DELEUZE, CINEMA AND THE THOUGHT OF THE WORLD

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Introduction: The Problem of Cinema

Transcendental Empiricism and the ‘Cahiers Axiom’

Gilles Deleuze’s two-volume work on the cinema poses its would-be reader a formidable task. Its proliferation of cinematic references and analyses would stretch the capacities of all but the most dedicated cinephile (of Deleuze’s love for cinema there can be no doubt). Furthermore, to engage fully with the historical currents of film theory therein calls for a familiarity with the development of cinema studies as a critical discipline worthy of a dedicated film theorist. Perhaps most challenging of all, it asks that these threads be grasped in relation to Deleuze’s own uniquely demanding engagement with the history of philosophy itself, and, more specifically, his own appropriation and transformation of that history and the problems that subtend it as developed across a philosophical career spanning the 1940s to the 1990s. The astonishing scope and ambition of the project are announced in its very title: a work of philosophy (for that is what it surely is) titled simply Cinema, as if within its pages Deleuze seeks in some sense to address or draw on the cinema in its entirety and as a whole. The extraordinary nature of this project invites a very simple question: why does Deleuze write about the cinema as a philosopher? This is the question the present book seeks to explore.

One path to accounting for this startling fusion might be to locate its origins in Deleuze’s own biographical history. His famous antipathy to travel was such that his philosophical career was firmly located within the intellectual and aesthetic life of Paris from the 1950s onwards. By the same token, his cinema-going was embedded in an upswelling of critical, creative and intellectual activity around the cinema that gave rise to one of the great historical and cultural focal points of cinephilia and cinematic exploration, in which the love of cinema took on the form of a critical exploration of the powers of the cinema itself.

As such, one can easily point towards a range of developments
located within that specific film culture that had an impact on Deleuze’s engagement with and knowledge of film history, theory and criticism, and ultimately on the Cinema books themselves. The role of Henri Langlois’ Cinémathèque Française in the development of Parisian film culture after the war,⁴ the critical and pedagogical activities of André Bazin⁵ and the foundation and development of the journal Cahiers du cinéma under the latter’s guidance seem, on the evidence of the Cinema books, to have had a particular impact on Deleuze’s experience of and interest in the cinema. Certainly it seems plausible to suggest that the Cinémathèque’s film programmes would have served as one of Deleuze’s key (although by no means only) experiences of the cinema and its history from the 1940s onwards, as it did for so many Parisians of the time.⁶

The influence of Bazin’s critical and theoretical explorations of the cinema are also clearly evident, not least of all in the Cinema books’ structuring proposition that post-war Italian neo-realist cinema marks a new and distinct phase in the cinema’s history. Although Cahiers du cinéma was, and remains, only one of a range of film journals and focal points of film criticism and thinking within Parisian film culture, one can make a strong argument for its particular influence over Deleuze and on the Cinema books. Raymond Bellour, for example, notes that Deleuze is ‘particularly close’ to the authors of the Cahiers tradition.⁷ Certainly the influence of the critical and creative works of the great Nouvelle Vague critic-filmmakers who were so central to that journal and its impact in the 1950s and beyond is clearly apparent in the cinematic and theoretical reference points of the Cinema books, as is the impact of Serge Daney’s contribution within Cahiers du cinéma and without.⁸

More than this, however, I would locate Deleuze as one of the key inheritors of what Dudley Andrew, following Daney, calls ‘the Cahiers line’ – a conceptual lineage of critical and theoretical thinking in and through which a particular conception of film as a critical activity concerning not just cinema, but the world, takes shape. This lineage is articulated around the backbone of the journal’s long history, whose shared proposition Daney presents as follows: ‘The Cahiers axiom is this: that the cinema has a fundamental rapport with reality and that the real is not what is represented – and that’s final.’⁹ Just as Bazin serves as the tutelary figure for and progenitor of the Cahiers line,¹⁰ his critique of montage in favour of mise en scène and the long take marks a point of origin for this ‘axiom’: for Bazin, where montage presents us with a ready-made analysis of the world
comprehended within its formal patterns, the latter seek merely to expose the world to the eye and to thought as a problem to which they must respond, rather than seek to capture or master.\textsuperscript{11} Given the vicissitudes of French political, theoretical and philosophical thought from the 1950s to now, the terms in which the Cahiers axiom is dealt with and expressed within that line necessarily vary. However, those treatments all share a concern for the relationship between image and world understood not in terms of representation or reflection, but as a problem offered to the eye and to thought.

If Deleuze’s work on cinema can be regarded as a continuation of this ‘line’,\textsuperscript{12} it is not only because of the evident impact of that line on his ideas, but because Daney’s axiom also serves as an apt description of the concerns of Deleuzian philosophy as a whole, irrespective of any discussion of the cinema. Indeed, the significance of this axiom may be clearer, at least in an immediate sense, in the context of Deleuze’s work than in relation to the theoretical traditions of cinema studies. Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, understood as the attempt to come to grips with the conditions of real, and not merely possible, experience, can be glossed as a concern for the real as that which cannot be adequately grasped or responded to by means of any representation of that reality. But it is for precisely this reason that I would argue that the Cinema books must be understood not as a response to the cinema, or as a product of Deleuze’s love for the cinema, but as a response to a properly philosophical problem within and for Deleuzian philosophy itself approached by means of the cinema: if the Cahiers axiom bears on Deleuzian thought, it is as an axiom not of the cinema, but rather of philosophy.

