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Compact Cinematics: The Moving Image in the Age of Bit-Sized Media. Edited by Pepita Hesselberth and Maria Poulaki. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017 (238 pages).

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In the introductory essay to *Compact Cinematics: The Moving Image in the Age of Bit-Sized Media*, editors Pepita Hesselberth and Maria Poulaki set the stage for their volume on compact cinematics, a term which encompasses a wide array of moving image works and their role in society—a role that is often minimised due to their length and "small screen" methods of display. Rather than agree with dominant understandings that compact cinematics are new, and exist on the border of film and television, the authors argue that such visual displays, now in digital form through platforms, such as Vine and YouTube, predate feature-length films, and can open new avenues of understanding in the realm of spectacle and leisure studies more broadly.

The tension Hesselberth and Poulaki note between the commodification of leisure time and personal information, on the one hand, and the agency of the public in willingly providing such "commodities" to media industries, on the other, is echoed by several authors throughout the collection. The text as a whole, and especially Part 4, "[Miniature] Mobile Cinematics", fills a gap in the field of film and media studies, acting as a collection of works dedicated to "compact" media, envisioned as media on physically small screens, as well as brief media pieces. While there are several texts on digital media, and a plethora of works covering short films—in particular or as a genre—*Compact Cinematics* uniquely focuses on short and "small screen" media forms and their less-than-obvious histories in the larger genre of film.

Part 1, "[Short] Minimal Narratives", opens with Tom Gunning's chapter "Countdown to Zero: Compressing Cinema Time," in which he argues that narrative form dominates in mainstream film, whereas a conscious reference to their own forms and conventions, and a refusal to naturalise them, are hallmarks of avant-garde films. He illustrates his points with a discussion of Lewis Klahr's *Two Minutes to Zero* (2004) trilogy, in which he argues that the linear progression of a 1950s comic strip is reduced to pleasurable imagery when the shots of comic art cannot be placed into a meaningful narrative. While this does seem to indicate an avant-garde emphasis on aesthetic pleasure that subverts the original comic's linearity and narrative form, it stops short of acknowledging the potential role of nostalgia for the 1950s, or how images that function as critique resist becoming consumerist spectacles. In "On Conflict in Short Film Storytelling," Richard Raskin provides examples of acclaimed short films which he deems devoid of conflict and focused

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more on aspects like fulfillment of desire—for example, David Greenspan's *Bean Cake* (2001), Marianne Olsen Ulrichsen's *Come* (*Kom*, 1995), and Unni Straume's *Derailment* (*Avsporing*, 1993)—in order to effectively bolster his argument that conflict is not an essential element in short films. Peter Verstraten's following chapter compares two cases of short films set within films. In Pedro Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* (*Hable con ella*, 2002), he argues, the short film placed within it acts as a metaphor and visual placeholder for an act of sexual assault taking place in the longer film in which it is set. In contrast to *Talk to Her*, Verstraten then argues that a pre-existing film was placed in *Cleo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*, 1962) not to act as metaphor, but rather to playfully disrupt the documentary conventions and linear narrative that Agnès Varda was using in the film. In the final chapter of Part 1, Todd McGowan argues that in David Lynch's short films it becomes apparent that all fantasy is inherently traumatic for Lynch as something that cannot, by definition, be attained. Overall, each chapter in the section focuses on brief works of film that eschew popular, mainstream linear narratives in their storytelling. Richard Raskin, Todd McGowan, and later in the book, Justin Ascott all argue that the run times of short films carry both constraints and possibilities that full-length films lack, such that format impacts narrative and form.

