

EDITORIAL:

CINEMA, THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT

The third issue of *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* takes up the theme of embodiment and the body, its relationship to Cinema's history (theory and practice), and its reawakening in a recent body of research which is attentive, not only to film, but also to new media practices. It encompasses the dismantling of one of the foundational theoretical perspectives of film studies for over a century — the metaphor of the disembodied eye — and focuses on a groundbreaking field which has been attempting to integrate the body in conceptual models for understanding art and cinematic spectatorship. It aims to be a contribution to the approaches which have been recently trying to show the fallacy of the distinction between the physical and the mental, focusing on the concept of embodiment taken, either as phenomenological encounter immersed in everyday practices, or as a material and physical process made of fluids, energies and forces. In both cases, the quest for understanding Cinema entails acknowledging its inherent sensuous qualities and recognizing that the intellectual, mental and cognitive activities must be reinterpreted as embodied and carnal.

This new understanding of cinema's spectatorship, which integrates the spectator's body in the process of his/her emotional and mental encounter with images, has been accompanied by an ongoing development of the moving image's sensuous and haptic qualities in contemporary world, media practices and artistic scene.

Two directions form the pivotal points of two vastly different paradigms for the sensuous qualities of images, which underpin understandings of cinema based

on divergent concepts of visual excess, the body and the senses. On one hand, we find the commercial uses of this visual excess, attached to logics of pure commodity consumption of images. On the other, we have a purely disruptive use of this visual excess, in practices that aim to explore the role of the senses and of the body, not as a place for amusement and diversion, but quite on the contrary: as a place of resistance to the dominance of rational/verbal based social order and scientific and capitalistic ordering of the self. It is an erotics of the image, an "acinema" (Lyotard), a "cinema of the body" (Deleuze), a dilation of the senses, an ecstasy (Eisenstein), a "vertigo" (Picabia), a nervous excitation, but more than that, it is an opening of perception. Their understanding of the body as an excess relates closely to Walter Benjamin's material rehabilitation of "reception in distraction," which is narrowly connected to his understanding of the term *aesthetics*. This idea of sensuous experience primarily associated with *aesthesis*, is fully present in the logic of "pure sensation," one of the pivotal aims of the first artistic avant-gardes of European cinema, supported by some of the most influential filmmakers at the height of artistic modernism in the twentieth century, like Epstein, Artaud, Delluc, or even Gance, not to mention the soviet montage theorists like Eisenstein. For all of them, the "sensations" produced by films depend upon the physical domain, upon the spectator body, acting directly on the senses, taking the field of aesthetics, in its original use in the Greek *aesthesis*, and the body in its corporeal material nature.

How do we understand this *aesthesis* in cinema and its relationship to the spectator body taken as an excess based on its corporeal material nature?

The understanding of this relationship arises from how the body or embodiment is conceptualized as the existential or/and material ground of perception, and bridges different traditions of thought. It stems mainly from two backgrounds: a phenomenological and a materialistic one, that have recently come

together in post-cognitivist approaches to film. Despite their mutual differences, there is an undeniable congruence between the phenomenological approaches to film, the concept of embodiment and the idea of the body as a corporeal material nature capable of creating meaning that are responsible for the proximity of these approaches in post-cognitivist views. They share the very same notion of physical sensation as a creative and productive excess and they both ascribe the same understanding of “sensation,” “ecstasy” and “embodied affect” but, most importantly, they both assign a formulation of a non-dichotomous concept of mind and body that we discover in the idea of “sensory understanding,” of a “flesh ontology” (Merleau-Ponty) or of “carnal thoughts” (Sobchack), and a challenge to cognitivist disembodied understandings of film’s spectatorship, as well as an attempt to conceptualize embodied vision and spectatorship as an inherently tactile and affective process.

How can we integrate this movement of the image towards the body and embodied perception, in its corporeal material nature, into the contemporary discussion of cinema and the moving images?

Currently leading in new digital media and fully present in the concepts of interactivity and immersion, haptical visibility looks for a palpable sensuous connection between the body of the viewer and the body of the image, a correlation between the physical perception, its affective dimension, and its resonance in the image. The aim is to achieve a new understanding of cinema’s spectatorship based, not on an idea of *mimesis*, but exploring the far more complicated notion of *contact*. And *contact* here is conceived as a complex visceral and perceptive experience of “porosity between the body of the image and the perceiver’s body.” Shape, texture, colour, protuberances and curls, all touch the perceiver and involve her/him in a sensuous and affective continuous resonance. They are not simple features of the image, but “energetic impulses,” which vibrate through a tactile, palpable cinematic

space and that are understood by the body of the spectator, by his/her “carnal thoughts” to use Vivian Sobchack vivid words.

