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Julian Hanich and Daniel Fairfax, eds., *The Structures of the Film Experience by Jean-Pierre Meunier: Historical Assessments and Phenomenological Expansions*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019. xx + 354 pp. Notes. €55.95 (pb); ISBN 9789462986565. €0.00 (eb). ISBN 9789048537846.

Review by Christophe Wall-Romana, University of Minnesota.

This is a very likeable scholarly project about Jean-Pierre Meunier, a Belgian film theoretician who wrote an important theoretical work on spectatorship over fifty years ago. It exemplifies the very best in contemporary cinema scholarship dedicated to completing its own history, and may it keep doing so.

To Meunier himself. I knew his name only in passing (from reading Vivian Sobchak); and as both Dudley Andrew and one of the editors (Daniel Fairfax) make clear, he incarnates a missing link within French-speaking (and perhaps even West European) film scholarship whose influence has been disproportionate. Between the *Filmologie* movement of the 1950s-60s, steeped in psychology and experimental research, and the post-Lacanian theoretical edifices of Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry; and between Edgar Morin's *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* focused on perceptual and conceptual processes, and Gilles Deleuze's masterly 1980s conferences on cinema (and subsequent two-volume *Cinema* book), there is a wide difference exemplifying the radical shift from structuralism to poststructuralism.[1] Yet this shift did not take place in the void. This collection enables us to grasp how this transition occurred within a single film theoretician's thought.

With its Sartrean cathexis on identification combined with and softened by the more holistic percepts of Merleau-Ponty, together with a keen awareness of psychoanalytical processes at play in the background, Meunier's theory of film perception is remarkable both for its polyvalence and for the numerous pitfalls it manages to avoid. Trained in Louvain where the Husserl archives are located, Meunier methodologically favors precise descriptive accounts, the hallmark of German research in psychophysiology, by contrast with the creatively wayward spiritualism of much French psycho-philosophical research on cinema (work at the Institut de Filmologie was often a medley of both approaches). Last year, I picked up Albert Michotte's *The Perception of Causality* from the discard pile of a retiring colleague, and I was immediately struck by how central haptics, micro-kinesis, kinesthetic sensations, temporal affects, and medium- and performance-specificity were to research in postwar Louvain, and how obviously it responded to cinema perception.[2] "The cinematographic method of animated cartoons would ideally fit these investigations," Michotte writes, although because of the cost involved he opted for rotating disks and still projections instead (p. 25). His study culminates in experiments on how screen projections of a

“flowing-trace [*traçage-écoulement*]” were perceived by observers (pp. 292-8). As team member within a general area of research, Meunier was not a generator of systems, rather a more restricted elucidator of what he calls, in a 2017-18 interview cited in the book, the polyvalent “*dispositif*” of cinema (p. 22). If he had expanded his research on cinema perception, he might have joined a cohort of what may be called “major minor thinkers,” who thrive in raising otherwise unasked questions, often by locating a crack within the architectonics of a field, using a method all their own.

Meunier follows the phenomenological doxa of locating “invariant” structures, focusing his investigations of filmic perception on identification, which he considers most powerful in cinema among all arts (p. 68). He takes identification in several directions: psychic assimilation (via introjection or projection), interaffectivity (as a particular dimension of intersubjectivity), and holistic permeation besides or beyond exclusive interhuman identification on screen (i.e., identification with nonhuman elements). He also invokes motor mimesis as part of filmic perception—an explanandum that has receded in validity. The ultimate yield of his work is a division of films into phenomenological genres: the home movie (*le film-souvenir*), where the viewer identifies with someone specific; the documentary, where the viewer identifies with real but general individuals; and the fiction film, where viewers identify with unreal others. The historical nature of these genres, or the presence or absence of editing, curiously poses no problem for Meunier. His phenomenological prose transcribes pieces of experience being undergone, reflected on, qualified, and theorized, so it can be slow going. Yet where phenomenological description is done carefully, readers share in a form of realistic experimentalism that carries a great authority for the theoretical conceptualization of what might happen to movie viewers.

