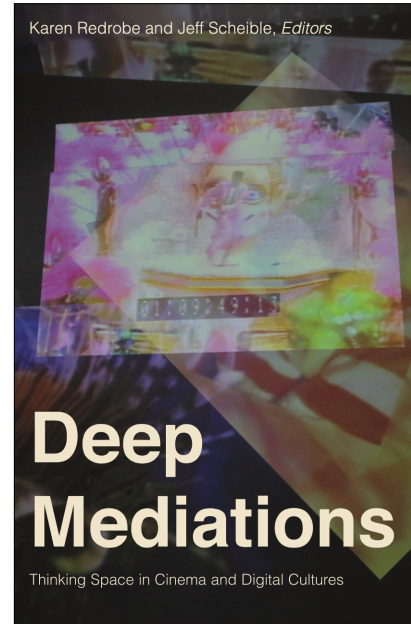


Karen Redrobe and Jeff Scheible (Eds.), **Deep Mediations: Thinking Space in Cinema and Digital Cultures**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021, 385 pp., \$35.00 (paperback).

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In *Citizenfour*, the documentary about former National Security Agency intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, director Laura Poitras (2014) evokes the dangers and stakes of a modern state's surveillance power through the cinematic depth of framing. Depicting mostly conversations between Snowden, Poitras, and journalist Glenn Greenwald, the film builds an atmosphere of tension for a sociopolitical tableau: portraying the contours of the state as a mysterious abstract force through strained framing and composition. The cinematography's unsettling depth of field—a film text's ability to represent multiple planes of an image—often suppresses visual logics. "Inside and outside are separated, with the spectator positioned in one and the subject in the other, on the threshold of entering a future whose regulation rests in others' hands," writes Jeff Scheible in "Depth Effects: *Citizen Kane*, *Citizenfour*, and the Deep Time of Cinema," his chapter in ***Deep Mediations: Thinking Space in Cinema and Digital Cultures***, a volume coedited with Karen Redrobe (p. 104). Scheible links the symbolic framing of *Citizenfour* with that of Orson Welles' (1941) *Citizen Kane*, noting the complex modalities of depth in cinematic texts through semiotic and narrativized operations.



Such rich considerations of depth within the context of moving images are prevalent throughout this outstanding collection. Seventeen chapters and the editors' preface excavate cinematic depth's aesthetics, conceptual density, and expressivity in relation to a wide range of case studies featuring international fiction films, documentaries, and experimental multimedia that are then sensitively placed in context with artistic, mediated, political, and economic actualities. How do layers of depth portray, underline, and organize instances of both disclosure and uncertainty in cinema as they unfold story arcs and characterization? How do diverse utilizations of the depth concept fit within the current multimedia ecosystem of content creation aided by mobile technologies and virtual methodologies? Gesturing to these dominant queries, the collection's essays are presented in four parts, each preceded by perceptive editorial introductions that offer relevant theoretical scaffolding and the weaving of thematic threads. These encompass matters of craft, spectatorship, and representation in cinema from the early 20th century until the present.

Scholars, students, and enthusiasts of film, media, and broader cultural studies will appreciate the book's assortment of engagements with paradigms of visibility and subjectivity. Across traditional and novel filmic settings, the authors' critical analyses represent a renegotiation of existing considerations of depictions of depth. Though not all case studies are fixed in the present day, their conceptual reverberations signal to the flair and hazards of contemporary 24/7 screen interactivity. From homes, backyards, mines, and oceans to the

lateral movement of trains and passenger windows, the volume's collective exploration engenders a portrayal of the depth concept within "zones of experience radically disassociated from our bodies" (p. 52). Take the chapters of the first part, "Depths of the Moving Image: Perception, Spectatorship, and Film Theory," which trace pivotal developments in film history and theory to spark fresh stances concerning depth of field and the cinematic concept's interactions with postmodern ideas of time, movement, and pictorial space.

The second part, "Depth Hermeneutics and Surface Turns," offers hermeneutic frameworks for the reading of contemporary art cinema and documentary film by unpacking the strained dialectic between depth and surface countenances. "Deep Space, Deep Time," the third part, stretches the book's analytical dimensions to a myriad of depths and directions, examining how spatiotemporal aspects figure in audiovisual depictions of sinkholes, mines, seabeds, and oceans. The final part, titled "Deep Networks," features two essays and a robust conversation (specifically on deepfakes) that altogether reflect on the visual and cultural repercussions of the operations of deep learning, a mode of artificial intelligence that imitates how human beings acquire particular types of knowledge.

