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Filming Concepts, Thinking Images: On Wonder, Montage and Disruption in an Image-Saturated World

Abstract:
This article explores the relation between cinema and philosophy through the lens of interest shown by some filmmakers in the lives and works of philosophers. It begins by delving into contemporary perspectives on the relationship between philosophy and cinema. In order to assess how the constitutive dissimilarity of the two terms and the ways in which they can be brought together are at the origin of speculative short circuits and experiences of wonder, it brings together the works of thinkers – Cavell, Benjamin, and Kracauer; and filmmakers Rossellini, Montaldo, Keaton, and Jarman. Reflecting on the aesthetic and cultural impact of cinema is all the more important given the current omnipresence of images and prosthetic technologies that, with their incessant solicitations, threaten the processes of apprehension, learning, and conveying of knowledge. Thinking and perceiving differently thus becomes an essential function of cinema, one keenly performed in Safaa Fathy's *Derrida's Elsewhere*, analyzed in the last two sections.

Keywords:
film, philosophy, wonder, speculative short circuit, montage, disruption

> *In the end, the theatre is inhabited by wonder, the starting point of all movement and all bewilderment (and of course, all philosophizing). What is bewilderment if not the sudden appearance of a reverse angle – a crucial point in editing – that is, a turnabout of glances in which we "take part"? What is it if not a sudden overrunning of boundaries, abandoning of paradigms, models, stability, itineraries – evidently, towards other boundaries, paradigms, models, stability and itineraries: yet always keeping faith with the transit and querying and re-thinking of our own story.*
>
> Roberto Escobar, "Immagini di libertà"

1. Introducing the Survey

Surveying the relation between cinema and philosophy through the lens of the interest shown by some filmmakers in the lives and work of certain philosophers means having to maneuver within an implied comparison and consequent translation of theories and specific languages, while always remembering the issues that each of these theories and languages brings along with it.[1] What follows is the development of such a survey, taking as its starting point the conviction that the constitutive dissimilarity between philosophy and cinema and the ways in which they can be brought together are at the origin of *short circuits* (aesthetic and epistemic, conceptual and imaginative) that prove to be highly productive from a cognitive, artistic and anthropological perspective. These short circuits, understood both as sparks of wonder and bewilderment – and thus as a fundamental part of the reflective roots of philosophy – and as convergences between reflective and sensorial approaches, can be said to widen cinema's horizon of possibilities and the way in which it becomes thinkable through its intersection with other ways of thinking and experiencing images. Reflecting on the philosophical, aesthetic and cultural impact of cinema is all the more important given the current omnipresence of images and prosthetic technologies that, through an ambivalent perspective of timeless time and the immobile speed of instantaneity, transfer our experience of the present to an epistemological suspension that reflects the progressive flattening of processes of prehension, learning, and conveying knowledge. This has profound consequences for how we construct memories and experience other complex processes such as forgetfulness and grief, which entail the paradoxes and negotiations that lie between presence and absence. Making us think and perceive differently thus becomes an essential function of cinema in an image-saturated world, one that is all the more relevant as the cognitive and creative strength of cinema, and its capacity to realize imaginative visions, is enhanced by its relationship with philosophical topics and some of its most notorious figures.[2]

2. Looking for Films and/as Philosophy in an Image-Saturated World

Philosophical and cinematic theories, written and audiovisual languages, different creative materialities and forms of experience, all testify to the reciprocal irreducibility of diverse disciplinary principles. This consti-

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2) Some sections of our article pick up on topics that are addressed in Vania Baldi's "Girare i concetti, pensare le immagini: corto-circuiti speculativi cuciti sullo schermo," *Filmcronache*, n°2, Torino: Ed. Effatà, 2004. Our aim is to tackle and relaunch the relationship between cinema and philosophy – with its heuristic perspectives, in an era where imaginary and cultural practices are increasingly digitalized – and, at the same time, the role that films on the lives and works of philosophers can play on the horizon of this "image-saturated world."

tutive dissimilarity has often functioned both as a source of mutual fascination and as a stimulus to subvert disciplinary boundaries and amplify what is doable and thinkable in each area.

Providing an overview of the historical course of such reflections on the relation between cinema and philosophy means returning more or less to the start of cinema itself. The questions that have usually been asked in this short span of time, little more than a century, have all been on philosophical topics such as the relation between reality and the reproduction of reality, the cognitive potential of cinematic media, the representability of abstract ideas, the creation and spectacularization of the collective imaginary, its educational or even coercive role in the formation of sentiments and behaviors, and the informative and exploratory dimensions to which cinema has contributed by allowing access to multiple contexts – emotional, behavioral and experiential.

