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Destroy Visual Pleasure: Cinema, Attention, and the Digital Female Body (Or, Angelina Jolie Is a Cyborg)

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Portuguese artist Julião Sarmento’s The Real Thing (2010) is an installation piece that features some 150 images of women arranged on a rectangular table in frames of various sizes. Most of the images are portraits of celebrities, although some pornographic images are mixed among them. In the configuration that I saw at a solo exhibition of Sarmento’s work at the Musée d’art moderne et d’art contemporain in Nice, France in August 2014, at the center of The Real Thing was a portrait of Angelina Jolie. The work would seem to suggest, then, that not only is Jolie an indispensible figure in any consideration of contemporary femininity but that she lies somehow at its heart.

Through its title, The Real Thing engages with various aspects of contemporary (Western?) society. Firstly, it suggests that the “real” is constituted visually in and through images; we do not see the real Angelina Jolie at all but a photograph of her, and yet it is only when one exists in images, it would seem, that one becomes “real.” Secondly, it suggests that there is a gendered aspect to this construction of reality through images: women in particular are the bearers of the attention of viewers, men and women. Thirdly, although images are exposed as constituting reality (thereby suggesting that reality is socially constructed rather than something that objectively exists out there “to be discovered”), it is paradoxically in constituting women as “things” (“the real thing”) that they become “real.” That is, in becoming an object (of the gaze), one becomes “real,” but one loses one’s “subjectivity” (i.e., one’s reality as a human agent) in this process. Fourthly, that this “reality” is one defined by commodification is exposed by Sarmento’s use of a well-known Coca Cola advertising slogan as the title of his work (“It’s the real thing” was first used to advertise Coca Cola in 1969’). In other words, only those (women) who have been commodified – as celebrities and/or as porn “stars” (something of a misnomer given the relative anonymity of many pornographic actors) – are “real.” That is, one only exists if one garners attention, with winning attention being a/the major means of making money. Fifth, The Real Thing reflects back on those people who interact with it as a work of art.
by asking them/us critically to engage with how it is through images that we construct what is “real.” For The Real Thing brings to our attention the way in which what we desire is constructed through images: images of pornographic actors and celebrities presented to us as real, such that our actual lives are made to seem dissatisfactory and unreal, such that we desire to become and/or possess the images that we see so as to feel real—even though patently we are real during every second of our existence, and not just those in which we feel what I shall term “cinematic.” In short, then, The Real Thing exposes how deeply ingrained capitalism is in humanity, such that it has been fully naturalized (making money is the only reality), while simultaneously exposing how there is a gender bias such that women are sold to us as objects (and in this process help to sell objects to us). Even if men and women look at these images of women, and even if many women can—thinkingly or unthinkingly—become part of this capitalistic image culture, the culture in which we live can thus be defined via this gender bias as patriarchal.

Forty years after the publication of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), then, it seems pertinent to ask the question: what has changed in terms of the way in which images of women are produced, circulated, and received? In this essay, I wish to sketch an answer to this question, in particular by engaging with a cognitive analysis of the digitized star image of Angelina Jolie. We shall find that, although in 2015 we live in a society that has become more technologized than that of 1975, suggesting that many things theoretically have changed, little actually has changed—as The Real Thing and the (digitized) image of Angelina Jolie suggest.

**Everything and Nothing Has Changed**

“Everything” has changed since 1975 because we now live in a significantly more computerized era, in which information circulates globally, especially in image form, at almost instantaneous speed. What is more, while the Lacanian framework that Laura Mulvey employed in her “Visual Pleasure” essay might not be required in such a prominent fashion, it is clear that various of her ideas have sunk relatively deeply into mainstream Western culture, suggesting a redressing of sexual inequalities. To provide two examples, the Bechdel Test is a popular website that simply asks of films whether they feature two or more female characters, whether those female characters meet, and, when they do meet, whether those female characters talk about anything other than a man. The site makes clear that passing all of the tests does not make a film either “good” or “feminist friendly” (to use the site’s own terms), but the site nonetheless brings to attention the male bias in many (predominantly narrative) films from all over the world. The second example could arguably be the trend in early 2014 for women to post “no-makeup selfies” on Facebook and other social media sites. This
trend, supposedly started by author Laura Lippman after being outraged by comments regarding the appearance of 81-year old actress Kim Novak at the 2014 Academy Awards, quickly became linked to breast cancer awareness campaigns (in the UK if not elsewhere) – and at least in part calls attention to the pressure on women to apply makeup in order to offer visual pleasure to men, thereby reaffirming the way in which women are what Mulvey once called “to-be-looked-at” – as opposed to active agents.

