

FILM-PHILOSOPHY

A Heideggerian Cinema?: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*

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In his 1979 foreword to *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell remarks on the curious relationship between Heidegger and cinema (1979, ix-xxv). Cavell is inspired to do so by Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), a film that not only presents us with images of preternatural beauty, but also acknowledges the self-referential character of the cinematic image (Cavell 1979, xiv ff). For Cavell, Malick's films have a formal radiance that suggest something of Heidegger's thinking of the relationship between Being and beings, the radiant self-showing of things in luminous appearance (1979, xv). *Days of Heaven* does indeed have a metaphysical vision of the world, but 'one feels that one has never quite seen the scene of human existence—call it the arena between earth (or days) and heaven—quite realized this way on film before' (Cavell 1979, xiv-xv). As Cavell observes, however, the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and Malick's films seems to challenge both philosophers and film-theorists. The film-theorists struggle to show how Heidegger is relevant to the experience of cinema, while the philosophers grapple with the question of cinema and aesthetics, precisely because film puts into question traditional concepts of visual art, as Walter Benjamin showed long ago (Cavell 1979, xvi-xvii).

In what follows, I take up Cavell's invitation to think about the relationship between Heidegger and film by considering Malick's 1998 masterpiece, *The Thin Red Line*. The question I shall explore is whether we should describe *The Thin Red Line* as 'Heideggerian Cinema'. Along the way I discuss two different approaches to the film: a 'Heideggerian' approach that reads the film as exemplifying Heideggerian themes (Furstenau and MacEvoy 2003); and a 'film as philosophy' approach (Simon Critchley 2005)

arguing that, while the film is philosophical, we should refrain from reading it in relation to any particular philosophical framework. In conclusion, I offer some brief remarks about how *The Thin Red Line* can be regarded as 'Heideggerian cinema,' not because we need to read Heidegger in order to understand it, but because Malick's film performs a *cinematic poesis*, a revealing of world through image, sound, and word.

What is 'Heideggerian Cinema'?

At first glance, the idea of a Heideggerian thinking of cinema seems unthinkable. Heidegger's rare remarks on the subject make it clear that he considered cinema and photography to be forms of technical representation signifying the 'end of art' in modernity. At the same time, the only passage where Heidegger explicitly discusses film is very suggestive. In 'A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer,' (Heidegger 1982: 15-17) two interlocutors, the Inquirer and his Japanese guest, converse on the relationship between Western rationality and its dominance over the East Asian sense of world. As an example of this all-consuming Westernization, the Japanese guest suggests, surprisingly, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). The Inquirer is perplexed, for he found *Rashomon* revelatory, above all its subdued gestures: 'I believed that I was experiencing the enchantment of the Japanese world, the enchantment that carries us away into the mysterious.' 1982: 17) Refuting this imputation of mystery, the Japanese guest explains that it is the fact that the Japanese world is 'captured and imprisoned at all within the objectness of photography' that makes *Rashomon* an instance of Western techno-rationalisation (1982: 17). Regardless of the film's aesthetic qualities, 'the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of what you call objectness' (1982: 17). Far from presenting the 'enchantment of the Japanese world,' Kurosawa's *Rashomon* shows us the incompatibility between this poetic sense of Being-revealed for example in Noh drama-and the objectifying tendencies of this 'technical-aesthetic product of the film industry' (1982: 17).

While intriguing, this passage hardly presents a promising start for thinking about the relationship between Heidegger and cinema. Indeed, it suggests that there is little to be said other than that cinema is a pernicious manifestation of technological en-framing. It is also a disappointing discussion of Kurosawa's work, given its explicitly hybrid character, fusing Japanese and Western dramatic traditions within a self-consciously stylized

aesthetic of cinematic action and visual poetics.¹ Given Heidegger's evident skepticism concerning film, what are we to make, then, of the talk of 'Heideggerian cinema' that Malick's work seems to provoke?

