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Preface

In an oft-quoted passage from *The Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust's narrator recounts an extraordinary moment he experienced during an otherwise monotonous train journey.[1] Waking up just before sunrise, the traveller's gaze is no sooner caught by the striking spectacle of the sky at dawn than the train's trajectory swerves and he suddenly finds himself facing a nocturnal, moonlit countryside. The narrator thus recalls spending the remainder of the journey going from one window to another, from darkness to light, trying to reconnect the fragments into "a complete view and a continuous picture" (15-16). In his illuminating commentary of this episode, Élie During points to the cinematic quality of Proust's description: the narrator's efforts evoke a form of filmic montage as he tries to recreate the landscape into a comprehensive image from the speeding train's windows (152).

Together with film, train travel remains one of modernity's foremost symbols and allegories for the shift in experience from human-centred to machine-mediated perception. Yet Proust's text also reads like an anticipation of the spectator's condition in the digital age. Faced with the visual field's complexification and fragmentation, brought about by technologies that both enhance and supersede her senses, the contemporary user-spectator must learn to surf the perceptual overload afforded by fast-evolving recording, communication, and display systems, while accepting the sense of lack constitutive of these systems. Paradoxically, technologically augmented perception and access, insofar as they surpass our capacity to process the available sensory data while making us aware of its tantalizing, virtual existence, generate the kind of fault-line that artists and writers have always exploited creatively. As Jane Stadler's article reminds us, the value of incompleteness should not be understated: in an experience of partial perception, brought about by excess or scarceness, the consciousness of absence or lack fosters our imagination.[2] In Proust's account of the train journey, it is the failure of the narrator's body to suture vision's disjointed field that, in turn, allows the writer to deploy his distinctive style and skill at weaving together "heterogeneous, dislocated, apparently incomposable realities" (During 152). Hence, if our experience of the world is increasingly machine-mediated, imagination and creativity nonetheless remain indelibly tied to a process of embodied perception that relies on synesthetic connections.

Accordingly, in Mark Hansen's 2004 volume *New Philosophy for New Media*, the reassessment of digitization's effect on the production and reception of images (that which belongs to the perceptible realm) hinges on human embodied experience. Hansen rejects the notion that the advent of the digital is equatable with increasingly passive reception, or that a "pure flow of data unencumbered by any need to differentiate into concrete media types" should do away with "the now still crucial moment of perception" (1). Instead, he argues that since the digitized image itself is a process rather than a given, it involves an active engagement on the part of the viewer – an engagement that takes the form of affective-embodied interactivity. Consequently, whereas the digital is usually associated with intensified dematerialization, Hansen's Bergsonian approach centres on the body's functioning "as a kind of filter that selects, from among the universe of images circulating around it and according to its own embodied capacities, precisely those that are relevant

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2. See the edited collections, *Dynamics and Performativity of Imagination: The Image between the Visible and the Invisible* and *Indefinite Visions: Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty*.

to it" (2). "Rather than selecting pre-existent images," he adds, "the body now operates by filtering information directly and, through this process, creating images" (10).

However, Hansen's positive account of a user-spectator's participation in the selected images' actualization from an endless pool of virtual data does not take into account the existence of other pre-emptive filtering processes. In her own take on Bergson, Laura Marks points to the complexification of the digital and the enfolding/unfolding processes at work in those images' actualization from an infinite universe of virtual images. "We may consider the infinite to be constituted of innumerable folds … Every perception is an unfolding. To figure out where an image comes from, we need to find out how it arose from the infinite" ("Information" Marks 87).[3] In our networked age of electronic information, digitization can function as a supplementary filter which Marks designates as a plane of information. Consequently, the code is a part of the "enfolding" that will need to be unfolded.

Power can arise from establishing a sense of immediacy and erasing the processes that enfold an image, leading end users to remain unaware of the filters that rule over the images we access. Whereas a strong anchorage in Merleau-Pontian phenomenology accounts for much of the continuing investment in exploring knowledge's embodied forms, in line with Marks's enfolding-unfolding aesthetics, contemporary approaches to new media remain equally preoccupied with the strategies of control at work in effacing images' sources and modes of production.[4] As David Deamer, Dilyana Mincheva, and David Richard point out in their articles, digital technology strives to make itself invisible, to achieve a state of immediacy where spectators experience representation and communication as seamless and unmediated. One key product of such continuity is surveillance in which the body is both the receptor and object of a system of vision that feeds on itself (Tarja Laine). Insofar as it eschews historical time, the withdrawal into objecthood as a self-sufficient, integral form of existence can only offer limited relief (Jenny Gunn). At the other end of the spectrum is the utopian notion of the osmotic collective, with "the phantasy of instant, pure, unnoisy communication" as the condition for the building of new forms of communities; framed by the very struc-

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ture it seeks to challenge, this collective carries its own promise of segregation and reclamation (Mincheva). In this context, for artists and hackers alike, the import of breaking the flow is at the core of the ethics of their practice—not merely as a revival of modernist strategies of subversion, but, rather, in the vein of the Nietzschean "powers of the false," as the disclosure of the co-existence of a multiplicity of incompatible discourses that are always also part of the system they may be denouncing (Deamer).

As this issue of *Cinephile* demonstrates, while process philosophy and phenomenology still dominate the field, the current scholarship in philosophy and new media is attentive to the crisis in political agency precipitated by digital modes of communication and labour organization that conform with the apparently inescapable logic of global capitalism. In this context, examples of critical, self-reflexive discourses and counter-technologies appear to arise not only from the high-end art to which independent and auteur cinema belong, but from the products of mainstream culture. In the resulting mix of media and genres (along with their concomitant heterochronies), the question of co-existing temporalities (time as historical, mechanical, or duration) that occupied the thinkers of the twentieth century, from Proust and Bergson to Deleuze and Foucault, meets the current interrogations of the contemporary "economy of attention."[5] For the crisis at hand is not only one of individualism and narcissism versus collective needs and agency, but one of time: in its endeavour to erase the traces of mediation and reach a perfect state of seamless, continuous presence, dominant modes of media communication and consumption do not merely undermine the possibility for critical distance. In the relentless foregrounding of immediate, ubiquitous access, they work to destroy our sense of time as duration, and, with it, the capacity, so fundamental to all political projects, to imagine ourselves as a part of a long *durée*.

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3. See also Marks's "A Noisy Brush with the Infinite: Noise in Enfolding-Unfolding Aesthetics."

4. In the texts comprised in this issue, as in Mark Hansen's writing, "image" is not understood in the sense of a visual representation but in its broad sense, as that which we perceive. See Marks, "Unfolding-Enfolding Aesthetics" (102).

5. See, among others: Jonathan Beller's *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Jonathan Crary's *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, and Yves Citton's *Pour une écologie de l'attention*.

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PROUST
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