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GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Cinematic/Trans*/Bodies Now (and Then, and to Come)

Cáel M. Keegan, Laura Horak and Eliza Steinbock

Cinematic bodies. Cinema captures bodies, their sounds and their appearances, and transmutes them to ones and zeroes, to emulsion, to magnetized tape. It cuts them up and pastes them together, and presents them, on screens and speakers large and small, to other bodies – bodies that stand, sit, walk, or lie, alone and in crowds, in private and in public, bodies that gaze, that look away, that cringe, that laugh, desire, imagine, dream. Where does one body stop and another end? How do these various bodies touch each other, constitute each other? Cinema shows bodies and solicits bodies, it buys and sells bodies, it has a body of its own, or many bodies, or does it?

Cinema is a technology and a technique, even as it is also a conglomeration of many different technologies and many techniques. Cinema is created, distributed, and experienced through a succession of machines and algorithms, but also through a succession of conventions and ways of doing things. We do not yet know – for certain – all that cinema can do. It has proved to be an open apparatus for affecting bodies of all kinds, with a diverse history of plug 'n play components. The filmic and video vectors that connect subject to object, subject to subject, are exchangeable, variable – and therefore the medium of cinema has no single supporting structure that defines it. These technological transformations of projection/screen/image/sound/special effects therefore are not just the composing elements of cinema's history, but what define cinema as an unstable medium-in-flux.

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Cinema, broadly construed, is ripe for a somatechnical approach. Derived from the Greek *soma* (body) and *techné* (craftsmanship), the term *somatechnics* holds in view both the lively enfleshment of *techné* and the practices of embodying via hard and soft technologies. From the first actualities and trick films, human and non-human bodies have assembled in and around filmic events, producing powerful cine-social apparatuses with paratextual and intertextual appendages (e.g. fan cultures, remakes, ‘the oppositional gaze’ [hooks 1992]). In this special issue, we invited scholars to approach ‘the cinematic’ broadly, as a sensorial and temporal flow of interrelations around images and sound that governs and opens possibilities for various embodiments. We asked and continue to wonder what might it mean, now, to occupy a ‘cinematic body?’ With this query, we cast our net back to the early 1990s, a moment when transgender social movements were swelling and film theory swerved into an anti-psychoanalytic assessment of film’s affective, non-binary generation of on- and off-screen bodies via Steven Shaviro’s daring and polemical book, *The Cinematic Body* (1993). Our revisit of the ‘cinematic body’ *now* calls for an interrogation of this continued collusion of trans* and affective cinematic bodies in our search for a somatechnical theory of film.

This volume arises out of our earlier collaboration, with C. Riley Snorton, on a trans* cinema studies panel titled ‘Trans-Produced, Then and Now: The Practices and Politics of Media/Historiography’ at the 2016 International Trans*Studies Conference at the University of Arizona. Drawing from and seeking to expand that interdisciplinary conversation, we petitioned contributors to reflect on how cinematic experiences might transition bodies in characteristically trans* modes of wayward gendering, inspired by definitions of transgender as ‘a movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place’ (Stryker 2008: 1) and trans* as a ‘movement across precisely *vitality* itself’ (Hayward and Weinstein 2015: 197). We asked, is cinema paradigmatically trans* in its somatechnical capacities? Reciprocally, does transgender phenomenology offer new modes for engaging with or imagining cinematic aesthetics? We invited authors to employ a trans* rubric to investigate cinematic bodies and to ask how are bodies like cinema. Our call for work therefore deployed trans* as an invitation to theorize and a call to new methods. We invited contributors to think of trans* as a ‘paratactic’ (Hayward and Weinstein 2015: 198) connecting bodies to cinema to bodies to cinema, asking how trans* might agglutinate *soma* and *techné*, producing an assemblage – the *cinematic body*. We were curious not just about the study of transgender representations in cinema, but

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about new theories for understanding *the somatechnics of cinema as trans** in its body-producing capacities, *and the somatechnics of trans* as cinematic* in its transfer of fantasy into the perceivable.

