

Edited by Laura Isabel Serna

# BOOK REVIEWS

- 
- 164     **Queer Times, Black Futures**  
by Kara Keeling  
Reviewed by Courtney R. Baker
- 
- 168     **Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons**  
by Hannah Frank  
Reviewed by Dan Bashara
- 
- 173     **Cartoon Vision: UPA Animation and Postwar Aesthetics**  
by Dan Bashara  
Reviewed by Ryan Pierson
- 
- 179     **Latin American Film Industries**  
by Tamara L. Falicov  
Reviewed by Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez
- 
- 182     **Media in Mind**  
by Daniel Reynolds  
Reviewed by Rob van der Blik

Reviewed by Courtney R. Baker

## *Queer Times, Black Futures*

by Kara Keeling

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2019. 288 pages.

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*Queer Times, Black Futures* examines and models the “‘freedom dreams’ that issue from Afrofuturist imaginings . . . so that those of us living today . . . can consider what in those freedom dreams might survive us and our limited perceptions.”<sup>1</sup> The book’s prose and logic strive toward the poetic, in the senses intended by both Karl Marx and Audre Lorde, as “poetry has the capacity to deterritorialize language, making uncommon, queer sense available to thought.”<sup>2</sup>

Kara Keeling’s effort echoes Lorde’s excavation of deep-earth Black wisdom that, as the late poet writes, becomes a “jewel in . . . open light” and that might service what historian Robin Kelley has termed *freedom dreams*—“the dream of a new world” entertained and envisioned by activists and artists that might form the “catalyst for . . . political engagement” in our time.<sup>3</sup> Keeling enhances Kelley’s principle by considering Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s trope of the “Black Swan event,” which is “characterized by ‘a combination of low predictability and large impact’” and manifests as reliance upon what is known rather than the inevitable eruptions of the unknown.<sup>4</sup> Keeling leverages Taleb’s principle to explain how the long history of revolutions can still be narrated as surprises within the colonial mindset. The supposedly unforeseen Black freedom dreams that gain from disorder have appeared as, variously, the Haitian Revolution (which “proved that Black belonging, anchored in love of freedom and of Black people, could be an antifragile revolutionary force”) and in “Black culture, as technē,” characterized by “mobility, dispersion, disruptive

1 Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), xiv.

2 Keeling, xii.

3 Audre Lorde, “Coal,” in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 6; and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 3.

4 Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 2007), as quoted in Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 20.

potential, and endurance.<sup>55</sup> Freedom dreams are also, as Keeling demonstrates in her book, expressed in such layered texts as Grace Jones's video for "Corporate Cannibal" as well as C. L. R. James's 1953 study *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*.<sup>6</sup>

This orientation toward a more just future to come—one that "requires (re)creation and imagination"—is recognized as "what Frantz Fanon referred to as a 'real leap.'"<sup>7</sup> Keeling's interest in these potentialities, "(re)turns," and "the (im)possible" is constructed as anticapital; the resources she identifies are for the enactment of a sustainable, ethical world that is not just divested from but radically un-invested in property, accumulation, and the injustices that follow investment in those capitalist, settler-colonial fictions.<sup>8</sup> If poetry resists the lure of rendering the felt into material, so too does it effectively transmit queer dreams of a radical future because "[p]oetry is a way of entering the unknown and carrying back the impossible."<sup>9</sup>

Keeling's book resonates with Stephen Best's 2018 monograph, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*, in their shared concern about the character of Black study and the utopianism of queer thought.<sup>10</sup> But whereas Best is invested in critiquing the Black history-bound subject of Afropessimism and the queer utopian subject who is alienated from an insistence upon a future bound up with narratives of reproduction, Keeling's approach seems much more expansive in its characterization of Black and queer radicalism. That is, Keeling targets not those subject to time and space but the subjectivizing functions of temporality and spatiality. Black and queer ontologies are less recognizable sites of resistance in *Queer Times, Black Futures* than they are recurring surprises and disruptions of social orders. These radical breaks are what Keeling terms, after Marx, "poetry from the future."<sup>11</sup> However, she enhances that phrase with the poetic theory of Lorde, whose injunction that "poetry is not a luxury" imbues functionalist Marxism with the Black-femme-wit of poetry's capacity to combat "the estrangement of the senses by Capital."<sup>12</sup> As Keeling explains, "'poetry from the future' interrupts the habitual formation of bodies, and it serves as an index of a time to come when today exists potently, even if not (yet) effectively, but escapes us, will find its time."<sup>13</sup> This gesture deprivileges the present as well as the subject of the present, preferring "what Octavia Butler's character Lauren Olamina from her novel *Parable of the Sower* calls 'the only lasting truth': change."<sup>14</sup>

*Queer Times, Black Futures* draws upon various narratives of past, present, and future located across media forms, particularly the short story, jazz, cinema, philosophy, and speculative finance. Nineteenth-century white English and white American literature rub up against Black American sonic forms. Multinational corporate speculative scenarios are held in provocative conflict with indigenous logics that

5 Keeling, 22, 161, 161.

6 C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1953).

7 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, x; and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 229.

8 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, xiv.

9 Keeling, xii.

10 Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

11 Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 81–82.

12 Keeling, xii.

13 Keeling, 83.

14 Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Warner Books, 1993), 3; and Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, 16–17.

upend the inevitability of the settler colonial project. Through it all, a Black swan is vaguely visible, threatening to expose the fragility of world systems based on practices of containment and resource extraction, like a Dickensian Ghost of Christmas Future or Sun Ra's intergalactic sonic prophet. *Queer Times, Black Futures* explores the philosophical principle of the "'Black Swan' event"—that which "appears to be a random, unpredictable, outlier," otherwise called the unthinkable—through and against another of Taleb's books, *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*.<sup>15</sup> In so doing, it offers that what is radical, unpredictable, and capable of surviving the disasters of late capitalism and environmental catastrophe is identifiable (though not knowable) as Black and queer thought. The queer utopian visions speculatively and nostalgically mapped by José Esteban Muñoz and Samuel Delany, respectively, but also, as Keeling reveals, by Herman Melville's *Bartleby* recommend other networks of just relationality.<sup>16</sup>

The book begins with a preface and introduction, both of which indicate Keeling's investment in situating the book's utterance in a present informed but not determined by history, a present poised to become a number of unimaginable futures. The first of these sections explains the book's investments in the future, poetry, queerness, and Blackness. The introduction abruptly launches its reader into a speculative moment, one orchestrated and circulated by the oil company Shell International. Here we are introduced to the "now" of speculation via a capitalist corporation that is financially if not ethically invested not only in surviving the future but in profiting from it. Keeling's deft exploration of the rhetoric of Shell's current speculative scenarios is situated in geopolitical time, connected to the exploits of the company's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ventures in colonialism and wars in Africa, Latin America, East Asia, and the Middle East. The Shell episode inaugurates the book's interest in "scholarly, artistic, and popular investments in the promises and pitfalls of imagination, technology, futurity, and liberation that have persisted in Euro-American culture since the beginning of the twentieth century" and the alternatives that "creative engagements with Black existence, technology, space, and time" might yield.<sup>17</sup> This long view of capitalist survivability enjoins us to interrogate other models of investments in survivability beyond the modern, Western logics of individualism, settler colonialism, and accumulation.

