

***Photography and Cinema (Exposures)*****By David Company**

London: Reaktion Books, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-86189-351-2. 127 illustrations, 40 in colour. 160 pp, £15.95 (pbk).

***Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*****Edited by Karen Beckenham and Jean Ma**

Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8223-4155-0. 57 b&w illustrations, 328 pp, £17.99 (pbk), £73.00 (hbk).

**A review by Tom Slevin, University for the Creative Arts, UK**

David Company's *Photography and Cinema* and Karen Beckman and Jean Ma's edited collection *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photograph* explore the relationship between forms of still and moving image. Both books come at a moment of increasing academic attention to this subject, perhaps largely a response to claims surrounding film's obsolescence as an analogue medium in the age of digital (re)production. Both books consider film's different temporal regimes – such as the photograph, the film still, the 'still film', and film itself – whilst also considering issues of photography emerging from its treatment within cinematic narrative. Indeed, these two books function well when read together since one engages with the territory the other lacks. Company's book is a valuable, if cursory, overview of the field whilst Beckman and Ma's collection lacks the same structural cohesion whilst providing a more sustained academic interrogation.

Whilst it is unfair to critique a work based upon shortcomings the author acknowledges – Company admits it is a "small book about a large subject" (21) – its brevity is both its strength and weakness. The book is immensely readable; its clear, flowing prose and structure is enjoyable to read. However, one must heed the author's warning about its lack of depth. Instead, it provides what Company terms "a framework for thinking" (21) rather than "an encyclopedia" (21) in its breadth and depth. In presenting his book thus, Company dispenses with more rigorous examination for a pithy treatment of the subject's themes and historicity. Accordingly, photographic and filmic examples discussed are done so with utmost concision. Nevertheless, the book is successful as an attractively produced, well-written text intended as an introductory survey of the field.

Readers therefore should not expect to be enlightened through a detailed, developed interrogation of conceptual, historical, and ontological issues regarding the medium, its processes and its materiality. Instead, Company offers an historical and thematic outline of its four areas: 'Stillness', 'Paper Cinema', 'Photography in Film' and 'Art and the Film Still'. The first chapter,

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'Stillness', has the medium's temporality as its underlying theme. It provides a brief but fluid history beginning with Muybridge and Marey (of course!) before unfolding into a range of subjects from modernism and the city, film's late twentieth-century self-referential temporality, the freeze-frame within film's temporal development, and photography's relocation of itself as witness of the event's trace after the evacuation of the mass media with its obsession with immediacy. These themes are structured semi-coherently, but the text's brevity moves the reader along apace.

Chapter two, 'Paper Cinema', presents photography and film's relationship within printed design. Here, Company proposes that photographs are rarely insular or singular, but are contextually bound to other images or text. Graphic page design here appropriates cinematic devices such as montage, sequence, narrative and the close-up. Company handles the material well, although its concision nevertheless has an uncanny effect of both seducing and distancing the reader. One example is Company's statement regarding the "photo-story format...[that] borrowed heavily from narrative cinema in the 1930s" (83); the historical how, who, and why that should accompany such assertion is lacking. Similarly, Company makes problematic claims regarding the photo-story's adoption of the dissolve and cross-cut by assuming them to be 'cinematic devices'. In fact, a more considered interrogation would acknowledge that they are not, or at least not solely, attributable to cinema. (In addition, Timothy Corrigan's essay in *Still Moving* proposes other influences.) Therefore, although Company's terse approach is largely successful, at times it wears so thin as to draw attention to historical and conceptual fissures.

Chapter three on 'Photography in Film' surveys narrative cinema's incorporation of photographs and photographers. Familiar themes of proof, identity, memory, and fantasy are highlighted in relation to a number of films. Company's more extended discussion of Godard's *Letter to Jane* (1972) is most incisive. In comparison, the juxtapositions between Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (1987), August Sander, and *Countenance* (2002) by Fiona Tan exemplifies certain issues within the book, eliding consideration of historical, aesthetic, and contextual differences between cinema and gallery video installation. Again we return to the notion of the book's success as qualified upon its wider readability at the expense of its intellectual and historical rigour.

The fourth chapter reviews the photography of film production, artistic appropriation of the film still and the archive, and the photographic assimilation of the performance's ambiguity regarding acting, posing, and 'self' in the work of Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, and Gregory Crewdson. Company's reading of Roland Barthes's idea 'The Third Meaning' is succinct and effectively joins the second two themes. Company references Mitra Tabrizian's rephotography of Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945) as the photographic staging of film editing, and Allan Sekula's *Untitled Slide Sequence* (1972) by virtue, seemingly, of its

theatrical 'frontality'. The flow between ideas here can be tentative, if nevertheless stimulating. Campany concludes by proposing that the photographic allows for the greater interrogation of film, particularly in the gallery space as a site of inspection whereby conceptual art becomes 'a dissecting table' for photography, film, and their relationship.

