COGNITIVE DELEUZE:
REPORT ON THE SCSMI CONFERENCE
(ROANOKE, 2-5 JUNE 2010) AND
THE DELEUZE STUDIES CONFERENCE
(AMSTERDAM, 12-14 JULY 2010)

William Brown (Roehampton University)

Given that many of the more prominent members of the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) were contributors to David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's edited collection, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*,[1] it might seem strange to put a conference report of its 2010 meeting alongside a report of the 2010 Deleuze Studies Conference.

For, in his opening broadside against theory, Noël Carroll comes straight out and says that the growth of (North American) film studies over the two decades preceding the publication of his and Bordwell's book had been influenced — negatively in his eyes — by, among others, Gilles Deleuze.[2]

That said, Deleuze only gets mentioned a handful of times in *Post-Theory*'s significant number of pages and, Carroll aside, he does not really come in for much criticism. (And it is worth noting that Carroll's beef is mainly with those that *use* Deleuze, and not with Deleuze's work itself.)

The next year, David Bordwell mentions Deleuze in one of his solo works, *On the History of Film Style*, but only to give a very brief overview of the Frenchman's two *Cinema* books, before, some thirty pages later, griping that Deleuze has "seized upon the findings of traditional film historians and reinterpreted them according to a preferred Grand Theory."[3]

In other words, Bordwell does not take issue with Deleuze's scholarship, but he does seem miffed that Deleuze might see for himself patterns that others had also

seen — as if confirmation of results through repetition and verification were not the very bedrock of empirical analysis and research.

This is not to overlook the fact that Bordwell disagrees with the idea that cinema has a "grand narrative," something that *does* emerge in Deleuze and for which Bordwell expresses a concern that is in many respects legitimate: when one looks at cinema from a great enough distance, as Deleuze seems to, patterns emerge (the predominant ones being what Deleuze calls movement- and time-images) that may not be visible on the ground level, and which therefore can be contested as being the fabrication of the observer.

However, a close-up of a person is no more or less "accurate" or "true" than a long shot of that same person, even if they reveal completely different levels of detail. And I would wager that the same applies to how we regard cinema: Bordwell's track record for brilliantly detailed analyses of films, both in terms of individual texts and across a range of texts, is no less valid than Deleuze's even more long-sighted look at cinema. Deleuze, from his distant position, may not see all of the details that Bordwell does, but it is particularly interesting to see what cinema does look like from the distance that Deleuze has reached. Like seeing Earth from space, all trace of individual human life has vanished, but the view can lead to greater levels of understanding.

Now, to employ a "relativistic argument" along the lines of legitimating *both* of these perspectives might be the kind of manœuvre that Bordwell and many of his "empirically-minded" colleagues might expect, and which therefore they would refute by virtue of the fact that it is not "empirical" and, precisely, relativistic. But if such an argument to "delegitimize" Deleuze were made, then it might also undermine the work of the "traditional film historians" with whom Deleuze seems in fact to agree — in Bordwell's words — even though his methodology and (as far as my current analogy of space and vision is concerned) perspective might differ.

Besides, it is not as if a science such as physics were not concerned with trying to find a balance between the macro (astrophysics) and the micro (quantum physics) so as to find what Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg has called a "final theory."[4]

In other words, one wonders whether the real cause for the discord between what I shall generalise as cognitivists, such as Bordwell, and "continental" philosophers, such as Deleuze, is not something else, something different. Blogging soon after the 2010 SCSMI Conference in Roanoke, Virginia, Bordwell wrote the following:

> Traditional humanists would decry a lot of what goes on at SCSMI meetings. The appeal to general explanations, the recourse to biology and evolution, the use of quantitative and experimental methods would all smack of "scientism." But more and more, humanists are starting to turn away from the endless reinterpretation of canonical or non-canonical artworks. Many are also quietly defecting from the Big Theory that dominated the 80s and 90s. In film publishing, I'm told, editors have come to an informal moratorium on books on Deleuze. Possibly more people write them than read them.[5]

Given how widely read David Bordwell's work is, I am not about to level any accusations of territoriality among or between these film scholars (not least because Gilles Deleuze is dead). That is, there are no sour grapes from Bordwell, who is doing fine, thank you, and even if there were I (and presumably many people) would have no care to know about them.

What I would say, though, is that Bordwell's contention that there are more books on Deleuze (and cinema) than there are people to read them is not only a hyperbole perhaps typical of the blogosphere, but it is also to misunderstand what a number of those publications do. That is, a number of recent Deleuzian film scholars have not simply been applying Deleuze's ideas to yet more cinemas from more eras and places

in order to offer up "endless reinterpretations," even though in principle this might seem to be the case (as if this were a bad pursuit in the first place — or would Bordwell claim with confidence that he has given us the final word on Ozu and Dreyer?).

