Alien Identities: Exploring Differences in Film and Fiction

By Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.)
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A review by Aylish Wood, University of Aberdeen, UK

Alien Identities: Exploring Differences in Film and Fiction follows the format of the previously published collections of the Film/Fiction series. As before a diverse, and perhaps unexpected, set of essays are brought together under a linking term, in this collection that term is "alien." In the introductory chapter the editors state: "This volume…ranges widely on the theme of the alien to explore how various cultures and times have determined their own collective and individual sense of identity through external as well as internal contrast." (1) The alien under consideration here varies from the foreigner, to "humanity's own alien identity", and the hybridities of the *Alien* film series. The essays explore these diverse aliens as unstable, open to re-definition and re-designation at different times and places, especially in periods of instability when the certainty of a self is in question.

Given this scope, it is unsurprising that the collection is broad; the topics addressed include national identity, citizenship, mutating bugs, humanness versus non-humanness. "America's Domestic Aliens", "See Europe with ITC", and "Leaving the West and Entering the East" explore the different ways in which national identities are constructed by the establishment of internal and external boundaries. "America's Domestic Aliens" discusses the narratives around Sally Hemings as a metaphor for the hidden sexual and racial histories that accompany "white America's self-narration of its identity." "See Europe with ITC" and "Leaving the West and Entering the East" delineate the ways in which the national boundaries of "Europe" have been used to explore Britishness in different historical periods. In each of these essays, the human as an alien figure is utilised to explore the constructions of difference within and around national identities. "Vagabond Desire: Aliens, Alienation and Human Regeneration in Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic* and Andrey Tarkovsky's *Stalker*" examines another perspective on the human alien. In this essay, *Roadside Picnic* and *Stalker* are read as Soviet narratives which explore the alienation of individuals in their everyday lives.

Other essays in the collection explore how the figure of the alien can operate as a tension across the terms human and non-human. "Satan Bugs in the Hot Zone", "The Martians are Coming", and "Aliens, (M)others, Cyborgs" consider how the non-human - the virus, the Martian or the Alien creatures - re-contextualises the human. "Satan Bugs in the Hot Zone" discusses lethal viruses as a human other, especially a Western other, which confronts the technologically sophisticated and militarily superior West with its vulnerabilities; "The Martians are Coming" argues that the Martian is not necessarily an other but is instead, as an extension of the technologically dominated human, a warning against passivity; whilst

"Aliens, (M)others, Cyborgs" celebrates the alien-human hybrid instead of keeping the opposition between the two terms intact.

A disappointing aspect of *Alien Identities* is, however, the lack of distinction between the specificities of film and written media in those essays where it seems especially appropriate to keep such a distinction in the foreground. Whilst the Film/Fiction series avoids any necessary distinction between the two media, some, though not all, of the essays in this volume might have been better served by giving more attention to the specific contexts of the making/writing of the particular works. For instance, it seems a little strange to discuss the chronological transformation of a text across different media, without paying some attention to how the context of the different media affects the process of transformation. What more might this attention to media specificity and context allow to be said about the subject of modernity addressed in H.G. Wells's *Time Machine* of 1895, and George Pal's film version of the novel in 1960? Does the medium of film have its own sets of transformative powers, each of which is contingent on the different historical periods of production? Might these not have some impact on the series of *Fly* films made between 1958 and 1986? I ask these questions not in an attempt to resurrect any of the unhelpful circularities of literature/film debates, but because the contingencies of the different media sometimes do matter, and they could be productively put to use.

Overall, *Alien Identities* is an inventive collection of essays. And, without meaning to suggest that the pieces in this collection cannot stand alone, that would be rather insulting to the individual authors, what is most effective in *Alien Identities* is the accumulative impact of the diverse ways in which notions of the alien are drawn out through the different perspectives of the separate pieces.

American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture

By Shawn Michelle Smith
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-691-00478-1, xiii + 299 pp., 57 illustrations. £12.50 (pbk)

A review by Lisa Rull, University of Nottingham, UK

Smith's introduction begins by quoting Walter Benjamin (1), and follows with references from such quality "usual suspects" in cultural commentary as Allan Sekula (from *October*), Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and bell hooks. Yet Smith's use of such familiar phrases as "visual culture not only reflects but also shapes" (5), belies the depth of her historical analysis of American photography from 1839-1910. Even a cursory consultation of her twenty-page bibliography clearly demonstrates how far removed her study is from a superficial re-viewing of photographic archives through the lens of (post-modern) theory.