It is precisely with an article by Vivian Sobchack entitled “Fleshing Out the Image: Phenomenology, Pedagogy, and Derek Jarman's *Blue*” that we open this issue. The choice to begin this first thematic issue of *Cinema* with an article by Vivian Sobchack is simultaneously a privilege and a tribute to one of the leading figures of the “neglected tradition of phenomenology on film studies” (Sobchack) during the XX century, a tradition that has only, in recent years, begun to be recognized in its full importance. In this article, Sobchack, lectures on Derek Jarman's film *Blue* (1993), taking it as an example of existential phenomenological philosophy which can be grasped by the phenomenological method of “fleshing out” of the film experience. Addressing Jarman's *Blue* is also a way of interpreting the reciprocal contributions that philosophy and film studies can bring to each other.

The selection of articles that meet in this issue reflect the exceptional amount of work and the diversity of approaches, which are being currently carried out on our topic. It integrates contributions from film studies, philosophy and neurosciences.

Ana Salzberg's article “Seduction Incarnate: Pre-Production Code Hollywood and Possessive Spectatorship” discusses movies produced before the Production Code Filmmaking of 1920s/30s Hollywood, in order to address issues of cine-eroticism, suggesting that through specific techniques, these films incorporate the very erotic ideas and drives that are being enabled by contemporary viewing practices. By exanimating pre-Code productions, Salzberg proposes that the “intimate viscosity enabled by contemporary viewing practices” are already present in these early films and suggests that both (early films and new media) “engage their viewers in a flirtatious visual pleasure: promising possession while eluding its grasp.”

Taking an interest on a different kind of moving images, Gavin Wilson's "A Phenomenology of Reciprocal Sensation in the Moving Body Experience of Mobile Phone Films" focuses on phone films, in order to investigate reception in this "minor cinema." Wilson proposes that this "hybrid media" is a privileged means of connecting perceptions and physical sensations of the filmmaker and of the spectator and tries and demonstrates how reception in phone films is "located within phenomenological experience," which is dependent upon a kind of "participatory experience." Wilson further argues that in phone films "the filmmaker and spectator are connected to one another through the exchange and sharing of a prototypal filmic experience. Whilst not involved in a physically, co-present form of engagement with screen-based moving images, both of them are nonetheless engaged in a kind of participatory involvement: what Laura Marks calls 'a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image'." Wilson's main argument is that phone films facilitate the physical, body-centred, cellular nature of the spectator's engagement with film and their makers.

Shifting again from "minor" to "major cinema," Angelos Koutsourakis' "Cinema of the Body: The Politics of Performativity in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* and Yorgos Lanthimo's *Dogtooth*" takes Gilles Deleuze's notion of "cinema of the body" and investigates how bodily gestures can be producers of filmic excess. Using two films as case studies — *Dogville* (2003) and *Dogtooth* (*Kynodontas*, 2009) —, the author analyses the means and meaning of the focus on the gesture and on bodily features in a certain kind of cinema. Koutsourakis proposes that in the cinema of the body we find a rupture with filmic narrative order, which creates visual excess. That visual excess, in these particular kinds of movies, corresponds to a shift from the representation sphere to a performance domain. Koutsourakis further argues that these disruptive characters of visual excess contained in the gesture and physical expression of the bodies within the image, entrusts this body-images also with an important political dimension.

Also exploring the political aspect of visual excess and the body in cinema, Marco Luceri's "The Myth of the Political Physicality of Mussolini in Marco Bellocchio's *Vincere*," moves from a disruptive dimension to an ideological one, analysing the role of the body and of the "cinema of the body" as a privileged place for fascist aesthetics. In contrast to Koutsourakis' Brechtian approach, which explores the idea of the cinema of the body as a means for political resistance and augmented political awareness, Luceri stresses that, in Italian fascist aesthetics, the body was explored as a political statement of a different kind. Drawing on Marco Bellocchio's film *Vincere* (2009) Luceri demonstrates how fascist aesthetics — using mass media images — has always relied mainly upon the figure and upon the physical gestures of Mussolini, and has used his gestures and bodily excess as a political statement.

Moving again to the disruptive power of exploring new sensory dimensions in our relationships to images — and on a different note but also focusing on the image as an embodied experience that interplays affective, perceptual and cognitive strategies of our "being in the world" —, Andrew Conio's article "Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Palpable Event," proposes a new reading of Eija-Liisa Ahtila's work. Conio analyses how, in using the installation form, Ahtila's work explores the ways film can create meaning and new relations between viewer and screen, by using devices of rupture, exploring an event unique in the video installation.

