

describes how differently classed, gendered, and raced children played with optical toys at home and at school. Her reconstructions of how children played with the thaumatrope (chapter 2) and moving image toys (chapter 3) should be required reading for scholars writing about these media for their exceptional insights into their variously stabilizing and transgressive work in constructing power, class, labor, and sexuality for child spectators. Bak's readings of the "child spectator" sometimes lack sufficient nuance in their handling of the gendered valences of optical play. Although optical toys were also marketed to girls, they were overwhelmingly associated with boyhood and masculine ideals of social, intellectual, and imperial mastery. I wished for more elaboration of the girl media spectator, a category that has not received sufficient attention in nineteenth-century media studies. Overall, through its engaging blend of archival, historical, and phenomenological methods, *Playful Visions* is an insightful and original contribution to the study of precinema.

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Ian James. *The Technique of Thought: Nancy, Laruelle, Malabou, and Stiegler after Naturalism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. 247 pp.

CORY STOCKWELL

While the title of this brilliant book is written in the singular, it should, to my mind, be read through the lens of what one of the thinkers addressed in the book, Jean-Luc Nancy, has referred to as the singular plural. For as Ian James establishes from one chapter to the next, in meticulous readings of contemporary scientific and philosophical texts, the real is irreducibly multiple, which means that there can never be "any overarching metaphysical or philosophical principle that would subsume that multiplicity into a unitary foundation or ground" (p. 221).

Consequently, one of James's main concerns throughout the book is to establish the ways in which the thinkers he names in his title construct techniques for approaching physical reality in all its multiplicity; taken together, these techniques form the foundations of what he calls "post-Continental naturalism." This new naturalism counters not only "scientism," the idea that science has rendered philosophy unnecessary by arriving at a total understanding of reality (the plurality of the real suffices to undermine this prejudice), but also the way certain strands within traditional naturalism have set up a continuum between science and philosophy: James argues not that the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, François Laruelle, Catherine Malabou, and Bernard Stiegler harmonizes with science, but rather that a series of provocative discontinuities between their philosophy (or, in Laruelle's case, nonphilosophy) and science provokes a creative tension within which post-Continental naturalism might be elaborated. In a chapter entitled "The Relational Universe," for instance, James forges a dialogue between Nancy and figures such as the philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem, the biochemist Nick Lane, and the astrophysicist Aurélien Barrau, demonstrating ways in which the "entanglement" of their thinking gives rise to "a naturalized realism articulated by means of a haptic ontology of sense" (p. 89). The book will appeal to philosophically inclined scientists who are interested in forging links between their own fields and those working outside of the scientific community. From a humanities standpoint, I believe the book will interest not only readers of the thinkers on whom James focuses, but more broadly, those working in branches

of fields such as object-oriented ontology and new materialism who take warding off ecological disaster as one of their explicit aims; even more broadly, I believe it will appeal to general readers who seek new ways of thinking about, and practicing, environmental politics. While James never deals explicitly with this theme, our current ecological predicament is clearly one of the subtexts of the book, arising from time to time, as when he notes in the conclusion: “To ignore the demands of the real is to risk destruction and annihilation” (p. 226). In its multiple responses to these demands, James’s post-Continental naturalism forms a deeply original ecological thought.

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Richard Menke. *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies, 1880–1900: Many Inventions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 259 pages.

SUSAN ZIEGER

When does “the media” begin? (And when, some might rejoin, will it ever end?) Whereas the answer to the latter question remains undivined, Richard Menke’s new book answers the former. He makes the case for the late nineteenth century, when media, newly unlinked from the senses, became readable by other machines, and connected in systems. No longer devoted to inscribing, recording, or storing events, media technologies such as the telephone instead transmitted them through networks. Menke describes how, as a system or complex, “the media” began to seem monolithic and impersonal, in contrast to literary writing. Menke’s book forms an early chapter in the story of our sojourn through the mediascape, a “peculiarly modern combination of repetition and amnesia,” as we clutch our own “many inventions” (p. 70).

The opening chapter proposes US President James Garfield’s assassination as “the first American media event”—in 1881, well before the age of radio and television, let alone the internet or TikTok (p. 45). The new telephonic network united the nation in suspense and then mourning. In Britain, where the telephone’s systematic use came more slowly, literature largely ignored it, or construed it as an emblem of mass media, in spite of its conversational intimacy: so contends chapter 2. Chapter 3, on George Gissing’s novel *New Grub Street* (1891), traces the transition of readership from a public to a market, via the new journalism, and the novel’s representation of *Chit-Chat*, a satire on George Newnes’s *Tit-Bits*. Gissing implicates modern-day novel-writing within a new, nakedly commercial system of mass print.

The remaining chapters of *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies* tell the story of how the media transformed the novel. The triple-decker, together with the circulating library that disseminated it, was a stalwart of Victorian literature that Menke reinterprets as another tottering media system. In chapter 4, he observes its fall to the single-volume novel, which was better geared to briefer reading on mass transit, between tasks, and by younger readers. In chapter 5, best-selling authors Marie Corelli and George Paston bury the old, male-dominated media system, as drivers of a new, more intimate and seemingly less mediated “codex novel.” Chapter 6 deploys the informatics term “lossy” to describe the way media transcriptions in *Dracula* shed details to create a flow of information that destroys the vampire’s authentic aura and relationship to ritual. The seventh chapter sets Mark Twain’s fatal investment in typesetting technology against *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, observing how both stage a violent collision between media and