However, although such an answer may tell us why cinema is of relevance to Deleuze’s philosophical project, given that difference and a concern for thinking in terms of difference lies at the heart of everything he writes, it does not tell us much about why the cinema in particular draws his attention. The clearest indication Deleuze offers comes when he tells us that philosophical problems ‘compelled’ him to ‘look for answers in the cinema’.\textsuperscript{13} Unfortunately he does not say what those problems are, or what it is about cinema that enables him to respond to them in a way that philosophy on its own does not.

The constantly growing secondary literature surrounding the Cinema books makes it abundantly clear that they are both continuous and deeply intertwined with the philosophical concerns and approaches explored across the entire body of Deleuze’s work. David Rodowick, Ronald Bogue and Paola Marrati, for example,
have in their different ways done invaluable work unpacking these connections and explicating the layered complexities of cinematic and philosophical refrains Deleuze presents to the reader. In doing so they locate the work of the Cinema books both firmly within the broader trajectory of Deleuzian thought and in relation to specific facets and problems explored therein. But for all their success in this task, the question of why Deleuze turns to the cinema for answers to philosophical problems, or what those problems are, remains unanswered.

Thus, for example, David Rodowick identifies the task of his Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine (which provides one of the most sustained, substantial and successful examples of such work) as the attempt to ‘treat the two [Cinema] books as philosophical works and to try to understand them as a logical development through cinema of Deleuze’s more general concerns’ in so far as the latter’s philosophy is ‘in the deepest and most complex ways, a philosophy of time’. Rodowick achieves precisely that, and in doing so makes a major contribution to our grasp of the ways in which the Cinema books develop these ‘concerns’. But given that ‘time’ understood as Bergsonian duration (as it is in the Cinema books) is simply another way of saying ‘difference’, and that difference underpins all that Deleuze writes, this contribution bears on and informs but does not bring into focus the specificity of those books and their problematic within the Deleuzian œuvre. It does not enable us to answer the question ‘why cinema?’

Similarly, the substantial body of individual essays that engage with the Cinema books in many cases provide valuable insights into particular aspects, problems or issues arising from them in their relation to Deleuzian philosophy (and perhaps to a lesser extent, in their relation to problems within the research tradition of cinema studies). However, their very specificity limits their capacity to respond to the question of the project of those books as a whole. The task of this book is specifically to redress this absence: not only to answer the question ‘why does Deleuze write about cinema as a philosopher?’, but to do so in terms of the specific philosophical problems that compel him to do so.

It seems worth asking why this absence in the critical literature remains, more than twenty-five years after the second volume of the Cinema books became available in English. Nearly two decades ago, Rodowick noted that the Cinema books were regarded as ‘anomalies’ by the research communities of both philosophy and
cinema studies, seen by both as ‘outside’ their legitimate field of interest or perhaps even as an unwarranted expansion of one field into the other (although possibly more so for cinema studies than philosophy). The manner in which Deleuze approaches issues and arguments ‘belonging to’ or arising out of the cinema studies research tradition as and in terms of philosophical problems, or presents his own philosophical arguments as though they were internal to the cinema, means that readers from both traditions can find themselves alienated from and critical of those arguments, even (or especially) when they appear to concern issues ‘proper’ to the reader’s own field.

‘Philosophical’ responses to the Cinema books have tended to acknowledge in passing, and with a greater or lesser degree of sympathy, the claim Deleuze makes for the philosophical significance of the cinema while still tending to treat the books as one more example among others of his tendency to engage with philosophy through and with a vast diversity of non-philosophical materials drawn from science, mathematics, literature and art. In doing so, the specificity of his engagement with the cinema has tended to be pushed to the background in favour of a focus on the more familiar philosophical concepts, problems and personae that arise therein.

Where the question of Deleuze’s contribution to the study of the cinema is concerned, there is a growing body of work from authors with varying degrees of Deleuzian philosophical commitments who have drawn on his work productively to explore aspects of the cinema he touches on in passing, or not at all. Quite reasonably, however, their concerns have tended to be more with what one can do with Deleuze in relation to the cinema than with questioning what the cinema makes possible for Deleuze. The ‘non-Deleuzian’ cinema studies community has been more directly critical of the lapses, gaps, incongruities or limits they perceive in Deleuze’s treatment of ‘their’ tradition (especially, although not exclusively, in the Anglophone world). Even Rodowick himself, who is clearly deeply engaged with and sympathetic to the philosophical project of the Cinema books, argues (with some justice) that Deleuze’s ‘knowledge of film history departs little from the general histories that have been so profoundly challenged and revised by the new film history of the past fifteen years’, and that his attitude towards film authorship ‘represents one of the worst aspects of Parisian cinephilism . . . [while] his analyses are often derivative of other works’.