Rather many (if not all) Deleuzian scholars have those other cinemas that they consider feed back into Deleuze's work, and they use these other cinemas to expand his taxonomy of images into newer categories. That is, work by Patricia Pisters and David Martin-Jones, among others, has realigned Deleuze within a series of different socio-historical contexts; in Bordwell-speak, we might say that they have used Deleuze's ideas as a springboard to looking at cinema from the perspective of "traditional film historians."[6]

In this respect, then, the "problem" with Deleuze, or rather Deleuzians, is not so much that they ignore film history "on the ground." It is that they persist in using Deleuze, defined here as a macro film scholar, even though they combine this macro scholarship with the micro levels of film history. For example, David Martin-Jones talked at the Deleuze Studies Conference in Amsterdam about how Deleuze's ideas do — and do not — apply to pre-1907 cinema, or what Tom Gunning has called the *cinema of attraction(s)*.[7] Martin-Jones proposes that a new type of "image" emerges, the "attraction image," which may sound high falutin to the "scientist" film scholars out there, but which is an effort to combine the two approaches, and which in itself is a more productive endeavour than the wholesale rejection of Deleuze that otherwise seems to take place.

To give the SCSMI its due, many of its members are concerned with the "macro" view of film history — as psychologist James Cutting's keynote address made clear.[8] Cutting and his team had looked at the rates of change in American feature films dating from the 1930s through to the present day and, in accordance with Bordwell's diagnosis that the continuity system of mainstream filmmaking has undergone an "intensification," they found that films move faster, cut faster, and

generally just *are* faster these days than they used to be.[9] This is macro film history and a more empirical version of it than the rather personalised overview that Deleuze does offer in his *Cinema* books — personalised because one does not get the impression that Deleuze watched any films that he did not want to watch in order to write his books.[10]

But in Deleuze-speak, Cutting's findings are important: for in the same way that Cutting informally linked his findings to a rise in ADHD, so too might a Deleuzian see the intensification of Hollywood cinema as the continued predominance of movement-image cinema over time-image cinema. That is, the predominance of a cinema based upon action and not upon giving spectators room to think, which Deleuze sees in "modernist" filmmakers of the post-war period (Antonioni, Resnais, etc.) and political new waves cinemas that similarly try to encourage critical thinking in their spectators. And while implicitly there is a political agenda to Cutting's worry that fast films provoke ADHD, so, too, explicitly, is Deleuze worried that fast (and violent) cinema in Hollywood leads to "Hitlerism."[11]

The question for both cognitivists and for Deleuzians becomes: is it really the case that films can affect our bodies and minds and produce in us modes of behaviour that are "constructed" at least in part through watching films and other audiovisual media? Those unfamiliar with Deleuze might assume at this point that the latter, Deleuze, would base his understanding of cinematic affect (what cinema does to its spectators) on some psychoanalytic theory predicated upon lack. That is, Deleuze would never have to get up out of his bed to find out what *really* happened during film viewing, because he would have some theory to answer as much.

Well, such an assumption is in part accurate — Gilles Deleuze did not conduct any lab experiments to verify his theories. But it is also inaccurate. Not only was the

book that made Deleuze's (and Félix Guattari's) name, *Anti-Oedipus*, in part a broadside against (Freudian) psychoanalysis, for Deleuze believed that desire is not based upon lack but upon presence, but Deleuze did also become, as Paul Elliott has recently pointed out, increasingly preoccupied with neuroscience and precisely scientific understandings of the human brain — and body.[12]

This was for Deleuze not solely the aim of understanding cinema, but of understanding the processes of thought and creativity more generally — although cinema continued to play an important role in Deleuze's (thinking about) thinking until his death in 1995. However, that this turn did take place in Deleuze's work leads me to my main point for putting SCSMI and Deleuze Studies together in this conference report: namely, to make relatively clear that not only are (some) cognitivist and (some) Deleuzian film scholars preoccupied with answering the same questions concerning what happens during the film viewing experience and how film can and does affect us both physically and mentally, but that both are increasingly incorporating similar methodologies, namely discoveries in psychology and neuroscience, in order to do so. For this reason, it seems that something of a *rapprochement* between the two is becoming overdue.

During its existence, the SCSMI has historically involved an emphasis on Hollywood cinema, something with which Malcolm Turvey took issue at this year's conference, in asking its members to consider films from outside the mainstream.[13] In many respects, Turvey's appeal stands to reason: psychologists have long since offered insights into "normal" brain functioning based upon "exceptional" brain conditions such as autism. Why not, therefore, use unconventional films in order better to understand how conventional films also function?