In a recent volume of essays on Malick's work, for example, Marc Furstenau and Leslie MacEvoy argue that *The Thin Red Line* simply is an instance of 'Heideggerian cinema' (2003, 173-185). This follows firstly, they suggest, from the fascinating biographical facts of Malick's career. Malick studied philosophy as an undergraduate with Stanley Cavell, and briefly taught philosophy at the MIT. He then traveled to Germany in the mid 1960s to meet with Heidegger, and produced a scholarly translation of *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (*The Essence of Reasons*) in 1969. That same year, Malick abandoned philosophy to become a film-maker. A philosopher turned film-maker is a rare and fascinating creature, so we can readily understand Furstenau and MacEvoy's confident claim that Malick clearly 'transformed his knowledge of Heidegger in cinematic terms' (2003, 175), a knowledge that came to fruition in his first feature, *Badlands* (1973), in *Days of Heaven* (1978), and of course in *The Thin Red Line* (1998).

While Malick's biography provides one reason to regard his work as Heideggerian, his films' philosophical complexity provides a stronger one. Citing Cavell, Furstenau and MacEvoy point to Malick's philosophical concern with the self-reflexive character of the cinematic image, the way the structures of presence and absence which shape metaphysical thinking are reenacted through the technology of the cinema. The reflexivity of the cinematic image involves a play between presence and absence: the image presents a being that is nonetheless absent, for us, as a being, yet present to us in the image. For Furstenau and MacEvoy, this conscious exploration of the parallel between metaphysical representation and the cinematic image is precisely what makes Malick an exemplary philosophical film-maker: 'The task of a philosophically engaged cinema,' they claim, 'is to address both the inherent reflexivity of the film image, as well as the consequences of a metaphysical thinking in which the world is understood to have been grasped through its representation' (2003, 176).

Malick's Heideggerianism, however, is not just a matter of the reflexivity of his cinematic images, or even a consequence of the technological transformation of reality

¹ As Julian Young notes, 'Kurosawa, who had studied Western painting, literature, and political philosophy, based *Yojimbo* on a Dashiell Hammett novel, *Throne of Blood* on *Macbeth*, and *Ran* on *King Lear*. He never pretended otherwise than that his films were cultural hybrids.' (2001, p.149, n.19) *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 149, fn. 19.

into stock of representational images. Echoing Heidegger on Hölderlin, they suggest that we should regard Malick as a cinematic poet responding to the destitution of modernity: 'Malick has assumed the role of poet-philosopher, revealing through the use of poetic, evocative imagery the cinema's unique presencing of Being' (2003, 177). Much like Hölderlin and Rilke, Malick's cinema would be a form of poetic revealing or bringing-forth, a way or reawakening our lost sense of Being, of finitude and mortality, in a world transformed into world-image.

There are two points I would like to make regarding this strongly 'Heideggerian' approach. The first is that we should be wary of reading the film solely through the lens of Malick's biography. The second is that recognizing the 'Heideggerian' aspects in the film shouldn't blind us to other dimensions of its aesthetic and philosophical complexity. The fact that Malick was a teacher of philosophy and translator of Heidegger shouldn't automatically prompt us to assume that he makes 'Heideggerian' films. Nor should the powerful treatment of themes such as mortality and finitude, authentic existence, and our relationship with Nature, blind us to the way that Malick might also be said to belong, for example, to the tradition of American transcendentalism embracing figures such as Emerson and Thoreau. Rather than citing Malick's background in order to lend the film's imagery and themes a Heideggerian content, the relationship between Heidegger and Malick should remain a *question*, rather than a presupposition, for philosophical readings of his work.

This question is avoided in Furstenau and MacEvoy's Heideggerian framing of the film. Moreover, their reading leaves precious few pages to discuss instances in the film where we can see this poetic revealing in action. Such revealing occurs, they suggest, in scenes that convey a sense of earthly dwelling by 'having the camera effect the upward glance to the sky, to where the divine is intimated yet concealed' (2003, 184). Underwater scenes are shot from below, the water's surface illuminated by the shimmer of the sky; likewise the shots of trees 'soaring to the heavens,' presenting a mosaic of sunlight filtering through the jungle canopy (2003, 184). Sparks from a roaring fire, the detritus of battle, disappear in the night sky, consumed by the draft into which we too are pulled. Like the work of the poets, Malick's cinematic poetics reveals this movement towards Being/Nature, a cinematic rendering of the fourfold of earth and sky, mortals and gods: 'As the camera follows their ascent, the distance between earth and sky-the distance by which humanity is measured-is spanned' (2003, 184).

