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Christina Parker-Flynn, *Artificial Generation: Photogenic French Literature and the Prehistory of Cinematic Modernity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022. ix + 246 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. $120.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9781978825079; $32.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781978825062; $32.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781978825086.

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In terms of its conception as an art form, cinema has taken an exciting yet circuitous, sometimes fraught path. When one of its underlying foundational features--still photography--first came into being, certain observers, including poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire, took umbrage at its facility in precisely presenting (not to say representing) subjects, deeming it unartistic inasmuch as it lacked an artist's creative labor and translation of the subject, a process "whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man's soul;" indeed, Baudelaire charged photography (and its use as an aid in painting) with contributing "much to the impoverishment of the French artistic genius."[1] Looking back to the moments leading to cinema's invention and tracking forward to the present, it has been seen along this same vein of thought as merely mechanical, a faithful but not creative reproduction of the world. On the opposite end of the spectrum, its capacities have been seen as frivolous in a different way--harnessed for entertainment purposes, with amusement park attractions (explosions and the like) that render it a fanciful confection fit for consumption only by children. Where is the *art* in that?

Notwithstanding these judgments, cinema--the seventh art, late-arriving--has enjoyed a number of fervent defenders who discerned within it qualities making it not just an art form but *the* art form of the twentieth century and beyond. These defenders have eloquently championed its claim to that realm. As Christina Parker-Flynn points out in her generous, well-researched historical study on this topic, *Artificial Generation: Photogenic French Literature and the Prehistory of Cinematic Modernity*, the cinema is the modernist medium par excellence. In her book, she offers an astute account of discourses arising in nineteenth-century literary contexts that lend insight into the cinema's emergence as a mode not just of documentary facility or narrative titillations, but as an art form uniquely capable of representing subjectivity. One of the key issues at stake for cinema's alignment with art has to do with the way cinema became and long remained a medium of representation. In that capacity, the emergence of cinema as Parker-Flynn traces it becomes entwined with a tangled web of ideas about the role of art, subject/object relations, and the generation of images from mid-nineteenth-century continental thought moving forward into the early twentieth century. Of these ideas, she fixes on the notion of *photogénie*, using it as one of the initial threads that might lead us safely through this labyrinth of ideas.

As the author suggests, *photogénie* is a sufficiently complicated idea that many film scholars have grappled with it. I would not have minded if the author had grappled with it just a bit more, too, drawing from more than just a small handful of the excellent texts unfolding the matter, inasmuch as one might in fact need a separate thread just to navigate *photogénie*'s own turns and redoublings.[2] Moreover, because the author's writing is densely packed with references both to primary and secondary texts, it can be difficult to follow that thread at times. Ultimately, however, it pays off. The idea of *photogénie* as it pertains to the art (and philosophy) of film comes down to us primarily from filmmaker and critic Jean Epstein, who adopted it from his contemporary Louis Delluc, further developing it while drawing on certain principles of Symbolist and Aestheticist thinking that Parker-Flynn usefully identifies. She then marshals the concept to consider the tricky divide between subject and object, stillness and motion, and reality and image in both literary and cinematic contexts. Epstein's copious writings offer an object lesson (literally) on these matters. Parker-Flynn argues that the generative qualities embedded in *photogénie* help to facilitate the emergence of new modes of representation. In so doing, she offers a new way of thinking about early debates on cinema's purview and purpose.

The book is most impressive when, by identifying the cross-currents between literary and cinematic ways of generating and regenerating images, Parker-Flynn turns to a rich set of case studies to detail how these emergent aesthetic traditions (crystallized in the notion of the "photogenic") held sway at the moment cinema began to be validated as an art form--and how they continue to perpetuate these traditions up to the present. In the first of the book's two sections, these case studies hinge on literary representations: chapter one examines the dynamics of burgeoning French literary modernism through the writings of Théoophile Gautier; chapter two focuses on Auguste Villiers de I'Isle d'Adam's *L'Ève future* (1886) and its titular character of the female automaton; and chapter three considers Oscar Wilde, the figure of Salome, and the concept of degeneration. All three studies center on issues of artificial reproduction. And each case elaborates a variation on the themes of original versus copy and the artistic re-generation effected through the texts' representations of women's bodies. This section offers a compelling account of how such texts held up a particular illusion of life (often with the image exceeding its original) that helped to usher in the cinematic age.

In the second part, Parker Flynn turns to more contemporary discourses to track the lineage of these ideas in twentieth-century filmmaking, from early Edison films through Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and ending with cinematic replicants in Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). This section is replete with evocative examples of the generative qualities of moving images and draws on discourses from a panoply of realms--art and ancient history and philosophy to name a handful--that flesh out the initial argument and bring it to life--often better than the original, just as promised. The chapters in the second part also productively call back parts of the first, so that for instance we see statues or Salome not just in a literary but in a cinematic context.

What Parker-Flynn's book offers as a crucial intervention in studies of cinema as an art form in the age of modernity, then, is its imbrication of discourses about the cinema at this moment with literary models that, brought together, illuminate each other in a wholly original and generative way. Additionally, the book's provocative suggestion of issues related to understanding the role of the female body as represented by cinema and literature means that Parker-Flynn's work will likely inspire further writing and research on the artificial, mimetic, copied, duplicated, and/or real, pro-filmic bodies of women on film. The aesthetic traditions she traces throughout *Artificial*

Generation thrive even as the cinema has shifted, like literary modes, into digital formats and into the future.

NOTES

[1] Charles Baudelaire, "On Photography," in Jonathan Mayne, ed. and trans., *Charles Baudelaire: The Mirror of Art* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1955); excerpt https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art109/readings/11%20baudelaire%20photography.htm, accessed December 21, 2022.

[2] Examples include Christophe Wall-Romana, "Epstein's Photogénie as Corporeal Vision: Inner Sensation, Queer Embodiment, and Ethics," in Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul, eds., *Jean Epstein: Critical Writings and New Translations* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Nourredine Ghali, *L'Avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, théories* (Paris expérimental, 1995); as well as Epstein's own writing, especially *La Lyrosophie* (1922), *Le Cinématographe vu de l'Etna* (1926), and *L'Intelligence d'une machine* (1946).

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