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Hilary Radner and Alistair Fox, *Raymond Bellour: Cinema and the Moving Image*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. 232 pp. \$34.98 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1474422888.

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A curious irony has accompanied the development of film studies in recent decades. We have seen an exponential increase in the quantity of scholars writing on the cinema: from the exiguous number of isolated individuals in the first half of the twentieth century, passing through the still quite compact academic discipline of the 1970s and 1980s, to the vast field of the present, incorporating thousands of individuals strewn across the world. But at the same time, the number of contemporary film thinkers who are worth writing *about*, in the way that has traditionally been done with the likes of Sergei Eisenstein, Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin or Walter Benjamin, has, if anything, diminished. It may seem as if the inexorable professionalization of the discipline has also led to a smoothing out of film scholarship: advances in the historical or cultural understanding of the moving image continue to be made, but more as the result of a collective, almost anonymous effort. Those individuals working today who offer a conceptually original insight into the cinema, such that their own thinking warrants an in-depth exegesis, are, by contrast, vanishingly rare.

One current film theorist who undoubtedly merits such scholarly attention, however, is Raymond Bellour. An active critic and thinker for more than fifty years (his first published texts appeared in the early 1960s), Bellour has accompanied the development of academic film studies from its origins. Moreover, he has been a personal eyewitness to the evolution of the cinema, with its often tumultuous formal and technical metamorphoses, throughout much of its history. This enduring presence alone would be reason enough to reflect on his ideas on the cinema, but, more importantly, during Bellour's time as a film theorist, he has been a singularly restless, groundbreaking thinker, perpetually prepared to break with received notions (including his own past methods) and re-conceptualize the cinema in new, theoretically stimulating and even, at times, bracingly polemical ways.

We have had to wait, however, until 2018 for such a study to materialize. With *Raymond Bellour: Cinema and the Moving Image*, Hilary Radner and Alistair Fox, professors emeriti at Otago University in New Zealand, have released the first in-depth study of Bellour's film theory, following on closely from the book-length interview published in French in 2017, *Dans la compagnie des œuvres*, selections from which are included here in translation. Radner/Fox's endeavor departs markedly, however, from the conventional form of the standard academic monograph. Instead, their book is divided into three heterogeneous parts: a seventy-page exploration of the contours of his thinking penned by Radner is succeeded by a hundred pages of material from interviews conducted by Gabriel Bortzmeyer and Alice Leroy (and translated and edited by Fox), while the book is capped off with a short biographical sketch and bibliography, serving as a handy reference guide for the reader impatient to turn to Bellour's writings themselves.

The fragmented structure of Radner/Fox's text is a mirror, undoubtedly, of the shifting, mutable nature

of their subject's life and work. Far from nurturing a unified, consistent research project over the course of his academic career, Bellour is a thinker who has led many lives. From his early cinephilia, when, as with so many other young Parisians, Bellour was enamored with classical Hollywood cinema, to his structural analysis of the 1960s, his more psychoanalysis-inflected writings of the 1970s, his Deleuze-inspired work on the "between-images" of the 1990s, and his more recent preoccupation with the proliferation of contemporary image-forms, Bellour has frequently changed his positions, methodologies and theoretical frameworks. This should not be seen as evidence of mercuriality or opportunism, but rather of an inquisitive mind constantly seeking out new possibilities for receiving and comprehending the moving image. This is not to mention the fact that the cinema has only ever represented one part of Bellour's profile as a thinker, given that he has written amply on literature—especially the work of Henri Michaux, Alexandre Dumas and the Brontë sisters—and even published his own poetic and literary writings.

Radner/Fox have judiciously refrained from any in-depth discussion of this non-film-related material, but even when restricting themselves to Bellour's cinema-focused output, the authors are presented with a considerable challenge. How to convey the major through-lines of Bellour's thinking, when their subject so often disavows his earlier work, stressing the ruptures and reversals with his previous ideas rather than the continuities? How to synthesize Bellour's methodology, when he himself resists the very idea that he has a consistent method to approaching works of cinema? And how to summarize Bellour's ideas in an easily digestible format, when confronted with such a vast textual corpus, and when so much of the impact of Bellour's work derives from the subtlety and complexity of its *écriture*, the intricate, "rhizomatic" manner in which he imparts his thinking to the reader? If Bellour is famous for his notion of the "unattainable text"—the insight that the moving image, incapable of being frozen and captured without the loss, precisely, of its movement, ineluctably eludes the analyst—then his own work, in a way, is an unattainable text, always slipping away from the interpreter at the moment they seek to firmly grasp it.