*Still Moving* is perhaps framed by its two most important essays: an opening polemic by Tom Gunning and a dense concluding article by Raymond Bellour on movement and the entwinement of photography and film. These essays raise the deeper issues largely absent in *Photography and Film*. However, Beckenham and Ma's introductory text to *Still Moving* describes itself using an academic rhetoric that Campany's text benefits from avoiding. Their quasi-Deleuzian explication verges on excessive rhetoric that is not always wholly convincing. It insists upon its own "radical assessment" of the field through interdisciplinary hybridity (2). The editors describe their project as without "clear theoretical paradigm" (2) whilst somehow promising "clarity to the messy intersections" (2) – and of "map[ping] out strategies for analysing and understanding" (5) – whilst not providing a 'map'. Even if the language threatens to undo itself, Beckman and Ma claim the collection's value is a response to mutations, recombinations and migrations across fields, mapping the "shifting contours" (9) and providing "lines of flight" (9). Fundamentally, however, their use of Deleuzian rhetoric does not fully recoup the weaker elements in the collection. When reading the collection, their repeated insistence on the word 'intersection' here feels somewhere between convenient and strained in describing how the essays actually function together. Nevertheless, the project deserves praise for its ambitious demarcation and engagement of the field. The book is outlined as a (modernist) interrogation of the filmic medium in its age of digital manipulation, addressing the problematic historicity and teleology assigned to medium, providing new historical readings, and the creation of "alternate models of film historical pedagogy" (11) with "new conceptions of the ontology of film and photography" (17). Particularly interesting is the notion of how film and photography eventually undo the notions of progress and obsolescence as positivistic mediums.

Gunning's 'What's the point of an index?' is a highly appropriate inaugural chapter given the editor's ambitions. Gunning questions the very concept of photographic indexicality in the context of film's referential status in its age of digital manipulation. Essentially, he defends the digital by comparing it to, and finding continuities with, analogue photography. Gunning provokes a number of engaging ideas. He insists that the 'only' difference between analogue and digital indexicality is the storage and materiality of the medium (although this perhaps is a crucial subject itself!). He questions their fundamental difference beyond improved ease, speed and quality of manipulation – which again perhaps deserves consideration elsewhere – but also regarding how photographs are made, who makes them, and how they are used. However, issues do still

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remain, for example, regarding the importance in digitally altering something already *photographed*. Photography no longer is writing in light, but in numbers. At times, Gunning's insistence upon the difference he is attempting to recuperate does tend to fold back upon itself. However, this makes for no less of a stimulating essay.

Gunning's argument regarding the lack of significant difference between the indexicality of each to its referent develops into a rejection of film's prior indexical claims. He points out that although far less indexical than medical instrumentation, analogue photography was, and continues to be, highly manipulable. Importantly, Gunning argues that digital manipulation will never dominate photographic practice since its transformation depends upon drawing attention to the very fact of the referent's manipulation. Therefore alteration recoups photography's indexical relation to the referent at the moment of manipulation. He also convincingly tempers the 'hysteria' surrounding the reliability digital testimony by arguing that it is comparable to the prior photographic witness, and that is also 'disciplined' as an image by larger institutional frameworks. The digital image is therefore located within a wider set of discursive practices.

However, Gunning's defence of the digital's greater potential for deception is perhaps at best debatable, and at worst, ethically questionable. To begin with, Gunning locates digital manipulation within analogue photography's history of doctoring whilst relating digital photography to painting in its ability to create images. He suggests that photography is also capable of constructing images, from Julia Margaret Cameron's and Lewis Carroll's costume and theatricality, to Man Ray's visual puns, to modern advertising's play upon "truth claims" (32). At this point Gunning reiterates his point over image's loss of value if everything was manipulated and the 'counterfeit' lost its invisibility. However, Gunning's example of the cover-model's digitally manipulated perfection as a "playful push-pull" with accuracy given its "obvious distortion" (33) is an unsettling claim. In writing the "playful image...deconstructs itself before our eyes" (33), he neglects that such a whimsical attitude towards referentiality, of 'evidence' and 'play', has profoundly harmful effects upon culture. It is well documented that this 'playful' relation to the truth is an insidious practice that has quite terrible and destructive effects upon self-image and esteem. Digitally manipulating a cover-model is not the same as Gunning's previous example of grafting a beak on to Uncle Harry's nose. The apparent lacuna in Gunning's argument is that despite our knowledge of photography's status, it nevertheless retains a privileged status – part ontological, part historical – as a cultural document. Also, even if an observer is quite aware of the glamour industry's practice of manipulating bodies, the image still exerts its influence; it is projected from the magazine's glossy cover not as an index of the referent, but of 'perfection'. Gunning suggests that such a tyrannically perfect visage actually provokes "delight" and

"provide[s] pleasure" (33). Readers, no doubt, might take exception to such an androcentric position.

