


 FILM-PHILOSOPHY

Review: Winfried Pauleit, Christine Ruffert, Karl-Heinz Schmid, Alfred Tews, eds. (2009) *Das Kino träumt: Projektion, Imagination, Vision/ Cinema Dreams: Projection, Imagination, Vision*. German edition. CD-ROM with English version and film clips. Berlin: Bertz and Fischer

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The link between cinema and dreams seems to be as old as cinema itself. Be it Hollywood's dream factory, Lacanian psychoanalysis or apparatus theory; the theoretical works connecting both subjects are manifold. Some theorists describe cinema as a dream state, others compare watching films to dreaming or discuss the dream-like quality of film narratives and images. The body of work ranges from mainstream fantasies to auteur films and experimental cinema.

So what new aspects can contemporary theory contribute to this debate? The new collection by Winfried Pauleit and colleagues gives a broad variety of impulses, ranging from surreal production design to Eastern philosophy. Having previous experience with essay collections looking at links between cinema, psychology and philosophy, such as his book *Word and Flesh: Cinema between Text and Body* (reviewed in *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 13, nr. 1), Pauleit and his colleagues have sufficient experience in editing such works. However, the book under discussion here would in my mind have benefited from a more stringent framing by the editors. Nonetheless, the effort to enliven a long running discourse must be appreciated, even when the selection of essays feels slightly random at times.

According to Pauleit's introduction, this book attempts not to follow the classic debate, which for him focuses on the dreamlike character of films and the cinematic experience itself. This work, on the other hand, aims to

investigate the process of dreaming itself, insofar as it relates to cinema. Pauleit writes that people ‘have built complex apparatuses such as the cinema’ (8) in order to dream. Thus he describes the scope of this collection as much broader than the traditional debate and attempts to find out more about contemporary society and the films it produces. Various film clips are included in the English e-book, which accompanies the German print version, and provide an effective visual support to the understanding of the diverse articles.

The first of ten essays is ‘Non-Thought, Non-Knowledge: On the visual unconscious.’ Here, Kathrin Peters discusses Walter Benjamin’s notion of the optical unconscious and its influence on aesthetic and theoretical works, such as the writings by Roland Barthes, Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Rancière. Her paper provides an introduction to aesthetic aspects of the image rather than focussing specifically on cinema, but is nevertheless an interesting starting point. Based on Benjamin’s theories Peters aims to explore the materiality of images independently from the significance brought to them by narrative and biographical contexts. Peters argues with Benjamin that while film is linked to the collective unconscious because of its collective reception, ‘it is not the stories or figures told in the film that touch the unconscious, but rather individual images, shots, and technological phenomena.’ (6) However, Peters’s next theorist Rosalind Krauss claims that it is not the camera that reveals an otherwise hidden visual world, as Benjamin had suggested, but it is only the artist who creates these new images. Peters then tries to find a way in between the two arguments by separating ‘Benjamin’s notion of the optical unconscious from a reading that reduces it to the technical’, in order to acknowledge ‘his notion that photography allows another dimension of visibility and thus another aesthetic to become legible’ (9). At this point she links the paper to Roland Barthes’s theory of photography and his concept of coincidence and the existence of an un-nameable element. Concluding, Peters turns to Rancière and his understanding of aesthetics as something that is not a theory of art but a ‘realm of nonthought’ (14).

The next article provides a systematic review of dream theories in film studies. Matthias Brütsch's paper, 'Dream Screen? The Dream/Film Analogy in Historical Context,' thus facilitates an understanding of subsequent articles for readers not fully cognisant of existing discourses. The most interesting point is Brütsch's notion 'that it took decades until the first analogies between film and the dream were expressly formulated in psychological terms' (26).

This overview is followed by Laura Rascaroli's remarkable analysis of the relation between dream theory and documentary film. Discussing Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003), she develops the concept of a film self-portrait, proving that documentary style does not per se contradict a dreamlike film style and that cinematic dreams are not the exclusive domain of fiction films. Rascaroli thus challenges the assumption that 'cinema's two natures, the indexical trace and the oneiric imagination,' are indeed 'irreconcilable' (49). She further argues that the combination of documentary and dreamlike elements is most often found in auteur films. This presumption directs her to the concept of the self-portrait, which is according to Rascaroli at the same time factual and subjective. After a short yet informative outline on the idea of the self-portrait in cultural history, Rascaroli focuses on her case study *Tarnation*. She argues that the film

questions the nature of nonfiction cinema and, while undeniable being a document, it raises one more time the age-old question whether there is any merit in separating the indexical nature of film from its imaginative, oneiric component, and of seeing them as belonging to two opposing impulses and artistic gestures (58).

The subsequent detailed discussion of the visual elements of the film is convincing and surely provides new aspects for a genre that has been widely ignored with regard to its dream connections.

