

Film as Film Today:
On the Criticism and Theory of V. F. Perkins

Symposium dates: 4-5 September 2018, University of Warwick

Confirmed keynotes: Adrian Martin, Laura Mulvey, George Toles

V. F. Perkins (1936-2016) was a foundational figure in the history of British film education, a pioneering theorist of the medium, and among the most insightful and eloquent writers on the art of film. His historical significance for the fields of film criticism and film study is uncontested. However, while Perkins' work – particularly the seminal *Film as Film* (1972) – still influences certain strands of scholarship, its contemporary relevance for critics, theorists, and students is presently underappreciated. This symposium is dedicated to reevaluating Perkins' critical methods and arguments by exploring their continued utility for those studying film, television, audiovisual media, and aesthetics today.

From his writings for *Movie* in the early 1960s to recent studies such as *La Règle du jeu* (2012), Perkins progressively refined a sophisticated critical project. A key aspect of his work was its commitment to defining why and how the form of particular films contributes to their aesthetic achievements or limitations. Yet Perkins' approach was also notable for its specific meta-critical, theoretical, and methodological character. The evaluative criteria he proposed were grounded in the properties of the medium while striving to resist essentialism. Developed via ongoing dialogue with competing aesthetic accounts, Perkins' criticism and meta-criticism set forth original theories of filmic expression, interpretation, and spectatorship. Perhaps most distinctively, his evaluations and theorising were always embodied in precise, evocative, jargon-free close readings.

Perkins leaves us with a body of work which poses important questions and challenges for the study of film, television, media, and aesthetics today. The aim of this symposium is to grapple with these questions and rise to those challenges by engaging with the nature and implications of Perkins' proposals and approaches. Papers might respond to any aspect of his criticism, theory, or pedagogy from any perspective. They may also explore its contemporary relevance in relation to any audiovisual medium – from film or television to digital media, from the gallery film to the audiovisual essay. Possible topics could include but are not limited to:

- “How” is “What”: Perkins and style, theories of ‘form’/‘content’
- ‘Must we Say What They Mean?’: Perkins and interpretation, aesthetics, hermeneutics, poetics
- ‘Where is the World?’: Perkins and film-philosophy, phenomenology
- ‘Moments of Choice’: Perkins and close reading, textual analysis
- ‘Authorship: The Premature Burial’: Perkins and direction, expression, intention
- ‘Participant Observers’: Perkins and spectatorship, cognition, reception
- ‘The evidence of feeling’: Perkins and emotion, affect

- The medium as ‘inherently impure’: Perkins and intermediality, medium specificity, adaptation
- ‘A synthetic theory’: Perkins and aesthetic criteria, theories of evaluation, criticism
- ‘Movie’: Perkins and the popular, taste, definitions of ‘art’

Papers must be no longer than 20 minutes; the deadline for submissions is Friday 16 March, 2018. Proposals are to be sent as Word attachments to VFPerkinsconference@warwick.ac.uk and should include the presentation’s title, a 250-word abstract, and a short biographical statement.

We hope for an edited collection to emerge from the symposium’s proceedings. The organisers are James MacDowell (Warwick) and Andrew Klevan (Oxford).