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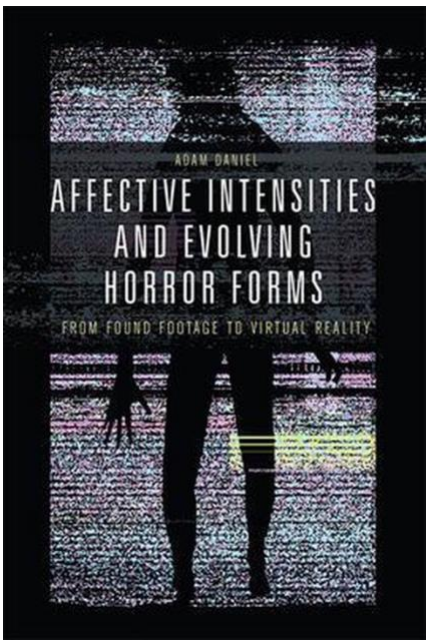

Book Review

Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality

By Adam Daniel
Edinburgh University Press, 2020

232pp.

Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality is an expansive and lively exploration into affective intensities and embodied experience in relation to emergent horror media forms. A central issue that Adam Daniel addresses is how theories of affect seem to spark conjecture of a brain/body binary, which lends Daniel a way of opening up discourse on embodiment theory, neuroscience, and Deleuzian film-philosophy. Daniel productively invokes Brian Massumi on affect. Affect and its qualification as emotion in Massumi's sense are separated by the codification of the intensities of affect (Massumi 2002, 28). However, the misconception is thus that cognition, and therefore language, occurs secondarily to affect. More specifically, this is in how we understand the relationship between intensities and language. A difficulty, I think, in conceptualizing the encounter with intensities of affect, is working out where cognition fits in the spectatorial experience. For Daniel, the affective spectator experience cannot be fully explained by a cognitive understanding of the film text (Daniel 2020, 2). In Chapter 1, Daniel reviews the cognitivist film theory of Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, Torben Grodal, David Bordwell, Greg Currie, and Carl Plantinga to argue how, when considering horror spectatorship, the formulation of the hierarchy between affect and cognition should be replaced by an understanding of the somatic interaction between film and viewer. Horror spectatorship, in this way, can be understood phenomenologically as a "dynamic entwinement of film-as-aesthetic-object and viewer-as-experiencing-subject" (Daniel 2020, 23). The behavior of horror's affective intensities is most aptly found in Chapter 6 in Daniel's reference to Steven Shaviro's "articulation and composition of forces" (Shaviro 2010, 17); however, it is also interesting to note that the question of cognitive processes returns in Daniel's book in his neuroscience studies of found footage horror

and when referring to the "apocryphal origins" and thus, authenticity, of Parker Wright's YouTube video *11bx1371* (Daniel 2020, 120).

The "dynamic entwinement" to which Daniel refers is conceptualised through the "machinic assemblage" as an "interaction between the brain/mind/body assemblage and the cinematic image" (Daniel 2020, 8). However, via the "machinic assemblage," Daniel's book also brings focus to medium (that is, the body's relationship with machines for which medium is product). This focus on medium is seen in emergent horror forms: found footage horror, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Willow Creek* (2013), *Creep* (2014), and *The Visit* (2015); YouTube videos, such as *Suicidemouse* (2009), *11bx1371* (2015), and *Marble Hornets* (2009–2014); horror video games, such as *Alien: Isolation* (2014), *Anatomy* (2016), and *Marginalia* (2017); and virtual reality experiences, such as *11:57* (2014), *Catatonic* (2015), and *Escape the Living Dead* (2016). In the "machinic assemblage," the medium directs attention to how affect arises in the interaction. For found footage horror, such as *The Visit*, this is how empathy is generated via embodied simulation theory's (EST) "feeling of movement" with the moving camera (Daniel 2020, 105); how a sense of anxiety is induced by the panning camera strapped to a cooling fan in *Paranormal Activity 3* such that the threat is of the "out-of-frame" (Daniel 2020, 64); and how elements such as "jump cuts, digital noise, glitches and overlays" in *Suicidemouse* and *11bx1371* disrupt and unsettle the viewer (Daniel 2020, 120). What is interesting is that while puzzle horror videos, such as *11bx1371*, seem to lend themselves to a cognitive spectatorial experience, for Daniel, the "distortion or breakdown of the audio-video image" via these elements generates an experience for the spectator of "discorrelation" (Daniel 2020, 117; Denson 2020). Such examples speak to the way the technological capabilities of these media forms produce a particular embodied and affective response. For horror media forms, affects such as fear, anxiety and dread are also redoubled in our relationship to media forms. As Daniel writes: "Denson observes that post-cinematic horror 'trades centrally on a slippage between diegesis and medium; the fear that is channelled *through* moving image media is in part also a fear *of* (or evoked *by*) these media'" (Daniel 2020, 3).

