

John Mullarkey, University of Dundee. (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009).

ISBN: 9780230002470

304

pages

Description:

Why is film becoming increasingly important to philosophers? Is it because it can be a helpful tool in teaching philosophy, in illustrating it? Or is it because film can also think for itself, because it can create its own philosophy? In fact, a popular claim amongst film-philosophers is that film is no mere handmaiden to philosophy, that it does more than simply illustrate philosophical texts: rather, film itself can philosophise as film. Approaches that purport to be less textual and illustrative can be found in the subtractive ontology of Alain Badiou, the Wittgensteinian analyses of Stanley Cavell, and the materialist semiotics of Gilles Deleuze. In each case there is a claim that film can think in its own way. Too often, however, when philosophers claim to find indigenous philosophical value in film, it is only on account of refracting it through their own thought: film philosophises because it accords with a favoured kind of extant philosophy. Consequently, the aim of seeing film as philosophy is more often than not reduced to 'film as text as philosophy', in as much as the film's audio-visual matter - no less than its cultural, technological, or commercial dimensions - are nonetheless interpreted from a ready-made philosophical vantage-point.

Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image is the first book to look at all the central issues surrounding the vexed relationship between the film-image and philosophy. In it, John Mullarkey tackles the work of particular philosophers and theorists (Žižek, Deleuze, Cavell, Bordwell, Badiou, Branigan, Rancière, Frampton, and many others) as well as general philosophical positions (Analytical and Continental, Cognitivist and Culturalist, Psychoanalytic and Phenomenological). Moreover, it also offers an incisive analysis and explanation of several forms of film theorising, providing a meta-logical account of their mutual advantages and deficiencies that will prove immensely useful to anyone interested in the details of particular theories presently circulating, as well as correcting, revising, or re-visioning film theory as a whole.

Throughout, Mullarkey asks whether the reduction of film to text is unavoidable. In particular: must philosophy (and theory) always transform film into pre-texts for illustration? What would it take to imagine how film might itself theorise without reducing it to standard forms of thought and philosophy? Finally, and fundamentally, must we change our definition of philosophy and even of thought itself in order to accommodate the specificities that come with the claim that film can produce philosophical theory? If a 'non-philosophy' like film can think philosophically, what does that imply for orthodox theory and philosophy?

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