Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations (review)

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Sung is evident while her writing style is always clear and conscientious. She has a way with words, illustrated in appealing background stories and anecdotes that convey the depth of her knowledge, and I thoroughly enjoy her sense of humor: "Are all prostitutes in Ford's westerns named after cities?" (114). In the end, Kalinak efficiently ascertains that auteur theorists have committed a major faux pas in omitting music from their theory and analysis. Kalinak's book offers a shrewd hypothesis, well organized and thoroughly examined, that brings a wealth of discovery into the formative study of film music.
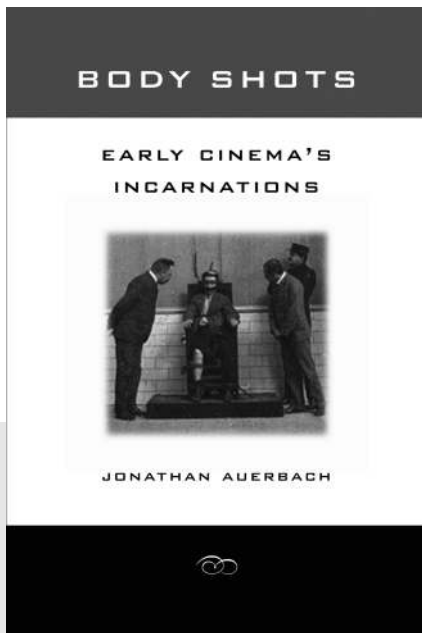
Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations

by Jonathan Auerbach
University of California Press, 2007

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While not a complete invalidation of his compatriots' work on early cinema, Jonathan Auerbach's new book, *Body Shots: Early Cinema's Incarnations,* presents a nuanced argument that deliberately sets itself apart from studies on modernity and audiences of the last two decades. In it, he wrestles with well-accepted theories on early film, namely Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions" model and the emergence of parallel editing in relation to narrative development. Having set the parameters with more or less nonnarrative films dating from the first decade of cinema, roughly 1893–1904, Auerbach particularizes concepts of attractions and modernity rather than overturning them.

He does this through concentrating on a curiously overlooked subject in the study of early cinema, specifically the presence of the human body on screen rather than those bodies—the supposed modern audience—that sit before it. "[L]ess concerned about the bodies in the seats than those moving in the frame" (3). Auerbach's focus may be seen as a possible thumbing at the work of Miriam Hansen on early cinema audiences. The idea, however, was inspired by something that film scholar and historian Linda Williams once proposed: "what is a body without a comprehensible story?" or "what remains before narrative arrives?" (2). Although in Auerbach's examination, he admittedly separates his focus from issues of gender and race, the questions posed by Williams remain intriguing, and require some wading through of the semantic and rhetoric employed by many early film historians. Auerbach asks, therefore, how we can discuss concepts like "continuity" and "shot" in films produced before such terminology existed. As a result, the role of the theorist often includes unpacking this excess baggage.

By positing the human body "as the basic building or 'primitive' block for plotting," (103) Auerbach's focus shifts toward the actual figures in the frame, how long we see them and how they interact with the space they inhabit; essentially, getting back to the images at hand rather than constructing a universal argument. The critique is most palpable in the introduction, where Auerbach accuses Gunning of evacuating the filmic image of form and content, similar, Auerbach contends, to what apparatus theorists did in the 1970s. In discussing the 1904 film *A Subject for the Rogue's Gallery,* Auerbach writes, "Gunning's emphasis on the camera's movement toward the criminal subject, rather than her own movement, tends to rob her of her agency" (5). By moving away from issues of reception and spectatorship (what he calls Gunning's eventual "aesthetic of

spectatorship" [4]), Auerbach attempts to loosen early cinema from a "predetermining past" and a "predetermined future" (8) by focusing on "kinesthetic aspects of the human form" (6).

In many ways, however, Auerbach embraces early film's links to modernity and technology, particularly in both the "Interlude," a pause between Parts I and II that deals with the vocality of gesture, and in his in-depth analysis of Edwin S. Porter's 1902 oft-cited *Life of an American Fireman,* a film that marks the telegraph—and electricity more generally—as part of the "invisible information" motivating the film. In terms of modernity specifically, the daily routine caught on the cameras of the Lumière brothers, for example, opens onto a discussion of the self-awareness of the subject being filmed. As the subject of chapter 2, "Looking Out: Visualizing Self-Consciousness"—which is particularly well-researched and supported— Auerbach draws on both the work of more contemporary psychologists as well as those from the turn of the twentieth century, unwrapping a lineage of visual culture in terms of "a reverse sort of spectatorship" (42). Here, Auerbach demonstrates the importance of visuality and physicality in their epistemological roles and attempts to historicize (and theorize) that very moment of self-objectification—an elusive, seemingly random moment at that. By examining those figures, paused and curious on the peripheries—a man in a top hat on a Moscow street, an excited waiter at a French café—we encounter "a dubious teleology by assuming that along the lines of a Hollywood narrative, figures on the screen must deliberately impersonate fictitious characters" (52). This brings into question the yet undefined role of improvisation, that moment "[b]etween acting and posing" (42) allowed to unravel in these early actualities, the spontaneous combined with the scripted. This is part of that alternate path that Auerbach is carving, one that retains the body within the prime idea of movement in images. It may not simply be the wind in the leaves, but perhaps just a man crossing the street.