Part 2, "[Condensed] Polyphonic Archives", continues with critiques of dominating narrative styles by demonstrating how multiple voices and experiences might be integrated into filmic projects. The section opens with a chapter from Sean Cubitt on archival preservation and the ethics of determining what is saved. He writes that "the work of the archive is as much one of systematic forgetting as it is of remembrance" (62). While the chapter does not explicitly address systemic power dynamics in archival work, as can be seen in the archived images and footage of Edward S. Curtis, which have been reclaimed and "remixed" by Indigenous peoples themselves, several authors such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Melissa Adams-Campbell et al., and Jeannette Bastian have written on such power dynamics in more detail. Chapter 6, "Long Story Short" by Natalie Bookchin, reflects on a video installation project of the same title from 2016 which featured multiple interviews, often overlapping in their display, on the subject of poverty and homelessness. The multiple voices, paired with a social-media-influenced recording style, acted as a critique of such sites, whose algorithms boost the voices of the popular and obscure the voices of those whom society already marginalises. In the following chapter, by Tina M. Bastajian, the introductions to short, interactive documentaries are analysed as liminal and reflexive spaces, where patterns set by creators can be altered by users. In the final chapter, Geli Mademli considers the effect of online film festivals on the overall film festival scene. While the online film festival allows for greater democratisation and less gate-keeping, it also makes the curatorial act more complex, and may be outsourced to individual users (creating atomised experiences) or to automated systems, prompting her to ask "what kind of curatorship are we talking about: the curator as programmer or the program as curator?" (90).

Part 3, "[Compressed] Pleasure & Productivity", focuses on user agency and pleasure, concentrating on practices that frequently obscure any difference between leisure and efficiency. Unlike earlier chapters, many of the media forms discussed in this section use mainstream narrative films as a basis for creative reimaginings or viewing practices, However, the section focuses on the agency of viewers to take such narrative, mainstream films and suit them to their own desires and purposes. Francesco Casetti's chapter opens the section with a discussion of new short film genres, in particular the fake film trailer, which speaks to the desires of fans to see certain films made; the "honest" trailer, used to humorously critique mainstream films; and the sweded trailer,

which playfully enacts film trailers with household objects in an act of aesthetic pleasure. Casetti argues that these videos complicate traditional notions of "creator", "reviewer" and "audience". Chapter 10, by Neta Alexander, focuses on speed watching. While there is no purist judgment levied at viewers who watch films at 1.5 times their intended speed, the chapter seems to present two interpretations of this practice. One is of "viewsers" hacking the system and getting what they need from a film, such as a sense of completeness, which suggests agency. The other is of cyborg-like efficiency, feeding into neoliberal capitalism, as viewers often report little time for traditional viewing, or even take more pleasure from their sense of speed and the hasty completion of a film than from traditional aspects of film viewing, such as visuals, performances, music, or dialogue. The issue of agency versus economic determinism recurs throughout this section and the entire book. Chapter 11, "Visual Pleasure and GIFs" by Anne McCarthy, comes closest in the collection to a head-on critique of media's role in furthering a capitalist agenda. In discussing the genre of "hypnotic" GIFs—which she argues popularly focus on production, usually factory contexts—she draws on Laura Mulvey's visual pleasure theory, by arguing that GIFs have a "to-be-looked-at-ness" which fill us with a sense of precision, efficiency, and effortlessness, further enculturating us to see these traits as desirable. In the last chapter of this section, Pasi Väliaho uses an anecdote about Sigmund Freud stopping with a crowd to watch the films at Rome's Piazza Colonna in 1907, in order to set up a contrast to atomised, individualised viewing practices in public spheres today, asserting a connection between capitalism and individualism. However, this reading may present as too exclusive an explanation, especially given the context of public transportation where many people can attest to merely pretending to view media, primarily as a reasonable defensive precaution.

While earlier chapters seemed to draw distinctions between mainstream narrative films and avant-garde works, Part 4 "[Miniature] Mobile Cinematics" points more toward liminal forms of film and media. Kim Louise Walden's chapter on the archaeology of mobile film opens the section, examining the stylistic and formal choices of the early, short mobile films produced by the UK company Blink, and the bluetooth sharing system Bluevend, which required physical interaction with users. In "Children's Little Thumb Films or 'Films-Poucets'" by Alexandra Schneider and Wanda Strauven, the short films of very small children are given a refreshing bit of attention, and the writing of Michel Serres in *Petite Poucette* (2012) is employed to give a powerful sense of agency to these tiny technology users. Their creations, they posit, may reflect their engagement with liminal media forms (like swiping photographs on phones and tablets, hence putting them into motion) as well as the "never-to-be-looked-at-ness" that often accompanies children's collections. In chapter 15, Yasco Horsman examines the *Quimby the Mouse* (2003) comic series by Chris Ware. While a hand-drawn comic series might at first seem a strange inclusion in a text focused on "the moving image", as the title suggests, Horsman argues for such graphic media's inclusion by noting that our eyes move across the page creating "images whose animation is never fully present" (163), but whose sense of movement can certainly be arrested should our eye pause on one segment for too long. Finally, chapter 16, "Mobile Cinematics" by Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter, provides a much-needed discussion of the overlooked format of virtual reality media. Pulling from Bolter and Grusin's well-known text *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), they argue that virtual reality is presented by its champions as the ultimate remediation, attaining greater authenticity than other media forms. Yet they point out that rather than a traditional, directed piece where your eye is guided and can take in the full screen (whether looking up at the theatrical screen or down at the phone), in virtual reality there is always too much to see

