This recent addition to the Routledge series In Focus examines the nexus of technology, culture, cinema, and film theory. Technology And Culture: the Film Reader (2005) (T&C) is a collection of essays brought together by Andrew Utterson of Canterbury Christ Church University College, UK. The selection is composed of largely untranslated texts from a variety of authors including André Bazin, Walter Benjamin, Henry V. Hopwood, Vivian Sobchack and Patricia R. Zimmermann, to name a few. Utterson has organised this collection into four parts. The first focuses on the origins and evolution of the technologies of cinema, painting a picture of an extremely diverse and contested debate about the status of cinema’s devices and tools through the work of Hopwood, Morton Heilig and Lev Manovich. In the succeeding section Utterson brings together Bazin on the underlying myths of cinema’s invention, Jean-Louis Comolli on the social, aesthetic and ideological over-determinations that have guided the development of visual technologies and Douglas Gomery on the coming of sound to the cinematic experience as an industry. The third portion deals with representation within and beyond the cinema with Claudia Springer on the effects of the technological immersion cinema and other digital technologies bring to experiencing ourselves as human subjects. This section also contains a fascinating piece by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg offering guiding principles to stave off the stylistic filmmaking consumer electronics brings into being. Apropos of this reactionary von Trier and Vinterberg piece, Utterson includes an excerpt from
Zimmermann on piracy in the wetlands of representation invoked by cinema and the digital visual devices that swarm the landscapes of consumer electronics. In the final section Dziga Vertov, Benjamin and Sobchack are introduced to give a purview into the social contexts and the philosophical consequences of visual technologies, and what this might mean for the representations of culture inclusive of cinema.

Series editors Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark have done well to bring in new talent Utteron to compile and edit this primer to technology and culture. Utteron’s previous editorial experience includes an earlier co-edited four-volume selection of key film theory texts from the past century *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (2003). In the current volume the variety of theorists collected together include several staples such as Gomery’s revisionist history of cinematic sound and Benjamin’s critical theory of art in an era defined largely by mechanical reproduction. The addition of the von Trier and Vinterberg article seems curious if simply because it is a manifesto too old to be fresh. However, the points the manifesto raises are critical in providing some transition from Springer’s theorising of pleasurable narrative interpretation/identification and Zimmermann’s introductory analysis of cultural piracy. Yet this extract from Zimmermann raises a contentious problem.

In the original work by Zimmermann Utteron is drawing from, *States Of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (2000), we find the section on piracy followed by observations on the copyright and ‘fair use’ crisis so prevalent in today’s era of consumer electronics and digital/mechanical reproduction. This copyright discourse is absent from Utteron’s selection. The crisis for copyright is a most curious exclusion from *T&C* given its seeming interest in the dispersal of cinema’s history and the socio-political future of the medium and its representations.
Reformulations of copyright, particularly in the digital mediums by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and comments on the future of authors’ rights and material ownership by the likes of *BoingBoing* co-editor Cory Doctorow (2006), suggest that the landscape will rapidly change over the next few years. And it is possible these shifts may plateau the neo-Futurist concept of social progress inculcated in Utterson’s collection.

In less filmic neo-Futurist literature outside the *T&C* collection, the discourse of social progress is informed by the notion of ‘Singularity’; particularly in the European and American contexts. Singularity is the imagining of the eventual overcoming of human intelligence by the creation of self-aware artificial intelligence that is superhuman in its capacities. Such imagining has often been played out in Japanese anime, which in recent years has become progressively integrated into the mainstream through its ‘cult’ status (see Napier 2001 for a useful discussion of the rising importance of anime to Euro-American audiences). By bypassing this geopolitical and theoretical exploration in the Japanese context, the Utterson collection unduly misses this tradition of Japanese anime, which in recent years has contributed to public awareness and debate of the philosophical issues sustaining notions of technology, humanity, and culture. Authors such as Susan Napier (2001) have made critical explorations of the posthuman (largely artificial) and transhuman (largely organic) forms as they appear in films like the anime feature *Akira* (1989) that offer some useful insights to the debt current theorising of pop-culture considerations of technology and culture owe to the cinema industry in Japan. In summarising this problematic, while one must consider the direction of the texts included in *T&C* to be introductory this impetus will tend to run the risk of generalising a Euro-American perception at the expense of the wealth of wisdom in other geopolitical regions.
Despite this ideological bias, Utterson’s assembled texts do give a structured yet openly critical view of technology and culture vis-à-vis cinema. Amongst the plethora of introductory texts available to the novice film theory adventurer T&C delivers a sensible collection of extracts and essays from various authors crucial to the activity of wondering about and critiquing thematic developments in cinema.

[H3] References

Doctorow, Cory (2006), Trademark Political Shenanigans, 15 January


Otomo, Katsuhiro (dir) (1989), Akira, Japan, Akira Committee.


BIO

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1 My heartfelt thanks extends to Thea Baumann (Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific), Christine Evans (University of British Columbia), and Susan Kukucka (Griffith University) for their assistance.