Because each of our own work takes up the question of what trans* cinema is and how a trans* cinema studies might appear, we are invested in building spaces where such new and transmuted field formations might come together.¹ Such a project is appropriate to the journal *Somatechnics* as a discursive space where interdisciplinary collisions and alchemies are invited. Since the publication of the anthology *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologicalisation of Bodies* (2009), which included Eliza Steinbock's 'Speaking Transsexuality in the Cinematic Tongue' – a chapter that examined the surgical model for bodily transforming in terms of cinematic editing of the film body through cuts and sutures – 'somatechnics' has emerged for us as a central analytic in the struggle to create the field we desire. This field, as it materializes in this issue, might not always be directly connected to specific transgender identities or practices. Rather, we hold these representational concerns in balance with trans* as a way to move newly among times and spaces, across fields and forms, toward (im)possible sensations, affects, and futures – always rooted in the material realities of transgender life as it has been historically and bodily constituted. Our idea of trans* is thus already an 'across' and 'with' praxis of between-us: trans-historical, transdisciplinary, and trans-medial. Horak has explored the diverse and surprising modes of cross-gender performance in American silent film and the role of cinema in proffering competing concepts of gender and sexual identity, as well as the long history of trans-authored film and video (2015; 2016). Steinbock's theory of 'shimmering images' reveals how, in the period from 1895–2017, the seeable and sayable consist in banded, organized strata that differentially conjoin the aesthetics of change to trans* bodies through cinematic images that flicker with nuanced legibility (Steinbock forthcoming). Keegan, drawing from transgender phenomenology and black feminist cinema studies, touches trans* as a mode for desubjugating what has not (yet) been perceived but remains sensible in our popular aesthetics of gender, race, and sex (2015; 'Revisitation;' 'Tongues;' 2018). Therefore, like bodies that open toward new imaginaries to realize other corporeal inhabitations, this issue of *Somatechnics* also points desirously toward a fantasy body – a body of trans* cinema studies that might cohere or accrete around such gestures.

The theoretical and cinematic work of trans* scholar Susan Stryker is a key point of congregation for us all. Stryker's vibrant

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histories of transtextors Christine Jorgensen and the queens and trans women participants in San Francisco's 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot are matched by her creative interpretation of how cinematic practices reflect on the possibilities for transforming and projecting transsexual embodiment. In conversation with us, Stryker has suggested that transsexual is to celluloid as transgender is to digital. The question arises: Do media formats attend to gender differentially? What is the 'technicity' (Stiegler 2010) of gender, and how has this technicity been 'cinematic?' Not only the format itself should be considered, but also the *making* practices of working the format into narrative or experimental form. This attention to the maker, the practitioner of cinema, refocuses this special issue's discussion of how transgender media makers have grasped media affordances to produce trans* cultural objects. We therefore open the issue with a roundtable conducted by scholar and filmmaker Jules Rosskam, who asked five active transgender filmmakers to describe their trans* practices for media-making. If, as Stryker has recently claimed, 'Making things real is what trans people do' (2017), then this issue orients itself both toward that *making* and toward the realness that making makes.

We similarly follow Kara Keeling's inquiries into how cinema shapes our collective cognitive, narrative, and affective expectations – our 'common sense.' In *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, Keeling writes, 'Neither cinematic perceptual schemas nor cinematic matter precedes the other. Together they constitute the cinematic, an assemblage that might also be referred to as "twentieth-century reality" because we neither posit nor access "reality" except via these processes, which were perfected by film' (2007: 12). Keeling's concept of 'cinematic reality' informs our questions about the cinematic body: If we cannot approach the real except through cinema, then how are all bodies considered to be 'real' a kind of cinematic *happening*, already in motion? If 'the real' is constituted by cinema as a perceptual and temporal field for whatever may occur, then how might other bodies that linger outside the frame yet become? To trans* such a supposition is to ask how reality might flow toward other arrangements, might exceed its own shape – how the cinematic happening that is the body might *happen otherwise than before*. Such considerations point this issue at the technicity of gender in all its cinematic practices and modes – produced, received, and circulated: documentary, experimental, Hollywood, independent, televisual, trash, speculative, and more.

