

Paweł Aleksandrowicz

"The Philosophy of Motion Picture", Noël Carroll, Malden 2008 : [recenzja]

Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature 34, 183-185

2010

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Paweł Aleksandrowicz
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
Lublin, Poland

**Noël Carroll (2008), *The Philosophy of Motion Picture*.
Malden: Blackwell Publishing.**

Being an author of countless articles and eleven books on film theory, and an unquestionable authority in the realm of film aesthetics, Noël Carroll is truly an outstanding figure in motion picture studies. His latest book entitled *The Philosophy of Motion Picture* is a synthesis of his earlier works, a comprehensive study of film theories conceived so far, and an ensemble of new ideas which constitute an innovative approach towards the moving image in the philosophy of art.

The book is structured in a very logical and coherent manner. Carroll starts with a fundamental but difficult question: can films be considered works of art? He proves they can using a very simple yet highly efficient method – by taking every counterargument there is and refuting it through exposing the limitation, narrowness and often absurdity which lies within it.

The second chapter, he deals with “medium specificity thesis”, the view that every artist should be true to the medium in which they work, and how being pure to the medium, in this case - being cinematic, affects the quality of the artwork. Carroll argues that

mastering the film medium, i.e. mainly shooting and editing, is not a guarantee of quality. In fact, many movies, despite being cinematic, are poor works of art for they fail on the planes which they share with other media, for instance they are badly written or acted.

In the following chapter Carroll asks the same question André Bazin posed in his collection of essays: "What is cinema?". Searching for a good definition of cinema, the author is in favor of the concept "moving image" as opposed to "film". Film, he persuasively argues, is merely celluloid-mounted moving photography, whereas the moving image is a broader category which encompasses not only film as understood above but also broadcast TV, CGI, video, etc. In other words, it is not the physical basis (celluloid film) that implies cinema, but the impression of movement.

The further part of the book deals with the stages of shooting a movie, beginning from a single shot (chapter 4), through a sequence of shots and up to editing (chapter 5) – each of which is analyzed with respect to its function in the final product. The author also presents various techniques of shooting as well as methods of narrating a story, creating in this way a mini-manual of direction.

Carroll smoothly moves on from narration to the effect it has on the audience, as he embarks on the subject of emotions. Not only does he show how to arouse the viewer emotionally, but he also presents and analyses different emotions the audience might feel towards the characters.

The final chapter is the icing on the cake as it focuses on evaluating movies. The author marks clear boundaries between "I like this film" and "It's a good film" and in a brilliant and erudite manner presents objective criteria for movie assessment. He advocates for a "pluralistic category approach" which states that each film belongs to a particular category (comedy, melodrama, musical, etc.) and as a member of this category it is designed to fulfill its category-specific functions. Therefore, one can choose the best action movie ever, but it is pointless to compare *The Shining* with *Eyes Wide Shut* as they realize different functions.

The Philosophy of Motion Picture reads well, it is informative and explanatory but at the same time concise and written with a slight doze of humor. However, being a book addressed primarily to scholars, its topics might not be of interest to average movie-goers (excluding chapter 6). Still, it is a fine piece of writing and undoubtedly a vital contribution to motion picture studies.

Bibliography

Carroll, N. (2008): *The Philosophy of Motion Picture*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.