Edited by Laura Isabel Serna

BOOK REVIEWS

Reviewed by Philippe Bédard

The Shape of Motion: Cinema and the Aesthetics of Movement

by Jordan Schonig.
Oxford University Press.
2021. 264 pages.
$125.00 hardcover; $35.00 paper; also available in e-book.

The Shape of Motion: Cinema and the Aesthetics of Movement, a first book by Jordan Schonig, is a unique and deeply engaging foray into some of cinema's numerous and often overlooked motion forms. By studying six different forms of cinematic motion, the book also, and importantly, presents a method for critically engaging with the movements in and of cinema. Significantly, Schonig proposes what we could call an alternative phenomenology of cinematographic movement, a way to "re-examine an aspect of cinema so fundamental that it rarely garners sustained theoretical attention."[1]

Throughout six chapters and a conclusion, Schonig consistently and convincingly highlights the fundamental strangeness of movement when it is imaged—that is, when it is framed (temporally and spatially) and made available for reviewing. Each chapter deals with a different kind of motion form, from the "wind in the trees" of early cinema to unusual camera movements to the novel effects of compression glitches. None of Schonig's examples are strictly limited to any particular period in film history, as he prioritizes tracing links between recognizable phenomena, regardless of their context or, for the most part, of their function within narrative films.

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1   Jordan Schonig, *The Shape of Motion: Cinema and the Aesthetics of Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 28.

As Schonig illustrates in *The Shape of Motion*, even the unpredictable movement of fire, water, and smoke and the often overlooked subtleties of human movement can be "pinned down and pictured on film."[2] This makes such phenomena available for aesthetic judgment, but it also transforms them. A persistent assumption throughout the book is that the simple fact of capturing and representing motion on-screen creates the conditions for an alternative engagement with movements we might encounter in our regular lives but which we might not be capable of witnessing. This stems from the fact that cinema allows us all to see the same images "through the same set of eyes."[3] Although Schonig does not make the connection to Vivian Sobchack's description of the cinema's unique duality as "an act of seeing that makes itself seen," his account of our ability to *see the seeing* of movement through the cinema reaches the same conclusion.[4] Put differently, cinema offers us a perception of movement once removed; already bracketed from our habitual modes of perception, cinema makes it possible for us to attend to movement phenomenologically.

Chapter 1 illustrates this perfectly, as it deals with the "contingent motion" of smoke, water, and the wind in trees, both in early cinematographic experiments and in more recent computer-animated films with their ever more realistic particle effects.[5] To explain what led audiences of early cinema and viewers of contemporary digital animation to enjoy the contingency of these natural phenomena, Schonig insists that these movements are not merely unplanned but *unplannable*. While Immanuel Kant may have judged these "formless" phenomena incompatible with judgments of beauty, Schonig insists on cinema's innate ability to give them form and thus make them available for aesthetic evaluation.[6] Hence, whether we consider the wind's interaction with the leaves in the background of the Lumières' *Repas de bébé* (*Baby's Dinner*, 1895) or the elaborate particle effects of contemporary computer-generated imagery (CGI), the fundamental strangeness of cinematic motion is already felt in the fact that the image "frames" a moment and a movement that can therefore be reviewed. In this, cinema offers the capacity to reveal the intricacies of the movements we habitually perceive but to which we rarely pay attention.

The second chapter's focus on cinema's revelation of the countless movements contained within the simplest "habitual gestures" serves as a continuation of Schonig's interest in the revelatory effect of cinema's imaging of movement.[7] Here, the author turns his attention to the body and face of actors as yet another site for witnessing contingent motion.[8] Schonig attentively

2 Schonig, 26.
3 Schonig, 27.
4 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Pinceton University Press, 1992). See specifically Schonig, *Shape of Motion*, 27, 186.
5 See also Jordan Gowanlock, *Animating Unpredictable Effects: Nonlinearity in Hollywood's R&D Complex* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).
6 Schonig, *Shape of Motion*, 26.
7 Schonig, 43.
8 This link is made all the more concrete when Schonig quotes Jean-Marie Straub, who alludes to the "wind in the trees" anecdote as a useful point of departure for appreciating the contingencies of filming human motion. See Schonig, 57; and

describes the emergence of the unexpected in the habitual gestures of post-war realist cinema, with examples from *Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica, 1952), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946), and *Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967). He also draws out the medium's propensity to make visible often unnoticed subtleties in human movement, a point most cleverly illustrated in his analysis of how Martin Arnold's found-footage work renders palpable the near-infinite articulations contained within even the simplest gestures.[9]

The transition from the second to the third chapter is made similarly seamless by the author's continued focus on the actor's face as a site for witnessing "durational metamorphosis."[10] Descriptions of contemplative images of slowly morphing faces, in Carlos Reygada's *Silent Light* (2007) and Bill Viola's video installation *The Locked Garden* (2000), are accompanied by analyses of the barely perceptible transformations of clouds in James Benning's *Ten Skies* (2004) and similar images in contemporary slow cinema. As rigorous as it is evocative, Schonig's account of the metamorphosis on display in the faces of Viola's subjects makes salient the differences between related but crucially distinct forms of movement on screen (e.g., between the trans*formation* and trans*location* of the head).[11] Meanwhile, the author's interpretation of Esther's resurrection in *Silent Light* conveys the minute changes witnessed in the character's face, again highlighting cinema's propensity to offer us a new perspective on often overlooked—or even barely perceptible—forms of motion.[12]

Chapters 4 and 5 offer the most interesting studies of cinema's motion forms, at least in my extremely biased opinion as someone invested in the study of (non-anthropomorphic) camera movements. Schonig begins by introducing the concept of "spatial unfurling" to describe the peculiar effect created by lateral camera movements.[13] In an attempt to forgo some of the shortcomings of usual film-phenomenological accounts of camera movement and thereby circumvent the "persistent assumption . . . that a moving camera seems to move *us* through the film's world along with it," the author offers "an alternative phenomenology of camera movement built on . . . particular ways of moving the camera that suppress the illusion of embodied movement and exploit the aesthetic potential of the flatness of the screen."[14] This approach to camera movement enables Schonig to discuss the screen's flatness as more than a mere "obstacle to the richness of an immersive cinematic experience."[15] That is not to say that the author denies that the camera can—and indeed does—furnish viewers with convincing illusions of bodily movement.[16] Rather, what Schonig attempts to do—and in my opinion suc-

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Jean-Marie Straub, "Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub," *Filmkritik* 10 (1968): 689–690.

9   Schonig, *Shape of Motion*, 70–71.

10   Schonig, 74.

11   Schonig, 87–90.

12   Schonig, 90–95.

13   Schonig, 99.

14   Schonig, 100.

15   Schonig, 114.

16   See Scott C. Richmond, *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

ceeds in doing—is showcase how the camera does not *necessarily* or *automatically* reproduce these sensations.

Indeed, both chapters 4 and 5 illustrate how unusual ways of moving the camera can create effects on screen that challenge expectations as to how cameras should behave, at least in the context of narrative films. For one, the spatial unfurling Schonig introduces in chapter 4 casts aside the illusion of depth produced by most camera movement, foregrounding instead the flatness of the screen and the boundedness of the image. Through the example of lateral camera movements in Leos Carax's *Mauvais sang* (*Bad Blood*, 1986) and *Holy Motors* (2012), the author convincingly demonstrates the alternative effects produced by ways of moving the camera that deny the kinesthetic sympathy typically generated by camera movement. The recourse to experimental films such as Michael Snow's *La région centrale* (1971) and Ken Jacobs's *The Georgetown Loop* (1996) and *Disorient Express* (1996) only serve to make this conclusion more evident.

