *perverse* because it is non-teleological: it sustains a relation with its object that has no consummation or *end*; it merely persists, insists; it requires an object but does not aim *at* the object or seek to do anything with it.

Metz's stressing of the object's *absence* in his account of primary identification is consequential: its dependence on absence is what *differentiates* voyeurism from any kind of "controlling" desire.[11] Pairing it with the "invocatory drive" that aims at hearing, he writes: "[A]s opposed to other sexual drives, the 'perceiving drive'... *concretely represents the absence of its object* in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of listening" (59). Because it does not aim, unlike the "oral and anal" drives, at consumption or consummation, it is also less narratively directed, less oriented towards orgasm.

This perceiving drive may be why Andy Warhol's films do not end as such; or if they do, as Wayne Koestenbaum observes, it is only "accidentally, at an unpremeditated instant" ("Facing *Taylor Mead's Ass*" 91).[12] Their formal lack of teleology corresponds to the endlessness, the insatiability, of the drive that, in this Metzian sense, animates them, and like voyeurism, they leave the viewer "in the position in which [s/]he began the film: a state of... yearning" (91). I would like then, finally, to turn to Warhol's proto-structural films of the 1960s, which, in largely doing away with cross-cutting and thus with secondary identification, isolate primary identification—identification with the camera's look—in its insatiability, its endlessness (its boringness), and its essential perverseness.

Warhol's Voyeurism

Warhol's famously boring films, especially the early ones (beginning with *Sleep* in 1963), tend to present a formally simple view on a single activity—a man eating a mushroom for thirty-nine minutes, a man sleeping for six hours, couples kissing, or, in the so-called *Screen Tests*, various subjects staring at the camera for the three-minute duration of a reel of film. These early films were shot with a Bolex, on black & white film, and projected at 16 frames per second, so that time—which is one of their themes—is experienced as drawn out. Ara Osterweil comments: "Watching Warhol's films of *nearly still* bodies, we learn the patience to look, to endure, to see" ("Flesh Cinema" 12). This is an apprenticeship in seeing that is also a form of corporeal training, "an exercise," as Osterweil puts it later, "in corporeal discipline" (16). Indeed, she quips that it takes more work to watch these films than it apparently did to make them! We can think of this stripping back of narrative technique as a kind of will-to-passivity on the part of what Tom Gunning has called the "filmic narrator."[13] David James observes that the "erasure of authorship" was Warhol's "most characteristic authorial gesture" (64), and P. Adams Sitney adds that Warhol, in what Sitney takes to be a rebuke to the intensely subjective American avant-garde tradition, "advertised his indifference to direction, photography, and lighting. He simply turned the camera on and walked away" (349). What these films offer in the place of authorial intervention is a detailed, if sometimes excruciatingly prolonged, view of the object onscreen, which is often but not always a human body or face.

In fact Warhol made several different kinds of films, from the silent, minimalist efforts of the early '60s (*Blow Job*, *Eat*, *Empire*, etc.) to the mid-'60s collaborations with Ronald Tavel, dominated by offscreen dialogue, to the feature-length works beginning with *My Hustler* in 1965 for which Paul Morrissey would notoriously claim full credit. But spanning the diversity of this oeuvre, the negligence of the "filmic narrator" remains a constant principle, though mitigated in the later films by the advent of more structured narrative style and the accompanying (if inconsistent) use of certain conventional techniques of filmic story-telling, like editing. Nevertheless, even in these relatively more narrative films, Warhol's camera tends to linger in a desultory, gratuitous way at odds with the principle of narrative progression.

