

definitions of genre purity.

Staiger's approach foregrounds the 'contact zone' between a film and its reception, how films galvanise interpretations like lightning rods; but 'shocking' films are only one (however *attractive*) wavelength on the reception study spectrum. This strategy demands both rigor and nuance. A brief survey cannot do justice to Staiger's rich, rewarding work. The writing style is refreshingly lucid, even while she negotiates complicated ideas and diverse spectator positions. Reception study obliges scholars to maintain a certain material credibility in their efforts to explain and/or understand films, rooting their claims in suggestive or illustrative testimony from a variety of historical-material documents. The archives are waiting.

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MARTIN RIESER AND ANDREA ZAPP (EDS)

## NEW SCREEN MEDIA: CINEMA/ART/NARRATIVE

BFI, London, 2002.

REVIEWED BY PATRICK TARRANT

**N***ew Screen Media: Cinema/Art/Narrative* edited by Martin Rieser and Andrea Zapp, is a weighty and extremely worthwhile book from BFI publishing that not only contributes to, but in many ways maps, that criss-crossed field prosaically indicated by its name. The book features a terrific range of writing from some twenty-five distinguished authors and practitioners that concentrates on 'content rather than interface', and which in the process locates narrative as the transit point for nearly all the arguments that come and go.

In some cases, as with Sean Cubbitt's es-

say, narrative is re-imagined as a form of social exchange, a sort of dialogue-interface that has the potential for uncovering new forms of narrative interaction, rather than narrative *per se*. Söke Dinkla makes a similar point in her investigation of 'the floating work of art', where she traces a history of non-linear narrative strategies relating to visual perception and the decentered subject in nineteenth century panoramas and Joyce's *Ulysses*. In the work of Joyce, she writes, 'the narrative is no longer the ... depiction of a sequence of real or imagined events based on a sender-recipient model, but ... an act of communication' (p. 30).

In other essays the body is central to an understanding of art and new narrative strategies since it has its own ways of narrativising data. And it is certainly the case that the body (both real and metaphorical) emerges consistently in the book's investigations as an interface that gathers, sorts and distorts content. In contrast Ken Feingold gripes about the interface lessons learned from ATMs and the like, where the user expects a fair transaction, a quantifiable return, and even a receipt. He laments that only rarely do audiences allow interaction to be as ambiguous or taxing a process as say, their corresponding contemplation of a painting.

*New Screen Media* is a genuine hub of intelligent criticism and a vibrant synthesis of the field. The book is broken up into two halves: 'Orientations: History and Theory', and 'Explorations: A New Practice', although the critical/practical divide is often blurred. Complementing both sections is the DVD that accompanies the book. Initially the DVD was a disappointment, since it acts very much as an accompaniment to the book, offering illustration and serving as an archive, rather than offering genuine content. For instance, there is not much that is interactive on the DVD. Images and movies dominate (albeit representing interactive projects). However it's great to see Michael Buckley's interactive *The Good Cook* make it on to the DVD in its entirety. And for anyone who hasn't encountered it before, I imagine this would fill out the experience of the DVD considerably. Of course an unavoidable problem with the DVD emerges from the fact that the sort of artistic practice covered by this book



far exceeds the bounds of the computer monitor. Many of the works highlighted involve elaborate installations and immersive set-ups not dissimilar in scale and scope to the kinds of experiments that developed in the 1960s and 1970s around an idea of expanded cinema, a history whose influence is well observed by Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel. Notwithstanding the limitations of the DVD, it does nonetheless offer a valuable and tantalising glimpse into interactive-artistic-narrative experiments that would otherwise be inaccessible, and which owing to the restricted nature of their exhibition, perhaps always were.

Central to *New Screen Media* is an exploration of what it means to think of narrative in the realm of interactivity, and vice versa. And these two planes of investigation fit neatly onto the book's frequently evoked vertical and horizontal axes, where narrative, consisting of temporality, cause and effect, maps onto the horizontal axis, and interaction is treated spatially (vertically)—so time and space. But this same model is just as useful for thinking about narrative alone, as is made clear by Jon Dovey who cites Roland Barthes' structural analysis of narrative. In this case the horizontal axis remains the same, focusing on story and plot, etc, and the vertical axis deals with deep narrative considerations: theme, character and atmosphere. Perhaps the most important thing that emerges from such a consideration of the spatial or vertical axis, is that it would appear there's a good deal more potential in interactive modes than for the mere manipulation of story. Indeed this model of analysis would appear to suggest that the proper subject of interactivity is everything *but* the story.