Interestingly, just as Jacobs's experiment "disrupts our perceptual habit of participating in what we ordinarily perceive as the camera's movement," the fourth chapter achieves a distanciating effect in the context of the book's larger discussion of camera movement.[17] Having set aside cinema's proclivity toward "forward movement into depth" to discuss spatial unfurling, Schonig returns to it in chapter 5 by focusing on the follow shot, a technique that puts the camera behind the character, following them and denying us any access to their face.[18] These characteristics make this an image that is neither quite subjective nor objective but rather "trajective," where *trajectivity* defines "a distillation of towardness, the vectorial nature of human will itself."[19] This is what makes follow shots—particularly those of Alan Clarke's *Elephant* (1989) and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003)—such apt objects to study, as they offer "an image of this trajectivity distilled, made palpable."[20] Importantly, Schonig's sustained analysis of the follow shot allows us to appreciate the crucial importance of cinema's imaging of movement; it renders visible and repeatable a particular set of experiential conditions.

The sixth and final chapter of *The Shape of Motion* sees Schonig shift from the camera movements discussed in the past two chapters to a phenomenological account of the compression glitches we regularly encounter with digital video. While I do not share Schonig's optimism when he suggests that

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17 Schonig, *Shape of Motion*, 121.
18 Although quite similar, this technique is distinct from the double-dolly shot often seen in the films of Spike Lee (a technique in which the actor is passively transported on a platform with or immediately in front of the camera) and from what I have alternatively termed third-person or "exo-centric" images (images created by having the camera *attached to* but *away from* the actor's body, *looking back* at them). See Philippe Bédard, "Disembodied Perspective: Third-Person Images in GoPro Videos," *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 9 (Summer 2015), https://alphavillejournal.com/Issue9/HTML/ArticleBedard.html; Philippe Bédard, "L'espace exo-centrique au cinéma," *Écranosphère* 4, no. 1 (2020), http://www.ecranosphere.ca/article.php?id=81; and Philippe Bédard, "Going beyond the Human Perspective: GoPro Cameras and (Non)anthropocentric Ways of Seeing," in *Versatile Camcorders: Looking at the GoPro Movement*, ed. Winfried Gerling and Florian Krautkrämer (Berlin: Kadmos, 2021).
19 Schonig, *Shape of Motion*, 131.
20 Schonig, 133.

"the regularity of glitches . . . sensitizes us to movement on screen in a new way," I do applaud his astute description of the way these glitches serve as traces of the algorithmic processes at the core of our contemporary viewing practices.[21] Glitches—and more specifically their intentional use within datamoshing—create an "occasion for a sustained aesthetic encounter with that familiar but generally overlooked aspect of compressed video," encouraging what Schonig describes as "a mode of perceptual reflexivity (a reflection on my processes of motion perception)."[22]

Schonig's main interest throughout *The Shape of Motion* lies in the way cinema allows us to gain a new perspective on forms of movement. I would even go so far as describing the book's very methodological contribution as being its encouragement to rediscover the fundamental strangeness of cinematic motion. In conclusion, the book presents a thoughtful and deeply engaging piece of scholarship on one of cinema's most fundamental characteristics: its ability to make movement visible. I strongly believe the book should be considered for best first book awards, and I hope many will be inspired by the work Schonig has initiated here. Finally, while some might feel the approximately twenty-page chapter leaves much up for discussion, I am of the opinion that this would be missing the central project of the book: to lay the groundwork and develop a method for a new kind of phenomenology of cinematic motion writ large.

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21 Schonig, 155.
22 Schonig, 170. As the author explains, "datamoshing" refers to "a technique that exploits compression glitches for aesthetic effect." Schonig, 151.

Reviewed by Ann Elias

Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater

by Melody Jue.
Duke University Press. Elements Series.
2020. 240 pages.
$99.95 hardcover; $25.95 paper; also available in e-book.

The image on the cover of Melody Jue's book *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater* intimates many of the book's themes: views from inside the ocean that put media scholarship in the cool blue-green light of the underwater, representations of sensory immersion and intimacy that demonstrate the value of learning from unfamiliar realms, and milieu-specific planetary understandings enabled by scuba diving and the "cognitive estrangement" it engenders.[1]

Jue's exciting book advances ecological ethics by exploring oceans as environments for thinking beyond the conventions and habits of human experience on land. It argues that by experiencing the buoyancy of oceans, the limitations of human-centered perspectives, acculturated by gravity on land, are critically challenged. An interest in attuning to planetary entanglements is identified early on when Jue evokes Jacques Cousteau's curiosity as a diver for his "flesh feeling what the fish scales know."[2] But the book is also about rethinking media theory through an embodied perspective in the fluidity of ocean water. Consequently, the first three chapters are divided into "interface," "inscription," and "database," media concepts that become defamiliarized when submerged in the materiality of the pressure, fluidity, and salinity of oceans, while the fourth chapter on "underwater museums"

1   Darko Suvin, quoted in Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 7.
2   Cousteau quoted in Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, 6.

brings eco-criticism to artistic practice, revealing the underwater as a site and condition for activism. Therefore, while Jue's book reexamines scholarly assumptions about familiar concepts in media studies, it also helps the reader think anew about aesthetics and environmental politics.

The analysis that unfolds throughout the chapters of the book is interwoven with personal descriptions and recollections of diving. It is from the position of being inside the ocean that Jue can think and philosophize about the differences between oceanic and terrestrial experiences of space, time, meaning, aesthetics, and embodiment. Submersion, buoyancy, and pressure, for example, are among the many effects of "saltwatery materiality" that estrange the human diver from terrestrial habits of perception and movement.[3] Combining literary and media theory with ocean diving, the book brings the unique properties and qualities of oceanic environments to bear on the concepts of interface, inscription, and database. These terms, which have shaped us as subjects, have been determined by terrestrial ways of thinking, yet they were conceived on a planet dominated by fresh water and seawater.[4]

As an ocean-oriented practice that investigates how immersion in water acts on the human body and mediates thought, Jue's writing sits alongside contemporary feminist and post-humanist theorists including Stacy Alaimo, Astrida Neimanis, and Nicole Starosielski.[5] Their collective scholarship advances the area of environmental politics through attention to trans-corporeality and the material forces that determine new ways of conceiving relations between human and nonhuman bodies and environments, especially bodies and water. By interweaving theoretical and empirical approaches, Jue explores how her underwater body's relation to seawater's materiality reveals terrestrial presumptions regarding gravity, planar space, and reliance on vision.[6] For Jue, the undersea gives rise to a planetary self who is more aware of the affective dimension of relations with the nonhuman and whose ethical engagement with environmental futures is based in care.[7] Jue also compares Western terrestrial bias with the epistemologies of islander and First Nations peoples. Their theories of environmental situatedness in the oceanic milieu are helpfully summarized by the Tongan and Fijian writer Epeli Hau'ofa, who once declared about the maritime peoples of Oceania, "We are the Ocean."[8]