Echoing *Bartleby's* and others' freedom dreaming, the author of *Queer Times, Black Futures* would prefer not to have the book's contributions calculated and instrumentalized. The book holds up even as it resists holding onto the potentialities endemic to radical queerness and the always unexpectedness of Blackness. It disarticulates the contemplation of futures from present pragmatism, in part by intermittently visiting Melville's *Bartleby* in his hold—a queer loophole of retreat from the functionalism of colonialist, capitalist accumulation—and voyaging into sonic Black otherworlds (e.g., the intergalactic vibrations of Sun Ra and the Eastern-facing sounds of Alice Coltrane). Its deterritorialized futurist freedom dreams sit alongside *Bartleby* and many other figures and images that are unaccountable to history: queer

15 Keeling, 23; Nassim Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012).

16 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); and Herman Melville, *Bartleby and Benito Cereno* (New York: Dover, 1990). Keeling states that "*Queer Times, Black Futures* turns to Melville's story to offer a series of provocations about power, language, space, time, and resistance." See Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures*, xiv.

17 Keeling, 4.

cinematic figures including “M—” of the documentary *The Aggressives* (Eric Daniel Peddle, 2005), who disappears victoriously from a screen and a narrative that would fix and de-queer her (chapter 2); the chimerical Black flesh in the digital cinemas of John Akomfrah and Arthur Jafa (chapter 3); Grace Jones, whose song and video “Corporate Cannibal” frustrate presumed networks of consumer and consumed (chapter 4); and worldly Black women like Coltrane as well as Asha of the Kenyan science fiction film *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu, 2009) (chapter 5).

Even in introducing her work, the author resists the colonizing determinism of speculative futures that characterize the temporalities of capitalist accumulation. The book promises and guarantees no such thing as such claims to possess knowledge are ideologically and structurally opposed to the anti-accumulative logic of knowledge being studied here. *Queer Times, Black Futures* conducts freedom dreaming with a commitment not to foreclose the dreaming of other readers and other texts. This book is not the final word, which is its strength, rendering its contingencies more (not less) relevant as the world evolves in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Call the author “Keeling” (as she writes, “if there is such a thing”), Dear Reader, and pursue the pursuit into the unforeseeable abyss, for the book “does not pretend to know where the insights it generates might lead.”<sup>18</sup>

How does one write a review of a work that rejects the tenets of capital accrual (including the accumulation of intellectual and cultural capital)? How does one recommend a work when the outcome of that work is intentionally stymied and denied, enacting its own politics of refusal to be put to work? How might one write of the value of (a) work without limiting the possibilities of that work’s influence and importance for a future that is unknowable even as it is currently unfolding and for a past the value of which has not been and can never be fully accounted for? These generative frustrations are at the heart of *Queer Times, Black Futures*—an incredible, (im)possible work that is invested in worlds to come with the necessary caveat that its readers divest from a critical project that is measured in immediate returns.

**Courtney R. Baker** an Associate Professor in the department of English at University of California, Riverside. Her book, *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (University of Illinois Press, 2015). Her current project entails a formalist analysis of twenty-first century cinematic depictions of Black historical subjects.

18 Keeling, xv, xvi.

Reviewed by Dan Bashara

# *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons*

by Hannah Frank

Edited by Daniel Morgan.

University of California Press.

2019. 256 pages.

\$34.95 paper; also available in e-book.

It is a rare thrill to be surprised by a work of criticism. In animation studies, we have many ways of conceptualizing the medium at its center. Animation is a branch of cinema, or, in the digital age, maybe cinema is a subset of animation. It is drawn cinema, or it is moving graphic design. It is an outgrowth of the trick film or perhaps of the comic strip or else of the optical toy. Or it is a *sui generis* art form that takes advantage of whatever technologies are around it at any given time. We are used to animation's porous boundaries and hybrid status, and we have a large body of scholarship grappling with what it is and how to talk about it. Hannah Frank's *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons* is an intervention in this discussion, and it is worth being blunt: I have never seen animation talked about in this way before. It is field-defining, mind-expanding scholarship, and it is a joyous surprise.

Frank's book is more than a surprise, however; it is *about* surprise. The question that echoes throughout this book—"Did I just see that?"—carries the ultimate lesson of this impressive and meticulously researched study.<sup>1</sup> Frank examines animated films of the Golden Age (1920–1960) frame by frame, sometimes even poring over individual cels stacked atop one another to compose a frame. In so doing, she illuminates what hides unseen within the studio cartoons that unraveled in front of their audiences at twenty-four frames per second: smudges and creases, mistakes and jokes, traces of fatigue and artistic intervention. In treating the familiar seven-minute ani-

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons*, ed. Daniel Morgan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 57.

mated short as a collection of thousands of photographs of hand-painted art, Frank opens a space to consider the role of human fallibility, private whimsy, and unrecognized labor in the industrialized realm of Golden Age studio animation. Labor is the most important of these; one of the book's main goals is to recuperate the artistry of Hollywood's unnamed inkers, painters, and camera operators and to reveal the centrality of their labor to the medium. When viewing animation frame by frame, we find surprise traces of these artists, including sometimes their literal fingerprints; for Frank, these traces are "an index of their presence."<sup>2</sup>

There is a second kind of labor at issue in this way of thinking about animation: our own, as the audience. If this method of viewing animation is in part an ethical responsibility, bearing witness to the hourly or daily toil of faceless employees, it is also an aesthetic necessity. To fully understand cartoons, Frank argues, one must *work*, as fair recompense for the painstaking, finger-breaking work of the artists who created them. This reciprocity is evident in the book's introduction, "Looking at Labor," and conclusion, "The Labor of Looking." (Elsewhere, there is a section heading that reads simply "Eyestrain.") However, central to the book's premise is that this work is fun. As Frank notes, looking for the labor in animation "can mobilize an inquisitive gaze that plays with and within the image. Rather than worry that we cannot ever know what it is that we are looking at, we delight in the masquerade. Forensic investigation becomes a game."<sup>3</sup> This spirit of play suffuses the book, balancing the towering demands of Frank's research—the time, the focus, and, yes, the eyestrain—with the thrill of discovery that such research offers.