On the same note, Adriano D'Aloia's "Upside-Down Cinema: (Dis)simulation of the Body in the Film Experience" also focuses on the disruptive powers of cinematic experience. D'Aloia interweaves a series of upside-down images in different genres of narrative films and investigates its uses and its effects on the viewers, stressing cinema's capacity to destabilize spacial coordinates. Departing from here, D'Aloia demonstrates "that narrative cinema provides a *re-embodiment* of an experience that is inevitably *disembodied*."

Also focusing on the issue of embodiment, but this time merging film studies, philosophy and an important contribute from the neurosciences, Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra's article "Embodying Movies: Embodied Simulation and Film Studies," could not be more clear: approaching film from an embodied point of view and trying to demonstrate that our relationship to movies is an embodied experience. The novelty of their approach lies on the fact that they entail a fundamental dialogue both with philosophical and film studies approaches to cinema, integrating contributions from science and the humanities. Specifically, Gallese and Guerra draw on a concept that was triggered by the discovery of the mirror neurons: the idea of "embodied simulation (ES)," trying to investigate the role it plays in film experience. They conclude that these neuroscience discoveries prove that our relationship to images is embodied, physical and that we feel movements, feelings and sensations through the images we see, in our own body, as if they were ours. According to Gallese and Guerra, such shared experiences between the film and the viewer ground an important field of embodying images and show that our relation to images is primarily physical and sensorial.

Continuing exploring the issue of emotions and empathy in film experience, Dina Mendonça article: "Existential Feelings: How Cinema Makes Us Feel Alive" proposes an encounter between phenomenological and cognitivist approaches to film experience. Drawing chiefly on the phenomenological concept of "existential feelings," as M. Radcliffe develops it, and trying to apply it to specific film experiences, Mendonça concludes that the emotional impact of cinema can only be properly understood in the light of the way films promote emotional awareness. Films are to be understood "as emotional laboratories" where emotions can be fully recognised and experienced.

Our final article, Seung-hoon Jeong's "The Body as Interface: Ambivalent Tactility in Expanded Rube Cinema," discusses the chief concepts of *interface*,

embodiment and *tactility*, in light of the tradition of Rube films, which the author believes are being updated in new media tactile devices and practices, through the notion of interface. The author starts with a close analysis of Roberto Rossellini's short *Virginity* included in *Ro.Go.Pa.G* (1963), reinterpreting it as a modern Rube film and further proposing that Rube film genre and its actualization in cutting-edge new media interfaces incorporates a shift from perception to action that signals a change which is transversal to several media: the change from transcendent to embodied spectatorship.

In the interview section, our editor Susana Nascimento has invited Vanessa Brito to conduct an interview with Marie-José Mondzain in French, apropos her last book, *Images (à suivre). De la poursuite au cinéma et ailleurs*. In a fascinating talk, Mondzain explains her immanent conception of the image, its connection to the idea of embodiment, and of irreducible place of political, social and aesthetic resistance.

In the conference reports section William Brown offers our readers a thought provocative review of four important events to film studies that took place during 2012 summer: *Powers of the False*, Institut français, London, 18-19 May; SCSMI Conference, Sarah Lawrence College and New York University, New York, 13-16 June; *Film-Game-Emotion-Brain*, Center for Creation, Content and Technology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 14-21 July; and, finally, a review of the 2012 Film-Philosophy Conference, Queen Mary, University of London, King's College London, and Kingston University, 12-14 September.

Completing this issue is an essay in the Portuguese language by Eduardo Barroso, which is not directly related with this theme, but is linked to our frequently "neglect tradition of Portuguese cinema." It is an homage to one of our most important filmmakers, which has passed away this year: Fernando Lopes. Barroso's fascinating article is not only an unquestionable piece of our finest academic

investigation on Lopes' films, but it also intends to serve as a tribute to one of the most important Portuguese filmmakers.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

THIS ISSUE'S EDITOR

Patrícia Silveirinha Castello Branco

P.S.: We sadly report that Paulo Rocha died on the 29th December 2012, aged 77. Paulo Rocha stands in the history of Portuguese cinema as one of its foremost filmmakers. Films like *Os Verdes Anos* (1963) and *Mudar de Vida* (1966) are hallmarks of the Portuguese New Cinema. Given that the news of Paulo Rocha's passing only came to us after the closing of the present issue, it is impossible to include a proper testimony of his work and legacy. This journal welcomes contributions on Paulo Rocha's work from a philosophical perspective, to be published in the following issues.