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Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory

'Gilles Deleuze, Philosopher of Cinema'
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In this edition of Iris serious attention is paid to the film theory of Gilles Deleuze. As D. N. Rodowick correctly notes in his introduction, Deleuze's film theory has largely been ignored either because commentators approach his cinema books with insufficient knowledge of Deleuze's concepts and philosophical work as a whole (which Deleuze presupposes throughout his cinema books), or one is familiar with Deleuze's work but is inadequately knowledgeable of film and film theory. This collection of essays attempts to approach Deleuze's film books while avoiding either of these two pitfalls.

The essays were edited by Rodowick, who has recently published Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine. Rodowick also wrote the first of the essays in this issue, 'La critique ou la verite en crise'. In this essay Rodowick explores what is clearly a dominant theme in Deleuze's cinema books: the transition from the movement-image to the time-image. The time-image, as Deleuze repeatedly says, and Rodowick acknowledges, results when the cinema, which was centered upon the motion of either the characters or objects presented in the film (or the movement of the camera as 'felt'), breaks down. Deleuze will refer to this as the break of the sensori-motor link. This break, according to Deleuze, made its way into film at the end of the Second World War, and once it occurred it allowed, for the first time, for the presentation of time-images in film. It is at this point where Rodowick's main concern enters the scene. Rodowick asks, 'what is time, and can we have a direct image of it?' (p. 7, translation here, and throughout, mine). Rodowick answers by claiming that Deleuze himself never directly answers this question in the two Cinema volumes.
Deleuze does, nevertheless, address the presentation of time-images in an indirect fashion, though quite unlike the manner in which Plato addresses truth indirectly. In other words, Plato too was concerned with attaining a direct image of truth for the understanding, and yet he admitted such a direct knowledge was unattainable; consequently, Plato, by way of Socrates, admits the necessity of analogy, or of approaching the truth through the son of truth, an analogical image of it (see Phaedo, 93b). Although Deleuze, too, would admit one cannot attain a direct image of the time-image, he would not allow for an analogical presentation of it. The reason for this is that Plato's approach presupposes both the identity of the truth which is to be presented analogically, and the resemblance between this truth and the analogy used to present it. The son looks like the father. The time-image functions quite differently. For Deleuze the time-image is that fundamental difference which is the passion of thought, or it is the difference which undermines the identities of truth and cannot be thought in its terms, and yet one cannot help but think that which cannot be thought (i.e., the time-image). As the title of Rodowick's essay suggests, the time-image places thought in crisis, or it is the crisis of truth. Consequently, to present a direct image of time, to present a truth about the time-image, would be contrary to Deleuze's very understanding of the time-image. Deleuze thus rightly leaves Rodowick's questions unanswered.

As for cinema, Deleuze believes, and several of the writers collected here will agree, that it is well suited for the functionings of the time-image as that which undermines self-identical truths, or instills the effects of time as becoming -- whereby becoming subverts and challenges the identity of being. Hence, as Rodowick points out, 'cinema fascinates Deleuze because it is by its very nature anti-Platonic'. The same is true for the author of the second essay, Reda Bensmaia, in her paper titled, 'L''espace quelconque' comme 'personnage conceptuel'". Here the focus is upon Deleuze's use of Pascal Auge's concept 'l'espace quelconque' (any space whatsoever). An 'any space whatsoever' is a space such as a metro stop, a doctor's waiting room, or an airport terminal. It is an anonymous space people pass through, or it is what Deleuze might call a nomadic space, a point of transit between places of 'importance', such as the
metro, which is merely the space one passes through between home and work. Moreover, in such spaces -- and this is what interested the anthropologist Auge -- individuals become depersonalized. No one notes or concerns themselves with one another. The place is crowded but everyone is alone. It is for this reason that Auge argued that the 'any space whatsoever' is a homogenous, desingularizing space.

In the hands of Deleuze, as Bensmaia shows, the 'any space whatsoever' plays a much different role. Bensmaia shows that the 'any space whatsoever' functions in Deleuze's theory much as the conceptual personae ('personnage conceptuel') do. That is, as Deleuze and Guattari argue in *What is Philosophy?*, philosophers, artists, and scientists each, in their own way, attempt to establish a sense of order to a fundamentally chaotic and forever changing world. They attempt to create a 'chaosmos'. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, to do this requires a mediating factor, or something that is neither chaos nor the strict identity of concepts (for the philosopher), affects (for the artist), or representations (for the scientist). This mediating factor is the condition for the possibility of such an identity, and for the philosopher it is the 'conceptual personae'. In other words, just as the 'any space whatsoever' mediates, or is the point of transit between two established spaces (e.g., home and work), so too the conceptual personae mediates between chaos and the order created out of this chaos. In contrast to Auge, therefore, rather than being an homogenizing and de-singularizing force, Bensmaia shows that for Deleuze the 'any space whatsoever' is a condition for the emergence of uniqueness and singularities.

In the context of cinema, Deleuze observes that frequent use is made of the 'any space whatsoever'. For example, Chris Marker uses airport terminals, public buildings, etc., as a means of undermining certain presuppositions one might have regarding the identity of character, plot, etc. Similarly, Antonioni's use of desert landscapes does much the same thing; in short, the 'any space whatsoever' functions in much the same manner that the time-image does: it places the identity of character, plot, etc., into crisis. A favorite example of Deleuze's is Bresson's film *Pickpocket*. In this film the pickpocket haunts the public 'any space whatsoever'. He preys upon people who are in transit.
However, for Deleuze, the significance of this use of the 'any space whatsoever' is to emphasize the undetermined moral nature of the pickpocket. The pickpocket is not predetermined to be evil, but rather he must constitute himself as such each and every time he steals; and, for Deleuze, it is the 'any space whatsoever' which is the condition for the possibility of constituting an identity, or for questioning one's identity (which is what occurs in *Pickpocket*).

