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**SEEING THINGS AND SCREENING REALITY. A REVIEW OF
*PHILOSOPHY AND FILM. BRIDGING DIVIDES***

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Abstract: This review attempts to present the ideas of the book *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides*. The volume Christina Rawls, Diana Neiva, Steven S. Gouveia (Eds.). *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* (New York: Routledge, 2019) moves between well-established authors and methods, to new scholars and innovative attempts to build upon already consolidated theories. The essays or chapters, as they are presented, include both analytic considerations and preconditions for an understanding of film as philosophy and approaches based in the continental tradition. A significant merit of the book is that it provides the reader with an overview without asking for a commitment to a particular methodology, and thus provides a basis for dialogue among the different methods.

Keywords: philosophy, film, theory, pop culture, continental tradition, analytic tradition

**PRIVIND LUCRURILE ȘI TRANSPUNÂND REALITATEA PE ECRAN. O
RECENZIE LA *PHILOSOPHY AND FILM. BRIDGING DIVIDES***

Rezumat: Această recenzie își propune să prezinte ideile din volumul *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides*. Volumul Christina Rawls, Diana Neiva, Steven S. Gouveia (Eds.). *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* (New York: Routledge, 2019) pendulează între autori și metode bine-cunoscute și respectiv cercetători mai noi cu abordări inovative, pentru a construi pe baza teoriilor deja consolidate. Eseurile sau capitolele, așa cum sunt prezentate în volum, include atât considerații analitice pentru înțelegerea filmului ca filosofie și abordări bazate pe tradiția continentală. Un merit semnificativ al cărții este că oferă cititorului o perspectivă largă fără să îi ceară un angajament pentru

o metodologie particulară, iar astfel oferă o bază pentru dialogul dintre diferite metode.

Cuvinte cheie: filosofie, film, teorie, cultură pop, tradiția continentală, tradiția analitică

‘What do you see when you look at a moving image?’ And how is the answer to this question marked by the advent of digital images and post-cinematic practices? While possible answers to the first question have been attempted for as long as cinema has existed and has exerted its fascination over us, the present volume has the advantage of keeping track of this history, while nonetheless offering bold moves beyond it. The volume *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides*¹ moves between well-established authors and methods, part and parcel of the film-philosophy field which took off around the 2000s, to new scholars and innovative attempts to build upon already consolidated theories, such as Deleuze’s writings on cinema. The essays or chapters, as they are presented, thus move between analytic considerations and preconditions for an understanding of film as philosophy – and its necessary correlate, what precisely is the activity that we usually refer to as ‘doing philosophy’ – to approaches based in the continental tradition. Therefore, the *divides* mentioned in the title are indeed multiple and layered – the book operates in ruptures and sutures, its aim both to facilitate a dialogue between seemingly incompatible approaches (and understandings of philosophy) and to present to the reader an overall perspective on the current status of a field situated precisely in the gap between film and philosophy.

In our contemporary culture and society, the presence of images, whether they are digital or analogue, has been increasingly commonplace, such that, as one of the authors present in the volume argues², they need to be treated as part our contemporary human condition and constitutive of our relationship to reality. In this way, the volume addresses a topic that should only become more important, particularly given advances in virtual reality. Moreover, the question surrounding our relationship with images is in a sense insufficiently posed when one only addresses one aspect of this relationship and of the nature of images themselves and should give way to a more profound understanding of the relationship between images and thought, something which the volume makes abundantly clear on several occasions. Consequently, the stakes behind the

volume and multiple and high – can film do philosophy? And if yes, in what way? What does this, in turn, imply for our understanding of ‘philosophy’, not only as a discipline of study but as an activity of thought? Are images themselves capable of thinking? And what is the nature of the cinematic experience? While the present volume does provide answers to these questions, it, more importantly, provides different methodologies for addressing each part, leaving it to the reader to constitute her/his sutures or bridges across the divides.