Smith's historically focused and theoretically articulated analysis references more than a hundred primary textual sources. Her interrogation of these texts, and selection of nearly sixty period illustrations, admirably justify her proposal that nineteenth century photographic practices inscribed bodies with specifically gendered, classed, and especially racialized identities: producing "a model of subjectivity in which exterior appearance was imagined to reflect interior essence" (4). Yet photography is merely the most concrete of the visual paradigms "that fundamentally influenced the conception and representation of American identities" (7) in Smith's period of study. Historians of other visual and narrative forms should note her simultaneous concern with the "popular, literary, artistic, and scientific discourses that called upon photographs to make claims upon identity" (7). Chapter Four ("'Baby's Picture Is Always Treasured": Eugenics and the Reproduction of Whiteness in the Family Photograph Album") and Chapter Five ("America Coursing through Her Veins") would make especially salutary readings for anyone not already cynical of the expanding interest in genealogy and family photography.

To tackle all three axes of that holy triumvirate (race, class, and gender), Smith posits an interwoven, dynamic relationship between them. Her study begins with the antebellum middle-classes affirming through photographic tropes the essence of femininity and the gendered construction of the domestic sphere. As Smith's argument throughout *American Archives* articulates, by the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class privilege is increasingly claimed through representations of the body as the sign of racialized character. Yet she refuses to see this as an effacement of concerns with gender. Instead, she identifies the "turn-of-the-century racial paradigms" as bounded and haunted by the shadows/ghosts of "their gendered origins" (7).

Smith deftly manages a wide range of sources to animate her reading of photographic practices as crucial to the formulation of nineteenth century identities. These include Nathaniel Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables* (chapters one and two); criminological and

eugenicist photography, and the "portraits"/photographic performances of Countess de Castiglione (chapter three); W.E.B. Du Bois's essays and subversive photographic anthologies of "American Negroes" (chapter six); and the serialised novels of Pauline Hopkins from the *Coloured American Magazine* (chapter seven). The analysis of Hawthorne's family romance is particularly engaging and typical of the book's attention to both textual and historical details.

Smith initially reads the family romance in Hawthorne's text, with its consistent invocations of mirrors, portraits, daguerreotypes, and eyes, as part of the concern with constructed representations of identity - body and "interior essence"; the "sacrosanct feminine interiority" upon which nineteenth century middle-class domesticity was founded (11). But Smith then describes how Hawthorne's identification of family and heritage as an "aristocratic class obsession" ignores the increasing fascination of white middle-class Americans with such discussions of "blood purity" (29). In attempting to distance himself from contemporary "biological racialism", Hawthorne merely succeeds, in Smith's analysis, in predicting a Freudian "return of the repressed": the later "racial reinscription of the American middle classes" (30). The daguerreotype's evidence of ancestral character in Hawthorne's narrative thus eerily echoes photography's later deployment by eugenicists such as Francis Galton (49).

Smith uses close reading and invocation of ancillary texts, alongside acute interrogation of the historical meaning(s) attributed to visual images, to shape a fascinating and intricate narrative. This qualitative developmental approach is especially demonstrated in her first three chapters, which effectively constitute half the book. Smith's conviction of her themes even succeeds in accommodating an analysis of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (chapter eight). This story of one woman's disruptive potential in re-reading the "position and the relative power … of woman-as-consumer ... woman-as-commodity … [and] Woman as the object of a masculine gaze" (221) through her voyeuristic and actual preoccupation with conspicuous consumption, is a sublime piece of literary analysis.

Yet Smith's analysis of nineteenth and early twentieth century concerns about the visualisation / internalisation of identity has a final sting. Her book culminates with a disturbing study of a 1993 computer-generated *Time* magazine cover image entitled "The New Face of America". This "multiethnic Eve", a mathematically calculated composite made possible through contemporary visual technology, worryingly demonstrates the "long legacy of racial science and visual typology" in the American psyche (222). Smith's thorough, scholarly, and approachable theorisation of cultural debates around nineteenth century photography thus ends by subverting any residual complacency that her analysis only looks backward into history.

The Blood Poets: A Cinema of Savagery 1958-1999, Volumes I and II

By Jake Horsley
Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1999. Volume I: ISBN 0-810836688. xxxviii + 322 pp. Volume II: ISBN 081083670X. xiii + 484 pp. £67.50 (pbk)