Accordingly, the "machinic assemblage," as Daniel theorizes it (specifically in Chapter 4), is a material relationship between the medium and the body as opposed to a *dispositif* as an energetic arrangement or assemblage. Such a focus on material subjects and objects as they make up the assemblage means that affects are concentrated in embodied subjectivities and media forms, rather than cinema necessarily comprising the force of affective intensities and their relations in the concatenation. That is, the focus is on the subject's embodied relation with the medium as an interactive and immersive experience. Daniel does make some concession to an

energetic arrangement wherein the boundaries of subject and object are "dissolved" in the process of intensities, however, when he writes: "The move towards interactivity and immersion has to some degree dissolved the boundaries that may have been conceived between a viewer-subject and media products as objects of experience" (Daniel 2020, 6).

What Daniel makes clear is that the focus on affect in the "machinic assemblage" "raises particular questions about the insufficiencies of theories which prioritise identification, alignment or mimetic communication with on-screen bodies as central to affective exchange" (Daniel 2020, 6). Throughout the book, Daniel challenges these traditionally understood terms of film theory; for instance, in Chapter 2 identification is considered "ocularcentric" such that Daniel calls for "the integration of the range of perceptual, cognitive and bodily ways in which we are drawn into the image" (Daniel 2020, 31–2); alignment is eschewed for "empathic engagement" and "entwinement" in Chapter 5 (Daniel 2020, 99–100); and mimetic experience in Chapter 3 describes a "contact" between the viewer and the image that takes the form of "a unique, sensuous and tactile exchange" (Daniel 2020, 61–2). Daniel's treatment of "mimetic innervation" in Chapter 5 develops such contact "as a dynamic exchange between the film object and viewing subject" whereby elements of the mise-en-scène produce a "porous interface" (Daniel 2020, 106–7; Rutherford 2011, 61–3), and Daniel's work on neuroscientific research into embodied simulation theory suggests how the movement of the camera also allows for "mimetic engagement" (Daniel 2020, 105–7).

In Chapter 4, the focus on subject–object becomes a question of perception, whereby Daniel employs Gilles Deleuze's perception-image to understand the interaction in found footage horror between spectator-subject and camera point-of-view (Daniel 2020, 82). For Daniel, the perception-image allows for the "being-with" (Deleuze 1986, 74) of spectator and camera that we find in found footage horror. Thus, for Daniel, the perception-image is centered on how new media forms provide the capacity for an affective extension of a spectator-subject (most significantly when the subject is "out-of-frame"). Nonetheless, one wonders why Deleuze's perception-image makes its appearance as the central theory of Chapter 4, while his affection-image only emerges as an adage to neuroscientific theories of "empathic engagement" via the close-up of the face (Daniel 2020, 106) given that this is a book about affective intensities. Perhaps in Daniel's focus upon neuroscience, concern must be shown for neuroscience's brain/body relations in which perception and subjective responses are the attraction? Perhaps Daniel is indirectly expanding upon what Deleuze says about Pier Paolo Pasolini's mimesis—defined by Deleuze as a "correlation between two asymmetrical proceedings […]. It is like

communicating vessels" (Deleuze 1986, 73)—as a way of approaching the interaction between spectator-subject and media form? Or perhaps it is rather a question of the subject of spectatorship in the way that Daniel outlines his argument: "how previous scholars, drawing on Deleuze, have used the perception-image as a pathway to consider alternative answers to the question of who or what encounters the film in the act of spectatorship" (Daniel 2020, 82)? While Daniel's book only develops a theory of affect through its collation of theories, the breadth of research makes this book a significant contribution to the field. For scholars working in the fields of film/media/screen studies, affect studies, neuroscience, and Deleuzian film-philosophy, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms* serves as a substantial resource for contemporary theories on emergent horror media forms.

— Sharon Mee

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