At least that is the lure of phenomenology, and it is not without problems. Meunier taps Sartre’s *The Imaginary* for modeling imagining phenomenologically; but he uses the Sartrean term “consciousness” in parallel with the Merleau-Pontyan “perception” and “experience,” and the Heideggerian “comportment.” Sartre proves to be a rather infelicitous choice since *The Imaginary* was itself written in the shadow of cinema, about which Sartre amply wrote in the 1920s and 1930s, thereby generating feedback loops within Meunier’s constructs. The conclusions of Meunier will convince some people more than others, and I confess to being left unconvinced by the final part of his work on identification in film-generic perception (part two, chapter two). On second reflection, however, I recognize something perhaps more valuable than conviction. By tacitly stripping away the cognitive/cultural discursive layers that he considers overlaid upon a deeper and impersonal “natural attitude” in filmic perception, Meunier locates the place and mode of activation of these layers (p. 162). His work thus prepares our own cultural critique of his invariant filmic perception structures. Meunier’s examples of kinds of identification with fiction protagonists (in Westerns and French films, some of the latter with female leads) end up for me problematizing precisely the cultural values at play in the construction of these protagonists and the stars inhabiting them, and which he attempts to neutralize. Of course, it is all too easy to critique an approach that predates cultural studies for not seeing culture as permeating subjects “all the way down.”

What is striking, in fact, is that Meunier is immensely attentive to identification as de/valorization of others; and inspired by the psychoanalyst Hesnard, he foregrounds intersubjectivity and interaffectivity at every turn as processes of identification. His signal ideas about filmic perception as short-circuiting the circulation of reciprocity in intersubjectivity (and

thus as promoting dissymmetric interaffectivity), is a wonderful corrective to some apparatus theory, and to Lacan's view of desire as desire for the other's desire, oscillating between warfare and lack.[3] This also intersects some of Levinas's work on the dissymmetric exigency of encountering and doing justice to others. Unfortunately, Meunier skips Levinas among the French pioneers of phenomenology, although the 1931 translation Levinas coauthored with Gabrielle Peiffer of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*—precisely on intersubjectivity—may be the very first “French” phenomenological publication.[4] By the by, Levinas, like Sartre, thought a lot about cinema prior to engaging with his main oeuvre, as his recently published *Carnets de captivité* have shown; one paradoxical question that comes out of Meunier's focus is whether it is even possible to think intersubjectivity outside of cinema.[5]

Fortunately, the editors (along with Amsterdam University Press) have seen fit to publish translations of Meunier's work alongside a set of essays by distinguished film scholars, some of whom have been mulling over his book for decades. And for those who have the patience to read both Meunier's opus and the constellations of articles using his work as springboard, it becomes clear that the former has been germinal for several generations of cinema thinkers. In many ways, it is through them that Meunier's own work shines through—and there can be little better compliment to a teacher and scholar.

Dudley Andrew opens these contributions with a first-hand account inserting his own discovery of Meunier within the development of film studies in the late 1960s to 1980s in France. Starting with a solid account of phenomenology from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty, Andrew sketches a vivid tableau of how Barthes's semiology, Morin's filmology, Metz, and Mitry, all warped the study of film in that hinge period—and how Meunier found his niche in that landscape. Andrew also contextualizes Meunier's work within the Belgian scholarship of Albert Michotte and Alphonse de Waelhens, a rare and salutary decentering of France within French-speaking film theory. Andrew does not shy from underlining some of Meunier's shortcomings, such as his apparent lack of interest in contemporary or past film criticism. He ends his lucid historical evaluation by contrasting Meunier's thorough-going phenomenology with the later post- or novel phenomenological approaches of Vivian Sobchak and Jean-Louis Schefer.

Like Andrew, Daniel Fairfax (one of the volume's editors) considers *The Structures of the Film Experience* to be a missing link between psychoanalysis and phenomenology—two distinct but not necessarily antagonistic movements in 1970s film thought. Fairfax focuses on Angelo Hesnard, the cofounder of the Société psychanalytique de Paris, whose influence on Meunier he puts in parallel with that of the other co-founder—Jacques Lacan—on Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz. Fairfax sees Meunier's key move as differentiating the phenomenological efficacy of identification via the film apparatus through the three generic categories of home movies, documentaries, and fiction. Although Fairfax does a great work of glossing to sustain this tripartite division (while astutely suggesting that the “home movie” category may now be hegemonic in the streaming sphere), it is not clear to me what he suggests the tripartite division yields in the last instance. His article defaults to favoring films that mix or compound their generic modes. For Fairfax, however, Meunier's work is essentially a useful provocation, as when he teases denial out of Meunier's refusal to consider it on a par with identification.