The proceeding essays are less provocative. However, highlights include George Baker's essay 'Photography's Expanded Field' that quite literally maps out photography with reference to modernity and postmodernity. Although the concept of the diagram and its terms are problematic – perhaps even at odds with the Deleuzian approach the editors propose – Baker's essay nevertheless is an enlightening consideration of expanded photography. His basic premise is that although conceptual art is seen to 'expand' its boundaries, this actually reflects the context of the limitations imposed upon photography before the appeal of appropriation, pastiche, recontextualisation and intermediality. Photography therefore becomes expanded rather than deconstructed. Meanwhile, Zoe Beloff's compelling contribution considers the theatrical 'Cartesian' gestures of filmed psychiatric patients. She briefly comments upon long-exposure photography, film, and chronophotography in documenting mental illness, but her focus is largely upon the bleeding realities of cinema and therapy through melodramatic narrative. Beloff not only refers to Charcot, but also studies the films of psychologists Cornelius Wholey and L. Pierce Clark. She concludes that it is actually the patient that "becomes ultimately no more than a reflection of the doctor's own cinematic fantasies" (251). Jean Ma's 'Photography's Absent Times' is another valuable contribution, considering photography and the photogram's relation to history, death, memory and remembrance through the film *A City of Sadness* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989). Via Barthes and Kracauer, Ma considers various issues regarding the image's role as an instrument of history, its cultural recuperation, and position within revisionist histories. For her, the 'freeze frame' lies at the tension between time and space, memory and history.

Elsewhere, a number of essays repeat ideas concerning strategies of appropriation, montage and reassembling photography and the archive. Rebecca Baron discusses her use of the still image in relation to history and memory through reconstructed narratives of fragmentary testimonies in found footage, the still, and its context. Rita Gonzalez's interesting piece shares a similar concern for reassemblage through her analysis of the filmmaker Jim Mendiola's use of found material and still imagery. Her concern is more directed towards (American-Mexican) cultural hybridity and new media that combines the dynamic between global and local culture through 1960s and 1970s Latin-American film, the Chicano film, and rock and pop. Reassembling archival material comes to mirror the formation of subjective identities through different cultural histories, memories and narratives in multiple claims upon the entangled image. In another essay, Louis Kaplan studies Wallace Berman's 'collage vérité'. This neologism attempts to articulate photographic animation and filmic arrest whilst drawing upon a number of references and influences from Berman's

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Semitism, Deleuzian theory, the influences of Brakhage and Warhol, Modernist references to Dada and Surrealism, and pop and underground American culture.

Other contributions includes Timothy Corrigan's study of the 'essay form' and its historical development between 1940 and 1958. He argues the photo-essay is derivative of the literary essay, a new essayist style that emerged from the context of the Second World War, the ideas of Hans Richter, André Malraux and Alexandre Astruc (including the *Cahiers du Cinema*), as well as technological change that enabled lighter film cameras in France and Germany. More specifically, Corrigan considers Chris Marker's *The Koreans* (1959) and *Letter from Siberia* (1958). Juan A. Suárez's 'Structural Film: Noise' provides a brief history, context and description of sound within 1960s Structural art, attempting to redress the concern over its opticality and materiality. Karen Beckman provides an interesting discussion of *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) and photography, although some of her claims are problematic. She discusses the repeated reference to the photographic within the film and the influence of Nan Goldin before moving on to consider each narrative strand of the film and its relationship to the still and moving image. Her analysis of Valeria's relationship to the image is both concise and penetrating.

*Still Moving* and *Photography and Cinema* complement each other by virtue of their different responses to mutual concerns. Somehow appropriate, relative to the accessibility of each's ideas, *Photography and Cinema* is a very attractive, well-illustrated and produced book, whilst *Still Moving* has an obstructive vertical line in its page margins. This is frustrating to readers who like to make notes in response to evocative ideas it produces. Nevertheless, it is an interesting collection that is both penetrating and insightful but also loses focus and relevance at times. *Photography and Cinema* indeed works very well as a short, smart overview of the field, although its rapid succession of ideas often ends just as they begin. In a book concerned more with the photographic, it reads like a film with its onrush of narrative and dispensation of the details. It is quite reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's quotation of Georges Duhamel: "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images" ('The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*. London: Fontana, 1977). Instead, *Still Moving* positions the reader akin to photography within a gallery space and the demands upon the subject subsequently engendered.