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REVIEW ESSAY



***Die Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger's Phenomenological Ontology: A Heideggerian Account of the Film Experience**

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Phenomenology of film: a Heideggerian account of the film experience, by Shawn Loht, Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland, 2017, 220 pp., cloth, \$95, ISBN-13: 978-1498519021

ABSTRACT

This review essay of Shawn Loht's (2017. *Phenomenology of Film: A Heideggerian Account of the Film Experience*. New York: Lexington Books) new book, *Phenomenology of Film: A Heideggerian Account of the Film Experience*, not only offers an ontological reading of the filmic experience inspired by Heidegger's philosophy but also contributes substantially to the ongoing debate of whether or not film is a medium that is legitimately philosophical. In addition to confronting unique ideas about film that emerge from Loht's analysis of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology of Dasein, including a reading of later Heidegger of the "Turn," this essay also seeks to think with and then beyond Loht in a way that might inspire readers to further pursue these issues in relation to a potentially reconceived understanding of the practice of film-as-philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Phenomenology of film; film-as-philosophy; philosophy of film; Heidegger's ontology; Heidegger's philosophy of art; Heidegger and film

When Heidegger embarks on the reading of Nietzsche that exposes him as the last metaphysician, the interpretation unfolds in terms of what Heidegger calls a "confrontation" with Nietzsche's thought. As we know, Heidegger engaged in many such philosophical-interpretive "confrontations" with other great philosophers. Heidegger calls this process *die Auseinandersetzung*, which for Heidegger instantiates a confrontation that is a "genuine criticism" of another's thought. Indeed, for Heidegger, *die Auseinandersetzung* is the "supreme way, the only way, to a true estimation of a thinker," for it is the case that in "confrontation we undertake to reflect on his thinking and to trace it in its effective force, not in its weakness" (1991, 4–5). Thus, what is entailed when "confronting" the work of a great thinker is engagement in a critical interpretation that is not focused exclusively on censure, not intent on tearing the work down, but is rather a reading that seeks to draw out the original power of the position in an effort to reveal an understanding that fuels the inspiration to move beyond it in new directions that would not have been possible without the original "confrontation." This is precisely what Shawn Loht's

book accomplishes, namely, a philosophical move beyond Heidegger made possible only in and through a confrontation with his thought. And, as I argue, the same might be said of the readers of Loht's book; for he inspires us, through *die Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger, to draw inspiration from the power of Heidegger's thought to push our thinking in new directions on film and the filmic experience in relation to the concerns of *film-as-philosophy*. In essence, Loht argues for cinema as an instance of an authentic work of art, as a *truth-revealing, truth-establishing* ontological event.

Whereas the majority of film-philosophy essays incorporating Heidegger's philosophy are limited to reading specific films from one or another Heideggerian perspective, Loht's book is far more ambitious in its aim, that of analyzing "*Heidegger's philosophy as a means of highlighting the phenomenology of film*" (2017, 151). At the same time, he pursues insight into "the world-fostering character of films, the fact that films have a unique (though not exclusive) capacity to manifest or disclose Dasein's being-in-the-world, in a fashion that is existentially real, and thus, non-representative" (43). The author succeeds admirably in offering readers a unique and original reading of film-as-philosophy, and beyond this, Loht's scholarship challenges and indeed invigorates the field of film-as-philosophy, as well as making a viable contribution to Heidegger studies. In relation to *die Auseinandersetzung*, in and through the critical confrontation with Heidegger's phenomenology and philosophy, Loht effectively approaches Heidegger's phenomenological ontology as a base from which to think convincingly and successfully in contention *with* Heidegger and then move *beyond* him, accentuating the true power of the original while revealing new insights into previously unexplored areas of Heidegger's philosophical thought. The effect is production of an original and illuminating study into the phenomenological-ontological aspects of film-as-philosophy, a view which I now consider in some detail.

