dened by obvious fallacies. Most bothersome is his inattention to the historical specificity of Vietnam as a war rather than a media phenomenon; the book could stand more emphasis on the real, less on the hyperreal.

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Close Encounters
Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction


Close Encounters is mostly a reprinting of articles about science fiction that appeared in a 1986 issue of Camera Obscura. Not all the articles are about film (two are about serialized television programs, and one about Villiers de l’Isle-Adams’s science-fiction novel, The Future Eve). All, however, make the assumption that fantasies in science fiction correspond to social reality in one way or another—whether by arguing that “The Jetsons” TV cartoon is a symptom of the “troubled” merger in 1960s America between “1950s domesticity” and the Space Age (Lynn Spigel, 205), or by telling how a scene suggesting incestuous relations between characters was cut from Metropolis because it was socially unacceptable (Enno Parals, 167).

Though familiarity is not necessarily a bad thing, it is striking just how familiar most of the arguments and examples in this collection of essays are—from Vivian Sobchack’s vision of how the birth of monster children in movies such as Rosemary’s Baby shows that “American bourgeois patriarchy [is] in crisis” (3) to Lynn Spigel’s claim that sitcoms make us “question the ‘naturalness’ of middle-class existence” (219), and from Janet Bergstrom’s belief that the presence of androgyny in science-fiction movies like Liquid Sky and in Calvin Klein underwear ads represents a crisis in the representation of gender difference to Harvey Greenberg’s analysis of the alien in Alien as paradoxically threatening and appealing. Raymond Bellour’s idea that men need to represent technology in feminine forms is now well established, as is Constance Penley’s linkage of the primal scene fantasy to narrative problems in “technological modernity.” We have also come to be familiar with proto-fascist elements in Metropolis (Roger Dadoun). The examples of science fiction, too, are the usual ones: Metropolis, Star Trek, The Terminator, Blade Runner, and Alien, among others. In all fairness, however, it is precisely because of these articles and others like them that now such arguments and such examples can seem commonplace.

Perhaps the time has come to admit that these kinds of essays are actually an entrenched part of academic criticism, and that it now seems a bit old-fashioned when some of the writers of the articles in Close Encounters—all university professors but one—claim that their work touches upon issues that are “scandalous” and dangerous to “traditional academic criticism” (Henry Jenkins III, 172). At least in the five years since these essays were first published, it is not at all clear that they have been truly subversive to the academy, though they surely have contributed to current debates about the place of popular culture in the university curriculum.

Close Encounters may be slightly subversive to the conventions of the publishing industry. The nicely surprising inclusion of a film script, Friendship’s Death, by Peter Wollen in this collection of essays is ultimately what saves Close Encounters, what makes the rereading of the Camera Obscura articles worthwhile, since the articles and the film script recontextualize each other in curious ways. Indeed, this relationship between the two is the most compelling “close encounter” in Close Encounters. After we read Wollen’s film script, for example, the articles take on narrative, dramatic qualities that we may not have noticed before; each article seems a bit like a character’s lines in a big script, and, as such, seems more vulnerable and eccentric than it might originally have appeared. Similarly, Wollen’s film script takes on aspects of the journal article. The dialogues between the two main characters—a male reporter and a female extraterrestrial—seem to be a way to make film theory personable, funny, and, in a way, itself uncanny. Text and criticism are thus given a chance by the editors of Close Encounters (Penley, Lyon, Spigel, Bergstrom) to demonstrate their powers to transform each other.

I hope the book’s pairing of “text” and “criticism” sets a precedent for those who are in the business of making collections out of previously published articles. Since it is now normal to conclude that the distinction between “text” and “criticism”—like that between social realities and science-fiction fantasies—is often merely a conventional one, it would be strange for us to continue publishing them as if they were two different creatures.

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