 Nonetheless, that both of these things exist also suggests the ongoing need for the propagation of feminist ideas precisely because little (“nothing”) has changed in terms of the patriarchal nature of the society in which we live. The “no-makeup selfie” trend itself perhaps suggests this as much as it works against the way in which women are “to-be-looked-at” in contemporary society: for the selfie still asks for women to be looked at (rather than to do the looking) – and potentially also becomes an exercise in who is the most “naturally beautiful,” as one commentator suggests in a Guardian article on the trend. I shall return to this notion of “naturally beautiful” later in this essay. In the era of “Photoshopping,” the fetishization of the “natural” is indeed deeply problematic, since what is often considered “natural” is in fact digitized (i.e., anything but) – including the star image of Angelina Jolie. However, before doing that, I should continue by saying that 2014 also saw a trend for “women against feminism” to post selfies online, but this time next to handwritten lists giving reasons why they disagreed with feminism. I cannot claim to have seen all of the images, but a common reason given is that many women participating perceive feminism to be exclusive, and in an equal society there should be no need for such sexual “discrimination.” Other participants make claims that it is only feminists who objectify women, while others affirm that they want to be looked at. We might suggest that one of – if not the – strongest legacies of first and second-wave feminism (if we are currently experiencing a third wave, as has been asserted since at least 1993) is precisely that feminism is debated in this open and exciting manner. In other words, feminism is not a unified movement – and perhaps should not be. Instead, feminism is multiple in its declarations and iterations. Nonetheless, I would perhaps concur with Angela McRobbie, who in 2004 wrote that the perceived lack of a need for feminism for reasons along the lines of “we are all equal now” is in fact misguided and is really the pushing forward of a neo-conservative individualism that paradoxically confuses equality with homogeneity. This confusion is paradoxical because individualism suggests difference (“everyone is different”), while collective movements suggest homogeneity (“we are together”). However, what is pushed is a certain type of individualism – and not genuine difference. This is made clear through McRobbie’s references to various postcolonial authors in her essay. The absence of non-white and non-Euro-American women from the Women Against Feminism Facebook group also makes this bias immediately apparent. It speaks of people who can afford to “do without” femin-
ism since they already belong to dominant groups within (Western) society. Furthermore, through – again – the emphasis on the visual via the use of photographs/selfies in the images, it speaks of how visuality is, indeed, a marker of power, and while some (white, predominantly young) women might be able to achieve some power, power as a whole remains the preserve of the white male (society is patriarchal). It is easy to celebrate individuality when you belong to the relatively homogeneous group that maintains hegemonic power.

If we accept the above, then we can come to two conclusions. The first is that while “everything” seems to have changed, in fact very little – perhaps nothing – has changed, with technology, the supposed signifier of change (“the Internet has changed everything”), being a marker of the intensification of a patriarchal and neoliberal system rather than a challenge to it – in terms of the production, circulation, and reception of images, especially images of women. Men still dominate the film industry, and numerous films are still made in which women are just to be looked at (more on this later), whether or not a woman takes on such a role by “choice.”8 The second conclusion is that, as Nina Power might put it, there has been a flattening of desire such that we live in an age of the “one-dimensional woman” (to go along with the one-dimensional man that Herbert Marcuse identified in 1964).9 Bombarded by media images that dictate to us what we should desire (with “cinema” and/or “the cinematic” being the umbrella term for what we are told to desire), we lose the capacity to develop our own desires and are not fulfilled by second-hand dreams – as The Real Thing suggests.

Attention, Cinema, Gender

In order to get to the specifically digital/digitized female body – as exemplified by films featuring Angelina Jolie – we should look at how the concept of attention is central to an understanding of film specifically and the “cinematic” society that we live in more generally. We shall do this by looking briefly at a growing strand of film studies, namely cognitive film studies.