Loht contrasts his phenomenological reading with filmic and philosophical readings focused on the epistemic and emotional aspects of film and filmic spectatorship, and we might extend what the author says to film readings grounded in both philosophy of mind, such as those of Colin McGinn, and psychoanalysis, such as those of Christian Metz. However, the main thrust of the scholarship takes issue with the so-called "metaphysics" of film reading, which includes, among several aspects, film disingenuously envisioned as an object bearing specific properties for analysis or, from a Heideggerian perspective, film as re-presentational and even metaphoric-symbolic in nature. Loht does not reference Heidegger's critique of "art" as *the metaphysical doctrine of art* or aesthetics, as found specifically in Hölderlin's *der Ister* lecture course (1996, 18), however, Loht's discussion provides crucial insight into the motives grounding Heidegger's damning critique of the science of "aesthetics" and re-presentational forms of art. For example, he critiques the nature of "metaphysical art" for invoking a symbolism (*metaphorically*) that points beyond the work in order to access the transcendent realms of the "nonsensuous and supra sensuous," such as we encounter in doctrinal readings of the Platonic Forms (*eidoi*). Symbols conceived in a metaphysical way actually lead the authentic *participant* and the *preserver* of the art – namely the highly engaged spectator of film – away from the immediacy of the context of the work itself. We must note that to espouse a reading of film emerging from Heideggerian origins, in addition to transcending metaphysical readings, this endeavor must also be separated from more traditional, or

we might say, *analytic* readings of film adopting the “philosophy of film” (*x* as object of study) model.

When considering Loht’s task of attempting to reveal an innovative Heideggerian treatment of cinema and the film experience, we must note that Heidegger is not a philosopher of film per se. Attending to Heidegger’s 1977 essay, “The Age of the World Picture,” Loht reiterates the issue of Heidegger’s technological critique of film and photography, and he states that the “present age is the age of picturing, the age of seeing all the world in terms of (subjectively represented yet purportedly objective) pictures” (2017, 78). Heidegger viewed the so-called “art” of the cinema, proximally and for the most part, as a bastardized medium for public consumption, a technological form of escapism, and so cinema failed to rise to the level of great art that holds cultural and even world-founding/grounding capacities. For as we know, in the modern age, according to Heidegger, great works of art have lost their power to mean, their power to break open new worlds and epochs, attuned by, because they are engulfed within, the sway of *das Ge-stell* or the “enframing” effect of technology (1977). Initially, it seems as if Loht’s task is to read Heidegger against Heidegger in the pursuit of an understanding of film-as-art. However, this is not the case; for Loht draws inspiration for his reading from a somewhat obscure passage that he importantly brings to our attention. In Heidegger’s late essay, “A Dialogue on Language,” an essay rife for speculative interpretation, Heidegger praises Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* in a way that separates it off from the categorization of film as mere consumer fodder (1971). As Loht observes, what Heidegger states about *Rashomon* is “surprisingly consistent with Heidegger’s understanding of art and artworks,” for the film works in such a way to “convey a genuinely meaningful disclosure of being” (2017, 80). And hence Loht sows seeds in fecund ground for the blossoming analysis of Heideggerian film-as-art.

Beginning the analysis of Heidegger, Loht turns to Dasein’s modes of *Being-in* (*ontologico-existentials*): attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and mood (*Stimmung*), understanding (*verstehen*) as inseparable from interpretation, and discourse (*Rede*). All these are related to the film-viewing experience, because it is the human’s *Being-in-the-world* that is attuned in the open and lighted clearing of the “film-world.”¹ I briefly focus on attunement related to film viewing, because attunement, from the ground up, colors the way we understand, interpret, and discourse about the world and others; it alters and configures the way in which things show up as meaningful issues for our Being. Importantly, from an ontological perspective, films effect a change in mood, inducing a new form of attunement in the viewer (participant-presenter) of the film, and this is due to our intimate way of “being there’ with or in the events depicted on the screen” (59). Although the “viewer is spacio-temporally removed from the situation depicted on the screen,” the fact that it elicits a powerful attitudinal response from the viewer indicates that the spaciotemporal gap is temporarily transcended. This occurs by means of a deep and primordial connection that is established between film and participant, who is “existentially present in the film world and as such, attuned to situations on screen” (61). Importantly, as related to the

¹Loht does not include *falling* (*verfallen*), which as Heidegger articulates, has the “existential characteristics of disclosedness of Being-in-the-world wherein the ‘there’ of Dasein maintains itself in the kind of Being of the ‘they,’” which is linked with an attunement constituted by *idle talk*, “the kind of Being of everyday Dasein’s understanding and interpreting” (1962, 211/167). *Falling* might be related to the author’s analysis of the human tendency to adopt overly simplistic views of things, in this case, to encounter film and cinema in unreflective or non-philosophical ways; for example, in *falling* we have the tendency to view popular instances of cinema as mere forms of technological escapism.