Lev Manovich offers further insight into



this area, continuing, and to some extent reprising his excellent work examining the language and history of new media. Manovich makes great mileage out of 'The Loop' and its promise of a 'new temporal aesthetic', leading even to his proposition that the loop might be understood as 'A Narrative Engine'. This engine is at the very least a graphic depiction of how motion (in space) can be thought independently of movement (in time), and in the process evokes an image of interaction as clutch-work. In other words, interactivity becomes less about stopping and going, and more about the continuous re-direction of flow and energy. The looping narrative then both propels us forward, and arrests our attention. Like the protagonist in *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993) for whom learning and emotional development maintain their forward march within an infernal twenty-four hour loop, this new temporal aesthetic induces a preoccupation with, and in, time. But if Bill Murray's character is doing time in his small town prison, he has little choice but to also do its space, resulting in the bored prescience that allows him to expertly cue the off-screen sound of the barking dog and a passing car. On this, Martin Rieser sounds a very amusing warning for the vigilant student of interactivity:

*Imagine the artistic disaster, if a film like Groundhog Day were spatially mapped as an interactive story, in such a way that the audience could live through all the repeated days and detail of the hero and his discovery of community. A tale of redemption would become a circle of hell ...* (p. 148)

Under the heading of 'Multilineal Verbosity', Rieser is making the point that more is not necessarily better when it comes time to bring interactivity to bear on narrative, citing economy and compression as hallmarks of a successful artistic narrative. And Zoe Beloff is similarly cautionary when imagining the damage that might be inflicted by an interactive Kino-Eye. Citing Vertov in the first instance—'Kino-eye uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points of the universe in any temporal order'—Beloff bemoans the possibility of a banal realization and literalization of such an idea, potentially spelling the end of metaphor at

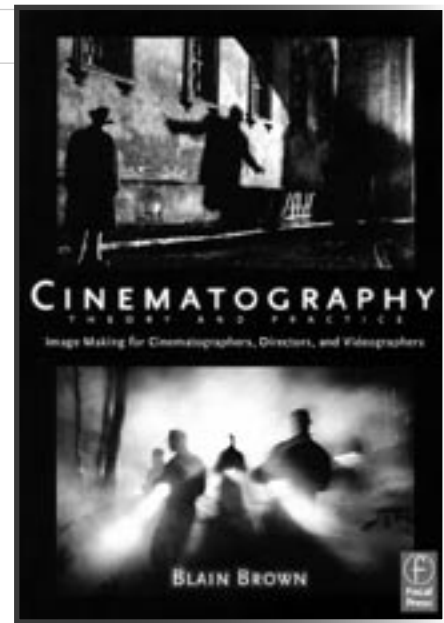
the hands of the go-everywhere mouse. (p. 291)

In '*The Good Cook: A Vertical Axis versus a Horizontal Axis in Interactive Narrative construction*' Michael Buckley describes how '[i]n a state of ceaseless flux, the mind goes about weaving and "un-weaving" itself' (p. 299). This sounds like subjectivity as a Mobius strip. Buckley's good cook is an alcoholic insomniac whose memories loop unreliably and incessantly throughout a single night, unwittingly triggered by the user whose experience emerges through the drama of occasion, rather than story. Buckley says he wants to represent the past 'as it is actually experienced', rather than as it actually was. In this spirit his narrative maps onto an embodied space ('I'm on a sea of fat.'), accessed via a sensing and censoring body-interface ('I'll let these thoughts dribble out of my throat, out into the void.'), and structured like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as recalled by Dinkla: both a network and a knot ('a stew to dip into.').

The first two sections of 'Part Two' are aptly titled 'Restructuring Time' and 'Redefining Space', the latter of which sees George Legrady, Malcolm Le Grice and Bill Seaman mapping the discourse of the virtual, and wrestling with ways of anchoring such discourse. Again the body crops up, its virtual presence being in part the test of virtual space. But so does the gallery space, and how it might intersect the virtual space. As Le Grice says:

*Participating in an interactive work within the context of a museum space implies engaging with spectacle and a form of audience performance ... Needless to say, the audience's engagement is a necessary component of the interactive work, since it positions the viewer into creating presence.* (p. 225)

Here we have the body, in public, interacting as audience and for an audience, present not only to the work, but also to the space and people in and around the work. An examination of spaces, whether virtual or imagined, goes to the heart of the artistic and narrative practices featured in this book, as they aim to incorporate their audience as members of an interactive narrative world.



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BLAIN BROWN

## CINEMATOGRAPHY THEORY AND PRACTICE

Focal Press, place, 2002.

REVIEWED BY HUNTER CORDAIY

This book is designed to be a manual for the working cinematographer and director, but it is more than a mere technical manual. Blain Brown, author of several prestigious books on cinematography and lighting, takes the position that the Director of Photography (DOP) is a storyteller in partnership with the director and actors. The DOP is therefore at the centre of the on-set marriage between technology and art. According to Brown this means that the DOP 'must know everything', because—quite accurately—a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The starting point and intellectual direction of the book is therefore found in the first two chapters, 'Filmspace' and 'Visual Language' respectively. This is where the story is located—in space, light and time. Brown supports the idea that the DOP must see the story within the frame, rather than the story being part of the world.

This is a technique and a mindset that all members of the film team should