

films' aesthetics. Kornhaber's analysis demonstrates how animation gives representation to experiences that are impossible to capture with photographic media.

Kornhaber continues her in-depth analysis of the aesthetics of animated films in the third and fourth chapters, focusing on "memory films" and "memorial films," respectively. For Kornhaber, memory films are those that address personal experiences. These films are "[o]ften reticent to foreground their politics and [are] generally unconnected to the film production apparatuses of the state"; they "perform the act of witness in its most direct and unmasked form," with animators conveying "some aspect of what they themselves saw and experienced in wartime" (141). Among the examples of such films are *Kinshasa Septembre noir* (*Kinshasa, Black September*, Jean-Michel Kibushi, 1992), *Skazka skazok* (*Tale of Tales*, Yuri Norstein, 1979), and *Fatenah* (Ahmad Habash, 2009). The three films choose to deal with the representations of war experiences from different perspectives: the first from that of an omnipresent narrator created by the collective of children drawing the images for the film; the second through the eyes of a character from a folk song, a wolf; and the third from the perspective of a deceased woman.

Contrary to memory films, the memorial films that the fourth chapter presents are less concerned with personal war experiences than with the documentation or recording of war events. Tracing the genre of the memorial film back to *The Sinking of the Lusitania* by Winsor McCay (1916), regarded as the first case of documentary animation, Kornhaber states that the memorial film is "a work that comes into being at the intersection of remembrance and fantasy, whether [as] a shared imagining between survivor and artist or else an interpolative reconstruction of an event never recorded" (197). However, here, too, the author insists that animation can bear witness, whether it is *Lusitania* or Isao Takahata's *Hotaru no haka* (*Grave of the Fireflies*, Japan, 1988). Such an insistence begs the question, What does it mean when a medium bears witness?

Starting with the book's introduction, Kornhaber insists on the ability of animation to bear witness to the atrocities of war. In fact, this medium-specific axiom is key to sustaining the book's central argument: that animation is the medium that is best equipped to bear witness, much more than other media—photography in particular. Throughout each of the book's chapters, however, "bearing witness" comes to mean different things, which range from paying attention to testifying, imagining, and animating.

One of the most useful things about this book is the care it takes to contextualize the historical and cultural specificities of each film alongside a detailed analysis of its aesthetics. In

so doing, *Nightmares in the Dream Sanctuary* becomes an invaluable contribution to animation studies. However, at times the contextualizations are too broad, with the films pushed into preset historical and political categories that overlook nuance. For instance, in the analysis of Czech animator Jiří Trnka's *Ruža* (*The Hand*, 1965), Kornhaber interprets the film as a symbol of an artist's resistance against a totalitarian (Soviet) state, using Cold War rhetoric, while overlooking possible interpretations of the film as an allegory of an artist (an animator) who resists the pressure of capital (the market), which dictates the artistic choices of those working in the culture industry. Neither interpretation is better than the other. I would argue that they coexist, or are superimposed, so to speak, just as the animated image is created by the superimposition of various media, including drawings and photography. Maybe this is also the meaning of bearing witness by way of animation: that any one image can be and can do many things at once.

The richness of the material as well as the stimulating insights make the book a highly fecund read that provides encyclopedic knowledge on the aesthetic diversity of animation, from stop-motion to drawing on paper and cartoons based on comic strips to 3D computer-animated films. Through its focus on animated films related to war, the book raises broader questions—about the medium specificity of animation and its aesthetics—that make it an excellent point of entry into the area of animation studies in general.

OLGA BLACKLEDGE, a media studies scholar, is an assistant professor at Bethany College. She has published in English and Russian on animation and life-action film, engaging such topics as cultural and gender representations, space construction, violence, body, and movement.

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MADELEINE COLLIER

***The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor* by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky**

If you are one of Facebook's 1.62 million monthly users and have the time to do a bit of scrolling, you have likely noted the rise of the "hand and pan" video format, though you may not recognize it by that name. Beginning in 2015, several corporate media subsidiaries (notably the BuzzFeed-affiliated Tasty and TheSoul Publishing's 5-Minute Crafts) have racked up millions of views on short-format instructionals that feature step-by-step recipes for everything from fluffy soufflé pancakes to slip-on sandals made entirely of hot glue. These videos follow a fairly precise grammar:

the camera is oriented downward, toward the flat plane of productivity, which is furnished with a range of objects. Hands (usually white and manicured, always perfectly adept) emerge from the bottom or lower sides of the screen, manipulating these raw materials into attractive cakes or inventive DIY goods.