In addition to these theoretical queries, which permeate the entire history of cinema, there are others closer to film theory, practice, and experience. The latter (relatively more recent) explorations have led to the publication of numerous articles and books and to the creation of new disciplines and areas of research focused on the relationship between philosophy and cinema.[3] From a methodological point of view, they oscillate between approaches that are more markedly Anglo-American, often analytic-cognitive in nature, and approaches that are more firmly rooted in so-called continental thought – extremes that do not fail to contaminate each other, even more so when, as so often occurs, they analyze the same filmic objects. What these studies and disciplinary areas share is the aim of thinking philosophically at the intersection between fundamental theoretical questions and what emerges from our experience of film.

In this increasingly wider field of research, there are many ways of framing the relationship between cinema and philosophy. Robert Sinnerbrink, for example, proposes three topics:

> The analytic-cognitivist turn in film theory; an alternative stream (inspired by Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze) that explores how film and philosophy respond to shared problems (film-philosophy); and the idea of "film as philosophy" (that films not only illustrate but can "do" philosophy in their own way).[4]

The second case (film-philosophy) conceives of an intimate connection between the two terms in the sense that both respond in different ways to the same underlying problems, which in turn contributes to expanding their respective fields and disciplinary boundaries.[5]

Jerry Goodenough, on the other hand, provides a spectrum that ranges from the notion of "film as illustrating philosophy" to the notion of "film as philosophy," while also identifying an intermediate case, indeed the one that most interests us here, concerning films about philosophical theories and philosophers. But perhaps more pertinent than clear-cut distinctions is the overlap between the two terms and the experimental ways in which they can be combined: "A film need not occupy a single narrowly-defined place on this spectrum: a particularly rich film might spread itself along from illustration to film as philosophy."[6]

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3) Without any attempt at exhaustiveness, it is worth mentioning the journal *Film-philosophy* (founded in 1997) and books such as: Frampton, *Filmosophy*; Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality*; Herzogenrath, *Film as Philosophy*. In general, each offers a wide-ranging overview of various theories, authors and approaches, from the beginnings of reflection on cinema to contemporary discussions.

4) Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, viii–ix.

5) Sinnerbrink returns to this idea in "Filmosophy/Film as Philosophy," 513–39.

6) Goodenough, "Introduction I: A Philosopher Goes to the Cinema," 3.

We do not intend to contribute to this debate here or to propose a new set of categories and relations. For our purposes, we wish merely to note that in recent decades, rather than simply reflecting on cinema, theorists have begun to think about cinema, in cinema, thanks to cinema, and therefore with cinema. This is the result of the gradual intersection of the respective curiosities of the two disciplines and the theoretical experiments that followed. On the part of a certain sort of philosophy, there has been an attempt to study and legitimize cinema as a thought event, as a conceptual practice, thus provoking critical self-reflection on one's own way of creating concepts and reasoning about reality, in other words, approaching the hypothesis that philosophizing can be like *thinking cinematographically*. On the part of a certain sort of cinema, by contrast, the encounter with philosophical thought has been registered in reflections on the heuristic potential of cinema, toward a possible framework for *philosophical cinema*.[7]

As we will see in our examination of Derek Jarman's film on Wittgenstein and Safaa Fathy's film on (and with) Derrida, it is also possible to conceive of and make a film about a philosopher such that one creates *film as philosophy*. On this topic, we could also add titles such as Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001), Sophie Fiennes's *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), and Michel Gondry's *Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy?* (2010). *Waking Life*, while it is not focused on a particular philosopher, is a good example of a film that experimentally performs a series of philosophical discussions (in a dream-like context that disrupts the everyday normality of its main character). The second and the third focus on Slavoj Žižek and the fourth on Noam Chomsky. Although they are decidedly philosophical, one would have to analyze each of these films individually in order to determine whether and in what sense they can be considered examples of *film as philosophy*. From the outset, a film that "would not be merely didactic, hortatory, or propagandistic, but that could be considered a relatively autonomous philosophical work."[8] After all, is philosophical experience the exclusive domain of the written word, or is it possible to establish correlations with traditional language and the world of images, sounds, bodies and spaces? And can philosophical writing have an affinity with film and its methods of writing and editing? In answering these questions, one should focus not so much on the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries as on the common paths dictated by similar *principles* and the ensuing philosophical experience running through the experimental methods – conceptual, sensorial and poetic – employed in certain films.

Before analyzing examples, however, it is necessary to clarify how the poetic motifs and theoretical strategies pursued in such films relate to contemporary discussions concerning the crisis of the autonomy of images and their devaluation. A certain loss of power on the part of cinematographic images seems paradoxically to be revealed by the visual overstimulation produced by the constant remixing of hypermedia images, by televised live events, by advertising, by the entire universe of images available on the internet, and by digital platforms that give the spectator increasing and overwhelming access to films. This creates an optical bulimia that seems to compromise the singular and intrinsic value of visual cinema products. According to Walter Benjamin's prognosis in the first decades of the twentieth century, the technical reproducibility that is inherent to cinema, as a mass art, contributes to weakening the singularity and cult character of works of art.[9] More contemporaneously, the almost immediate availability of the film object, resulting from its digital production and distribution, has contributed to weakening the very experience of cinema-going, which for all intents and purposes still maintains a certain cult-like character, involving an interruption of daily life, in addition to containing

7) For a further, thorough discussion of "how a film can philosophize" (from the perspective of Deleuzian thinking), see Viegas, "Deleuze and Film's Philosophical Value," 271–86.

