

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 12TH ANNUAL COLLOQUIUM OF THE  
CENTRE DE RECHERCHE SUR L'INTERMÉDIALITÉ (CRI)



GRAFICS AND ARTHEMIS

ANNOUNCE THE

SECOND INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM OF THE  
PERMANENT SEMINAR ON THE HISTORY OF FILM THEORY

MONTREAL

NOVEMBER 1-6, 2011



Call for Papers

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS ON THE  
THEORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY  
OF CINEMA

SPECIAL EVENTS WITH:  
JEAN-LOUIS COMOLLI, GÉRARD LEBLANC AND JEAN-PATRICK LABEL  
ON "TECHNIQUE AND IDEOLOGY: 40 YEARS LATER"  
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BERNARD STIEGLER (ARS INDUSTRIALIS)

Date for submitting a 300-words proposal with a brief  
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# The Impact of Technological Innovations on the Theory and Historiography of Cinema

It is often repeated that before being an art, before being an industry, cinema was initially a technology. At the beginning, moreover, the camera was as intriguing as the illusion that it managed to recreate. And if the initial fascination with the cinematographic mechanism waned quickly, it resurfaces at regular intervals following the emergence of each new technology that changes the way films are produced, distributed or exhibited, and even, more fundamentally, the way we think about cinema. Over the past thirty years, several studies have traced the development and socioeconomic consequences of new technologies which, year after year, shape and redefine what cinema is. But what exactly is the significance of all these kinds of machines and devices for the theory and historiography of cinema? Have they helped open new avenues of thinking and new methodologies or break down some misconceptions at the heart of Film Studies? This colloquium seeks to question the impact of technological innovations on the development of the critical discourse and historiography of cinema. The pervasiveness of the “technological” in the history and theory of cinema demands its further investigation. The aim of this colloquium is to evaluate the importance of technological innovation in the articulation of a critical discourse in film studies. More specifically, it seeks to comment on the impact caused by the introduction of new technologies on the theory and historiography of cinema, that is to say, to investigate how these technologies have altered the way we think about cinema, its fundamental properties, and its potential uses. Film scholars all know of the “four legendary moments” of the technological history of film evoked by Peter Wollen – the invention of the Lumière Cinematograph, the arrival of sound, that of color, and finally the introduction of “widescreen” formats – but how exactly have these shaped the discourse of theorists, historians and other film critics? And what about other, lesser known or forgotten innovations that have emerged at various times in film history? We could not, moreover, neglect the advent of digital technologies and CGI (computer generated images), whose countless cinematographic applications caused major upheavals in the course of reflection on cinema, upheavals whose full extent has not yet been measured. The history of film theory is punctuated with reflections that, occasioned by these technological upheavals, manage to escape the extreme positions that are often used to summarize the debate (technology as a “panacea” or as a “scourge” of the modern world) and instead propose a more nuanced and stimulating perspective on the fundamental properties of cinema.

It is time to question ourselves about the emergence and development of these discourses by placing them within their historical context and by trying to understand their origin and scope. Several major issues are at the heart of the problem tackled by this colloquium. Such fundamental concepts as realism, authenticity or representation, for example, are irretrievably placed under the banner of the technology which constantly affects their intrinsic modalities. Also, should we ask how the emergence of a new technology, such as CinemaScope, non-linear editing tables or ultra-portable digital cameras for example, manages to cast a new critical eye over the film object? Or how does it significantly affect the positions of a particular theorist? Of a particular school of thought? What about technologies that support a media space related to cinema’s, such as radio or television? Have they led to a redefinition of movies based on the singularity of the medium or, conversely, do they tend to blur the borders? Also, have technologies from outside the immediate process of film production also contributed to a more complex theoretical discourse? Indeed, some technical features which, at first glance, might seem foreign to our field (microscopy, the locomotive, the typewriter, the telephone, etc.) can often provide a fuller epistemological portrait within which to inscribe cinema.

It should not be overlooked, moreover, how the very concept of technology has been redefined to improve our understanding of new historical and aesthetic phenomena. Long perceived as apposite to institutions of power (industrial, political, colonial, patriarchal), technology has been reinvested in many works and discourses, allowing the creation of new forms of subjectivity and representation. Film scholars in film must also confront technology when they teach : analytical projectors, VHS, DVD video discs and other technology are all ways to access the film and, in the classroom, are “diverted” from their commercial intent towards academic purposes. Moreover, there are now tools for computer-aided analysis developed specifically for academic purposes (“Cinematics”, “Ligne de temps”, etc.). How does technology fit into the teaching practice of cinema? How does it determine film education? It is the same for archiving and film restoration: how does technology transform our conception of these practices? The second colloquium of the Permanent Seminar on the History of Film Theory hopes to bring to these questions if not answers, then at least food for thought to illuminate this unifying theme.