There is also a sense of the fantastic about this book that stems from an enduring public fascination with the underwater regions of oceans. Few ideas capture the imagination more than the idea of being undersea. The estranging effect of the undersea and the depths of the planet's bodies of water have

3   Jue, 36.
4   Jue, 5.
5   Stacy Alaimo, "States of Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3 (2012): 476–493; Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); and Nicole Starosielski, "Beyond Fluidity: A Cultural History of Cinema under Water," in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt (New York: Routledge, 2012), 149–168.
6   Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, 86.
7   Jue, 74.
8   Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

always produced excitement for Westerners. The book therefore belongs to a broader context of writing on the underwater. The link with Jules Verne and science fiction is important, although seeking "conceptual displacement" underwater was also a strategy of Surrealist artists, who valued its defamiliarizing qualities and suggestive escape from the geometries of the city and the rationalizations of everyday life on land.[9]

The way the book philosophizes through diving aligns Jue's project with those of the American author, nature writer, and environmentalist Barry Lopez and the philosopher Alphonso Lingis. Like Lopez and Lingis, Jue expands the consciousness of her readers by refusing the confines and boundaries of thinking and feeling that land and its metaphors of stability and verticality engender. In chapter 2, for instance, she takes to the undersea to "escape the particular constraints of our human embodiment in a terrestrial environment" while considering the philosopher Vilém Flusser and a tale about a vampire squid.[10] Her method recalls Lopez's 1999 observation that "something, most certainly, happens to a diver's emotions underwater," an effect he accounted for as a combination of pressure on the body, the feeling of weightlessness, proximity to wildlife and terror, loss of orientation as the body moves through three spatial planes, the unfamiliarity and intensity of exposure in the vastness of the ocean, and "a state of rapture with the bottomless blue."[11] In 1985, Lingis described diving as the sensation of drifting suspended in a sensory space unlike land and air, a sensation of "depth without orientation" created in part by the loss of vertical axis.[12] Lingis recounts how human beings underwater quickly give up any sense of self-importance and instead succumb to flows, currents, and bodily encounters with marine life.

Wild Blue Media can also be set in the broader context of the histories of early media figures of the twentieth century who harbored fantasies about exploring the underwater but, in the days before scuba, often went there in imagination only. The explorer and filmmaker Frank Hurley, for example, saw his project as mastery of air, land, and undersea through mobility in travel and through image-making. He took advantage of the globalizing media industry comprising photo agencies, press agencies, and film agencies to send images worldwide showing underwater scenes produced with aquariums. It was also an era interested in testing the limits of media by investigating whether cameras could work underwater, if radio transmission was possible in the depths, and what modifications were needed to enable human bodies to exist inside the sea and linger there. In Hurley's day the very idea of a diver, or an underwater camera, was somewhere in the realm of magic, but he was similar to Jue because he wanted to take his audiences away from their habitual thinking cultivated in terrestrial settings by armchairs and office desks.[13]

9   See Margaret Cohen, "Underwater Optics as Symbolic Form," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (2014): 1–23.

10 Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, 77.

11 Barry Lopez, *About This Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 27–28.

12 Alphonso Lingis, "The Rapture of the Deep," in *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 6.

13 Information in this paragraph is from Ann Elias, *Coral Empire: Underwater Oceans,*

However, Jue's book is not focused on media products or objects, such as underwater films, but rather on concepts of "media" that seem to have few boundaries in a field that is constantly shifting. Even in 2008 it was said that "scholars today are caught by the impossibility of finding common ground for what they mean by *media*."[14] Clearly Jue's intention is to destabilize the land-based conceptions of media expressed by the German philosopher Friedrich Kittler.[15] Contra Kittler, she sets out to show how it is possible to gain new perspectives on media studies and epistemological questions by thinking through the distinctive nonhuman environmental milieu of seawater.[16] To think from inside seawater allows the author to bring the oceanic qualities of pressure, light refraction, and 3D movement to media studies.[17]

Wild Blue Media helps dissolve nature–society distinctions and advance ideas of connectivity while also respecting the alterity of the oceanic realm. In a climate-changed planet, the book argues for a more ethical way of living with and relating to nonhuman life. Yet it helpfully focuses not just on oceans but on atmospheres as well. Jussi Parikka writes that "our environments are complex and constituted of multiple scales of reference, agency and time"; he notes that there are many places—undersea, underground, and in the air—to practice planetary relations and train the mind to "cultivate an understanding of the structural complexity and agency of our environment and its various layers of activity."[18] I found that *Wild Blue Media* also helped me think more deeply about the sky and to practice environmental thinking in relation to the element of air, where bodies and objects—humans and birds, insects and colors, moisture and gases—are also connected across social and natural worlds.

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Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

14 Eva Horn, "Editor's Introduction: 'There Are No Media,'" *Grey Room* 29 (2008): 7.

15 The book Jue refers to is Friedrich Kittler, *Draculas Vermächtnis: Technische Schriften* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993).

16 Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, 22.

17 Jue, 13.

18 Jussi Parikka, "Cartographies of Environmental Arts," in *Posthuman Ecologies: Complexity and Process after Deleuze*, ed. Rosi Braidotti and Simone Bignall (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 42.

Reviewed by Tien-Tien Jong

Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics

by Ryan Pierson.
Oxford University Press.
2019. 216 pages.
$120.00 hardcover; $46.95 paper; also available in e-book.

After he is ostracized by the kids at school and shushed by his busy father, the titular boy wonder of United Production of America's (UPA) *Gerald McBoing-Boing* (Robert Cannon, 1950) walks up a frighteningly pendulous staircase—depicted for us as a flat, saw-like path receding sharply into the top left frame. How can viewers explain what it is that we are seeing in this moment, when the stairs never change in perspective as Gerald advances upward, even during a simulated camera track-in? How can we better describe the sensations of movement in animated films that are ostensibly created frame by frame, thus defying our perceptual habits for watching movies and making sense of the movements we see on-screen? And what political possibilities open for us once we begin to think about animated motion beyond the isolated actions of cartoon characters and focus instead on the figures and forces that animate the image? Ryan Pierson tackles these issues in his new book on figural and abstract animation, a far-ranging analytical work that blends philosophical aesthetics with animation history. In doing so, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* generates new frameworks for studying historical receptions of modernism, cinematic motion, and the possibilities for talking about and viewing animated films.