film-world, attunement/moods can be public, and shared “collective cognitive and perceptual states can derive from our mood” (56). More primordial than emotions or psychological states, moods hold the potential to overtake each other, and Heidegger (1995) talks of the overriding quality that moods possess and display; since we are always *attuned*, when our moods change, one mood overpowers and overtakes another mood, and when drawn into the film-world, the potential for a change of attunement exists on both a personal and communal level. Loht’s analysis of moods emerges from *Being and Time*, where Heidegger (1962) famously introduces the fundamental attunement of *Angst* in relation to Dasein’s *Being-toward-death*. However, we note that the notion of attuned states (as *Stimmungen*) continues deep into Heidegger’s philosophy of the 1930s and 1940s, for example, as we encounter it in the attunement of Hölderlin’s poetry, in which it is described as *das Festliche* (The Festival Mood).²

Although the author introduces many aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy of art, what is crucial as related to Dasein’s attuned mode of *Being-in* is the claim that film-as-art not only breaks open a context (lighted clearing of Being/*Lichtung des Seins*) for the phenomenon of “truth-happening,” but beyond this, that the occurrence of *aletheia* is inseparable from the attunement of the film-viewer as she is drawn into the revelation of the *world-of-film*, effecting a change to her *Being-in-the-world* and her understanding. Film, as Loht reasons, is an ontological phenomenon of light; it is an interplay of light and dark, a *polemos* between the counter-striving forces of world and Earth, revealing and concealing, which in essence facilitates Dasein’s movement into the lighted clearing or truth; this at once induces the ecstatic standing out into the “truth of Being,” or the *truth of film-as-art* in relation to the participant and preserver in the experience of the art. The truth revealed, however, is never universally binding, for it is limited to the unique context of the viewing experience – the existential situation; for as Loht contends, the “film’s clearing is existentially constitutive of the film experience rather than functioning as a metaphysical essence. To put it this way likewise conveys human Dasein – the human viewer – as a counterpart to film’s existential manner of clearing” (2017, 100). There are many ways that film instantiates the vacillation between concealing and revealing as displayed in the primordial counter-striving of world and Earth; for example, the film experience “consists of a showing that is always at the same time concealing. The film shot, for instance, consists of a showing that is always at the same time concealing what lies outside of the shot.” Loht also considers edits and transitions, which “always conceal one subject in favor of another” (101). The same might be said of the manner in which characters show themselves in film – always incomplete, always in limited ways that defy full disclosure or full understanding by the viewer and philosopher, an occurrence that is intrinsic to all of our worldly encounters with others.

We note that art’s ability to “reveal” or “show” something is grounded in “poetry,” which for Heidegger is not poesy, but rather *Dichtung*, a distinction which indicates the essentially disclosive nature of art as a form of *truth-happening*. Heidegger reminds us

²I have focused on “mood” and attunement as a critical phenomenological-ontological aspect of a Heideggerian analysis that sets such a reading off from other philosophical readings of film and the film experience. However, this is an aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy that requires a vigorous defense against critics, which Loht ignores. For such a legitimate defense of Heidegger’s use of mood and a unique solution to the problem, Freeman (2010), for example, presents Heidegger’s account of mood, the five problems with this account, and then reconciles Heidegger’s philosophy of mood with psychological research.

that the German *Dichtung* is derived from the original Greek δεικνυμι (*deiknumi*), which “means to show, to make something visible, to make it manifest, not just in general, but by way of a specific pointing [or *naming*]” (2014, 29–30). Film might be said, importantly, to “speak” in the language of images, pointing to or gesturing toward a hitherto unknown revelatory aspect of our lives in a way that, according to Loht, the images “originate in a poetic manifestation of being, without which neither the images nor their articulation on part of the viewer would even be possible” (2017, 106). Loht goes on to stress that “*film images are constituted by being expressing itself in pictures*, pictures which moreover foster the existential projection of world” as indicative of their “origin, in a disclosure or manifestation of being” (106).

