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Robert Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images*, London and New York, 2011. 247pp., pb., 978 1 4411 53432.

[Pre-publication version of a book review appearing in *Radical Philosophy* 180, July/August 2013, pp. 55-8]

Recent years have witnessed a growth in publications seeking to stake out a newly defined and emerging territory named, by certain of its exponents, film-philosophy. Indeed one of the primary exponents in an anglophone context, founder of the web portal *film-philosophy* – Daniel Frampton – coins the term 'filmosophy' in his 2006 book of that title in order to describe the supposed immanence of the conceptual activity associated with the discipline of philosophy – let's call it thought – to cinema. One needs immediately to qualify this comment. For what is at stake is *some* cinema. There is an evaluative dimension that lies at the crux of the battle of cognitivism and film-philosophy in Robert Sinnerbrink's *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* seeks to intervene. More particularly the book responds to what it sees as a need to "steer a successful course between the Scylla of dogmatism and the Charybdis of reductionism" which seem to arrange the battlefield (20).

For Sinnerbrink, the so-called Grand Theory which dominated academic film discourse in the 1970s and 80s and which was in the sights of the most influential of the cognitivists, Noël Carroll and David Bordwell, is the main protagonist in stimulating the very reductionism and dogmatism which continues to dominate exchanges between cognivitists and film-philosophers..

So what is film-philosophy? A lot of impetus for one strand of it derives from the influence of Deleuze and it is often characterised as indicating a switch from Lacanian orthodoxies – still represented, albeit in idiosyncratic Hegelian form and operating outside mainstream film studies, by Zizek's writings on film. This strand is characterised by a commitment to immanence – tied to Deleuze's insistence that films think, a view held by the other doyen of cine-thinking, Stanley Cavell. Philosophy departments, however, and certain film departments at universities in the 1980s also began to play host to a quite distinct approach to cinema, one fuelled by analytic philosophy, but sharing with Deleuze a sense of the limitations of both psychoanalysis and structuralism, and giving rise to a strand all film studies students now refer to in shorthand terms as cognivitivism. Sinnerbrink's book is explicit in its aim to produce points of convergence between these two strands and to find "new ways of synthesising, rather than dismissing, alternate theoretical frameworks and critical philosophical perspectives" (20).

If Deleuze and the cine-thinking strand and Carroll and the cognitivists both dislike psychoanalysis and structuralism, however, they would fail to recognise the version of each of these latter fields of film studies which they respectively invoke. This fact of mutual non-recognition is merely one of the challenges faced by Sinnerbrink in his self-appointed task of placing these implacable opponents into dialogue.

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Sinnerbrink has an idea about what film-philosophy should be. He also wants to show us when it is not what it could or should be. The distinctions are important in anglophone film studies, less so elsewhere. In France, after all, analytic philosophy has made little or no headway into university film departments. The situation in the US in particular is different. While Carroll may have declared our era as post-theory, and Deleuze's main exegetical ally in the US David Rodowick has written with bitter irony an 'elegy for theory', Sinnerbrink's intention is to propose a response to the combat which sets out a potentially productive differend.

The book is in three parts. The first addresses the cognitivist turn associated with Carroll and the massively influential Bordwell – whose book, written with Kirstin Thompson...is still a staple of undergraduate film studies courses. The second section is devoted to what the author regards as the bifurcating paths of Cavell and Deleuze, both of whom advance film-philosophy without regarding themselves as members of such a discipline. The third section presents itself as cinematic thinking in action, with three chapters devoted to a particular film from a heavyweight of contemporary art-house cinema. If the thesis of this book is to be convincingly argued then David Lynch, Lars Von Trier and Terrence Malick will need both to be named and to find their places justified in a pantheon including Deleuze, Cavell and, in the Cavellian lineage, Mulhall.

Sinnerbrink offers a sympathetic survey of the main players in cognitivism. Bazin, Münsterberg, Arnheim and Metz rub shoulders with Carroll, Bordwell, Currie and Grodal. He is however careful, despite his quest to heal, to display an attunement to the reductionism and pretensions to scientific rigour by means of which the cognitivists sought to condemn the so-called grand theory, encapsulated in the title of Bordwell and Carroll's edited volume *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996). When the author considers the core contributions of the cognitivists he is very alert to their limitations, finding for example that their approach to narrative does an injustice to the aesthetic qualities of film (46).

The cognitivists of course have since that juncture extended a sort of olive branch to the grand theorists, in the form of the inclusion in anthologies of film and philosophy, entries from the very tradition they have sought to attack. The rapprochement, if that is indeed what Sinnerbrink has in mind, and he says he does — has perhaps already been underway with students being exposed to a range of approaches through the existence of such collections on reading lists. Thus, in the second section, Sinnerbrink's film-title invoking metaphors for two chapters give us Cavell and Deleuze as a *bande à part* (from Godard) and 'scenes from a marriage' (Bergman) respectively and thus restyle the 'new philosophies of film' as undergoing a form of relationship counselling ('marriage' even features as an entry in the book's index).