Methodologically, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* draws from and expands upon the contributions to animation studies previously made by Donald Crafton, Vivian Sobchack, Dan Bashara, and Tom Gunning.[1]

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1   See, for example, Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Vivian Sobchack, "Animation and Automation, or, the Incredible Effortfulness of Being," *Screen* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 375–391; Dan Bashara, *Cartoon Vision: UPA Ani-*

These theoretical inheritances are evident in the book's deep engagements with the psychology and phenomenology of perception and its interest in finding affinities between popular and avant-garde cultural spheres. Pierson also follows Stanley Cavell's approach to film theory as "a lens with which to view a world."[2] Each chapter of the book is dedicated to careful, historically contextualized study of a single animation concept or technique. Pierson's main theoretical intervention is the examination of how each choice of an animation technique aligns with possible ways of (re)organizing and navigating one's place and relations within the world. Style here stands in for a way of seeing the world differently, and perceptual shifts are key to Pierson's approach to studying the medium: "animation techniques offer not only *pictures* of change but ways of *thinking through* change."[3] When Pierson asserts that "we can use style to think about animated movements as experiments in the possibilities of sensory organization," the act of studying techniques for executing and animating a world becomes infused for the reader with an unexpected purpose: the political, social, momentary, and complex project of living.[4]

Chapter 1, "Soft Edges," explores techniques for animating atmospheres, clouds, smoke, and flames, focusing on animations that have emphasized the looseness between figure and ground, in which either can be activated unpredictably. The discussion in this chapter takes as its main case study the 1933 film *A Night on Bald Mountain* (Claire Parker and Alexandre Alexeieff), an unparalleled achievement in animation made using the highly labor-intensive and impressionistic pinscreen method. A stretched canvas perforated with 500,000 movable pins, the pinscreen allowed for the creation of strikingly textured images through careful manipulations of light and shadow. "With this technique," Pierson observes, "Alexeieff and Parker deliberately avoided one of the central pleasures of animated cartoons up to that point: the movement and transformation of the *line*."[5] He links the powerful, uncanny affect of *A Night on Bald Mountain* to the haziness of the pinscreen's soft edges and half-tones, which, he argues, invoke the embodied sensation of exposure "to extreme temperatures, to radiation, to the public, to effects—to collective events, in other words."[6] What is so ambitious about Pierson's method is precisely this connection between a formal device and the political or existential levels of significance its analysis allows us to see: "Once our boundaries are made porous, we may be arranged in new ways and in new connections with our environments. Exposure thus makes for one way of opening ourselves to change."[7] Through this analysis, *A Night on Bald*

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mation and Postwar Aesthetics_ (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); and Tom Gunning, "Animating the Instant: The Secret Symmetry between Animation and Photography," in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Beckman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

2   Ryan Pierson, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.
3   Pierson, 13.
4   Pierson, 4.
5   Pierson, 16.
6   Pierson, 39.
7   Pierson, 17.

Mountain becomes a newly rich environment for thinking about the power of disruptive change and transformation.

Chapter 2, "Walk Cycles," takes as its main text Norman McLaren and Grant Munro's stop-motion film *Canon* (1964), originally produced as an educational short to demonstrate the principles of musical canon for the National Film Board of Canada. Using this example, Pierson shows us how the basic cartooning device of the walk cycle—in which a series of drawings representing the steps in a simple action are looped—can be used to create complexity out of deadening repetition and put to the service of facilitating greater understanding of how larger systems work. By layering the movements of four "walking" blocks as they travel along a preordained chessboard path, *Canon* surprises viewers by suggesting new centers of movement as the system grows in complexity. Pierson demonstrates how the dynamism of *Canon*'s use of the walk cycle shifts viewers' attention from single objects or figures to recognizing the relations between and among them: "it is the entire picture before us, the entire system of interlocking parts, that is spontaneous and lively."[8] The system ultimately collapses at the film's conclusion, an event viewers may interpret as exhaustion but also as an invitation to consider other ways that the parts of a whole can be organized in more sustainable and rejuvenating relations to one another.

Chapter 3, "Perspectival Movement," is a virtuosic section of the book that impressively engages with Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies, the early cinematic genre of the "phantom ride," Disney's multiplane camera, and the midcentury cartoons of UPA to think about how the impression of camera movement within the space of an animated world can necessitate shifts in our understanding of its structural possibilities. Pierson considers the divergent and rich examples of simulated movement offered by *Blinkity Blank* (Norman McLaren, 1955) and *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* (Caroline Leaf, 1977) to develop this argument. Both of these animations, which feature sudden shifts into the z-axis and metamorphosing camera effects that subvert our assumptions about what counts as a figure versus fore- or background, radicalize the notion of how space can be represented and what animation can make it do. By disorienting the viewer so much that figuration itself is bypassed, these films explore the relations between camera movement and revolution in the social or structural sense—or "a movement within a world that seems to change the configuration of that world."[9]

Any study of animation and movement would be incomplete without a section on the alternately abject and beautiful practice of rotoscoping, and Pierson devotes chapter 4 to this technique. This final chapter is also where the friction between underlying figures and forces and the drawn line (initially introduced in relation to half-tones in chapter 1) returns as a formal question of interest. Pierson brings together American rotoscoping styles as varied as those practiced by Ralph Bakshi, Mary Beams, Robert Breer, and Disney studio animators to examine the differences viewers may experience between traditional "by outline" and freehand "by through-line" models for

8   Pierson, 70.
9   Pierson, 84.

animating from live-action footage. To elucidate these differences, Pierson turns to the concept of plasmaticness, which "seeks to retain a body but without its constraints of weight or structure or finitude." Thinking about the distance between a traced line and its underlying footage, Pierson draws an analogy between the plasmatic figure and the sentimental subject who "seeks love without sacrifice . . . the gratification of relations without the responsibility."[10] More courageous is an unsentimental view of love that resists idealization and embraces difference, even at the risk of being oneself transformed in the process. Pierson scrutinizes details from Beams's wonderfully peculiar *Going Home Sketchbook* (1975) to articulate this idea of how the rigid specificity of rotoscoping may also invoke an artist's openness to seeing, working with, and loving what is already there.

Chapter 4 ends with a sustained discussion of love as an animating force for change in the world. The concept of relationality here connects to the idea of seeing larger collectivities and connections articulated in chapter 2's theorization of walk cycles. Given these themes, one cannot help but feel that the topic of collaborations between animators or creative partnerships remains undertheorized, especially in a book so dedicated to understanding how animated images are made and what particular production techniques afford. Chapter 1 implicitly presents *A Night on Bald Mountain* as Alexeieff's brainchild, for instance, even though it was his collaborator and second wife, Claire Parker, who engineered and patented the pinscreen technique. (Parker built on work started by Alexeieff's first wife, Alexandra Grinevskya, whose own labor is too seldom relayed by animation scholars in the story of the pinscreen's invention.) The second chapter likewise leaves Grant Munro's contributions to *Canon* underexamined, despite his substantial collaborations with McLaren over the course of both men's careers. By focusing on the more eminent figures of Alexeieff and McLaren over Parker, Grinevskya, and Munro—not to mention John over Faith Hubley—Pierson largely follows the legacy of how these films have been received and passed down to us by predecessors in the field of animation studies. But when we lapse into auteurist habits, we lose an opportunity to better understand the complexity of creative partnership, as demonstrated by the necessity and pleasure of (so-called) "independent" animators relying on the capabilities and interventions of another person. Thus, one wishes Pierson would push us to think more about love as it relates to the validation and recognition of creative and intimate partnerships within the animation process.