Commendably, Radner/Fox do not shirk from the daunting nature of their chosen project, but confess to its contradictory nature from the very start of their study: a synthetic overview of Bellour's film and media theory may, they admit, appear to be "a violation of the very principles that he advocates, the most crucial being an attentiveness to specific arts, whether it be a film, a poem, or an installation, over time" (p. 1). Their modest response is that *Raymond Bellour: Cinema and the Moving Image* proposes merely a single point of entry into his work, representing only one possible *parcours* into "a very thickly wooded terrain of dense vegetation that must be examined in detail to understand its full effect and import" (p. 1). The book's introduction highlights some of the main contradictions in Bellour's work: that between the roles of critic and scholar (Bellour's beginnings as a film reviewer still leave a mark on his often unabashedly partisan writing), that between a fascination with the ineffable powers of the image and the need to discuss it via the medium of the written word, and that between his persistent engagement with multifarious forms of "new" media and his nostalgic preference for the cinema of the past. As such, the authors note the difficulty with which Bellour can be inserted into wider theoretical movements: while moving away from structuralism and (later) psychoanalytic film theory, he has also kept a healthily ironic distance from the North American "post-theory" of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Instead, his recent influences are more eclectic, taking in the child psychologist Daniel Stern, the neurobiologist Antonio Damasio, or research done into the history of hypnosis.

The four chapters of Radner's overview of Bellour, while adopting a generally chronological order, nonetheless have a more overarching thematic delineation, and Radner is happy to make dramatic leaps across different time periods within each chapter. The first of these, dedicated to Bellour's practice of film analysis, is indicative of this tendency. Radner finds the origins of Bellour's approach not only in the wave of structuralist theory dominant in the 1960s, which found fruit in the field of film studies with the Saussurean linguistics deployed by Christian Metz, but also in the French education system's emphasis on *explication du texte* exercises. Radner notes that Metz and Bellour represented a revolution in the appreciation of film, breaking with the belletristic critical tradition of Bazin and other *Cahiers du*

*cinéma* writers, and moving it towards a more strictly academic, even scientific register. Nobody, perhaps, has undertaken more meticulous efforts at the analytic dissection of films than Bellour did in his Hitchcock studies of the 1960s and 1970s (*The Birds*, *Psycho* and *North by Northwest*). In an echo of Freud's "finite and infinite analysis," however, Bellour found himself thwarted by the impossibility of producing a truly complete analysis of any sequence of moving images, and his focus on Hitchcock also induced a turn to psychoanalytic film theory, with a focus on the role of "symbolic blockage" and the Oedipal scenario in classical Hollywood cinema. Even here, however, Bellour met with frustration: inspired, in part, by Deleuze and Guattari's renunciation of psychoanalysis in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Bellour's later writing tended to speak of "textual volumes," the "between-images" or "the body" of a film. If film analysis is no longer a central part of Bellour's project in his more recent writings, the analytic mentality has nonetheless persisted, up to the present, in the painstaking attention to detail in Bellour's methodology, while the structuralist emphasis on issues of enunciation continues to be reflected in Bellour's focus on the question of authorship in a film. As Radner writes, "Bellour's unwillingness to give up the notion of an author paradoxically served him well when approaching art in the subsequent decades of the twentieth century" (p. 27).

Chapter two thus follows Bellour's path from a traditionally cinephilic concern for canonical works of cinema, to newer image forms and modes of spectatorship, primarily those to be found in gallery-based moving-image art. For Radner, the sweeping technological changes of the end of the millennium dovetailed with biographical influences—notably, the turn of Bellour's friend Thierry Kuntzel from film theorist to video and multimedia artist. While Bellour has been stimulated by certain works of video art, with their perpetual invention of unique viewing *dispositifs*, he retains a patrician disdain for much contemporary image culture. Radner herself admits that his "engagement with the many popular forms that the moving image would take, and with popular culture more generally [...] was minimal" (p. 37). Moreover, the artists Bellour is usually attracted to invariably align with this attitude, often out of a kind of "inveterate leftism" (p. 37)—notable here are filmmakers, such as Jean-Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda and Harun Farocki, who have made migrations from the movie theater to the gallery, and whose work Bellour has treated at length. All the while, however, Bellour has insisted on the importance of what he has dubbed the *spectateur pensif*; that is, a viewer actively engaged in an intellectual response to the image. At the risk of appearing nostalgically anchored in the past, if not stubbornly resistant to change, Bellour still finds the most propitious circumstances for the existence of the *spectateur pensif* to be the traditional *salle* of the cinema, which finds itself under threat from the distracted viewing habits common both to the television watcher zapping between channels and the gallery-goer (*visiteur*) ambling from one screen to the next. If Bellour is receptive to much contemporary video art, he nonetheless stubbornly insists that it is *not* cinema. Like Serge Daney and Jean-Luc Godard, with whom his recent thinking has much in common, Bellour thus believes that *seul le cinéma* ("only the cinema" or "the cinema, alone") is capable of producing the "unique experience of perception and memory" that enables "thinking" spectatorship (p. 52).

