



Moments of Texture Introduction

Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism calls for writing that is ‘responsive to the detailed texture’ of film and television. The three lead articles in this issue manage this responsiveness in varied ways. In his look at the complexities of Maurice Pialat’s staging, Adrian Martin reveals how this particular director invests interactions between characters with discomfort for both the actors and the audience, examining the strategically awkward manoeuvring within a long take and its deliberate resistance to fluidity. Nathaniel Deyo writes about the impact of decisions concerning casting, composition and narrative structure made in the 1946 adaptation of Raymond Chandler’s novel *The Big Sleep*, working to evaluate the relationship between the detail of particular moments and scenes to the constitution of the film as a whole, especially those which stick out from the overall flow. Steen Ledet Christiansen explores the sensory connection between the surface of the cinematic image and the narrative through details of grain and light, in order to map the emotional engagement invited by *Deja Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006). Between them, these articles engage with intricacies of how sequences work – of framing, staging, camera movement and rhythm – the textures of material details – of mise-en-scène, of performers’ faces, of lighting – and how these innermost workings contribute to the achievements of filmmakers and films. For the following ‘Moments of Texture’, this kind of responsiveness to texture as detail is elaborated further, as the materiality of objects, surfaces, movement and time are brought into evaluations of achievement.

In Issue 3, Alex Clayton’s article on performance in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) directly addresses what attention to texture might constitute and achieve, calling on F.R. Leavis by way of Raymond Durnat: ‘The superiority of *Psycho*, over its apparent genre, lies not in its structure, but in its fine detail (what Leavis used to call “texture”)’ (Durnat 2002: 102). Through examination of a single scene of Hitchcock’s film, in comparison with Gus Van Sant’s version of *Psycho* (1998), Clayton unpicks ‘the fine detail of what is offered by actors to microphone and camera, and the manner in which that work is woven into the fabric of the film’ (2011: 78), suggesting that ‘the word ‘texture’ is convenient partly because it captures the need for close attention to surface details and also to their integration’ (78). The relationship between the parts and the whole that Clayton points to here speaks to the roots of the word, texture referring to weaving in the literal sense of the material construction of fabric resulting in a particular surface / weight / feel, and composition in its figurative or immaterial sense. Texture is the result of decisions made concerning which material is used and how warp and weft is combined, details which affect how an object feels (thick or thin, soft or rough) and its function (sturdy and tough or delicate and fragile).

The comprehension of texture as both fine detail and total composition has an important connection to its sensory dimension, concerning the resulting qualities of a surface that we might perceive through touch or anticipate through sight and sound. Texture expresses the sensuous ‘feel’ of a medium, material, or environment, and thus connects with the subject of touch. This in turn invites consideration of affect, and of the sensorial relationships between film and spectator, which has been a growing field of focus in theoretical and philosophical approaches to film studies since the 1990s, and is of central concern to Christiansen’s account of *Deja Vu*. Yet, as indicated already, attending to texture in the context of film criticism also involves attention to the fine-grained decisions observable in a film’s realisation, the interrelation of such decisions and overall fabrication. Given this concern with concrete details, a focus on the material constituents of a film’s audio-visual style can further enrich discussions not only of the sensuous aspects of film viewing, but also of filmmaking, as in the articles by Martin and Deyo. In this short section, writers have been invited to each take the detail of a moment from a film or television programme in order to discuss the intricacies of how it works and how this relates to the concerns of the whole – using the texture *in* a moment to understand and value the texture *of* the moment.

The first two writers are most directly engaged with the material details of surface as shaped through sound and mise-en-scène. Adam O’Brien identifies an aural texture – the clunk of glasses coming together – that describes a character’s circumstances and sensibilities (among other material qualities of his environment), and the way in which this sets a tone of restraint for the rest of a climactic scene in *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005). Ian Banks explores the attention to surface textures in a long take from *Death Line* (Gary Sherman, 1972), in order to re-evaluate this overlooked British horror film and make an argument for thematic density contained within its audio-visual style. My own response to a key moment in an episode of the television crime drama *Cracker* (Granada Television, 1993-1996; 2007) is concerned with how characters within a fictional world respond to a space, drawing together the matter of how this is shaped through details of performance and staging with the manner in which these workings relate to the series, its characters, narrative and genre. In focusing on the

opening montage of *Frances Ha* (Noah Baumbach, 2012), James Zborowski considers texture in terms of flow, exploring how the rhythms and balances of character and staging in this sequence establish a quality of intimacy in the film's central relationship, which is felt to be lacking throughout the rest of the film. In each instance, the writers reflect on significant dimensions of character development, the constitution of moment-to-moment interactions and drama, the shape of the narrative, and relationships to genre.

If we regard texture as the evocation of touch and surface, of the materiality of a film's work, it offers a particular way of acknowledging the importance of stylistic decisions to our responsiveness to an aesthetic object's details, patterns, and overall shapes; the density or sparsity of action, the flow or friction of a camera movement or montage sequence. This brings to mind a statement about criticism made by V.F. Perkins: 'In order to discuss [movies] critically we have to find ways of defining not only images, actions and interpretations but also the nature of our involvement' (1972: 141). By attending to and trying to describe the fine detail – the consistency of surfaces, performances, rhythms, the movement from shot-to-shot – as it is perceived, we can be more precise about the nature or quality of the film or television programme, and the ways in which it might move us or invite involvement. Texture for film and television, therefore, channels concern with affect through concrete description, foregrounding the importance of critical arguments that are grounded in the text, in its consistency.

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Works Cited

Clayton, Alex (2011) [Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism](#), 3, 73-79.

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