BOOK REVIEW

Aesthetics and Film. By KATHERINE THOMSON-JONES. (London: Continuum, 2008. Pp. 160. Price £60.00.)

The object of study in Katherine Thomson-Jones' clearly written and succinct treatment of philosophy of film are themes and topics that have interested the group of contemporary philosophers who dominate the anglo-analytic literature on philosophy of film. As the main authors covered have a considerable following in analytic philosophy of film courses given the number of citations they receive in the burgeoning literature in this field, the book will be of particular interest to those teaching or studying introductory courses in this vein.

Each chapter covers one topic and largely consists of brief summaries of arguments for and against various themes. The topic of the first chapter is whether and on what basis a film can be considered art. Photography is used as an analogy. The arguments range from considering the mechanical form of cinema as an obstacle to arthood to arguments considering cinema's mechanical nature as essential to its arthood; the former by those who ground art in human agency, the latter by those who ground art in some conception of verisimilitude. Those worried by the former argument, emphasise editing and montage effects as the essential aspects of cinema, the idea being that the less representational veracity a film presented, the more it could be classified as art. On the other hand, for those who equate the art of film with verisimilitude, it is argued that the realism of film is superior to the realism of the other representational arts due to film's retrieval of images as opposed to merely representing them.

The second chapter continues this discussion focussing specifically on realism in cinema. Film realism might be conceived in terms of the causal genesis of the film image, in methods of reception (seeing through the image to the object represented or the image acting as a natural sign) or in methods of filming, editing and lighting. Whereas Thomson-Jones traces the outline of the various arguments with precision and clarity, at this stage in the book I found myself looking for more on what is at stake in siding with one argument rather than another. For example, there is a brief mention of Andre Bazin and Rudolph Arnheim's views on aesthetic value: realism for Bazin and expressiveness for Arnheim (p. 21). This would have been a good opportunity to explore the different implications taking realism or expressiveness as an aesthetic value might have for related issues in philosophical aesthetics. Bazin's writing is rich in implications for the point of film but this is not explored. Instead, we are moved on to summaries of the views on film realism of Noel Carroll, Kendall Walton and Greg Currie. The next

question posed is 'Does the Film Image Really Move?' (p. 33). This question is addressed by drawing attention to the difference between photographs and film.

The next chapter on Authorship (which takes up chapter three) focuses on whether the author we imagine in interpretation is real, implied, constructed, and whether single or multiple. Thomson-Jones identifies her project as within a well defined style of philosophising on film, only mentioning authors who fall outside this style in passing. For example, she mentions rather than discusses the rejection of authorship as oppressive (for interpretation) by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes (p. 42). Another theme discussed is whether when interpreting a film, the whole body of work of the film maker is the object of interpretation rather than a single work. Various arguments for and against are canvassed (pp. 52–4).

Chapter 4 on the language of film promises more meaty material. However, a lot rests upon the distinction between denotative and connotative meaning (even though Charles Peirce's theory of signs is covered in only one paragraph p. 64). It would have been interesting had the author stepped outside the standard way of dealing with the topics and brought together ideas on the notion of film as communicative from this chapter with questions treated in the next chapter on Narration in the Fiction Film. Instead, the questions asked in Chapter 5 are kept distinct from discussions from previous chapters. The questions on Narration are identified by the author as: '1. Must narrative films always have narrators? 2. What is it for a film's narration to be unreliable? 3. How do films support narrative comprehension?' (p. 73). These questions would have been better motivated through a more in depth discussion of examples.

Chapter 6 on the thinking viewer presents arguments along the lines that what we know about the various categories which apply to the film such as its genre influences the film's meaning for us. This might be understood as constructivism as long as this is compatible with the communicative nature of film. We are presented with Berys Gaut's objections to David Bordwell's constructivism (p. 92) which touches on the implicit reliance of theories of interpretation on theories of perception but this reliance is glossed over very quickly. Bordwell's view may be that perception is an active and inferential process, and his theory of interpretation may be a version of constructivism, but this does not lead to the kind of relativism which many of the contemporary authors covered here seem to fear. Thomson-Jones does not mention Bordwell's notion of 'contingent universals' (1996) which would have gone some way to more accurately represent his position and arguably contribute to a better understanding of the so-called consistency puzzle addressed in the following chapter on the feeling viewer.

The chapter on the feeling film viewer which completes the book includes some views on whether we can ever be said to empathise when we can never be sure we know what the other feels (p. 121), and on identification being a matter of feeling what the other feels. The author brings the two concepts together in discussing Gaut's aspectual account of empathetic identification (p. 119). I was left wondering given the earlier discussion how the author would overcome the problem of empathy to allow for identification. Richard Wollheim's notion of central and acentral imagining is introduced, noncognitive mimicry is recommended and

footnoted to Murray Smith, while Greg Currie's simulation theory is quickly dismissed. Psychoanalytical identification is discussed and the author sceptically asks of one version of it, whether it illuminates the cinematic experience to which she answers in the negative. It would have raised the critical tone of this book considerably had the author directed the same question to the topics and themes which dominate the book.