That lingering, which is also a resistance to formal intervention on the material, might be seen from a Bazinian perspective to honor cinema's inherently "realist" tendencies. Like Bazin, Warhol was interested in the camera's capacity to receive, rather than to shape, the world whose details it mechanically registers. In an interview in *Vogue* in 1970, Warhol said: "This is my favorite theme in movie-making—just watching something happening for two hours or so" (Kent 187). Bazin famously takes the objectivity of the lens (*objectif*) to be a technology that "wipes away the spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered" the world, thus "present[ing] it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love" ("Ontology" 15). But for Warhol, this subtraction of a willful subjectivity reveals a world that is neither so virginal nor so pure. Instead, in and through that very giving over of subjective willfulness to the objectivity of the "impassive lens" (Bazin, "Ontology" 15), we find ourselves contaminated by the unmistakably "pathological" interest of a camera whose incredible patience in looking, lacking a narrative alibi, recalls nothing so much as the inexhaustible appetite of the perceiving drive.[14] In the same interview, Warhol goes on to say: "I really do think movies should arouse you, should get you excited about people, should be prurient" (Kent 189). In other words, for Warhol, whatever the cinema offers by way of objectivity *is* prurient. Prurience is not the effect of formal intervention, of the imposition of the filmmaker's will, but rather of its subtraction, its aphanisis (in the Lacanian sense: the fading of the subject). In the place of "virginal purity," albeit through the same formal operation, we find ourselves assimilated to the position of a perverse looking that adopts the posture of objectivity as effectively as it reveals the "pathological" foundation of that posture (much as Williams writes that "science and perversion interpenetrate" in the will-to-objectivity of the cinematographic capture of bodies [45]).

An "objective" looking whose objectivity is coextensive with its prurience is one of the two major poles in Warhol's cinema aesthetics, the other, linked to dialogue, being the "camp," the ironic, the urbane. The early works, like *Sleep* and *Eat*, isolate the first of these poles. In later work—consider *My Hustler*—both modes coincide, though at different levels: the former in the camera's look at Paul America's body (and thus in the film's visual track), and the latter in the campy voiceover (thus in the film's soundtrack). At other times, dialogue serves as a pretext for, or gratuitous accompaniment

to, a lingering look at bodies. Witness the verbal sparring between Eric Emerson and Joe Dallesandro in *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968), during the course of which Eric delivers a circular disquisition on what it means to be a lonesome cowboy ("you get such a lonesome feeling, because you've been alone for so long and you build up such a love for yourself from feeling so much that you can't find anybody that you love as much as yourself, so you're always lonesome..."). Dialogue here, rather than furthering plot or revealing anything about character, serves to prolong the occasion for looking at (Eric looking at) Joe's near-naked body. At other times, as in the long scene of Julian (Tom Hompertz) washing, no pretext is required (figure 3). Warhol's camera gives itself over to an unironic (non-campy) looking, as neglectful of the imperatives of narrative development as it is uncontaminated by the sophistication of speech.



Fig. 3: Tom/Julian dries off in *Lonesome Cowboys* (Andy Warhol, 1968).

The erotic charge of the look on Tom Hompertz's body here is not resolved, as it typically is in narrative cinema, by tying it into a love plot, sublimated into romance, or falsely resolved into the complementarity of the couple. Nor does it serve to anchor an identification with Tom as "ideal ego" (Mulvey 10) through the syntactical alternation of the shot and reverse shot.[15] (There are no reverse shots; Tom remains strictly the object of our look, and we are not invited to share his point of view.) The "primary identification" with the camera is here (more or less) detached from the syntactical

operations of suture that place us illusorily *within* what Stephen Heath has called "narrative space." It is thus without passing through secondary identification that we enter the world of the film and that the screen here "overcomes our fixed distance," to return to Cavell's phrase. For its part, the prurient quality of the look is exaggerated through its equipmental, technical quality; the look does not transcend its saturation with equipment. The camera zooms in, in an almost Hitchcockian fashion (but without the effect of narrative suspense), lurches forward arbitrarily in time through obtrusive jump cuts, and whitens out into flash frames, which create the impression of a skittish "filmic narrator" not quite in control of the technology that produces the look we share. In the absence of narrative organization, what obtrudes is that look itself, whose drive-like (i.e. unmotivated) tenacity tends to imply prurience even when there are no bodies on screen.[16]

Warhol's films are contemporaneous with the rise of the sexploitation genre, the object of an illuminating study by Elena Gorfinkel. In Gorfinkel's account, this 1960s genre reflexively registered anxieties over an increasingly sexualized public sphere. One way in which it did so was through the incorporation into sexploitation narratives of the figure of a "gawker," the prototype being the eponymous protagonist of *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (Russ Meyer, 1959). In Warhol, the gawker also sometimes appears in the diegesis, especially in the later (more narrative) films, as the figure of the "queen" who looks at butch "trade."[17] But in the earlier, structural films, even more radically, the gawking look, appearing nowhere onscreen, is absorbed *into* the cinematic "enunciation." What emerges distinctly in Warhol—and what will find its corresponding theorization in the work of Metz—is an erotic looking that is not allegorized at the level of content, and that is thus *independent* of content, absorbed into cinema as a technology of perceptual modulation (to borrow a phrase from Richmond), where perception, however, cannot be separated from the "*passion* for perceiving" (Metz 58 and *passim*).

