

strategies of quotation common in the experimental 16 mm film culture that shaped Mulvey's work in the 1970s to achieve something deeply moving. These women filmmakers find formal means to allow the past to speak through the present—a distanciation *affect*.

Writing on the essay film, Timothy Corrigan remarked that “essays describe and provoke an activity of public thought . . . in a dialogue of ideas.” In *Afterimages*, each essay, as well as the book's rich connective, contextualizing prose, holds its reader in mind as an interlocutor, exploring a set of ideas—about spectacle, the “apparatus,” and what I might call the life of the image (which encompasses questions of death). This is also true of Mulvey's media work: the essayistic structure of *Riddles of the Sphinx* looks ahead to her recent experiments in videographic criticism.

Ultimately, I believe, it isn't only what Mulvey says in her essays that galvanizes new sets of undergraduates every year but how she says it, in her inimitable figural language. Just as her film work is heavily linguistic, so is her writing full of concrete imagery: “the half-light of the imaginary” where the mother bonds with the child in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” the heroine “torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity” in “Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure Inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946),” and the precise pronouncement that “the strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, a cloud of overdetermined irreconcilables which refuse to be dispersed in the last five minutes” in “Douglas Sirk and Melodrama.”

*Jeanne Dielman* was released the same year in which “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” was published—a watershed year (1975) for cine-feminism. Mulvey emphasizes the importance of the film: “It felt as though there was a before and after *Jeanne Dielman*, just as there had once been a before and after *Citizen Kane*” (100). But Mulvey rolls back the definitive claim to remind the reader about that moment's “nerve of urgency” and its reach toward the future. Thus “the product is more exemplary than personal, more transcendent than individual.” She could be talking about her own essay, with characteristic modesty. Poignantly, *Afterimages* was published right around the time Mulvey's former partner Peter Wollen passed away. As contributors to the film journal *Screen* in the 1970s, their generation staked out a future for film studies. Mulvey is loath to have the last word, and the vibrancy

of feminist film culture today is enriched by that generosity.

BOOK DATA. Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times*. Reaktion Books/University of Chicago Press, 2020. \$25 cloth. 240 pages.

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## FAN YANG

### *Underglobalization: Beijing's Media Urbanism and the Chimera of Legitimacy* by Joshua Neves

The experience of reading Joshua Neves's *Underglobalization* is a bit like watching an experimental film. Beijing, the Chinese capital, which serves as the backdrop for much of this ambitious book, zooms in and out of kaleidoscopic lenses in breathtaking ways. The view of the city—and the fast-changing mediascapes that its (non)residents inhabit—is often mesmerizing. This has to do in part with the visual archive and embodied experiences that Neves draws on; their presence has the effect of defying the representational and epistemological limits intrinsic to the book's textual medium. Bringing an innovative approach to media that focuses on forms, technologies, practices, and infrastructures, Neves has produced a captivating account that challenges the methodological complacencies of much scholarship at the intersection of China, media, and globalization.

Neves situates his study in what he calls “the Olympic era,” beginning with Beijing's winning of the Olympics bid in 2011 and extending to the Beijing Winter Games in 2022. The concept of “underglobalization” in the title takes a cue from Ackbar Abbas's term “faking globalization,” which describes the historically specific rise of counterfeit practices as China became integrated into the global economy. Instead of treating “fakes” as a stage in a linear trajectory that progressively leads toward a legitimate design culture, as Abbas has done, Neves shifts critical attention to what lies between hegemonic norms and their illegitimate “others” in order to destabilize the sanctity of the former through the prism of the latter.

Underglobalization is reminiscent of the “globalization from below” concept used by scholars of diaspora to emphasize the role of transnational migrants in

challenging the global norms propagated by Euro-American governments and corporations. But the creative use of “under” here evokes both the geographical and power divide between the Global North—from which dominant ideologies of development emanate—and the Global South, where these ideologies are contested, if not undermined. The notion of “underdevelopment” with which the latter is more often linked is thus turned on its head; the practices of underperforming, often taking the form of copying, faking, and making do with what one has, constitute alternate forms of being and acting in the world characteristic of what Partha Chatterjee calls “political society” (15–16).

