Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age. **William Brown. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. Pp. 198 (cloth).**

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William Brown's fascinating and provocative study, *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age*, opens up a refreshingly original perspective in the burgeoning literature on film and philosophy. Apart from a few notable exceptions—Berys Gaut's *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (2010) and D. N. Rodowick's *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), for example—few authors working in the interdisciplinary field of "film and philosophy" have given much considered attention to the aesthetic and philosophical implications of the shift from analogue to digital image-making in the last two decades. This is a striking state of affairs, and reflects, as Brown suggests, a generational lag between those whose formative years in relation to cinema pre-dates the digital revolution, and the younger generation of "digital natives" for whom the nostalgic and arcane talk of smoky cinema theatres, rare reprints, and celluloid stock belongs to a bygone era. Most theorists (myself included) have tended to skirt the issue by adopting a loosely pluralistic definition of "expanded cinema," so to speak, one that encompasses the new digital technologies, the development of new production and post-production techniques, changes in narrative filmmaking style and cultural aesthetics, and dispersed viewing practices distributed across multiple mobile platforms. Nonetheless, the "D" word, as Brown notes, continues to loom large, dividing theorists into those for whom the shift to digital technology signals the "end of film" as we know it (and the definitive shift to media studies and/or philosophically-informed new media theory), and those for whom it signals a new phase of audiovisual culture—including digital "cinema"—that demands a careful rethinking of the fundamental assumptions and implications of film theory. For these theorists, digital media remain connected to what we understand by "cinema," while posing new technological, aesthetic, and philosophical challenges to our understanding of its significance as *the* contemporary global medium of communication. Brown's impressively argued book cuts across this unstable and unsatisfactory divide, proposing bold new ways of thinking about digital cinema that takes seriously the cultural-aesthetic changes to the meaning and practice of "film" prompted by the digital revolution as well as the philosophical implications of thinking though what

digital images now enable us to experience, communicate, and to think. The result is a challenging suite of meditations on the work of cinema in the age of digital manipulability: Brown offers here a series of brilliant philosophical provocations and conceptual elaborations—combining Deleuzian film-philosophy with phenomenological and cognitivist approaches as well as ideas drawn from the "new physics" (chaos theory, quantum mechanics, and complexity theory)—exploring with impressive clarity and originality what a "film-philosophy" adequate to the digital age would look like, and what it makes possible for us to think.

Brown begins with a discussion of question of "film-philosophy" and its relationship with film theory (and indeed with philosophy): namely, whether the two—film-philosophy and film theory—differ semantically but are essentially engaged in the same task; or whether there is a difference that makes a difference between them in their respective concerns, aims, and methods. Brown inclines to the former (semantically but not essentially distinct) option, articulating his (Deleuzian) conception of film-philosophy as exploring "what cinema can do"; in particular, exploring the manner in which cinema might elicit new thoughts in us or prompt us "to *think*" (6). Drawing principally but not exclusively on Deleuze, Brown articulates an admirably pluralist conception of film-philosophy, which could be defined, he suggests, as "trying to weave together film theoretical, cognitive, phenomenological and other approaches to film" (8). This is a highly productive way of thinking how film-philosophy can contribute to contemporary forms of philosophical film theory. At the same time, there are always challenges or risks in adopting this kind of theoretical pluralism, given that not all perspectives may complement one another equally well.

There is an ambiguity, for example, in respect of how we might conceptualise the relationship between cinema and thought (noting that "thought" can refer to a proposition or idea or to the act of cognition [thinking]). It is one thing to say that films elicit, invite, or provoke thought in spectators or viewers, another to claim that moving images themselves express thought, which is to say an idea or perspective in visual form (although the two propositions are clearly related). Generally, philosophers mean the former, though they can also mean the latter, which raises important questions about the extent to which one can claim that film can "do philosophy" or make an original contribution to philosophical

