



New Philosophy for New Media (MIT Press)

By Mark B. N. Hansen

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In *New Philosophy for New Media*, Mark Hansen defines the image in digital art in terms that go beyond the merely visual. Arguing that the "digital image" encompasses the entire process by which information is made perceivable, he places the body in a privileged position -- as the agent that filters information in order to create images. By doing so, he counters prevailing notions of technological transcendence and argues for the indispensability of the human in the digital era. Hansen examines new media art and theory in light of Henri Bergson's argument that affection and memory render perception impure -- that we select only those images precisely relevant to our singular form of embodiment. Hansen updates this argument for the digital age, arguing that we filter the information we receive to create images rather than simply receiving images as preexisting technical forms. This framing function yields what Hansen calls the "digital image." He argues that this new "embodied" status of the frame corresponds directly to the digital revolution: a digitized image is not a fixed representation of reality, but is defined by its complete flexibility and accessibility. It is not just that the interactivity of new media turns viewers into users; the image itself has become the body's process of perceiving it. To illustrate his account of how the body filters information in order to create images, Hansen focuses on new media artists who follow a "Bergsonist vocation"; through concrete engagement with the work of artists like Jeffrey Shaw, Douglas Gordon, and Bill Viola, Hansen explores the contemporary aesthetic investment in the affective, bodily basis of vision. The book includes over 70 illustrations (in both black and white and color) from the works of these and many other new media artists.

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New Philosophy for New Media (MIT Press) By Mark B. N. Hansen Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1046052 in Books
- Published on: 2006-02-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .75" w x 7.00" l, 1.40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 361 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Mark B. N. Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media* departs from much theorizing about the cognitive effects of new media to argue that the embodied experience--rather than a de-contextualized, disembodied flow of information--is the proper framework for understanding perception. His nuanced claims, infused with both cognitive theory and science, offer compelling insights into the human interaction with the digital image, but the book falls somewhat short of its title's dramatic promise.

Ultimately, Hansen's project is to update Henri Bergson's notion of the "affective body" for the 21st century. He claims that in the world of interactive new media "the 'image' has itself become a process, and, as such, has become irreducibly bound up with the activity of the body." The body acts as a filter to frame the digital image. In contrast, Hansen offers a sustained critique of Gilles Deleuze's "treatment of the movement image in which the cinematic image is purified of connection with the human body" (as described by Tim Lenoir). The book expands Hansen's vision across seven chapters that variously engage with new media art theory, virtual reality, the "digital facial image," and digital artwork. His most compelling illustration comes in the final chapter, where he demonstrates how artists Douglas Gordon and Bill Viola open "experience to the subperceptual inscription of temporal shifts (machine time)." Here, drawing on work of neuroscience, he shows that art actually engages the body and expands perception of the interstices between what human normally experience as "now."

While, like many contemporary works of theory, Hansen sometimes falls into opaque passages of academic, postmodern jargon, he tries to ground his theorizing in a concrete language that he lays out early on (with definitions of such terms as "embodiment" made explicit in relation to the neuroscience). In the end, though, Hansen doesn't make entirely clear why this "new" philosophy of embodied experience is actually particular to new media. His supposition seems, rather, that new media art--interactive digital images--heighten the felt experience of perception, but this difference appears to be quantitative, rather than qualitative, relative to the experience of "old" media. In the end, then, Hansen provides a useful remedy to the abundance of "disembodied" theories of virtuality, but his book does not present a comprehensive "new philosophy" for those seeking guidance in the new media era. --Patrick O'Kelley

Review

Hansen's work makes a significant shift by approaching new media through affect and sensation, rather than techniques, forms or aesthetics. His thesis reintroduces reception in a sophisticated way, countering posthuman 'machinism' with a productive notion of the human engaged in an entangled, affective co-evolution with technology. This is an important and invigorating reorientation.

(Mitchell Whitelaw, Lecturer in New Media, University of Canberra)

New Philosophy for New Media is a major contribution to the question of digital media and art. Unlike too many other writers on the subject, Hansen is able to approach his topic in relation to the most profound efforts of the philosophical tradition and his highly original take on the question is one that recognizes the media specificity of the digital in its novelty while insisting on the continuing importance of the body in the practice of new media art. The book pursues its thesis of the place of the human in face of digitized information in a rigorous, systematic manner.

(Mark Poster, University of California, Irvine)

Brilliant and exciting work.... Obligatory reading for anybody interested in the philosophy of technology and its phenomenological dimension, as well as those interested in new media and digital aesthetics. Hansen is an engaging, lucid, and provocative writer.

(Andrés Vaccari *Metapsychology*)

New Philosophy for New Media brilliantly theorizes the co-evolution of the human body and the digital technosphere through the radical aesthetic interface provided by new media artworks themselves. Hansen offers a strong, subtle, and ultimately exciting argument that our bodies, brought into contact with the digital in these new ways, *experience* the virtual. He also vividly testifies to these new experiences of perception and embodiment that emerge in the process: the affects of bewilderment and vertigo, disorientation and irrelevance.

(Kathleen Woodward, Director, Simpson Center for the Humanities, and Professor of English, University of Washington)

From the Inside Flap

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