From initial ingredients to final product, these videos sequentially track the coming into being of a commodity. At face value, this social-media fad could be dismissed as nothing more than a particularly zeitgeisty brand of fetishism; but in fact, hand-and-pan content exhibits a representational syntax that can be traced back to the birth of cinema. Hand-and-pan videos are recent manifestations of a centuries-old labor aesthetic that Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky terms the “process genre.”

Naming is a prerequisite for theorizing, as Skvirsky notes in her introduction, but rarely is this gesture undertaken with such exquisite attention. In *The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor*, Skvirsky makes a compelling case for a new, transmedial genre encompassing sequential, process-driven representations of labor and production. Locating the origins of the genre in fifteenth-century how-to manuals, she tracks the evolution of process-driven representation through Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, the craft demonstrations of nineteenth-century international exhibitions, industrial and ethnographic films, and, finally, new media DIY culture.

Amid this sweeping range of texts, Skvirsky asserts that the process genre is uniquely suited to the moving image; unlike print or live media, film has an innate capability to deconstruct and recompose motion sequences (3). Accordingly, she chooses to structure her argument around six films: *A Visit to Peek Frean and Co.’s Biscuit Works* (Cricks and Sharp, 1906), *Nanook of the North* (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922), *Riffifi* (Jules Dassin, 1955), *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959), *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975), and *El Velador (The Night Watchman)* (Natalia Almada, 2011). The diversity of this selection demonstrates Skvirsky’s ambition; nevertheless, she is a sure-footed navigator and charts a clear path through the many artifacts of a surprisingly pervasive phenomenon.

Skvirsky outlines her research in lucid and compelling questions: Why is processual content so mesmerizing and satisfying to watch? Does the process genre assume any inherent political stance on labor? When and how can “immaterial” labor practices be folded into this grammar of representation? Across five chapters, she takes up each of these questions in turn, and then some—constructing a taxonomic analysis of the process genre’s syntax and establishing the limits of its reach.

In chapter 2, “On Being Absorbed in Work,” Skvirsky addresses the peculiar appeal of process-driven films that fall outside of the narrative mode native to the process genre. Outlining her conception of the process narrative (typified by the culinary recipe), Skvirsky claims that affective engagement with the process genre largely relies on the gaps and tension between the narrative’s generic protocol and the viewer’s knowledge and expectations (81). Taking the delightful example of a visit to a Crayola factory once featured on *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, she traces the curiosity structure that sustains viewer interest over a six-minute segment devoid of human faces, as a vat of wax metamorphoses into a kindergarten staple. The genre’s fundamental occupation with the “how” of production processes, Skvirsky claims, engages viewers in their capacity to marvel over human creative ingenuity as well as in their anticipatory expectation of closure, as raw goods slowly approach the familiar forms of everyday objects.

This appeal is impossible to ignore while reading *The Process Genre*; even Skvirsky’s step-by-step accounts of the texts she cites elicit a distinct sense of gratification. These methodical movement descriptions are mirrored in image form, as each chapter is punctuated with grids of film stills that cooperatively evoke the grammatization of discrete human and mechanical movements so central to the genre.

For a genre so closely aligned with the assembly of commodities and the routine execution of tasks, the process genre reveals itself to be remarkably ambivalent about the traditional politics of labor. In chapters 3 and 4 (“Aestheticizing Labor,” “Nation Building”), Skvirsky demonstrates that the process genre has long been  thing of a mercenary agent, enlisted in left-wing depictions  a glorified proletariat in *Arundanda* (Linduarte Noronha, 1960) as well as in right-wing projects of nation building and corporate ascension, such as *How Henry Ford Makes One Thousand Cars a Day* (1914). Skvirsky attests that the process genre resists classification according to specific political agendas but is fundamentally committed to a metaphysics of labor, a “basic embrace of the existential, as well as the material, value of labor to human life” (47). It is a genre that valorizes the technical process by rendering it visible, elevating the intricate interchange between hand and machine, casting all production, regardless of mode, as skillful. Thus, the genre is compatible with any political project save antiwork politics; though even there, there are parodic exceptions like the anarchistic, egg-flinging mayhem of YouTube’s HowToBasic channel.