understanding.[1] This issue becomes intriguing in the case of Deleuzian film-philosophy, which not only claims that cinema elicits or provokes thought (for example, by disrupting the cognitive routines of the "sensory-motor action schema") but can also articulate or express thought via moving images (for example, the sense of "the intolerable" in society in Italian neo-realism, or the "exhaustion of the body" in filmmakers such as Antonioni or Chantal Akerman). Brown's approach to this issue is pragmatic, in the philosophical sense: by exploring and analysing "what film can do," film-philosophy can theorise or conceptualise—based on singular case examples—cinema's potential to communicate thought and to explore its mutating possibilities in the digital age. At the same time, cinema itself can express "thought," notably concerning the interconnectedness of entities, matter-energy, and events, which remain in keeping with the pluralistic, probabilistic, and multidimensional conception of the universe theorised within contemporary physics. Embracing both the Deleuzian insistence on the "creation of concepts" in relation to cinema, and the cognitivist scepticism towards "grand theory" construction, Brown steers an admirable course here between radical constructivist and hard reductivist approaches to film theory. Drawing on cognitivist approaches, he argues that cinema should be thought philosophically by drawing on empirical theories (of consciousness and cognition, for example) and recent developments in the sciences (concerning matter, time, and space, for instance), while advocating a practice of conceptual invention that both deepens our understanding of film while responding to our received ways of thinking and experiencing the world.

As a preliminary definition of digital cinema, Brown passes over the more conventional "medium-based" definitions that emphasise the use of digital video cameras, digital post-production techniques, and the exploitation of the digital image's capacity for manipulation, animation, morphing, and other forms of plastic transformation. Rather, he draws attention to the digital image's capacity for continuity, the potential to eschew or avoid the cut (despite contemporary cinema's proliferating rate of rapid cutting techniques and styles), and its

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[1] See Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008); Paisley Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011); Aaron Smuts, "Film as Philosophy: In Defence of a Bold Thesis," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67.4 (Fall 2009): 409-420; Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (New York & London: Routledge, 2007).

capacity to foreground its own capacities for transformation and connection across space and time. Unlike analogue cinema, which conceals its analogue character in the interests of creating a seamless or directed representation of reality, digital cinema affirms its digital character, placing profilmic and animated characters, entities, and processes on the same cinematic plane, and displaying, rather than concealing, its powers of transformation and visual plasticity (digital cinema as Superman, whose alter ego is a disguise, compared with analogue cinema as Batman, whose alter ego is a superhero). To this end, Brown proposes the term "supercinema" to refer to the new kind of cinematic imagery wrought by the advent of digital technology, CGI, and the "digital logic" shaping both complex forms of audiovisual representation and our experience and understanding of reality. Instead of a strictly ontological inquiry into the definition or nature of digital cinema as such, he proposes to explore what digital cinema can do, which amounts to a philosophical inquiry into supercinema as a transformative way of thinking and experiencing the world.

This is followed by a fascinating discussion of the challenges that digital images, and digital cinematics more generally, pose to our conventional understanding of space and time. One of Brown's most original theses is that digital cinema resonates with developments in contemporary physics and the new vitalist philosophies of matter (as explored by Deleuzians such as Jane Bennett, Manuel de Landa, and Brian Massumi). Commencing with a brief analysis of the opening sequence of *Fight Club* (1999), Brown points out the extraordinary manner in which the "camera"—or rather the digital perspective offered to the viewer—moves from an intra-bodily space, literally inside the protagonist's head, showing neural synapses firing, passing through the interior of the character's bodily cavity, before passing on to the gun barrel protruding into his mouth, and then on to outside of his body in order to finally adopt the "normal" or conventionally humanistic perspective of mid-range objects, familiar to ordinary perception that defines the space of cinematic narrative proper. The implication of this kind of "impossible" point of view—impossible from the point of view of "natural perception" but perfectly possible from the perspective of digital images—is to show the ontological equality of all levels and objects of perception, from the quantum/neurological level, the vitalist level of non-organic life and vibrant matter, to the cosmic/astronomical level of macrophysical reality.