in one glance, and to access the visual surplus inherent in this media form, one must necessarily interact with the apparatus.

The final section, "[Compacted] Urban Ecologies", contains three somewhat lengthier chapters. Each examines how representations of our world interact with and cocreate physical space. It opens with Gillian Rose's chapter probing the filmic presentation of smart cities and what these visual representations mean for our visions of the future. In it, Rose focuses in particular on Siemens' film *Future Life* (2012), of which there are several versions, including one that plays in the Crystal building in London. This short film shifts quickly and steadily from maps, to aerial views, to tabletop displays, calling to mind the need for speed in Neta Alexander's chapter, the consistent movement of the eye in Horsman's chapter, and the efficiency from McCarthy's chapter (as does the perpetual looping of the film, GIF-like, on its large screen within the Crystal building). Chapter 18, by Ulrik Ekman, uses the C4 building in Córdoba, with its media façade that challenges notions of interiority and exteriority, to argue that "an individually, socially, and technically interactive mixed-reality cinematics" (185) is breaking from the older "theater" model of viewing. Taken with the last chapter and the entire text, it seems that in the future privileged physical spaces are destined to contain more screens, and our screens in turn will become increasingly tactile and interactive. In the final chapter of the book, Justin Ascott discusses his short film *Codified Space* (2011), in which he uses natural elements interjected into urban spaces to challenge our capitalistic notions of cities as efficient, functional spaces. The natural elements Ascott employs in his films range from animal droppings to weed growth to alien soundscapes in order to disrupt the presentation of cities as utilitarian, and create within them poetic renderings of space.

Unique in its focus on a variety of short, small or otherwise "compact" media forms, *Compact Cinematics* is a rich well of provocative thought on both media and its role in our lives, historically and presently. Each chapter, around ten pages, could easily inspire lengthy forays into these specialised fields of inquiry. While many of the chapters appear to be sparsely referenced, this likely owes to the elevated status of many of the authors in their respective fields, as well as to the short length of each of the chapters, which, in this regard, act effectively as think-pieces spurring further inquiry and research. Chapters that seem unlikely to contain fruitful overlap often result in though-provoking points of convergence. For example, speed and efficiency recurred as a focal point, from the cyborg-like precision of hypnotic GIFs considered by Anne McCarthy, to manic speed watchers in Neta Alexander's chapter, to the fear of moving slowly or experiencing "dead time" discussed in the book's introduction. These foci tie directly into the more overarching question that the book raises; namely, the extent to which our media practices are an exercise in agency or a capitulation to a capitalistic system that will allow us certain movements within its bounds of consumption. This central question looms large in the reader's mind, nudged sometimes brusquely to the fore by the probing text of several authors.

Compact Cinematics: The Moving Image in the Age of Bit-Sized Media is a stimulating text and, read in whole, it will not fail to ignite passion for further research in nearly everyone who reads it. The text's own exploration of what "compact cinema" entails, expounded on in seven of the chapters, is enlightening to consider and expands our view of contemporary media. Some prior theoretical exposure to media and/or film studies would likely assist in fully mining the intellectual pay dirt it contains—if such a crude capitalistic metaphor might be used—but those interested in

the topic at every level would benefit from this text. Students further enmeshed in media and film studies may detect the curation of particular theoretical inclinations, such as the focus on remediation over transmedia and convergence, as well as the emphasis on agency over structure, but the text leaves room for its own content to dialogue with divergent theories and texts. In the impressively dense yet readable nineteen chapters the volume contains, the relevance of media history to our current compact media practices is illuminated, and exciting areas of further research are enticingly offered.

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