Metz's felicitous coinage invokes the body offscreen—independently of what body appears (or fails to appear) onscreen—not merely as physiological locus of sense faculties, nor of the pleasures of proprioceptive modulation and spatial disorientation (valuable as the account of those pleasures surely is), but as a body of *drives,* which Freud described as a translation between psychic and somatic processes. Metz gave film theory a body that was, more than a bundle

of affective and perceptual capacities, the disorienting and dis-unified source of drives whose pulsion and compulsion pushes it precisely beyond physiology; beyond, that is to say, the pleasure principle. Visual pleasure, it turns out, is not just pleasurable—as the experience of watching a Warhol will confirm. And the look is not just a physiological capacity of the eye, even the eye of a fully corporealized "observer."[18] Metz thus translates to a level of generality—the theoretical act—what in Warhol we might otherwise be tempted to read only in historicist terms, as, say, a response to sexploitation or an expression of the problematics of sexual looking in an increasingly sexualized public sphere. To claim Warhol as an apparatus theorist is not to challenge these (or any alternative) historicist readings. But it is to say that Warhol's works, in ways specific to their historical moment and technical means, raise the question of what Bazin called the "ontology of the photographic image." The question of ontology is not beyond history since, as Bazin's title suggests, any given "ontology" pertains to a particular (i.e. historical) technological arrangement of elements (economic, epistemic, social, and institutional). Arguably—I would argue—every film is not only a document of its historical moment, it is also an expression of and reflection on the ontological conditions out of which it emerges. Warhol's films suggest—without moralizing this fact or attributing the slightest value judgment to it—that the age of cinema is an age in which "being" (social being, existential being) has some fundamental connection to voyeurism.[19] The "cinematic magnification and projection of human bodies," to return to Williams' phrase, produced the body as "ideally visible"—and the viewing subject as ideally invisible.

It might rightfully be objected that the things Warhol's camera trains on are not always human bodies, and are not always very captivating, nor very erotic, as anyone who has attempted to sit through the entirety of *Empire*, or even *Eat*, knows well.[20] Of course, boredom and prurience are not distinct in Warhol's film works, which, as Koestenbaum notes, "plumb boredom's erotics" (*Andy Warhol* 10).[21] Those works do not offer the appeasements of a narrative motivation for their looking; they abandon us to the boringness, the relentlessness, of the "passion for perceiving" in its stripped back form. Arguably, although what the camera looks at is not always a body, the body remains at the horizon of that look, its ideal object, an object that may (or may not) return at any moment.[22] In an essay

on *Couch*, Osterweil observes that "in Warhol's world"—which is of course *our* world—"there is no such thing as sex unmediated by looking" ("On (and Off) the *Couch*" 52). We can enhance this formula by adding its corollary: that in Warhol's world, there is no such thing as looking that is not in some sense the mediation of sex.[23]

If the cinema produces the body as "ideally visible," this also suggests that what is visible on screen is *ideally* (though clearly not always actually) a human body. (Béla Balázs thought so.) This might help us make sense of Cavell's enigmatic claim that "the ontological conditions of cinema reveal it as inherently pornographic" (45). Those ontological conditions, as we have seen, correspond to the spectator's invisibility in relation to the world viewed. That structure in turn entails a formal game of revelation and concealment, which also bears on the *documentary* quality of the image: "In movies," Cavell writes, "clothes conceal; hence they conceal something separate from them; the something is therefore empirically there to be unconcealed" (44). Giving this observation a more concrete (and gendered) referent, he specifies: "A woman in a movie is *dressed*... hence potentially undressed" (44, his italics). And then, reversing a formulation of Baudelaire's: "A woman and her garb are a divisible whole" (45). Warhol's oeuvre evinces a similar understanding of the "ontological conditions of cinema," even as it renders Cavell's gendered presumption absurd. Ungrounded hetero-chauvinism aside, Cavell's is an endearingly novel spin on Bazin's "ontology of the photographic image," which, in the philosopher's hands, becomes the observation that bodies onscreen, dressed, are bodies that empirically exist underneath their clothing, and whose revelation as such is thus a constitutive promise of the camera that films them, whether or not we apprehend that promise consciously, and in spite of the fact that most films frustrate it to the end. ("All the Hays Offices in the world," quips Cavell, cannot attenuate this "inescapable demand"—they can merely enforce its interruption [45].)[24]

