

Preface to the book: Filmmakers on film: global perspectives

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Nagib, L. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8808-9748>
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Preface for the book *Filmmakers on Film*

Lúcia Nagib

Filmmakers on Film asks a difficult but crucial question: who, or more precisely, what is the filmmaker? Is it the god-like (male) figure whose signature is imprinted on every aspect of a film, regardless of the number of collaborators involved? Is it the renowned director offering platitudes to the hungry press at film festivals? Or is it the technical team whose practical decisions and savoir faire do not usually count as serious theorising? The answer is all and none of the above. In fact, this book's great contribution is to shift the focus from single individuals to the thought entrenched in the act of filmmaking, whoever the directors or authors may be. So many of us are used to thinking of filmmakers post-film, that is, once the complete work has been distributed and showcased through various outlets, and the starring crew and cast offer anecdotes of their experience to both attract the audiences and distract them from the unglamorous labour behind it. Thus we tend to forget that the hard and elaborate thinking behind a film starts much earlier, in the months or more often years in which the various departments – scriptwriting, art design, cinematography, lighting, sound design, acting, editing, colour grading, mixing and of course directing – remain in frantic conversation through a plethora of activities and documents, including letters, scripts, auditions, interviews, drawings, spreadsheets, storyboards, all of which are a source of theory, if looked at through the specialist lens this book is now offering us.

Film theory in recent times has evolved in various and exciting directions. 'Film-philosophy' is nowadays spelt with a hyphen to signify the way film creates new theories, as well as being their object. Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Noël Carrol, Vivien Sobchak, Slavoj Žižek and Steven Shaviro are just a few of the recent philosophers

who drew on cinema to revolutionise their discipline. The genres of video essay, videographic criticism and essay film are sheer theory in the form of images and sounds. As well as evidencing the intricate web of ideas embedded in each image and sound, seeing film 'as' theory serves to demythologise the latter, turning it into the impure form Bazin had championed, in his vision of cinema as a hybrid of theatre and literature for the masses. Intermedial studies have done a great favour to cinema by exposing its mixed fabric, which includes literature and associated theory. It is no surprise that this book frequently borders on intermediality, for example, by responding to Colombian filmmaker Víctor Gaviria's poetic impulses, or identifying Brazilian Kléber Mendonça Filho's 'melomania', that is, his personal music choices in his films. Few would doubt that Godard's films are as much theory as cinema, not least for their constant literary allusions and the director's taste for writing before, during and after making them; in this book he attends in the company of Kiarostami whose multimedia reflexivity went as far as changing cinema into animated painting in his posthumous *24 Frames* (2017).

In fact filmmakers across history and geography have been attempting to propose theories for their films and those of others. Eisenstein and his comrades in the former Soviet Union formulated the montage theory, a formalist way of thinking film that resorted to the structure of poetry, music, theatre and other arts. Decades later, the early critics (and future cinéastes) of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* created a 'politique des auteurs' which went on to become the most influential theory of authorship in film history. No wonder the first chapter of this book is devoted to the concept of cinematic authorship through a historical flashback; and it is Eisenstein's unfinished project to film Marx's *The Capital* that inspires the chapter on the related work of German philosopher-cum-filmmaker Alexander Kluge.

As much as films, any films, are archives of other films, filmmakers' prototexts are an endless source of theoretical gemstones for expert excavation. Turkish Nuri Bilge Ceylan and German Wim Wenders are heirs of a long-standing lineage of filmmaking writers and philosophers of the likes of Tarkovsky, Antonioni, Bergman and Bresson, and are thus duly represented in this book.

But we should not underestimate the role of women in expanding and democratising both the concept of 'filmmaker' and the filmmaking activity as a theoretical act, first and foremost with the intervention of Laura Mulvey who, with the help of psychoanalysis, deconstructed the ideology inherent in the visual pleasures provided by dominant American cinema. *Riddles of the Sphinx*, directed by her and Peter Wollen in 1977, is perhaps the most eloquent example of filmmaking as theory. Women are in fact a prominent presence in this volume, including Agnès Varda, Maya Deren and, of course, Chantal Akerman, whose *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) has been crowned by the 2022 *Sight & Sound* poll as the greatest film of all times, which is the very first time a woman, and a resolute feminist at that, has achieved such a recognition.

Though marked by a strong Portuguese-Brazilian cinephilic alliance, supported by the Association of the Moving Image (AIM) in Portugal, and the Brazilian Society of Cinema and Audiovisual Studies (SOCINE), this collection stands out for its truly global breadth, bringing together and celebrating the thought of filmmakers from India to Turkey, from Germany to China, from paper to screen and back into a substantial book. An admirable feat, and an indispensable read for film experts and lovers alike.