Robert Sinnerbrink picks up on the “missing link” theme by considering imagination. He emphasizes identification as intersubjective comportment—a dimension implying a robust *Mitsein*—seeing Meunier's work as ultimately congruent with Murray Smith's spectatorial model

of recognition, alignment, and allegiance.[6] Sinnerbrink delves deeper into facets of identification that Meunier does not quite differentiate: phenomenological (precognitive), psychoanalytical (unconscious), and aesthetic. Sinnerbrink also points out that the cultural-historical horizon, and the integral power of worldliness that filmic presentation deploys, was largely sidestepped by Meunier.

Essays on the *film-souvenir* suggest that it is perhaps Meunier's most promising proposal. Vivian Sobchak--to whom everyone points as the reviver of Meunier's work--examines a subset of home movies where the viewer experiences themselves in an uncanny moment that has axiological ramifications for aesthetics and self-value. The exploration of bodily self-representation in dissonance with what Merleau-Ponty calls our "body schema"--something like the tacit sensory practice of our own bodily form--allows Sobchak to explore various gradients of disidentification (though she does not use that term) from the simple recoil to one's self on screen to Heidegger's ontico-ontological shimmery unease of being and not being at home in the world. Marie-Aude Baronian applies the *film-souvenir* to the multifaceted work of Atom Egoyan and the polyvalent mnemotechnic inducement of photographic images linking personal, collective, and historical layers of memory in the context of the Armenian genocide. *Film-souvenir* here "situates itself between the excess, the surplus, and the lack, the loss" (p. 227), in that its images are replete with a full reality, yet cannot but let the essence of that reality, that is, the human affects that provide its meaning, slip through, thus giving form to cinema's and memory's inherently unfinished quality.

Christian Ferencz-Flatz picks up on the potential of the *film-souvenir* for understanding one of the massively central genres of today's moving images: video selfies. He argues that selfies enact a new form of intersubjectivity whose phenomenological account would reveal categories and experiences beyond those Meunier describes, since new intersubjective circuits occur between the filmmaker, the protagonist, and the viewer, who are both one and the same, and not. Ferencz-Flatz sketches a critical approach of video-selfies through self-perception, communication (address), affect, space, and movement which holds a great potential for further analyses of the social mining of self-performance in influencer platforms (Twitch, Tik Tok, etc.). Vincenz Hediger springs off phenomenological approaches to film in order to complicate both the idea of cinema as expressive artfulness and the category of *film-souvenir*, by invoking corporate, educational, or training films. This leads Hediger on a searching reappraisal of what cinema's ideal or default object is taken to be when utility, orphan, or found films are favored over artfully made movies.

Other contributions in this expansive collection are by Victor Fan on two divergent schools of Buddhism, providing deep context to Meunier's foundational ideas about intersubjectivity. Fan makes tantalizing references both to Chinese thinkers reflecting on cinema and Western thinkers using filtered Chinese thought to theorize cinema. Florian Sprenger compares Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon*, Meunier's *Phenomenology of Film Experience*, and Landgrebe's *The Path of Phenomenology* as all three are dealing with the problem of immediacy in perception. He considers how a medium, hinging on mediation, "cannot be immediate" yet must present itself as "fantastically immediate" (p. 290). Guido Kirsten offers an account of Meunier's work from the purview of semiotics and referentiality. Kirsten focuses on how each of Meunier's three fundamental categories of films (documentaries, fiction, and home movies) combines three types of referential systems which he extrapolates from Barthes and Frege: intension (with an -s-), extension, and reference. Rather than inherent to each category of film, Kirsten argues that these

systems depend largely on viewers' attitude, thus complicating and completing Meunier's phenomenological claims. Julian Hanich (the volume's other editor) develops Meunier's reference to dreaming and playing towards the unthought of daydreaming in theories of spectatorial perception. He makes a compelling case for daydreaming being organically connected to spectating, pointing out that psychologists themselves allude to film-viewing when they analyze daydreaming. Hanich's detailed phenomenological descriptions seek to discern five stages of daydreaming while watching a film, thereby adding a whole new sphere to Meunier's film experiencing which implies conscious viewership.