Underglobalization, in other words, makes neoliberal globalization less legitimate than it usually appears. Probing the underbelly of neoliberalism’s normative form of globalization helps to undercut the myth of creativity that its proponents like to describe as the solution for, rather than the cause of, its deepening inequities. The political society conjured by China’s “illicit or underworldly practices” (22) thus becomes emblematic of a global condition. These urban practices, Neves argues, work to disrupt the chimera of legitimacy perpetuated by powerful institutional actors, from the Chinese state to the World Trade Organization—as may be seen in their endorsement of the globalizing regime of intellectual property rights. The multifarious ways in which people engage in underglobalization indeed point to alternative visions for globalization and politics that are otherwise obscured.

One of the many laudable goals of Neves’s book is that it brings theoretical insights developed in the Global South to bear on the Chinese situation. Ravi Sundaram’s Delhi-based account of “media urbanism,” for instance, has inspired Neves to explore Olympics-era Beijing through an unconventional archive that includes architectural ruins, design blueprints, movie theaters, ambient television, digital videos, and pirated DVDs, among other material transformations not manifested in linguistic forms. It also illuminates the potential for connecting the Chinese experience to that of others in the Global South. In doing so, Neves seems to be heeding Taiwan-based critic Chen Kuan-hsing’s call for inter-Asian dialogue by showing that it is possible to connect a China-specific postsocialism to the decolonizing projects envisioned by scholars based in South Asia, Africa, and elsewhere.

By focusing his analysis on unexpected locales and gesturing toward a subaltern sociality, Neves aims to dislodge the Global North-centric political critique of neoliberal globalization. This impulse is not entirely unique, especially given the expanding scholarship on branding and

counterfeiting in China and beyond. But Neves has brought to the table a refreshing set of ideas that recast China as a site of theory- and world-making. Chapters 1 and 2, for example, respectively propose the related concepts of “cognitive rendering” (49) and “piratical citizenship” (62) to illustrate the tensions that exist between the visual culture of Beijing’s Olympics-era planning and the concomitant displacement of the city’s inhabitants during this process. “Cognitive rendering” seeks to amalgamate the past and the future at the expense of making the present livable. “Piratical citizenship,” on the other hand, encompasses activist-artistic projects that aim to reoccupy the city by way of piracy and appropriation, thus laying claim to different forms of political subjectivity.

If the first two chapters focus on concepts that primarily address temporality, chapters 3 and 4 analyze spatial practices, such as those pertaining to cinema and television. These practices provide yet another set of lenses through which to discern the politics that entangles China and underglobalization. Chapter 3 develops the notion of “technologized spatiality” (96) to detail the wide range of exhibition venues and viewing practices that emerged during this era. Alongside the state’s project to build up Beijing as a media capital through the construction of movie theaters, multiple informal and communal forms of film spectatorship continue to proliferate. Their “illegal but locally legitimate” (117) status points to social visions that delegitimize, if not exceed, the cinematic aspirations of the state.

Chapter 4 deploys the term “the unhomey social” (141) as a framework for understanding television’s role in blurring the lines between public sphere and private space in Olympics-era Beijing. While “screen postsocialism” (140)—contra Benedict Anderson’s well-known “print capitalism”—distinguishes a state-sanctioned mode of imagining the nation in transition, the unhomey social invokes the contingent sites and experiences of television viewing that disrupt the signaling of official audiovisual displays. The interactions between the two therefore encourage a rethinking of postsocialist possibilities against the grain of neoliberal developmentalism.

The remaining chapters zoom out of Beijing as a locale to give way to broader considerations of China’s relation to the global circuit of technological production. Chapter 5 puts forth the twin concepts of “videation” (152) and “floating media” (163) to articulate the un(der)recognized forms of desire and affect emerging in the interactions between technologies and their migrant producers. The concluding chapter, chapter 6, continues this attention to the haptic and the intimate by considering people’s hand-to-hand

delivery of DVDs as a form of pirate infrastructure. Here, the comparison that Neves draws between pornography and fakes is most fascinating. Both, he argues, endow a sense of timeliness—in celebration of the here and now—that cuts through the temporal logic of the modernizing telos, which valorizes the promise of a future to come over the immediacy of pleasure that the fakes often provide.