In an essay arguing *against* the conventional reading of Warhol's films as "voyeuristic," Douglas Crimp locates in those films rather what he calls an "ethics of *anti*voyeuristic looking" (8). Elaborating this idea via a reading of *Blow Job*, Crimp writes of the man whose face forms the subject of that film (figure 4): "We cannot take sexual possession of him. We can see his face but we cannot, as it were, *have* it. This face is not *for us*" (7).

This might be repurposed as a rightful rebuke to Baudry's claim, at the beginnings of apparatus theory, that the cinema spectator as transcendental subject beholds a "world... constituted not only by [its look] but *for it*" ("Ideological Effects" 292). Crimp's resistance to the term "voyeurism" is a resistance to the idea of a will-to-mastery, of a viewing subject situated at the center of the world that renders itself up as knowledge and as spectacle. For Crimp, as for Mulvey, voyeurism is *epistemological* and *possessive*—it wants to know and to possess.



Fig. 4: Not "for us." *Blow Job* (Andy Warhol, 1963).

But as I have pointed out, voyeurism is distinguished in the Freudian schema precisely as a mode of relating to an object predicated on *distance*: it does *not* reach the object, which retains its separateness and thus its autonomy; voyeurism is *not* driven by a desire to "have" the object; on the contrary, such "having" would close the gap on whose preservation it depends. This is precisely why cinema, Metz reasons, *is* a structurally voyeuristic technology—because the object is not really there. Voyeurism is also not *epistemophilia*, not a drive to know, to translate visual experience into symbolic or conceptual knowledge, but rather a rapt gazing that, like Warhol's camera, trains on the surface of things, gratifying itself in the body's "obdurate materiality," whose mysteries it preserves (Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* 10). Cinema solicits and satisfies a passion for perceiving, predicated on the object's absence, thus displaced from the world of means and ends, a functionless looking

that serves no instrumental purpose, that emanates from a body that cannot be quantified in terms of its purely physical or physiological dimensions, and that is "driven"—but not determined.

Mulvey's critique of voyeurism was predicated on her assumption about its sexism: the polarized, asymmetrical structure of the look corresponds to the polarity between the man who looks and the woman who is looked at. I hardly need to point out that Warhol's cinema does not follow this formula. It is clearly more often men that are the objects of the look in Warhol, though we might simply say that to-be-looked-at is the shared condition of the beings that populate his world. This is not to say that Warhol's gaze is somehow indifferent to sexual difference; on the contrary, as Thomas Waugh has shown, it produces sexual binaries everywhere it looks (binaries in which gender, however, moves independently of sex). But this gaze, inseparable from its technical support in the cinematic operation of primary identification, fails to do what a male gaze is supposed to do—which suggests again that the ideological system Mulvey correctly perceived at work in classical Hollywood narrative operates at the surface level, making of the "male gaze" an ostentatious rhetorical device, one that protests too much, as it were. Underlying that rhetorical or narrative posture of heterosexual maleness—and who believes it, even or especially in classical Hollywood cinema?—Warhol reveals a perverse technical substructure, a queer foundation at the level of the apparatus. I mean "queer" not in any identitarian sense—not *gay*—since identitarian positions within an established symbolic order are precisely what this gaze traverses and undermines.[25] Although the rhetorical and ideological operations of films as texts make it possible for us (and for Cavell and for Mulvey) not to see it, the "ontological" voyeurism of the cinematic apparatus, though it may not always be specifically sexual, is fundamentally queer.

Warhol, finally, understood that the boredom and the eroticism of the medium are not distinct, and he anticipated an erotic-bored, oscillating mode of spectatorship that has now acquired its correlative technologies. (Reality television, which he arguably invented, would be one of its genres.) Does this mean the voyeuristic dimension of cinema has been supplanted through what I earlier referred to as a new "technological arrangement of elements"? If modes of perception, embodiment and, let us not forget, desire are bound up in technological apparatuses that are historically formed and ideologically saturated,

the task remains of formulating a post-cinematic apparatus theory that gives us a body that is more than perceptual, more than proprioceptive—a body, a locus of fantasy, both caught up in a social machinery and given over to a "passion for perceiving" that serves no instrumental purpose.