A phenomenological ontology of film can be revealed and grasped in the sense that film has its “own manner of being, that is, a meaning, sense, or intelligibility, that can be uncovered and described” (17), and this phenomenological project is focused on wresting from concealment “the ontology of various intentionalities involved in film-viewing, and the sorts of disclosures that take place for the viewer” (17). Because film gathers these powers to mean, it is conceived as having a life beyond reduction to a mere metaphysical object or physical artifact; because of its ontological nature, it calls for interpretation, and so elicits a *hermeneutics of facticity*. Film-viewing, according to Loht, consists of the human’s projection toward the moving images; it is “an intentional directedness toward images, such that one is able to meaningfully appropriate or make present what is depicted in the image” (27). The viewer, as preserver and participant, is *there with* the images and what is depicted in and through an attuned mode of dwelling in the midst of the image, *Being-in* the midst of the world the images open and establish. In short, film holds the power to disclose Dasein’s world in its intimate relation to and immersion in the *world of the film*, which opens the potential for Dasein to reinterpret and change its world through the understanding gleaned, or the interpretation that has been enacted, from the experience of film-viewing. It is possible to set the entire Heideggerian analysis within the following understanding: The cinematic experience of film-viewing – however, as is clear at this point, what the author really sets up is not an analysis of spectatorship, but rather Dasein as “participant” in and “preserver” of the work of art – bespeaks a *two-way disclosure*: Film-viewing is intimately bound up with Dasein’s *being-there* as projection for its own most possibilities, and film discloses its truth as a temporal phenomenon which the human is open to and attuned to. That is to say it opens to those possibilities that are “owned” (*ereigen*) by Dasein and those potential new – as of yet unrealized – possibilities that are always on the approach from out of the experience of the film.

If we relate Heidegger’s general ontology of art to the ontology of film as work of art, we recognize “the phenomenological ways in which artworks truthfully articulate their world to and for the viewer” (93), and in doing so, as stated, attune the participant within this world. Importantly, films hold the power to open what I would term “limited” or “small historical worlds.” Loht employs the example of Orson Well’s *Citizen Kane* and claims that it opens a world of America where “freedom, capitalism, success and failure” prevail, and provides us with a view into the “American citizen of the twentieth century, over and above portraying a fictional biography of one man” (94). To reiterate, film does express and instantiate certain qualities that are consistent with Heidegger’s view of art as an experience of truth, but when Loht writes that film is capable “of fostering

truth as *aletheia*, particularly in the cultural and historical undercurrents” (94), we must exercise caution with respect to this claim; for, as stated above, film is capable of accomplishing this *only* in a limited manner, as film cannot rise to the level of a historical, epoch-defining work of art. This is an especially relevant issue, considering it is Heidegger’s claim that for art to be “great,” it must at once have origins (*Ursprung/Anfang*) that are historical, and more importantly, must even foretell of a grand historical destiny.

Although no argument is made regarding film as a Heideggerian *cultural founding event* – and indeed, I’m doubtful that any such argument could be formulated – Loht does make the critical case for modes of communal attunement through our communion with the characters and their worlds on the screen; for “we appreciate the existence of others such as ourselves because the film world is already worlded in a Dasein-centric [but never solipsistic] way” (53).³ We extend this idea to include the attuned experience of *Mitsein* or *Being-with-others* in a shared world, others toward whom we demonstrate solicitude as their lives intertwine with our own. “The worlds opened up by fiction film are not simply spaces in which I exist solipsistically [as *solus ipse*]; they are also fundamentally human worlds, worlds constituted by the presence of other Daseins” (53). Films open common worlds, and when viewing film, we comport ourselves toward the others we encounter as “beings whose fates are also existentially significant for [us],” and we “appreciate the existence of others such as ourselves because this film world is already worlded in a Dasein-centric way” (53). For example, the lives of cinematic characters have meaning for us because their struggles not only mirror our own, but are also indicative of and instantiate the struggles that we encounter and seek to overcome, and these encounters harbor and shelter the potential to gain new insight and understanding into our *Being-in-the-world*. We might also consider the fact that a venue such as a movie theater also facilitates the opening of communal “worlds” that *world* – the event of *worlding* – because when viewing a film, an event of communal attunement is occurring. This attunement is in every way as powerful and unifying as the experience of spectatorship we experience at sporting events, where we more resemble *involved-and-attuned-participants* than removed spectators, partitioned off from others and the *world of the game*, in a subjective and internal experience.