As early as 1916, Hugo Münsterberg made clear that we can pay voluntary and involuntary attention to a film, highlighting in particular that our attention can be attracted involuntarily towards that which is “loud and shining and unusual.”10 Although vague, this formula nonetheless describes much of what many filmmakers endeavor to present to us when we watch a film. More recently, psychological studies of movement and motion perception and of attention have been used to argue that our attention is also attracted involuntarily to movements in our visual field, since we are constantly on the lookout for prey, predators, or mates.11 The increased/intensified rate of cutting in contemporary cinema, as identified by David Bordwell, suggests, then, that contemporary filmmakers wish to arouse our attention and to keep it.12 Furthermore, Bordwell also argues
that the shot-reverse and point-of-view system of Hollywood cinema relies on natural processes of vision and attention.\textsuperscript{13}

What is true of the images as a whole is perhaps also true of what we see in the images: most images picture moving creatures, but they also picture humans and in particular human faces. Eye tracking studies suggest that the human face is a focus of attention whenever we see one on a cinema screen\textsuperscript{14}. This stands to reason: the human face attracts our attention both inside and outside of the cinema because it conveys to us information, in particular information about the emotional condition of the owner of the face, an emotional condition that might in turn inform us of the situation more generally in which we find ourselves, be that as human beings in a new environment, or with human beings in a film/on a screen (three examples of this approach in relation to film are Carroll, Plantinga, and Tan).\textsuperscript{15} Without wishing to downplay the importance of this emotional information, at present we need simply to know that the face, like many other aspects of cinema (its movement, its onset of new visual displays via cuts, its brightness, its loudness, and its unusualness), attracts our attention, often in an initially involuntary fashion.

This is important because we can see being constructed in this cognitive discourse a sense in which film viewing is based upon natural processes: we naturally attend to bright, loud, and unusual things, and we naturally attend to human faces – and so it makes sense for there to be a cinema that takes advantage of, or works with, these natural processes – such that cinema is enjoyable for us, since it arouses our attention and by extension our curiosity. However, there are more than just natural reasons for films to be constructed in the way that they are. For there is also an economic aspect to attention that, as Jonathan Beller (2006) has so lucidly discussed, involves keeping humans attending to certain things and not to others.\textsuperscript{16} In short, the more that one has the attention of the greatest number of eyeballs possible, the more economic power one has in terms of being able to commodify that attention via advertising. The cutting rate of Hollywood films has doubled, if not tripled, over the course of the last 70 years.\textsuperscript{17} Although humans blink and move their eyes, heads, and bodies, human perception is not like a film in terms of rhythm and rate of change. If Hollywood films do capture our attention by appealing to quite natural mechanisms, they therefore also do so via quite unnatural means.

Now, to say that cinema catches our attention involuntarily will perhaps seem counter-intuitive, because most cinema viewers of course pay willingly to go and watch a movie. However, in the spirit of Beller, we should acknowledge how humans make not just films (to assert this would be a tautology) but also the world itself increasingly “cinematic.” Many humans now inhabit urban spaces in which there is, to use Münsterberg’s terms, brightness (electric lighting), loudness (traffic), and the unusual (in the form of different kinds of innovation and fashion; note that the contemporary urban environment can be described in terms
similar to the war zone). Furthermore, humans have also filled their urban (and all domestic) spaces with screens that themselves feature loud, bright, and unusual images. My own experience of living in London suffices for examples: screens in supermarkets, screens in taxis, screens on Tube platforms, screens alongside escalators, and more pertinently screens in nearly everyone’s hand in the form of a phone, a tablet, and/or a laptop. So habituated have we become to the ubiquity of screens that we live in a condition of seeming dependence: when my experiential field is too quiet, I take out my screen in order to get a hit of brightness, unusualness, and/or loudness. The argument to make, then, is not that we voluntarily go to the cinema to have our attention attracted via often involuntary means but that we have surrounded ourselves with screens that employ techniques developed in the cinema in order to attract our attention as much as possible.

The female face has a key role to play in capturing and maintaining human attention. Without space to explore in full detail, cognitive studies suggest that humans not only pay special attention to the faces of other humans but that the following female features are deemed most attractive and thus capture even more attention: perceived youth or neoteny (Symons); small lower jaws and noses, and large lips (Perrett et al.); higher cheek bones (Grammer et al.); open eyes and blonde hair (Oliver-Rodríguez et al.); smooth, unblemished skin and hairlessness on the body (Fink and Penton-Voak); a smile (Langlois et al.), and body decorations (e.g., jewelry; see Fink and Penton-Voak). All things considered, then, biologist Karl Grammer and colleagues assert that 24 is the age when a woman should reach her optimum attractiveness, thereby making her most fit for mating and becoming a mother. What these studies seem to describe, then, is *grosso modo*, many a Hollywood female starlet – meaning that Hollywood is perhaps “correct” to include young, smiling blonde women in its movies. We “naturally” find these women attractive because, the studies often contend, they have stronger genes to which we “naturally” would be inclined for purposes of reproduction.

