

Editor's Introduction

Dan Flory

As most readers of this journal know, *Film and Philosophy* experienced a staggering blow with the unexpected passing of its Managing Editor for nearly two decades, Daniel C. Shaw, on March 3rd, 2020. Because at the time of his death Dan was not only Editor but also President and Treasurer of its sponsoring institution, his passing constituted a serious challenge for the Society for the Philosophic Study of the Contemporary Visual Arts as well. Remaining Society officers, Secretary Richard Nunan and Vice President Christopher Grau, along with founding member and Past President Sander Lee, long-time Society and Editorial Board member Tom Wartenberg, and I formed an ad hoc committee to deal with the difficulties that Dan's passing raised. After some discussion I volunteered to step forward as Editor on an interim basis because I had done so previously in order to complete Volume 5/6 (2002) and had guest edited Volume 10 (2006). This ad hoc committee also sought to appoint a new editor. After a search that reviewed several excellent candidates, we selected Laura Di Summa to take on responsibilities after the current issue. We are quite pleased with Laura's appointment and I for one look forward to seeing what new directions she will take the journal.

The current issue is slimmer than many previous volumes (no doubt as much the result of COVID-19 as the confusions surrounding the journal resulting from Dan's unexpected passing), but I nonetheless believe it to be an impressive collection of essays that represent analytic, Cavellian, Continental, and feminist philosophical perspectives on film, as well as interesting amalgamations of these views. The essays contained herein offer fascinating and original analyses of the films discussed, which range over eight decades, from Classic Hollywood to European art cinema, from mainstream movies to those much more precariously produced and created. I think that Dan would have been proud of this issue, had he lived to see it, because it represents the diversity of philosophical views that *Film and Philosophy* has taken pride in publishing over the years. In addition, it considers films as well as topics that arguably expand the journal's range into new intellectual territory.

The first essay, Dominic Lash's "(Re)producing Marriage: Stanley Cavell and *Phantom Thread*," takes seriously the idea that Cavell's genre of "comedies of remarriage" may be extended into the twenty-first century insofar as it manifests itself in Paul Thomas Anderson's captivating 2017 film. Lash argues per-

suasively for this film's inclusion on the grounds that it both conforms to and extends those features that characterize remarriage comedies. For example, while this film is about the education and growth of one of its characters, it is the man in the relationship who is educated and forced into greater maturity, not the woman. Moreover, this education and growth is achieved in a very unorthodox way: periodic poisoning by his wife in order to calm him down and remind him of human frailty. Lash also underscores this genre's concerns with provisionality and difficulty, even while acknowledging its modest therapeutic optimism, by articulating how *Phantom Thread* both subtly adheres to and creatively expands its generic inheritances. Lash furthermore argues for The Claim of Reason's importance to better grasping Cavell's work in the philosophy of film, which is a salutary extension of scholarship in the ongoing debate regarding how film might be considered as philosophy.

In the next essay, "The Vicious Undertow of Vanity in *Young Adult*," longtime contributor Joseph Kupfer argues that Jason Reitman's 2011 film provides a striking portrait of vanity as a moral vice and the ways that it interconnects with other debilitating imperfections. Of particular interest is vanity's resistance to accurate critical self-evaluation and analysis, for as Kupfer's examination shows, even though this movie's main character comes to realize her faults late in the narrative, she cannot bring herself to act on that insight and change who she is. Instead, she slips back into her previous haughty self-appraisal, which illustrates the vicious undertow that Kupfer's title makes explicit. Using mainstream philosophical scholarship on vanity, arrogance, and other vices and virtues, Kupfer makes clear how *Young Adult* provides much food for thought regarding the intricate workings of this diminishing human flaw.

The third essay, "Historical Realization in Godard's *Historie(s) du Cinéma*," offers readers important insights into the famous French director's complex essay film. Steven G. Smith argues that Godard makes good on his claim that "for me, history with a capital H is the history of cinema," a declaration that Smith notes in his essay. However, Godard's work and its relation to history is hardly straightforward. Rather, Smith argues that this auteur means to provoke extended philosophical reflection about history as well as cinema through his film, with the result being possible insights achieved by the viewer regarding history's meaning in the twentieth century. Through unexpected juxtapositions, allusions, montage, layered imagery, interpretive playfulness, and other techniques, Godard means to provoke his viewers into judgments and realizations about the history of the previous century that they might not otherwise have had. These realizations might be personal, historical, political, aesthetic, or collective, but Godard ultimately aims for us to have "undismissable" realizations that reflect all these diverse categories. He by no means tells us

what to think, Smith observes; instead, we must formulate these realizations and judgments as thoughtful, engaged viewers, thus making *Historie(s) du Cinéma* philosophy in action concerning history as well as cinema and what they might be or capable of.