The scholarly issue of the “Turn” (*Kehre*) in Heidegger’s philosophy is not addressed in any great detail by the author, and the interpretation is far more effective for avoiding the scholarly complexities of this thorny issue. Uniquely, it is the author’s treatment of Heidegger’s view of “philosophy” – which according to Loht, demonstrates a consistency from early to later thinking – that serves to bridge the so-called “gap” between *Being and Time* (1927) and the later essays on art and poetry (works of the 1930s and beyond). Ultimately, what emerges from Loht’s analysis of Heidegger’s 1936 view of art in its connection to the 1927 *phenomenological ontology* of Dasein, although Loht does not employ this Heideggerian term explicitly, is a view of Dasein that uniquely merges the *fundamental ontology* of Dasein with the understanding of Dasein’s relation to film-as-art found in Heidegger’s later philosophy, expressing what in “Letter on Humanism” is called, *ex-sistence* (1993,

³We must note that the idea of spectators relating to characters in a narrative film in ways that move and inspire our *Being-in-the-world* is neither novel nor new; for example, philosopher Nussbaum (1995) has philosophized and championed the view of “narrative characterization” and its potential for ethical philosophy in the field of comparative literature for many years. Indeed, it is also one of the critical components in Nietzsche’s (1995) theory of Attic tragedy, which is given content and form by way of the interplay between the counter-striving forces of the Apollonian and Dionysian.

229). “The ‘Being’ of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of *ek-sistence*, that is of an ecstatic inheritance in the truth of Being,” and this is the projective character of Dasein as it “stands out” and is set within the open clearing of Being. Here, the “essence” of the human as *ek-sistence* is sharply separated off from the “*esse essentiae*” and “*esse existentiae*” of traditional metaphysics, as something with an immutable, eternal essence. Indeed, as Loht contends, philosophizing film-as-philosophy is possible in the first instance because the viewer or participant, as “Being there” (Dasein), is a co-participant through the viewer’s disclosing projection into the film: “In a manner of speaking the viewer is taken out of herself, transported to another place” (2017, 126), and this relates directly to my referencing Dasein as *ek-sistence* – the ecstatic “standing out” of Dasein, both beyond itself in the present moment as well as its standing out in the lighted clearing of Being, the region of ontological context, opened through the film experience.

The unique insights gleaned from Loht’s critical confrontation with Heidegger yield a deeper understanding and transformed view that contributes to the film-as-philosophy debate, setting it off from philosophy of film, concerned with how film inspires philosophical engagement, including the issue of whether or not film itself – as an artistic medium – *philosophizes*. Loht shows how the account of Heideggerian phenomenology and philosophy compliment and enrich the positions of such recognized and renowned film scholars as Stephen Mulhall, Stanley Cavell, and Robert Sinnerbrink. “Philosophy’s province” is the thinking of the truth of Being, which calls for the philosopher to, in light of the eternal mystery related to the Earthen aspects of cinema, “concede to being’s own refusal of complete openness” (Loht 2017, 135). This crucially indicates, in relation to Heidegger’s thinking, “first, that philosophy and art are limited in their own insight into the power of their discovery, and second, that the way and how of their discovery is similarly unpredictable” (137). Philosophy, in the spirit of Heidegger is essentially an ever-renewed process of “questioning and seeking,” and so is never reducible to a method for procuring sure and certain instances of truth possessing syllogistic certainty or unquestioned empirical veracity. Indeed, Heidegger believed that good philosophy always asks more questions than it can ever hope to answer. We might say that philosophy is a practice attuned in advance to the *mystery in all things*, the manner in which all that we inquire into holds the *originary* propensity for receding into finitude, sliding away from our philosophical grasp through the recalcitrant move into concealment. This is precisely, according to Loht, how philosophy, guided by phenomenology, should approach film-as-art, granting and allowing it to retain its ontological status. For example, films such as *Citizen Kane* “do not become ‘used up’ after viewing; if anything, they require repeated viewing in order for their staying power to perpetuate” (94). Our interpretations always emerge from the renewed attempts to wrest the film’s elusive secrets from their concealed modes, a pursuit that inspires questioning anew. This quality is expressive of the lighting and concealing aspects of truth in relation to the way in which world and Earth struggle within the context (*Riss*) of the work of art; film preserves the quality of the *ontological mystery* bound up with all things, and beyond, preserves and shelters it *as* mystery. For, as Loht reasons, in our experience of film “the illuminated things of the clearing *show* their hidden side. They do this in a way that *they show it as hidden*” (99).