Central to the peculiar absorption and political efficacy of the process genre is its specific mode of haptic visuality. Marcel Mauss once remarked that the American walking style must have been transmitted to France via cinema, whereas

Skvirsky comments on the singularly embodied response invoked by the process genre's display of bodily techniques. These texts are rich in sensual, material information; they "evoke the proprioception of a practitioner in action and thus invite the spectator's kinesthetic identification with the active practitioner" (41). While Skvirsky doesn't dwell on the kinesthetic empathy engaged by watching process narratives, the potential ideological implications merit further research. After all, neoliberal DIY content typically suffuses the process genre with principles such as perpetual self-improvement, frugality, environmental consciousness (on an individual scale), and, of course, the unobtrusive presence of a few friendly brand names. In an era of unprecedented interface intimacy, the disembodied, laboring appendages that pick up where our own arms leave off are optimally positioned to cultivate neoliberal habitus.

As Skvirsky attentively traces the genre's historical ebb and flow, she takes particular note of the "operational" aesthetic prevalent across the early industrial period and the deluge of industrial and ethnographic films that accompanied the rise of Taylorism. Considering both of these historical pivots in production and consumption, Skvirsky suggests that "the process genre is a representational consolation for a society too complex to be masterable" (220).

Today, the popularity of process-driven content in online forums may attest to a heightened sensitivity to the covert nature of the commodity in the era of globalization, by which far-reaching assemblages of labor, material, design, and marketing coalesce into tangible things. Frank Pasquale recently coined the phrase "black box society" to describe the prevalence of proprietary corporate knowledge frameworks that render labor processes and the ontology of the commodity itself increasingly unfathomable; and Jathan Sadowski's recent work on pseudo-AI has testified to the fundamental unknowability of a sphere of technological apparatuses wherein services allegedly performed by AI are actually being offloaded to warehouses of low-wage workers. In the face of such rapidly evolving production paradigms, Skvirsky's book is an uncommonly thorough and focused debut, and a valuable resource for anyone interested in representations of labor, functional cinema, technique and technology, or media materiality.

MADELEINE COLLIER is a New York-based writer, researcher, and filmmaker currently pursuing an MA in Film and Media Studies at Columbia University. Her writing has appeared in the journals *Film Comment*, *Sound Studies*, and *Afterimage*.

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JEFFREY MIDDENTS

Lucrecia Martel by Gerd Gemünden

Lucrecia Martel has only four features to her credit over nearly twenty years of filmmaking, but her style is so iconic and her influence so expansive that her work can be considered, as A. O. Scott once suggested, a genre unto itself. With the publication of *Lucrecia Martel*, the Argentine director has become the first South American director to be profiled in the University of Illinois Press's Contemporary Film Directors series since its inaugural volume on Nelson Pereira dos Santos in 2003.

In *Lucrecia Martel*, Gerd Gemünden meditates on what he calls "a poetics of the senses," arguing that Martel's work defies both expectations and narrative norms in its overarching emphasis on the sensual: "Filmmaking, she believes, enables us to discover the cracks (*vajaduras*) in the everyday, which in turn offer a glimpse into the constructedness of what we call reality—the fact that reality is made, not given—and how the individual pieces are assembled" (6).

These types of films have made Martel into a festival darling: she debuted at Berlin with *La Ciénaga* in 2001 and was booed at Cannes—something she considers a rite of passage—for *La mujer sin cabeza* (*The Headless Woman*) in 2008. Gemünden notes that these very films are crafted for an immersive viewing experience. Discussing the critical response to *The Headless Woman*, her third feature, he notes that the film "may not just merit but in fact require" repeated viewings: "The considerable demands it makes on viewers implies that it is less than perfect for the festival circuit, where attendants watch several films per day, often with little time to process them" (86). It is not that the films are difficult; rather, the "sensory overload" asks for a different kind of audience participation. Gemünden's close and careful writing imbues his analysis with the time and space to dwell in the moments that enrich her work—"the ephemeral, fortuitous, fragmentary, and endless quality of human experience" through filmmaking that "encompasses a strong aural and haptic dimension that physically involves viewers and viscerally affects their engagement with the screen" (7).

Martel's work is especially well suited for the structural form of the Contemporary Film Directors series, which eschews traditional chapter breakdowns in favor of a monograph that is actually one long essay. More expansive and leisurely than single tightly focused academic articles, these volumes allow room for an argument to swell and contract, providing a close-up on a closely researched element before