REVIEWS

CineWorlding: Scenes of Cinematic Research-Creation. By Michael B. MacDonald. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. 283 pp.

Reviewed by Matt Horrigan

Michael B. MacDonald's *CineWorlding* speaks to research practitioners in cinema, recording, music, ethnography, and any of their neighbour practices, but most directly to those who self-identify as musicological filmmakers. The book blends process theory after Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, and Gilles Deleuze with practical exercises for students experimenting in cinematography. Intricate philosophy appears here in an affable style, and the book goes to significant lengths to encourage creative multiplicity. It was evidently written with movies in mind, and readers should intersperse encounters with the book and encounters with the "posthumanographies" it references—more about the neologism below.

MacDonald presents himself as a subversive intellectual "in but not of" academe (Harney and Moten 2013; MacDonald 2023, 76), and proves his "not of" credentials with stories of tense encounters with disciplinary peers seeking to enforce colonial anthropological paradigms. "When I leave documentary film festivals, I often feel like I have compiled a list of enemies and enemy practices" (265), he says, polemically describing his embattled nexus of cinema and music studies. MacDonald expresses suspicion of the othering "ethno" in ethnography, challenges the exoticizing frames that still striate that venerated field, and connects with people closer to home in developing documentaries, often musicological, always constructed with a musical sense of pace. Nowhere does he appeal to the mysterious etic power, epistemically privileged cultural distance, sometimes used to generate feelings of objectivity around social research. Unconvinced by "audiovisual aesthetics of truth" that claim scientific authority through disciplinary distinction (45), MacDonald seeks better filmmaker-filmed relations, and in so doing, makes his and his crew's presence obvious throughout his films, regularly reminding viewers that what his recorders capture are mediated ecologies affected by moviemaking as a process. The conservatism of conservatories is as frustrating for MacDonald as the corporatism of industry, so he negotiates a unique path that reconciles a kitschy "dirtbag artistry" with the apparatus of a world that prizes monographs and peer review (32).

CineWorlding unfolds as a phenomenological autoexegesis, aggregating narrative descriptions of MacDonald's own moviemaking, parables through which he grapples with colonialism, capitalism, and the peculiar, elusive mandate of research-creation, "not only to work in cinema," but "to invent new cinematic forms" (263). MacDonald has no illusions about where his keyword comes from: research-creation is a "funding-category" (193), a strategic label in an artform that has convened research and creation throughout its history. Moviemakers from the Lumière brothers to Thomas Edison to Lois Weber, Oscar Micheaux, Dziga Vertov, and Nabwana I.G.G., to name a few of various canonicity, all made cinema through what can be considered research practices, and Hollywood films today usually leverage not just technology but technicity, as producers martial their employees' creative energies to face moviemaking's parades of challenges. Consider, for example, Jordon Peele's *Nope* and its novel infrared-captured day-for-night chase scenes (Insider 2023).

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Research-creation, the funding term, is a subset of research-creation, the widespread assumption in filmmaking. Nevertheless, research-creation as MacDonald figures it carries a specific ethos separate from Hollywood arts of money-getting, and the "local and creative" audio-vision that he seeks to inspire yields artful gestures that bigger budgets cannot afford (MacDonald 2023, 260).

The monograph's introduction sets up a textbook-like pattern, through a sequence of passages that each begin with a reading and end with practical exercises that could be deployed in a media production class. The exercises are good, showing keen practical attention to process in their balance between openness and direction. At one point, they prescribe randomness using quasi-astrological means, asking practitioners to use their birth date to choose a popular song for a short movie's soundtrack (17). However, *CineWorlding* abandons the textbook genre after the first chapter and begins a much longer discussion that takes form as a creative memoire. Here, MacDonald struggles with his settler status, trying to figure out how to act as a decolonizing force despite the spectre of the hungry, ghastly "wintigo" with which he sometimes identifies himself and generally identifies capitalist machinery (241). The figure of the wintigo comes in response to Dylan Robinson's book *Hungry Listening*, which issued a salient critique of extractive epistemic practices in music studies particularly and Canadian arts generally as colonial institutions have developed what was already an insatiable hunger for resources into a specific lust for Indigenous cultural capital (Robinson 2020). In response, MacDonald says, "through cineworlding, I am attempting to develop a practice that will help me become something other than Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listener*" (MacDonald 2023, 258).