As mentioned above, Loht stresses that his analysis of film-as-philosophy actually concerns the nature of philosophy more than it does the nature of film: “If a film affords the viewer insight into the nature of things, that is, if a film’s self-showing opens up new modes of understanding, then it is an instance of philosophy” (144). Loht conceives philosophy in terms of an expression in various explicit (methodological) and implicit (non-methodological) forms of phenomenological ontology, concerned with “the being of beings and the manner in which beings show themselves” (116), and I include the issue of *how* this showing is possible, based on the *enowning* event of Being within which the human participates. It is possible to draw out from Loht’s reading an approach to philosophy in relation to the later Heidegger’s view of *thinking* as an *originary* mode of *meditative* thought (that opposes “calculative thought” and “traditional metaphysical” thinking). This approach is associated with what Heidegger (1966) expresses in terms of *Gelassenheit* (the releasement toward things) and *Offenheit für das Geheimnis* (openness to the mystery). It significantly includes an essential orientation toward “questioning and seeking,” and it is the case that Heidegger (2000) importantly brings our attention to the “original” questions bound up with issues of an ontological nature, which must in advance attune, structure, and guide our inquiries. Critical concerns about our place in the world arise from out of “the film-viewing experience whenever Dasein’s film-oriented projection leads it to a questionable state of meaning,” that is, “a questionable state regarding Dasein’s own meaning, its self-understanding, and thus, its being-in-the-world” (Loht 2017, 129). This opens the possibility for a change in mood and attunement, facilitating a change in the film-viewer’s understanding and the interpretation that underlies it, producing a “new articulation of intelligibility from out of this original state” (129). Philosophy is possible because the viewer, or participant-*as*-preserver, exists as “Being there” in the context of the film’s unfolding “work-Being,” in the moment of *aletheuein*, or *truth-happening* of film-as-art.

Loht’s filmic analyses comprise only a small, but what I think is a significant, portion of the book. Importantly, we note, in relation to the manner in which phenomenology lives, that this section does not represent the so-called “application” of Loht’s film-as-philosophy approach to films, but rather allows these films to live as they are revealed through the lens of the Heideggerian-inspired phenomenological ontology developed in the main sections of the text. Among the films analyzed are: Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven* and *Thin Red Line* (not surprising considering Malick’s philosophical and academic connection to Heidegger), Michael Haneke’s *Code Unknown* and *The White Ribbon*, and, in a surprising choice, David Gordon Green’s *Joe*. Loht selects for analysis films that are both narrative and non-narrative in their structure, along with films, such as *Joe*, which transcend categories of what we might label classic cinema or art-house film. The choice to analyze *Joe* might appear at first blush an odd choice, especially when one is attempting to develop a film philosophy that draws on Heidegger’s philosophy of art. Such a film might appear to completely obliterate the line between what would be powerful and truth-establishing art and other forms of lesser art. But recall that Loht is really seeking not only to establish the boundaries of a Heideggerian filmic philosophy, but also, and here’s the originality of Loht’s interpretation, to challenge and push the boundaries he’s established to their limits. One reason *Joe* is an appropriate film for phenomenological analysis is that, according to Loht, “it offers fresh potential

for thinking about Heideggerian issues without the distraction [as with Malick] and clutter bound up with making sense of the filmmaker's biography" (192).