David Bordwell’s argument that Deleuze uncritically repeats the dominant research tradition of cinema studies from the perspective
of an arbitrarily imposed theoretical and philosophical framework offers itself as a kind of synecdoche for such criticisms, in so far as behind them all is the question of why the cinema (its histories, theories and the films on which they bear) can or should be approached in terms of philosophy at all. The specific terms of Bordwell’s critique foreground the difficulty of responding to the Cinema books in terms adequate to the demands of the intellectual and critical traditions of both philosophy and cinema studies. Bordwell characterises the philosophical framework he sees Deleuze as imposing as implicitly Hegelian (by which he largely means ‘teleological in orientation’), which will immediately strike anyone familiar with Deleuze’s philosophy as somewhat surprising, at least without some very careful and nuanced supporting argument – which Bordwell does not provide. Bordwell is one of the most significant figures in Anglophone cinema studies, and although hostile to what he calls ‘grand theory’ as a framework for approaching cinema, is a wide-ranging and exacting thinker and writer on the formal, industrial and theoretical dynamics of the cinema and its histories. As such, his failure to support his assertion of Deleuze’s Hegelianism in terms that might satisfy (if not necessarily convince) a reader grounded in Deleuzian philosophy seems to me less a reflection of a lack of rigour on his part than it is of the difficulty of dealing with a work (the Cinema books) that refuses to distinguish between cinema and philosophy. Any response from a position rooted within only one of those two research traditions runs the risk of missing, misreading or misplacing the goal or the context of the arguments therein, or, more dangerously, the problems those arguments respond to or are grounded in. To read the Cinema books as if they were about either cinema or philosophy is to miss the point entirely.

It seems worth noting that even if Bordwell’s use of the adjective ‘Hegelian’ can be seen as problematic, this does not mean that his overarching criticism – that Deleuze ‘imports’ a conceptual framework external to the cinema to the analysis of it – can therefore be dismissed out of hand. A more adequate response to Bordwell’s critique (and to the wider question of why the cinema can or should be approached in terms of philosophy) and to its philosophical counterpart (why and how the problems of philosophy should be approached by means of the cinema), would be to demonstrate how and why the philosophical problems Deleuze responds to by means of the cinema are internal to the cinema itself. This, of course, goes to the very heart of the problem the Cinema books pose to the reader,
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regardless of their intellectual and aesthetic commitments. It is not only that the simultaneous depth of cinematic and philosophical erudition that Deleuze demands of the reader has been such that few have been either equipped or willing to engage fully with both aspects, as Rodowick points out.\(^{25}\) It is also that the Cinema books are premised on the principle that the cinema ‘thinks’ in its own right, and that that thought bears directly on philosophy – and that the basis on which that ‘principle’ is asserted remains obscure within the books themselves.

The barriers to engagement that Rodowick describes with such clarity have, it must be said, lowered somewhat in recent years, and the reach of the Cinema books’ impact and influence has in consequence expanded considerably. The continuity and consistency of the Cinema books with Deleuze’s other work have been skilfully unpacked in the intervening period (not least by Rodowick himself) and, as Robert Sinnerbrink has argued, Deleuze’s work on cinema has been a significant contributor to the emergence of ‘film-philosophy’ as an area of research in the Anglophone world.\(^{26}\) Within the field of cinema studies more narrowly conceived, the question of how, or indeed why, Deleuze’s work could or should be brought to bear on research problems generated from within that field at all has been a more contested issue. Even here, however, we can note that the reconsideration of Bazin’s critical fortunes after their nadir in the 1970s and ’80s (a reconsideration driven in part by the work of Daney, and reinforced within the Anglophone world by the efforts of Dudley Andrew) has at least to some extent been propelled by Deleuze’s treatment of Bazin’s work and ideas in the Cinema books.\(^{27}\) Beyond this, the work of authors such as Laura Marks, David Martin-Jones, David Deamer, Elena Del Rio, Nick Davis and Nadine Boljkovac (to name only a few) have in very different ways and contexts shown how Deleuzian concepts can be appropriated to offer productive new ways to approach the cinema.\(^{28}\) And Patricia Pisters’ work on the ‘neuro-image’ has projected Deleuze’s work on the cinema beyond the cinema itself into the realm of the twenty-first century’s digital and transmedia reconfigurations of the moving image.\(^{29}\) Nevertheless, even if the conjunction of cinema and philosophy found in the Cinema books appears less anomalous now than it once did, the specific basis on which Deleuze himself constructs this conjunction constitutes no less of a problem now than before.

The difficulty of identifying and specifying this basis is, I think (and perhaps inevitably), rooted in difference itself as the very ground of
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Deleuzian philosophy, and the corresponding critique of representation and identity that accompanies it. This difficulty manifests itself on multiple levels. To begin with, there is a general methodological problem that faces anyone wishing to write on, or with, Deleuze and Deleuzian concepts. The primacy of difference for Deleuze means that his own philosophical practice cannot simply describe, analyse or discuss difference, since to do so would in various ways be to seek to represent it, to treat it as something identical to itself and so not difference at all. Rather, his philosophical practice must differ from itself if it is to engage with difference as difference: it offers, as Bellour says, a ‘heterogenesis’ whose consistency lies in its difference from itself.30

In so far as difference grounds all that he writes, Deleuze is the most systematic and consistent of philosophers, but that system is fundamentally disjunctive in so far as each ‘moment’ or ‘event’ within it is one of creation, given as the variation of the system itself. In short, as Daniel W. Smith says, ‘there is a becoming of concepts not only within Deleuze’s corpus, but in each book and in each concept, which is extended to and draws from the history of philosophy, and is repeated in each act of reading’.31 Attempting to identify or specify what Deleuze is doing at any given point (say, in the Cinema books) is thus always problematic, not only because it always slips from our grasp, but also because doing so risks falling into the trap of representation (‘Deleuze says . . .’, ‘Deleuze means . . .’) and so missing the point.

One response to this in the secondary literature has been to claim that one’s commentary marks an ‘appropriation’ of or ‘deviation’ from Deleuze’s work and ideas, rather than a representation or critique of them – to be consistent with Deleuze by differing from him.32 Deleuze himself encourages us to treat a theory ‘exactly like a box of tools’,33 to take what is useful from it in relation to one’s own frame of reference and do something with it, rather than seek to fix or pin down what it ‘means’. Both of these paths have produced valuable insights into, and uses of, Deleuzian philosophy. However, they are limited in their capacity to investigate and respond to the coherence and consistency of that philosophy.