This joining of work and play both celebrates the artistic labor of below-the-line cartoon workers and constitutes the book's most exciting paradox. Frank ruthlessly demystifies the animation apparatus. One description reads, "there is not a single mouse, nor is there a cat, a chair, a mirror, or a door. There is only a stationary camera of prescribed focal length, directed downward at a table, on which is placed a stack of paintings."<sup>4</sup> This seemingly clinical approach is a feature of Frank's argument, not a bug: "[T]o see the labor of photography is to puncture the phantasmagoric spell of animated cartoons."<sup>5</sup> However, her next move is what makes this book so thrilling because Frank's demystification somehow reinvests animation with another kind of magic. She insists that as we remove cartoons from their imaginary worlds and ground them in the prosaic, workaday world of industry, their component pieces become charged with life: with the frustrations, boredom, and dreams of the anonymous people who created them. Far from being a simple record of a thing that once was, the photograph becomes "an object in which knowledge hides, an object out of which knowledge must be startled."<sup>6</sup> This startled object, this living thing, is the key to Frank's view of the animated frame and the boundless world onto which it opens.

In chapter 1, Frank begins to teach us how to, in her words, look at this world. Exploring the animated film as an indexical document, she willfully takes its constituent frames out of order to see how they resonate with one another, a method undergirded by Sergei Eisenstein's theories of cinematic montage. For Frank, this

2 Frank, 53.

3 Frank, 47.

4 Frank, 146.

5 Frank, 67.

6 Frank, 16.

means that “[t]he single frame is viewed in isolation, in conjunction with frames that do not precede or follow it, and is juxtaposed with other instances of photographic reproduction wholly distinct from animation.”<sup>7</sup> This method immediately bears fruit as Frank discovers, for example, images of newspapers copied from cartoon to cartoon, some of which bear startling traces of the world from which they were taken. Echoing Walter Benjamin, she finds “the tiniest authentic fragment[s] of daily life” hovering in the periphery of the cartoon image.<sup>8</sup> Stopping the film and exploring the single frame turns the cartoon into an unexpected archive. Ultimately, Frank proposes a new way of seeing the cartoon: “I thus inaugurate a study of the single frame, the single document, in which the tiniest of details—a brushstroke, a shadow, an errant speck of dust—is freighted with historical and, ultimately, political weight.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 2 juggles the epistemological questions that emerge from this mode of looking, wondering “what happens if one were actually to *watch* an animated cartoon as a photographic record of graphic images.”<sup>10</sup> This strategy requires attending to photography’s materiality, particularly when it comes to mistakes in the image: a backwards cel, a fingerprint on the lens, or dust in the air between. Most importantly, it means leaving behind the cartoon’s fictional world and inhabiting the fuzzy netherworld between fantasy and reality. Such an orientation can lead to historiographic difficulties; upon finding a black spot in one frame of a Mickey Mouse cartoon, Frank muses, “[I]s what I am seeing on the cel, on the camera lens, in or in front of the projector, on the film emulsion, a digital artifact, on the screen?”<sup>11</sup> There is no answer, at least to the question of what happened. Consequently, the question becomes an aesthetic one: the spot just happens to be the same size and shape as Mickey’s ears, and what might we do with that graphic echo and the new abstract pattern it introduces into the image? Elsewhere, paint applied unevenly from cel to cel causes a spot of color to wander around Snow White’s dress, and an improperly dusted cel depicting Mickey beset by gnats adds a second “swarm” to the first.<sup>12</sup> Frank’s analysis of these moments involves a delightfully perverse use of André Bazin’s theory of photographic realism, collapsing the material cel and the imaginary cartoon into one world. Like it or not, Frank argues, this is the cartoon you’re watching, mistakes and all.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus more on labor, turning the previous chapters’ theoretical insights to an explicitly political end. Chapter 3 is a celebration of unseen laborers, the painters and inkers whose work was considered “noncreative.”<sup>13</sup> Here Frank zeroes in on frames of abstraction—explosions, snowstorms, blurs of rapid movement—and spotlights the women who created them. Indeed, Frank is abundantly clear that her analysis aims to recuperate the labor of women who worked and who were not recognized for it: “The fact remains that these women were separated from the creative process, even as what they produced was intrinsic to the final product. It is *their* work that fetches high prices at special auctions. It is the traces of

7 Frank, 15.

8 Frank, 39.

9 Frank, 15.

10 Frank, 46.

11 Frank, 47.

12 Frank, 57, 63, respectively.

13 Frank, 79–80.

their hands that we see on-screen.”<sup>14</sup> By highlighting the undeniably creative output of female inkers and painters—and they were almost always female in the studio system—Frank reveals the political import of looking at cartoons frame by frame as photographs of paintings. Within the cartoon narrative, that frame of exquisite blue abstraction is merely water, and watching it whiz by at projection speed, you’ll barely notice it anyway. But if you stop the film, you’ll see a woman at work.

Chapter 4 offers a sustained history of xerography in animation, especially as used by Disney for *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Wolfgang Reitherman, Hamilton Luske, and Clyde Geronimi, 1961). The chapter is also a virtuosic gathering of the book’s various threads, as labor history, animation theory, and formal stylistic analysis sing together in profound harmony. The introduction of xerography promised to preserve the artist’s handiwork by copying it directly to the cel rather than having it inked by a third party. But how could mechanical reproduction be a more honest guarantor of the trace of the artist than manual reproduction? And what would such a conceptualization of art mean for the female inkers whose role it was to trace over the male artists’ pencil drawings, especially as xerography eliminated their jobs? What follows is an intricate and elegant theory of the animated line. Caught somewhere between image and text, between original and copy, and between trace of the artist and stamp of the machine, the line emerges from Frank’s exploration as a complex and contradictory force that scrambles our notion of what it means to draw a picture.

One cannot walk away from these chapters thinking about cartoons in the same way as before. Frank’s methodology, voraciously interdisciplinary, reveals the dense web of cultural and historical relations in which every cartoon—no, every *frame* of every cartoon—is caught. Her argument draws, in part, from sources one might expect: from labor history, film theory, and photography theory, from Eisenstein and Benjamin and Bazin. But what could literary history and microfiche, Emily Dickinson and Fernando Pessoa and Google’s book scanning project, possibly have to say about cartoons? A whole lot, it turns out. Frank explains in her first chapter that we must view cartoons as montage rather than as sequential cinema, and she enacts that method in the very explanation of it. Over and over, as Frank places seemingly unrelated concepts into unexpected juxtapositions, thesis and antithesis add up to a paradigm-shifting synthesis. Ultimately, she reminds us why we do scholarship and research in the first place. She shows us that what we thought we knew intimately we did not actually know at all; she has crafted, patiently and painstakingly, a theory of surprise.