The irony here, as the third chapter outlines, is that this perspective is contemporaneous with a prolific outburst of writing (three weighty tomes in the space of seven years) that rethinks the fundamentals of the cinema experience in pioneering ways. In *Le Corps du cinéma* (2009), which Radner considers Bellour's "magnum opus" (p. 47), the theorist describes the cinema as the site of an encounter between two bodies: the body of the film itself (an entity existing in time and space), and the body of the spectator whilst watching the film. This outlook prompts three related conceptual lines of flight in Bellour's book: the presence of animals in the cinema, the parallels between the film viewer and the subject under hypnosis (a medium state between wakefulness and sleep, conducive to various forms of suggestion and external manipulation), and the role of emotions (or what Stern calls "vitality affects") in the spectatorial experience.

Bellour is thus caught between mourning for the loss of a past configuration of the moving image, and his excitement at the continued potential for discovering new formal possibilities. Here, Radner gives the last word to the former attitude, dedicating her last chapter to an "Elegy for Cinema." Bellour is

situated within present-day debates on the nature of the cinema in the contemporary era, with Jacques Aumont, Francesco Casetti and Philippe Dubois representing his sparring partners of choice. The dialogue with Casetti, whose views in *The Lumière Galaxy* are diametrically opposed to those of Bellour (the cinema lives on in spectatorial experience, regardless of the *dispositif* deployed), is particularly well developed here, and Radner notes that “both Casetti and Bellour represent how a scholar’s journey is one in which personal and intellectual history are deeply intertwined” (p. 82). Her insistence, however, on a generational cleft between them seems stretched—Casetti is only eight years younger than his French counterpart. Beyond his specific views on new media forms, therefore, Bellour’s work, according to Radner, is of interest to future film scholars not only because of his unrivalled account of the specificity of what cinema *was* during the period of classical film spectatorship, but also, and above all, because he remains “faithful to the work itself as an aesthetic object, whether it be a film, a novel, or an installation, and also to the experience of the work” (p. 84).

The interview with Bellour fills out most of the rest of Radner/Fox’s book, and forms an interesting pendant to Radner’s preceding overview, offering Bellour’s own personal insights into his life and work, where Radner had delivered a mostly dispassionate, objective summary of his major ideas. Of particular note here is Bellour’s discussions of the formative figures in his life, whether Metz, Thierry Kuntzel, Gilles Deleuze or Michel Foucault, which mingle private anecdotes with a profound engagement with their thinking. Elsewhere, he develops in greater depth notions—such as the cinema/hypnosis parallel—which are only lightly touched on in the first half of the book. This section also ends on an indecisive tone, with Bellour hovering between optimism and pessimism for the future of cinema: if the “social fact” of cinema-going has been largely eroded, Bellour is comforted in the rise of smaller-scale “communities of desire” formed around modern-day ciné-clubs and film festivals, which, much like the cinémathèques of his youth, are “imbued with an almost religious atmosphere” (p. 170). Once again, however, darkness looms: when presented with the experiential continuity of a film in a movie theatre, people today are impatient, distracted, they reach too easily for their phones. Here, for Bellour, the cinematic *dispositif* is under threat, “as if it is being eaten away from within by the private disaffection of a new kind of spectator” (p. 170).

In terms of a full engagement with Bellour’s ideas, there are limitations to Radner/Fox’s endeavor. In addition to the brevity of Radner’s text, which often leaves the reader yearning for a more in-depth discussion, the writer for the most part restricts herself to a summary of Bellour’s thinking, rather than critically grappling with it, highlighting its weaknesses, or even polemicizing against certain of the theorist’s positions. But this is justifiable. As the volume’s editors acknowledge, Bellour’s work, patchily translated into English, is still far from being as well known in the Anglophone world as it deserves to be. A broad introduction to his ideas, which represents a fundamental contribution to our understanding of cinema and the moving image, necessarily precedes a more critical confrontation with them. *Raymond Bellour: Cinema and the Moving Image* admirably serves this purpose.

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