As Alain Badiou has noted, Deleuze’s commitment to difference as the univocity of being is such that it appears throughout his work repeatedly in different guises and via different terminology.34 Badiou emphasises this repetition as part of his own interpretation of Deleuze as a philosopher of the One, but in doing so Badiou
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suppresses difference itself as the single voice in which being speaks, and so distorts the consistency of Deleuzian philosophy (egregiously, to my mind), rather than seeking to understand it in its own terms: the univocity of being is given not as unity, as Badiou would have it, but as multiplicity. What is needed instead is an approach that recognises the repetition Badiou identifies, but this time as an expression of difference as the ground of the coherence and consistency of Deleuzian philosophy.

Deleuze offers us a path to fulfilling this demand in so far as he characterises the specificity of any given ‘thing’ in terms of the difference of the thing itself. The specificity of the colour red, for example, lies not in its difference from green or blue or even of all the ‘other’ shades of red, but in its participation in the differing from itself of ‘pure white light’ (which ‘contains’ all the colours as nuances of that difference). The consistency of Deleuzian philosophy – the repetition of the ‘same’ concept under different names (movement, duration and difference for example) – is thus given in the specificity of each ‘name’ as a nuance or differing from itself of that concept, such that they are vitally connected without being interchangeable.

One path to grasping that nuance, that specificity, is to examine the relation between the variations of the concept as it appears throughout the Deleuzian corpus in order to grasp the specificity of the task or problem to which that nuance responds. In more straightforward terms, if you want to work out what Deleuze is doing at any given point, and why, you need to locate the ‘moment’ you are examining in the context of its difference from related concepts, problems or arguments that appear throughout his work. In relation to the task at hand, this suggests that to identify the problems that drive the argument of the Cinema books is to identify the specificity or nuance of difference that they unfold, and to do so in relation to the difference that grounds the consistency of Deleuzian philosophy.

The necessity of such an approach is only amplified if one accepts Michael Hardt’s argument that ‘often, Deleuze’s arguments appear incomplete because he takes for granted and fails to repeat the results of his previous research’, thus obscuring the problem or concept each work in turn responds to and differs from. Reading Deleuze in the manner I have outlined requires that we look for our cues and clues in the relationships between texts – what might, in traditional terms, be called a hermeneutic methodology. If such an approach can usefully be brought to bear on Deleuze it is because the repetition of a concept or problem across texts marks the differing of that
concept or problem, and in that differing lies the specificity of the instance under examination. Such an approach is not merely a case of attempting to define and restate what Deleuze already says – in this case, the arguments presented in the Cinema books. To prefigure arguments made in the body of this book regarding Deleuze’s own philosophical practice, this approach can rather be conceived of as kind of montage – a cutting up and reordering of relations between texts in order to enter into the movement of the Cinema books by counter-actualising the event of thought actualised within them.

The Monotony of Difference

Given the demands the Cinema books place on their reader, I cannot help but be aware of the hubris implicit in the undertaking of this project. Although I love the cinema and know its history moderately well, I do not count myself a true cinephile and most certainly not one on the scale of Deleuze. My academic specialisation is the history of film theory, not philosophy, and in the best light I might be regarded as an informed outsider with regard to the field of Deleuze studies – although perhaps better informed at the end of this project than at its beginning. But there are, I hope, some advantages to such a position, at least in the sense that it allows me to offer a pair of fresh eyes to the question of the relation of the Cinema books to Deleuze’s philosophical œuvre.

It must be said that there is a great deal that might have been addressed in this book that is not. The usual caveats as to the shortness of time, space and life apply, of course, but it should also be noted that a great deal has already been said about the Cinema books. I have tried to avoid repeating analyses already done better elsewhere, except where they might be brought to a new conclusion. For reasons that will become clear over the course of the book, the focus of my argument is on the terms of the break or gap between the two Cinema books, and on the relation this break constructs between the different images of thought proper to each of them. It is that relation, and not the details of Deleuze’s taxonomy of the classical and modern cinemas and their films, that interests me here. As such, the specifics of Deleuze’s arguments regarding the classical and modern cinemas individually play little part in my discussion, except where they bear on this break and relation.

Of the great Deleuzian triumvirate of Bergson, Spinoza and Nietzsche – all of whom play a role in the Cinema books – I give
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sustained attention to Bergson alone. This is not to diminish the importance of the others, but because by my reading it is the ‘return to Bergson’ presented in the Cinema books that points us towards the philosophical problems Deleuze turns to the cinema to resolve. It is this Bergsonian problematic that therefore forms the primary focus of my argument. The Spinozian vector of the Cinema books remains largely absent from my treatment because it bears less directly on the philosophical problems that I argue Deleuze turns to the cinema to resolve. If Nietzsche plays a more overt (though still minor) role in my argument, it is because he bears more directly on the question of how the cinema allows Deleuze to solve these problems. Thus, for example, although my analysis of the break between the two volumes of the Cinema books offers a foundation for understanding the Nietzschean powers of the false Deleuze attributes to the modern cinema, those powers themselves are mentioned largely in passing.