Whether MacDonald is succeeding depends on more than this book, and readers should look to the films it references, most available on Vimeo (e.g., MacDonald 2017). With that said, streaming services are antagonists in MacDonald's narrative, as he identifies them along with other elements of platform economics as part of a broad late capitalist project he links with the "transhuman," "characterized by cryogenics, private space exploration, the metaverse, robot dogs on the US-Mexican border, university education made to serve industries . . ." (MacDonald 2023, 212). Against the "project of the transhuman," MacDonald thinks after Rosi Braidotti in developing what he calls a "posthumanography," a play on words that challenges ethnography's prefix "ethno," "human" (37). Although I am doubtful about the philosophical future of a transhuman/posthuman agonism—the morpheme "trans" is occupied with other work—posthumanography seems more promising. It is an adventurous, grammatically mixed neologism reflecting a notion of posthumanities, a vein of scholarship that abandons the traditional humanities' investments in colonial great chains of being that model what is human after bodies that hegemonic powers privilege as normative—White, male, adult, heterosexual, cis, et cetera. MacDonald's posthumanography has in actuality broken away from some such majoritarianisms, but the bodies of interest in MacDonald's documentary practice remain distinctly human. A future posthumanography depending less on slippery arguments about what has historically counted as human, and framed more in the sensor of a camera, is currently virtual.

I have a more salient criticism for *CineWorlding*, however, and it concerns the order of sense in MacDonald's notion of movies as "audio-vision" (5). While audio-vision can be understood as a musician-filmmaker's challenge to visual dominance in what scholars have often territorialized as a visual medium, it could go further. At first blush, audiovisual primacy may not seem problematic for a practice of audiovisual recording. But students and workers of cinema think haptically in manipulating delicate and heavy equipment, proprioceptively in navigating the influx of novel environments that are film sets, and chemosensitively in managing exposure to drugs and toxins. Chemosensation forms a purview for cinema's immaterialized material workers who labour around

paints, fuel, and the materials of the "honey wagon," developing compulsory familiarities with whatever the staff of large productions consign to cinema's undercommons. And fatigue on film sets has ways of expressing new hallucinatory senses, as workers explore psychedelic lines of flight between consciousness and its lacunae. My comments here about minoritized senses may seem symptomatic of cinema industrialized, products of experiences that should not be, whether because incommensurate with artistic concerns or invested in traditional exploits of factory-like worlds too alienated from artistry to be called cineworlding. But research about movie production cultures strongly suggests that what happens in industry influences the "indie," and vice versa (Caldwell 2023)—students learn in the smallest units of even the most progressive art schools distinctions relevant to cinema's largest industrialized hierarchies, whether those distinctions become tacitly naturalized or critically deliberated about. Further, production cultures have not only classed but gendered camera centrism, producing and reproducing technomasculinist norms that place men close to devices and assign women a disproportionate amount of relational and bureaucratic labour such as occurs in tents, trailers, offices, or informal meeting places away from the specially sanctified cameras called cinema cameras. To fully comprehend the minoritarian standpoint MacDonald points toward will require a supplementary challenge to the colonial politics of the senses, a challenge to normalized categories of what is audio, what is vision, and even what is touch (see Culhane 2016).

CineWorlding is a progressive instalment in moviemaking literature, a book that does not reduce the practice of filmmaking to a topic-agnostic figure portable from ground to ground in a capitalist industrial process, but rather treats moviemaking as something that must emerge from its practitioners' relationships with people. Although MacDonald emphasizes the special nexus he has cultivated between movies and musicians, left implicit in his argument is the idea that, say, a food-documentarian might cineworld a very different practice, a different world, and a wildlife filmmaker might develop a unique cineworlding with the animals on the other side of her lens. Students seeking best results from *CineWorlding* should bring their own creativity and cultural backgrounds to their encounter with the book—bring their whole selves, to take after bell hooks (hooks 2014, 29–32)—and read between the lines of MacDonald's autotheory to express what their own cineworlding will entail.

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