

Bernd Herzogenrath (ed.) (2017) *Film as Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 362 pp.

With *Film as Philosophy*, Bernd Herzogenrath sets out to “bring film studies and philosophy into a productive dialogue” that explores the ability of film to “think” and to enable thought (pp. xiii–xiv). In his introduction, he traces a tradition of philosophical engagement with film that informs cognitive film studies, academic philosophy on film, and an understanding of film as philosophy following the leads of Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze. Noting the new perspectives offered by the influence of neuroscience on the humanities, Herzogenrath posits the notion of “cinematic thought” and argues for benefits to both fields when film studies and philosophy interact (p. viii).

Such interaction is not always straightforward, given diverse constructions of the brain between disciplines and scholars, as well as divergent notions regarding what constitutes philosophy between the analytic and continental schools of thought. Definitions of “film-philosophy” vary, moreover, largely falling into four categories: films about philosophers; films that illustrate philosophical propositions; philosophy of film, which asks the question “what is film?”; and philosophy as film (or indeed film as philosophy), which ascribes agency to film in the creation of concepts.

Herzogenrath’s fifteen contributors approach their subject from “diverse entry points” (p. xiii). Most wrestle with the aesthetic and epistemological nature of film, many highlight issues of perception or draw parallels between film and the human brain, some explicitly address the idea that film thinks, some demonstrate it doing so, while others position film as a provocation or tool for the reflective spectator. The resulting volume presents a “long genealogy of film and philosophy” (p. xi) that offers the reader a mosaic of interrelated ideas, echoing over the years and across disciplines. Given that space prohibits doing justice to them all, this review will focus on those chapters that most directly address the titular theme of film as philosophy.

For Henri Bergson the cinema is a “philosophical experience” (p. 1). In the opening essay, John Ó Maoilearca takes his lead from Deleuze in exploring the Bergsonian nature of cinema, but rejects Deleuze’s focus on the “virtual image” as a distortion of Bergson’s ideas. He proposes an alternative Bergsonian approach more in tune with modern film theory, focusing on two inter-connected ideas: the parallel between the “vanishing point” that Bergson ascribes to each philosopher’s thought and the “one film” that each director makes and re-makes, as per Jean Renoir’s adage; and the parallel between the “attitude of the body”, which for

Bergson underpins philosophical intuition, and Giorgio Agamben's notion of gesture as "the fundamental filmic property" (p. 8). Through his analysis of Lars von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* (*De fem benspænd*, Denmark/Switzerland/Belgium/France, 2003), Ó Maoilearca argues that it is the "postural aspect of cinema" that allows it creatively to revisit a single idea again and again (p. 19).

Jean Epstein was the first philosopher to consider cinema as not only a worthy object for thought but as generating a new, nonhuman, mode of thought – an "antiphilosophy" that fundamentally challenges our understanding of the world. Christophe Wall-Romana thus explores Epstein's key concepts of *photogeny* (conceptualising the shot as suggestive rather than representational) and *coenathesis* (linking bodily sensations with affect), and suggests that the cinema screen is integral to Epstein's "unified intellectual plane" (closely aligned with Deleuze's "plane of immanence"). He argues for the importance of Epstein's *The Intelligence of the Machine* (1946): a work predicated on cinema's revolutionary role in modern philosophy as an autonomous cognitive agency (pp. 90–110).

It is a challenge for any contemporary commentator to find something new to say about Deleuze's philosophy of film, but Herzogenrath does so by focusing on Deleuze's ideas of time and the thought-provoking encounter. For Deleuze, the predictable cinema of the movement-image produces recognition, in effect preventing thought, whereas the more creative cinema of the time-image produces the kind of encounter that provokes thought by challenging our assumptions about the world. Herzogenrath's extended analysis of David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (France/USA, 1997) demonstrates how a film that eschews conventional narrative and the comforting strategies of suture, in favour of an unsettling topology of space-time that he likens to that of the Möbius strip, can "do philosophy" (pp. 161–179). Elizabeth Bronfen's chapter on Stanley Cavell likewise offers close readings of films that "think", but in this case the focus is on classical Hollywood movies, particularly *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, USA, 1940) and *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, USA, 1937). Cavell takes a specifically American perspective, explicitly underpinned by his own autobiographical experience; he conceives of the role of the cinema in US culture as a conversation between movie-goer and film, and as a conversation between film and philosophy. Bronfen's account explains how the idea of moral perfectibility is explored through the person of the new woman in comedy and melodrama respectively (pp. 180–199).