Perhaps most striking of all for a book on a two-volume work titled Cinema, the discussion of films and their interpretation plays virtually no part in my analyses. Although my own intellectual background and the origins of my interest in the Cinema books are rooted in the traditions of cinema studies rather than philosophy, it is one of the underlying contentions of this book that Deleuze’s engagement with and relevance to cinema studies can only be adequately grasped in terms and by means of an understanding of the philosophical problems that drive Deleuze to the cinema. That is, although Deleuze himself thinks with and through the cinema and a vast proliferation of examples thereof, I aim to understand the philosophical terms on which this cinema-thought takes place and can be understood. It is therefore these problems, and in particular their roots in the very ground of Deleuze’s philosophical project, that are the focus of this book. Any exploration of what one might say about specific films on that basis is a task for another time. It is, however, my hope that unpacking these problems may help lay out the terms in which the relation between cinema and philosophy Deleuze constructs might be brought to bear productively on the research problems and traditions of both.

How then can we begin to approach the specificity of the philosophical problems that drive Deleuze to the cinema? Bellour makes the observation that the Cinema books stand out as something distinct within the Deleuzian œuvre, singular or perhaps even unique in so far as they concern themselves with a single art form in its entirety – the cinema as such, and as a whole.38 Where other of
Deleuze’s works turn on encounters with specific authors or artists, or entrain congeries of the most diverse artistic and scientific materials as grasped by and for philosophy, the *Cinema* books summon all of a single art form. They do so not in order to produce a philosophy of cinema (an idea Deleuze regards as plainly ‘stupid’), but to discover what cinema can enable philosophy to think for itself that it otherwise could not. ‘I was able to write about cinema’, he says, ‘not because of some right of consideration, but because philosophical problems compelled me to look for answers in the cinema.’

Now this statement tells us very clearly that if we wish to understand the *Cinema* books and what is at stake in them for Deleuze, we must read them as philosophy and specifically in the context of Deleuze’s own philosophical history. The necessity of such an approach is implicit in Hardt’s observation that each new work by Deleuze tends to assume its predecessors as a given. As such, Deleuze’s reasoning at any given moment can remain obscure if the reader is not familiar enough with its antecedents to place both the terms of an argument, and the problems it responds to, in the context of his work as a whole. Immediately, however, we find a curious tension at play: the *Cinema* books, as a ‘unique’ and ‘singular’ event within Deleuze’s career, are nevertheless inextricably a part of that career, continuous with it and inexplicable outside of it.

The two poles of this tension (the unique and the continuous) might be read as an echo of Badiou’s characterisation of Deleuze’s career as one devoted to the repetition of the singular, in which Deleuze’s account of universal creation as univocal difference gives rise to conceptual productions that I would unhesitatingly characterise as monotonous, composing a very particular regime of emphasis or almost infinite repetition of a limited repertoire of concepts, as well as a virtuosic variation of names, under which that which is thought remains essentially identical.

In this vein we could say that Deleuze’s thought is devoted to accounting for the unique and the singular, in each and every case, in terms of a single and singular thought: that of being which is everywhere and always given in the same way and in the same sense, as difference that differs from itself. Peter Hallward points us in a similar direction when he notes that ‘the real challenge in writing about Deleuze’s philosophy lies not in the remarkable diversity of materials that he considers but in the monotony of the underlying logic he invokes
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to understand them. In other words, all of Deleuze’s writing, all of its dizzying proliferation of subjects and terminology and topics and fields of inquiry, unfolds from the single assertion that the difference of the unique subsists not in its difference from anything or everything else, but in the difference of being from itself first of all. In this sense, then, the uniqueness of the Cinema books does indeed demand to be grasped as a production, or indeed a repetition, of the very same univocal difference that animates all of Deleuze’s writing.

The danger of such a formulation, however, is that left undeveloped it remains purely abstract and thus, in a properly Deleuzian sense, incapable of grasping the difference that the Cinema books repeat concretely and for itself. In other words, the concept of difference would remain transcendent to the differences collected under its name (i.e., to the cinema) and thought would consist of going ‘from the concept to the variety that it subsumes’, recognizing this or that difference as just another case of the concept. This is, of course, a model of thought Deleuze rejects: for him, thought is creation, not recognition. To put it more concretely and pragmatically, to say that the Cinema books are just another example of Deleuzian difference doesn’t tell us very much about them – it tells us nothing of the ‘nuance’ Deleuze demands of a thought adequate to the concrete, the ‘how, how many, when and where’. The task at hand, then, is to account for the singularity of the Cinema books – their difference – in terms of the singular, monotonous thought that animates them: breathes life into them, causes them to move of their own accord.

The two poles of this task unfold from a single question: what use is cinema to Deleuze? At one end, this question seeks to account for the singularity Bellour finds in the Cinema books (what is it about cinema that makes Deleuze want to write about it, in a way that is different from all his other works?). At the other, it looks towards the monotony of thought Badiou and Hallward find in Deleuze (how do the Cinema books fit with, develop, draw on, assume, repeat the thought of his other work?). Asked ‘When did you begin to love cinema and when did you begin to consider it a domain worthy of philosophy?’, Deleuze responds that he was ‘compelled’ to look to cinema for answers to philosophical problems. He is interested in cinema because it is able to give philosophy something strictly philosophical that philosophy nevertheless lacks. In particular, it is movement that crosses or is given back and forth in the movement between philosophy and cinema, and which draws him to the latter: ‘I liked those authors who demanded that we introduce movement
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to thought, “real” movement (they denounced the Hegelian dialectic as abstract movement). How could I not discover the cinema, which introduces “real” movement into the image?’