For all the richness of these remarks, Furstenau and MacEvoy nonetheless tend to sketch the visual elements of the film that suggest Heideggerian themes without showing how the film *thinks* these themes or explores their ambiguities in visual and narrative terms. What recedes from view in this reading is *the film as a film*, the detail of its narrative structure, the significance of its characters and their situation, the complexity of its sound and imagery.² This strongly 'Heideggerian' approach assumes that the film can be subsumed within a philosophical framework that would explain its thematic content and aesthetic style. It applies philosophy to film or reads film in light of a given philosophical framework, without, however, raising the question of the relationship between philosophy and film, which is what a reading in the spirit of Heidegger's thought might be expected to do.

This objection is well made in Simon Critchley's essay, 'Calm: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*.' Indeed, Furstenau and MacEvoy risk slipping on what Critchley dubs the three 'hermeneutic banana skins' confronting any philosophically-minded viewer of Malick's work: 1) fetishising the Malick the enigmatic auteur; 2) being seduced by Malick's intriguing relationship with philosophy; and 3) reducing the matter of Malick's film to a philosophical meta-text that would provide the key to its meaning. Doing film-philosophy is a risky undertaking, as Critchley remarks: 'To read from cinematic language to some philosophical metalanguage is both to miss what is specific to the medium of film and usually to engage in some sort of cod-philosophy deliberately designed to intimidate the uninitiated.' (2005, 8) Sobering words indeed for any aspiring philosophical reader of film!

Critchley's point, however, is a serious one: a philosophical reading does not mean reading *through* the film to a framing philosophical meta-text, but rather presenting a reading *of* the film as itself engaged in philosophical reflection. A philosophical reading does not rely on a pre-given philosophical framework but remains rather with the cinematic *Sache selbst*. This 'film as philosophy' approach, in short, is one that takes film seriously 'as a form of philosophizing, of reflection, reasoning, and argument'.³

So what of Critchley's philosophical approach to *The Thin Red Line*? It offers a strongly immanent reading of the film, eschewing explicit recourse to given philosophical

² Kaja Silverman (2003) develops a more cinematically grounded reading of the film as 'Heideggerian cinema'.

³ For a similar approach to film as philosophy, see Stephen Mulhall (2002, 5-10).

frameworks and foregrounding instead its textual, thematic, and narrative elements.⁴ The narrative, Critchley suggests, is organized around three central relationships, each consisting of a conflict between two characters, and each articulating one of three related themes: 1) *Loyalty*, the conflict between Colonel Tall (Nick Nolte) and Captain Staros (Elias Koteas) over loyalty towards the commands of one's superiors versus loyalty towards the men under one's command; 2) *Love*, explored in Private Ben's (Ben Chaplin) devotion to, and ultimate betrayal by, his wife Marty (Miranda Otto); and 3) the question of metaphysical *Truth*, an argument, in the fullest sense, between Sergeant Welsh (Sean Penn) and Private Witt (Jim Caveziel), a struggle that spans the entire length of the film.

Loyalty figures prominently in the first half of the film, the ferocious battle scenes on the Kunai grass-covered mountain slopes on which the American troops seek to capture a Japanese machine-gun bunker concealed near the mountain-tops of Guadalcanal. Colonel Tall expects men to be sacrificed not just to win the battle but to satisfy his own personal ambitions (for 'his' first war). Staros refuses Tall's order to attack the position directly, which would recklessly expose his men to death, suggesting an alternative flanking strategy. Critchley recounts this point somewhat imprecisely, attributing the alternative strategy (flanking from the right) to Tall rather than Staros: 'Suppressing his fury, Tall goes up the line to join Charlie Company and skillfully organizes a flanking assault on the Japanese position' (2005, 9). In fact it is Staros who initially requests permission to organize this alternative flanking approach, which Tall flatly refuses then takes over once he sizes up the situation for himself. Despite relieving Staros of his command, Tall tacitly acknowledges Staros' loyalty to his men by offering him the Silver Star and 'throwing in the Purple Heart'. Tall recognizes that Staros' judgment was *right* in holding off the direct attack that was ordered, but nonetheless regards him as 'too soft-hearted' to be an effective leader-too loyal to the men under his command rather than the military objective at issue.