Daniel Barratt discussed in his paper at SCSMI how film viewers share responses when viewing mainstream films, but that attention quickly diverges to different parts of the screen (and thus we might speculate that they enter into divergent modes of

thought) when watching art house films.[14] Translated into Deleuzian lingo, this might reinforce the notion that movement-image (mainstream) cinema does encourage viewers to "think alike," an argument reaffirmed by the empirical work by Uri Hasson and colleagues in their research into "neurocinematics."[15]

Politically speaking, this may well constitute the kind of "Hitlerism" that Deleuze describes, whereby film viewers are encouraged to think in the same way as opposed to thinking differently. Meanwhile, art house (or, broadly speaking, time-image) cinema does seem to encourage viewers to think differently — and while it would be hard if not impossible to map each and every possible and/or real response or train of thought associated with art house film viewing, we might begin to understand how this divergence of thought happens *as a process*, in the same way that we can understand the mainstream viewing experience as a process as much as we might understand it as a thing.

This is not to reify or to confine to strict categories mainstream/movement-image cinema and art house/time-image cinema, since without question there is a lot of slippage between these two categories — and there are proponents both within the film-as-philosophy/philosophy of film camp (some of whose members do work in/with the SCSMI, such as Paisley Livingston, Thomas Wartenberg, and Murray Smith — not all of whom would agree with the position I am about to put forward) and in the Deleuze Studies camp (such as Richard Rushton, Patricia Pisters, Anna Powell, and Martin Rosenberg) who would argue that any film can inspire "philosophical thought," as opposed to this being simply the preserve of certain types of film. Furthermore, this is not to draw a hard and fast distinction between the body and the brain, wherein a rapprochement between Deleuze and cognitivists can also be drawn by the way in which Deleuze and prominent neuroscientist António Damásio both find their work centring upon the thought of Baruch Spinoza, who famously did argue that all that affects the body also affects the brain.[16]

Both the 2010 SCSMI Conference and the 2010 Deleuze Studies Conference offered far more in terms of papers than any one conference participant could hope to cover — testifying to the fact that both are in rude health (contrary to Bordwell's argument that fewer people read work on Deleuze than write it). The work of Stephen Prince and his team from Virginia Tech, and the work of Patricia Pisters at the University of Amsterdam and Rosi Braidotti at Utrecht University, together with their helpers, respectively organised two conferences that in 2010 allowed participants to feel as though they were part of cutting edge and innovative work with regard to moving image culture. Long may it continue — perhaps even with some dialogue beginning to take place between the two.

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1. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).
2. Ibid., 37.
3. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 116-17, 148.
4. Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory: The Search for the Fundamental Laws of Nature* (London: Vintage, 1993).
5. Bordwell, "Now You See It, Now You Can't," *Observations on Film Art*, 21 June 2010, accessed 12 November 2010, http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=8509.
6. Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).
7. Martin-Jones, "Attraction-Image: Early Silent Deleuze" (paper presented at Deleuze Studies, University of Amsterdam, 12 July 2010). Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI, 1991), 56-62.
8. James Cutting, "Attention, Intensity, and the Evolution of Hollywood Film" (paper presented at the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image, Roanoke, 3 June 2010).
9. Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 16-28.
10. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. (London: Continuum, 2005).
11. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 159.
12. Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Helen R. Lane, Robert Hurley, and Mark Seem (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). Paul Elliott, "The Eye, the Brain, the Screen: What Neuroscience Can Teach Film Theory," *Excursions* 1, no. 1 (June 2010): 1-16; accessed 12 November 2010, http://www.excursions-journal.org.uk/index.php/excursions/article/view/2/8.
13. Malcom Turvey, "Tati, Sight Gags, and Ludic Modernism" (paper presented at the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image, Roanoke, 4 June 2010).
14. Daniel Baratt, "Attending to the Moving Image: Toward a Computational Theory" (paper presented at the Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image, Roanoke, 2 June 2010).
15. Uri Hasson, Yuval Nir, Ifat Levy, Galit Fuhrmann, and Rafael Malach, "Intersubject Synchronization of Cortical Activity During Natural Vision," *Science* 303, no. 5664 (2004): 1634–40. Hasson, Ohad Landesman, Barbara Knappmayer, Ignacio Vallines, Nava Rubin, and David J. Heeger,

"Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film," *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1-26.

16. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988). Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza,* trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992). António Damásio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorry, and the Feeling Brain* (London: Vintage, 2003). Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996).