

# Letter from the Editors

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Dear readers,

The late cultural theorist Mark Fisher asks in his seminal text *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative*, "How long can a culture persist without the new?" For Fisher, the postmodern future under capitalist realism "harbors only reiteration and re-permutation" (2008, 6-7). In capitalism's inability to look beyond itself, media culture has become excessively nostalgic and "incapable of generating any authentic novelty" (2008, 63). Accordingly, one can observe a certain malaise surrounding media's inability to imagine new and alternative futures.

Music, fashion, film, TV, and digital media have all primarily engaged in nostalgia rather than an imagination of the future. Moreover, this nostalgia has been formalized through an aestheticization of the past — fashion and style trends mimic 70s, 80s, and 90s culture, while the emulation of film grain in digital cinema is more common. One need not look further than recent cultural touchstones such as eighties exploitation in *Stranger Things* (2016) and *Joker* (2019), greatest hits soundtracks in *Baby Driver* (2017) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), and contemporary sampling practices evident in Jack Harlowe's "First Class" to find that innovation in form and material is no longer embraced by the mainstream. Instead, these media foreground the past such that nostalgic pastiche and aesthetic remediation is the text. What is more, media texts not explicitly set in past milieus insist on this ahistorical fetishization of past aesthetics through their very form.

The above query will be tackled through a series of essays meticulously curated for you in this edition of *Cinephile*. These essays offer a rich tapestry of responses to the cultural diagnosis, spanning political, theoretical, and

philosophical implications of this cultural malaise — and its potential counterforces — as they intersect with evolving digital media and technology, minor and major cinema, postcolonialism and marginalized identities, algorithms and artificial intelligence, and other cultural phenomena. As editors, we underscore the particular relevance of these essays in their interplay with emerging artificial intelligence, contemporary global conflict, and climate change, among other pressing issues.

We are honored to present the inaugural article, "Artificial Intelligence," by Shane Denson, an esteemed associate professor of Film and Media studies at Stanford University. Denson's profound insights have been a cornerstone of our call, and his latest work, *Post-Cinematic Bodies*, continues his pivotal exploration into the transformative (post-)cinematic technologies and their impact on our (shared) physical and mental being. In this piece, Denson delves into the philosophical and ethical implications of emerging A.I. technology, challenging the presumed neutrality of A.I.' thinking.'

Stephanie Kang's contribution delves into *Everything But the World* (2022), a video work by the art collective DIS, renowned for their exploration of the contemporary condition of our shared world and the myriad crises we confront. Kang deciphers DIS's envisioning of alternative forms of existence in a world seemingly on the brink. Ryan Trecartin, a character in the DIS video work and the creative force behind *Centre-Jenny* (2013), takes center stage in the next article by Orrin Pavone. Pavone's cross-cultural analysis spans various media forms: film, fashion, and photography, as he proposes a fresh philosophical framework for understanding the pervasive pastiche impulse

in our visual and sonic culture. His critical essay offers novel insights into the intersecting role of imperialism and capitalism in popular and avant-garde media works.

James Sweeting introduces a new foil in this conversation, refashioning Jacques Derrida's hauntological form by examining video games and nostalgia culture. Sweeting responds to our call by shifting our gaze away from film and finding new insights to be drawn from other popular media forms. Importantly, Sweeting suggests a potential digression from the doom and gloom tone that this cultural malaise potentially elicits from many critics. Alice Reiter further destabilizes the focus of this edition of *Cinephile* by asking us to turn away from Western media forms by examining Palestinian artist Larrisa Sansour's film *In Vitro*. Reiter's analysis is, of course, incredibly poignant given our current global moment.

Finally, we proudly present a special article by Yani Kong on small-file media. Kong presented a version of this essay to a group of undergraduate students here at UBC during the winter as a part of the inaugural UBC Cinema and Media Studies undergraduate conference. With help from the Department of Theatre and Film at UBC and the UBC Film Society, the UBC Cinema and Media Studies undergraduate conference was a major success that we hope will continue to provide an ongoing platform for undergraduate students to share and learn from each other and foster a sense of inquiry and a culture of research that spans from both undergraduate and graduate students to faculty at UBC and beyond.

If, as Gilles Deleuze suggests in his late essay "Postscripts on Society of Control," we have found ourselves in a society no longer defined by discipline, but by the mechanism of con-

trol exasperated by digital technologies, then we must be wary of what is under the purview of systemic control. In a talk delivered in 2011 at a UMass conference, Alexander Galloway suggested the main lesson to be learned from Deleuze's essay is need for historical thinking in the face of the dehistorical logic of control societies. In other words, time, like any other factor of our lives, is subject to control, and in order to resist the momentum of the late-stage neoliberal control society, we must preserve the past such that we might imagine a future different from the forever now that adheres to the desires of Capital. We hope this issue helps you think more critically about nostalgia; past, present, and future; and our contemporary moment in new and enlightening ways.

Sincerely,

Will and Liam Riley