Love and its inevitable betrayal is the second important theme, with Private Bell finding the strength to fight and endure only by recalling (even in the heat of battle) idealized fantasy images of his young wife, intimating love but also loss. This romantic fantasy is shattered by the reality and contingencies of war. In a devastating scene, she writes to him that their prolonged separation has strained their marriage, and that she has

⁴ Critchley thus discusses the ways in which Malick departs from James Jones' gritty 1963 novel and the 1964 film version by Andrew Marton.

now met another man whom she wants to marry. Bell's idealized love ends in betrayal, not only of their marriage but of his conviction about enduring the war. Critchley describes this theme as handled 'rather abstractly' by Malick, but this abstractness, in my view, is consistent with Bell's romantic, fantasmatic image of the relationship, which provides him with a source of strength and purpose in response to the violence and trauma of battle. We should remember, moreover, that all of Malick's films thus far are love stories, in a strangely lyrical sense, featuring a tragic central couple (*Badlands*, *Days of Heaven*), or a homosocial male couple in *The Thin Red Line* (Welsh and Witt). Their masculine bond reveals subtle undercurrents of rivalry and respect, envy and eroticism, agonism and acknowledgment, all powerfully rendered in the brilliant performances by Sean Penn and James Caveziel.

The most important theme, however, is that of *truth*, the search for which shapes the complex relationship between Welsh and Witt. The question, as Critchley puts it, is whether there is a transcendent metaphysical truth: 'is this the only world, or is there another world?' (2005, 10). In an early dialogue, Welsh informs Witt that, 'in this world, a man himself is nothing ? and there ain't no world but this one.' Witt disagrees, replying that he has seen another world, beyond the merely physical realm. 'Well,' Welsh responds, 'you're seeing something I never will.' This argument is elaborated throughout the course of the film. Welsh maintains that the war is ultimately about nothing more than 'property,' which means that the best a man can do is to 'make himself an island' and simply seek to survive. Witt, by contrast, claims to see beyond the lie of war, finding amidst the violence and brutality the possibility of selfless sacrifice; he seeks an encounter with 'the glory,' with the moment of immortality that arrives in facing one's death with calm.

Their relationship thus takes on the character of a philosophical disputation, Welsh's 'nihilistic physicalism,' as Critchley describes, clashing with Witt's 'metaphysical panpsychism'. Welsh's assertions are confounded by Witt's questions: 'What is this war in the heart of nature?' 'Where does this evil come from?' 'Maybe all men got one big soul, that everybody's part of-all faces are the same man, one big self'. Welsh's dispirited resignation is contrasted with Witt's affirmative spark: Witt survives the war, but is deadened; Witt dies but in an enlivened state, calmly sacrificing himself for his fellows. Who is 'right' about the metaphysical truth of war? There can be no answer to this question, the ambivalence of the experience of war being precisely Malick's point: it 'poisons the soul' but also 'reveals the glory'.

These metaphysical reflections on truth, mortality, and humanity, are, for Critchley, what makes Malick's film a philosophical work. The key to the film and to Malick's work generally, he suggests, is *calm*: the calm acceptance of death, of this-worldly mortality, a calmness present not only as a narrative theme but as a cinematic aesthetic. Malick's male protagonists, as Critchley observes, 'seem to foresee their appointment with death and endeavour to make sure they arrive on time' (2005, 13). Witt is one such character, recklessly putting himself in situations of extreme danger, fascinated by the intimacy of death, but with an anticipation of it that brings not fear but calm. Early in the film, Witt describes his initially fearful response to his mother's death as follows: 'I was afraid to touch the death that I see in her. I couldn't find anything beautiful or uplifting about her going back to God. I heard people talk about immortality, but I ain't never seen it.' Witt then wonders how it will be when he dies, what it would be like 'to know that this breath now was the last one you was ever gonna draw'. And it is here that he finds his answer about the relation between immortality and mortality: 'I just hope I can meet it the same way she did, with the same ? calm. Because that's where it's hidden, the immortality that I hadn't seen.'⁵

The thought Malick presents here, Critchley remarks, is that immortality can only be understood as this calm before death, the moment of eternal life that can only be imagined as inhabiting the instant of one's own death.⁶ This surely tempts one to think about what Heidegger describes as authentic finitude, which is what Kaja Silverman does in her brilliant reading of *The Thin Red Line* as a meditation on authentic being-toward-death, the Heideggerian nothing at the heart of our finite existence. Indeed, Critchley himself points to the parallels with Heidegger's being-toward-death, the *Angst* that can be experienced as a kind of *Ruhe*, as peace or calm; yet to do so, he maintains, would be to slip on one of the hermeneutic banana skins we canvassed earlier.