8) Perniola, *Art and its Shadow*, 34.

9) Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," 101–33.

corporal and social elements that are difficult to replicate in home cinemas and similar forms of entertainment and spectacle. This is not a matter of looking at these transformations in an absolutely negative way but of being aware of the gains and losses they entail.

Against this background, how can we expect and demand the making of films that have a fundamentally different linguistic-visual quality from the everyday? Which expressive experiences should we draw on to avoid the narcotizing, bludgeoning effects of banal images proffered by the diffusion of techno-media on our ability to experience wonder and to admire? These questions lead us indirectly toward the search for the *type* of theoretical prerequisite, common to filmography and philosophy, that is under discussion.

3. On Socrates, Giordano Bruno and The Missing Philosophy

To better identify this prerequisite and how it allows for the convergence of poetics and theoretical strategy, we will discuss examples of films on philosophy which, by contrast, indicate and confirm the need for such an investigation. Two such examples are Roberto Rossellini's *Socrates* (1970) and Giuliano Montaldo's *Giordano Bruno* (1974), films on the lives of two "heretics" who, while condemned to death for their "free" thinking, proved transgressive (because of their insidiousness) vis-à-vis the ruling culture of their respective times. Both films portray the main elements of the characters' biographies while providing commentary on their methods and ideas, including quotations of their philosophy, and both can be assessed as substantially didactic and academic such that it is unsurprising that they commonly circulate in schools and are used to support the teaching of pedagogical and philosophical subjects.

Although the educational value and historiographic effort of these cinematic works is evident, it is difficult to maintain that there is any philosophical reflection, or at least any such sensibility, behind their staging. Undoubtedly present, however, is that operation of piecing together, of segmentation-composition, that is present in all linguistic-creational meaning, which therefore requires a certain mutual familiarity between the two disciplinary fields. Yet here too, we must highlight the fact, in advance of Jacques Derrida, that there is film editing and then there is *film editing*.

This is not a question of rehashing, this time in the context of cinema, the old debate on philosophy and narration or of carrying out a simple transfer from one linguistic register to another. The piecing together on the screen of the two conceptual characters of Socrates and Giordano Bruno is not, therefore, originally philosophical, as it would be were the aim to find ways to put the invisible into the scene of the visible, to think (this time) not *about* philosophy but *in* and *with* philosophy.

Hence our focus will be those cinematic operations that aim to ensure that the film reality does not represent its philosophical content (that is the subject of the film), *in a merely detached way*; so that it does not rest content with a neutral staging or illustration of the speculative product, but is instead *part* of the philosophical content which tends to correspond in its "writing" to the practical-creative *ethos* that underlies any theory that generates sense. Our focus will be cinema operations in which the film reality therefore has the power to come across as a radically different reality, capable of awakening in us a certain state of bewilderment, or even a disruptive experience within daily life – an experience that is not reducible to a mimetic, in the sense of merely *reproductive*, relationship with that outside reality.[10]

10) The idea of cinema *as reality* rather than as a fictional or illusory representation of the real is upheld most strongly by Gilles Deleuze in his two volumes on cinema (see Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-image* and *Cinema 2. The Time-image*). According to Deleuze, cinema is not simply an object worthy of thought but the very subject of thought and philosophy creating effects in reality.

4. Film and the Experience of the Worldhood of the World

These remarks have outlined the *type* of poetic and theoretical principles that underlie films that reflect on, and are reflected on by philosophy. Before passing on to further examples, we must first ask: what is the philosophical experience that constitutes the basic short circuit within this cinematographic thinking; is it an experience that is, in turn, substantially philosophical?

