Crazy Cameras, Discorrelated Images, and the Post-Perceptual Mediation of Post-Cinematic Affect

Shane Denson

Post-millennial films are full of strangely irrational cameras – physical and virtual imaging apparatuses that seem not to know their place with respect to diegetic and nondiegetic realities, and that therefore fail to situate viewers in a coherently designated spectating-position. While analyses ranging from David Bordwell's diagnosis of "intensified continuity" to Matthias Stork's recent condemnation of "chaos cinema" have tended to emphasize matters of editing and formal construction as the site of a break with classical film style, it is equally important to focus on the camera as a site of material, phenomenological relation between viewers and contemporary images. Thus, I aim to update Vivian Sobchack's film-theoretical application of Don Ihde's groundbreaking phenomenology of mediating apparatuses to reflect the recent shift to what Steven Shaviro has identified as a regime of "post-cinematic affect." By setting a phenomenological focus on contemporary cameras in relation both to Shaviro's work and to Mark B. N. Hansen's recent work on "21st century media," I will show that many of the images in today's films are effectively "discorrelated" from the embodied interests, perspectives, and phenomenological capacities of human agents – pointing to the rise of a fundamentally post-perceptual media regime, in which "contents" serve algorithmic functions in a broader financialization of human activities and relations.

Drawing on films such as *District 9*, *Melancholia*, *WALL-E*, or *Transformers*, the presentation sets out from a phenomenological analysis of contemporary cameras' "irrationality." For example, virtual cameras paradoxically conjure "realism" effects *not* by disappearing to produce the illusion of perceptual immediacy, but by emulating the physical *presence* of nondiegetic cameras in the scenes of their simulated "filming." At the same time, real (non-virtual) cameras are today inspired by ubiquitous, aesthetically disinterested cameras that – in smartphones, surveillance cams, satellite imagery, automated vision systems, etc. – increasingly populate and transform our lifeworlds; accordingly, they fail to stand apart from their objects and to distinguish clearly between diegetic/nondiegetic, fictional/factual, or real/virtual realms. Contemporary cameras, in short, are deeply enmeshed in an expanded, indiscriminately articulated plenum of images that exceed capture in the form of photographic or perceptual "objects." These cameras, and the films that utilize them, as I shall argue in a second step, mediate a nonhuman ontology of computational image production, processing, and circulation – leading to a thoroughgoing discorrelation of contemporary images from human perceptibility. In conclusion, I will relate my findings to recent theorizations of media's broader shift toward an expanded (no longer visual or even perceptual) field of material affect.

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