EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

Affect and Empathy

The Phenomenology of Perception and Spectatorship in Screen Media

Andrew J. Ball

Our summer issue begins with a three-part special section on phenomenologies of perception in screen media. These articles focus on novel technological means of representing embodied, lived experience, as well as ways that visual media can impact embodied spectatorship. Each examines media artworks that attempt to represent the seemingly intangible, such as loss, decay, and temporality. The authors in this section offer nuanced and ethically oriented phenomenologies of vision, motion, and time. In “Projecting the Colors of Vision,” Wendy Haslem discusses how artists working in animation, cinema, and virtual reality use visual media to represent the lived experience of sight loss. Haslem analyzes the “haptic optics” of Yoav Brill’s Ishihara (2010), Derek Jarman’s Blue (1993), and James Spinney and Peter Middleton’s Notes on Blindness (2016) to show how these artists use technological tools and experiments with color to represent diverse, embodied experiences of visual disability, and to encourage “empathic awareness” in viewers. In his article, Yifei Sun critiques the analog-contingent theories of movement put forward by Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Sun modifies aspects of Deleuze’s Cinema 1: The Movement-Image to offer a theory that accommodates the qualities of digital film. Sun considers the possibilities for software art to produce what he calls “voyeuristic authorship” and applies his “ontology of decay” to Marc Lafia and Fang-Yu Lin’s The Battle of Algiers (2006). In “Aesthetics of Slowness, Aesthetics of Boredom,” Giulia Tronconi examines slow cinema’s phenomenology of time. Tronconi offers an incisive reading of Tsai Ming-liang’s films I Don’t Want to Sleep Alone (2006) and Days (2020) that reveals how the filmmaker uses “felt duration” as a strategy to cultivate “empathic contemplation” and “respectful observation” in viewers. The author engages with the work of Schopenhauer and Heidegger and with
Deleuze’s *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* to explain the political and ethical potential of delaying movement in film.

The group of general articles begins with Macy Todd’s “Identification and Contagion in Anna Rose Holmer’s *The Fits.*” Like the work of Haslem and Tronconi, Todd is concerned with the ethics of embodied spectatorship. In particular, Todd examines how images on screens address and affect the raced, sexed, and socially situated bodies of viewers. Todd applies psychoanalytic concepts of conversion disorder to show that *The Fits* (2015) exemplifies how film can “address an audience ethically” and resist “audience disembodiment.” In his excellent article, “The War of Desire and Technology in *Dream Daddy,*” Jon Heggestad examines the video game genre of dating simulators with a focus on the ways gameplay produces desire and corporeal responses in players. Heggestad investigates how technology and communication media have been used to send and receive desire and places dating simulation games in a history of objects of affection. In his rigorous and insightful article, “Becoming Other, Becoming More,” Jasper Lauderdale examines the subject of continuity in trans studies and in feminist literary and cinematic works by Angela Carter, Octavia Butler, and Sally Potter, among others. Lauderdale focuses on representations of transgender and transsexual embodiment and lived experience in fictional autobiographies and discusses the ethics of reading bodies as narratives and writing narratives about bodies. Similarly, Mariana Pintado Zurita writes about how the aging bodies of actors in what she calls “time-critical sequels” are vehicles of meaning that are integral to the films’ narratives. Zurita argues that the body communicates social status and levels of social inclusion or exclusion. Lauderdale and Zurita offer compelling accounts of how the body is inscribed and read, or misread. Along with Haslem and Tronconi, Hayley C. Stefan is the third author in this issue to make significant new contributions to the field of disability studies. In her timely essay, “New Narratives of Madness in Popular US Television,” Stefan applies research in mad studies and disability studies to the analysis of three series and finds that positive advancements have been made in the representation of mental disability and neurodiversity in American popular culture.