A rewarding (and emblematic) intervention in this regard comes from the philosopher and cinema theoretician Stanley Cavell. In an appendix to one of his books on Hollywood comedies after the Second World War, significantly entitled *Film in the University*, Cavell motivates his project of setting up degree courses in cinema within philosophy faculties, drawing on a juxtaposition between an important aspect of Heidegger's thinking and a recurrent approach taken in silent film comedies.[11] The connecting point is offered in reference to Heidegger's notion of "the worldhood of the world" (*die Weltlichkeit der Welt*), a notion that provides the title for the third chapter of *Being and Time*. In this chapter, Being-in-the-World, in other words, the fundamental state in what the German philosopher calls *Dasein*, makes its appearance. Heidegger:

> Makes Being-in-the-World first visible as a phenomenon for his special analysis by drawing out, in his way, the implications of our ability to carry on certain simple forms of work, using simple tools in an environment defined by those tools (he calls it a work-world). (This is not unlike the imagery in the opening sections of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.) It is upon the disturbing or disruption of such carryings on, say by a tool's breaking or by finding something material missing – above all in the disturbing of the kind of perception or absorption that these activities require (something that is at once like attention and like inattention) that, according to Heidegger, a particular form of awareness is called forth.[12]

This "supervening awareness *of* the worldhood of the world" indicates that an instrumental and functional absorption in the objects and activities of the "work-world" veils the very totality with which, according to Heidegger's conception, "the world announces itself." Through the interruption or disruption of the former relations, one discovers what was always there, as well as other modes of Being-in-the-World. Furthermore, the affinity between this specific philosophical concept and film, particularly film comedies, is made clearer if one focuses on Heidegger's characterization of this supervening awareness "as a mode of sight that allows us to see the things of the world in what he calls their conspicuousness, their obtrusiveness, and their obstinacy."[13] Cavell thus expresses his intention:

> [To] work out the idea that the comic figure whose modes of perception best fit Heidegger's phenomenological account in this early passage of his work is Buster Keaton. It is in Keaton's silent absorption with things (not, say, in Chaplin's) that what is unattended to is the worldhood of the world announcing itself (in the form, for example, of entire armies retreating and advancing behind his just-turned back). *I should like to work this out in contributing to a philosophical curriculum as well.*[14]

11) Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 265–74.

12) Ibid., 271.

13) Ibid., 272.

14) Ibid., (our italics).

If considered independently of the various connections that Cavell has always drawn between cinema and philosophy, this parallelism between Keaton and Heidegger's worldhood of the world may appear arbitrary, since it approaches philosophical reflections on cinema that originally arose in order to reason about other things. And, as Cavell himself points out when imagining the reasons that might be cited against such a *philosophical curriculum*, it can nonetheless be regarded as an illustration of prior ideas or preoccupations that tend to dismiss what films can specifically teach us.[15] This argument would seem to be unfair given the particular framework that Cavell is building, not only because he is quite conscious of the exploratory character of his proposal, but also because of the respect he shows for films themselves. Still, it is undeniable that the "threat of illustration" and the danger of artificially and forcibly applying theories to cinematographic elements can easily haunt philosophical approaches to film, which is why they should always be counterbalanced with attention to individual films, their features, and the experiences they foster.

The question of the experience we have of either a philosophical work or a film is a fundamental aspect of any further confluence between the two, one that entails being guided by the experiential moment but not subjugated by it, leaving room for the conceptual to espouse the experiential. In this sense, Cavell states in the introduction to *The Pursuits of Happiness* that the best way to focus on experience and to overcome the sheer application of philosophical theory "is to let the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it."[16] The cinematographic object in particular has the capacity to awaken a teaching and an actual desire for speculation; after all, there is a deeper affinity between philosophy and cinema, sustained by the inherently self-reflexive character of the latter, which thus "takes itself as an inevitable part of its craving for speculation."[17]

Returning to the affinity between Heidegger and Keaton, one might add that it is the revealing of the philosophical constitutive of cinema since it represents and is perceived as an experience of epiphany in which we discover something about ourselves and the world. This experience is the outcome of a convergence between specific philosophical concepts *and* filmic elements and genres that fall under the guiding thread of the *worldhood of the world*.

5. Benjamin, Kracauer and the Philosophical and Cultural Role of Cinema

We find further, decisive confirmation of the justification linking the philosophical *principium* to the film *principium*[18] on another path of research. The reply to issues regarding the *cultural emblem* of the double ancestry of film production and the production of philosophical texts comes from theoretical contributions from authors such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer (ground-breakers and forerunners of studies on the nascent mass and consumer society). Such work identifies a relation between the appearance of "photogenetic" techniques and the anthropological transformation of modern man and his imaginary.[19]

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15) Ibid., 272–73.

16) Ibid., 10.

17) Ibid., 13–14.

18) In *L'amore del pensiero*, 38, Carchia writes: "As Josef Pieper wrote – 'wonder is not simply the beginning of philosophy in the sense of the *initium*, the first stage, the preliminary stage of any given knowledge' to come. Rather, 'wonder is the *principium*, the origin, constant and eternal, of philosophy.' Now, this *principium* … generates and inspires research, in a questioning that, *circularly*, always returns to the affirmation of the primacy of the object, reconfirming the wonder, acknowledging and admitting – as Jankélévitch would say – the mystery of the *quodditas*" (our translation). Does this succession of extraordinary reflections represent the short circuit that we are seeking – the short circuit between *that idea* of cinema and *that idea* of philosophy on which the reciprocal fascination mentioned at the start of this paper *is founded*?

