**Frozen to Death: The Impasse of Analysis**

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Abstract

Cinema, as a cultural phenomenon and artistic medium, has long been the subject of intellectual inquiry, yet it is in the late 1970s – during the institutionalization of film studies as an independent academic discipline – that close textual analysis, grounded in the repeated viewing of particular works and the meticulous inspection of individual filmic frames, burgeoned as a mode of theoretical and reflective practice. Enabled first by mechanical and analog devices, the reproduction of photographic frames took hold as a central analytical technique. Facilitated by the arrival of video and, at the turn of the millennium, digital technologies, advanced and ever-more powerful methods of material intervention (including pausing, freeze-framing, fast-forwarding, rewinding, magnification, rotation, and color alteration) inaugurated film as a pliable, submissive and infinitely fungible object of study.

Yet throughout twentieth-century meditations on filmic analysis, there remains a pronounced ambivalence, if not an outright defeatism. While much is gained with the intimate inspection of films and their temporally suspended frames, there remains an element in the cinematic text that eludes the analyst’s concentrated gaze, her attempts at the full codification and compartmentalization of meaning. Something in the enlarged and reprinted image remains forever inscrutable, opaque, and unknowable. Deploying the metatheoretical writings of Raymond Bellour and Laura Mulvey in conjunction with notions of opacity as politically conceptualized by Martiniquan poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant, this essay argues that, despite its close associations with visibility and perceptual plenitude, the filmic image remains forever secret, forever enfolded, to the efforts of an analyst. Never fully able to reveal a work’s mysteries or capture its inexhaustible affective richness, the close inspection of an image always, in some way, inevitably fails.