

Panel 27

Film, Phenomenology and Storytelling

Reconfiguring the Auratic: The Phenomenology of Filmic Vision and Aesthetic Contemplation in Jem Cohen's *Museum Hours* (2012)

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This paper seeks to critically engage with the philosopher and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin's bifurcation of the art of painting with the technical apparatus attendant on cinema in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" using Jem Cohen's film *Museum Hours* (2012). Benjamin's genealogical account of the decline of the auratic in painting arising from modern techniques of reproducibility and dissemination necessitates a historical and cultural cleavage between the organism of form and the modernist fragment, which suggests a paradigmatic shift in aesthetic sensibility, challenged by Cohen precisely on the grounds of the dialectical confrontation between painting and cinema, and reconfigured by the film's ambivalent interrogation of multiple acts of spectatorship, viewing, and interpretation. As I will analyze, *Museum Hours* offers an alternative account of the source of the aura in painting from Benjamin by demonstrating how art is cognitively and aesthetically registered and disseminated through a phenomenological experience of film. The camera's traversing of the spaces inside and outside of the museum become integral to the dis-location of the auratic, reconfiguring the ethical valence of looking at and interpreting art as activities transformed by cinema's translocation of the image of painting outside of the museum. In this way, I demonstrate how *Museum Hours* sustains a dialogue with Benjamin and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on what the latter calls "the living historicity" ("The Indirect Language" 73) of art by reconfiguring the relations between painting and film, aesthetic contemplation and the explosion of frames of reference separating the two mediums.

Biography

Ian Tan Xing Long is Assistant Professor of English at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, and Associate Editor of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. He is the author of *Wallace Stevens and Martin Heidegger: Poetry as Appropriative Proximity* (2022), *Wallace Stevens and the Contemporary Irish Novel: Order, Form, and Creative Un-Doing* (2023), and *Understanding Barbara Kingsolver* (2024), as well as the editor of *Wallace Stevens in Theory* (2023). His research interests include contemporary literature and poetics, literary theory, and European film. His numerous essays on contemporary literature and literary theory have appeared in *College Literature*, *English Literary History*, *English Studies*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Modernism/Modernity*, *Poetics Today*, *Narrative*, *Style*, and *Textual Practice*.