I would be remiss to not mention the circumstances of this book’s publication. *Frame by Frame* is Frank’s dissertation; she was not able to see its publication as a book before her death in 2017. Yet what we have here is not an undigested dissertation; this is a book—a formidable display of research prowess and fearless intellectual tightrope walking—written in lucid, powerful prose that bears the mark of her playful intellect. Near the end of the book, she responds to a passage by Vladimir Nabokov musing upon the history of a pencil, of which, she informs us, over one million were used to draw *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*: “But the sheep is gone, the saw is gone, the pencil is gone. We are left with only its trace, the trace of its trace, a copy of a copy of a copy, a screen grab of a digital file of a scan of a print

14 Frank, 81.

of a photograph of a palimpsest of glass, celluloid acetate, and paper—thousands of them. Where do we even begin?<sup>2215</sup> We, too, are left with Frank's trace. It is a bold and exciting foray into unexplored territory, and while it is a crushing blow to know that she will not guide us through this territory any further, Hannah Frank has shown us where to begin.

**Dan Bashara** is an instructor of media and cinema studies at DePaul University. He is the author of *Cartoon Vision: UPA Animation and Postwar Aesthetics* (University of California Press, 2019) and essays in *animation: an interdisciplinary journal* and *Up Is Down: Mid-Century Experiments in Advertising and Film at the Goldsholl Studio*.

15 Frank, 142.

Reviewed by Ryan Pierson

# *Cartoon Vision: UPA Animation and Postwar Aesthetics*

by Dan Bashara

University of California Press.

2019. 296 pages.

\$85.00 hardcover; \$34.95 paper; also available in e-book.

In a 1923 essay, critic Élie Faure argued that cinema's aesthetic and political potential lay in its status as a plastic art. Faure claimed that film did not arouse our deepest feelings through characters or plot; rather, he wrote, we are most moved by the patterns of tonality and volume that shift over time before our eyes. Faure called this quality of film "cineplastics": the expression of movement or change itself as a pictorial value.<sup>1</sup> By fixing visual movements into rhythmic shapes, cinema could offer its audience an impersonal collective spectacle. According to Faure, collective spectacles like Greek tragedy, religious ritual, and architecture—and now the cinema—have the power to help a population define itself, "developing in the crowd the sense of confidence, harmony, [and] cohesion."<sup>2</sup>

For modernist critic Annette Michelson, Faure's essay marks an apotheosis of what she calls the "radical aspiration": a dream that the movies could bring together the possibilities of formal experimentation and social utopianism.<sup>3</sup> According to Michelson, this radical aspiration was soon quelled with the consolidation of the film industry and the advent of sync sound. Revolutionary programs for film did crop up again after World War II, but these had to be carried out in fierce defiance of industry and popular taste.<sup>4</sup> Michelson's story of cinematic modernism will be familiar to

1 Élie Faure, "The Art of Cineplastics," trans. Walter Pach, reprinted in *Screen Monographs* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970), 1:9–45.

2 Faure, 1:44.

3 Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," *Film Culture* 42 (1966): 36.

4 Michelson, 36.

film scholars. It upholds a now-standard modernist canon as running from the 1920s European avant-garde and the Soviet montage movement through the French New Wave (particularly Jean-Luc Godard) and the American avant-garde.

But what if cineplastics—not Faure’s to-the-letter definition of modeling in time but the underlying cinematic dream of using pictorial values to organize a population—didn’t really go away? What if it changed its form instead? What if the radical aspiration became *cartoony*? This is the question driving Dan Bashara’s book *Cartoon Vision: UPA Animation and Postwar Aesthetics*. To be sure, linking animation to modernism is hardly a new gesture. In fact, it is probably *the* characteristic gesture of animation scholarship within film studies.<sup>5</sup> Bashara’s innovation here is to connect the radical aspiration to a particular American cartoon studio, United Productions of America (UPA), under the aegis of a particular kind of modernism, the New Bauhaus school of postwar design, spearheaded by European émigrés György Kepes and László Moholy-Nagy.

UPA has a distinctive visual style. Its major traits are pretty well agreed upon by animation scholarship: simplified graphic forms, bold colors, an aggressive use of the two-dimensionality of the screen, and human characters (rather than animals). In other words, UPA cartoons liberally mix together elements of abstraction and representation. This mixture is easy to read as a kind of light formalism or kitsch. Bashara insists, though, that UPA’s style is not reducible to a compromise between high modernist technique and mainstream sensibility. Rather, the principles that UPA took from the world of Kepes and Moholy-Nagy constitute their own specific modernist program, with its own aesthetic and political goals.

The chief goal of the Kepes and Moholy-Nagy program was to train citizens in a new way of seeing, one that was more in keeping with the modern world.<sup>6</sup> The task of the artist was to streamline a viewer’s sense of vision by offering images that reduced forms to their essential qualities and reduced spaces to simple structures. UPA, Bashara argues, was as much an active participant in this modernist project as Charles and Ray Eames, Paul Rand, and other towering figures of postwar American design.

Scholars have long noted that UPA stylized its cartoons in a design-like way, but no one before Bashara has clarified UPA’s relationship to postwar design with such depth or specificity. Crucial here is that Bashara takes figures in design culture, instead of the work of other animation studios, as his primary reference points. Consequently, about UPA, he writes mainly as a visual studies scholar rather than an animation historian. In so doing, he avoids the risk of reducing the UPA style to a checklist of easily identifiable features. To summarily list the major visual features of UPA cartoons—flatness, bold colors, human characters—does not really help us perform close formal analysis. Bashara is able to conduct such close analysis admirably by borrowing methods of description from design and

5 For examples, see Kristin Thompson, “Implications of the Cel Animation Technique,” in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 106–120; Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2002); Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002); J. P. Telotte, *Animating Space: From Mickey to WALL-E* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010); Hannah Frank, *Frame by Frame: A Materialist Aesthetics of Animated Cartoons*, ed. Daniel Morgan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); and Ryan Pierson, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

6 Dan Bashara, *Cartoon Vision: UPA Animation and Postwar Aesthetics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 12–15.

architecture. This approach even enables Bashara to clear up some critical misconceptions about the UPA style. For example, contrary to popular belief, the visuals of UPA films are not exactly “flat.” While the films do use flat shapes and unmodulated colors, they also often use diminishing perspective. When these qualities are used together, they create effects of startling depth—effects that we cannot account for if we call UPA cartoons “flat.”<sup>7</sup>