Turning to the fascinating work of Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, whose work has been the subject of several essays in this journal as well as elsewhere in the philosophy of film, Meribah Rose argues in her "Pedro Almodóvar's Communities of Circumstance" that the preferred communities depicted in his work conform to an ethics of care. Almodóvar's films thus crucially center on the nature of meaningful community and how individuals might negotiate the complexities of dynamic relationships as well as evolving or novel identities. These works thus offer an ethical message, one that coalesces in communities of circumstance that presume randomness and contingency, rather than being organized around more traditional societal structures. Important to this reconceptualization of community is the idea of the maternal, a conception that is not bound by gender, biology, or sexual preference. Instead, this notion is defined by its relations to others and the quality of care provided. Central to Rose's argument is, of course, *Todo sobre mi madre* (*All About My Mother*, 1999), but these qualities suffuse Almodóvar's entire oeuvre, a point that Rose makes clear through her thoughtful consideration of films throughout this director's career. The insights offered by these movies also have important implications for our lived experience, a point that Rose emphasizes through drawing on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy toward the end of her essay. Almodóvar's films thus deepen our thinking about community and how we are to live together, a message that in these dark times has become even more imperative for us to take seriously.

The fifth essay, "*Blade Runner 2049*: Reproduction, the Human, and the Organic," by Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, was the last essay accepted by Dan Shaw before he passed. Botz-Bornstein takes on this controversial sequel to a much-beloved film in the film-as-philosophy community and explores how its focus on reproduction and humanity provides a different perspective on age-old philosophical questions concerning what it is to be human and why we exist. This essay contends that, rather than being politically regressive or antifeminist, *Blade Runner 2049* challenges a conception of the human that has dominated Western philosophy since the early Modern era, the "Machine Conception of the Organism." Tracing this idea back to Descartes, de La Mettrie, and others, Botz-Bornstein observes that this mechanistic conception of the human additionally has many more recent advocates, such as John Searle and Richard Dawkins, whose perspective this film and in particular its protagonist, K (Ryan Gosling), reject over the course of the narrative. K's move also

mimics important claims advanced in twenty-first-century biological theory, Botz-Bornstein argues. He further points to crucial allusions to Nabokov and Stoicism that are fundamental to this sequel's narrative, which further underscore the need to take it more seriously than some of its philosophical interpreters have done since its release in 2017.

The last essay, Pamela Foa's "*The Philadelphia Story: Growing Up Is Hard To Do*," returns us to Cavellian territory, but this time in a more critical mode. Foa argues that this much-praised film—one of the prime examples of remarriage comedies for Cavell—fails to meet the criteria that he set out for the genre. By means of a detailed analysis of this film and critical engagement with feminist and other scholarship on Cavell, Foa focuses on previously little-remarked details that undermine standard Cavellian perspectives on this 1940 comedy directed by George Cukor. Among the most important features of remarriage comedies, of course, are education and maturation of its characters. Typically, as many critics have noted and at times criticized, this education requires that a woman be taught by her former husband and induced to grow up by learning how to forgive and accept human frailty, all of which are standard components of most Cavellian understandings of *The Philadelphia Story* and how this movie works as an instance of remarriage comedy. However, Foa argues that the main character, Tracy Lord (Katherine Hepburn), never achieves full maturity. Moreover, her teacher and former husband, C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant), is far from ideal as an educator of his ex-wife (in spite of his attractiveness!), thus seriously challenging accepted Cavellian doctrine regarding the film. Instead, Foa points to details that indicate how Tracy was an abused wife during her marriage with Dexter and moreover fails to completely mature by the end of the film, choosing instead to remain subordinate and therefore unequal to her husband. Strikingly, Tracy could have chosen a partner with whom she might well have entered a more fully adult relationship, namely, Mike Connor (James Stewart). But she explicitly rejects him and chooses to remarry Dexter. One of the more salient aspects of Foa's essay is its sensitivity to and adroit use of the function of costume design and fashion in this film, and how they help to explain the undermining of Tracy's image as a full-grown woman. What were the costumers, or Cukor, or Katherine Hepburn, thinking? On the other hand, maybe they knew and these infantilizing outfits were part of Hepburn's being domesticated and forced into greater conformity with pre-war American movie-going tastes. In either case, Foa's essay raises a cluster of issues that deserve careful consideration in the philosophical scholarship on Cavell as well as *The Philadelphia Story* itself.

Together these essays constitute admirable contributions to *Film and Philosophy's* twenty-fifth issue. I am grateful to their authors for having submitted

them to the journal and working through detailed revisions and emendations that probably sometimes reflected more my obtuseness about what they were saying than real objections. Lastly, I am hopeful that the journal's readers will find these essays worthy of their time, thought, and consideration, and a laudable tribute to its late editor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For logistical as well as financial support for this issue I wish to thank the Department of History and Philosophy of Montana State University, the Philosophy Documentation Center, and the dues-paying members of the Society for the Philosophic Study for the Contemporary Visual Arts. For their encouragement, suggestions, or editorial assistance for this issue, I am especially grateful to Laura Di Summa, Christopher Grau, Sander Lee, Richard Nunan, Tom Wartenberg, and George Leaman of the Philosophy Documentation Center.

For their reviews of submissions, I would like to thank Larry Benaquist, Craig Fox, Richard Gilmore, Alessandro Giovannelli, Christopher Grau, Deborah Knight, David La Rocca, Sander Lee, Richard Nunan, William Pamerleau, Robert Sinnerbrink, Sam Sphall, Kevin Stoehr, Enrico Terrone, Katherine Thomson-Jones, and Tom Wartenberg. Their efforts were much appreciated; I could not have done it without their help.