

**Luke Hockley**

***Somatic Cinema: The Relationship between Body and Screen –  
a Jungian Perspective***

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How can psychoanalysis contribute to the study of cinema? How can the discovery of the unconscious cast new light on the subjective experience of watching a film? Those questions might seem naïve, especially since the relationship between psychoanalysis and film can be traced back to several decades ago. And still, it is precisely when the most simple and seemingly predictable questions that allow us to look at something apparently familiar from a completely different perspective. There is in fact something that stays at the forefront of the experience of psychoanalysis that seems to have been completely overlooked by the discipline of film studies: the unconscious is always experience individually. For example, if we have a symptom, it is always inscribed in our own particular body.

It is with such a premise that Luke Hockley starts his defense of a Jungian approach to the film experience. A premise that cannot but recall a classical phenomenological assumption: an experience of vision concerns the entirety of our own body and not just our eyes. The emphasis should be put on ‘our own’ as well as on ‘body,’ meaning that an experience of vision is at the same time a bodily sensuous experience and an eminently personal one.

Hockley seems to be particularly discomforted by a certain use of psychoanalysis in Film Studies that according to him has overemphasized the linguistic – and somehow objective – dimension of cinema “prescribing the role of the individual [and overlooking] the individual relationship we have with films [through which] they become personally meaningful to us” (p. 3). The concept of ‘feeling’ and the Jungian alphabet of ‘affect’ seems to play a crucial role in this regard, limiting any objective pretension to create a direct causal relationship between the image and the viewer, and adopting a more individually-oriented point of view: “the activation of personal unconscious material is so strong that it overwrites the inscribed, consensual and collective sense of the film’s narrative” (p. 84).

Jungian psychoanalysis and the whole tradition of psychodynamic psychotherapy have emphasized a clinical practice where a strong emphasis is put on the dyad analyst-patient, conceived as a relation where both parties give a necessary contribution to the progress of the therapy. This position “challenges the ubiquity of the Lacanian-inflected psychoanalytic model of film theory, along with its suggestions of decentred subjects, fragmented bodies and inherently fragile

concept of self” (p. 1), among which there is also the asymmetrical dimension of transference that is on the contrary seen in a much more disjunctive way. Such a dialogical view, which serves more than an analogical purpose, allows Hockley to give a relational account of the relationship between the viewer and the filmic image. The concept of the ‘third image,’ which plays a very important role in the book, is coined by the author precisely in order to describe a space that is not reducible to the subject of vision nor to the neutral objectivity of the screen, but that is constructed through the contribution of both. This interstitial space – which exists in a sort of limbo between objectivity and subjectivity – has a status similar to the ‘transitional’ object of Winnicott, positioned halfway between outside and inside the individual psyche (p. 44). The interplay between the film and the viewer “provides a rich environment for the unconscious material to flourish” and “what arises from these two elements is something new and fresh: not just an image from the unconscious of the viewer, not just the image on the screen, but something new that comes into being as a result of their interaction” (p. 84).

Film Studies according to Hockley should thus learn to deal with this affective and meaningful dimension of the cinematic experience, even at the cost of sacrificing the more celebrated emphasis of ‘a universal language.’

The concept of image is therefore defined in this book without any recourse to empirical or objective properties, but rather relying on C.G. Jung’s definition according to which, “an idea of image [is] something closer to a metaphor – something that is felt or experienced, and which contains an important psychological meaning” (p. 55).

While Hockley’s argument is elegantly developed, it can become convincing only for those who already share his theoretical premise. At times his recourse to a theoretical sparring-partner – which is an understandable and respectable rhetorical strategy in order to clarify one’s own position – cannot but sound slightly misplaced. For example: in his recurring references to Lacanian psychoanalysis as an opposite approach than his own, he risks to give an inaccurate account of a theoretical position that I believe, despite some evident differences, could have been in many ways (at least in the field of Film Studies) one of his allies. There is hardly any doubt that a Lacanian approach would not have put at least an equal emphasis on the singularity of the unconscious, or on the bodily dimension of vision (with the concept of gaze), or on the impossibility to reduce the study of film to an objective and prescriptive model (with the concept of the not-all). It seemed that in this case the problem for Hockley did not come so much from Lacan himself, but rather from the Lacan-influenced Film Studies literature that constitutes his exclusive point of reference in this work. The references to Lacan by Christian Metz, Jean-Pierre Oudart, Jean-Louis Baudry or Laura Mulvey, for several historical reasons, are limited almost exclusively to early texts such as *The Mirror Stage* or the *Écrits* where the French psychoanalyst had not yet developed his most innovative and original reflection on the gaze or on the Real of vision.

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