

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82244-2 - A Philosophy of Cinematic Art
Berys Gaut
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

A PHILOSOPHY OF CINEMATIC ART

A Philosophy of Cinematic Art is a systematic study of cinema as an art form, showing how the medium conditions fundamental features of cinematic artworks. It discusses the status of cinema as an art form, whether there is a language of film, realism in cinema, cinematic authorship, intentionalist and constructivist theories of interpretation, cinematic narration, the role of emotions in responses to films, the possibility of identification with characters, and the nature of the cinematic medium. Groundbreaking in its coverage of a wide range of contemporary cinematic media, it analyses not only traditional photographic films, but also digital cinema, and a variety of interactive cinematic works, including videogames. Written in a clear and accessible style, the book examines the work of leading film theorists and philosophers of film, and develops a powerful framework with which to think about cinema as an art.

BERYS GAUT is Professor of Philosophy at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (2007) and co-editor of *The Creation of Art* (2003) and *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (2nd edn, 2005).

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82244-2 - A Philosophy of Cinematic Art
Berys Gaut
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

A PHILOSOPHY OF CINEMATIC ART

BERYS GAUT



Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82244-2 - A Philosophy of Cinematic Art
Berys Gaut
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521529648

© Berys Gaut 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-82244-2 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-52964-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82244-2 - A Philosophy of Cinematic Art
Berys Gaut
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For Morag

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1.1 Film theory and philosophy	2
1.2 Moving image technologies	6
1. The challenges to cinema as an art	21
1.1 The causal challenge	22
1.2 The reproduction challenge	34
1.3 Film and communication	42
1.4 Digital cinema as art	43
2. Language and realism	51
2.1 Film as a language	51
2.2 Digital cinema and language	56
2.3 Realism: traditional and digital cinema	60
2.4 Transparency: traditional and digital cinema	78
3. Cinematic authorship	98
3.1 Two puzzles	98
3.2 Varieties of auteurism	99
3.3 Minimal auteurism	102
3.4 Three strategies for single authorship	105
3.5 Cinematic utterance and single authorship	118
3.6 Ontology and multiple authorship	125
3.7 The multiple-authorship view refined	128
3.8 Digital cinema and authorship	133
3.9 Interactivity and authorship	140
4. Understanding cinema	152
4.1 Intentionalism	152
4.2 Constructivism	164

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
4.3	The patchwork theory	180
4.4	Digital cinema and interpretation	192
5.	Cinematic narration	197
5.1	Symmetry or asymmetry?	197
5.2	The a priori argument	199
5.3	Three models of implicit cinematic narrators	202
5.4	Absurd imaginings and silly questions	209
5.5	Literary narrators	218
5.6	Other narrative features	221
5.7	Interactive narration	224
6.	Emotion and identification	244
6.1	Emotion and cinema	244
6.2	The concept of identification	252
6.3	Identification and film techniques	263
6.4	Identification and emotional learning	268
6.5	Emotion and interaction	272
7.	The role of the medium	282
7.1	Two tendencies in the philosophy of art	282
7.2	Medium-specificity claims	286
7.3	Evaluating artworks	292
7.4	Explaining artistic features	296
7.5	Media and art forms	300
7.6	Conclusion	306
	<i>Bibliography</i>	308
	<i>Index</i>	318

Illustrations

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. The four-way split screen in <i>Time Code</i> (2000). Source: Red Mullet Prod/The Kobal Collection/Marks, Elliot. | <i>page</i> II |
| 2. Frodo (Elijah Wood), Gollum and Sam (Sean Astin) in <i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> (2003). Source: New Line Cinema/The Kobal Collection. | 44 |
| 3. Ann (Naomi Watts) and Kong: photorealism in <i>King Kong</i> (2005). Source: Universal/Wing Nut Films/The Kobal Collection. | 66 |
| 4. Deep focus in <i>Rules of the Game</i> (1939). Source: Nouvelle Edition Française/The Kobal Collection. | 74 |
| 5. Sal (Danny Aiello) gesticulating at Mookie (Spike Lee) in <i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989). Source: Universal/The Kobal Collection. | 131 |
| 6. Tajomaru, the bandit (Toshiro Mifune) and Masago, the wife (Machiko Kyo) in <i>Rashomon</i> (1950). Source: Daiei Films/The Kobal Collection. | 185 |
| 7. Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) receiving her award in <i>All about Eve</i> (1950). Source: 20th Century Fox/The Kobal Collection. | 210 |
| 8. Phil Connors (Bill Murray) reporting in <i>Groundhog Day</i> (1993). Source: Columbia/The Kobal Collection. | 266 |
| 9. Lisa (Joan Fontaine) and Stefan (Louis Jourdan) in <i>Letter from an Unknown Woman</i> (1948). Source: Universal/The Kobal Collection. | 270 |