The film demonstrates the potential for fostering the "occurrence of *aletheia* – that is, revealing and unconcealing ... by creating a world; this is a world whose opening requires a degree of struggle" (195), and this necessitates drawing the viewer within the context of the existential situation that the film reveals – here there are moments of *Being-in-the-world* as "being-in-the-film-world," which inspire "the development or activation of understanding" (195). As viewers we "interpret the characters through the world in which they appear but it is a world co-founded in the viewer," and here we have the co-communal aspect of film interpretation and film as work of art, here we are beckoned to enter the filmic context (the lighted clearing broken open by the film) and remain as active participants and hence *preservers* of, not just the work of art, but more importantly, the *truth-happening* in the context of the *Riss*. "The being-in-the-world fostered through the film *Joe* appears for us as one that is mooded in terms of slow, dying, poisoning, and decay" (197), or what is the "mooded" experience highlighted by transformation and participation of the viewer in the *work-Being* of the film. Here there is a change to our *Being-in-the-world* grounded in a change to our attunement, and hence the development of our understanding is made possible through the interpretative activity the film demands. Based on the ground covered, moving through Loht's analysis, we imagine the *polemos* occurring within the clash of world and Earth in the film's "work-Being" – as the ontological and *poietic* "power of images ... assert themselves." The *polemos* inspired in the spectator as *participant* in the film-world or *Being-in-the-film-world* (the *existential situation*), which she has been drawn into and attuned to in a new and unique manner, is intensified because the "film-viewing experience is seated in Dasein's existentiality, particularity, and projective understanding" (195), the deepening of the attuned understanding of the film-viewer.

To conclude and reiterate, in a highly effective and unique manner Loht engages – *confronts* – Heidegger's phenomenological ontology and uses it to convincingly and successfully think *with* and then *beyond* Heidegger, offering us an original and illuminating study of the phenomenological-ontological aspects of film-as-philosophy.⁴ Indeed, Loht's book could be read as a companion piece to Young's excellent study of Heidegger's philosophy of art (2001); for Young, although he offers an extensively detailed analysis that provides valuable insights into many key aspects of Heidegger's thinking on art, does not include a sustained discussion of film as a form of modern art. Loht's book, in my estimation, will have a wide appeal to practitioners within a myriad of disciplines. First and foremost, it will appeal to film theorists and film philosophers, for the readings of both Heidegger's philosophy and the films are complex and challenging; however, the ideas are clearly articulated and accessible to even those readers who might not be steeped in either systematic philosophy or Heidegger's philosophy, which admittedly can be quite dense.

⁴I spoke of the "critical confrontation" with Heidegger's philosophy that comprises Loht's book, but it is also possible to speak of *die Auseinandersetzung* with respect to Loht's philosophy, especially as it is laid out in the chapters where he moves in an original direction. Specifically, I am thinking about film's power to articulate new meanings through an interpretive process of deepening our understanding as attuned participants in the filmic experience, and this we might say, in colloquial – but certainly not naïve – terms, is *learning something new*. This I argue would be consistent with an approach to developing a phenomenology of *cognitivism* as relating to film. The task of relating both Heidegger and Loht to a *cognitivist* view of film-as-art is left to future scholars engaging Heidegger and, in this case, using Loht's scholarship as a springboard for thinking in new directions.

Second, it will appeal to students and scholars of philosophy. Third, it will contribute to the ongoing academic issue concerning the adoption of philosophy and ethics curricula grounded in the practice of film-as-philosophy. This is Loht's first monograph as a philosopher, and this book gives the positive impression that his future publications will be, much like this impressive text, books that challenge orthodoxy and push hard against comfortable, complacent, and even dogmatic, philosophical interpretations.⁵

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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⁵What an analysis such as this requires is an *apologia* (a defense) of phenomenology itself and not merely an explication of it – Why should we trust its findings? It is problematic to embrace the view that phenomenology, as a mode of philosophical inquiry, is legitimate, and beyond, superior to other methods of practicing philosophy, and this is an issue highlighted in the contemporary thought of Continental philosopher Harman (2010). It is necessary to distance phenomenology, or defend phenomenology against – dare I say, rescue phenomenology from – critiques such as those lodged against it by Dennett (1991), who discounts phenomenology by reducing it to an inconsequential mode of subjective introspection – mere *flights of fancy*. The move to defend phenomenology, I claim, is necessary if we hope to begin to consider a legitimate move toward a phenomenology of film – or anything, for that matter! A defense of phenomenology should serve as a prolegomenon to a study of this depth and insight. What is unique, however, as my review testifies, is Loht's treatment of film and Being-in-the-world as viewed through the phenomenological lens of Heidegger's philosophy.

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