The intrinsic difficulty of describing movement remains a generative problem throughout Pierson's survey of different techniques and animators. A great strength of Pierson's writing that helps him through this daunting task is his teacherly instinct for anticipating questions and reader hesitations. As a resource for inquiry-based learning, *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* is a highly rewarding text to work through with students (with the added stylistic benefit of never sounding like a literal textbook)—so I discovered while teaching excerpts from the book in an introductory undergraduate film studies course this past fall. Pierson skillfully encircles his

10 Pierson, 137.

theoretical problems with successive questions, patiently guiding readers to see what makes these seemingly small films so remarkable and unexpected. Beyond their elegance, his descriptions of animation also function as serious attempts to generate better descriptive prose for articulating exactly what it is that we are seeing when we watch moving images.[11]

Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics will be not only influential for scholars and students of animation studies, modernist art, or midcentury experimental filmmaking but also a resource for all those interested in larger questions about cinematic motion and its relations to realism; the work (and play) of reality testing as it applies to the animated image; and the shapes of our own awkward, yet potentially revolutionary, movements through the world. As an alternative to what Suzanne Buchan has called "the inarticulate 'mmm . . .' that is often the response to what we see on screen," *Figure and Force in Animation Aesthetics* fascinates and elevates the discourse and perceptual possibilities for how we may continue to watch, study, and think about abstract and animated films.[12]

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11   In addition to the descriptions of animation examples within the book, Pierson also created four brief video essays (one corresponding to each main chapter) to illustrate his analysis and to give readers a sample of the main films discussed. These videos are available on the book's companion website, hosted by Oxford University Press (https://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780190949761/res/) and on the author's personal website (https://www.ryan-pierson.com/book).

12   Suzanne Buchan, "The Animated Spectator: Watching the Quay Brothers' 'Worlds,'" in *Animated "Worlds,"* ed. Suzanne Buchan (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), 36.

Reviewed by Siddharth Chadha

LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness

by Antoine Damiens.
Amsterdam University Press. Film Culture in Transition series.
2020. 294 pages.
$134.00 hardcover; also available in e-book.

The past two decades have seen an exponential rise in academics studying myriad aspects of film festivals. Indeed, at least among scholars writing on the subject, film festival studies is now considered to be a legitimate academic discipline.[1] Inherently interdisciplinary, film festival scholars employ a range of theoretical and methodological tools such as network theory, film analysis, discourse analysis, history of institutions, national cinema, logics of film distribution, and gatekeeping in order to study the film festival phenomenon.[2] A notable strand of this scholarship addresses LGBTQ film festivals, a specific niche at the intersection of art, identity, and activism. Antoine Damiens's *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness* is a timely book that attempts to intervene in this burgeoning scholarship by looking at some of the key assumptions that guide larger film festival studies based on his reflexive inquiry within LGBTQ film festival research.[3]

Damiens embarks on this ambitious journey on the back of two theoretical concepts: *critical festival studies* and *film festival as a method*. Critical festival studies, according to Damiens, is an "analysis of the methodolog-

1 An authoritative and comprehensive introduction to film festival research can be found in Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, eds., *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016).

2 Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist, "Film Festival Studies: An Overview of a Burgeoning Field," in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova (St Andrews, Scotland: St Andrews Film Studies, 2009).

3 Antoine Damiens, *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

ical conundrums and political projects that structure the field of festival studies."[4] This concept illuminates how film festival scholarship is predominantly driven and shaped by its desire to gain academic legitimacy. A large number of film festival researchers, laments Damiens, are occupied with justifying why and which festivals matter, either because of their scale, influence on film distribution, position in national discourse, and so forth.[5] The second concept, film festival as a method, attempts to draw scholars' attention to film festivals "not solely as objects of research but as ideal sites for understanding cinematic cultures."[6] This book promises a critique, or in Damiens' lexicon, a *queering*, of the field of film festival studies by suspending the field's race toward institutional legitimacy, and it prepares the ground to think about film festivals in ways that could provide explorations of film cultures, especially using the film festival as a tool for theoretical and methodological reflection.

To that end, the first three chapters of *LGBTQ Film Festivals* are devoted to critical festival studies, and the subsequent two chapters pave the way for the further development of the film festival as a method. Chapter 1, "Festivals That (Did Not) Matter: Festival's Archival Practices and the Field Imaginary of Festival Studies," gives a detailed account of Damiens's experiences of conducting research at several public archives and private collections, including the ONE Archives at the University of Southern California (Los Angeles), the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, and the Archives gaies du Québec (Montréal). This chapter provides a fascinating reading of significant LGBTQ film events that were never documented and are now accessible only through their ephemeral traces. Based on his work in the archives, Damiens informs readers that as early as the late 1960s, several US-based adult theaters organized gay film festivals that were thinly documented. This is surprising because these events predate San Francisco's 1977 Gay Film Fest, largely assumed to be the first or the oldest LGBTQ film festival in the world, by almost a decade. This chapter reflects upon the principles that dictate which festivals are "deemed worthy of being preserved" and how scholars' over-reliance on these materials deemed worthy skews the field of film festival studies. Drawing on Robyn Wiegman's concept of disciplinary unconscious, it further analyzes how a specific theoretical apparatus or exclusion of ephemeral film events creates epistemological biases in the scholarly inquiry of festivals.[7]

In chapter 2, "The Queer Film Ecosystem: Symbolic Economy, Festivals, and Queer Cinema's Legs," Damiens turns his attention to the history of North American and Western European queer films and LGBTQ film cultures. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of taste-making and cultural production, the chapter examines the circulation of LGBTQ films, particularly in the United States and Western Europe. Damiens provides a historiographic account of a simultaneous circulation of queer films across networks

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4 Damiens, 27.
5 Damiens, 27.
6 Damiens, 27.
7 Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

as diverse as avant-garde cinemas, art house venues, adult cinemas, queer film festivals, and mainstream commercial cinemas. The chapter is correspondingly filled with rich historical accounts about how the film festival format enabled gay and lesbian filmmakers to circumvent censorship and economic marginalization in the 1970s. Based on a historical analysis of the development of LGBTQ film cultures in this region, Damiens argues that a film festival is one of the many practices that contribute to the development of film cultures. He juxtaposes his analysis with film festival scholarship that narrowly positions the festival network as the main institution that regulates the circulation and valuation of films.

Chapter 3, "Out of the Celluloid Closet, into the Theaters! Towards a Genealogy of Queer Film Festivals and Gay and Lesbian Film Studies," further develops the concept of critical festival studies by tracing how gay and lesbian studies infiltrated the malleable boundaries between film criticism, academic scholarship, and community-based activism in the United States. By focusing on the careers of specific film scholars and critics, including Vito Russo, Richard Dyer, Thomas Waugh, and B. Ruby Rich, the chapter attempts to highlight how organizing and curating have been instrumental in shaping LGBTQ cinema as an object of knowledge. This chapter is an attempt to destabilize a core methodology of film festival studies that emphasizes the rigid distinctions between scholarly inquiry, film criticism, and festival organizing; Damiens urges scholars to instead theorize "how our disciplinary, affective and personal attachments to festivals shape our scholarship."[8]

Having evidenced in detail how film festival scholarship is deeply structured through its own assumptions, assumptions often made in scholars' attempts to legitimatize the field, Damiens turns in the following two chapters to elaborating his second concept, film festival as a method. Chapter 4, "Festivals as Archives: Collective Memory and LGBTQ Festivals' Temporality," teases out various aspects of LGBTQ film festivals that make them a part of gay and lesbian history. Placing a special emphasis on the visual elements of film festivals, that is, not only their films but also other materials such as decorations of the venue, trailers, and posters, he argues that "LGBTQ film festivals both reveal and visualize queerness."[9] The film festival as such is a site where a complex set of practices are performed, including self-representation, shaping and enabling access to queer practices, and development of an archive of gay and lesbian cultural memories. The chapter provides a nuanced account of these practices while also reflecting on the fact that festivals often refract conflicting images of the subject they attempt to represent. This means that festivals "do not seek to establish a definitive historical truth, nor do they entail a linear relationship with/of history." Rather, they "create memories—of one's friends and loves, of films, of community."[10]

Chapter 5, "Images+Translation: Imagining Queerness and Its Homoscapes," focuses on the discursive aspects of LGBTQ film festivals. This chapter draws heavily from the case of Image+Nation, a Montréal-based

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8   Damiens, *LGBTQ Film Festivals*, 146.
9   Damiens, 159.
10 Damiens, 178–179.

