


From the Editors: Quantity and Quality

Well, here we are, starting our fifth year of publication and things seem to be going smoothly enough. Ever developing (we are never satisfied), we bring you something new with this issue, an approach that might further our understanding of cinema and the way it affects us as viewers. The field is “cinematics” and though some form of it has been around since the 1970s, the field has taken off especially with the start of the cinematics website in 2005.

In some ways cinematics proves the old adage that “art uses quantity as well as quality, to make the effect it chooses” (the statement actually comes from Josephine Miles who was counting nouns, verbs, and adverbs in the works of the English poets, back in the middle of the twentieth century [Cleveland 1953: 268]). Yuri Tsivian points out on the cinematics website that “In verse studies, scholars count syllables, feet and stresses; in film studies, we time shots.” To our purposes cinematics is most important when it gives us insights into the way film plays on our mind but also the ways in which it mirrors our mind (note, for example, James Cutting and his colleagues’ recent essay [2010] on the relationship between shot patterns and viewers’ attention spans).

Let us assert, then, that all good writing on film originally starts with the details and data of the text and that the application of any outside knowledge must also come out of the details and data of that particular discipline. We are fortunate to begin this issue with an excellent example of cinematics in an article by Cutting, Brunick, and DeLong, relating the natural parts (or acts) of cinematic narrative to the length of shots and nature of transitions. These scholars examine 150 Hollywood films, demonstrating a major tradition of continuity from 1935 to 2005. They also plausibly suggest that these patterns control viewers’ expectations and reactions. Such work on the basic elements of film is a foundation for future studies, theories, and generalizations about the nature of the cinematic experience.

We follow the cinematics investigation with a psychoanalytic essay that on the surface seems very different but reinforces the point about the efficacy of theorizing from particulars. The ideas of D.W. Winnicott are especially useful in understanding the way a child creates an area of fantasy and play, one that becomes the origins of our love for and creative interaction with art. Speaking from his own observations and understanding as a pediatrician and

therapist for some forty years, Winnicott's ideas seem immediately accessible to the reader and immediately applicable to one's own knowledge and experience. Andrea Sabbadini's article is a suggestive application of Winnicott's ideas about childhood, especially those of mirroring and transitional space, to our experience of film. Sabbadini's own notion of the bridge space between creator and film and the viewer and film is a useful and graphic way to see that interplay between self and reality that is such a basic element of Winnicott's writings and the filmic experience.

Sometimes contributions in an issue fall naturally together (we have made this observation once before)—a happening less due to the editor's planning and skills and more to the contemporaneity of certain subjects and approaches. Such is the case with the three cognitive studies presented in this issue. All three examine the ways in which we attempt to find meaning from the stuff a film is made of—all, in a sense, are about the ways in which we attempt to read and comprehend the particulars of a film.

Henry Bacon's article is an exploration into the basics of viewing a film. How and how much do we contribute to the material at hand in our mental constructions of a film? Bacon has some interesting parallels to make between the ways in which we see the world that surrounds us outside the theater and the world we see on the screen. It follows that different films seem to cue us differently in how and how much we should fill in the blanks in creating our perception of the fictional world. Bacon's ideas are basic and germane but they also suggest a meaningful way to understand the aesthetics of cinema—the pleasures we get from knowing and not knowing.

András Bálint Kovács discusses our complicity in the creation of a film from a slightly different angle—his concern is with our construction of the causal links that unite the actions of a film. The article is for Kovács a kind of working through of the theoretical material concerning narrative causality as a preface to his own empirical research with actual spectators. The empirical work is necessitated by the realization, emphasized throughout the paper, of the important part that the spectator's emotional bias plays in his or her construction of narrative causality. Kovács and Bacon are, to some extent, constructivists concerned with the process by which we create meaning and the mental constructs we employ. Kovács' argument for empirical research into our perception of narrative causality suggests how cognitive studies of film must take account of our individual and personal perceptions.

Finally there is William Brown's article on intensified continuity, the way in which the rapid cutting of contemporary cinema can disappear for the viewer while at the same time capturing his or her attention so completely that the viewer is oblivious to important social issues. Ideological criticism in past years was at times dogmatic and obtuse, and Brown's discussion is free of such prejudice. Brown, in a sense, warns us that it is all well and good to talk

about the mechanics of perception, as he certainly does, but we ignore the ideology hidden beneath the film technique at our own peril. His article is a cogent reminder that cognitive study need not be ideological when applying itself to a study of ideology in the cinema.

We continue to believe that book reviews play an important role in keeping our readers aware of the continuing dialogues and debates about movie and mind that exist outside the articles published in this journal. In this issue we bring to your attention seven recent books on film and the arts that create a context for our own discussions. When some books are sufficiently related, we seek to connect them in a review essay that can cover a wider panorama of film studies. In the last issue we featured a review essay on recent books on cognitive film studies, and in this one Jane Stadler brings us a review essay on phenomenology and film. Stadler's essay discusses three recent books on the subject in such a way as to give the reader a good sense of what phenomenological studies of film is about, as well as a good sense of how this philosophical approach broadens our understanding of movies and mind. Please take note of the other reviews that cover books on neuroscience and art, classical film theory, philosophy and film, and Ingmar Bergman.

References

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