There are many philosophers of film whose work inherently motivates our interest by either implicitly or explicitly contributing to or refining the evaluative categories at our disposal and hence the significance one can attribute to film generally or in some cases to particular films. The authors whose views are covered in this book are such candidates and it is left to the reader to decide which among them illuminate the cinematic experience. Thomson-Jones has written a very useful and well referenced overview of many of the current debates in the philosophy of film, which can be fruitfully used as a springboard to philosophical discussions of film.

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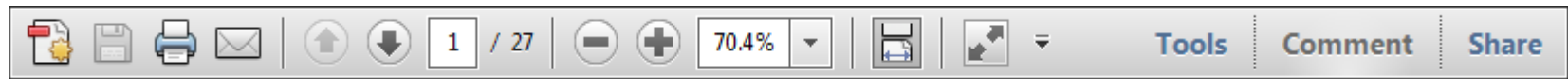
This will open up a panel down the right side of the document. The majority of tools you will use for annotating your proof will be in the Annotations section, pictured opposite. We've picked out some of these tools below:

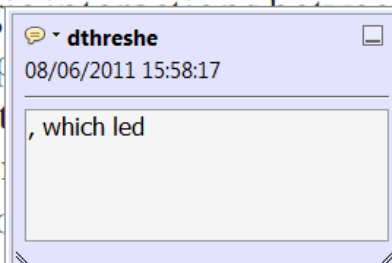---
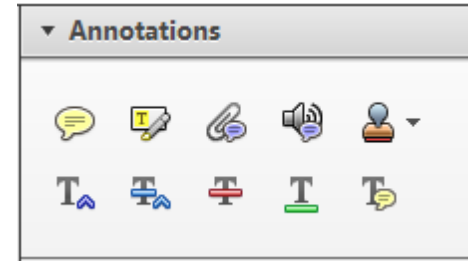
1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.

Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.

How to use it

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- Type the replacement text into the blue box that appears.

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2. Strikethrough (Del) Tool – for deleting text.

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3. Add note to text Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic.

Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.

How to use it

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- Type instruction on what should be changed regarding the text into the yellow box that appears.

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4. Add sticky note Tool – for making notes at specific points in the text.

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How to use it

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- Type the comment into the yellow box that appears.

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5. Attach File Tool – for inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures.

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How to use it

- Click on the Attach File icon in the Annotations section.
- Click on the proof to where you'd like the attached file to be linked.
- Select the file to be attached from your computer or network.
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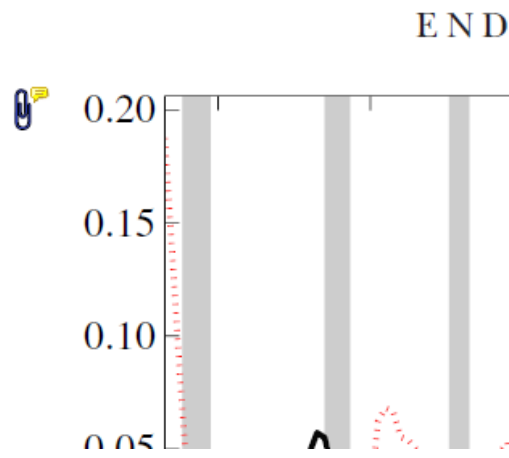
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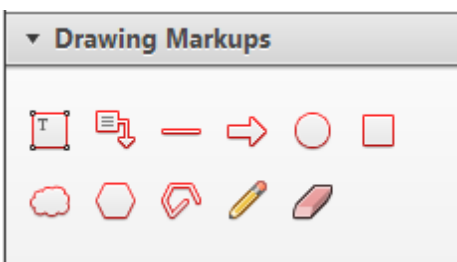
Drawing Markups

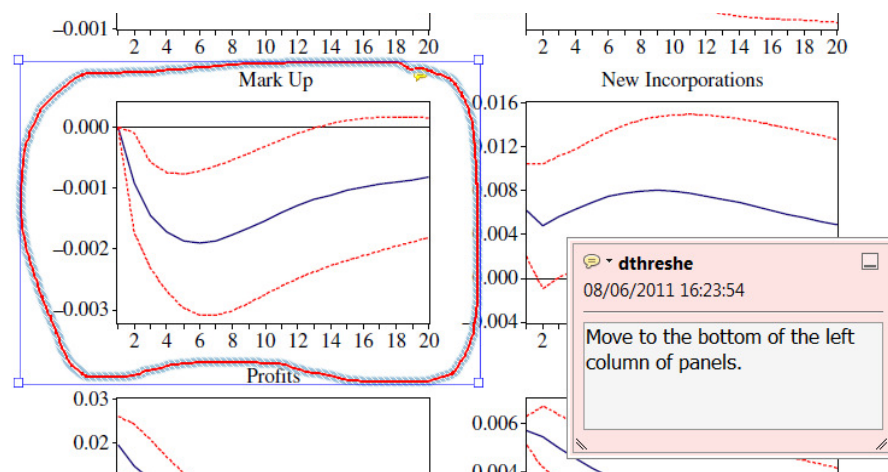## 7. Drawing Markups Tools – for drawing shapes, lines and freeform annotations on proofs and commenting on these marks.

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How to use it

- Click on one of the shapes in the Drawing Markups section.
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- To add a comment to the drawn shape, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears.
- Double click on the shape and type any text in the red box that appears.

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