To take on the body's conscious withdrawal from self-presence is no easy task. There is considerable footwork that Auerbach has accomplished here, which makes this text a useful contribution to the study of early cinema. At 136 pages, *Body Shots* impressively

manages to take up somewhat more than it proposes, and Auerbach is very careful about his intentions. While chapters such as "Looking In: McKinley at Home" are supported with political history—which should interest students and scholars in American studies—*Body Shots* is at its core a critical examination of film as a representational moving image, a focus that unfortunately one sees less and less often. Nevertheless, he allows peripheral interests, often drawn from other disciplines like psychology, to gain momentum either indepth or simply as informative footnotes. This is particularly apparent in the first chapter in which Auerbach proposes William McKinley as the "first media president," making an exemplar figure out of McKinley by privileging this body (politik) for its ability to traverse spaces and have a continuum of presence through absence; either at home, in the minds of a "mob," or in the president's funeral procession (35). Here we get short intertwining histories on Thomas Edison and the Biograph company, whose reenactments of the Spanish–American War became a vehicle for boosting patriotism and box office sales (33).

It is clear that the selection of films that Auerbach presents stems not simply from their representation of the body, but other issues that have intrigued film scholars previously, such as how to define narrative and the articulation of both horizontal and vertical space. Space, as the site of the film, also becomes imagined space that we understand by the body's movement through physical framing devices like windows and doors as discussed in chapter 4, "Windows 1900; or *Life of an American Fireman.*" In *Body Shots* we also find an "alternative conceptual framework," that relies on "American pragmatist philosophers and social psychologists from the turn of the 20th century" (6), growing out of a theoretical lineage in American studies, but also situating itself within theories of modernism.

Appropriately, the concluding chapter of *Body Shots,* "The Stilled Body," makes a lasting impression, taking as its subject the relation that cinema has had with death, such that we ask ourselves "what happens when the body stops moving?" (124). Here, the dubious stillness of a dead body on film is compared to the invested stasis of a dead body in painting.

Beyond this, the concepts that Auerbach presents throughout this work plant a useful seed that incites the reader—film historian or archivist, scholar of American or Performance studies—to reexamine the role of the body in contemporary media and take into account the surprising similarities and critical differences that might be found. *Body Shots* makes an exceptional contribution to current debates by doing more than simply drawing on previous theories, but opening up another dialogue on early cinema and the scholarship that surrounds it.

Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s
BY SCOTT HIGGINS
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS, 2007

Zack Lischer-Katz

For the first time in the history of the moving image, the full spectrum of visible light could be effectively reproduced. While earlier photographic systems of color reproduction had some

success projecting "natural" colors (Kinemacolor in 1908, as well as the various two-color Technicolor processes between 1917 and 1932, to name a few), these were only able to reproduce a limited range of the color spectrum, and technical problems often discouraged industry adoption. Successfully demonstrated in 1932 in Disney's animated short, *Flowers and Trees,* the three-strip Technicolor process was a milestone in cinematic color. However, as Scott Higgins points out in his new book, *Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow: Color Design in the 1930s,* the deployment of three-strip Technicolor within the context of the feature-length Hollywood narrative film had to overcome a complex array of technological, economic, and aesthetic concerns before it could be widely adopted. Higgins suggests that, at its inception, the three-strip process felt the tension between the need to show off its new found chromatic ebullience, allowing producers to rationalize the high cost of the new process, and the need to harmonize color with the existing structural elements of the classical Hollywood form, thereby ensuring critical and popular success.

Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow offers a bold examination of the concerns of early three-strip color designers, directors, and producers through a careful analysis of industrial discourse, scientific development, and the films themselves. In this sense, there is something for both the archivist interested in the history behind Technicolor technique, perhaps hoping to gain some insight into how the colors in a restoration project are "supposed to look," as well as the film scholar interested in the economic, technological, and aesthetic imperatives shaping Technicolor color design in the 1930s. While the lack of color in many of the illustrations can cast a pall over the writing, the thirty-three color plates in the middle of the book are adequate for driving across many of the author's points. It is also encouraging to find an appendix devoted to the problems associated with projecting old Technicolor prints, color balanced for carbon arc projectors, on cooler xenon arc projectors. A considerable degree of care is taken to discuss the types of prints referenced and the color temperature of the viewing illumination used for each print.

Prior to beginning his analysis of these early Technicolor films, Higgins lays out the