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Jennifer Wild. *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. xv + 360 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 (cl). ISBN 9780520279889; \$34.95 (pb). ISBN 9780520279896.

Review by Hannah Lewis, University of Texas at Austin.

Paris in the 1920s was a dynamic site of cinematic experimentation. As the cinema flourished and matured, avant-garde visual artists and writers found it to be a perfect medium for exploring their own aesthetic and artistic preoccupations. Well-known examples range from the play with rhythm and movement by Cubist painter Fernand Léger in *Ballet mécanique* (1924), the bold Dadaist multimedia experiment *Entr'acte* (1924), which was the creative result of a collaboration between René Clair, Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and composer Erik Satie, and the Surrealist films of the late 1920s, including Germaine Dulac and Antonin Artaud's *La Coquille et le clergyman* (1928) and Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's audacious *Un Chien andalou* (1929). These intersections between cinema and avant-garde visual and literary arts, though not unique to 1920s Paris, were particularly fruitful there, and helped to define French national cinema in the late silent era, and avant-garde cinema for decades to come.

But the influence of cinema on the avant-garde began with the emergence of the medium twenty years earlier, as Jennifer Wild's *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema* makes clear. Wild uncovers a fascinating history of intersections and encounters between cinema and a wide circle of two generations of avant-garde artists and writers, starting at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story is more hidden than that of the 1920s, as the influence of cinema did not manifest itself in cinematic works or collaborations, and rarely even in explicit cinematic references. Instead, cinema's influence was more deeply embedded in artists' conceptions of the world and how it was perceived. As cinema and cinematic spectatorship evolved in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the medium influenced ways of understanding the image, artistic circulation, the artist's persona, and other aspects of visual and written culture that resonated in avant-garde works in significant ways.

In *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, Wild argues that "the early cinema not only shaped the culture and experience of urban modernity, but also played a significant role in the development of modern and avant-garde art" (p. 1). She investigates the relationship between Parisian avant-garde art—particularly Cubism and Dada—and cinema during what she calls its "prehistorical" era (p. 1), when questions about film form, spectatorship, the star system, and even projection itself, were still being figured out. She traces the period from the "cinema of attractions" (a term coined by Tom Gunning), to the increasing trend toward theatricality and narrative absorption leading up to World War I, to the sudden explosion of Charlie Chaplin on European screens following the war. As the cinema and cinematic spectatorship evolved, so too did the avant-garde, which explored new and different ways of seeing and thinking cinematically. Wild weaves a rich and captivating interdisciplinary story, drawing on detailed examinations of primary sources alongside analysis and critique that draws from both film studies and art history in its methodology, to uncover previously unexplored points of connection.

Wild adopts a framework of “horizontalness” to better understand the cinema as a modernist practice. She argues that vertical projection, long understood as the dominant form of cinema, has structured our way of cinematic thinking since the 1920s. Her focus instead on *projection par transparence*, which was used often in the early days of cinema, serves as an apt metaphor for her entire project, upending our traditional thinking about cinema as “a direct analogue of human sight” (p. 12). She focuses on transparent projection as a symbolically radical way of restructuring cinematic thinking, which allows her to expand her scope of inquiry beyond the cinematic image to include “the spatial, relational, and conceptual parameters organized by early methods of projection and exhibition” and “the film industry’s expansive, extrafilmic penetration into cultural life by way of stardom, advertising, and distribution” (pp. 1-2). It also allows her to work against the grain of dominant historical narratives about both cinema and the avant-garde during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The concept of “horizontalness” plays out in both literal and conceptual ways in Wild’s book, and provides a productive framework for expanding the ways we understand the influence of cinema on contemporaneous visual and written culture. She examines literal connections between the avant-garde and cinema—Picabia’s interaction with the film star Stacia Napierkowska, for instance—alongside more symbolic points of connection, like the ways in which transparent projection might have influenced Picasso’s representation of space. The result is a compelling alternate history of both the development of cinematic spectatorship in France and of the avant-garde’s relationship to it.

Wild’s case studies are both diverse and coherent, presenting a linear narrative of synchronous developments in cinema and the avant-garde, while acknowledging competing conceptions and practices at any given moment. Chapter one explores early contexts of cinematic projection, particularly the ways cinema “operated as a modern exhibition scenario—a ‘space of experience’—that revealed in the image’s and the spectator’s mutual conspicuousness and reflexive relativity” (p. 25). Wild examines the cinematic horizontalness of early projection, which may have influenced Picasso’s experimentation with formal and phenomenological forms of representation in his works like *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. She draws connections between cinematic exhibition and Picasso’s “collapsed...distinction between representation and lived, spectatorial space” (p. 27). In *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Picasso transformed “the representational problems of modern painting into a reflexive study of mediation and beholding” (p. 27), a “confrontational...aesthetics of exhibition and address” (p. 32) that was influenced by early cinema. She delves into the history of transparent projection and relates its form of exhibition to the Cubist concept of transparency. Transparency in both cases, she argues, was a “potent, confrontational address to the beholder” (p. 62). The chapter deftly connects the exhibition narrative with a nuanced understanding of Cubism’s unique form of display. Wild additionally goes into meticulous historical detail to posit that Picasso might have come into direct contact with transparent projection during his first years in Paris.

Chapters two and three treat horizontalness metaphorically, expanding the scope of the cinematic to include early conceptions of stardom. Chapter two focuses on the “multiple, intermedial and fragmented” emergence of print culture on film in France (p. 63)—from which early concepts of film stardom were built—as a different site for cinematic reception. An interaction between Picabia and the film star Napierkowska in 1913 becomes the point of departure for a larger exploration of Picabia’s “development of diagrammatic visuality” (p. 70) in his machine drawings from 1913-15. Chapter three continues this thread, focusing on Duchamp’s work *The Large Glass*. Duchamp’s diagrammatic approach was likewise influenced by the intermedial imagery of the film star. Both artists were interested in the relationship between the live body and its reproduction on film and through photography, and the ways in which the process of cinematic stardom transformed the subject.