Before reaching such speculative heights, Brown commences his philosophical exploration by revisiting the debate over indexicality in relation to analogue versus digital images (22 ff.). As is well-known, the classic "Bazinian" account argued for the realism of cinematographic images based on the causal-indexical link between image and object; hence the moral and aesthetic claims for the virtues of realism as maintaining greater fidelity to the unity of space and time consonant with our experience, and for using long-takes to respect the relational unity between interacting individuals situated within an identifiable place or locale. In a novel inversion of current debates, Brown argues that there is, despite appearances to the contrary, a specific kind of realism that pertains to digital images: one that involves the eschewal of cuts and maintenance of (intensified) continuity that is no longer confined to the perceptual and experiential boundaries of a human subject or cognitive agent. This kind of digital realism, which expands the boundaries and intensity of perception, may not be a form of causal or indexical realism but rather a (prosthetically-mediated) perceptual realism that is consistent with the implications of the "new physics." This perceptual realism insists, as did Bazin, on the (complex) unity of space and time (where the boundaries of our perception of space-time have been considerably augmented by digital images). It also signals a return to the long take film (Sokurov's *Russian Ark* [2002], for example), in which the technical limitations of analogue film are overcome, and the possibilities of a unified space and plural horizons of time are explored more fully in relation to memory, history, and cultural experience. Indeed, this intensified form of digital continuity (as Bordwell has observed) can now be taken to an extreme, thanks to the manipulability of the digital image, which opens up different conceptions of time and space than those implicitly at play within analogue cinema. Following Deleuze, Brown this links this complex, mediated form of digital realism with the "Riemannian spaces of general relativity" (50) that resonates strongly with Deleuze's account of the shift from movement- to time-image cinema.

What follows from this, moreover, is a strong emphasis on the non-anthropocentric character of digital cinema (51 ff.): it is genuinely "post-humanist" in the sense of moving beyond the confines of an anthropocentric perspective on the world in order to reveal new levels and aspects of reality that would ordinarily remain inaccessible, imperceptible, or unintelligible. One might object that cinema has always had this anti-anthropocentric tendency, even in its

analogue or pre-digital forms. Brown's point, however, is that analogue cinema had to conceal this tendency or else is forced to simulate it, whereas it is intrinsic or immanent to digital cinema given its emancipation from the limitations of indexicality and materiality (it can depict the animated world of subatomic molecularity as well as cosmic space-time as co-existing on the same plane of vital matter-energy in motion). Digital cinema has the capacity to move beyond a fixed anthropocentric view of the world, and towards the exploration of a dynamic "process metaphysics" of continuous transformation (Deleuzian "becoming"). Indeed, the digital universe is one of physical becomings in which space and place become profoundly transfigured; digital realism, from this point of view, expresses a relational ontology linking bodies, objects, places, and other disparate elements. The result is a blurring of boundaries between conventional notions of inside and outside (regarding bodies and spaces), evident in digital cinema's capacity to depict a "passing through matter" that can reveal a vitalist molecular level of reality in which all things are interconnected (revealing unified timespaces that enfold various dimensions—like in *Fight Club* or *The Matrix* (1999)—rather than discrete locations in space-time to which we are perceptually confined) (65-72). Hence the importance of *morphing* in digital cinema, as a technical-aesthetic feature of digital imagery that also expresses a vitalist ontology of continuous transformation (72-76). This mutation of fixed notions of identity, Brown remarks, has its corollary in a renewed exploration of other aspects of identity, notably with respect to gender (76 ff.).

In Chapter Three Brown moves to an exploration of time and multiple temporalities within digital cinema (81 ff.). Cinema no longer posits a human figure at the centre of the world, but rather a posthumanist world in which space is revealed in its molecular plurality, where bodies and events exist in a condition of continuous transformation, and where human agents are "enworlded" by their environment rather than separated from it (as a figure against a ground). This is coupled with the emergence of specific experiences of time, what Brown calls multiple "temporalities", understood as "the different rhythms, speeds, and tempos at which we and all other matter exists" (81). One of the effects of this shift towards multiple temporalities is a reclaiming of spectacle—not only visual but spatial and temporal—as central to the experience of digital cinema, which therefore tends, across a variety of genres, towards a disruption of the cause-effect logic governing "classical" narrative cinema.

Spectacle is liberated from narrative demands and thus opens up multiple coexisting temporalities that need not be confined to a linear cause-effect trajectory defining the coherence of more conventional narrative cinema.