Karl Sierek's essay 'I'm Flying' analyses the dream spaces of contemporary Chinese cinema, focussing largely on the visual aspects of flying and floating. He cleverly links these stylistic elements to an understanding of space and movement based on Taoist philosophy and an Eastern conception of the body. Exploring the references between the dream

experience and flying as a perception of movement and time beyond physical limitations, Sierek states that one essential element in the visual representation of these dreamlike modes is the veil. Not only does the veil conceal the actual bodies and give them a light and airy quality, it also generates a new sense of time. As Sierek writes, the veils ‘form an echo of the body motions’ and ‘do not submit to the rapid changes in speed and direction of the veiled body without slight resistance and palpable delay’ (71). Apart from flying bodies, there is also the ‘flying camera’ and sublime points of view, which is not common in other cinemas. Whereas in Western cinematography these perspectives are often used to describe ‘un-natural’ states, e.g., dream or madness, Sierek argues that in Chinese films they are

rather a codified normal case scenario – floating viewpoints appear here quite simply as resulting from the space and gaze conception of a culture that has not granted subjectivized vision the importance we are familiar with. (76)

The last aspect regarding flying objects, such as projectiles, daggers and arrows, seems to represent a modern point of view more influenced by computer games and contemporary weapon technology and can also be found in contemporary Hollywood films, e.g. *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999)

Subsequently, Paul Young goes back to the early cinema, investigating D. W. Griffith’s war epos *Hearts of the World* (1918) and its fictional realism. His article examines the foundation of Hollywood realism, which opts for a concept of ‘verisimilitude’ marking the departure of silent cinema from a representation that emphasises the technological novelty of the medium.

The next essay ‘Writing for Breakfast: Dream and opening Credits’ is confusing in so far as it feels like two essays put together. Rembert Hüser aims to position Sigmund Freud as a cinematic thinker by combining anecdotes of the latter’s biography with his analysis of the opening sequence from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (Blake Edwards, 1961). That said, the second part of the paper, which discusses the title sequence of *Breakfast* is very interesting and poses valid questions regarding the connection between

image and text. Hüser argues that opening scenes are the places where ‘the film dreams of itself and admits what it tries to conceal: how it came to be’ (111). He asks whether this dream sequence would have been equally memorable if it did not feature the opening credits. Hüser’s answer is no, as according to him it is the writing that gives the images their dreamlike quality. He further notes that maybe this sequence is ‘so dreamy because it plays through the relationship of image and letter in film in all its facets quite unnoticeably, with a kind of somnambulistic security’ (113). I would have wished for a more detailed discussion of this aspect instead of the biographical notes on Sigmund Freud’s journey to America.

With Philippe-Alain Michaud and his essay ‘Dream and Film: Visual Forms in Scientific and Experimental Cinema’ the book continues its discussion of dream and film. Michaud argues that the dreamlike quality of films vanished with the invention of sound film and we now only find its remainders in experimental and scientific film projects. He further compares the connection between film and dream to that between film and drawing, in the sense that ‘the light of the projection is unequally distributed on the surface of the screen and covers it in an unstable manner, ephemerally and incompletely’ (126). The soundtrack brought upon us the dominance of narration, and this dominance thus eliminates the dreamlike quality of the cinematic.

Mechthild Zeul draws on post-Freudian theories, mainly by René Spitz and Bertram Lewin, to interpret Pedro Almodóvar’s film *Volver* (2005). The most interesting aspect in Spitz’s theories on early childhood experiences is in the duality of passively absorbing and actively seeing, which Zeul applies to cinema. She carefully suggests that Almodóvar’s ‘use of music as a means of expression in film puts the audience in the role of the infant, which cannot yet speak and is directly exposed to both internal and external stimuli’ (135). With regard to *Volver* she particularly points out that music is directly used as narrative which, together with the ambivalent characters of the leading female figures encourage the audience to identify with several primary experiences.

In 'Stuff Which Dreams are Made Of,' Kristina Jaspers turns to the more practical aspects of production design in films, more specifically in dream sequences. She examines different forms of representation, comparing the films *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (*Secrets of a soul*, G.W. Papst, 1926), *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) and *La Science des Rêves* (*The Science of Sleep*, Michel Gondry, 2006). A central element in the visualisation of dream states is according to Jaspers the use of clichés, which, from the perspective of the production design, are not negatively marked. They rather present strong symbols that are easy to recognise and collectively understood. Nevertheless, these processes ultimately depend on the audience that has 'the freedom to make associations with these dream spaces' and 'thus the processes will always remain subjective' (157).

The final paper of the book introduces Lars von Trier's journey through dream and hypnosis represented in his *Europa* trilogy. According to the author, Dietmar Kammerer, these films present 'not history, but the dream of history' (164). Proceeding from *The Element of Crime* (*Forbrydelsens Element*, 1984) to *Epidemic* (1987) and finally *Europa* (1991), Kammerer tells the story of a cinematic dream, which continuously slides into hypnosis and nightmare, so that the distinction between film dream and film reality ultimately becomes indistinguishable. This well-written and convincing study presents an inspiring conclusion to this collection.

Although not all the essays manage to set its subject in the broader socio-cultural context of cinematic dreams, which Pauleit had suggested in his introduction, this book is clearly of critical interest in how it provides new impulses and positions in a discourse that seems to be as compelling as it was a century ago.