In the first sentence of this quote, we find, *ab ovo*, all of Deleuze’s philosophy and all that it flees. We will have cause to expand on the themes embedded in it throughout this book, but in their compacted form, they are as follows. On the one hand, there is the positive assertion of the primacy of the being of becoming as the founding principle of Deleuzian philosophy: the difference from itself of being *is* real movement. On the other, there is its critical moment, figured by Hegel as the most extreme version of philosophies of identity and representation – those that begin with being and only then seek to account for its becoming (which gives only an abstract movement). Finally, and most important of all, there is the positing of a thought for which real movement will always be a *demand* and not a right, such that its proper task is always and only to become adequate to such movement, that is to say, to difference *as such* or, as Peter Hallward puts it, to *creation*: ‘The main task facing a creature capable of thought is to learn how to think.’

To become adequate to movement, then, is to escape the lures of representation and identity, to wrest oneself free of abstraction in the struggle to think movement as differing difference. Hence the dramatic nature of so much of Deleuze’s philosophy: in each of its endless proliferation of cases, it is a story of the struggle of thought to think.

Thus, in his second sentence, Deleuze tells us it is cinema’s capacity for real movement that draws him to it. It is not, however, that cinema makes thought adequate to such movement in and of itself. He goes on to say that

something bizarre about the cinema struck me: its unexpected ability to show not only behaviour, but spiritual life as well . . . Cinema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind. Spiritual life is the movement of the mind. One naturally goes from philosophy to cinema, but also from cinema to philosophy.

Immediately, the story is more complex (the plot thickens): to put movement into the image is merely to show behaviour, but cinema also puts movement into the mind, into thought – it *shows* us the movement of the mind or ‘spiritual life’. Cinema is not simply thought, but shows us thought thinking, presents it to us directly. This, it seems to me, would be the special virtue of the cinema for Deleuze. Philosophy, surely, can think for itself and may put these
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thoughts into words, but it cannot show us thought in its struggle to think. Cinema, then, does not merely think, but presents us with the dramatisation of thought’s struggle to become adequate to becoming, to real movement: the drama of the struggle to construct concepts or ideas adequate to the being of becoming. As Deleuze says elsewhere, it is through ‘dramatisation [that] the Idea is incarnated or actualised’.53 ‘This, then, is the proposition of the Cinema books: cinema as the dramatisation of philosophy itself.

Indeed, this is precisely Bellour’s answer to the problem posed by the uniqueness of the Cinema books: ‘why the cinema, why the cinema at that point? Quite simply so that philosophy can thus itself write its novel.’54 And as he points out,55 this dramatisation or ‘novelisation’ of philosophy is prefigured long before the Cinema books, in Difference and Repetition, where Deleuze argues that

a book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction . . . The search for new means of philosophical expression was begun by Nietzsche and must be pursued today in relation to the renewal of certain other arts, such as the theatre or the cinema.56

What Bellour does not add is that Deleuze then goes on to say: ‘It seems to us that the history of philosophy should play a role roughly analogous to that of collage in painting.’57 Christian Kerslake draws our attention to the preface of the English edition of Cinema 2, where Deleuze ‘claims that cinema is a repetition, in speeded-up form, of an experience that has already occurred in the history of philosophy’.58 What is ‘repeated’ here is what Deleuze calls the ‘great Kantian reversal’ of the subordination of time to movement.59 This ‘reversal’, as it appears in and for the cinema, and in the Cinema books, does so in terms of the break between the classical and modern cinemas, which is itself repeated in the break or gap – or indeed, the cut – between Cinema 1 and Cinema 2. The Cinema books, then, offer us a cinematic’ history of philosophy, not as collage, but as montage: the gap or interval between the two volumes, between the classical and the modern cinemas, the pre- and post-war periods, as a cutting together or splicing apart to create the film of the history of philosophy.

But what is this break or ‘reversal’, this ‘experience’ that has already occurred in the history of philosophy and is repeated in the history of the cinema? In this reversal, ‘time ceases to be the measurement of normal movement . . . [and] increasingly appears for itself and creates paradoxical movements. Time is out of joint: Hamlet’s
words signify that time is no longer subordinated to movement, but rather movement to time.60 In the Cinema books, this reversal takes place as or in the break between the cinemas of the movement-image and the time-image: in other words in the break or interval between two regimes of montage, the second of which reverses the subordination of time to movement characteristic of the first. But what this reversal reveals is thought’s confrontation with the impossibility of thought, of its ‘impower’, ‘this powerlessness at the heart of thought’,61 as Deleuze says. Thus the dramatisation of thought’s struggle to become adequate to movement, the dramatisation of the history of philosophy itself, is not one of thought’s ascension to power or mastery but of thought’s confrontation with its own impossibility.

The pivot of this drama is the demand for the introduction of real movement into thought. Inasmuch as it is a demand, and not something thought possesses by right, it is driven by the failure, the inadequacy, of thought itself. Thought that retains a merely abstract conception of movement – thought that subordinates time to movement – is, to invert Hallward’s formulation, the thought of a creature that has not yet learnt to think. Yet to accede to this demand, to introduce into thought a movement now subordinated to time – what we see in the time-image of Cinema 2 – is to cause it to suffer the disordering, destabilising, decentring powers of time ‘out of joint’. A thought that truly thinks, it seems, is a thought for which thought is no longer a power that it holds, but powerlessness that it suffers. Thus the appearance of ‘the Mummy’ in Cinema 2, ‘this dismantled, paralysed, petrified, frozen instance which testifies to “the impossibility of thinking that is thought”’.62 Thought, then, either fails to think, or else can think only and always its own failure.