By taking seriously not just the visual qualities of design culture but its philosophy, Bashara is also able to avoid characterizing UPA as a simple act of resistance to Disney’s cuddly realism. This is an especially tempting move for animation scholarship. It allows us to neatly transpose a story of high modernist development from the history of painting onto the history of animation.<sup>8</sup> This characterization is partly correct, in that UPA was started by former Disney employees in the wake of the 1941 animators’ strike. But thinking of style as resistance ultimately risks dooming UPA films to irrelevance next to more canonically “radical” works by Harry Smith, Robert Breer, and Stan Brakhage. In comparison with these exemplars, any “resistance” by a cartoon studio cannot but be seen as already compromised—especially by one that made sponsored films for training and advertisement.<sup>9</sup>

The problem with that line of reasoning, of course, is that it judges one kind of modernism by the standards of another. It was never the point of midcentury design to be rebellious or autonomous. As Bashara argues, the point was to educate the public in a way of seeing that was more fully aligned with the forces of the modern world. This often meant working with those very forces: governments, advertising agencies, unions, museums, and so on. As Bashara takes pains to show, this tendency toward commissioned work was baked into UPA’s mission from the beginning. This not only was a matter of the studio paying its bills—it made only sponsored films for several years before turning to the theatrical market—but also reflected a company ethos in which the animator was seen as a kind of public servant, improving the world through visual education.<sup>10</sup> As Bashara notes, however, this philosophy does not make UPA immune to critique.<sup>11</sup> After all, a utopian project of a more fully streamlined society is, by definition, a project of social engineering. When this utopian project, originally a socialist fantasy of central planning, met with the forces of late capitalism in the United States after World War II (as it did with UPA and design culture at large), the question of complicity became even more fraught.<sup>12</sup>

Bashara arranges his material essayistically, clustering studies of films around topics, concepts, and analogies. The first chapter argues for a stylistic homology between UPA and Precisionism, a movement of American painting in the 1910s and 1920s that worked in simplified representational forms and strong colors. Chapter 2 argues for a similar homology between UPA and postwar architecture, in their shared goals of producing movement and metamorphosis in the viewer (or inhabitant)

7 Bashara, 31–33.

8 Esther Leslie makes this move in *Hollywood Flatlands*, wherein UPA’s “flatness” marks a revenge of turn-of-the-century avant-garde sensibility against Disney conservatism. See Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, 289–300.

9 The American avant-garde did dismiss basically all of midcentury animation for precisely this reason: it was not modernist enough. This assessment was key to the dismissal of animation from the study of film. See Pierson, *Figure and Force*, 152–153.

10 Bashara, *Cartoon Vision*, 3.

11 Bashara most frequently characterizes UPA’s brand of modernism as “rhetorical,” drawing from Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

12 Bashara, *Cartoon Vision*, 15–18.

by means of color and directional vectors. Chapter 3 links UPA to graphic design, arguing that communication was a problem shared by both fields and to be solved by what he calls, loosely following Freud, “condensation,” or the “transforming [of] thoughts into visual images.”<sup>13</sup>

This approach contains some risks, especially of redundancy; Bashara returns to a few key texts in every chapter, like the manifesto “Animation Learns a New Language” authored by UPA figures John Hubley and Zachary Schwartz. The reader sometimes gets a treadmill effect from this repetition, but the net gain across these three chapters is a satisfyingly wide scope of inquiry and a precise sense of the studio’s visual style. We get close studies not only of animated films but also of paintings, buildings, and book covers. Bashara takes lessons from these other works to closely describe visual movements, spaces, and symbols in cartoons. The book’s remarkable success lies in how well it leverages the former to bolster the latter. We learn how to look at things that don’t move, then use that knowledge to learn how to look at cartoons that do move. These descriptions are the most rewarding parts of the book. Bashara has considerable gifts for fine-grained analysis and a keen ear for the rhythm of a sentence.

In other words, the book seeks to train us in new ways of looking at these films (not unlike how the films themselves sought to train viewers in new ways of looking at the world). This goal comes into clearest relief in the book’s final chapter, which is not about cartoons at all. Instead, Bashara theorizes what he calls the “design gaze.”<sup>14</sup> Modeled on Martin Lefebvre’s landscape gaze, the design gaze is an aesthetic vocabulary and set of concerns that Bashara takes from the design elements of postwar visual culture (such as unmodulated colors and flat shapes) and applies to live-action American cinema of the midcentury.<sup>15</sup> This strategy allows for a new way to see cinematic images more generally. What Bashara ends up detailing is closest to *mise-en-scène*, but the qualities of a shot take on a different tenor when they are viewed as components of a designed image (rather than as things placed before an upright camera). Thus, Bashara describes instances from other categories of postwar film—musicals, American avant-garde cinema, and film noir—as if they were UPA cartoons. He notes how musical numbers from *The Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953) and *Singin’ in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) compress three-dimensional space into two-dimensional color fields.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, he writes that even avant-garde films like Pat O’Neill’s *7362* (1965–1967) and Shirley Clarke’s *Bridges-Goround* (1958) occupy a middle ground between representation and abstraction.<sup>17</sup> Most daringly, he claims that the deep shadows and silhouetted figures in films like *D.O.A.* (Rudolph Maté, 1949) participate in visual culture’s broader logic of dematerialization, turning bodies into streaks of shadow and shafts of light.<sup>18</sup> These new descriptions, Bashara argues, allow us to see midcentury film as being in conversation with the ubiquitous culture of “good design” and its imperatives of rhetorical modernism.

13 Bashara, 122.

14 Bashara, 168–175.

15 Martin Lefebvre, “Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema,” in *Landscape and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6–18.

16 Bashara, *Cartoon Vision*, 175–189.

17 Bashara, 192–196.

18 Bashara, 196–206.

How convincing will the reader find the design gaze as an analytic tool? This will depend on how compelling the reader finds the descriptions that result from its application and how fertile the reader finds the attendant connections from film to design culture. In my case, I found the descriptions thinner and less satisfying once the book moved to live-action film. After being so commandingly present in the previous chapters, Bashara's specificity in detailing what our eyes do when faced with particular movements or images starts to recede here. For example, he never spells out what happens to Gene Kelly's body when it dances before a field of color beyond noting its "contrast with flat backgrounds."<sup>19</sup> After the earlier descriptions in the book, which are revelatory precisely because they do not settle for a checklist of broadly "modern" characteristics, observations like this feel unfinished. As for the issue of the films' connections to design culture, I found myself wondering how I was supposed to take the notion that the visual style of film noir is inflected by the culture of good design. If postwar design thinking, as Bashara argues, is so fervently utopian, with its desire to simplify the human sensorium and make the world into a frictionless surface that is free of contingency, what happens when it is placed in films that are so riven with nonsensical dream logics, capricious characters, and fatalism? That I was even led to ask this question is promising. Putting such seemingly opposed sensibilities together, as Bashara does, is the beginning of a fertile account. But it is only a beginning, and we are not given much hint as to how the rest of the story might go.