19) Buñuel's words set the tone for this section: "The intuition of film, its cinematic embryo, comes to life in that process called découpage.

The reflections of these two authors are both fundamental and foundational to a new sensibility and *epistemic* propositional approach (essential for specifying which cinema and which philosophy is being alluded to when referring to their most *cultured* relationship). This epistemic condition is outlined in the authors' emphasis on those de-subjectivizing shock experiences (caused by the novel exposure to accelerated urban and technical metamorphoses that were first seen in their time) that are endowed with a central theoretical dimension with respect to more ordinary *lived* experiences. Effectual conditions are thus created to promote access to that philosophical experience that has bewilderment and the impersonal feeling of being suspended as its highest aspiration in its relations with the things of the world.

Siegfried Kracauer[20] understood the essence of cinema as a philosophical "view from outside," a viewpoint that is external and alien to needs and wishes, almost as if this alienation marked the entry into an experience that constitutes an alternative to everyday life. In his seminal reflections on photography, which are also intrinsically related to his understanding of film, Kracauer pointed to photography's capacity to present what he calls "mute nature," a nature not inhabited by consciousness. Faced with this unheard-of matter, consciousness freed from old natural bonds, has a unique opportunity to reconfigure human experience, which implies not only the transformation of artistic categories but also new forms of experiencing reality and amplifying its historical and cultural dimensions. By diving into the details and disrupting the correlation between spatial elements, photography opens up the possibility of different associations between these same elements; this is something that is deepened in a particular way in cinema, where this power of association is reminiscent of *dreams*.[21] In sum, the strangeness originating in the fragments of cinematographic images, torn from reality and assembled according to novel configurations, concerns the visible world and "physical reality" while adding formative elements to it that open up to the *unforeseen*.

Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" gives fundamental support to this idea. Through an examination of the passage from the traditional work of art to modern forms of art, such as photography and cinema, Benjamin's glimpses of a profound transformation in sense perception can be identified: the camera and the movie camera capture images that escape the natural eye, which finds itself spurred on to reposition and identify itself in the technological device, adopting the latter as a sensory prosthesis. To explain this experience, Benjamin coined the term "optical unconsciousness":

> Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. "Other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. *It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.*[22]

Segmentation. Creation. Excising one thing to turn it into another. What before was not, now is. Style. The simplest and the most complicated way to reproduce, to create. From the amoeba to a symphony." Buñuel, "Découpage, or Cinematic Segmentation," 131–32.

20) Kracauer, *Theory of Film*.

21) Kracauer, "Photography," 47–63.

22) Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," 117 (our italics). Some of Kracauer's comments

Such perceptive and sensitive transformations are far-reaching, and Benjamin and Kracauer present their revolutionary potential. They shift both our perception of nearness and distance and indeed the very notion of reality (not only fictional reality), which takes on illusory-phantasmal features on the one hand and hypernaturalistic features on the other. Taken to the extreme, this shift in perspective not only leads us to see *another*, *different* reality in the cinema projection but also provides entry to an *altering* experience in which we see ourselves as aliens.

On this note, Benjamin's essay on Kafka argues that modern man, increasingly subjected to technically mediated experiences, is unable to recognize his own recorded voice and his own filmed gait. For Benjamin, the paradoxical power of recording and reproductive technologies, particularly film, contributes to a context of estrangement, which is an important driving force of Kafka's literary work and its effort to make sense of a fragmented world.[23] One can add that the possibility of *making sense* in a fragmented world is also a quality of film itself; there is a redemptive promise rooted in the technological apparatus and its alienating effects. It is the heterogeneous way in which this alienating amazement is made productive and is structured that marks the cultural emblem of some of the most interesting short circuits between filmographic and philosophical research.

6. Wittgenstein and Derrida: The Unrepresentable and the Ghosts Within Montage

As a means of illustrating that cinematography which, translating from a traditionally philosophical (written) language to an audiovisual language, renews the tension of philosophy-making rather than betraying it; we will consider two films on Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida, respectively – films made by authors with a consolidated relationship with philosophy.

The film *Wittgenstein* (1993) was directed by Derek Jarman, known as a painter and a consistent experimenter with a film language that takes it for granted that "the movie camera is silent,"[24] for which reason the images, data, colors, and sounds that it shows us must first of all achieve their own expressive-conceptual autonomy. The film's screenwriter is the English philosopher Terry Eagleton. It presents the quandary of how someone ought to represent the life of a thinker who undermined our hypotheses about representation. "Ludwig found a black hole in his words. This is why no language existed."[25] How should film form be structured in a topic such as language, which for Wittgenstein was not a representation of the world but part of it? How should film be used to explore the shaping, in public, of our most intimate experiences?[26] The film uses a black background against which stand out the fiery colors of clothes, of things, of all that *makes* life, and the "form of life" of those who are standing around (among them Bertrand Russell and John Maynard Keynes); Wittgenstein is grey in color (so much grief in Wittgenstein's life) and the whole work filmed in a single studio with no outside shots:

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on cinema's capacity to discover and reveal something to us about the world can be directly related to Benjamin's characterization of optical unconscious: "any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before." (Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 48). On the relation between the two authors, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience* and Gilloch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, 189–201.

23) Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," 814. On the de-subjectivating experience connected to the appearance of technological prosthesis, see Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*.

24) Jarman, *Questo non è un film di Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 51.

25) Ibid., 52.

26) Ibid. "Ludwig used to think that language was a series of images. Later on, after seeing many films, he gave up this notion."

> Cheap black drapes and gaudy colors. Always the same costumes or clothes, but changing color. Ludwig grey and Cambridge full of dots, friends in high definition… . Floors and walls of the small studio draped as if for a funeral. An infinity of black. The minimum of props and installations. Light blues, reds, violets. Only one set is scenically elaborate… . *Invisible words re-focused*. Galileo's telescope. Newton's prism. Glass. Negative. The lens of the Hubble telescope and the lens of the movie camera… . My film neither portrays Ludwig nor betrays him. It aims to open a breach. It is logical.[27]

Jarman's emotional ethos, imaginative and whimsical, pervades a script that, sewn onto the screen, makes the vision of the drama and the contradictions (black and vivid colors) of Wittgenstein's philosophical travail as visually interesting as it is intellectually challenging.

As for the 1999 film on Derrida, entitled *D'ailleurs Derrida* (*Derrida's Elsewhere*), the director is the philosopher Safaa Fathy.[28] The film was shot in Paris, Algeria, Spain, and California; all places without narrative continuity that overlap and fragment each other in the vision of the film. To each place, a conversation: on memory and grief, on teaching and religion, on hospitality and forgiveness … topics that are woven together and that become confused, confirming a principle of Derrida's research: the infinity and impossibility of each "auto-bio-grapho-philosophy."[29] Here too, the aim is not to deal with the philosophy of the person who is the subject of the film, but rather to outline the *principle* of his philosophy, which emerges throughout the film itself. This aligns with the basic idea that cinema can be a *presentation without representation*, a registration of the movement of the world.

In the film we hear that "writing is infinity, and that means there is always exclusion. Each editing session always ends up in alluding to an 'out of field,' something the language forces us to leave out, that the code does not contain and that finishes up, quite simply, by not existing, yet hovering," like a ghost. Cinematic techniques pose questions that Derrida considers decisive for his work (work that reflects on writing as the essence of philosophical work). The film begins with a sequence of words that are key for the French philosopher, and concepts that link the two forms of writing (film and philosophical): the anacoluthon, interruption, ellipsis, trace, quotation, specter, out-of-frame, and so forth.

In what follows, we intersect Derrida's words with brief commentaries that aim to establish links between fundamental topics addressed in the film. Allowing Derrida to speak substantively for himself not only within the film but on it is a risky, but perhaps fair way to do justice to his principle of the ghostly character of *découpage* and montage within cinema and writing:

> There is no real synchronization, but this comparison is important to me. Between writing of the deconstructive type that interests me and cinema, there is an essential link. It is the exploitation in writing, whether it be Plato's, Dante's, or Blanchot's, of all the possibilities of montage, that is, of plays with the rhythms, of grafts of quotations, insertions, changes in tone, changes in language, crossings between "disciplines" and the rules of art, the arts. Cinema, in this domain,

27) Ibid., 53–54.

28) For a comparison of this film with Kirby Dick and Amy Kofman's *Derrida* (2002), a discussion that converges on an analysis of how both manage – more or less successfully – to perform the thought of the philosopher they portray, see Sinnerbrink, "Photobiographies," 59–76.

29) An interview with Derrida for the "Cahiers du cinéma" after the film came out. See de Baecque, Jousse, Derrida, and Kamuf, "Cinema and Its Ghosts," 22–39.

