# [Review] Catherine Fowler, Claire Perkins & Andrea Rassell (2017) Dead Time

Article  (Accepted Version)

**Review of *Dead Time* by Catherine Fowler, Claire Perkins and Andrea Rassell**

*Dead Time* offers a fascinating vision of eye-tracking methods 'at work' (to echo the authors' interest in the labour of spectatorship). Fowler, Perkins and Rassell state that their approach in this audio-visual piece is more 'aesthetic than analytical'; instead of giving us data, the work is rich with resonance, suggestion, and possibility. The experience of viewing it dovetails beautifully with the kinds of aesthetic experiences that might be had when watching the video-essay's visual object, *The Passenger*. The authors' triangulation of the video-essay format, eye-tracking data, and slow cinema is thus inspired, and very much in evidence in *Dead Time* itself.

A particularly valuable aspect of this video-essay is that it gives us a very rare glimpse into the possibilities of seeing *in time*, through the duration of the viewing process, viewing vision as it occurs. We can roughly oppose this to much of the activity of film studies, which is naturally concerned with the work of interpretation conducted retrospectively, yet which often downplays the fact that the process of coming to interpretation is a fluid, temporal activity. This video shows us how seeing unfolds through duration, but also how it 'takes place', quite literally, in pointing to the locations of visual attention on the screen.

Thus, Fowler, Perkins and Rassell claim that 'it was "seeing" rather than "knowing" that we wanted to explore.' At the same time, video-essay seems to visualise not just 'seeing' but also a *desire* to know, interpret, understand, and make meaning (or at least, this is an interpretation that the video-essay seems to open itself up to) even if that desire is thwarted. The red dots often visualise, as they move across the screen, a particular desire or search for meaning. We can see this in the concentration of the red in the areas occupied by human figures on screen, which draw our attention through movement, but also through their narrative functions. The moments where these particular spectators are simply dwelling on the textures of the wooden and stone surfaces or the colours of the of sky are also significant, but quite brief by comparison.

We can also see this desire for meaning in other moments, for example, early in the third segment, when the character's body is decapitated by the frame, and the red dot pulses in that corner as though visualising a spectator's attempt to see his face (which is so often the marker of identity, the uncertainty of identity of course being something that *The Passenger* explores) beyond the frame. The final segment provides a further example in relation to sound: after remaining fairly concentrated on two characters speaking (who we can't hear), the introduction of an off-screen dialogue by unseen characters suddenly mobilises the red dots, which bounce randomly as the viewer seems to search for the sound's source. The authors have chosen an excellent sequence through which to explore the viewer's relationship to the frame, and the way in which it is paradoxically both permeable (we can 'sense' what is beyond the frame) and resistant.

*Dead Time* opens up many possibilities for further research; specifically, it would be intriguing to attempt to capture the differences between first and further viewings: what happens to our attention when we revisit such films? Does our attention shift perhaps further away from narrative figures to textures and surfaces?

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