Yet the underlying thrust of Bashara's gambit with the design gaze, and with the book more generally, pays off handsomely. With cinema's digital turn, film scholarship began to offer a flurry of theoretical speculation on the new nature of the moving image, and much of it was some variation on the question, *Is digital cinema more like analog photography or animation?* Missing from all this theory were sustained accounts of what "animation" looked like—especially different kinds of animation.<sup>20</sup> In keeping with much of the best recent work on animation, Bashara's turn to design culture offers a way out of this problem of overgeneralization.<sup>21</sup> He makes no strong ontological claims about the animated image. Instead, he offers with deceptive humility one sustained way of looking at a particular iteration of it. In the process, he points out the limitations of the concerns and analytic procedures that film studies has inherited as a discipline, mostly from literature and theater. What would film scholarship look like—what would it look *for*—if it kept design in mind?<sup>22</sup>

Bashara's work confirms how appropriate it is that Faure made animation a crucial part of cineplastics in 1923. Faure imagined a future of film in which the actor has disappeared from the screen altogether, to be replaced by an art of moving

19 Bashara, 188.

20 For examples, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," *differences* 18, no. 1 (May 2007): 128–152; D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

21 For examples, see Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); and Frank, *Frame by Frame*.

22 Bashara's book forms part of an emerging trend in scholarship that is interested in this question. See Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity: Avant-Garde—Advertising—Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); and Julie A. Turnock, *Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Not coincidentally, these other works also engage with animation in a sustained way.

shapes and tonalities; hope for such a future, he writes, can be found in the technique of the animated cartoon.<sup>23</sup> Inasmuch as Bashara's work makes clear the debts of midcentury animation to the New Bauhaus school, it also hints that the intertwining histories of design and film, in their mutual desire to make a world with all the artificial perfection of an image, run much deeper. They are there, waiting to be written.

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23 Faure, "Art of Cineplastics," 1:42.

Reviewed by Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez

## *Latin American Film Industries*

by **Tamara L. Falicov**

British Film Institute.

2019. 208 pages.

\$94.00 hardcover; \$31.95 paper; also available in e-book.

In terms of sheer output, Latin American cinema in the twenty-first century has surpassed the previous record set in the 1940s and 1950s, during the so-called Golden Age of cinema in Mexico and Argentina. In terms of reception, contemporary Latin American cinema is at least on par with the kind of critical acclaim enjoyed by the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. How has this unprecedented convergence of sustained high output and critical acclaim been possible? In this long-awaited volume, Tamara L. Falicov argues that a key factor has been the emergence and growth of various public-private partnerships with enough flexibility to adjust rapidly to ever-changing conditions. The book's central thesis is that in the twenty-first century, state and private initiatives are so intertwined that to separate the two would be a "false dichotomy, as it is often state legislation that promotes and incentivizes the private sector into participating in film production."<sup>1</sup> This has been studied before at the national level, and to a lesser extent at the transnational level, but Falicov's book is the first to provide ample and detailed evidence that state and private partnerships play a major role in not just film production but also exhibition and distribution.

*Latin American Film Industries* is the first book of its kind to be published since 1984, when Jorge Schnitman published *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development*.<sup>2</sup> Just as Schnitman's book summarized much of what we knew about Latin American film industries during the so-called Golden Age of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as during the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s,

1 Tamara L. Falicov, *Latin American Film Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2019), 65.

2 Jorge Schnitman, *Film Industries in Latin America: Dependency and Development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984).

Falicov's book summarizes much of what we know about Latin American film industries in the twenty-first century. Yet unlike Schnitman, who clearly privileges strong state intervention as the best way to break with what he saw as Latin American cinema's dependency on capitalist models of production and representation, Falicov avoids privileging any one mode of production, distribution, exhibition, or legislation over others. Instead, she describes a wide range of real-world interactions between private and public sectors in a number of national industries over the past two decades, leaving it up to the readers to make their own judgments based on the vast amount of information provided in five areas: state funding; private funding; distribution networks; the role of exhibitors; and the impact of legislation, screen quotas, and piracy on all of the above. She dedicates one chapter to each of these areas, framing them with an introduction plus a first chapter on the history of film studios on one end and with a conclusion that summarizes the book's main arguments on the other.

In chapter 2, "State Film Funding," Falicov notes that "in the case of most Latin American film industries (with the exception of Mexico), the state remains the main purveyor of essential funding and support for filmmakers in their respective countries to produce cinema and circulate it nationally and globally."<sup>3</sup> Much of the chapter is devoted to what she calls "film institutes," state agencies whose role varies widely by country but nevertheless share an overarching goal to develop, protect, and promote national cinema at home and abroad; one example is through the highly successful Program Ibermedia.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Brazil, Falicov traces the country's long experience with said institutes, including the National Institute for Educational Cinema (INCE), the National Film Institute (INC), the Brazilian Film Enterprise (EMRAFILME), and the National Film Agency (ANCINE). In the case of Mexico, she briefly discusses the Department of Radio, Television and Cinema (RTC) and the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) as well as a number of tax incentives. Finally, for Argentina, Falicov discusses the National Film Institute (INC, later the National Institute for Cinema and Audiovisual Arts, or INCAA) and the city-supported Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival (BAFICI). Unlike in the twentieth century, when these institutes focused primarily on increasing production of films without much attention to exhibition and distribution, in the twenty-first century, the vision of these institutes has shifted to one in which production, distribution, and exhibition strategies are considered from the very beginning of a film's project time line and always with an eye on both national and transnational markets.

Chapter 3 addresses the increased role of private capital in co-productions, as state financing keeps dwindling because of ideological shifts or economic decline. Many governments, Falicov notes, address lack of state funds for filmmaking by passing industry-friendly film legislation that promotes state-private partnerships. She briefly discusses the case of Brazil's Globo Filmes but also co-productions made in local languages with transnational media conglomerates; state-private partnerships like those used by the Colombian production company 64-A Films; private television financing of the kind supported by Spain's Telefónica; financing by private equity firms from the United States, Europe, and Latin America; and creative financing such as crowdfunding and even auctions. The chapter includes three case studies

3 Falicov, *Latin American Film Industries*, 34.

4 Falicov, 39.

of films co-produced under different kinds of public-private partnerships, yet the relationship between modes of production and modes of representation is never developed, a missed opportunity here as elsewhere in the book.