Can we avoid such hermeneutic slips? I suspect not, nor should we even try, for the Heideggerian context of *The Thin Red Line* necessarily resonates within the film, whether we embrace or eschew it, providing a horizon of meaning that is impossible to bracket

⁵ Kaja Silverman (2003, 328) points out that this scene presents Witt's mother's sense of calm, rather than Witt's own recollection of his mother's death. For Witt recalls the *fear* he felt in seeing his mother 'going to meet God'. Yet it is her moment of calm before death that gives Witt a clue to the experience of authentic being-toward-death.

⁶ Critchley also mentions Blanchot's *L'Instant de ma mort* in this context.³¹ Silverman reads the film in relation to the early, pre-Kehre Heidegger of *Being and Time*, Division II, and the 1929 lecture, 'What is Metaphysics?' This raises the interesting question of how the film can be read with reference to Heidegger I (Silverman) and Heidegger II (Furstenau and MacEvoy, who cite Heidegger's later essays on poetry and technology) when these phases of Heidegger's thought clearly diverge in important ways.

completely. Heidegger has, after all, left an indelible mark on our horizon of philosophical thinking. The reflections in the film on death, mortality, finitude, and our relationship with Nature/Being, I suggest, gain at least some of their philosophical resonance from their distinctly 'Heideggerian' tenor. In this respect Critchley's strictly 'immanentist' reading of *The Thin Red Line* risks foreclosing the very horizon of thought that nourishes much of the film's speculative and metaphysical vision.

This difficulty of avoiding Heidegger becomes clear in Critchley's concluding reflections on the ethical significance of *The Thin Red Line*. Here the theme in question is being open to the presencing of Nature, just letting things be, what we might describe, though Critchley does not, as an attitude of 'releasement' in both an ethical and aesthetical sense. Witt's calm in the face of mortality is framed by the massive presence of nature, dwarfing the human drama of war, of physical violence and historical conflict. This beautiful indifference of nature, Critchley observes, might be viewed as a kind of *fatum* for Malick, 'an ineluctable power, a warring force that both frames human war but is utterly indifferent to human purposes and intentions.' (2005, 17) According to Critchley, this indifference to human concerns, which differs from the enchanted nature of animism, follows from Malick's broadly naturalistic conception of nature: 'Things are not enchanted in Malick's universe, they simply *are*, and we are things too'. Things simply are, luminous and shining, being as they are, 'in all the intricate evasions of the 'as!'' (2005, 18) Malick's camera thus takes on a neutral perspective, calmly revealing their presence not *for us* but as it were *despite us*.

Malick is in this respect more akin to a poet like Wallace Stevens than to a thinker like Heidegger, though Critchley leaves the nature of this relationship tantalizingly open. In the end it is the poet Stevens who 'frames' Critchley's reading of *The Thin Red Line*, which opens with Stevens' 'The Death of a Soldier' and closes, aptly, with a quotation from 'The Palm at the End of the Mind' – lines resonating with the final image of a coconut shoot emerging from out of the sandy shallows. As with the later Heidegger, we defer to the poet rather than the philosopher when it comes to that mode of poetic revealing which exceeds the philosophical framing of the film, or indeed the framework of philosophical discourse itself.

Surely here, a philosophically anxious viewer might exclaim, we are talking of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit!* For all the care to avoid invoking a philosophical meta-text, or departing

from our immersion in the cinematic *Sache*, we find ourselves talking of the way things presence, their luminous appearance, their revealing of a world that we do not master or control, that reveals the mystery of finitude and the calm releasement towards time, death, and the mystery of Being/Nature. Hermeneutic banana skin or not, it seems difficult to avoid talk about Malick's cinematic 'letting be' without invoking, at least implicitly, the Heideggerian thought of *Gelassenheit*, about which Critchley remains silent. Is Critchley's reading here not a touch 'Heideggerian' after all? Surely it reveals phenomenologically the way the film itself thematises death, finitude and our proper relationship with Being/Nature. Whereas Furstenau and MacEvoy's approach threatens to subsume the film within a too rigid 'Heideggerian' framework, Critchley's avoidance of such a framework might be taken as another kind of avoidance of the question of the relationship between Heidegger and cinema—even where this relationship becomes, as it does with Malick, marvelously thought provoking.