Preface

In 1987 I was working towards my PhD at Princeton and was surprised to discover that the Department of Philosophy was offering a course on the philosophy of film. I had no idea that such a subject existed. I was interested in the philosophy of art and had a passing interest in film, so I decided to sit in on the lectures. The course was a revelation: one could actually do philosophy about film and moreover do it in a way that was both intellectually rigorous and also acutely sensitive to the aesthetic qualities of individual films. The visiting professor who taught that course was George Wilson, who has been a friend and something of a mentor ever since. My greatest intellectual debts in the philosophy of film are to him. Had he not taught that course, this book would probably never have been written.

Having been inspired by George's course, I attended several film courses run by P. Adams Sitney and Tony Pipolo at Princeton. I sat well back in a large lecture theatre, and I suspect that they never knew I was there. But their lectures showed me, along with George's wonderful interpretations of films, how powerful and interesting films could be and that films were capable of far greater depth than I had previously imagined. My debts to these two scholars are considerable.

On moving to St Andrews in 1990, I was delighted to discover that my new colleagues encouraged me to start a philosophy of film course, and they have been unfailingly supportive of my endeavours since then. I also owe a great deal to several generations of St Andrews undergraduates and post-graduates, who have attended the various philosophy of film courses I have taught. Most of the material in this book has been, in various versions, road tested on them. They no doubt suffered through early drafts of this material, but several of them, as well as some of my erstwhile colleagues who taught the course when I was on leave, have gone on to teach philosophy of film courses since then, so I suppose that I must have been doing something right. Roy Cook, Brandon Cooke, Matthew Kieran, Kathleen Stock, Hamish Thompson and Kate Thomson-Jones were among my victims.

I would also like to thank the many philosophers and film theorists who have over the years given me comments on papers or talks, material from which has been incorporated into this book. These include Noël Carroll, Diarmuid Costello, Greg Currie, Julian Dodd, Jonathan Friday, Peter Goldie, John Hyman, Andrew Kania, Jerry Levinson, Paisley Livingston, Dom Lopes, Patrick Maynard, Bence Nanay, Alex Neill, Michael Newall, Carl Plantinga, Greg Smith, Murray Smith and Kendall Walton. I am particularly grateful to Richard Allen and David Davies, who read a draft of the entire manuscript and provided many helpful comments on it. I am also grateful for the comments on the book by members of my M.Litt. seminar on the philosophy of film in 2008. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Noël Carroll, whose work on the philosophy of film played a critical role in convincing me early on that the subject is one that can support serious philosophical endeavours, and whose writings and friendship have been of great importance to me in helping me to develop my own philosophy of cinema.

I would like to thank the University of St Andrews for funding two periods of research leave and the Leverhulme Trust for granting me a Research Fellowship to work on the book. I am also very grateful to Hilary Gaskin and Gillian Dadd at Cambridge University Press, whose encouragement for me to write this book has been much appreciated. And I am indebted to the staff at the Kobal Collection for being unfailingly helpful and efficient in providing the illustrations for this book.

This book draws in part on several of my previously published papers, though this material has been extensively revised and augmented. I have used material from the following by kind permission of Oxford University Press: 'Film' in Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (2003); 'Film Authorship and Collaboration' in Richard Allen and Murray Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy* (1997); and 'Making Sense of Films: Neoformalism and its Limits', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 31 (1995), pp. 8–23. I am grateful to Blackwell Publishers for permission to use material from: 'The Philosophy of the Movies: Cinematic Narration' in Peter Kivy (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 2004); 'Interpreting the Arts: The Patchwork Theory', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51 (1993), pp. 597–609; and 'Cinematic Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60 (2002), pp. 299–312. I would like to thank Routledge for permission to use material from 'Digital Cinema' in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (Routledge, 2009). I have also used material from 'Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film' in Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (eds.),

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82244-2 - A Philosophy of Cinematic Art
Berys Gaut
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

xiii

Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion, pp. 200–16; © 1999 The Johns Hopkins University Press, reprinted with permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press. I am grateful to the Association for Media Education in Scotland for permission to use material from ‘Film and Language’, *Media Education Journal*, 38 (2005), pp. 19–20. I have used parts of ‘Imagination, Interpretation, and Film’, *Philosophical Studies*, 89 (1998), pp. 331–41, with kind permission of Springer Science and Business Media. Finally, I am grateful to *Presses Universitaires de France* for allowing me to use material from ‘Opaque Pictures’, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 62 (2008), pp. 381–96.

Finally, as always, my thanks go to my parents, and to Morag, Suzanne and Robert. The dedication of the book speaks for itself.