A review by Oliver Harris, University of Keele, UK

Fredric Jameson memorably introduced his collection of film essays, *Signatures of the Visible* (1992), by moralising that the visual has its end in "rapt, mindless, fascination": likening his critical approach to the project of Freudian analysis, Jameson concluded with the bald and rather disconcerting discovery that he had no desire to see again a movie about which he had written well. Resisting the seductions of cinematic desire by reasserting critical agency, Jameson was following the familiar example of Christian Metz, for whom cinephilia must be turned against itself. It is now over a quarter of a century since Metz - together with Laura Mulvey, of course - established cinematic fascination as a key field of film studies and, more generally, massively propelled its theoretical turn away from *auteurism* through semiotics, psychoanalysis, ideology critique, and beyond. All of which makes it intriguing to come across a declaration of pure, untheorised and unabashed cinephilia, as when Jake Horsley introduces his two-volume "cinema of savagery" as a "labor of love" whose writing has given him "as much joy and satisfaction as did the movies themselves" (II: xiii). Since Horsley's stated goal is "to make a bridge" between the specialist academic field and the populist field of movie reviewing, he opens up the refreshing prospect of what might be termed, contra Mulvey, "passionate attachments". However, since his "roughshod history of the last thirty-five years of American cinema" focuses "exclusively on those directors dealing with violent subjects" (I: 131), his pleasures as a cinephile visibly subsume the troubling ambiguities of screen violence while sustaining untroubled valorisation of the *auteur*. Indeed, *The Blood Poets* turns out to be less a work of rapt, agreeably accessible film history, sidestepping Metz, Lacan and Althusser, than a labour of mindless atavism: by the end of its 800 pages I almost yearned for a dose of the MLA.

To be fair to Horsley, *The Blood Poets* cannot be called a work of cinephilia, any more than it is a study of *la politique des auteurs*, or even violence. When he writes of *Blow Out* that, in De Palma's world "we're *all* voyeurs, a perspective especially persuasive to a movie audience!" (II: 23), the exclamation mark stands in for any theoretical discourse, debate, or even self-positioning. Rather, *The Blood Poets* is a work of a rarer species still: Kael-ophilia. Not only is the first volume dedicated to Pauline Kael, but her film reviews are quoted on almost every other page (the index lists over a hundred citations, but it feels like more). Horsley is a Paulette, twenty-five years too late. Of course, Kael was a seminal reviewer, an advocate and activist who left her permanent mark on film history - most visibly by championing *Bonnie and Clyde* - but her example hardly provides a sufficient methodological basis for bypassing a quarter of a century of film theory and criticism. Loving Hollywood cinema by loving Pauline Kael, what Horsley really loves is, of course, Art with an old-fashioned capital A. Accordingly, *The Blood Poets* is a remarkably unapologetic work of evaluation and canonisation, committed to sacramental archetypes and individualist

expression, while seemingly unaware of a mass of underpinning essentialist assumptions. For Horsley, the social effect of screen violence, for example, depends on the absence/presence of "*artistic merit or intention*" (II: 152), while his repeated appeals to the "authentic art" of the "true artist" fetishises authenticity in ways eerily redolent of the Sartrean phase of the early *Cahiers* movement.

For Horsley, the film critic not only has to "assign credit and blame" but, more profoundly, aspires to be "an artist whose work depends wholly upon the art of others" (I: ix), which is to say, aspires to the same heroic individualism of his individual heroes - the pantheon of great directors. In this light, the foregrounded idiosyncratic agenda of *The Blood Poets* -quirky detours into pop-occult theory, asides on gnostic tradition, pearls of wisdom from Carlos Castaneda, Charles Fort, and sundry others - has to be read as Horsley's own bid for that all-important capital A. Never mind the disputed theoretical or heuristic merits of *auteur* theory, and whether it has, as Robert Stam recently claimed, "won" or not, *The Blood Poets* proves indisputably its inherent political liability. Defending Clint Eastwood and Don Siegel from charges of being "fascistically inclined," for instance, Horsley retorts that, "for all their limitations, these men at least aspire to being artists" (I: 91). Or again, considering the "racist tendencies" of Oliver Stone's *Midnight Express*, he decides that what is "*really* offensive" is the film's "glaring lack of taste" (II: 52). All of a sudden we realise that, far from being an unfortunate slip, Horsley identified himself quite fully in his opening polemic for the contagious force of "passion - whether for movies or for women or for Greek yogurt with apricots" (II: xiii). It almost goes without saying that Horsley's gallery of "blood poets" is, from Penn and Peckinpah to Coppola and Scorsese, exclusively white and male.

From this point on, it would be easy enough to indict Horsley further still: it is certainly tempting to ridicule his claim for "a largely unconsidered dimension to film criticism cum cultural studies, and that is the subject of cinema as a *tool* for 'social engineering'" (I: xxxiii); or mock his ranking of Coppola alongside Mozart, Van Gogh, Shakespeare, Blake, Dante, da Vinci, Dostoyevsky, Balzac and Michaelangelo (I: 177); or laugh at (rather than with) his reduction of Freud to "Monsters from the Id" (I: 191); or object to his throwaway use of secondary criticism in footnotes, as when citing Carol Clover on *Nightmare on Elm Street* and quipping, "Feminists rejoice, for Freddy is your friend!" (II: 166). The other temptation is to offer his two volumes as an essay assignment: "Authorship is an irredeemably ideological construction: taking *The Blood Poets* as a case history, discuss the ways in which the heterogeneous productivity of the film text is checked by Romantic notions of creative expressivity; OR, evidence the ways in which notions of a transcendental individualism dehistoricise empirical subjects and audiences; OR contrast how the Great Man theory of cinematic evolution and agency functions in post-New Hollywood with the polemical functions of early *auteur* theory, with specific reference to the Sarris-Kael dispute of the 1960s. . ."