LGBTQ film festival that caters to both French Québécois and Anglophone audiences. Based on an analysis of Image+Nation's bilingual texts and the subtle differences in the way the festival constructs discourses of sexuality, Damiens argues that LGBTQ festivals do not necessarily refract global LGBTQ discourses but rather redefine the notions of *global* and *local* in their specific contexts. Even if this chapter is perhaps the weakest in contributing to the author's argument about film festivals as a method, it makes a coherent contribution to the topic of globalization and sexuality.

As a scholar who recently completed a doctorate on LGBTQ film festivals in Sweden, I was particularly impressed with the breadth and scope of literature and empirical material that the book encompasses. Along with its academic authority, I was also taken by Damiens's self-reflexivity and acute awareness of his own limitations. Although the book does not address film festivals outside the United States or Europe, and at times reproduces the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, Damiens deftly acknowledges such shortcomings in his work. As a reader, I was charmed by the earnestness with which Damiens frames this book as an homage to the several people he befriended during his research. In his own words, "friendship and fucking, be it in an academic context or at festivals, structure artistic and intellectual productions."[11]

One of the many valuable contributions of this book is to draw attention to the paradoxes of film festival studies, a rising field of inquiry that seems to be trapped in justifying its own object of research. The book also presents an exceptional example of how a study largely pertaining to LGBTQ subjects is not simply an investigation of identity but productively examines broader social phenomena and makes wide-ranging theoretical and methodological interventions. Damiens's book can reach far beyond its primary audience of film festival scholars to researchers in adjacent fields including political science, gender studies, anthropology, and sociology by offering critical insights into how LGBTQ film festivals are not simply cultural events where films about gender and sexuality are screened, but places through which the lives of LGBTQ communities become intelligible.

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11   Damiens, 29.

Reviewed by Zizi Li

Micro Media Industries: Hmong American Media Innovation in the Diaspora

by Lori Kido Lopez.
Rutgers University Press.
2021. 184 pages.
$120.00 hardcover; $29.95 paper; also available in e-book.

Lori Kido Lopez's second book, *Micro Media Industries: Hmong American Media Innovation in the Diaspora*, draws on her multi-year fieldwork from 2012 to 2018 with Hmong American communities in Wisconsin (Appleton, Green Bay, and Milwaukee), California (Fresno), and Minnesota (Minneapolis–St. Paul) to provide an account of Hmong media industries. The Hmong diaspora is constituted in relation to a non-sovereign homeland that is not bounded by a specific nation-state, for Hmong remain an ethnic minority in countries of origin such as Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and China.[1] Hmong Americans face vastly different challenges than diasporic populations originating from and identifying with a nation-state with a strong popular media presence. Lacking a home country of their own limits the scale, power, and available resources of Hmong media. Despite all these difficulties, Hmong Americans have found ways to build and maintain a vibrant media landscape composed almost exclusively of micro media industries and small-scale legacy and new media productions ranging from newspapers to podcasts, from radio shows to social media influencing.

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1   Kou Yang, "Hmong Diaspora of the Post-War Period," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12, no. 3 (2003): 271–300; and Sangmi Lee, "Between the Diaspora and the Nation-State: Transnational Continuity and Fragmentation among Hmong in Laos and the United States" (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2015).

Contra the mainstream growth mindset that devalues media limited in size, scale, and budget, this book positions micro media industries as innovative models of media production worthy of close examination. Lopez uses Hmong American media as a specific and complex case study with which to propose a theorization of micro media industries. Her approach to micro media industries considers its possibilities for visibility and community empowerment via self-representation alongside its limitations, such as the high concentration of media power in select few entrepreneur-owners, lack of infrastructural autonomy, and a high degree of burnout and creator precarity. In contouring Hmong micro media industries, the book challenges the binary of mainstream conglomerate media and alternative grassroot media to examine "media projects that occupy a shifting ground in between" for a more expansive framework around media industries.[2] In studying Hmong American journalistic media across print, radio, and digital platforms, Lopez shows how many of these small-scale entrepreneurial media entities are modeled after and perpetuate the aesthetics and operation of established media. Lopez also documents how the affordance of digital media has enabled Hmong Americans to produce a wide array of traditional media and develop hybrid media platforms, which further blurs the boundary between legacy media and digital media.

Micro Media Industries beautifully weaves together a comprehensive examination of small-scaled media industries and snapshots of Hmong American media reception. The focus on Hmong American media ecology complicates our understanding of micro media vis-à-vis ethnic and diasporic media. The book is a welcomed challenge to film and media studies' tendencies of (1) centering East Asian diasporic communities in conversations around Asian American media and (2) privileging media that serve the dominant ethnic group of any given sovereign state, thereby eliding differences and heterogeneity within diasporic media. The book captures the Hmong American mediascape as a kind of minor media, to follow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[3] Hmong Americans are a minority within a minority (e.g., Asian Americans), just as the Hmong population are a minority in Southeast Asia and China. Lopez correspondingly maps out the Hmong American media ecology as a network of micro-sized minoritized cultural productions that commit to the building of local, regional, and transnational Hmong identities, which in turn showcases "the breadth and depth of Hmong American experiences."[4]

Lopez works within a production studies methodology, analyzing data generated from interactions with Hmong American communities, media production site visits, and interviews with Hmong media producers. *Micro Media Industries* documents a history of Hmong American media makers that spans

2   Lori Kido Lopez, *Micro Media Industries: Hmong American Media Innovation in the Diaspora* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 7.

3   "Minor media" here refers not simply to media of minorities and minor nations but also media that mobilize deterritorialized languages, connect the individual to the political, and produce collective voices. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

4   Lopez, *Micro Media Industries*, 18.

from the early 1980s Hmong radio programs through local community radio stations to the 2010s hybrid or all-digital multimedia outlets, shedding light on Hmong American media entrepreneurship while also pointing out how micro media production cultures perpetuate (chapter 3) or challenge (chapters 4 and 5) social hierarchies. While micro media industries "push back against forces such as commercialization or conglomeration," there are many instances wherein "the structures of micro media industries are actually prohibitive to new voices, shoring up already existing power dynamics within the community that they serve."[5] The consumption of Hmong American media is another key area of investigation. Lopez conducted interviews with everyday Hmong American consumers and audiences and met weekly with a group of bilingual Hmong American research assistants to analyze various Hmong media texts. Lopez explains the latter process in her introductory chapter, yet it was difficult for me as a reader to discern how the research assistants' work contributed to specific textual analyses. That matters, because Lopez is a tenured, non-Hmong professor, whereas her assistants are Hmong graduate and undergraduate students.