Disciplinary Impetus, Now and Then

In response to the disembodied eye of so much apparatus and gaze theory, film studies experienced a ‘corporeal turn’ in the 1990s and 2000s, inspired by Vivian Sobchack’s championing of phenomenology, Linda Williams’ ‘body genres,’ Laura U. Marks’ ‘haptic visuality,’ and Carl Plantinga’s attention to viewers’ physiological responses.² Today, a number of scholars theorize diverse relationships between viewers’ bodies, bodies on-screen, and even the film’s own ‘body.’ However, for the most part, approaches to the body in film studies have not picked up on trans* studies scholarship, or responded to the early questions posed in that field, such as the concept of somatechnics. While film studies has explored cinema as a ‘technology of gender’ (De Lauretis 1987), it has not thought as much about *gender as a technology* (Stryker 2000) that might operate via specific cinematic aesthetics, designs, or processes. In this issue, we hope to bring trans* studies and film studies into conversation, and to alert scholars of film and media to emerging work at the intersections of these fields. Our exciting and trepidatious moment – when the political stakes of trans life are increasingly hashed out through media – calls for new work that takes up the meaty tensions and possibilities within the concept of trans* without abstracting from the material urgency of actual transgender bodies.

Film studies and gender studies are at heart interdisciplinary endeavors, but both fields have narrowed in their quests for institutional recognition. Both fields have started producing PhDs, a formalizing practice that has sometimes obscured their interlaced histories and shrunk their capacities to fully engage across each other. Though the generation of film scholars who built the field and who are now in the process of retiring were trained in many different disciplines, the legitimation of film studies as a formal discipline within the academy has sometimes had the unfortunate effect of shaking off some of its earlier and fruitful connections. While feminist conceptualizations of gender – in the form of gendered subject formation, ‘sexual difference,’ and analyses of the objectification of women’s bodies – were formative to film studies from the 1970s onward, and queer approaches were adopted relatively rapidly in the 1990s, film studies has been slow to adopt trans* studies approaches to audiovisual media.³ This resistance is perhaps as much due to the field’s rigidification as to the subjugated position of transgender within both feminist and queer studies. A trans* approach seeks to excavate trans* from feminist and queer theoretical constructs that have

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constrained it as a necessary erasure, permitting us to theorize transgender spectatorship and authorship, rethink the way gender as such works in cinema, and reconceptualize the relationships between bodies and technologies forged by audiovisual media. The responses to our call for this special issue revealed that this work is mostly being done by scholars in fields outside of film studies, such as women's and gender studies, cultural studies, and performance studies, and mostly by emerging scholars.

As we have sometimes experienced as trans* cinema scholars, it can be difficult to find a scholarly 'home' for work that traipses between disciplines. Much as there is a lack of space for trans bodies to appear within our cultural frames for personhood, there is a lack of institutional and disciplinary space to fully engage the implications of trans*. Trans* studies often finds itself stranded in a disciplinary situation that replicates the shape of transgender life, contesting negatory discourses while negotiating acquisitive expropriations that nonetheless block its most crucial and challenging claims. In response to these dynamics, we sought to create in this issue a bimodal, interdisciplinary space supporting the nascent intersection of trans* studies and cinema studies, which we view as vital to understanding how the histories and forms of cinema are co-constitutive with the histories and forms of bodies – especially transgender corporealities. Because trans* is inherently concerned with modulations and movements, we petitioned scholars from a range of disciplines to approach the cinematic from a somatechnical perspective, creating other genealogies for tracing audiovisual cultures: thinking about the forms of cinema as creating bodies, the forms of bodies as creating cinema, that cinema as creating bodies, those bodies as creating cinema, and on.