Additionally, the logic of the volume is clearly defined and allows the reader to advance in an almost step by step fashion into an ever more encompassing consideration of the relation between film and philosophy. The first part introduces four chapters on the nature of film, thus considering film *from* a philosophical perspective. Malcolm Turvey’s “(Collapsed) Seeing-In and the (Im-)Possibility of Progress in Analytic Philosophy (of Film)” itself bridges two questions, namely how do moving pictures engage our perception, taken on from an analytical perspective, and if and how the answer to this question can propel analytical approaches to film forward. Nevertheless, the underlying theoretical issue – whether our perception of representations (and here the distinction between moving images, photography and painting should be considered) is the same as our perception of reality – is what drives Turvey’s analysis forward and which remains to be further investigated.

In the meantime, Jônadas Techio’s “The World Viewed and the World Lived. Stanley Cavell and Film as the Moving Image of Skepticism” offers an incisive analysis and reading of Cavell’s ontology of film, whereby (analog) film and the photographic image express the condition of the modern subject in its relation to the world. The condition of the modern subject is expressed through Cavell’s notion of *skepticism*, whereby the subject’s relation to the world is coordinated by a problem of knowledge. In other words, the world is postulated as an object to be observed and understood by a subject-spectator, increasingly replacing a world that is *lived* with one *merely viewed*. By emphasizing Heidegger and Wittgenstein’s influence on Cavell, Techio brings out the thematic of a *world become image* – both photography and (analog) film are the fulfillment of our modern

aspirations and condition and therefore need to be understood concerning the larger history of modern philosophy.

Another way of assessing cinema's philosophical potential – as expressing a certain relation and experience of the world – can be found in Steen Ledet Christiansen's "The Morph-Image. Four Forms of Post-Cinema". The chapter advances four forms of post-cinema, namely animacies, capture, flows, and plastic temporalities. While nonetheless taking each form and elaborating its significance, Christiansen's point is the consolidation of plastic temporalities as a new image of time specific to digital cinema, adding another category to Deleuze's movement-image and time-image. What is furthermore worth mentioning is the fact that each of these categories is founded upon the specificity of the digital medium and its relation to the world. Namely, the notion of plastic temporality effectively expresses the condition of time and space as resources for digital cinema, i.e. as *malleable elements*. Thus, rather than simply recording reality, post-cinema produces new aspects and experiences, thereby transforming it into "a form of thinking of and about the world."³ Lastly, the first part concludes with Susana Viegas' essay, reading Deleuze's works on the cinematic image alongside his distinction between *Chronos* as chronological time and *Aiôn* as the time of becoming from *The Logic of Sense*. The merit of the first part lies precisely in the way in which the engagement between film and philosophy is produced, its insistence on the specificity of the medium, the meaning of its history and appearance for philosophy, constituting, without a doubt, one of the strong points of the volume.

The second part is mainly focused on the analytical approach to film, namely on the film as philosophy debate. Four chapters elaborate on the conditions for considering film as doing philosophy, giving the feeling of a progressive interaction and dialogue with each other. Paisley Livingston's "The Bold Thesis Retried. On Cinema as Philosophy" sets up the frame of the discussion, explicitly stating the conditions favourable to consider the medium of film as capable of actively doing philosophy, while Tom McClelland's chapter furthers the discussion by referring to Thomas E. Wartenberg's idea that one way in which film could do philosophy would be by offering

(philosophical) thought experiments. Diana Neiva's *metaphilosophical considerations* contribute by examining how the questions and objections to film as philosophy revolve around normative conceptions of philosophy itself. Finally, David Davies concludes the second part by bringing up the necessity of regarding the possibility of film as philosophy within our own experience of the film. Thus, the "Philosophical Dimensions of Cinematic Experience" points out the experiential dimension of the medium, as well as the role of the subject/viewer, as pivotal to any consideration of film as philosophy. Furthermore, this stance offers a passage to the rest of the volume and is, to a different extent, reflected in the upcoming chapters.