Brown develops this idea further with regard to the Deleuzian distinction between two notions of time (100 ff.): *Chronos* (the chronological sense of time as an orderly, linear, irreversible succession of present moments); and *Aeon* (the "totality" of time in which past, present, and future coexist as virtual, interrelated elements), which are mapped on to the Deleuzian concepts of the movement-image (*Chronos*) and time-image (*Aeon*) respectively. By rendering time, and different temporalities, "visible" through digital morphing and animation techniques—the "ramping effect" familiar from *The Matrix*, in which a figure or object is rendered immobile, while others or the "camera" itself move around it, an effect that both "freezes" and opens up the different temporalities within the image—digital images can be said to express, Brown argues, a "spatialisation of time" (104), that is, making time visible in ways that would ordinarily remain inaccessible or imperceptible to us. These digital forms of "time-image," for Brown, are part of the "chaotic aesthetics" of digital cinema (105 ff.); a paradoxical cinematic aesthetic attuned to the microcausal (or "quasi-causal") relations between disparate objects and events (the "butterfly effect" in chaos theory) as well as to the complexity of relations defining natural phenomena in a multidimensional universe (from fractal geometry and strange attractors to quantum uncertainty and nonlinear causality).

Brown's fascinating speculations on the links between contemporary science and digital cinema reach their apogee with his discussion of time (understood as *Chronos* and as *Aeon*), and exploration of the ways in which these concepts might intersect with notions of parallel universes and possible worlds within contemporary physics (and metaphysics). Time-travel movies, for example, have for a long time explored the possibilities of time-travel paradoxes, and for Brown this is in keeping with digital cinema's commitment to a relational ontology of continuous becoming and multiple temporalisations that put into question the "natural attitude" of ordinary consciousness confined to a particular point in time and space. Not only precursor films like Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) but digital explorations of time such as *Russian Ark*, *Run Lola Run* (1998), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *Source Code* (2011), and *Eternal Sunshine of the*

Spotless Mind (2004) express this "supercinematic" logic of coexisting temporalities, giving viewers a virtual experience of chaos, complexity, and of "time itself" through nonlinear, spectacular forms of narration.

The "film-spectator-world" assemblage is the subject of Chapter Four (123 ff.), which again brings together Deleuzian insights with cognitivist theory, positing an account of embodied spectatorship that, in a manner recalling recent "extended mind" and 4E cognitive theory, incorporates body/brain, the cinematic apparatus, and world into a complex composite "body" (or assemblage) that more accurately reflects the "logic" of digital cinematic experience. What follows is a fascinating exploration of cinematic spectatorship "in terms of time and thought," drawing on cognitive psychology and neuroscience (but also on Deleuze) in order to argue that cinematic experience is always "philosophical" because it involves the production of thought, that is, the co-production of consciousness between observer and observed. Taking up Deleuze's account of the cinematic cliché—understood a perceptually habitual, cognitively motivated, action-oriented image of a thing—Brown argues, contra Deleuze, that parody can succeed in "emptying" the cliché, recasting or transforming its metaphorical/horizon-orientating function, and thus opening it up to thought and transformation (124-127). Indeed, the fact that consciousness is always embodied suggests that there remains a powerful potential within sensory-motor images (Deleuze's clichés) to effect thought through their manipulation or transformation (repetition, variation, or parody).

Brown goes on to argue, moreover, that Deleuze's claims concerning the time-image as arising from the "break in sensory-motor perception" or the transcendence of it towards time- or thought-images is impossible (129 ff.). Indeed, Deleuze is even accused of reverting to an implicit dualism between body and thought in his contrasting valorisation of time-images (and thought-images) as "transcending" the sensory-motor action schema that would define all forms of embodied cognition (129-130). This is an important point since it would seem to undermine Brown's earlier claims concerning the importance of time-images and thought-images in relation to the experience of multiple temporalities and the consonance between digital cinema and the vitalist materialism of the new physics. One could query, moreover, whether what Deleuze is arguing for is a "break" in, or "transcendence" of, the sensory-motor

schema altogether, or rather a shift away from its instrumentalist, action-oriented character in favour of an emphasis on affect and thought and more complex experiences of time. Contemplation, affect, mood, and reflective thinking do not necessarily imply a radical transcendence of our embodied (but also embedded, extended, and enactive) modes of cognition but rather a modulation or modification of these processes in favour of alternative modes of cognitive engagement that are usually backgrounded (or "offline") in more action-oriented forms of comportment.