There are, however, strong grounds to refute the accuracy of these (anger-inducing studies. There is, for example, an overwhelming emphasis on mating as the sole reason to look at a woman, and the results are often based primarily on the responses of college-aged, straight American males – meaning that the experiments are representative only of certain tastes and do not allow space for alternative ways of, or reasons for, looking. Furthermore, the “stronger genes” argument is plainly fallacious: every single human that is alive has equally strong genes since they have survived this far – and if such traits were the result of “stronger” genes, surely they would be more common than rare. In addition, not only do these studies perhaps only reflect the taste of college-aged straight American males but the taste of that demographic is not so much “natural” as also culturally/socially constructed – as various other cognitive studies would
suggest. Watching an episode of Charlie’s Angels (Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts, 1976-1981) directly prior to meeting a female of “average attractiveness” has been proven, for example, to lead young straight males to rate that female as less attractive than males who had not just watched the show (the so-called “Farrah effect”). Various studies confirm that Hollywood perpetuates the beauty equals goodness myth – and influences how people understand beauty and beautiful people in the real world, while Grammer himself admits that “[m]en who see films with beautiful women adjust their beauty standards accordingly as compared to controls.” Since college-aged American males have grown up exposed to an increasingly intense battery of images of what female attractiveness is supposed to be (i.e., the “Farrah effect” becomes permanent), it is little wonder that studies replicate such findings.

The reason for this excursion into cognitive film studies is threefold. Firstly, it is at least to float the possibility that the would-be naturalization of certain film techniques – including the casting of certain types of women – as “better” because they appeal to our “natural” predispositions has, in fact, a political dimension that is regularly disavowed. Secondly, it is to reinforce the idea that what is “real” and/or “natural” is contingent, or the result of historical, social and cultural processes, as much as it is a product of biology – an idea that will be important when we consider the digital/digitized female body. And, thirdly, it functions as a means to consider the films of Angelina Jolie, whom I shall use as an exemplar of the digital/digitized female body in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

**Jolie as Cyborg**

Angelina Jolie’s appearance – youthful features, high cheek bones, big lips, big eyes, big breasts, big smile, occasionally blonde hair, and ornaments (in the form of highly mediated tattoos, as well as jewelry) – would make of her the “perfect” film star from the cognitive perspective: viewers cannot but pay attention to her, meaning that, from the perspective of neoliberal capital, she logically has been commodified as a star. What is more, in regularly playing, kick-ass action heroines – that is, in movies that are brighter, louder, and feature much in the way of “unusual” imagery (we do not regularly see exploding cars in the real world), Jolie functions as the almost ideal film star because she supposedly demands attention while also starring in films that themselves demand attention. Indeed, from the cognitive perspective, why Hollywood took so long to work out that action heroines can make money seems a mystery. However, as we shall see, there is also regularly something about Jolie’s characters that exceeds society, an uncontainability that belies the very unnatural appeal of a star that otherwise seems so “naturally” to command our attention. Repeatedly in her films, this is rendered through the identification of Jolie’s characters with digital technology.
Jolie’s characters have been associated with digital technology since the start of her career. *Cyborg 2* (Michael Schroeder, 1993) saw Jolie play “Cash” Reese, a cyborg designed to destroy a rival tech company, but which begins to develop feelings for martial arts instructor “Colt” Ricks (Elias Koteas). In *Hackers* (Iain Softley, 1995), she played computer hacker Kate “Acid Burn” Libby, who becomes embroiled in a plot to expose a fraudulent employee at a large corporation before a virus causes shipping fleets to capsize. Jolie played the iconic computer game character Lara Croft in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003), as well as Commander Franky Cook in *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (Kerry Conran, 2004), one of the first films to be created using an entirely digital backlot. Jolie often plays (tellingly ambiguous) heroines in action films that feature numerous digital special effects, including *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (Dominic Sena, 2000), *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004), *Mr & Mrs Smith* (Doug Liman, 2005), *Wanted* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2008), *Salt* (Phillip Noyce, 2010), and *The Tourist* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2010). She has voiced characters in several digital animations, including *Shark Tale* (Bibo Bergeron, Vicky Jenson, and Rob Letterman, 2004), *Kung Fu Panda* (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, 2008) and *Kung Fu Panda 2* (Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2011). She played Grendel’s Mother in the motion capture version of *Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007). And latterly she played the title character in the heavily computer-manipulated *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014).