Notes

[1] Translation modified "Dans le cinéma traditionnel, le spectateur ne s'identifie plus qu'à du voyant, son image ne figure pas sur l'écran… Il ne reste plus que le fait brut de la voyance… sans marques ni lieu, vicariante…" (*Signifiant imaginaire* 120).

[2] See Baudry's two classic essays, "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base" and "Le dispositif" (with both *appareil* and *dispositif* appearing in English translation as "apparatus").

[3] See Marks and Barker. Arguably, post-apparatus theoretical concepts such as the "skin of the film" (Marks) or the "address of the eye" (Sobchack) anticipated, without quite registering, the changed conditions that have produced *literally* haptic and interactive modes of spectatorship.

[4] Bazin expands on the idea of an eroticism specific (and essential) to the medium: "[E]roticism has clearly no specific connection with… literature… [And e]ven painting, in which the representation of the human body might well have played a determining role, is only accidentally or secondarily erotic." Eroticism in these other arts is "a subordinate and secondary phenomenon," whereas in cinema it is primary ("Marginal Notes" 169-170). Bazin goes on to construct a Metz-like formulation when he writes that "the cinema unreels in an imaginary space which demands participation and identification" (174).

[5] On the racialized dimensions of Muybridge's photography of the "virile [male] body" see Brown.

[6] This displacement is not the same as our (existential) condition of "estrangement" from the world, but it is its technological analog. Cavell writes: "By my account, film's presenting of the world by absenting us from it appears as confirmation of something already true of our stage of existence. Its displacement of the world confirms,

even explains, our prior estrangement from it. The 'sense of reality' provided on film is the sense of *that* reality, one from which we already sense a distance" (226).

[7] While I remain skeptical about such formulations, both authors make an immeasurably important contribution to post-apparatus theorizing about the cinema—not least in that they actually dare to theorize.

[8] As Richmond, reading Metz, puts it in a felicitous formulation, "as long as I am in the cinema, I am relieved of the burden of being a subject" (132). I do not see this, however, as a "return to the infantile state of undifferentiation of the ego and nonego" (132), which is putting it too strongly, since it claims for the cinema the power to effect a return that is clearly impossible. With Cavell, I would describe the pleasure of spectatorship not as that of a dissolution of self but as that of a displacement. To be displaced and unburdened of responsibility is not to be dissolved into the world; it is to be freed from the burdens of "worlding."

[9] Note that for Freud, scopophilia is the umbrella term for a "component drive" which includes both voyeurism and exhibitionism as its respectively active and passive forms of expression. Later in her essay, Mulvey distinguishes two kinds of scopophilia: the first she calls "fetishistic scopophilia" and the second "voyeurism," with the second kind associated with sadism. Metz's account of voyeurism is more nuanced and less damning, though he also refers at one moment to "[v] oyeurism which is not too sadistic," adding in parentheses, "(there is none which is not so at all)" (62). But in the very suggestion that there may be some sadistic component to voyeurism, he importantly keeps the two terms distinct.

[10] In Freud's definition, perversion comprises "sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union, or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (150).

[11] Though a full consideration of this fact would require a separate essay, clearly for Metz, fetishism is equally fundamental to cinema (a disavowal taking the form of "I know but all the same"); both voyeurism and fetishism turn around the fact that the object is not really there.

[12] Douglas Crimp similarly observes that "Warhol's cinema... resists denouements. Warhol's films don't have happy endings. They don't have endings at all. They just end" (94).

[13] See Young for a longer discussion of Gunning's "filmic narrator" in relation to Warhol.

[14] I mean "pathological" in the Kantian sense of "stemming from sensuous inclination" (as opposed to autonomous). By "drive," I have in mind Jean Laplanche's discussion of the crucial distinction between *Instinkt* and *Trieb* (drive). "[T]he sexual drive," he writes, "is propped upon a nonsexual, vital function" (16), as, for instance in the distinction between the infant's sucking of the breast for nutrition and what becomes "sensual sucking," which includes the demand for the breast. Sexuality, while originally grounded in biological needs, arises "*in the movement which disassociates it* from the vital function" (18, orig. ital.), and thus from functionality in general. The drive, though therefore not disconnected from biology, is strictly functionless.