A Cinematic Poesis?

In conclusion I want to offer some brief remarks suggesting an alternative way of approaching the question of 'Heideggerian cinema'. As discussed earlier, Heidegger's thinking on film, such as it is, remains overwhelmingly negative: film is a powerful instance of reductive technological en-framing that only intensifies the Western obliteration of Being. From this negativistic, 'end of art' perspective in Heidegger, cinema can only be regarded, as I've argued elsewhere (Sinnerbrink 2004), as an *aesthetic resource* oriented towards the intensification of subjective sensation and objectification of Being.

Whatever the case, we should recall here Heidegger's claim that en-framing or *Ge-stell* as the essence of technology—the revealing and ordering of beings as a totality of available resources—is a thoroughly *ambivalent* process: it not only presents the great danger of a destructive reduction of human beings to manipulable resources, but also presents the possibility of a 'saving power' – of a new relation of appropriation between Being, human beings, and beings that might emerge from within the technological world (see Heidegger 1977). What would be the artform most essential to the technological age? Surely cinema (along with its cousin photography): the technological en-framing of reality in order to reveal luminous appearances in time. If we take cinema to be the artform most appropriate to the age of technology, then such ambivalent possibilities must also be present in cinematic art. This remains the case despite the evident dominance of

standardised Hollywood genres and conventions that often do reduce film to a 'worldless' aesthetic resource designed to manipulate sensation and homogenize affect.

My suggestion, nonetheless, is that just as *Ge-stell* is inherently ambivalent, so too is cinema as the essentially technological artform. Despite the instrumentalisation of modern experience, technological en-framing also opens up the possibility of a new way of revealing world, namely through film as a form of cinematic *poesis*. By this I mean a revealing or bringing-forth through sound and image that displaces the conventional representational and narrative focus on presenting objects in their presence within the action-directed, motivational schemas of self-willing subjects.⁷ Such an anti-representationalist account of cinematic *poesis* could supplement the reading of Malick's film offered by Critchley, bringing it into a reflective relationship with Heidegger's thought without thereby reducing the meaning of the film to a Heideggerian meta-text, or else foreclosing the question of the relationship between Heidegger and cinema altogether.

Heidegger's general complaint against cinema is that it remains irreducibly 'metaphysical' in the sense of only ever being able to present beings in their massive presence. It is beholden to a metaphysical realism intrinsic to the cinematic image as presenting beings to perception rather than revealing the luminous play between Being and being. Malick's films, I suggest, provide a practical refutation of Heidegger's complaint. *The Thin Red Line* is an enactment of this cinematic *poesis*, revealing different ways in which we can relate to our own mortality, to the finitude of Being, the radiance of Nature, as well as depicting, from multiple character-perspectives, the experience of loss, of violence, of humanity, and of just letting things be. This showing is enacted not simply at the level of narrative content or visual style; it involves the very capacity of cinema to reawaken different kinds of attunement or mood through sound and image, revealing otherwise concealed aspects – visual, aural, affective, and temporal – of our finite being-in-the-world.

A 'Heideggerian' approach to Malick's work, as we might expect, can embrace many ways of being, from the thematic and reflexive to the philosophical and poetic. All of these approaches, however, presuppose that we have already considered the question of the nature of the cinematic image and its capacity to provoke thought. And these are

⁷ One need only compare *The Thin Red Line* with Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) to understand the contrast I am proposing here.

questions still very much to be explored. Broaching these questions cinematically is one of the remarkable achievements of Malick's *The Thin Red Line*. It is a film that performs the cinematic revealing of world, staging the poetic difference between saying and showing, yet that also questions our violent mode of dwelling in modernity. Witt's openness to the world-his calm embrace of finitude through visual and tactile releasement-shows that even in the most devastating capacity for destruction there might also be the possibility of ethical transformation, of another way of being in which we might experience 'all things shining'.

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