



At the Edges of Vision

A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship

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Histories of Vision



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In *At the Edges of Vision*, Renée van de Vall re-examines the aesthetics of spectatorship in terms of new-media art and visual culture. The aesthetic experience of visual art has traditionally been described in terms of the distanced contemplation and critical interpretation of the work's form and representational content. Recent developments in installation, video and computer art have foregrounded the bodily and affective engagement of the spectator and, in retrospect, throw into question the model of spectatorial distance for more traditional art forms as well. But what does this development entail for art's potential for reflective, imaginative and experiential depth? Is art still capable of providing a critical counterpoint to the ubiquitous presence of sensational, yet short-lived media imagery when it speaks to the senses rather than to the mind?

In a thorough examination of examples from painting, film, installation art and interactive video, and computer art, Van de Vall argues for a tactile and affective conception of reflection, linking philosophy and art. Looking at a Rembrandt self-portrait and navigating through an internet art work have in common that both types of work rely on a playful, rhythmically structured, sensuous and embodied reflexivity for the articulation of meaning. This sensuous dimension of playful reflexivity is just as important in philosophical thought, however, as the transcendental condition for genuine, open-ended reflection.

Drawing on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Lyotard and Deleuze on the one hand and on new-media theory on the other, Van de Vall develops a performative phenomenology of aesthetic reflection, visibility and visual art, in order to rethink art's ethical and political relevance in present-day digital-media culture.

Contents

Introduction; Space without hiding places: Merleau-Ponty's discussion of linear perspective; Touching the face: the ethical dimension of visibility between Levinas and a Rembrandt self-portrait; Between battlefield and play: on art and aesthetics in visual culture; Criticism from within: on reflection and aesthetic feeling; The mediation of passibility: art and interactive spectatorship; Bibliography; Index.

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