

Session 3: **Phenomenological Exchanges**

Friday February 16, 2018

“The Cinematic Imaginary: Ontology and Immanence in Film Theory”

Dino Koutras (PhD Candidate, Cultural Mediations)

Most synoptic accounts of film theory are based on the unspoken assumption that film theorists have traditionally approached cinema as an object of knowledge. In such accounts, the question “What is Cinema?” has, it is said, invariably yielded one of the following answers: it is an art; it is a language; it is a recording device or copying machine; it is a prosthetic device for our sense of sight; it is a handmaiden to ideology.

This assumption, however, is questionable. Theories of film that take an epistemological view of cinema are balanced, if not outweighed, by accounts that consider cinema from a phenomenological perspective. In these cases, cinema is evaluated not as an object of knowledge but as a medium of experience.

In my presentation I will explore this phenomenological tradition in film theory. I will make the argument that what organizes this tradition is not the art or language of cinema per se, but rather the sensation peculiar to cinematic spectatorship in which mind and screen seem to exchange identities, an experience I sum up in the concept of the “cinematic imaginary.” Drawing on contemporary examples as well as historical precedents, I will identify and discuss the key themes of this discourse, including: the opposition to verbal language; the question of ontology; the phenomenological experience of immanence; theorizing the cinematic imaginary.

“Phenomenological Encounters in Berlin’s *Neues Museum*”

Rebecca Clare Dolgoy (CTCA/ICI Berlin Postdoctoral Fellow)

How might phenomenology figure in museums, particularly those charged with responsibility for difficult heritage?

Drawing upon Dino's notion of the "cinematic imaginary" as well as citing both Frampton's *Filmosophy* and key texts in the phenomenological tradition by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I will offer a reading of Berlin's *Neues Museum* that engages with architectural, curatorial, and experiential moments in the museum. Re-opened in November 2009 after being closed for 70 years, the fragmentary architecture of the re-established museum fascinatingly *embodies* the past rather than *tells* it and its reflective vitrines facilitate spaces of moments of encounter. I argue that this embodiment and these encounters are expressions of phenomenology and that these phenomenological encounters are of a different conceptual and experiential quality than those that occur in spaces that are specifically designated for encounters with traumatic heritage (e.g. Berlin's Jewish Museum), where *ersatz* or prosthetic forms dominate the visitors' imagination.