Accordingly, the third and fourth parts focus on the notion of cinematic experience, first by considering the philosophical relevance of cinema as a practice of telling stories and, secondly, by looking at the particular way in which it engages the viewer. Thus, the practice of telling stories can be found both in Christopher Falzon's "Philosophical Experience and Experimental Film" – where we find the idea that film can create counter-narratives which are able to provoke viewer self-reflection – as well as in Roberto Mordacci's "Filmmaking as Self-Writing. Federico Fellini's 8½ (1963)", where the practice of filmmaking is analyzed as a form of self-writing, allowing the author (presumably the viewer too) to engage in an (ethical) autobiographical self-reflection. Meanwhile, Robert Sinnerbrink's "Film and Ethics" argues for an approach that looks at the filmmaking process, the narrative content of the film and its ability to engage the viewer through an understanding of *the medium as an ethical experience*. It is, however, the fourth part which places the engagement of the viewer at the heart of the matter, first through Noël Carroll's exposition of *erotetic narration* and *critical prefocusing* as the manner in which films successfully engage their viewers. In the following act, Dina Mendonça's essay proposes the Experimental Solution as a way of solving the paradox of fiction, namely by treating fictional films as *emotional laboratories*. Basing her approach on the theory of predictive processing, she then advances the hypothesis that fiction can function as a safe space where emotions are tested and analyzed for more accurate prediction.

Dina Mendonça's cognitivist approach is followed by Hanna Trindade's phenomenological analysis of cinema as a lived experience. Trindade thus explores the possibility of using a Husserlian approach for investigating the manner in which we perceive and relate to moving images – how do films engage our capacity for experience and in what exactly consists cinema's privileged access to reality? Eventually, it is through its ability to engage both our perception and our imagination that films are able to express an experience and perception of the world – cinema has a privileged access to the real because of its ability to provide an actual perception of the real.

The fifth part of the volume moves towards philosophical interpretations of films, ranging from Deborah Knight's interpretation of the evolution of philosophical motives from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* to Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, to Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo's analysis on how *Get Out* (2017) and *Black Panther* (2018) comment on the lived realities of African-Americans in contemporary US and to Oana Șerban's account on how two films from Udi Aloni, namely *Forgiveness* (2006) and *Local Angel* (2002) engage issues of nationality, identity, memory, and forgiveness, interpreted as part of a project espousing biopolitics and aesthetics. Lastly, the final part of the volume provides the reader with three essays offering possible new directions for interlocking film and philosophy. Inês Rebanda Coelho's chapter, "Cinema and Television. The Art and Industry of Joint Works" takes a look at how the notion of authorship can be applied to cinema and television studies and proposes *joint authorship* as a way of overcoming the difficulties inherent to this task.

In turn, Hunter Vaughan's "Towards a Natural Screen Philosophy" aims to sketch a natural philosophy for the digital age, where the screen and the propagation of images are part of our contemporary human condition and our interaction with the environment. By anchoring our use of technology in our use of natural resources, Vaughan applies ecological thinking to the digital age, in an innovative attempt to devise a material account of culture and of our being-in-the-world. The volume ends with John Ó Maoilearca's exposition of a philosophy of time through time-travel between J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927) and Richard Matheson's *Somewhere in*

Time (1980), providing interpretations to the film from the point of view of its (philosophical) elaboration of the question of time.

As previously mentioned, the virtue of the volume lies in the multiplicity of perspectives that it presents. Although one has the feeling of a stronger emphasis on the analytic tradition, neither perspective or philosophical tradition is treated preferentially. This has the effect of providing the reader with an overview without asking for a commitment to a particular methodology and can provide the basis for dialogue among the different methods. In this way, the volume *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* fulfills its aim without simply dismissing the obstacles.

Notes

¹ Christina Rawls, Diana Neiva, Steven S. Gouveia (Eds.). *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

² Hunter Vaughan, "Towards a Natural Screen Philosophy", in Christina Rawls, Diana Neiva, Steven S. Gouveia (Eds.). *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* (New York: Routledge, 2019): 342 – 355.

³ Steen Ledet Christiansen, "The Morph-Image. Four Forms of Post-Cinema", in Christina Rawls, Diana Neiva, Steven S. Gouveia (Eds.). *Philosophy and Film. Bridging Divides* (New York: Routledge, 2019): 50.

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