



FILMMAKERS THINKING

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ABOVE Jean Renoir's *French Cancan* (1955)

Adapted from a lecture course by the Australian critic Adrian Martin at Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola in San Sebastián, *Filmmakers Thinking* is many things at once, the first of which is a short but impressively nimble primer on cinema's fundamental operations and theoretical underpinnings from the perspectives not of the usual gaggle of scholars but of creators instead. While the book may include the musings of directors whose thoughts on such matters are well documented – Vertov, Hitchcock, Godard, Tarkovsky, Akerman – Martin also sees this as a valuable opportunity to rescue a variety of undeservedly obscure writings and speculations from cinema history's dustbin. As a result, the sources of insight are just as likely to be mavericks like lettrist provocateur Isidore Isou or American poet and filmmaker Abigail Child as they are any oft-taught titans.

The most fascinating trove of eureka moments uncovered by Martin is a panel discussion that took place at New York's Cinema 16 on 28 October 1953. Invited by Amos Vogel to speak about the relationship between film and poetry, the guests included filmmakers Maya Deren and Willard Maas, critic Parker Tyler and two literary heavyweights in Dylan Thomas and Arthur Miller. Speaking ten years on from the debut of her *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Deren offers the panel's most astute contributions, describing cinema's properties and

possibilities in lateral terms. After considering implications of cinema's spatial and temporal qualities, she suggests that it shares poetry's essentially vertical orientation, the latter being "concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means". Yet film also possesses "the *horizontal* attack of a drama", such that cinema continually shifts along one axis or the other in order to convey its meanings and effects. Martin rightly marvels at the many echoes of Deren's concept in other observations here, the sources of which include director statements, festival masterclasses and previously untranslated pieces and interviews. Martin also notes the disdain Thomas and Miller directed toward the panel's sole female member for the sin of thinking too deeply. "I was against, as a whole, the idea of spoken pictures, anyway," adds Miller grumpily.

Chances are they would be similarly hostile to Philippe Grandrieux's *pensées* on cinema's ability to capture what's most savage in humanity, Jacques Rozier's glimpse of eternal truths in a single scene in Jean Renoir's *French Cancan* (1955) and Lucrecia Martel's emphasis on the medium's experiential and immersive capabilities. Others will be much happier to immerse themselves in this fine compendium of ideas about film by its makers, a kind of publication too seldom seen since the end of John Boorman's cherished journal *Projections*.