

Thinking Cinema with Proust. Patrick ffrench. (Moving Image, 7). Cambridge: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2018. 218 pp.

Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu* was written and published after the birth of cinema, but makes practically no mention of film at all in its many pages. Yet film criticism and theory has repeatedly gone back to Proust to rethink cinema, not only as it is practiced throughout its history but also what cinema could be, virtually. Patrick ffrench's new book sets out to chart the intersection of Proust's novel and cinematic thought, to look at how the *Recherche* "enters into a 'functional competition' with the cinema" in ways parallel to how critical theories of cinema "deconstruct the institution of film and [think] it differently" (1). The unique approach taken on by ffrench avoids the pitfalls of most scholarly work on Proust and cinema by focusing on theory and not on adaptations of the novel or on the few passages in which Proust's text engages directly with the cinema. Instead, ffrench offers a cornucopia of theorists who have proposed readings of cinema through Proust or in ways parallel to his work, including such major figures as Agamben, Bellour, Benjamin, Barthes, Blanchot, Bersani, Bowie, Cavell, Deleuze, among many others. One could begin to wonder if it is possible to think cinema *without* Proust.

The book's six core chapters deal with very dense issues of cinematic theory framed by ffrench within a Proustian context. The first, "Reverie in a Dark Room," examines the opening passages of the novel, when the narrator is literally in a dark room, and provides an opportunity to reflect on the complex subject position of the spectator of cinema. The second chapter, "Camera Obscura," argues that Proust's novel dedramatizes the notion that a camera obscura can serve as a model for the transcendental subject by showing how the body is present within the chamber – a position Deleuze had described in relationship to the Baroque and Proust, in *Le Pli*. "Proust's Projections," the third chapter, plays on the multiple meanings of "projection," in psychoanalysis, in literature, and in film, to propose that both the novel and cinema "relativize the conditions of objective knowledge," which is dependent on our own distorted projections. Chapters four and five, "The Cinema of Montjouvain" and "Theory of Gesture," demonstrates how Proust's novel problematizes cinema's relationship to staging images and movement or gesture, creating and also withholding a secret knowledge (153). The final chapter, "Screen Memories/Screen Histories," is the strongest as ffrench masterfully argues that Proust's novel undoes our confidence in the objectivity of memory and of history.

This brief account cannot do justice to the intricacies of ffrench's book, which will serve as a valuable resource to scholars of the novel and of the cinema. If there is a critique to be made of ffrench's approach, it is that by proposing that Proust's novel only engages in film's "prehistory," ffrench is arguing for a teleology of the cinema, in which literature and photography are outdated stages of film's development. While ffrench shows very persuasively that Proust is necessary for thinking about the cinema, is cinema necessary for thinking Proust? Just as importantly, what can Proust's novel teach us about our post-cinematic age, where the moving image has migrated to other screens?

Patrick M. Bray
Ohio State University