In this context it is worth noting that books such as this rely in part on exclusions which might rather muddy the water. For example Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body (1993)* is neither referred to, nor does it warrant inclusion in the list of further reading. Yet surely this book stands out as one of the first significant (admittedly Deleuzian) entries in what

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would become identified as film-philosophy. Likewise Laura Marks' influential attempt to outline a haptic theory of film, in her *The Skin of the Film* (2000) is not entirely – though it is no doubt partly so – reducible to the mere *application* of Deleuzian concepts to cinema. Both books are aware of the critique of psychoanalysis in Deleuze's cinema books and both attempt to articulate a certain immanence to the films they discuss of a cinematic thinking.

Part of the reason for these exclusions may come down to the particular Deleuze Sinnerbrink wishes to cultivate alongside Cavell and the more obviously pragmatist Mulhall. The author asserts that while Cavell gives us cinema as a response to skepticism, Deleuze offers us cinema as a riposte to nihilism. For this Sinnerbrink replies upon one version of Deleuze's rupture between the movement image and the time image. This is a account which pays scant attention to the ontological version of the rupture also outlined in *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* and relies exclusively on the historical rupture. To be fair, Sinnerbrink does not swallow the rather disingenuous criticism mounted by Jacques Rancière in *Film Fables* and cites counter arguments. The counter arguments however are limited to the consideration of what is itself a limited repositioning of the Deleuze position as anti-nihilist (by Paola Marrati, in her book *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy*). It might have been interesting to see if a stronger defence against Rancière could have been mounted by a way of a genealogy of Deleuze's approach to film as this was informed by his familiarity with French film criticism in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is these sources which help to forge the ontological side of Deleuze's reading of a rupture.

In France, the dispute between cognitivism and film-philsophy makes little impression on the very film culture which in part gave rise to 'grand theory'. As Hunter Vaughan points out, in his introduction to a recent number of *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, the relationship between French intellectual culture and the moving image is a special case. What, one could ask, does a journal such as *Traffic* or *Vertigo* (the French one) do, other than produce output which would often be called film-philosophy? What does Jean-Luc Nancy do when he writes on Kiarostami or on Claire Denis? Or Jacques Rancière when he discusses the westerns of Anthony Mann. Is it film-philosophy?

Translation has played its part in the genesis of so-called film-philosophy. A lot of the theorisation in the 1970s and 80s undertaken by such French critics as Serge Daney, Pascal Bonitzer, Alain Bergala and Jean Douchet was conducted in magazines and reviews but was far from comprehensively in thrall to the twin paradigms of psychoanalysis and structuralism. Even the most prolific of them – Daney – remains represented in English by one single volume. Rayond Bellour – who took over the editorship of *Traffic* after Daney's death in 1992 - is known in English only for his 'structuralist' work – close readings of Hitchcock and Barthesian essays, often published in *Screen* in the 1970s such as 'The Unattainable Text' and so on. Other important books from the period such as Jean-Louis Schefer's *L'homme ordinare au cinéma* (1980) remain untranslated. Arguably film-philosophy would have found useful and influential allies much sooner if the work of French critics had been more widely translated into

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English. Yet, for all that, in an Anglophone context, the efforts of those operating under the banner of film-philosophy have been valuable

What then of the key third section of the book, where Sinnerbrink wants to show us his cinematic thinking? The directors chosen for consideration in the final section of the book are already canonical as far as film-philosophy is concerned. Neither von Trier nor Lynch are canonised by Deleuze of course but they have been by scholars influenced by Deleuze The films – von Trier's *Antichrist*, Lynch's *INLAND EMPIRE* and Malick's *The New World* - are presented as objects which resist appropriation under the banner of any particular thought system. In particular both *Antichrist* and *INLAND EMPIRE* are said to resist cognitivism, the former film explicitly. Malick is presented here as a 'romantic' filmmaker. Sinnerbrink of course knows the philosophical heritage of the filmmaker (who studied Heidegger and has been written on by Simon Critchley and by Sinnerbrink himself) as well as its more recent heritage as film..

So there are affordances and resistances. There is a praxis of viewing. There is a dialectical underpinning to this book which will perhaps come as no surprise to those who are aware that the author also previously put his name to a study of Hegel. It has to be asked, however, if we really need the resistance of *Antichrist* and *INLAND EMPIRE* to show us the limitations of cognitivism? For, if we need to be shown this resistance as one of the immanent thoughts of the films in question, then is the recourse to the argument that such refusal not in fact in itself an acknowledgement that the presentation by the author of immanent thought is perhaps an insurmountable challenge? Is it not the case that one will always end up using film as a mirror through which to view concepts and debates in film studies? These questions notwithstanding, Sinnerbrink's book will add a dose of welcome skepticism to anyone embarking on the consideration of some recent developments in Anglophone film studies under the sign of Carroll and his cognitivist band. Sinnerbrink is to be commended for the life he injects into his consideration of the cognitivists by means of adroit illustration from examples of his own choosing which display a cinephile's reservoir of resources. This is not always something that can be said of commentators content to use the same filmic examples as do their sources. This aspect – present in all the other chapters of the first two sections - indeed is one of the many pleasures of Sinnerbrink's welcome addition to the growing body of work in this field.

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