This issue is therefore an attempt to bring together the voices of established cinema scholars whose work informs the proliferating strands of trans* studies with the voices of emerging scholars working at the intersections of trans* studies, cinema studies, media studies, and performance studies. The voices of transgender filmmakers and their material attention to both the methods of cinema production and the distribution of cinematic works call into question the theoretical and textual archives the issue itself draws upon. The trans filmmaker roundtable, especially, calls attention to the politics of our specific media moment. Despite increased interest in and representation of transgender characters (mostly played by cisgender actors) in film and television, such 'visibility' has not yet resulted in improved conditions for transgender people as a whole

(Feder and Juhaz 2016). As Jeffrey Tambor leaves *Transparent* amid allegations of sexually harassing his trans women costars, and as the murder of transgender people rises globally, we commit to thinking about how media acts as a staging ground for the types of life that are permitted to become real and to shape reality in turn. What ‘trans* cinema’ might be, who gets to say, and from what embodied and discursive positions, are thus live political questions at play within the issue

A Road Map

In our call, we offered a set of provocations and jumping-off points, encouraging submissions that develop an analysis of particular films or media texts, filmmakers, or theories, and that attend to assemblages of cinematic bodies in their social, transformative, and transmorphing dimensions. We sought contemporary and historical approaches to cinema’s political and aesthetic somatechnical qualities, but also scholarship in the speculative genre that gestured toward new understandings of cinema as a form, crux, or process. In response, some authors addressed spectatorship theory by building up critical analyses from their own experiences of being struck by cinematic texts, moments, or encounters. Other writers elected to attend to form, drawing close analyses of genre, editing, and montage. Trans* circulates through all these works as a method, a heuristic, and a horizon, stitching the issue together as so much assembled flesh while holding open the question: What sort of sociality or apparatus might the cinematic body (yet) become?

The issue opens with ‘Making Trans Cinema,’ a roundtable in which trans filmmakers set the political and material stakes of the issue’s conversation. Madsen Minax’s observation, ‘I don’t know exactly what trans cinema is. Is it cinema that portrays trans bodies? Is it cinema that specifically...addresses a trans narrative? Is it cinema that is made by a trans person but maybe the content doesn’t have anything to do with trans identity? Is it cinema that broadly challenges normative gender presentation?’ points the issue toward a host of considerations. If the cinematic aestheticization of ‘the real’ determines which bodies are to be perceived, then *trans* cinema* might name any number of processes by which the life of images drives the assemblage of phenomenal embodiments, or vice versa. Following these evocations, we plunge into Jennifer Barker’s close reading of the absurdist narrative film *The Lobster* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015) in ‘A Horse Is a Horse, Of Course, Of Course: Animality, Transitivity and

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the Double Take.’ Barker considers what new readings of transitivity are brought on by her multiple viewings of the film. Thematically, the film’s narrative concerns single humans whose punishment for not coupling is to become animals, though they do get to choose their species. This brutal transformation in the ‘Transformation Room’ opens attention to the film’s use of slow motion, lateral and juxtaposed camera movements – a fantastic transversality that evokes a mutual entanglement of human-animal. The spectator’s invited double-takes, she argues, make the film – though conservative in plot – a peculiar series of moving images that undoes recognition of categorical belonging, constantly positing the *animalous* on the edge of the frame: that which ‘forms a porous border between the group and its Outside,’ as Barker quotes literary scholar Derek Ryan. The figures of the animals in the film, however, are not the point, Barker insists. Rather than recognizable form, it is the way ‘animal, human, and cinematic movements contribute to the state of animalousness, which unseats the notion of “this” or “that” body, self-identified and fixed in place and time.’ Drawing on trans* studies, animal studies, and film theory, Barker directs us to consider the regenerative and trajectory characteristics of trans*ing practices.

