

2024 Vol 23 Issue No. 1 – Idealism and Contemporary Film Theory

> EDITORIAL

Idealism and Contemporary Film Theory: Subjectivity, Politics, Technics

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This special issue of *Transformations* explores the relevance and utility of philosophical idealism as it pertains to film theory, film analysis and film in general. Less a defence of idealist philosophy than a sympathetic reconsideration of its tenacious influence upon theoretical and hermeneutical approaches to film, the special issue houses a range of contributions whose diverse philosophical interests testify to the difficulty of reducing idealism to any narrowly defined philosophical proposition, school of thought or movement. First conceived as a panel on “The Idealism of Contemporary Film Theory,” delivered at the 2022 Screen Studies Association of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand conference, this issue is motivated by a concern to rectify the lack of careful attention that has been paid to the question of idealism in film scholarship since the discipline was subject to a so-called “philosophical turn.” Persuaded that there is a need to reconsider the legacy of philosophical idealism in Film Studies, we propose this issue in the hope that, by publishing scholarly work that closely engages with the problem of idealism as it pertains to films and film theory, these articles will open up new avenues for film theoretical and film philosophical enquiry.

Although the *concept* of idealism has been employed with some degree of regularity as the “bad object” of Film Studies – misconstrued as a one-sided form of subjectivism incommensurate with “objectivist” approaches such as Marxist materialism or cognitivist film theory, and, more recently, as a brand of anti-naturalism at odds with the naturalism of the new materialisms of the post-humanist turn – idealism as a *philosophical stance to the world* poses a challenge to its most vocal detractors insofar as, without some notion of the ontology of *ideas*, such theoretical and philosophical discourses could not be articulated. Indeed, ideation subtends even the most strident anti-idealisms as these positions have no

choice but to reckon with thought as a dynamic process irreducible to its material origins or outcomes. In rethinking the way philosophical idealism has shaped the way we perceive, conceptualise and experience films, the articles in this issue – each in their own way – testify to the imperative of arriving at a more nuanced appreciation of the way the idealist tradition has shaped the annals of film theory and continues to enrich our comprehension of films.

The contributions that populate this issue cover significant philosophical territory, from Leibniz's monadology (Esmail), to Fichte's transcendental realism (Mules), Deleuze's "transcendental empiricism" (Kent) and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology (Cribb). A recurrent philosophical motif found among this selection of articles is the question of the "subject" – key to the Germanic idealist tradition – which might be viewed as a subject of reason (Dasgupta), of the unconscious (Shervington) or of cinema itself (Jampol-Petzinger). There are also contributions built around close analyses of specific films that might be fruitfully (re)read in relation to questions of ideality including Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (Lash), Tom Ford's *A Single Man* (Hillman), Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Escobar) and Guy Maddin, Evan Johnson and Galen Johnson's "never-to-be-repeated" *The Mark of the Brief Night* (Băcăran). Collectively, they demonstrate that there are not only numerous avenues through which we can reassess the question of idealism in Film Studies today, but equally that ours is a field overflowing with numerous (often incompatible) ideas about what, where and for whom cinema is.