> has no equivalent, except perhaps music. But writing is, as it were, inspired and aspired by this "idea" of montage.[30]

Alluding to the potential for remixing offered by digital technologies, Derrida highlights a further resonance between the different writing techniques:

> Moreover, writing – or let us say discursivity – and cinema are drawn into the same technical and thus aesthetic evolution, that of the increasingly refined, rapid, accelerated possibilities offered by technological renewal (computers, Internet, synthetic images). There now exists, in a certain way, an unequaled offer or demand for deconstruction, in writing as well as in film. The thing is to know what to do with it. Cutting and pasting, recomposition of texts, the accelerating insertion of quotations, everything you can do with a computer, all this brings writing closer and closer to cinematic montage, and vice versa.[31]

And so, continuing on the theme of the relationship between the similarity and translatability of languages, he states:

> What was going to happen with the translation? In principle, words are translatable (although here the experience is daunting at every step), but what links images and words is not, and thus involves some stakes that are quite original. One must accept that, in its cinematic specificity, a film is linked to untranslatable idioms and that translation must take place without losing the cinematic idiom that links the word to the image.[32]

Images from the archives (personal or otherwise) appear, re-evoking dead people who the film brings back to life as in a dream, images that act as alibis for a type of reflection that connects *one* general aspect of the experience of cinema with the work of grief:

> Spectral memory, cinema is a magnificent mourning, a magnified work of mourning. And it is ready to let itself be imprinted by all the memories in mourning, that is to say, by the tragic or epic moments of history… . This solitude in the face of the ghost is a major test of the cinematic experience… . This experience was anticipated, dreamed of, hoped for by the other arts, literature, painting, theater, poetry, philosophy, well before the technical invention of cinema. Let's say that cinema needed to be invented to fulfill a certain desire for relation to ghosts. The dream preceded the invention.[33]

Again, in the film we hear and see Derrida's reflections on the impossibility of his own autography:

> I have managed to say that I am attracted by the loss of identity: autobiography takes for granted a subject that knows how to write. "I" is a pronoun linked to the potential of knowing how to write.

30) Ibid., 33.

31) Ibid.

32) Ibid., 35.

33) Ibid., 28–29.

> Except that it can't be taken for granted that the "I" knows how to narrate. If we knew each other, we would not search for each other. If anyone were able to identify himself, I would not write and therefore I would not be able to live.

Lastly, Derrida seems to tell us and show us that as long as memories continue to bear fruit, anything the world shows us (including a film) can be savored in relation to memories we have stored away, short-circuited in an eternal film that finds its own origin within itself. After all, the images, Derrida explains, are at the same time both like an inscription of memory and like a confiscation of memory:

> It is immediately an inscription, a preservation, either of the image itself at the moment it is taken, or of the memory act that the image speaks of. In the film, *Derrida's Elsewhere,* I evoke the past. There is both the moment *in which* I am speaking and the moment *of which* I am speaking. This already makes for two memories implicated in each other. But since this inscription is exposed to cutting, selection, interpretive choice, it is both a chance and a confiscation, a violent appropriation by both the Author *and* myself. When I speak about my past, whether voluntarily or not, I select, I inscribe, and I exclude. I don't believe there are archives that only preserve; this is something I try to point out in a short book, *Archive Fever.* The archive is a violent initiative taken by some authority, some power; it takes power for the future, it *pre-occupies* the future: it confiscates the past, the present, and the future. Everyone knows there is no such thing as innocent archives.[34]

The topics examined in the film and in Derrida's comments on it show us the complexity and the (im-)possibility of narrating one's own history and thinking, not only because any attempt to do so always involves the "out of frame" of memory, but also because the film itself is an edited image which enters a circuit of thinking, memories, fantasies, visions and ghosts that disrupt the possibility of a mere representation of the life and ideas of the philosopher. While we can agree with Sinnerbrink that Fathy's *Derrida's Elsewhere* – in comparison with Dirk and Kofman's *Derrida* – is "more successful in capturing the performance of thinking through film but at the cost of downplaying the deconstructive performativity that this thought attempts to articulate,"[35] it undoubtedly constitutes an experimental and on the whole successful attempt to bring to light the *principles* of Derrida's philosophy while making them emerge through the film's own *principles*. At play at the center of all this is the ghostly dimension of the philosophical-cinematic experience of *découpage* and montage.

7. Screen of Thought and Filmic Thought

The theme of memory in its relation to autobiography, entailing the paradoxes and negotiations that lie between presence and absence, converges as a short circuit explored cinematographically and philosophically in the film about and with Derrida. If in his text on photography Kracauer already pointed out the ambiguous power of the photographic record in relation to memory, the truth is that today in the age of digital and social networks, photography (in fact, the practice of photographing) is disseminated in an overwhelming way, as a process that instead of fulfilling a salvaging function in the face of oblivion, contributes paradoxically, to oblivion itself. In fact, we are faced with a double metamorphosis of the status of imagetic production, challenged by easy access to technical devices. On the one hand, photographs of every detail of daily life are constantly being taken; they

34) Ibid., 39.