The next article asks what the concept of somatechnics has to offer theorizations of Indigenous bodies, media, and politics. In ‘Bodies in Transition: Visualizing “Nomadic Cinema” in Liselotte Wajstedt’s *Sámi Nieida Jojk (Sámi Daughter Yoik)*,’ Kate Moffat investigates how Nordic cultures have somatechnically constituted Indigenous Sámi bodies as objects of eugenic investigation, political suppression, and exotic romanticism, and how various Sámi filmmakers have used cinema to constitute Sámi bodies differently. In particular, she argues that Swedish-Sami filmmaker Liselotte Wajstedt’s experimental documentary *Sámi Daughter Joik* (2007) enacts a somatechnical process that reconstitutes the often objectified Indigenous Sámi body as a body in transition, an Indigenous body tied to landscape not exclusively through land claims but through its ambivalent experiences of and connections to a succession of non-places.

Another question we posed to scholars was how trans* might offer a way to map changes in the ‘cinematic bodies’ of the 21st century. The next two essays use close readings of cinematic figures and processes to indicate how trans* analyses might draw out the obscured somatechnical potentials within contemporary popular media texts. An Sasala’s piece, ‘Panic! Humanity’s Cis-Heteronormative Fear of the Transgender Android’ examines the bodies of cinematic and actual

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androids to trace the species, race, and gender panics induced by the revelation of the android's increasingly modular body. Rooting their analysis in *Dark Matter's* (2015–17) representation of an android with multiple genital design functions, Sasala posits the trans*droid as an imaginary-yet-dawning assemblage of fantasies and technologies through which we might read the violence of dominant scientific, white supremacist, and cis-heteronormative gazes. Despite the trans*droid's violent eradication from *Dark Matter's* storyline, Sasala lingers in the moment before panic sets in, where the trans*droid evokes both the survival strategies deployed by transgender bodies to avoid such eradication and the future lifeworlds where such violence might be suspended or ended. In 'straddling the border of life and death,' Sasala notes, the trans*droid 'challenges sociocultural and biopolitical definitions of humanity, providing imaginative pathways that might connect fictionally trans* android representations. . .to new real-world mechanical constructions.' Thus, the trans*droid assembles within the *could*, a modal tense that induces panic as much as it promises other ways of doing and becoming a body, pointing toward 'potentially new futures of human-android interaction where gender might be arranged differently.'

While Sasala is interested in the trans*droid as a futural body, Joshua Bastian Cole's 'Passing Glances: Recognizing the Transgender Gaze in *Mulholland Drive*' turns the issue backward, toward a cinematic body we thought we knew. Cole places *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) alongside *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Pierce, 1999) to posit a spectatorial somatechnics by which he and David Lynch's film become trans* together. Asking what room remains to resuscitate and repair spectatorship theories founded upon sexual difference, Cole stages a close examination of *Mulholland Drive's* montage to argue for the presence of a transgender gaze, despite the film's lack of overt transgender characterization. Cole disarticulates Jack Halberstam's original analysis of the 'transgender look' in *Boys Don't Cry* (Halberstam 2005: 76) from that film's concern with transgender representation, reading with and through prior queer and lesbian analyses of *Mulholland Drive* to claim the film's fragmentations as historically and aesthetically linked with trans male body fashioning. Cole notes how the film's duplicate bodies and disappearing/reappearing objects mirror phantasmatic trans anatomies, suggesting how trans* phenomenologies and cinematic aesthetic processes have become intermeshed since the advent of the 21st century. Citing *Mulholland's* famous line, 'There's a man in back of this place. He's the one doing it,' Cole writes, 'I am the one who's doing it' – a substitution that

indicates how retrospective engagements can alter the meaning and content of cinematic objects, even as they simultaneously re-work the spectatorial body.