Alain Badiou is adamant that art thinks for itself, and that cinema presents a unique "philosophical situation". Nevertheless, Alex Ling

suggests that Badiou's work on cinema has been neglected, perhaps because of his early ambivalence towards this "parasitic" form. Ling's account, however, traces through Badiou's writing an evolving understanding of cinema as the art that, despite or perhaps because of its formal "impurity", has the greatest affinity with philosophy (pp. 200–218). A similar sense of affinity animates Nicole Brenez's chapter on Raymonde Carasco, who saw her filmmaking as an extension of her philosophical work. However, Carasco's work begs a very different understanding of "thinking" and perhaps of "film". For Brenez, thinking here is less "a process of clarification" than "a gesture of rupture and invention" (p. 226), while the films constitute an experimental form of philosophy that works towards a "possible ethnography of the power of thought" (p. 227).

By way of contrast, Tom Conley's reading of Jacques Rancière takes a quasi-Barthesian perspective, whereby film becomes a thinking tool for the spectator quite independently of authorial intent, as per Rancière's "deviant" readings of two Hollywood Westerns, namely *Winchester '73* (Anthony Mann, USA, 1950) and *Colorado Territory* (Raoul Walsh, USA, 1949) (pp. 241–264). Noël Carroll, meanwhile, makes his case for "movie-made philosophy" by outlining and rebutting key arguments against it. He argues that original thought in film, as in philosophy, may be built on existing ideas, and that "thought experiments" in film and philosophy respectively have more in common than is often allowed. Critically, he takes issue with the suggestion that language is the only legitimate vehicle for thought. While accepting that this position may be relatively rare, Carroll believes that some films "offer philosophical insights to reflective viewers by means of their phenomenological address" (p. 279). Thomas Wartenberg's following chapter on Michael Haneke's *Amour* (Austria/France/Germany, 2012) can be read as an illustration of Carroll's premise. Wartenberg unpacks the film's contribution to our understanding of the ethical obligations of marriage and to debates about dignity in dying (pp. 286–305).

Murray Smith then completes the collection with an essay that highlights the epistemological ambiguity inherent in the relationship between film, film theory and philosophy. For Smith, cinema has its basis not only in perception, but also in the capacity to prompt and sustain abstract thought. He argues for the potential of philosophical naturalism (drawing on the knowledge and methods of the natural sciences) to film. Through a case study of *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, South Africa/USA/New Zealand/Canada, 2009), he demonstrates how film engages us across a range of "embodied mental capacities" (p. 306), from reflex to reflection; thus while our emotional responses to a film are

largely predicated on unconscious (or “sub personal”) responses to cinematic affordances that produce degrees of empathy with characters, the spectator may be invited to bring a higher order of understanding to reflect upon philosophical problems embodied in the text.

Besides the wealth of ideas outlined above, there was much additional food for thought in chapters on such important figures as Hugo Münsterberg (by Robert Sinnerbrink) and Antonin Artaud (Gregory Flaxman), who were responsible for early articulations of the parallels between film and consciousness, and André Bazin (Angela Dalle Vacche), who saw cinema as a kind of metaphysical microscope or telescope – a medium of perception rather than thought. However, while interesting overviews, chapters on Béla Balázs (Adrian Martin) and Sergei M. Eisenstein (Julia Vassilieva) contribute little to the core discussion. Explorations of Paul Virilio’s concept of “the vision machine” (Virilio 1994) or Vivian Sobchack’s casting of cinema as an embodied subject (Sobchack 1992) might perhaps have been more productive in this context.

Nevertheless *Film as Philosophy* represents a remarkable achievement, providing a unique overview of its subject that at once serves as an illuminating introduction for those unfamiliar with the field, and advances our understanding of film as a cognitive rather than a purely representational phenomenon – of film as philosophy.

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