Micro Media Industries starts with two chapters on print and televisual news. Chapter 2, "Without a Newsroom: Journalism and the Micro Media Empire," focuses on the operation of traditional forms of print media within the Hmong American media ecology. Hmong American newspapers are run by extremely small labor forces, usually just the owner and a couple of their family members or friends. Small journalism is not unique to Hmong American media, but Lopez's industrial analysis of Hmong American newspapers, such as *Hmong Today* and the *Hmong Tribune*, emphasizes the importance of seeing Hmong media owners as entrepreneurs, as more than journalists. Lopez argues that these outlets' "survival and resilience amid immense resource scarcity has been predicated on a number of different innovations" in business management, content production, and distribution.[6] The turn to multi-skilled, multimedia operations by these micro media outlets is not primarily motivated by increasing Hmong community participation; rather, they "retain a commercial sensibility and hierarchical relationship to audience members, even amid their efforts to support their communities."[7]

Chapter 3, "TV without Television: YouTube and Digital Video," further addresses the challenges facing and innovations of Hmong news channels on YouTube, some of which started off as traditional television and radio stations, while others are digital natives modeled after TV news aesthetics. Lopez focuses on "the digital textuality of these programs [such as Suab Hmong News and 3HMONGTV] and the impact of digital affordances on micro media users," which allows for the rare existence of a digital archive for Hmong micro media content.[8] Toward the end of the chapter, Lopez critically analyzes a controversial incident concerning a misogynist video on Hmong TV 24 Hours in July 2015 titled "Hmong TV #1 *Poj Niam Tsis Zoo*

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5   Lopez, 10.
6   Lopez, 26.
7   Lopez, 43.
8   Lopez, 45.

(Bad Women)" and the community's responses. This case study demonstrates the disproportionate amount of power that a single micro media platform wields and how Hmong American community members perceive that power, as Hmong TV 24 Hours is popularly assumed as a community TV station even though it is a privately and personally owned digital outlet. It also lays out the complexity of Hmong American news as a male-dominated industry that perpetuates the existing gender hierarchy. With this, *Micro Media Industries* pivots to study the inner workings and complications of Hmong American micro media entities, giving special attention to the role of gender and sexuality.

Lopez's next two chapters focus on audio media; my favorite discovery within them was the teleconference radio program discussed in chapter 4. Such programs ingeniously facilitate low-cost yet low-tech and somewhat anonymous interactions across the global Hmong diaspora using free conference call platforms and affordable cellphone plans with unlimited calling. Hmong teleconference radio programs are popular yet controversial within the community, and Lopez attributes that positioning to the gendering of these largely women-owned, -operated, and -hosted programs, which also attract mostly female participants and "play a transformative role in [their] lives, opening up communication networks for validation and support during difficult times."[9] While they provide unprecedented space for active audience participation, literacy education, and conversations around taboo topics such as sex, domestic abuse, and child brides, these female-centered programs are often belittled by traditional Hmong American media entrepreneurs as overly emotional and intellectually lacking. In chapter 5, "Queer Sounds: Podcasting and Audio Archives," Lopez further examines women-led Hmong media outlets through discussions of the queer Hmong American radio show *Nplooj* (leaves), the podcast *Hoochim* (a combination of the Hmong word *hwm chim*, which usually refers to male prestige or authority, and the English word *hoochie*, an offensive word used to describe provocative women), and the radio series *Poj Laib* (Bad Hmong girl). If the teleconference radio programs are Hmong-language spaces for predominantly first-generation global Hmong diaspora, the queer programs examined cater predominantly to English-speaking Hmong American youths and younger adults to challenge the heteronormativity and patriarchy of mainstream Hmong media and community discourse. These two chapters demonstrate how micro media can be mobilized for alternative and even resistant uses even if it is not inherently so.

While much of the book focuses on news and audio content, chapter 6, "Alternative Aspirational Labor: Influencers and Social Media Producers," attends to Hmong American social media micro-influencers such as Phillipe Thao and Naomi Kong in the construction and branding of their selves. This chapter brings Hmong American creators into the existing scholarly conversation around influencer culture, highlighting how monetization and capitalist growth are not necessarily the goal for many social media producers. Importantly, Hmong American creator culture offers further insights into how platform capitalism and the gig economy are shaping

9   Lopez, 85.

the possibilities and limitations of individualized micro media making. To that end, *Micro Media Industries* concludes by summarizing some directions to apply the notion of micro media industries outside of the context of Hmong American media ecology.

An important book, *Micro Media Industries* contributes to a new wave of scholarship in media and culture studies that is rethinking possibilities and categorizations of media industries. It is a must-read for scholars interested in media labor, notions of authorship, platform and infrastructure, diasporic media, and ethnic studies. The book's relevancy to media convergence and entrepreneurship along with its rather accessible language suggest that it would also appeal to a popular audience outside academia interested in contemporary media culture.

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Reviewed by Sabrina Negri

Italian Ecocinema: Beyond the Human

by Elena Past.
Indiana University Press.
2019. 226 pages.
$80.00 hardcover; $34.00 paper; also available in e-book.

The influence of location shooting on the ethics and aesthetics of a film has been of interest to film scholars since at least André Bazin's work on cinematic realism. Less studied, however, is how films may affect the locations where they are shot. This mutual relationship is at the core of Elena Past's *Italian Ecocinema: Beyond the Human*, a well-researched and beautifully written study that draws on interviews, published works, and close readings of specific scenes. Past offers a new outlook on Italian cinema through the lens of ecocriticism—an interpretive framework that examines the films as well as the ecological context of their making, including "cinema's dependence on hydrocarbons and its significant waste stream, its use of nonhuman animals . . . and more generally human reliance on the more-than-human world."[1]

Past's book is shaped by personal engagement with the films she discusses, encounters with the films' production crews, and trips to Italy. Each chapter opens with situated stories of the interviews she conducted as part of her research, marked in italics. This approach is integral to the book's argument, as Past's goal is to "trace some of the impressions Italian film productions have left on the world, while also documenting part of the process of doing this research."[2] In other words, Past's ecocritical analysis of Italian cinema must include her own embodied role as a researcher examin-

1 Elena Past, *Italian Ecocinema: Beyond the Human* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 2.
2 Past, 1–2.

ing the relationship between locations, films, human and nonhuman actors, and crew members. This framework explains the book's structure as well as the lyrical style of Past's prose, which makes the book a joy to read but, conversely, is sometimes more impressionistic than analytical. The introduction to the first chapter, detailing the author's interview with Michelangelo Antonioni's assistant director Carlo Di Carlo, provides an example of how the author's physical presence shapes her writing. Past writes, "Like the places it captures on celluloid, the film is a product of an energy-intensive industry. Di Carlo's trip to the set to study the film, and my visit to Di Carlo to learn from him, add further layers to the film's hydrocarbon legacy."[3] Statements like this are frequent throughout the book, though rarely leading to more in-depth analysis.

