General Conclusion

When beginning this work, we announced that it would include a number of gaps and imperfections, and now that we are concluding this study, we can see how necessary this precaution was.

When making our way through the different parts of this book, we would doubtless have taken note of the fact that there are aspects of the problem that have escaped our attention, or that have not been given the space they warrant.

This is why, having come to the end of this study, we believe it is useful, and even necessary, to take another quick look at the path we have taken. This will permit us to measure the limits of our analysis, but also to become aware of the place that it occupies in the general framework of filmology.

We had proposed to reveal certain important aspects of the process of filmic identification, but it has appeared to us that, for this goal to be realized, our project must be based on a rather detailed description of the fundamental structures of the film experience. We have thus applied ourselves to the task of explaining this experience, and what we have been able to conclude from this can be summarized in the following terms: the film experience is a perceptual experience that underpins the imaginary attitude of consciousness.

This imaginary attitude is not univocal. We have seen that it can be differentiated by assuming several different possible forms, of which the three main ones seemed to us to be the ‘home-movie attitude,’ which considers its object to be known and existing elsewhere, the ‘documentary attitude,’ which considers its object as existing but not known, and finally the ‘fiction attitude,’ by means of which we let ourselves become fascinated by an object that we know does not exist.

Depending on which one of these three forms the imaginary attitude takes, the manner in which subjectivity is constituted in its own turn as an interpersonal relationship can also be differentiated. From this point derives the problem of identification, and the structure and particular meaning that it assumes when it is held up by the different forms of the imaginary attitude.

When it is realized within the home-movie attitude, identification is the actualization of an intuitive knowledge relating to the person under consideration, and can be interpreted as an attempted ‘presentification,’ or evocation of the person known elsewhere.
When it is developed based on the documentary attitude, identification has a didactic effect. It is the behavior of understanding, aimed at the formation of knowledge relating to an existing and general reality illustrated on-screen by anonymous forms of behavior that are representative of a general type of behavior.

Finally, when it takes shape within the fiction attitude, identification often becomes a participation in the behavior of other people, a participation that can be realized according to two modalities, that of ‘being-with’ when the character is followed in the mode of solidarity or connivance, and that of ‘being-like’ when there is an attempted escape into this character.

In short, the imaginary attitude specific to the film experience differentiates itself in various different forms, and each one of these forms underpins a particular modality of identification. This is what we hope to be the principal lesson taken from this study.

Having said that, we must now more explicitly come to terms with the limits of this analysis. These limits are of two kinds. The first are of an internal nature and concern the imperfections and the incompleteness that we have been able to discern in our own descriptions. The others are of an external nature, and result directly from the fact that we have had to make a methodological choice. We will have to explain this choice later. In the meantime, let us try to shed a little light on what remains incomplete in our analysis.

Every theoretical exposition requires that we retain from reality only the most pertinent aspects, that we simplify them and exaggerate them. Owing to a concern for introducing clarity to the topic, this results in the neglect of details and the lack of nuance that was bound to have marked our study.

We have signaled these imperfections on several occasions. Broadly speaking, they can be boiled down to the following remark: while abstracting some well-characterized attitudes from the film experience, we have neglected, alongside the modifications capable of supervening within these attitudes, their possible interaction. Additionally, we have left to one side the detailed analysis of the relations between the attitudes and objective elements of the film or, if you will, the particulars of filmic language. Finally, while considering the film experience as an isolated experience, the aspects that we have been able to elucidate have not been envisaged in their integration within the general experience of the subject, an experience that is intellectual, perceptual, and affective, etc.

We have said all this over and over again. In fact, these limitations have been dictated to us by our intention to draw out only the most fundamental structures of the film experience.
What we desire is that these overly clear and precise descriptions nonetheless contain enough truth to inspire the wish to complete them.

The external limits of our study essentially derive from the choice that we have made in terms of our methodology. In the vast spectrum of methods recommended by the various disciplines of the human sciences, we have resolutely opted for the one that has permitted us to read the meaning of these phenomena, such as they are immediately experienced. From the very start, we have tried to justify this choice. A reading of the lived meaning of the phenomena to be studied indeed appeared to be the natural starting point for filmology, just as it is for any of the other human sciences. We have thus provisionally put aside the more properly scientific methods in order to consider the film experience such as it is proffered to the subject in a filmic situation. We have tried to understand this experience ‘from within’ in order to describe and explain it.

Of course, filmological research should not remain at this point. By uncovering some aspects of the film experience, we have simply surveyed the terrain for other disciplines and other methodological approaches.

Hence, the conclusions that we have reached should serve to nourish thinking inspired by other methodological approaches (scientific psychology, sociology, linguistics, etc.).

All that remains, then, is to wish that this should take place, since, in that case, our modest reflection will not have been useless. It will have shown its fecundity and contributed to creating unity within the science of filmology.

Notes

3. Ibid., p. III [p. lxxii].
5. Ibid., pp. 92-93 [pp. 51-52].


11. Ibid., p. 29.

12. Ibid., p. 39.

13. Ibid., p. 42.


15. Ibid., p. 46.

16. Ibid., p. 100.


18. Ibid., p. 98 [p. 55].

19. Ibid., p. 100 [p. 55].


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid., p. 45 [p. 20].

26. Ibid., pp. 32-33 [pp. 13-14].

27. Ibid., p. 30 [pp. 12-13].

28. Ibid., p. 34 [p. 14].

29. Ibid., p. 25 [p. 10].

30. Ibid., p. 105 [p. 50].

31. Ibid., pp. 49-50 [pp. 21-22].

32. Ibid., p. 54 [p. 24].


34. Translator’s note: The original term used by Meunier, le film-souvenir, refers to films made for private purposes, with the goal of acting as a keepsake or
record of an event in the individual’s life, such as weddings, vacations, family gatherings, etc. The English term ‘home movie’ comes close to this meaning, and its usage as an equivalent term has been established by Vivian Sobchack. As Sobchack reminds us, however, the original term has a close relationship with the role of memory (le souvenir), which is absent in the term ‘home movie,’ and this should be kept in mind throughout Meunier’s discussion of the home movie (le film-souvenir), and its corresponding attitude, the ‘home-movie attitude’ (l’attitude-souvenir). See Vivian Sobchack, “Toward a Phenomenology of Non-Fictional Film Experience,” in Michael Renov and Jane Gaines (eds.), Collecting Visible Evidence (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 241-254.

35. *Lonely Boy* (1962) is a reportage on the singer Paul Anka, directed by Wolf Koenig and Roman Kroitor and produced by the National Film Office.


37. Ibid., p. 327.