Neves's (filmlike) treatise arguably has itself a pornographic effect. Some of his tantalizing conceptual musings could perhaps have been even more gratifying if accompanied by more-full-blown analyses of the political society in action. By calling the book a "sociography or technography" (28), Neves wishes to distinguish his project from others that are more explicitly committed to representing marginalized voices and narratives. The turn to the material and the infrastructural that his study promotes is a most welcome intervention in critical studies of media and globalization. But his provocative move also makes one wonder about the relevance of meaning-making practices in non-Western locales when the focal point of attention is shifted away from the textual realm. How, for example, might a political society look and sound if one were to return the enactments of piratical citizenship to the Chinese-linguistic milieu in which they unfold? Might the near exclusion of the non-English realm of meaning production—that is, how people in China talk about and make sense of what they see and experience, in the streets and on the internet—reinforce the epistemological hegemony that the book seeks to contest?

Neves is a daring theorist who offers a dazzling array of concepts that will prove inspirational for China studies, Asian studies, and media/cultural studies alike. The multilingual mediascapes of contemporary globalization and the related "vibrating forms of overlapping legitimacy" (165) in which a rising China is increasingly entangled can also benefit from an approach that methodologically liberates media from their messages. After all, how media manifest their presence and effects in different space-times can illuminate more about their social and political ramifications than the contents they deliver, verbal or visual. By demonstrating a bold defiance of globally circulated myths and a keen sensitivity toward site-specific transformations, Neves's book undoubtedly contributes to an ongoing effort to decolonize knowledge production. But its insights also serve as a good reminder for scholars of global/non-Western media to continue reflecting on the uneven power relations that render the locally sanctioned legitimacy of faking and other nonnormative practices illegible. To imagine globalization otherwise calls for more

sustained analyses of how and why global norms are capable of perpetuating themselves even as they fail to control the unruliness of those governed.

BOOK DATA. Joshua Neves, *Underglobalization: Beijing's Media Urbanism and the Chimera of Legitimacy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020. \$99.95 cloth; \$26.95 paper; \$25.60 e-book. 272 pages.

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## GIOVANNI VIMERCATI

### *Cinema of the Arab World: Contemporary Directions in Theory and Practice* edited by Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard

Over the last decade or so, films from the Arab world have enjoyed a renaissance of sorts, with many of them having received exposure and acclaim at international film festivals. Yet scholarship on the subject, as the editors of *Cinema of the Arab World: Contemporary Directions in Theory and Practice* argue, "remains relatively limited, both in substance and frequency" (vii). It is precisely this lacuna that those editors, Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard, set out to address.

One of the many merits of this volume is that it approaches cinema in its sociohistorical dimension, thus shedding as much light on the circumstances (social, historical, economic, etc.) under which films are produced and consumed as on the films themselves. While the term "Arab world" may erroneously suggest a homogenous space, both linguistic and cultural, the image of the "world" that emerges from the book is one of pluralistic difference, full of fertile contradictions. As the book's subtitle suggests, there is no overriding trend or stylistic current to be found in the region; rather, what emerges is a set of "directions," plural and often diverging.

The different contributions range from historical analysis of "documentary diplomacy" (Hadi Gharabaghi) to Moroccan documentary (Kevin Dwyer) and from the impact of foreign backing and funding in diverse contexts such as Lebanon (Wissam Mouawad) and Qatar (Suzi Mirgani). For the first half of the twentieth century, the arrivals of cinema and of colonial powers in the Arab world roughly coincided. Film distribution, determining what the colonized got to see, was perhaps the central concern for (post)colonial powers throughout the Arab world, as masterfully denounced in Tahar Cheriaa's seminal study *Écrans d'abondance, ou cinémas de libération*