The fourth chapter begins by acknowledging and providing evidence for the claim that “the United States’ distribution companies, owned by the major studios, still dominate the entire region. The smaller the national film industry, the larger the portion of the distribution ‘pie’ taken by the US majors.”<sup>5</sup> Concretely, US multinationals buy distribution rights to the more profitable films “with appealing stars, bigger budgets and ‘name’ directors,”<sup>6</sup> whereas national distributors, for the most part, pick up less profitable films like comedies with limited (because national) appeal. The chapter also covers windowing platforms such as home video, DVDs, over the top (OTT) media services, and video on demand (VOD) platforms; the statist model used to distribute films in Cuba; pan-Latin American distribution networks such as the privately funded LARED and the publicly funded Retina Latina; independent film distributors like Colombia’s Cineplex; and companies that distribute Latin American films in the United States (Cinema Tropical, the Global Film Initiative, and PRAGDA’s Spanish Film Club). The chapter includes two case studies that exemplify how co-production agreements and the use of transnational film stars have been successfully leveraged to achieve better international distribution, clearly the Achilles’ heel of Latin American film industries.

Chapter 5 covers a range of exhibition models with very different strategies and market penetration. Falicov begins with the recent phenomenon of multiplex expansion in Latin America, led by Cinépolis but also practiced by national firms like Cinemex and Cine Colombia and by transnational firms like Cinemark. At least two factors account for the exponential growth of multiplexes in the region. The first is the development of low-cost digital technologies that made it possible for exhibitors to turn from analog to digital with relative ease. The second is a strategy that Juan Llamas-Rodríguez, in a recent essay in this journal, theorized as the experience modular cosmopolitanism: “a privileged form of global belonging that is transposed around the world through a set of standard technologies and practices.”<sup>7</sup> Moving on to Espacios INCAA, a state-owned theater chain run by the Argentine Film Institute, Falicov details its beginnings in the mid-1990s, “when the INCAA invested in a few urban movie theaters to create a dedicated space for Argentine cinema.” She concludes that as of 2015, the INCAA runs fifty-five theaters throughout the country, with more than 18,000 seats, ninety film festivals, mobile cinemas, and film competitions.<sup>8</sup> Other exhibition models she enumerates include a similar initiative in Brazil, where the city of Rio de Janeiro built a state-of-the-art theater in a favela and remodeled a 1950s movie theater in a middle-class neighborhood; mobile cinema initiatives in Cuba, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico; and film festivals that sometimes include screenings in prisons and public parks. Exhibition, it is clear, also runs the gamut of public-private partnerships.

Chapter 6, “Film Legislation, Screen Quotas and Piracy,” closes the study by addressing these three topics separately. “Historically,” writes Falicov, “film legisla-

5 Falicov, 82.

6 Falicov, 83.

7 Juan Llamas-Rodríguez, “A Global Cinematic Experience: Cinépolis, Film Exhibition, and Luxury Branding,” *JCMS* 58, no. 3 (2019): 49–71.

8 Falicov, *Latin American Film Industries*, 113–114.

tion has had a dual thrust: it has both supported the production of domestic film through state funding mechanisms, and has facilitated transnational links . . . [via] co-production treaties with Spain and other Latin American nations. In the 1990s, accords were [also] signed between Latin American, European and other countries, such as Canada and China.”<sup>9</sup> Falicov then hones in on Colombia as an example of the disconnect between these two approaches, with incentives for national production focused on short documentaries for local consumption, and incentives for co-productions focused on commercial films for the international market. On the topic of screen quotas, Falicov focuses on the effects of Argentina’s most recent screen quota instituted in 2004. This restrictive measure, she concludes, “is becoming ineffective, given that changes in technology are undercutting cultural policy tools.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, on piracy, Falicov addresses the roots of the practice and some of the laws passed to curb it and discusses two case studies that support a more nuanced understanding of piracy. She examines one instance in which piracy worked to the advantage of the film, namely *Tropa de elite* (*Elite Squad*, José Padilha, 2007), and then turns to the operations of bootleggers in Bolivia and Ecuador, who “have cultivated strong circuits of distribution that are useful for national filmmakers . . . [who] do not have large marketing budgets at their disposal and few distributors . . . willing to purchase the rights to their films.”<sup>11</sup>

*Latin American Film Industries* leaves one with the feeling of having seen many trees but only hints of a forest. In this way, it calls attention to the need for further research into the relationships between state and private funding, distribution, exhibition, and legislation and how these relationships impact aesthetics and ultimately ideology in Latin American cinema. Put another way, what are the major patterns that stand out in modes of representation, given that the privileged mode of production is that of the public-private partnership? Are the case studies included examples or exceptions to these patterns? In addition, the book would have benefited greatly from tables and charts to visually summarize the vast amount of numerical data presented or, alternatively, from more careful editing to avoid overwhelming readers with numbers that more often than not encumber the narrative. That said, there is no denying that Falicov has done her research. The result is an ambitious and timely elucidation of contemporary Latin American cinema as a complex and highly varied set of interconnected national industries that alternatively compete and collaborate for space and recognition in the international film market.

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9 Falicov, 122.

10 Falicov, 131.

11 Falicov, 136.

Reviewed by Rob van der Blik

## *Media in Mind*

by Daniel Reynolds

Oxford University Press.

2019. 224 pages.

\$99.00 hardcover; \$35.00 paper; also available in e-book.

*Media in Mind* is a stimulating and mostly philosophical exploration of mind-body dualism in the context of films and video games, using John Dewey's concept of transactionism as an analytic thread. The book aims to address what Daniel Reynolds perceives as a shortcoming in media theory—namely, that the prevailing dualist orientation neglects and obfuscates essential aspects of embodiment and agency in perception. A transactionist approach views perception as a continuous whole, erasing or at least subjugating the distinction between subject and object. To quote Reynolds, “Media use is not an interaction in which two discrete things, a medium and a mind, come into contact with and act upon one another, but instead a transaction within a continuous field of matter that produces the intertwined phenomena that we (always contingently) may call ‘media’ and ‘mind.’”<sup>1</sup> Reynolds proceeds to develop this central idea by way of examples of video games and films, supported by numerous references to philosophers and film theorists, including Robert Bresson, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Gilles Deleuze, Germaine Dulac, Mark Johnson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Christian Metz, Hugo Münsterberg, Alva Noë, Alfred North Whitehead, and of course John Dewey. With a cast of characters like this (and others), you would assume that the argument is easily buried in philosophical lingo, but Reynolds keeps the text readable and never loses sight of his original idea.