But what is it that thinks, and thus doubly fails to think, in each of these two ways? The human being, whose task it is to ‘learn how to think’. And what is it that the human being thus fails to think twice over? Being as such, being as difference that differs from itself. Thought that insists on the subordination of time to movement is a thought tied ultimately to a static conception of being, which moves only on the impulsion of an abstract movement imposed from without (the becoming of being, whose most extreme avatar is Hegel’s dialectic). But a thought that introduces real movement, the movement that is the being of becoming, is a thought that suffers its own impossibility. If, as Badiou says, the Cinema books sing Deleuze’s monotonous refrain of univocal being, it is because they do
indeed return us to his single and singular thought of being as self-differing difference. The singular nature that Bellour finds in them, their nuance and concreteness, lies in their dramatisation not merely of thought, but of thought understood in terms of human being’s confrontation with being.

This, in a sense, is the essential theme of all ontological speculation, in so far as ontology is, and can only be, a problem posed to and of being by beings, and from within being, by human beings themselves (there is no one else to ask the question and nowhere else to ask it from). In contrast, the specificity of Deleuze’s formulation of the ontological question lies in his positing of a being that is univocal, such that beings, and thus human beings, are given in the same terms as being itself and not transcended by it. Transcendence only appears to or in thought to the extent that movement remains abstract and thus separated arbitrarily from being. When real movement is introduced into thought, being appears in and as that movement (that is to say, as real difference): thought becomes adequate to movement at the moment it places itself within that movement, when it thinks with or in movement rather than of it. What the cinema gives us, what it thinks and shows us then, is, as Deleuze says, the ‘relationship between man and the world, nature and thought’. This is ‘the thought of the world’, understood as the problem of thought’s thinking of being, and its struggle to become adequate to being. What I hope to demonstrate is that it is this struggle that lies at the heart of the philosophical problems Deleuze turns to the cinema to solve.

**Notes**

1. I will refer to these works collectively hereafter as ‘the Cinema books’, and individually as *Cinema 1; Cinema 2*.
2. Although the Cinema books themselves were published in the 1980s, the problems in question and their treatment in those books nevertheless bear on, inform and can be productively informed by the works that came after them – Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* in particular.
3. See, for example, ‘V as in Voyage’, *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z*.
4. For an account of the history of Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française, see Roud, *A Passion for Films*.
5. Dudley Andrew’s 1978 biographical study *André Bazin* remains a key reference point for those wanting to grasp Bazin’s impact on and significance for the *Cahiers* tradition and cinema studies more generally,
while the 2011 collection *Opening Bazin* is testament to Bazin’s continuing relevance and importance to cinema studies today. Andrew, *André Bazin*; Andrew and Joubert-Laurencin, *Opening Bazin.*

6. Film scholar William D. Routt once proposed to me in conversation that it should in principle be possible to work out which programmes of the Cinémathèque Française Deleuze had attended, on the basis of the films referred to in the *Cinema* books.


8. Daney was a contributor to *Cabiers du cinéma* from 1964 and its co-editor and editor from 1973 to 1981. He was also instrumental in inviting philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière and Deleuze himself to contribute to the journal, and so marks an important point of contact between the trajectories of French philosophy and cinema studies. For more on what Garin Dowd describes as the ‘traffic of ideas and concepts between Deleuze and Daney’, and the specificities of Parisian cinephilism within which this traffic took place, see his ‘Pedagogies of the Image Between Daney and Deleuze’, 41, and 41–56 more generally.


10. As Andrew puts it, this ‘line’ ‘is neither perfectly straight, nor is it singular (having many threads), nor is it necessarily tied to this one periodical [*Cabiers du cinéma*]; however it does identify an orientation that owes most to Bazin’. Andrew and Joubert-Laurencin, ‘A Binocular Preface’, x.


12. In a quite separate context Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener identify within the traditions of film theory ‘a French line of thought linking Jean Epstein, André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze’. Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 2.

13. Deleuze, ‘The Brain Is the Screen’, 367. Even this hint is offered outside the *Cinema* books, in an interview for *Cabiers du cinéma*. I will be referring throughout this book to the English translation of this interview included in Gregory Flaxman’s anthology *The Brain is the Screen*, which borrows its title from that of the interview in question. ‘Le Cerveau, C’est L’écran’, 24–32; ‘The Brain Is the Screen’, 365–73.


16. Gregory Flaxman’s anthology *The Brain is the Screen* is a key source of such material, but numerous significant examples can be found in a diverse range of compilations and journals – many of which are cited throughout this book. From a quite different perspective, the essays collected in Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack’s *Deleuze and
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the Schizoanalysis of Cinema look to Deleuzian sources beyond the Cinema books to think the relation of Deleuzian philosophy to cinema on other terms and in relation to other problems than those Deleuze sets himself in the Cinema books.

17. If there is an exception to this rule it is Bellour’s remarkable essay ‘Thinking, Recounting: the Cinema of Gilles Deleuze’. For my money, this essay is the best short analysis of the Cinema books available and perhaps the finest at any scale – the subtlest, the most graceful, the most able to grasp their fusion of cinema and philosophy and respond in kind.

18. Given that I neither speak nor read French, this project has an unavoidable bias to the Anglophone reception and discussion of the Cinema books. Although this constitutes a real and present limitation on its scope, the enthusiasm with which French philosophical/cinematic thought and writing have been engaged with in the English-speaking world means that a significant (although necessarily selective) body of relevant French-language material is available in translation.

