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In Thailand, Roland Barthes has been tremendously admired and cited in the dialogues of both myth and demystification, after his well-known 1957 *Mythologies* was translated into Thai and released in 2001. Originally consisting of fifty-four articles, the Thai version *Maya-khati* (*Mythologies*) collects twelve pieces of his works, plus one analytical essay titled ‘Roland Barthes and Literary Semiology’ by the late editor Nopporn Prachakul. Since then, *Mythologies* has stormed into the various studies of Thai humanities, from literature, advertising, stage shows, and cinema. Although cinema was also demystified during the 1950s decade, Barthes’ cinematic connection went beyond that. Philip Watts’ *Roland Barthes’ Cinema* provides an in-depth and well-researched analysis between Barthes and cinema, which has remained unknown until now and might shock the entire circle of Barthes’ academic fans here.

At first sight, *Roland Barthes’ Cinema* seems disorganized and inconsistent in such a compilation of an academic book. Because Watts sadly passed away, it was re-collected by his wife Sophie Queuniet and the editorial teams into a book of three parts—six chapters of Watts’ analysis on Barthes’ cinematic writings, one interview with Jacques Rancière, and nine texts on cinema by Barthes himself. Despite the editorial team’s apology concerning the imperfect revision that might not entirely fulfil Watts’ intention, *Roland Barthes’ Cinema* is inevitably an intellectual travelogue on Barthes’ cinematic taste and contributions. From the arrival of *The Birth of a Nation* to the eras of sound, videotape, and digital technology, Barthes opened the academic world to

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mythologies, structuralist semiotics, poststructuralism, and autobiography [ix]. These contributions are examined critically and analytically, and challenge further research and new discovery. Barthes is seen as a man of changes throughout his life, from a younger, arrogant, and somewhat foolish theorist [xxiv] in the semiology on *Mythologies*, to a later and wiser theorist in the poststructuralist enlightenment. Along this trajectory, Barthes becomes a man of new ideologies, but at the same time does not acknowledge his debt to André Bazin's writings.

The first part of the book entails Watts' extensive exploration on Barthes' writings on the cinema. For Watts, Barthes grows from being a demystifier, to a realist and a sensorist, whose ideologies had long been interrelated with transitional thinkers or visual arts experts such as Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein, Christian Metz, Michel Foucault, André Bazin, and the French New Wave. All of them have become important film theorists to date. In the first chapter, 'A Degraded Spectacle,' Barthes, in Watts' eyes, employs his demystification in two ways: interpretation and sensualism. As an interpreter, he always pays attention to small details, rather than cinematic elements, in the same way as his exploration of wrestling, *steak-frites*, or laundry detergent, to transform *petit bourgeois* culture into a universal nature. Hollywood and mainstream French productions are the main sites of this ideological construction. The 'roman haircut' in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (1953), Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), and the face of Garbo in Rouben Mamoulian's *Queen Christina* (1933) are all exemplary. These three examples of Barthes' writings, for Watts, signify Hollywood's capitalism in the European market to its change following the declining star system.

Barthes' sensualism is partly explained in Chapter 1 but becomes clearer in Chapter 2's 'Refresh the Perception of the World'. As a sensufulist, he explores cinematic effects on spectators and employs his own emotional response to explore the cinema. He believes in its ability to change the perception of the world. Through his essays on 'On Cinemascope' (*Les Lettres Nouvelles*, 12 February 1954) and on Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), cinema can free the spectator's gaze to visualize the gap among the poor. Watts also examines the interrelationship between Barthes and the French New Wave, which seems both vivid and inconsistent. At some points, he admires
Claude Chabrol’s *Le Beau Serge* (1958) on the use of location shooting as evidence of freeing the world’s perception. At the same time, he questions the transitional debate of the New Wave whose members had a reputation for being on the right, exemplified in *Le Beau Serge*’s title, ‘Cinema right and left.’ In 1954, Barthes also reacted against François Truffaut’s admiration of Sacha Guitry’s *Si Versailles m’était conté* (1954).

