Acknowledgements.

This thesis was undertaken as a defence of a love of film.

The indulgence of completing this work was supported by my excellent supervisor, Axel Kruse. I’ve heard that a PhD candidature can be arduous, even a trial. Axel ensured that mine was always a pleasure. Miraculously, and in spite of the freedom Axel afforded me at every stage of this project, it’s actually come to an end.

For encouragement and support throughout my life, I thank my family. I thank my twin brother, Herschel Isaacs, in particular, for shared interests and understanding beyond reckoning.

I don’t know how to thank Rebecca Goldsworthy, my partner, for what she has brought to this work, and to my life. So I’ll leave it at that.

For companionship during a crucial seven week writing period in 2005, I thank Nordberg.
Abstract

The influential theorist, David Bordwell, talks about various modes of watching film: the intellectual, the casual, or the obsessive interaction with cinema practiced by the film-buff. This thesis is an attempt to come to terms with film and film culture in a number of ways. It is first an attempt at reinscribing a notion of aesthetics into film studies. This is not an easy task. I argue that film theory is not adequately equipped to discuss film in affective terms, and that instead, it emphasises ways of thinking about film and culture quite removed from the act of film ‘spectating’ – individually, or perhaps even more crucially, collectively. To my mind, film theory increasingly needs to ask: are theorists and the various subjectivities about whom they theorise watching the same films, and in the same way?

My experience of film is, as Tara Brabazon writes about her own experience of film, a profoundly emotional one. Film is a stream of quotation in my own life. It is inextricably wrapped up inside memory (and what Hutcheon calls postmodern nostalgia). Film is experience. I would not know how to communicate what Sergio Leone ‘means’ or The Godfather ‘represents’ without engaging what Barbara Kennedy calls the ‘aesthetic impulse.’ In this thesis, I extrapolate from what film means to me to what it might mean to an abstract notion of culture. For this reason, Chapters Three and Four are necessarily abstract and tentatively bring together an analysis of The Matrix franchise and Quentin Tarantino’s brand of metacinema. I focus on an aesthetics of cinema rather than its politics or ideological fabric. This is not to marginalise such studies (which, in any case, this thesis could not do) but to make space for another perspective, another way of considering film, a new way of recuperating affect.
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