In Past's view, Italian cinema lends itself particularly well to ecocritical investigation thanks to the peculiarities of the Italian territory. In Italy, Past argues, "closely interwoven human and nonhuman spaces have created a legacy of cohabitation, both constructive and destructive," such that while "walking slowly in Italy, you can find many reasons to scoff at the idea of a world where human and more-than-human matters are decoupled."[4] Even though Past clearly states that ecocriticism "is an interpretive approach, not a genre," the five films that she chooses as her case studies are particularly apt examples of the interconnectedness between cinema, environment, and human and nonhuman forces at the levels of both narrative and style.[5] Past identifies these films' frequent use of nonprofessional actors, long takes, handheld cameras, and long shots as markers of their intense relationship to the places where they were made: in so doing, she gives an ecocritical spin to long-standing theories of cinematic realism, thus showing the potential of subverting the hierarchy between humans, nonhuman actors, and spaces.

Each of the five chapters in Past's book is devoted to the analysis of one film. Chapter 1 offers a case study of Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964), the title that has by far received the most scholarly attention among the author's case studies. At the core of the chapter is Antonioni's main location for the film: the industrial periphery of Ravenna and the impact of its factories on the natural environment. Past's analysis engages with the existing literature while widening historical context in which the film is read. In addition to noting the often-cited Italian economic boom of the 1960s, Past also addresses the environmental movement that was beginning to take root in Italy around the same time. Past devotes many pages to the portrayal of pollution in Antonioni's film, yet she does not read *Il deserto rosso* as a condemnation of the modern industrialized world. Rather, she departs from Antonioni's admitted intent to "translate the beauty of this world, in which even the factories can be beautiful" to investigate the film's construction of a world where the boundaries between humans and environment are blurred.[6] The concept of trans-corporeality, which Past uses to read the interactions

3   Past, 23.
4   Past, 8.
5   Past, 3.
6   Past, 26.

between the protagonist Giuliana and the places that she inhabits, guides the author's formal analysis of some of the key scenes in the film.

The second chapter is dedicated to Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* (2008) and engages with many of the same issues as in the first chapter: this time, though, Past shifts her perspective from the cultural and environmental effects of industrial modernization to a focus on how organized crime profits from the activities related to it, film production included. In particular, Past investigates how the Camorra organization profits from the byproducts of industrial wealth by illegally disposing of garbage and toxic waste. The history of the *Gomorra* location (Naples's infamous housing project Le Vele) thus plays a prominent role in Past's analysis, which includes accounts of the crew's sometimes difficult participation in the daily life of the place.

The other three chapters' locations are seemingly less affected by the process of industrialization and modernization than the regions at the core of the first two case studies. Nonetheless, the films chosen by Past for the second half of her book demonstrate how difficult the interaction between humans and the nonhuman world can be while also showing the harshness of human cohabitation. Chapter 3 investigates *Il vento fa il suo giro* (*The Wind Blows Round*, Giorgio Diritti, 2005), a product of collective filmmaking wherein all crew members were also co-producers of the film. The communality of the project extends to both the film's narrative, a profound reflection on the limits of hospitality, and its production context, as the film crew lived for months with the people of a remote Alpine village and their farm animals. This chapter's theoretical framework is provided by posthumanism and animal studies, as the author investigates the far-from-picturesque coexistence of human and animal beings, particularly goats, on set. The death of a goat is in fact the key to both the movie and Past's analysis of the film, as she interrogates the ethical framework of the dead animal's presence onscreen: "Should *The Wind Blows Round* have filmed two, real, dead goats? If the goats were to die anyway, is it worse that they were killed for visual consumption than for a meal? And if they had been destined for dinner, what if those plates had gone uneaten, or those leftovers had spoiled in the refrigerator? Should we even watch films if they are based materially on animal sacrifice?"[7] These are clearly questions that cannot be answered univocally, and in fact Past closes the chapter by acknowledging that raising them is in itself a tribute to nonhuman lives: "If the film has done its work, these and other questions continue to haunt us long after the closing credits roll. . . . Haunted or not, we are not absolved of guilt. But if we stage our position as tragedy, as 'goat-song,' we at least sing it for ourselves and others and do not let it disappear from view."[8]

Chapter 4 focuses on non-anthropic sound by considering the acoustic geography of Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* (2010), a film that challenges narrative conventions by following four different stories, none of which feature human protagonists. In fact, the film has virtually no audible human dialogue, and the soundscape emphasizes those non-anthropic

7   Past, 117–118.
8   Past, 118.

sounds that the human ear tends to filter out. Past reads Frammartino's experiment as a successful attempt to immerse the spectator in a world where humans live in a nonhierarchical relationship with other living beings, a position with obvious ecological consequences: "The process of recording sound for *Le quattro volte* constituted an awakening to the world's eloquence, as Benvenuti and Olivero [the film's sound recordists] explained: 'When you remove the dialogue, you discover an enormous variety of sound.'"[9] No longer at the center of the film world, humans are forced to acknowledge the complexity of non-anthropic life through sound, thus challenging their supposed supremacy over the nonhuman environment.

Finally, the last chapter challenges anthropocentrism by focusing on volcanoes and volcanic territories. The case study here is on Giovanna Taviani's *Fughe e approdi* (*Return to the Aeolian Islands*, 2010), a narrative documentary that engages the seismic nature of the archipelago as well as its cinematic history—including Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) and William Dieterle's *Vulcano* (*Volcano*, 1950). Taviani's film combines archival material and new footage, interlacing the history of Aeolian cinema with the history of the territory, its inhabitants, and the filmmaker's own family. Past departs from the film to investigate the role that volcanoes play in the environment, both filmic and geological, in a fascinating reflection on human and nonhuman memory. In Past's words, "This is a tale of cinematic memory and its entanglement with Italy, especially the Aeolian Islands. It is the story of the vitality in volcanoes, cinema, water, and film crews, and about how the cycling and recycling of energies shapes Italian cinema. Finally, it is a proposal for how volcanic stories can help form disciplinary and material alliances between actors of all kinds."[10]

The five films chosen by Past invite a new outlook on modern Italian cinema, which is one of the several reasons her project is worthy of praise. The ecocritical lens that Past adopts is a fascinating framework both for rethinking the critical engagement with well-known films, such as *Il deserto rosso*, and for approaching less-known titles that are deserving of more attention, such as *Il vento fa il suo giro* or *Le quattro volte*. Hopefully, Past's book will spark more scholarly interest in these films and will enable their inclusion in a variety of class syllabi.

Another noteworthy feature of Past's project is her interweaving of film analysis, production history, and reflection on the process of her own research, even though the different threads sometimes seem to proceed on separate tracks rather than grow organically one from the other. At times, Past touches only briefly upon production history in favor of more conventional textual analysis; more than once, the reader's curiosity is titillated but left dissatisfied. For instance, Past's study of the ecological dimension of these films does not go so far as to engage with the material impacts of filmmaking on the environment, including the very places in which these films were shot. Past acknowledges that her scholarly goal is slightly different—namely, to "read the film in terms of pressing environmental questions"—yet one is left

9   Past, 128.
10   Past, 154.

wondering what is left of the shoots in their locations once the crews are gone and what kind of material impact these productions have had on the places, people, and nonhuman actors with which they interacted.[11] These issues are touched upon frequently throughout the book, but Past rarely engages with them in depth. This observation is not meant as a criticism of her project, but rather as a testament to the richness of both Past's approach and the material in which she immerses herself. One cannot but hope for future additions in her ecocritical work, which may hopefully provide answers to these questions while asking new ones.

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11   Past, 2.