

Book Review

Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, and Algorithms.
Edited by Eivind Røssaak, 2012 [2011] (Amsterdam University Press), 239 pp.,
ISBN: 9789089642127, Paper \$35.00

Chris Conner*

Department of Sociology
University of Nevada,
Las Vegas



*ctconner@gmail.com

Visual Methodologies is online at:
<http://journals.sfu.ca/vm/index.php/vm/index>

One debate that has gone underdeveloped within the field of visual methods, are the implications and applications for film as opposed to photographs as a tool for study. Røssaak is interested in addressing the differences between photography and cinematography – or, in other words, between film and motion. This book explores issues raised by the cinematic turn. It is concerned particularly with the philosophical underpinnings of cinematography, temporality and speed, the sociological insights from film, and the role of postproduction and authenticity. Each chapter addresses the theoretical arguments and implications that using motion pictures introduce to the humanities. A central theme in this book is that in trying to obtain a clearer representation of life, there are also elements which other mediums which get covered up. The authors of this text try to develop a critical reading of cinema, in order to overcome potential glosses within the method.

The main theme in this work is if a fundamental difference exists in film, or if film is a series of sped up photographic images. Mark Hansen contends that film is a qualitative change as a result of a quantitative technical enhancement of images. Thomas Elsaesser further explores the issue by examining slow motion. Elsaesser concludes that slow motion is an example of the qualitative shift in film. He sees film as a qualitative shift because of slow motion's ability to create tension within the viewer and enhance our ability to perceive motion. He goes further to state that theoretically this means time itself may be seen as a human construction. A final gem within this work is Ina Blom's analysis of *On Otto*. This film interrupts temporality by constructing the film backwards, producing the marketing materials first, the score second, and the script last. Blom concludes that this shows how film is a collective collaboration between producers, viewers, and others – a notion Howard Becker addressed in his book *Art Worlds*.

While *Between Stillness and Motion* contains several potentially interesting arguments, the book has some weaknesses which are hard to ignore. Generally speaking, the book is written from a very narrow film studies perspective. The authors do not do a good job of making this accessible to an outside audience, or applying it to social life. The theoretical and philosophical arguments restrict themselves to the films they analyze. One way this problem could be remedied is by connecting this work within postmodern theory, the authors dance around this topic but fail to explicitly connect it to their analysis. In a text concerning itself with the visual there is a noticeable underutilization of images. Incorporating more images could help make this text more accessible through illustrating a sophisticated set of films. One major theoretical problem results from the authors calling into question the authenticity of digital work. This argument is an overly conservative one that in many ways demonstrates fear and ignorance towards new technologies. Many classic photographic works have been presented as real yet, they have no basis in reality. I would argue that the ideas and feelings embedded within the image are far more important than any claims to reality. There is also a redundancy of the history and development of cinematography, which quickly becomes unnecessary and prohibits full development of the authors' work.

Although this work contains some highly interesting theoretical arguments, its usefulness outside of advanced scholars in film studies is questionable. Several links could have been made to issues of postmodernism, cultural studies, and other interdisciplinary fields. Despite this, many of the issues they bring up are really quite fascinating. As a reader for a course analyzing historical shifts from photography to cinematography this text could be useful – both for the history as well as the lingering issues the cinematic turn has provided.

Chris Conner