

**CALL FOR ESSAYS | Special Issue no. 38 (Open access)**

## **Gestalt Filmology. Insights on Form and Embodiment in the Film Experience**

*Edited by Adriano D'Aloia (Università degli studi di Bergamo) and Ian Verstegen (University of Pennsylvania)*

**Deadline for abstract proposals: September 5, 2021**

An incipient *neurofilmological* turn in film and media studies promises to reframe the study of the film experience into a post-cognitive episteme that stresses the idea that the perception of visual and acoustic stimuli implies the activation of embodied forms of simulation. According to the “embodied simulation” hypothesis, the significance of the film experience emerges from the interactive mutuality of an agent (or organism) and environment, and perception evokes internal forms of action that support an empathic understanding of the character’s gestures, intentions, and emotions. These dynamics can be extended to the film’s low-level features (e.g. cinematography, camera movements, editing) and allow one to rethink the aesthetics of the film experience in the light of multimodal sensory perception.

Although the theoretical references of the embodied and enactive approach are patent (e.g. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and James Gibson’s ecology of perception), the endless appearance of new ideas risks losing one’s bearings in the traditional commitments of the field. For example: the internal re-production of the observed movements, the empathetic nature of the film-spectator relationship, and the understanding of the external world through imitation recall the principle of *isomorphism* – one of the central (and debated) ideas of Gestalt psychology; the so called body-mind problem and the enactivist claim that the body in as inseparable part – if not the very origin – of perception and cognition, remind one of the gestaltist fundamental claim that the human subject is able to organize local features into a larger and coherent whole; the centrality of the organism-environment coupling recalls Gestalt figure-ground reversibility and Kurt Lewin’s field theory. A number of theories proposed that are influenced by Gibson’s ecological theory but open to brain research do not countenance that such an approach would be contrary to his theorization.

As a result, their theoretical commitments of phenomenal realism and naturalistic reduction appear a lot like Rudolf Arnheim’s gestalt approach while eschewing or ignoring it. Authors are invited to go beyond Arnheim the situated author (who effectively stopped writing about film in the 1940s) to his grounding theoretical commitments. These come of course from Gestalt psychology and involve phenomenal realism (slippage between live action and animation), priority of expressive over discursive filmic features, and the value of neuroscientific heuristic reduction.

The call for essays for *Cinéma&Cie* #38 special issue “Gestalt Filmology. Insights on Form and Embodiment in the Film Experience” asks authors to situate their theories not according to genealogies or stated influences but basic meta-theoretical categories like naturalism (explanation) and representationalism (direct vs mediated).

Among the topics that could be addressed are:

- Gestalt affect and film
- Gestalt isomorphism and film
- Gestalt-oriented research on motion perception

- Gestalt as a film-philosophy of mind
- Optical illusions and film perception
- “Mute” films and visual expression
- Gestalt forms of filmic embodiment
- Gestalt and phenomenological critiques of mirror neurons and empathy
- “Prägnanz” and the future of film and Virtual reality

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## Submission details

Please send a 400-word abstract in English, 3/5 bibliographical references, 5 keywords, and a short bibliographical note to [adriano.daloia@unibg.it](mailto:adriano.daloia@unibg.it) and [verstege@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:verstege@sas.upenn.edu) **by September 5, 2021**. Notifications of acceptance will be emailed no later than September 19, 2021. If the proposal is accepted, a 5,000/6,000-word essay must be submitted for double-blind peer review by **November 30, 2021**.