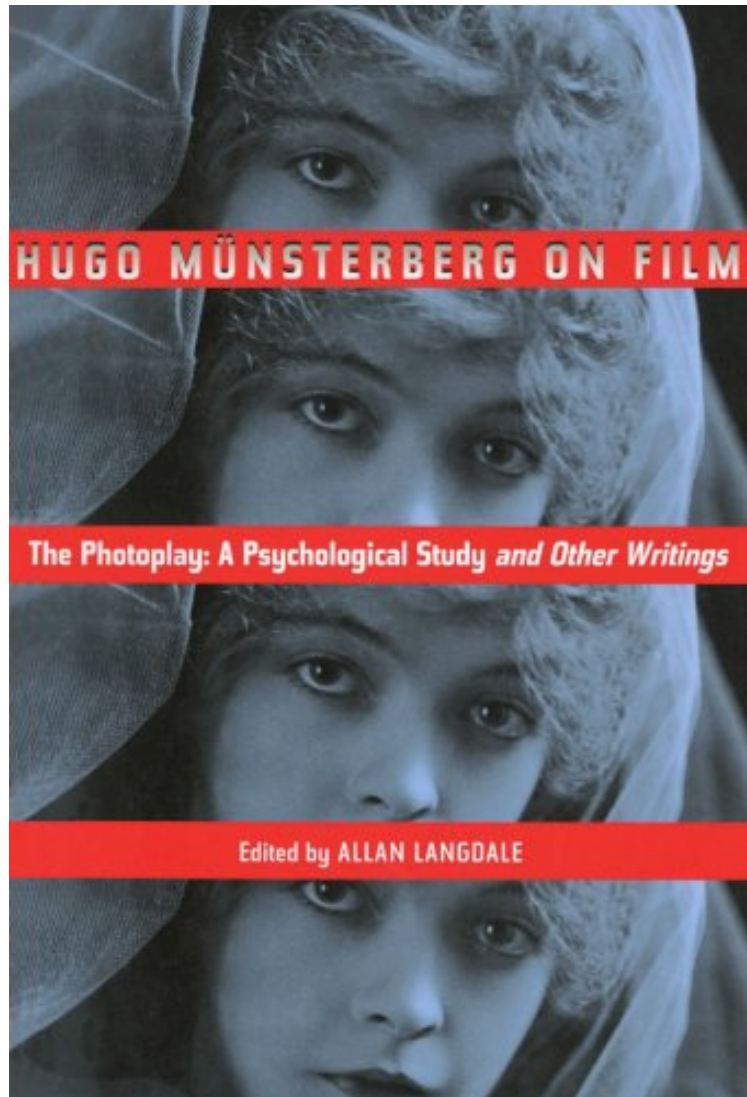


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## Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings

*Hugo Munsterberg*

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**Hugo Mnsterberg : Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hugo Munsterberg on Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating early work investigating the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of cinema aestheticsBy NateWidely regarded as the first serious work of film theory,

Hugo Munsterberg's "The Photoplay: A Psychological Study" is a rich and fascinating book, written by one of the most prominent experimental psychologists alive in the time of film's infancy (published in 1916). The book is contained here in its entirety, along with a few other minor writings from Munsterberg and a useful introduction that situates the book in the context of Munsterberg's work as a whole and in relation to other works investigating cinema, before and after. It would be valuable reading for anyone interested in the development of film theory, and serves as an important precursor to several subsequent developments in the field, especially for its assertion of an affinity between the techniques of cinema and the mechanisms of the mind. The book examines, first, the distinctive techniques of cinema by contrasting the "photoplay" with the stage play, and arguing that the photoplay appeals to the mind in distinctive ways. Unlike others who have argued that what is unique to cinema is its capacity to depict reality, Munsterberg claims that the photoplay shapes the reality it presents according to the laws of thought rather than according to the laws of cause and effect. For example, he argues that the photoplay is able to mirror the mental act of attention, that tends to isolate and focus upon some element of experience in such a way that other elements withdraw from focus and become less vivid. He is, then, important for those film theorists and philosophers of film who reflect upon the affinities of film and thought - both cognitive film theorists and philosophers interested in the question whether films can "do philosophy." The second half of the book is devoted to aesthetics, and develops a neo-Kantian vision of aesthetic pleasure, or the pleasure we take in the beautiful. What is beautiful is what draws upon our interest, but in such a way as to prolong and sustain that interest, rather than fulfill it as an object of desire might. So the photoplay artist should draw upon and present something real that interests us and appeals to our emotions, but set it apart from reality in such a way that it appears as a kind of self-contained world, that doesn't call for us to engage with it practically as we might if we were confronted with similar material in the practical world. He points out that different artforms have different means for setting what they present off from the reality in which we take a practical interest, and shows how the means whereby the photoplay achieves this are distinct from those employed by, say, theater or painting. One of the implications of this account is that features of cinema that we might now think of as relics of its origins - its silence and lack of color, for example - he celebrates as virtues of the artform, that serve the purpose of setting off its presentations as not a part of the reality we reflect upon by means of them. One might argue that the early films or "photoplays" that Munsterberg discusses were precursors to what we now call cinema, and that the emphasis on its distance from reality drew in part on features of the medium that have since been largely abandoned. It's also clear that some of the symbolic or expressive techniques that he extols, are no longer effective. Still, it's a fascinating theory, and while there's much to argue against here, there's also a lot of insight that remains relevant to contemporary discussions of a medium that has evolved from its origins in a number of ways. It's notable, in fact, that Munsterberg discusses the possibility of 3D photoplays achieved through the use of stereoscope and tinted glasses, but he points out that what would remain essential for the art of the photoplay is that while the viewer perceives image depth, she nevertheless remains aware of a gap between the perceived depth and the real depth of reality. A fully immersive 3-d experience might be interesting for a number of reasons, but I find Munsterberg's argument that it wouldn't be art intriguing. Essential reading for historians and philosophers and theorists of film. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars By adrienne rozzigood book.

Hugo Munsterberg's *The Photoplay* (1916) is one of the first and most important early works of film theory. Munsterberg's work on the emerging art of cinema remains a key document for film scholars, but it has long been out of print. In this new edition, Allan Langdale provides a critical introduction to the seminal text and collects numerous hard-to-find writings on film by Munsterberg.

"Hugo Munsterberg's work offers a refreshing, provocative clarity that is all too rare among today's film theorizing. It is wonderful to have his "Photoplay" available once more, along with several articles and Allan Langdale's richly informed introduction. Munsterberg's work reminds us of the movies' irresistible appeal to our mind and senses." - David Bordwell, University of Wisconsin--Madison About the Author Hugo Munsterberg was a psychologist and author of one of the first works of film theory, *The Photoplay*. Allan Langdale teaches in the Film Studies and Art History departments at the University of California at Santa Barbara.