I close with contributions by Jennifer Barker and Kate Ince, because both touch on interaffectivity, the sustained but minor key of Meunier's category-driven investigation. One of Meunier's most important formulations is that: "The psychic fact as a fundamental internal reality whose bodily manifestation would only be epiphenomenal does not exist" (p. 43). In short, no mental event is not also a bodily event. This is as elegant and incisive a definition of affect as has been offered. It also signals that Merleau-Ponty's metaphorical "flesh of the world" is actualized in interaffectivity, a field of bodily manifestations animated by hypothetical psychic facts and subjects and out of which the ego "affectivizes" (to use Meunier's term), that is, out of which affects individualize as "mine." How the ego affectivizes through others—including others on screen—is paramount for Meunier, even though his work dates from before the turn towards affect theories. This is what Barker fleshes out in her contribution around child psychologist Daniel Stern, whose work occasioned an essay by Raymond Bellour, "The Unfolding of Emotions," which is fundamental for affect studies in film.[7] Barker focuses on Stern's study of interintentionality and interaffectivity through forms of vitality play, and she connects children's affective/sensorial development through such play to modes of awakening to polysensorial motion native to cinema, very close in fact to the core of attraction theory. Barker glosses a sequence from Hitchcock's *The Birds* which occasioned a two-way dialogue between Stern and Bellour starting in the late 1970, in order to elucidate Meunier's invocation of child's play in identification processes via film. Her tour-de-force essay manages to illuminate all at once Meunier, Bellour, Stern, the cinema of attraction, and film affect theory.

Kate Ince's essay attempts something quite different, but similarly expands Meunier's theoretical range. Referencing the work of Sandra Bartky and Angelo Hesnard, Ince delineates what she calls "the feminist phenomenological strand of film theory/philosophy" (p. 261). It leads her to disagree with the editors' 2016 essay "What is Film Phenomenology?" which proposes an absolute either/or between invariant structures of spectatorship (proper phenomenological generality) and contingently limited structures (deficient phenomenologically, according to the editors), such as feminist/queer or other subgroup experiences.[8] Ince asserts that Meunier's work makes crucial allowances for intermediary levels of general subgroup experiencing, since, in the last instance, Meunier favors the actual experiencing of subject over any abstract "scientific attitude" (p. 211). Like Barker, Ince thus expands or trains Meunier's work in a direction only incipient, by showing that legitimate phenomenology can result from deobjectivizing human collectives in critical film phenomenology. For that matter, it is imperative to acknowledge radical differentiations of experiencing—from the purview of critical race studies, gender studies, or disability studies—precisely in order to deploy forms of interaffectivity fully informed by how experiencing was historically parsed and normatized.

Altogether, this collection of essays manages to make a strong case for why Meunier's theory of film experiencing should be reevaluated. First, it represents an exemplary hinge for how the

theoretical landscape of late 1960s and early 1970s theories of cinema shifted. But it also reminds us to keep exploring the archive—beyond the usual cultural epicenters (Paris, Berlin, New York, etc.)—to uncover a fuller array of historical film thought. Finally, it invites scholars at the beginning of their career to devise and offer creative if imperfect frameworks that re-problematize all the premises of moving image studies, from the typologies of its objects, and the reach of its affective and psychocultural effects, to the composition and communities of its viewers.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Dudley Andrew, “Stages of an Encounter with Filmic Identification”

Daniel Fairfax, “Meunier’s Theory of Identification in the Cinema”

Robert Sinnerbrink, “The Missing Link: Meunier on Imagination and Emotional Engagement”

Vivian Sobchak, “Me, Myself and I’: On the Uncanny in Home Movies”

Marie-Aude Baronian, “Remembering Cinema: On the *film-souvenir*”

Christian Ferencz-Flatz, “You Talkin’ to Me? On Filmic Identification in Video Selfies”

Victor Fan, “Illuminating Reality: Cinematic Identification Revisited in the Eye of Buddhist Philosophies”

Kate Ince, “Whose Identification? A Brief Meditation on the Relevance of Jean-Pierre Meunier’s *The Structure of the Film Experience* to Contemporary Feminist Film Phenomenology”

Guido Kirsten, “Jean-Pierre Meunier’s Modalities of the ‘Filmic attitude’: Towards a Theory of Referentiality in Cinematic Discourse”

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Vincenz Hediger, “Engines of the Historical Imagination: Towards a Phenomenology of Cinema as Non-Art”

Julian Hanich, “When Viewers Drift Off: A Brief Phenomenology of Cinematic Daydreaming”

NOTES

[1] Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* (1956; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[2] Albert Michotte, *La Perception de la causalité*, 2nd ed. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 1954).

[3] See Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986); Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), and Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[4] Edmund Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, trans. Emmanuel Levinas and Gabrielle Peiffer, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1931).

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, *Œuvres complètes, tome 1: Carnets de captivité et autres inédits* (Paris: Grasset, 2009).

[6] Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[7] Raymond Bellour, "Le Dépli des émotions," *Trafic* 43 (2002): 93-128.

[8] Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich, "What Is Film Phenomenology?" *Studia Phaenomenologica XVI* (2016): 11-61.

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