This revisitation of objects-thought-known extends through Josh Morrison's 'Cutting Camp with Killing: "Bad" Feelings, Refusing Respectability, and Homeopathic Camp,' in which he asserts that theories of camp and homeopathy serve trans* cinema well, explaining why 'bad' or 'irresponsible cinema' can be therapeutic for various kinds of traumatized bodies. Taking Israel Luna's much-repudiated *Ticked-Off Transnies with Knives* (2010) as his case study, Morrison explores its reception and circulation as a bad object amongst different kinds of viewers, concluding that the graphic tale of a rape revenge by trans women – a literal story of a trans girl collective wielding the power to exact violence – offers a generic vehicle to remake exploitation tropes and engage in a symbolic, transformative working-through of negative affects. These theories for understanding trans* media and cultural production decenter medicalized, pathologized narratives of transition: The alternative medical treatment of homeopathy purports to use a natural rather than invasive means to help the body adjust to toxins and threats, placing it into a model of building resilience. The aesthetic potentials of homeopathy, Morrison argues, are 'useful for thinking through how people come to terms with an overwhelming pain, fear, or hurt through the reliving of that trauma in small doses.' Morrison responds to the public outcries that the film incites violence and panders to stigmatizing tropes by claiming that the film's supposedly guilty or bad pleasures are, in fact, rehabilitative.

Two reviews round out the issue by turning us toward the sensible. Sean Donovan discusses the Belgian-French horror film *Raw* (Julia Ducournau, 2017), exploring the cannibal horror genre's 'bodily fascinations' and *Raw*'s infamously visceral effects on its audiences' senses and flesh. '*Raw* puts bodies on display,' Donovan writes, 'but at the same time, through the language of cinema, creates a sense of haptic empathy with the screen, speaking to us through sensation about the mysterious insecurities of our own troubled somatechnical embodiments.' Donovan is interested in how *Raw* produces a cinematic corporeality that weaponizes the haptic and its touching contacts to force the horrific feeling of our own bodies as consumable – as meat. Genevieve Newman's review of Scott C. Richmond's *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Floating, Flying, and Hallucinating* (2016) similarly follows the senses, tracing how Richmond's work departs from phenomenology to perceptual

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psychology to produce a theory of proprioceptive aesthetics – a ‘co-mingling of the body and technics’ that ‘orients the sensing self (rather than the cognitive self) in both the cinema/tic space and in relation to the internal self.’ Newman notes how Richmond’s engagement with the body is primarily concerned with the viewer’s placement within a ‘cinematic technics’ – the many ways in which ‘human corporeality is co-constituted by inorganic processes,’ producing a cine-somatechnics of proprioceptive sensation.

Eugenie Brinkema’s afterword, ‘Of Bodies, Changed to Different Bodies, Changed to Other Forms,’ closes the issue by reading closely how the contributions share a rethinking of the co-implicated relationship of embodiment to the cinematic, focusing on how cinema operates transversally as a body-invoking and yet body-shattering machine – ‘*As though the cinema were a machine ready to tell of bodies, changed to different bodies, changed to other forms.*’ Brinkema expands from readings of Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze to consider how each of the issue’s contributions ultimately poses the problem of aesthetic form – scale, texture, framing, montage – as essential to the question of what cinematic bodies are and might be, what they can and might do. ‘The *encounter* between bodies and the cinema,’ Brinkema notes, ‘reimagines the body as that which, in being discovered, explored, and broken up *as body* is simultaneously derailed as a unity that might be named *The body.*’ Ultimately, Brinkema concludes that, amidst these reconsiderations of its two titular terms – ‘cinematic’ and ‘bodies’- this special issue asserts the speculative promise of trans* as a prepositional element that asks us to go ‘over, across, beyond, through, outside, on the farther side of’ the thing denoted, destabilizing the point of origin from which we might imagine such a departure. We three read here a call for the ‘cinematic body’ we imagine, a body of trans* cinema studies that might produce new theories and possibilities as much as it shatters open prior formations and bodies of thought. Returning to that agglutinating space between our sensing flesh and the cinematic text, we end where we began – asking how trans* moves us toward/across/through *what could happen* between cinema and bodies *now*.

Notes

1. See also Steinbock (2017) and Horak (forthcoming).
2. See Sobchack (1992), Williams (1991), Marks (2000), and Carl Plantinga (2009).
3. A significant outlier is Chris Straayer’s 1996 *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientation in Film and Video*, with two critical, separate chapters on transvestite- and transsexual-themed films filed amongst queer concerns.

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