19. Within the Anglophone world at least, although Tom Conley suggests this confusion was shared to some degree by French readers as well. ‘Film Theory “After” Deleuze’.

20. See for example, Luc Moulet’s attack on what he describes as Deleuze’s ‘schoolboy’ errors in the latter’s treatment of the cinema. Moulet, ‘The Green Garbage Bins of Gilles Deleuze’.

21. What Rodowick doesn’t acknowledge here is how thorough Deleuze’s grasp of this tradition is or, indeed, that most of the ‘revision’ of this tradition he refers to in this passage took place after the Cinema books were written. Rodowick, Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine, x and xiii–xvi.


23. Indeed, a similar criticism can be made in reverse with regard to the relevance of the cinema as a means of exploring philosophical problems. In particular, Deleuze’s assertion that the history of the cinema in some sense repeats or recapitulates the history of philosophy risks seeming no less arbitrary an imposition in the absence of an account of how and why this parallel is either justified or required, or indeed what is meant by ‘history’ in this context – an issue that, as we shall see, has a particular resonance with the project of the Cinema books.


25. Rodowick, Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine, ix–x.

26. Sinnerbrink identifies Deleuze and Stanley Cavell as the ‘founding figures’ of this area (their very different philosophical contexts notwithstanding.) Along with the work of Sinnerbrink himself, we might point to Daniel Frampton’s book Filmosophy, Danial Yacavone’s Film Worlds,
or the journal *Film-Philosophy* (along with its eponymous conference) as some of the markers for this ‘emergence’ in the English-speaking world. Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images*, 4.

27. As evidence for Deleuze’s role in this revival we can note, for example, that the index of names in 2011’s *Opening Bazin* lists no fewer than eighteen references to Deleuze therein – the second highest, on equal footing with Orson Welles and beaten only by references to Jean Renoir with twenty-five. Moreover, both Welles and Renoir are key cinematic reference points for Bazin’s own writing, in a way Deleuze is not and could not be. Such metrics are a blunt tool at best, but they at the very least support Elsaesser’s contention that Deleuze’s work on cinema warrants the description of him as one of Bazin’s key ‘successors’. Andrew and Joubert-Laurencin, *Opening Bazin*, 339–44; Elsaesser, ‘A Bazinian Half-Century’, 5.


29. Pisters, *The Neuro-Image*. I find Pisters’ book to be a particularly productive extension and appropriation of Deleuze’s work on cinema. If I don’t refer to her work in what follows, it is only because I am concerned here with where the *Cinema* books come from, whereas to my mind Pisters is more concerned to map out where we might take them.


32. Brian Massumi is often cited in justifying this kind of approach to the use or interpretation of Deleuze’s work. See, for example, his ‘Foreword’ to *A Thousand Plateaus*, xiv–xv; or his *User’s Guide*, 8.


35. As Jon Roffe points out in his book-length critique of Badiou’s treatment of Deleuze, ‘In Badiou’s account of Deleuze’s ontology, the word multiplicity only ever appears in places where it is clearly interchangeable with the word multiple . . . which erases, at the level of terminology, a decisive Deleuzean theme.’ *Badiou’s Deleuze*, 9.

36. Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, 54. He ‘repeats’ this argument in a different context and in slightly different terms some years later, in *Difference and Repetition*: ‘The Idea of colour, for example, is like white light which perplicates in itself the genetic elements and relations of all the colours, but is actualised in the diverse colours with their respective spaces.’ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 206. In both cases, he is drawing on a passage from Bergson’s essay ‘The Life and Works of Ravaisson’, 225–6.
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39. Hume, Spinoza, Kafka or Bacon, and so on.
40. *Difference and Repetition, The Logic of Sense*, the work with Félix Guattari.
42. Ibid., 367.
43. Hardt, *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, xix. As we have seen, Rodowick points out that this ‘obscurity’ is perhaps exacerbated in the case of the Cinema books – readers drawn to them by an interest in cinema may lack the requisite expertise not only in Deleuze’s work, but in philosophy more broadly conceived, while those drawn by Deleuze and an interest in philosophy may find their knowledge of film and film history lacking. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine*, x–xi.
45. Hallward, *Out of This World*, 2.
47. The genuinely new – creation – is of necessity unrecognisable, since it has no model that could precede it in our understanding. Thus ‘things and people are always forced to conceal themselves, have to conceal themselves when they begin. What else could they do? They come into being within a set that no longer includes them.’ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 2–3.
50. Ibid., 366.
51. Hallward, *Out of This World*, 2. It is worth noting that although I agree with many of the premises of Hallward’s reading of Deleuze, I do not agree with his conclusion – specifically, I do not agree that Deleuzian philosophy offers nothing to the human or to properly human concerns.
55. Ibid., 72.
57. Ibid., xxi.
59. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 166. Note that the English translators of the Cinema books use both ‘impower’ and ‘inpower’ to translate the French ‘impouvoir’. Where I make use of quotes including the latter term, I have followed their translation with regard to the relevant passage.
62. Ibid.
63. It is a fairly common convention to capitalise ‘Being’ when using it in its ontological sense, in contrast to the lower case ‘being’, used to refer to a particular being or beings. This usage tends to imply a transcendent conception of being, inasmuch as the necessity of distinguishing between the two suggests that ‘Being’ is of a different order to ‘beings’. In keeping with Deleuze’s univocal conception of being (in which being and beings are necessarily of the same order), I do not follow this convention here, relying rather on context to provide the reader with the relevant sense in which the term is being used.
64. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 163.