

media exigeant des compétences spécifiques pour le comprendre est-il uniquement une invitation, pour ceux qui le peuvent, à s'en emparer? Ou ne s'agit-il pas de penser les limites de la représentation et l'opacité de certaines expériences?

Ces interrogations n'enlèvent rien à l'intérêt de l'ouvrage et à la richesse des analyses de Sanders. La volonté de comprendre le texte au plus près de l'événement sonore qu'il relate pose de réelles questions herméneutiques. Jamais d'ailleurs l'étude ne donne l'impression de proposer des interprétations définitives: elle suggère des pratiques de lectures étendues, toujours respectueuses de la lettre première (on apprécie tout particulièrement le fait que tous les textes soient cités dans la langue originale). L'exercice d'interdisciplinarité proposé dans ces pages est stimulant: quelles qu'en puissent être les limites, il ouvre à une compréhension élargie des œuvres, et nous rappelle que la littérature, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, nous invite toujours à une lecture philosophique, à savoir active et investie.

**Nathalie Vuillemin** est Professeure ordinaire à l'Université de Neuchâtel.

*Le Cinéma des Lumières: Diderot, Deleuze, Eisenstein*

by Marc Escola

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Review by Guy Spielmann, Georgetown University,  
Washington, DC, United States

In his 1943 essay “Diderot Wrote about Cinema” [“Дидро писал о кино” / “Didro pisał o kino”], noted Russian director Sergei Eisenstein claimed that the French polygraph's project *Le Fils Naturel* (1757) was a proleptic conceptualization of filmic representation. For those not yet familiar with this provocative argument, since then revisited and amplified in numerous studies, Marc Escola's short book provides a handy conspectus. To some extent, *Le Cinéma des Lumières* is a commentary on Eisenstein's analysis of Denis Diderot's work, both being quoted at length, but Escola also brings to bear further commentaries by various scholars, notably Bazin (“Théâtre et cinéma,” 1951), Barthes, (“Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” 1973), and Bonnet (“Diderot a inventé le cinéma,” 1995). The nature of Escola's own contribution is only partially revealed in the title, which lists Gilles Deleuze as a major source even though he did not explicitly partake in the “Diderot all but invented cinema” tradition. Escola enrolls Deleuze's writings *Cinéma 1: l'image-mouvement* (1983) and *Cinéma 2: l'image-temps* (1985) in an attempt to better ascertain Diderot's radically innovative conceptualization of the relationship between representation and time.

The inquiry begins with a riddle: why would Diderot, allegedly seeking to “reform” theatre circa 1757, produce a play that was not in itself particularly original, and in fact not meant to be performed, but rather published with a series of discussions (*entretiens*) between the author and Dorval, a man who had supposedly penned a play about an episode in his own life? Dorval’s play was also not meant to be shown publicly, being performed by family members playing themselves (except for the father, now dead) as a kind of private memorial ceremony; only Diderot was allowed to witness the performance while remaining hidden. The show was cut short when the stand-in for the father—the only actor not playing himself—broke down in tears. The incident, Escola argues, reveals that the others were not in fact acting out a stage play, but rather were involved in something more akin to cinema: if Diderot’s attempt at formulating a new kind of theatre went nowhere in the mid-1700s, it is because what he had in mind could only be realized on film, not through a live stage performance. Hence his famous dictum (in *De la poésie dramatique*, 1758) that actors should play as if in front of a closed curtain, as if there were no spectators.

Yet, other forms existed that would also eventually lead to cinema, notably slide projections (“transparents”) perfected by another dramatist, Carmontelle—experiments to which Escola devotes a sizeable “interlude” (57–86). The general line of reasoning is that while, technically, the motion picture remained a faraway prospect, the necessary conditions for cinema to emerge as a new form of expression were already present in an aesthetic and intellectual dimension cultivated by Diderot, Carmontelle, and other Enlightenment creative types. Unlike many of those who have floated a similar hypothesis, Escola remains careful not to succumb to anachronism, and he presents “cinema” as a particular frame of mind in the process of representation, waiting for the suitable device to be invented by some engineer.

Escola’s most substantive contribution resides in his discussion of the representation of time, with reference to Diderot’s writings not only on theatre but also on painting (the *Salons*). A still picture, a novel, drama, and cinema reflect different modes of temporality that Diderot attempted to reconcile. Escola finds a clue in Deleuze’s concept of “cristal,” a kind of image that reveals a temporal depth underneath an apparently flat surface. Thus, the performance of *Le Fils Naturel* witnessed by Diderot, while inscribed in the present and in representation, also functions as a re-enactment of a lived experience by the actors—except for one, who proves unable to play his part because he is merely playing a part. “It might be that Diderot tried to

dramatize not the representation of an action, but that relationship between the actual and the virtual that is time itself,” concludes Escola (109, my translation).

There are two advantages to re-envisioning cinema from this perspective. The first is to disengage the medium from its alleged nature as “motion picture” and bring out its unique capacity for representing the passing of time rather than a series of actions. The second is to disengage theatrical experiments by Diderot and others from the narrow confines of early modern dramatical theory. Escola convincingly shows that the point of a play like *Le Fils Naturel* could not simply be to establish a new genre, the “drame,” a type of realistic, serious fiction involving ordinary people (which, I would add, had already been accomplished over two decades previously by George Lillo in his “domestic tragedy” *The London Merchant*, 1731). Diderot wrote an “unperformable” piece as a test of his “fourth wall” principle, which Escola describes as a staging configuration that in essence negates theatrical performance and ushers in cinematic performance later to be realized by filming.

*Le Cinéma des Lumières* is a brief but very dense essay that will engage anyone eager to explore the complex relationships between various media (theatre, narrative prose, painting, cinema), especially when it comes to the implicit temporal dimension, too often neglected in favour of the more obvious visual dimension. My only real qualm with this essay is that it almost exclusively references sources in French, except for Eisenstein’s 1943 text (and, alas, one of the most misguided theoretical works in the field of visual arts, Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality*, 1980). Surely studies in other languages could have been brought to the discussion; if Deleuze did derive his “image-cristal” concept from Henri Bergson’s *Matière et mémoire* (1896), what of, for instance, Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927)? While such a selective referencing strategy in no way invalidates Escola’s arguments, the non-francophone reader may wish that he had cast a wider net.

**Guy Spielmann** is an Associate Professor in the Department of French, where he teaches linguistics and performing arts, at Georgetown University.