The next couple essays in *Iris* pay closer attention to particular films, and to particular film-genres. For example, Jon Beasley-Murray examines the relationship between Deleuze's theory of the time-image and Tarkovsky's long take which ends his final film, *The Sacrifice*. Beasley-Murray's discussion of Tarkovsky is interesting, and his relating of the long take to Bergson's conception of 'duree' (duration) is appropriate. However, Beasley-Murray suffers from an inadequate knowledge of Deleuze's work. For example, he will often use Deleuze's terminology, without explanation, and, moreover, will do so inappropriately; for example, he argues that the long take 'produces a deterritorialization of the time-image'. First, he does not explain what a deterritorialization process would entail, and more importantly the time-image is precisely, as Rodowick's article showed, that which deterritorializes or undermines the identity of truth, etc. The time-image is not the identity that is itself deterritorialized. Perhaps Beasley-Murray intends to say that the long take deterritorializes our normal conceptions of time as chronological time (i.e., time as subordinate to the movements it measures). If this is so, it was certainly not made clear.

Jaimey Fisher's essay is much better, and sets forth an interesting thesis. Fisher argues that Deleuze's cut-off point of the end of World War II as the time when time-image films emerge, and as emerging with Italian neo-realism, is artificial and false. Fisher argues that the German 'rubble-film' can be understood and interpreted in much the same way as Italian neo-realism. Fisher also argues that Deleuze's discussion of Italian neo-realism as the first film genre to explore the break in the sensori-motor link (and the emergence of the time-image as crisis in truth) needs to be supplemented with a gender analysis. The action-image, Fisher claims, is a predominantly male image, typified by the
western action hero (e.g., Clint Eastwood) who enters a situation and through his actions transforms this situation (Deleuze's S-A-S' structure). The emergence of the time-image, or at least the breakdown in the sensori-motor link, is for Fisher just as much a breakdown in the effectiveness of patriarchal dominance. Thus Fisher analyzes the helplessness of the men in German rubble-films, such as in Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers are Among Us*, and shows how it is women who become dominant through their passivity. Fisher's arguments are interesting, though he mistakenly argues that 'Deleuze's history of cinema itself seems like a movie ruled by the action-image', or that it functions teleologically. This could not be further from the truth. Deleuze adamantly opposes teleological analysis, and the same holds true here. Fisher also could have given attention to Deleuze's theory of minor politics, wherein he explicitly argues in support of feminism.

Tom Conley's article, 'Evenement-cinema', explores the relationship between another of Deleuze's important concepts, 'event', and his film theory. In particular, by starting with a discussion of Montaigne's near fatal fall from a horse, an event Montaigne admits was important in leading him to write his essays, Conley then shows how, for Deleuze, events themselves (e.g., death as event), are conditions which generate a series of other events. Thus, just as Montaigne's event led to a series of essays, the time-image as event leads, in film (Conley cites Godard as an important example), to a series of counterpoised images -- e.g., sound and visual. Conley recognizes the importance, as did Rodowick, of a fundamental difference (in this case the event) which plays the role of differentiator that subverts identity, or that causes this identity to change.

The last few articles discuss the importance of 'immanence' within Deleuze's philosophy, and the relationship of this theme to his film theory. Timothy Murray, for instance, examines the nature of immanence and seriality in Peter Greenaway's movie *Prospero's Books*. Colin Gardner brings out the Spinozistic nature of Deleuze's theory of immanence, and shows how this aids in the understanding Joseph Losey's film *The Servant*. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi discusses Deleuze's frequent reference to film authors, or 'auteurs', and shows
how this is not inconsistent with his critique of the subject. In particular, he shows that for Deleuze an author is the name given to a cinematic assemblage, or to the processes immanent to the film, processes which should not be identified solely with the author of the film (i.e., its director). And Alain Menil, in his article 'L'Image-Temps: une figure de l'immanence?', revisits the theme with which Rodowick began this collection of essays. Menil argues (and this is largely true of the other essays which examine the role of immanence in film and in Deleuze's theory of film) that immanence forms a whole or totality (*Tout*), but not a closed whole or totality. As Deleuze would argue, the plane of immanence is a plane of consistency which allows for the emergence of identifiable subjects, etc. Such a plane of consistency, however, is not to be confused with what Menil calls a closed totality. A closed totality implies completion, or the end of a process; yet for Deleuze, the plane of immanence is a totality of becoming, a continual process, and to the extent that cinema taps into this immanence -- i.e., to the extent it is a cinema of the time-image -- it taps into this becoming and places established identities into crisis. Or, as Rodowick argued in his essay, the time-image, and the plane of immanence, is the condition for the possibility of thought, but it is also the condition which makes a complete, closed thought impossible, or which places truth in crisis.

In sum, this collection of essays makes up for a gap that has existed for far too long in film theory. It has been more than ten years since Deleuze's cinema books were published in English, and yet their impact on film theory has been slight to non-existent. This collection of essays will hopefully generate more discussion concerning Deleuze's place in thinking about and with film. The path for more work in this area, therefore, has been cleared.

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