Cristina Stasia has argued that Jolie’s star persona marries two identities that previously were relatively fixed and stable – the butch and the femme – and turns them into the butch femme.22 However, while Stasia certainly gets to grips with some of the contradictions that Jolie seems to marry, she overlooks the role that technology plays in Jolie’s films and in the construction of her star persona. Meanwhile, Charles Soukup has identified how in a range of recent Hollywood films, and not just ones featuring Jolie (although she is the “queen of technoscopophilia”),23 the female body wears and/or becomes confused with (combat) technology, meaning that viewers are invited to look at sexualized women as “machine-like” as well as to celebrate technology itself in a fetishistic fashion. However, while Soukup concentrates on technology in the form of gadgets and weapons (an important part of the Jolie persona, particularly in the action films mentioned above), he perhaps overlooks the way in which Jolie is technologized formally.

Cinema has likely only ever presented to us technological versions of humans, in that cinema itself is a technology that presents to us humans and parts of humans as fetish objects (especially faces); the fetishization of (parts of) the body enhances the functioning of cinema as (capitalist) fetish machine as a whole – with the fetish being, in the terms of this essay, that to which we pay (perhaps even unwilling) attention. However, in the digital era, this technologization
seems to have intensified and thus the fetishization process is to a certain extent crystallized: this is the “Photoshopping” of the female body in order to remove “undesirable” hair and to change body shape and facial features. The way in which this involves an intensified femininity is most clear in Beowulf, in which we see a motion-captured Jolie morphed into the mother of the monster, Grendel (Crispin Glover), with a prehensile tail added to an emphatically feminized torso and chest. This is also suggested in Maleficent, in which Jolie’s appearance is similarly modified through a combination of digital and more traditional, prosthetic make-up techniques (much has been made of Maleficent’s “razor-sharp” cheekbones, which were designed as prosthetic bones by the film’s special-effects supervisor, Rick Baker). Overall, then, it is not just that Jolie in her action films wields guns and uses computers such that there is a “techno-scopophilia” along the lines described by Soukup – movies as a means to promote various technologies by associating them with the sexualized glamour of the female star (the star commodity used to sell and/or to naturalize other, technological commodities). Rather, Jolie is herself rendered a kind of cyborg, in that digital technology has been inscribed into/on to her body in the digital age, making of her a post-human woman who somehow marries machine and flesh.

Most important for this essay is the way in which this “cyborg” persona has itself become naturalized. This logic extends beyond Jolie and to so many women in the media when we take into account the relentless Photoshopping of the female form; all women (as commodities) capture the attention of viewers who have been encouraged to pay greater attention to digitized female bodies from the first time they saw a screen. As humans come to demand hits of brightness, loudness, and the unusual from their screens, so might humans now come to demand this from women. In the spirit of Naomi Wolf, whether or not endorsing a particular product placement, the mythological beauty promoted through the use of digital technology underpins an entire industry of woman. Society demands of women – and, more insidiously, women demand of themselves – that they conform to the Photoshopped screen images as well. In “becoming cinematic,” we supposedly “empower” ourselves. However, this “empowerment” is really the expression of our powerlessness in the face of the cinematic logic of capital.