Barthes is seen as being more intense in his relationship with the French New Wave’s mentor André Bazin. To Watts, Bazin is Barthes’ ‘lost continent’ [40]. Several of Barthes’ writings on the cinema seem at some points connected to, and actually follow, Bazin’s articles—from ‘On Cinemascope’ (Bazin wrote about the advent of Cinemascope), *On the Waterfront’s ‘A Sympathetic Worker’* (Bazin wrote about the film as ‘irritation’), Greta Garbo’s face (Bazin also did *Queen Christina’s* review), and most importantly, the close relationships between Barthes’ significant turn in the 1960s on the photographic image in his article ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ (1964) and *Camera Lucida* (1980), which was heavily influenced by Bazin’s ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ (1945).

Watts sees another turn in Barthes’ writings in the years after May 1968, from social and political demystification toward the questions of affect and intimacy. Barthes used Eisenstein’s movies to find ‘The Third Meaning,’ through the exploration of insignificant details—such as the head, gold, etc.—with affect, while *Mythologies* placed it in the process of demystification. Watts suggests that both Barthes and Eisenstein belong to a politics of friendship, a reconfiguration of revolution that includes love, and of course love between men [60], which was spoken in code—owing to the illegality of homosexuality in many quarters—signalling a certain form of queerness. It is somewhat the eyes of fetishist, in which he showed his nascent ideology of camp humour at that time.

The last two chapters show Barthes’ writings in a new scope of, as Watts put it, an ‘autobiography.’ In his essay ‘Leaving the Movie Theatre’, Barthes remains ambivalent in exploring the 1970s debate over the apparatus theory. While most transitional theorists emphasised the passivity of the cinema in controlling spectators, Barthes includes in his own analysis the activity of physically leaving the movie, and considering how the experience changes our
perception of reality, in order to proclaim that the world of cinema is full of desire and sense, which he thinks, to Watts at least, is a resistance to Christian Metz's apparatus theory at that time. Spectators are rarely controlled by cinema, but, according to Barthes, have the rights to enjoy everything around them, not just the images.

Chapter 6 explores the connection between Barthes and Michel Foucault through their mutual imagination of melodrama. Perhaps due to Watts' declining health at that time, most texts go to the movement leading to the popularity of melodrama in transitional French culture, which also drew the interests of both Foucault and the New-Waver Truffaut. However, Barthes' connection to the genre of melodrama incorporates merely his co-starring in André Téchiné's *The Bronte Sisters* (1978), and the generic interrelation between Barthes and Truffaut.

Jacques Rancière's interviews helpfully bridge the gap of imperfection left by Watts' premature passing. Rancière was chosen to complete the book, as a thinker who has made contributions to philosophical, sociological, and aesthetic disciplines, and he also knew Watts. Most of the interviews tackle some of the points that could have been written in the book had Watts lived longer. These include a connection between Barthes' film writings and those of Rancière, his inception on the debate of apparatus theory, and the evolution of his trajectory, despite the fact that several controversial issues have yet to be resolved, including the resemblance of Barthes' and Bazin's works.

Nine texts on the cinema by Roland Barthes' is a judicious close to this cinematic journey. Though Barthes has been quoted on his infamous dislike of—his self-proclaimed 'resistance' to—cinema, he did write several pieces in his evolution of theoretical creation. The texts range from short, radical, journalistic demystifications in the 1950s, when Barthes railed against the political dominance of bourgeois ideologies in transitional works, to his leftist thinking, and semiological digestion, to the concept of intimacy and affect—which, in my opinion, shows some reference to the new affect post-theory. Aside from its real emphasis of Barthes and the cinema world, Philip Watts' *Roland Barthes' Cinema* will certainly open a new chapter of Barthes' theoretical studies in Thailand.