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# The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium

*By Gilberto Perez*



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In a recent international survey conducted by the online film journal *Screening the Past*, which invited film critics and scholars around the world to nominate the most important contributions to the field in the past decade, *The Material Ghost* tied for first place with Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*. Gilberto Perez draws on his lifelong love of the movies as well as his work as a film scholar to write a lively, wide-ranging, penetrating study of films and filmmakers and the nature of the art form.



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## Editorial Review

### Review

The long tradition of sensitive film aesthetics (it would once have been called film appreciation), from Béla Balázs to V.F. Perkins, finds its apotheosis in Perez's superb book, as fully literary as it is analytical. Has anyone ever written this beautifully about Dovzhenko, Renoir or Straub-Huillet?

(Adrian Martin)

Few books of film criticism in the past twenty-five years have been so enjoyable or instructive... [Perez] has excellent things to say about authorship, about documentaries, about popular genres, about cinematic point of view and narrative technique, about actors, and above all about camera style... He never condescends to his audience or sacrifices his intellectual clarity, and most importantly he makes us want to look once more at the remarkable pictures he discusses. The virtues of his writing are quite rare.

(James Naremore *Cineaste*)

Strikes an ideal balance between insightful analysis and graceful writing... A model of thoughtful criticism that treats the complexities of film and the sensibilities of readers with equal understanding, consideration, and respect.

(David Sterritt *Christian Science Monitor*)

This volume has already become a milestone in film criticism, and it isn't hard to see why. For one thing, Perez magnificently vindicates the beauty of illusionism--a salutary attitude after decades of academic militancy that judged it a ruling-class plot. But even more crucially, he understands how every general theory of cinema must start from its concrete particulars as an art form. The book is really about nothing beyond the author's own infinite sensitivity to the implications of style... A work of transcendent intelligence.

(Peter Matthews)

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, Antonioni's *Eclipse*, Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, Godard's *Breathless*. Perez's frame-by-frame analysis of them is always lucid and invigorating, reminding us why these films were considered classics from the first. Even better, Perez takes up lesser known films and filmmakers... The eclectic mixture of films is one the book's strengths, allowing Perez to write on a breadth of topics... Despite holding films to a high standard, Perez never comes off as a film snob; his readings remain rooted in a genuine and communicable love for the cinema.

(Jonathan Vogels *The Republic of Letters*)

In recent decades there has been no more cogent a rethinking of the physical and psychological experience of film as it evolved, both as a technology and as an art form. I want to read it again, soon.

(Nick James *Sight & Sound*)

Perez's book may strike some readers as anachronistic because it is about nothing but the author's love of movies, its pleasure lying in the sheer intensity of his intelligence. In so far as this wonderfully flexible and expansive thinker has a thesis, it's that the illusionist medium of cinema is endlessly poised between reality and abstraction... Brilliantly polemical in his critique of cynical reason ('the official philosophy of late capitalism'), no less passionate in defending the truth-value of cinema, Perez seems to be the clearest heir to the great humanist critic André Bazin.

(*Sight and Sound*)

Dazzling... The sheer intelligence at work in these lucid pages is exhilarating.

(Alfred Guzzetti *Boston Book Review*)

[Perez's] early and persistent love of film imbues *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium*, which moves gracefully from the documentaries of Robert Flaherty to the revolutionary epics of Alexander Dovzhenko to the pastoralism of Jean Renoir.

(*Chronicle of Higher Education*)

The chapters on Keaton and Renoir are stunning, full of perceptive remarks; the chapter on Godard is a persuasive rehabilitation; none of the chapters is without memorable insights.

(Michael Wood *London Review of Books*)

The section on [Iranian director Abbas] Kiarostami in Perez's new book, *The Material Ghost*, is the best comment I've seen on the subject.

(Stanley Kauffman *New Republic*)

Gilberto Perez's book, *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (\*\*\*\*\*) ranks with the finest cinematic writing anywhere.

(Tony McKibben *The List (Glasgow and Edinburgh)*)

It is as fine a book on film as I have ever encountered, a *hypermarché* of insight, precise and lovely writing, information, and clear thinking. Page after page elaborates arguments so acute and aptly formulated that I have no doubt I'll be exploiting them in the classroom and in writing for the rest of my career.

(Lesley Brill *Criticism*)

A pleasure. Gilberto Perez is one of the smartest film critics writing anywhere.

(Jonathan Rosenbaum)

Strikes an ideal balance between insightful analysis and graceful writing... A model of thoughtful criticism.

(David Sterritt *Christian Science Monitor*)

Gilberto Perez's ambitious, abundant, and cultivated book?the fruit of decades of thinking and teaching?accompanies readers on a journey of discovery into the wonder of film.

(Stanley Cavell)

Tough, smart, superbly engaging, *The Material Ghost* is a terrific book.

(Edward W. Said)

About the Author

**Gilberto Perez** is a professor of film studies at Sarah Lawrence College and film critic for the *Yale Review*.

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