The second half of the book examines cinema’s slow struggle toward legitimation, which Wild describes as a figurative “battle between verticality and horizontalness” (p. 17). Chapter four turns to the period from about 1908 to the end of World War I, when cinematic spectatorship was becoming increasingly vertical. The development of a national French cinema, the efforts of cultural uplift through classic literary and

theatrical adaptations on the screen, and the removal of extrafilmic attractions resulted in a cinematic model centered on spectatorial absorption. During this period, the avant-garde maintained horizontality as a means of resistance against theatrical “absorption as an ideological expression of the state’s sovereignty over individual aesthetic experience” (p. 147). Unlike Apollinaire’s generation, who experienced the excitement of the wide possibilities of film in its early years as a cinema of attractions, the “generation 1900,” which included Aragon, Breton, and Soupault, were coming of age during this period of cinematic legitimation. As a result, they did not find in cinema the kind of liberating inspiration that the older avant-garde did.

Within this context, the shocking arrival in Paris and Zurich of French and American film serials, American westerns, and especially Charlie Chaplin comedies between 1914–1917 felt like a radical break from cinematic verticality, one that appealed greatly to this newer generation of avant-garde artists. These films seemed to present to artists what Wild calls a “cinema of ballistics,” defined by the temporal form of the instant: “It erupts spontaneously in a momentary, ungraspable form capable of rupturing the continuity of language, narrative, and the primacy of vision for the sensorium of the body in its place—in situ, as it were, within the horizontal, cultural domain and the moment of reception” (p. 190). The last two chapters of the book explore the emergence of the cinema of ballistics, which arose simultaneously to the radical temporality and mode of address upon which Dada was established.

Chapter five examines the new kind of temporality presented by serial films such as *Fantômas*, whose advertising “generated their receptive aesthetic in the flash of instant recognition, and with a directness that required no extended duration to elicit their perceptual or epistemological effect” (p. 190). The kind of jolt of recognition that these films and their printed imagery inspired helped redefine the cinema and film spectatorship “as a field of avant-garde possibility” at the same time that members of generation 1900 were forming their own kind of “artistic revolt against the bourgeois sphere” (p. 191). Chapter six examines the sudden arrival of Chaplin films in France and Switzerland at the very moment Dada was emerging in full force. Chaplin quickly became internationally popular, and many avant-gardists were drawn to him, seeing his “physical comedy [as] a literal physical assault on spectatorial dignity, civility, and national identity” (p. 226). Tristan Tzara was especially influenced by Chaplin while constructing his own persona and engineering his desired reception. Particularly of interest to him was the idea of authenticity and “counterfeit” Chaplins, and Tzara made “Dada mimic the system that had made Chaplin both a star and the object of counterfeit” (p. 250). The conclusion of the final chapter explains how the end of Parisian Dada led to the end of the “age of cinema”: the age of cinema “draws to a close when, in a history of modernism, the avant-garde film steps into the horizon and quietly claims the cinema’s place” (p. 274).

Wild’s trajectory—from the cinema of attractions, to the movement toward spectatorial absorption, to the arrival of a new form of spectatorial address—offers an insightful way of thinking through the varied influence of cinema on artists and writers of the period. Moreover, through the concept of horizontality, she uncovers a complex history that requires delving into unexpected places. This model of historical inquiry would likely yield equally rich results in other geographical and historical contexts. Her approach is only possible through her interdisciplinarity, one of the book’s greatest strengths. She understands and explicates points of connection that the boundaries of scholarly disciplines have taught us to ignore, or have prevented most scholars from obtaining the proper critical tools to address.

This interdisciplinarity is also one of the book’s biggest challenges. To speak multiple discourses and address multiple audiences in a way that is both comprehensible and rigorous is an almost impossible needle to thread. As a reader, it requires patience and attention. It may be challenging at times for those not already steeped in art historical discourse, or conversely, film theoretical discourse. Moreover, sometimes the dense theory obscures, rather than clarifies, Wild’s main points. Nevertheless, Wild handles the challenging task with aplomb, bringing a range of discourses in dialogue that illuminate the topic at hand in novel and creative ways.

As a scholar of film music, I personally would have liked to see the scope of the artistic collaborations expanded to include musical composition and works for the stage. Numerous French avant-garde musicians were influenced by cinema in their own way—through the scenarios of many of the ballets they composed for the Ballets Suédois, and through works that referenced cinema in various ways, such as Darius Milhaud’s *Le Boeuf sur le toit* (1920) and, perhaps most famously, Satie’s ballet *Parade* (1917). Musicians were an important part of the artistic milieu explored in Wild’s book, and her argument could have expanded beyond the visual realm in interesting ways. Jean Cocteau, who often allied himself much more closely with musicians than with other writers and artists, would also have been a welcome addition. Expanding beyond the realm of the visual might have made the scope of the book unwieldy, but including a wider range of performing arts could also take the concept of horizontality one step further in illuminating ways.

In short, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema* is an indispensable book for multiple disciplines: for film studies scholars, art historians, and scholars of twentieth-century French cultural history. Its importance goes beyond the precise historical moment it delves into, and it provides a productive framework for future explorations of other artistic moments in other times and places. Through a horizontal approach to cinema, combined with a rich historical excavation and multi-faceted analysis of a broad range of artworks, Wild provides us with tools to explore relationships between artists and their culture against the “vertical” grain, which will likely yield plentiful rich new understandings of these relationships.

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