Nonetheless, Brown does explore, through images of "stillness" (135 ff.), the possibility of cinema invoking a more contemplative stance towards movement and time, as well as other aesthetic dimensions of the image, than we would otherwise experience. At the same time, he insists that the same potential for provoking an experience of time and thought can also be found with the acceleration of the image in contemporary forms of action-film. This meeting of extremes, according to Brown, is typical of the paradoxical logic of digital images. What contemporary digital cinema reveals, moreover, is the inevitable "blurring" of the distinction between movement- and time-images, and a significant aestheticisation of "novelty" in perceptual, affective, and cognitive experience. Not only contemporary art cinema (like Philippe Grandrieux) but digital blockbusters (like *Transformers*, 2007) are capable of exploring an "aesthetics of chaos" (Beugnet) that emphasises "thought as the consciousness of novelty" (140). In this sense, a digital cinema, across a variety of genres, is capable of expressing both (active and passive) dimensions of spectatorship as a complex cognitive-affective process of experiencing our "enworlded" relationship with reality. Finally, Brown offers some concluding thoughts on the ethical dimensions of digital cinema, advocating a "loving" or sophophilic relationship to film (and by extension, towards the world) that opens up a deeper appreciation of our "enworlded" nature.

This brief summary of some of the ideas explored in *Supercinema* hardly does justice to the richness and breadth of the book's original insights. It amply fulfils its aim to offer a film-philosophy adequate to the challenges of the digital age, responding conceptually to the profound changes we are experiencing in cinema as a consequence of the digital revolution. And it does so through a brilliant engagement with the possibilities of interdisciplinary "convergence"

between philosophy, cognitivism, phenomenology, and the new sciences. Anyone working across these fields will find rich material for critical reflection in this remarkably original and accomplished book. Let me conclude, however, with a few questions suggested by its overall argumentation that may be worth exploring further.

The first is a methodological question concerning the relationship between Brown's (hybrid Deleuzian) film-philosophy and the new physics/cognitive sciences in relation to digital cinema. Are we to take these as expressing a productive parallel between different theoretical perspectives, or is there a more substantive "grounding" of film-philosophy in the sciences at play in his account? Brown is careful to avoid arbitrary borrowing from the sciences, offering various argumentative justifications for why he has drawn upon theoretical work ranging from cognitive psychology and neuroscience to quantum physics and complexity theory. Nonetheless, one may want to know more about the relationship between these theoretical perspectives and the film-philosophical claims Brown articulates concerning digital cinema. Does the philosophical theorisation of digital cinema require a "grounding" in ideas from the sciences, or is the relationship between these approaches more productive when understood as a theoretical "parallelism"? How are these theoretical approaches related conceptually to the kind of film-philosophy Brown advocates?

A related issue concerns what the "mediating" level of the body (the brain and embodied cognition) in Brown's relational account of the film-spectator-world assemblage. The book explores in impressive detail the implications of digital film (drawing on film-philosophy and film theory) and consonant ways of understanding the complex reality of the physical world (drawing on physics, chaos theory, and so on); but it is less focused on the embodied spectator's cognitive/neurological as well as phenomenological-psychological experience of (digital) images. Although there are a number of references in this direction, one could ask how recent work in neuro-cognitivism, for example, bears on our experience and understanding of digital cinema (in respect of affect, perception, cognition, and evaluation). More specifically, what is the relationship between "the brain" in Deleuze's *Cinema* books (the intriguing Bergsonian idea of the brain as "image") and the more familiar "physicalist" accounts of the brain

within neurocognitivism? Although it appears that we are talking about the same thing, Deleuze's "Bergsonian" account of the brain does not appear to be "physicalist" in any straightforward sense. Finally, given the theoretical richness of Brown's digital film-philosophy, a more extended and elaborated film case study would have been very welcome. The key film examples he discusses are fascinating and apposite in the context of his various theoretical discussions, but also leave the reader with a desire to know how his digital film-philosophy works in relation to more sustained film analyses.

These questions are raised in a partisan spirit of admiration and acknowledgment of the remarkable achievement of *Supercinema*, one of the most intellectually rich and theoretically creative books one can read on the relationship between cinema and philosophy. I can only agree with Brown's conclusion, which also inspires his book, that reports of the death of cinema thanks to digital culture are greatly exaggerated. *Supercinema* shows us, with lucidity and intensity, how film-philosophy and cinema are both "with us and with the world," how they have survived as a living and mutating force, superhuman almost, one that "seems to have remerged, evolved, capable now of more than it was before" (156).