Jolie is often presented in the media as the world’s most beautiful woman (ten different magazines have nominated her for this accolade), suggesting that the computer-generated is further naturalized/presented to us as real. And yet, looking more closely at her films, we can see that Jolie’s characters regularly demonstrate an inability to fit into the contemporary world – an excess that paradoxically betrays the “unnatural” processes of the patriarchal society that constructs her, attempts to naturalize her, and yet which cannot contain her. We can see this in various ways. For example, Lara Croft may be a kick-ass action heroine, but she also seems incapable of meaningful human relationships, as is clearly seen in The Cradle of Life, where Lara shoots love interest Terry (Gerard
Butler) at the film’s climax because he wants to take Pandora’s Box, an artifact that Lara believes should be kept away from human beings. There is a sense, even, that Lara herself is a kind of Pandora’s box, then, who must similarly be kept out of reach of men. Similarly, in Cyborg 2, Hackers, Gone in Sixty Seconds, Sky Captain, Mr & Mrs Smith, Beowulf, Wanted, Salt, and Maleficent, Jolie plays characters of which the “good” or “bad” nature is hard to determine. Either she is figured as a “good” character who otherwise engages in illegal activities (Hackers, Gone in Sixty Seconds); or she is misunderstood as a bad character when in fact her motives are good, or at least reasonable (“human” (Mr & Mrs Smith, Beowulf, Wanted, Salt, Maleficent); or Jolie is inhuman and thus hard to understand (Cyborg 2, Beowulf); or she is a good but threateningly “butch” ex-girlfriend whose otherness is marked by an eye patch (Sky Captain). Even in Alexander, there is something “unnatural” about the mother-son relationship between Jolie’s Olympias and Colin Farrell’s Alexander.

In other words, time and again, Jolie’s characters, despite being incarnated by the most beautiful woman in the world, somehow exceed or elude easy categorization. As an agential female who takes charge of her own destiny, there is something uncontainable about Jolie – and her characters must suffer on some level as a result. Perhaps this is equally clear in several of Jolie’s more “serious” roles – as Legs Sadovsky in Foxfire (Annette Haywood-Carter, 1996), as Lisa in Girl, Interrupted (James Mangold, 1999), for which Jolie won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress, as Mariane Pearl in A Mighty Heart (Michael Winterbottom, 2007), and as Christine Collins in Changeling (Clint Eastwood, 2008). In each of these films, Jolie’s characters are punished through familial separation (A Mighty Heart, Changeling), through incarceration (Girl, Interrupted), and/or by being alone (Legs leaves the girl gang at the end of Foxfire and is never seen again).

In sum, then, there is clearly something transgressive about Jolie, as wrought through her associations with the butch femme and, more particularly, through the technoscopophilia that is associated with her. In many, if not all, of her films, Jolie is presented as a figure to be looked at. If she is also an action heroine that is more active than passive (a formula for maximum attention!), this aspect of her persona is contained through the liminal status of her characters (often bad, often hard to understand) and the fact that many of the characters face unhappy, or at the very least lonesome, endings. This seeming contradiction – she is to be looked at (passive), but also an agent (active) – is resolved precisely through these unhappy endings, through her uncontainability: Jolie is presented as a commodity for consumption but never really as a human being; she is a commodity and not a woman. Upheld as the paragon of femininity, her films paradoxically convey the ongoing message that women face unhappiness if they try to achieve too much.
The glamour, the technology, and the products that Angelina Jolie’s attention-grabbing features help to promote are revealed as not being the key to happiness through the films’ ambiguous endings. Nonetheless, the capitalistic work of cinema has already been done by film’s end: the pursuit of the “cinematic” (of becoming capital) has been posited. Jolie’s already unusual features are enhanced digitally to make her a cyborg that combines technology and the flesh; an object of (male, techno-scopophilic) visual pleasure, Jolie helps to naturalize the culture of the digital, of the cinematic (and, coincidentally, of the ethos that violence solves problems). But, we repeatedly are told that this may not lead to happiness.

On the ontological level, digital technology may disrupt the usual distinctions between the representation of the sexes in cinema – since we have characters that morph between male and female and/or which are not gendered according to the traditional categories of male and female. However, on a political level, gender clearly remains an object of fierce debate. The pleasure that is “naturally” taken in seeing quite unusual female forms serves to naturalize a certain kind of (digitally enhanced) femininity that the real world cannot hope to match (and so humans take refuge increasingly in the digital realm, in order to be/become as “cinematic” as possible). Although fraught with contradictions – as the uncontainability of Jolie’s characters makes clear – it seems certain that much work still needs to be done so that women can break free from the neoliberal ethos that underpins the technological drive of the contemporary world (together with the postfeminism that this era supposedly brings with it). As per Mulvey’s classic essay, perhaps there is much to be gained in trying to destroy easy, “cognitive” visual pleasure – and to endeavor to encourage humans to take different types of pleasure in different types of image, including those that are not obviously attention-arousing. Jolie might be presented to us as “the real thing,” but, as Sarmento’s work conveys, she is anything but.