Berys Gaut
A Philosophy of Cinematic Art.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010.
338 pages
$104.00 (cloth ISBN 978–0–521–82244–2); $32.00 (paper ISBN 978–0–521–52964–8)

As a philosophy of cinematic art, Berys Gaut's excellent book is concerned with the ontology of moving images and the ways in which works produced in cinematic media are authored and interpreted. The focus on 'cinema', broadly conceived, permits Gaut to consider a wide range of technologies, including traditional (photochemical) film, digital cinema, animation, videogames, interactive artworks, and even shadow plays. The book's breadth of scope is matched by an analysis that is both rigorous as to detail and innovative in the contrasts drawn between different cinematic media, in particular between traditional photographic cinema and its more recent digital counterpart. Juxtaposition of these media throughout the book not only permits insightful elaboration of aesthetically relevant differences between them, but also enables the author to re-evaluate classical film theory and, in many instances, to show its ongoing relevance to the analysis of cinematic works in digital form.

Gaut's study of various technologies of the moving image reveals cinema to be a medium that is interesting, in part, by virtue of its 'plasticity'. Yet this also means that it eludes the imposition of rigid theoretical categories. Gaut's solution is to draw out distinctions and overlaps between different kinds of cinema, while using the idea of 'nesting' to impose methodological consistency. This concept enables the author to describe cinema as a medium that contains other media, thus permitting discussion of an overarching 'cinematic medium' as well as analysis of various 'species' within the genus. It also allows him to make important distinctions between features of cinema that are specific to moving images generally and those that are aesthetically important to individual media. The notion of medium-specificity is crucial to the book's core arguments and motivates nuanced analyses of individual works that range from Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* to Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Chapter 1 begins with consideration of the challenges that cinema has faced in demanding appreciation as an art form. Gaut focuses, in particular, on how cinema responds to the charge of being a mere 'recording device', a line of argument that has been debated in classical film theory and that recurs in Roger Scruton's analysis of photography. In rebutting the idea that film is essentially a mechanical reproduction of reality (the 'causal challenge'), Gaut identifies different ways in which cinema communicates and examines the techniques by which control is exerted over these means of communication. The representational (rather than recording) capacity that Gaut finds in traditional film is enhanced by the digital medium, for here, he argues, it becomes possible to generate expressive content more directly. In the latter medium, cinematic art comes to share certain features of painting as it is no longer dependent on 'some independently existing object to create expressive content' (50).

Chapter 2 digs further into the representational capacities of cinema by examining two contrasting ideas: the idea that film is a kind of language or that it is essentially a pictorial

medium distinct from language. Gaut's argument in favour of the latter is based on the 'natural generativity' of images and the idea that we use the same faculties to recognize a picture of an object as we use to recognize the object itself. This leads to a consideration of realism in cinema (systematically analyzed in seven different forms) and, more specifically, to consideration of the thesis that pictures are transparent. Gaut's detailed analysis of the transparency thesis and his engagement with ideas on this subject put forward by Kendall Walton and Dominic McIver Lopes will also be relevant to readers whose primary interest is in still rather than moving images. Arguing that the verb 'to see' means the 'uninterrupted transmission of light from object to the viewer's eyes' (94), Gaut makes the case that a necessary condition for seeing an object is not met in the case of pictures of that object. He argues that despite their 'natural generativity', all pictures are opaque and that looking at a photo and looking at an object are different in ways that affect our appreciation of each.

Chapter Three moves the discussion from artwork to artist. Here, too, much of the discussion has relevance to issues in aesthetics that extend beyond the cinematic medium, particularly in its examination of different concepts of authorship. Gaut discusses the pervasiveness of the literary authorial paradigm in the context of cinema and tests different varieties of the 'auteurist' view. The principal challenge to the model of single authorship in cinema derives, Gaut argues, from practical issues concerning the nature of a work's production in this medium. Arguing that films are collaborative works in ways that affect their aesthetic properties, Gaut opts for a multiple-authorship approach for both film and digital cinema. This model of authorship also holds true, he argues, for interactive digital cinema. In this case, however, while members of the audience may determine the character of different instantiations of the work, this does not make them co-authors of the work. Here, too, Gaut's arguments have wider application and will be relevant to those interested in other interactive media (particularly computer art).

The discussion of authorship in Chapter Three leads to consideration of interpretation in Chapter Four. The idea that cinematic artworks are the result of a collaborative process between two or more artists poses a problem for various theories of interpretation, in particular, intentionalism. Rejecting both this thesis and a constructivist approach to interpretation as advanced by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Gaut describes the advantages of a 'patchwork' or mixed theory. In such an approach, various factors (including, for example, artists' intentions, formal features of the work, production context, history) enter differentially into the interpretation of a work's features. As in earlier chapters, Gaut elucidates a flexible approach to the cinematic medium and seeks to accommodate the complex, collaborative acts of making that are germane to its various manifestations.

Chapters Five and Six develop arguments from the earlier part of the book by examining how stories are told in cinema and analyzing the ways in which works in this medium produce an emotional effect on their audiences. Gaut identifies overlaps between acts of story-telling in cinema and literature before highlighting key differences between the narrational capacities of each of them (for example, the greater potential for implicit narrators in literature or the contribution of narrative information by music in cinema). Here, too, medium-specificity is seen to play a key role in explaining why films produce a different effect from, say, novels.

Further elucidation of the notion of a 'medium' is provided in the final chapter of the book. In arguing that the artistic features of cinematic works are conditioned by the relevant medium, Gaut explains how medium-specific features should be construed. Stressing, once again, that a flexible approach is needed to accommodate overlaps between the explanatory importance of certain features of various media, he argues that such features do not operate in absolute terms (i.e. a feature need not be unique to a medium), but are relative to other media. They are, thus, 'differential features'. Turning again to the concept of 'nesting', Gaut stresses the importance of determining the level at which one makes a medium-specific claim about a cinematic work in order fully to understand the latter's distinctive properties.

In its thorough and detailed examination of ideas and secondary literature relating to medium, authorship, transparency, narration, emotion, and fictional identification, this book is essential reading for students in aesthetics. For specialists in the field, the book significantly advances philosophical analysis of different technologies of the moving image and engages subtly with the emergence of new media within the genre, enabling readers to savour anew 'the ingredients and flavours of the cinematic potpourri' (129).

Kathryn Brown
Tilburg University