

Call for Contributions

Plotinus and the Moving Image: Neoplatonism and Film Theory

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Can Neoplatonic philosophy be used for film studies? Given the often-stated parallels between Plotinus’ and Bergson’s philosophies, it is surprising that Neoplatonism has provided relatively little input on philosophy of film. Curtis Hancock writes that the effects of Bergsonism are evident in pragmatism, psychology, and theology and that the decedents of Bergson have created a vestige of Neoplatonism that perdures into the late twentieth century. This vestige must also exist in film studies. Today, with the newly emerging observative “Cinema of Contemplation,” this Neoplatonic vestige is worth exploring. The following points (as well as others) can be developed:

- **Contemplation.** Plotinus’ search for the “intelligible” that can be grasped neither by mere sense perception nor by abstraction or analysis, leads to “simple” contemplation: “Such vision is for those only who see with the soul’s sight—and at the vision, they will rejoice, and awe will fall upon them and a trouble deeper than all the rest could ever stir, for now they are moving in the realm of Truth” (“On Beauty,” *Enn.* I, 6, 4). Can a theory of “contemplative cinema” be built upon those ideas? Who contemplates? The viewer? The film?
- Closely linked to contemplation is the question of **the cinematic image and grace**. For Plotinus, grace is not an object; as a consequence, it does not require *objective* contemplation. Instead, it is immediately linked to a simple presence that bestows beauty on all material things (I, 6, 2). For Hadot it is a “je ne sais quoi.” Grace is perceived by those “who see with the Soul’s sight” (I, 6, 4). It is like looking at matter without searching for it because it is simply present. For any theory of perception, exploring the contemplative way of seeing this must be of interest.
- **Against materialism.** Does Plotinus’ skepticism towards the material world lead to an art whose images “express themselves all alone”? Plotinus portrays matter as a mirror reflecting the movements of the soul as bodies (*Enn.* II, 4 and III, 6). Bodies are intermediate reflections of the soul. Does this have any significance for film theory?
- Plotinus’ conception of **the One** as power-of-all-things beyond any kind of actuality and intelligence (*Nous*) leads to the seeing of the world without adapting those things to any definite perspective;

neither to that of subjectivism nor to that of epistemological objectivism. This is what interested Deleuze. In a Bergsonian way, Deleuze puts forward cinematic experience as a means to perceive time and movement as a whole. In cinema, our mind does not need to put together the successive percepts or sensations it perceives, but receives them as a whole.

- This is linked to the idea of the **overcoming perspectival seeing**. Plotinus' expression of the first effluence of the One (which is intelligible matter) as an "indefinite sight" before becoming "definitive" in *Nous*, might announce a way of seeing that overcomes perspective. Also the fluent spatial experience avoiding geometrical divisions that we can observe in the contemplative cinema of, for example, Tarkovsky and Béla Tarr can be described as a negation of perspective.
- Bergson's "**time-image**" (*Matière et mémoire*) is supposed to be superior to "concepts" because the image is able to evoke thought content in a more fluent and less abstract fashion. For Deleuze, the pre-signifying "signaletic material" that films are made of cannot be assimilated to models of semiotics. Is this idea of "time-image" compatible with Plotinus' theory of time as a transitory intelligible movement of the soul (*Enn.* III, 7)? In other words, **does the conception of the soul as an intermediate and restless entity between the intelligible and the perceptible world reflect the "time-image?"** And how does this relate to Plato's definition of time as the "moving image of eternity?"
- **Realism.** The "time-image" is based on pure thinking. It emerged in cinema after WWII mainly with Italian Neo-Realism and French New Wave cinema. It does not follow the scheme of action-reaction, but it can evoke a time that is prior to movement (Deleuze). It is useful to revisit, in this context, Kracauer's "**Kamerarealität.**" Does this concept express the quasi-Plotinian fusion of eye and object, a vision where reality and camera fuse?
- **The virtual** in Deleuze and Plotinus as well as its significance for film offers many points of comparison. For Plotinus "the soul creates living beings not by merging into body but by giving forth, without any change in itself, images or likenesses of itself like one face caught by many mirrors" (*Enn.* I, 1.8. See also III, 6 and IV, 2).
- **Organicism.** For Plotinus, expressions are not constructed: "If nature creates these organisms, this will be an immediate art. Nature is like a painter who contents himself with looking at his model, while the image draws itself on the canvas all alone" (Hadot). Does this suggest the conception of an image manifesting an **organic link between matter and form**, a link that is potentially important for contemplative cinema? The distinction between matter and form which, according to Heidegger, has served as the conceptual schema par excellence for any theory of art since Plato and Aristotle was previously undermined by Tarkovsky. The conception of the image as an organic link between matter

and form is indeed reminiscent of the image as a constructed body in terms of the Plotinian hylomorphism.

We will also be interested in proposals on video art. Send abstracts (ca. 800 words) to thorstenbotz@hotmail.com and gstamap@yahoo.com.

Chapter length: 5500-6500 words including endnotes and bibliography.

Deadline for abstracts: Sept. 30 2015.

Deadline for final papers: June 30 2016.

All full-length texts will be peer reviewed. Proposals will not be accepted on the basis of abstracts.

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