35) Sinnerbrink, "Photobiographies," 73.

can be edited and shared immediately and will remain in memory cards or cloud memories buried by the flow of images, a ceaseless flow of information that serves less and less to consolidate subjective knowledge and cognitive processes. On the other hand, the present is seen from an ambivalent perspective of *timeless time* and the *immobile speed of instantaneity*. Its experience is delegated and transferred by registration systems that imply an epistemological suspension, reflecting the progressive flattening of processes of prehension, learning, and conveying knowledge. Indeed, like the many neuroscientists who for years have warned of an increase in attention, sleep, and memory disorders due to our digital hyper-connectedness to uninterrupted and pervasive flows of hypermedia information, we can trust that technologies registering and caculating everything have substantial effects on memory retention processes and therefore on in-depth thinking and the actions consequent upon it. Following the phenomenological account of memory developed by Bernard Stiegler and Victor Petit in their own way by introducing a third term, tertiary memory, we can think of consciousness as being constituted by primary and secondary retention processes that allow for the integration of significant past experiences into the subject's present and future (protension): "primary retentions are in fact selections, since the flow of consciousness that is you cannot retain everything: what you do retain is what you are, yet what you retain depends on what you have already retained."[36] These complex processes of composition and selection are at the root of memory (and its relationship with personal identity), and they play a fundamental role in our ability to manage the temporal flow of thoughts and actions. On the other hand, the processes that occur through tertiary memory – external memories that rely on increasingly powerful devices and interconnected clouds – seem to weaken the basic processes by which memory and consciousness are constituted, replacing them with a false promise of enduring retention that ends up weakening the cognitive and imaginative faculties. At the same time, and resuming analyses of the cultural relevance of filmic and philosophical principles, the processes by which our experiences are filtered and digitally stored tend to weaken the meaningful selections and "montages" of our stream of consciousness – of our self.

Derrida's Elsewhere, for instance, calls upon a type of reflection that, by combining word and image through montage, problematizes and gives new life to these aesthetic and epistemological, ethical and political questions. As we have seen in the quoted interview, Derrida himself alludes to the potential for remixing offered by digital technologies, which can be connected to the incessant flow of images, but also to the paradoxes of memory, the lack of innocence of archives, the powers and frailties of photographic and cinematographic records, the role of montage in the face of the untranslatability and unrepresentability of the connections between word and image. In the last two decades, however (the film dates from 1999), we have been witnessing the internalization of processes that take both the deconstruction of images and writing and their disruptive effect on our memory and identity to the extreme.[37] This disruptive effect expands both individually and collectively: "individuals and groups are thus transformed into data-providers, de-formed and re-formed by 'social' networks operating according to new protocols of association."[38] Culturally and technologically, the very conditions for thinking philosophically according to an idea of cinematic montage – in the modern, constructive, and meaningful sense that we have been describing throughout this article – are increasingly being transformed. Within this scenario of a contemporary culture that challenges a heuristic concept of montage, there seems to be no time to wonder and reflect, much less to allow philosophical experiences with cinema to have a trans-

36) Petit, "Vocabulaire d'Ars Industrialis," 381.

37) On this negative concept of disruption linked to digital technologies – which has nothing to do with the critical positive effect that a film might have in "disrupting" our habits and everyday life and thus creating a different experience of reality – see Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption*.

38) Ibid., 7.

formative effect, individually and socially. Nevertheless, finding experiences of wonder can be a way to avoid succumbing to total disruption, and the convergence of philosophy and cinema can still be a way to resist and to cultivate this seed.

If it is true that digital editing and mashups constantly remind us of the intrinsic frailty of digital images and the disruptive role they play in our cognitive and memory processes, it is no less true that different levels of editing also give rise to different levels of reflection and conceptual, perceptual, and poetic experience. The point here is not to draw a distinction between high and low culture, between worthy and unworthy forms of editing and their relation to enriching cognitive experiences, but rather to emphasize that even in everyday digital life there is editing and then there is *editing*; that ambiguities and paradoxes do not disappear but rather tend to hide under an apparent cloak of naturalness and the rapid and reticular flow of information. Uncovering this naturalness remains a philosophical and cinematic task.

In this article, we have been exploring the forms taken by the relationship between philosophy and cinema, by means of a description of various speculative convergences and an analysis of films that focus on the lives and work of philosophers. These forms can be traced back to the question of the philosophical *principium* in its relation to *wonder* and *bewilderment*, the engine of thought in a movement of repetition, and a return to the primacy of things that feeds a certain way of understanding both the roots of philosophy and the roots of artistic creation – in particular, cinematographic creation. In the case of films about the lives and work of philosophers, the focus should be on exploring the principles of their respective philosophies and how they emerge through the films' own procedures. In this sense, it is the short circuit ignited by experimentation that allows one to bring wonder and bewilderment to the heart of film and to the experience of the spectator. At the same time, this allows for the creation of the movements of reverse angles and the overrunning of boundaries to which Roberto Escobar refers in the epigraph to this article. These movements open up the possibility not only of critically reassessing our understanding of memory, identity, and similar processes related to the dissemination of images in a digital culture, but also of enriching films with imaginative visions that are capable of rendering them experiences of – and occasions for – philosophizing.

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