

Making Images Move

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In histories of cinema, photography is often figured as a mere technological stepping stone, a necessary but primitive moment in the inexorable progression toward increasingly realistic forms of representation. According to this narrative, the prodigious time-motion experiments of Muybridge and Marey seem quaintly tragic in their failure to achieve an illusion of movement which is today taken for granted. But, as some of the earliest commentators on cinema noted, it was photography, not film, which provided rare glimpses into worlds that are invisible to the naked eye. Movies, as Warhol reminded us, do little more than slavishly recreate the world as we see it, replete with all its artifice and tedium. While some photographers have claimed to realize greater flexibility in the transition from still to moving images, others have sustained a complex and productive engagement with the two.

Unfortunately, the creative interrelationship of film and photography has been largely neglected by critics of both media. With a detailed examination of eight photographer/filmmakers, Jan-Christopher Horak's new book, *Making Images Move*, offers an intelligent and much-needed contribution to this gap in contemporary scholarship.

Horak's selection of artists to exemplify the entangled relationship of film and photography is necessarily idiosyncratic. Rather than attempting an overview or comprehensive history, Horak opts for a close, circumscribed reading of the work of a few individuals who have traversed the two media throughout their careers. The artists selected, Chris Marker, Helmar Lerski, Paul Strand, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Helen Levitt, Robert Frank, Danny Lyon, and Ed van der Elsken, range from the renowned to the obscure, making the book at once invitingly familiar and provocatively broadening. The subjects of *Making Images Move* are defined as:

... photographers who ventured into the field of cinema without relinquishing their interest in photography. Unlike many ... who only trained as photographers before moving more profitably into the field of moving pictures, these photographer/filmmakers have traveled across the borders of both media, learning from each mode of expression, wholly allegiant to neither. (7)

Horak's agenda varies from artist to artist. With Chris Marker alone he looks for evidence of direct amalgamation of the two media--e.g., the "photographic nature" of films like *La Jetee* (1963) or *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (1966) and the overtly cinematic influences of his photographic books, which are largely unknown (and as yet unpublished) outside of Europe. In most other cases, such connections are woven into a reading which revolves around a theme like politics (Strand, Lerski, Lyon) or subjectivity (Frank, Levitt, van der Elsken). Horak's discussion of less prominent artists such as Lerski and van der Elsken is accessible and

informative, while his readings of Strand and Moholy-Nagy offer a fresh angle on lesser-known aspects of their well-documented careers. In all cases, discussions of the individual artists are best understood in relation to this book's narrowly defined project and the gap it is trying to fill, rather than as a comprehensive reading of a complete body of work.

In addition to the chapter on Marker, of particular interest are the treatments of Robert Frank and Helen Levitt. Although the title of the chapter on Frank ("Daddy Searching for the Truth") seems to promise a simple narrative reading of Frank's many forays into autobiography, Horak in fact demonstrates a rare sensitivity and insight into these personal documents and the often tragic lives they reveal. The chapter on Helen Levitt (the only woman represented in the book) performs an important and unprecedented archaeology of a body of film work which the artist herself has all but disavowed. However, its reading of masked children in terms of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque feels somewhat forced and overly literal, while Horak's further observation about the filmmaker discovering her subjectivity through artistic production is among the author's least inspired. Nonetheless, this chapter offers a convincing argument that, in spite of her resistance, Levitt's film work should not be lost to history.

Horak's project is fundamentally auteurist, as he seeks to make connections across each artist's body of work, tracing themes which are consistent within both their film and photographic work. This links up neatly with Horak's (following from P. Adams Sitney's) view of the American film avant-garde as a fundamentally Romantic movement driven by the expression of unique vision and subjectivities. In most cases, his elaboration of these themes goes beyond merely tracking similarities or arguing for the importance and appreciation of each photographer/filmmaker's other oeuvre. Each chapter stands on its own, developing a clearly defined reading of some aspect of one individual's work without attempting any substantive historical or thematic links between them. The result is a less cohesive overall work, which excels in its specificity and detail but frustrates the desire for a more global theorization of the nature of the relationship between photography and film.

The volume concludes with an extremely useful filmography of photographers who have made films and an extensive bibliography, pointing the way for additional work on this subject. Far from an oversight, Horak's refusal to generalize about the interrelationship between photography and film is reinforced by the extremely diverse examples he has chosen. Making Images Move does not pretend to offer the last word on this subject, but it is particularly successful in demonstrating the need for additional scholarship and the rewards of doing so. Together with his excellent anthology, *Lovers of Cinema* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), this book distinguishes Jan-Christopher Horak as one of the most original and creative contemporary scholars of avant-garde cinema.

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