[15] Richmond remarks that "close-up reaction shots" are "one of the most important figures for identification with a protagonist" (123).

[16] Every commentator on Warhol's films tries to get at this quality one way or another. Osterweil describes it, in relation to *Sleep*, as "amorous[..], patient[..], and obsessive[..]" ("Flesh Cinema" 21). Marc Siegel, refusing the term "voyeurism," refers to this quality as "ethical, erotic, and intimate" (13). Callie Angell describes it as both "prurient" and "appreciative," as "something like erotic intimacy, an interaction that is consummated not in a sexual act, … [but] in a finished film" (36). Stephen Koch writes that Warhol's camera gives a "sense of the person divested [of everything] but the essentials of life itself." And then he notes, intriguingly: "That abstraction is erotic" (40). Later he calls it simply "voyeurism." Warhol's cinema, he writes, stages "the structure of a psychopathology… the metaphysical structure of voyeurism" (57). (This is of course what Metz thinks the cinema does *in general*, and what I am arguing corresponds to the process of primary identification.)

[17] The gendering of this binary of the look in later Warhol reverses its "normal" (or normative) structure. On active queens and passive trade in Warhol, see Waugh.

[18] I am referring to Jonathan Crary's argument in *Techniques of the Observer*. In Joan Copjec's critique of Crary, she points out that in the optical experiments whose rise in the 19th century Crary narrates—the experiments that signaled the transition from an "abstract" (Cartesian) to a "corporealized" observer—"all indications are that the human eye

that was the object of its study might just as well have been the eye of an ox—in other words, (merely) a physiological organ (Copjec 182)." But as Sartre teaches us in *L'être et le néant*, the human "look" is not what takes place, as a merely physiological process, in the organ of the eye. Indeed, Crary's attempt to debunk Metz and apparatus theory—by arguing that the *camera obscura* model of vision that theory associates with cinema was historically replaced by a regime of the corporealized "observer"—fails to account for the survival of a look that would be anything other than a physiological process, thus a look that would be driven by a "passion for perceiving."

[19] It is thus not surprising that Sartre's existentialist parable characterizes the subject (the subject of "being") as a voyeur at the keyhole.

[20] Osterweil quips about *Empire*, though, that it "amounts to an eight-hour hard-on, supplying more uninterrupted phallus than any but the most tireless spectator could endure"! ("Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*" 443).

[21] He adds: "There was no end to the patience of his eye, when confronted with the obdurate material body."

[22] For Koestenbaum, the waiting for that return—whatever form it may take—is inherent to Warhol's erotic gaze. Warhol's "art ponders what it feels like to wait for sex; to wait, during sex, for it to end; to wait, during sex's prelude, for the 'real' sex to begin; to desire a man you are looking at; to endure postponement, perhaps for a lifetime, as you wait for the man to turn around and look back at you" (*Andy Warhol* 14).

[23] This does not mean sex is the "referent" of every image in Warhol, of course. It means that the technologized asymmetry of the cinematic look is sexualized in some more general and ideal sense. I was once asked if I mean to suggest by this that work by experimental filmmakers such as Len Lye or Michael Snow is also "secretly" about sex. The absurdity of the question provides its own response. Lye's films examine the technological/material substructure of the film medium, or the physiological/perceptual substructure of the viewing eye. These are "ontological" conditions too, but abstracted from the larger "ontological" complex of the cinematic apparatus, which *ideally* tends towards the display of human bodies. They would thus be—and indeed aim to be—the exception that proves the rule.

[24] For his part, Bazin rightly points out that this frustration, this "censorship," is an essential part of cinematic eroticism. He does so

by uncharacteristic recourse to the language of psychoanalysis: "[T]he analogy between dreams and cinema... lies no less in what we deeply desire to see on the screen than in what could never be shown there... [T]he function of censorship is essential to cinema and dreams alike. It is a dialectical constituent of them." ("Marginal Notes" 171).

[25] See de Lauretis's recent discussion of sexuality as what troubles identity (the domain of gender).

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