The book is laid out in six chapters, along with an introduction and conclusion. Reynolds begins with Dewey's concept of transactionism, as expressed in the book he coauthored with Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, and argues for transactionism's relevance in the context of media studies, tying it into more contemporary

1 Daniel Reynolds, *Media in Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.

theories about embodied cognition and active perception by philosophers Mark Johnson and Alva Noë.<sup>2</sup> We are also introduced here to the first video game: *The Unfinished Swan* (Giant Sparrow, 2012), a game Reynolds classifies under the rubric of “first-person shooter” games in which protagonists normally move through their environment while firing away at menacing objects and beings.<sup>3</sup> *The Unfinished Swan* upends this activity, however; through the act of throwing paint, the player discovers a world rather than destroys it. Reynolds describes this action as “an allegory of the ways people create perception and knowledge by inhabiting and moving through the world. From birth, we embark on a series of differentiations, dividing light from dark, soft from hard, loud from quiet, object from nonobject, available from off limits, food from nonfood, threat from nonthreat.”<sup>4</sup> Reynolds extends this idea with an analysis of Robert Bresson’s *L’Argent* (1983), in which “Yvon [the protagonist] and the film itself seem to want to feel something about the world, to touch its material surfaces. Bresson’s camera lingers on details of scenes in unconventional ways, taking in events from uncommon and at times confounding angles, such as a car chase filmed almost entirely in static shots of automobile pedals and a side-view mirror.”<sup>5</sup>

These two examples, a video game and a film, set the tone for the rest of the book. As with any philosophical text, the strength of the argument lies in the supporting examples, and Reynolds has chosen these carefully. The subsequent range of films discussed includes *How It Feels to Be Run Over* (Cecil Hepworth, 1900), *La souriante Madame Beudet* (*The Smiling Madam Beudet*, Germaine Dulac, 1923), *Le quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*, François Truffaut, 1959), *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), and *Ni na bian ji dian* (*What Time Is It There?*, Tsai Ming-liang, 2001). In addition to *The Unfinished Swan*, video games such as *Tetris* (Alexey Pajitnov, 1984), *Katamari Damacy* (Namco, 2004), and *Don’t Look Back* (distractionware, 2009) are used to expound on what it means to move beyond interaction to the more enveloping sense of transaction.

In ensuing chapters, Reynolds examines the idea of active perception by invoking Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of “flow,” a state of mind that can most easily be characterized as being in the moment. He further characterizes flow as “a feeling of balance between mastery and challenge, a loss of self-consciousness, a transformation of temporal perception, and the merging of action and awareness” and also addresses concepts of mental representation in media theory and the philosophy of mind. Reynolds centers on “radical embodied cognition,” a specifically nonrepresentational view of the mind that goes beyond more traditional notions of embodied cognition anchored in mind-body dualism.<sup>6</sup> For Reynolds, such cognition “would be understood less as an extending out than an extending across, in which no ‘internal’ aspect of experience or action is discrete from the environment in which it occurs.”<sup>7</sup>

Following this, Reynolds devotes a chapter to platform studies, an area mostly associated with hardware and technological determinism but that, in Reynolds’s view, should be radicalized to include the human body. In line with this idea of radicalizing concepts in digital media studies, Reynolds proposes to expand the idea

2 John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949).

3 Reynolds, *Media in Mind*, 21.

4 Reynolds, 21.

5 Reynolds, 45.

6 Reynolds, 66.

7 Reynolds, 79.

of interface, conceived as a “regulated channel through which users are granted access to the power of the platform,” to fit a more transactionally oriented notion of “intraface” that “acknowledges that actions are not undertaken unilaterally by one thing upon another but always reciprocally and in such a way that they constitute the parameters of the things themselves.”<sup>8</sup> The final chapter discusses the culture of Nintendo, a company that Reynolds argues has done more than any other game developer to experiment with console formats, control devices, and display technologies with which users fully experience new relationships between their body and game technologies.

*Media in Mind* is based on Reynolds’s dissertation, but unlike most books that originate as revised dissertations, here there is a significant terminological if not conceptual shift present. The examples have been carried over from the dissertation, but the line of argument has evolved from looking at these examples in terms of interaction to casting them in the framework of transactionism. We might ask ourselves, If one can make a convincing argument with one term, why the need to recast it through another? With this in mind, we could then profitably look at how Dewey originally framed the difference between the two terms *interaction* and *transactionism*. In *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey describes the difference through the history of philosophical thought, beginning with “self-action,” in which things are viewed as acting under their own powers. Self-action is followed by “inter-action,” which balances things against one another through causality, to a final phase of “trans-action,” “where systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to ‘elements’ or other presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities,’ ‘essences,’ or ‘realities,’ and without isolation of presumptively detachable ‘relations’ from such detachable ‘elements.’”<sup>9</sup> This quote itself manifests—lexically or metaphorically—the shift in conceptual complexity from interaction to transaction.

Transactionism thus emphasizes wholeness and temporality, in which objects are “continuous with one another, entangled and ultimately never discrete. Ways of knowing are also fundamentally entangled with that which is known.”<sup>10</sup> It may at the outset seem like an idea that is difficult to envision, and just by writing this, I am already falling into the trap of separating out the known from knowing. However, Reynolds keeps the thread of the argument intact throughout the book, continuously illustrating it through different film and video game scenarios. Transactionism as a conceptual model for analysis, notably, does seem more amenable to video games than to film, since participation and agency is more obvious in video games than in film. Film allows for a kind of participation in that it asks us to direct our attention and to think and feel, but the act of viewing a film does not require us to engage physically, which is, to my mind, somewhat at odds with Reynolds’s emphasis on embodied cognition in his analyses.

*Media in Mind* gathers a diverse and distinctive group of ideas and examples, and following the traces of these ideas and examples is genuinely rewarding. It remains a question whether Reynolds’s call for an acceptance of Dewey’s transactionism as a basis for a new theory of media will be heard, but perhaps more importantly, Reyn-

8 Reynolds, 126, 132.

9 Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 108.

10 Reynolds, *Media in Mind*, 13.

olds is, at the very least, bringing contemporary philosophical objections to mind-body dualism into what he sees as a predominantly interactionist body of media theory. Ultimately, he argues for transdisciplinarity, a “thinking across and among the disciplines, for thinking not just about what they could show and tell one another but about what they can say in their polyphonous, entangled collectivity.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, 172.