

Paul Bowman, ed. *Rancière and Film*. University of Edinburgh Press 2013. 224 pp. £80.00 (Hardcover ISBN 9780748647361); £24.99 (Paperback ISBN 9780748647354).

In his ‘Remarks by Way of a Postface,’ Jacques Rancière tells us he writes about film because he loves it. He makes claim to the ‘politics of the amateur’: ‘I have never in my life given a single lecture on film theory, nor have I taught in a Film Studies department’ (185). There is a strange and marvelous irony then in Rancière’s writings on cinema, which oppose themselves to the academization of discussion on the pleasures of cinema while writing in the hybrid language of academic aesthetics. The scholarly analyses of Rancière writings included in this volume share this irony; all the contributors are from some corner of academia. This performative contradiction, along with the wide range of content and tone that is both the strength and challenge of compilations of its kind, makes reading *Rancière and Film* an oddly double-sided experience. The essays repeatedly promote an aesthetics of equality, but not just anyone can pick up and read this book. Like Rancière’s ‘cinematographic fable,’ it is an undertaking divided against itself—but perhaps that is precisely the point.

Indeed, the importance of Rancière’s writings on film is undeniable for thinkers who want to reconsider the aesthetics of cinema beyond modernist elitism on the one hand, or cultural apology on the other. Rancière has had the courage to take on the exclusionism and condescension rampant in academic analyses of this most democratic of art-forms. This volume offers a solid introduction to the main themes at stake in this reevaluation as well as some specific examples of their application.

Rancière himself has written several books on film, so a collection of essays on Rancière and film might seem somewhat redundant. On the other hand, Rancière’s ideas can be enigmatic and their implications obscure. *Rancière and Film* is successful when the contributors can shed light on these obscurities, or push Rancière’s insights beyond themselves, or apply them in unexpected places. For the most part, the collection accomplishes this admirably, though not consistently. There are some questionable inclusions, along with a tendency - as is often the case with studies on an innovative thinker—to indulge in terminological pyrotechnics at the cost of clarity and depth.

Paul Bowman’s Introduction sets the stage nicely, posing the question of the novelty of Rancière’s ‘tactical and alterdisciplinary’ intervention in the name of equality into the active disciplining conducted by academic disciplines. Bowman poses the question as to whether Rancière’s is really an intervention, or simply a re-articulation of a paradigm shift that has already happened in ‘post-disciplinary’ academe. Bowman suggests that Rancière’s critique is indeed innovative, and that its insistence on relation and equality are ‘portable lessons’ that go beyond previous egalitarian, emancipatory projects, including that of Marxist theory.

Not surprisingly, then, the politics of aesthetics pervades the volume. Nico Baumbach’s ‘What Does it Mean to call Film an Art?’ uses Rancière’s work on intellectual equality and aesthetics to highlight the pitfalls and paradoxes of teaching film as art. Baumbach explains the strategies of analyzing film as ideology, culture or art, and differentiates three traditional models (Romantic, Utilitarian, Didactic) for designating any object as a work of ‘art’. He uses the tension in Rancière’s own writings between his egalitarian claims and his elitist modernist examples to discuss how film might be taught according to what Baumbach calls an ‘Aesthetic Model’ (following Rancière’s description of an ‘aesthetic regime’). Such an approach to teaching would have to integrate film back into ‘the history of a form of experience of sensible being’ (28)—as an art that is available to everyone.

The relation of art to politics and the potential of cinema's democratic spectatorship are likewise the subject of Abraham Geil's 'The Spectator Without Qualities,' and Mark Robson's 'Cine-marxis'. Geil explores Rancière's idea of an 'emancipated spectatorship' as the embodiment of what Rancière calls *dissensus*—a rupture between sense and the senses that provokes resistance to inscription in normal roles and interpretations. Film addresses itself to anyone and no one, creating an autonomous spectator that is also anonymous, suspended between active and passive and therefore free. This emancipated spectatorship is the opposite of film theory's traditional assumption of a passive audience/consumer consensus manipulated by the director or the industry. Robson's essay picks up this democratic theme and sets forth Rancière's complex relation to Marxism through the films and writings of Jean-Luc Godard, again questioning the confrontation of modernist aesthetic pretensions with egalitarian politics.

Some of the high points of *Rancière and Film* are the essays that engage Rancière's thought by means of specific films or film techniques. Bram Ieven's essay 'Memories of Modernism' articulates the questions surrounding Rancière's notion of an 'aesthetic regime' through the lens of Chris Marker's 1992 documentary film, *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre*. In 'Aesthetic Irruptions', Mónica López Lerma brings the idea of *dissensus* and its aesthetic/political force to bear on Alex de la Iglesia's 'La Comunidad' (Common Wealth, 2000). Richard Stamp's 'Jacque Rancière's Animated Vertigo' explores the production and aesthetic impact of John Whitney's early machine animation in Hitchcock's 'Vertigo' (1958), by extending and developing Rancière's reading of film as a 'thwarted fable'. In this essay, Rancière's move beyond the modernist focus on medium is shown to have implications for understanding contemporary digital effects; as a thwarted fable, film's aesthetic impact is not thinkable without the technical and material nature of the medium, but also not reducible to it.

James Steintrager confronts the current apocalyptic tone of media studies regarding these digital effects in 'The Media is not the Message'. Steintrager underscores Rancière's suspicions of the 'reduction and simplification' of media-obsessed film theory, insisting instead upon the need for a 'complex genealogy of aesthetics' (169). Steintrager shows how with Rancière we might see the new digital technology as heralding not the end of film but the mode of its continuity. Post-millennial cinema will only be understandable by means of its repetitions as well as its disruptions with the past, a past that 'refuses to relinquish its grip on and relevance to the present - and thus to the future' (183).

As is often the case with edited volumes, there are a few clunkers. Ray Chow's essay on 'acousmatic complications' seems to be visiting from another discourse (Paul Bowman is also the editor of *The Ray Chow Reader*). Its relevance to Rancière's work and to the other essays in the collection is oblique at best. And Patricia MacCormack's excessive, poetically ambitious attempt to move beyond the human in 'Inhuman Spectatorship' is perhaps a bit too successful.

Rancière and Film's strength is that it both introduces readers to the timely ideas of an unconventional thinker and sets forth some provocative interpretations. Those who know Rancière may find its applications intriguing, and those who are not familiar with the thinker may find themselves wanting to read the original, to think things through for themselves. In this way, the collection is faithful to the real democratic potential of cinema and the true force of Rancière's egalitarian thought. His insights open out beyond their immediate articulation. After all, as many of the contributors point out, what makes cinema so fascinating and so difficult to analyze, aesthetically and politically, is the way it combines materials and forms to pull together audiences who will sit in the same theatre and

experience the same film differently. There is potentially something for everyone; affects cannot be known beforehand. In Rancière's charming words: cinema is a 'common world' that belongs even to the 'daughters of peasants'—some of whom, it should be noted, hold Ph.Ds. in Philosophy and review academic books.

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