Regarded as networked discourse, *Deep Mediations* reinforces depth as core idea in the grammar and language of cinema, one that has retained dynamism amid continued development in global media industries. Paradoxically, depth represents a hallmark value of continuity in the field of cinematic arts while also rendering difference through aesthetic play, form conventions, and the adaptation of styles and references from multimedia sources across transnational cultures. The film projection screen, according to the editors, "marks the spot where the differences that depth of field seem to make visible . . . are welded to each other through the 'narrativization of film'" (p. 4). Depth ably portrays a given narrative as both evident and ambiguous, reality and fantasy. Given this variability, thinking about depth expands the perspective beyond stylistic use to encompass gestural message and sociocultural significance.

Several chapters stand out for the caliber of their critical exploration of the merits and restrictions of the depth concept. The related unknowingness and inaccessibility of the far depths of oceans intrigue Lisa Han, who, in her chapter, "Transparency at Depth: Dark Mediation of the Deep Seabed," depicts the history of deep-sea sensing within a framework "of disrupting communications—a *dark mediation* that limits and controls signals across a vast expanse" (p. 241, emphasis in original), as if the abyss requires to be subdued and uncovered. Her exploration is aptly followed by Nicole Starosielski's own probe into the ocean as a spatial setting for imaginations of the depth concept. Her essay, "Depth Mediators: Undersea Cables, Network Infrastructure, and the Deep Ocean," chronicles popular, informational, and philosophical representations of the ocean's perceived depth as expressive representations of the entwining activity of bodies of water and networked deep-sea ecosystems. "They are a site for the transmission and transformation of knowledge about depth: a form of depth mediator. In many cases, they index broader cultural imaginaries of the ocean," writes Starosielski. "Depictions of cabled depths reveal the imagined role of the depth mediator itself" (p. 264).

The book's strength indeed lies in the spatial diversification of its case studies. In her chapter "Inaudible Evidence: Counterforensic Listening in Contemporary Documentary Art," Pooja Rangan looks into three documentary artists who engage in deep listening practices to sound and reveal what the audience may not immediately perceive. Voices in wire recordings, transcripts, and cassette tapes are artistically deconstructed via techniques of forensic scrutiny, attuning the listener to dig for these distinct modes of

audibility that go beyond established depths for documentary film. Conceptually, this may entail thinking “towards explicitly vertical, infrastructural modes of thought,” asserts Redrobe, the book’s coeditor, in her exploration of mining films that embody submerged stances to depict exchanges of identity, power, and energy as intricate expressions of depth (p. 217). These submerged perspectives critique the deep circumstances that furnish metaphoric webs of muted renderings of the colonized and disenfranchised. Here, spectatorship is shaped around a model of depth to involve the seemingly hushed (or even possibly disoriented) audience as major contributors to a text’s internal attributes and resonant themes.

“Depth models, so the logic goes, allow the critical thinker to see the fuller, bigger picture,” muse the editors (p. xiii). Notions of depth reconfigure and are reconfigured by media systems and technologies. This related grasping of cinematic depth’s layers of contexts entails a contemplation of visual, multimedia, and philosophical attachments. Consequently, mediated surfaces encase modes of technical deployments and artistic models. As Jussi Parikka ponders in his contribution to this volume, “From Planetary Depth to Surface Measure, or How to Read the Future from an Image,” the technical and theoretical complexities of the aerial imaging and machine learning of planetary surfaces corresponds to the general embeddedness of mediation in multiple surfaces of the everyday. To read a surface is to engage in the scrutiny of its legibility, laying bare its prospects but also the excesses brought about by current and escalating technological coverage. To think deeply about depth is to attune to the horizontal, vertical, and even diagonal fields of a given cinematic space, harnessing an expansive frame of looking and interpreting media texts.

Beyond multifaceted analysis of the functions of depth in cinema, this collection further impels an appraisal of the linguistic usage of the concept within film scholarship and criticism. Collectively the essays reject facile binary deductions of depth in relation to the surface concept by pointing to their aesthetic, spatial, and epistemological overlaps concerning the structural and referential activity within a given film text. Instead, the book and its contributors are more interested in the transformative aptitude of depth and/or with surface to sketch perspective and dimensionality in a narrative setup. The result is a nuanced dissection of the rhetoric and economics of the depth of field concept within cinema and pertinent multimedia ecosystems, manifesting the potential and possibility of alternating, nonlinear pathways in the critical study of cinema.

References

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