As for the book's theme - thesis is too strong a term - violence, the choice comes down to films that leave you "more twisted up inside" or "reconciled" to your inner demons (I: 14), although it remains unclear whether Horsley believes the effect of *Natural Born Killers* is to heat or cool down a "budding sociopath" in the audience. He is somewhat clearer when it comes to praising "Bloody Sam" Peckinpah over "Cerebral Stan" Kubrick, but then he hates Kubrick for gate-crashing the Hall of Fame, which always remains his abiding obsession. Hence of Kubrick he writes that "the only way he could be sure to escape a critical drubbing" for *Eyes Wide Shut* "was by *dying*" (I: 13), which follows the logic of accusing Scorsese and Coppola of betraying their artistic genius and spoiling their oeuvre's integrity, by living

beyond their masterpieces. In fact, what is most surprising about Horsley's two volumes is that you would expect the first, charting the rise and demise of the New Hollywood *auteurs*, to be better not only than it is (in *Easy Riders and Raging Bulls* (1998), Peter Biskind tells a better, because better researched, story), but than the second volume. In fact, to give Horsley some credit, the quality of film commentary in "From *Apocalypse Now* to *The Matrix*" is much stronger than in "From *Touch of Evil* to *The Terminator*". Not only can he be witty - of *Silence of the Lambs*: "Hopkins as Lecter is like Peter Lorre's *M* after fifteen years of Scientology 'clearing'" (II: 183) - but he covers a large field with unflagging energy. The film he ends with - *The Matrix* - brings out the best and worst of Horsley. It is an extraordinarily hyped up, twenty-page tribute to a "sci-fi kung fu Surrealist classic" that delivers gnosis - "Watching it frees the mind" (II: 449) - that doesn't so much critically analyse as vividly *reproduce* the archetypal trickster seriousness and postmodern shallowness of the film itself. At the same time, it tells us nothing about the film's - surely crucial - alignment of technological violence and illusion, rendered as plot theme *and* production value. Equally, the apocalyptically prophetic status he gives this film affirms the blind eye Horsley turns to the emergence of other, more radical film histories and to even the most conservatively constructed agendas of race, gender, and sexuality. Finally, since *The Matrix* is - alongside *Blue Velvet* and *Natural Born Killers* - Horsley's favourite movie of all time, it exposes the historical contradictions in his central polemic, which goes back to the future by recycling Kael's essay, "On the Future of the Movies" (1974). Twenty-five years on, Horsley restages her excoriation of Hollywood for what it does to visionary artists, using Kael to polemicise on behalf of "rebellious filmmakers" who should join together to seize the means of production and distribution. If the Wachowsky brothers are Horsley's best hope of realizing this vision of poetic brotherly radicalism, then I can only think that Morpheus must have given him the wrong pill.

Classics in Film and Fiction

By Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye, and Imelda Whelehan (eds.)
London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000. ISBN 0-7453-1593-3 (hbk); ISBN 0-7453-1588-7 (pbk). x + 240 pp. £40.00 (hbk); £13.99 (pbk)

A review by Patrick J. Cook, George Washington University, USA

While the past several years have witnessed a proliferation of books examining the film adaptation of literary works, the present volume distinguishes itself from the rest by using the convergence of literature and film to interrogate the problematic notion of the "classic." The eleven essays that follow the editors' lucid introduction fall into two groups. Six essays compare multiple films adapted from the same book or the same author. In the volume's sole discussion of Shakespeare, Sara Martin eschews the expected classics. She examines instead two of the freest adaptations available, finding both the science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet* and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* to be "original and successful adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and, by virtue of their daring choice of filmic language, valuable commentaries on the impact of Shakespeare's textual and theatrical legacy on cinema" (34). Lisa Hopkins follows with a look at two versions of *Jane Eyre* from the 1990s: Zeffirelli's theatrical film and Robert Young's television production. Hopkins is especially good on the way both versions are infused with decidedly non-Victorian values, but to opposite effects, since Zeffirelli's revisions are part of a "coherent guiding project" to reproduce the original's newness and urgency while Young's constitute a superficial attempt to make the story's emotional dimension more acceptable.

For Paul Malone, the two films made from Kafka's *The Trial* elicit a different set of issues. The 1993 version directed by Terry Jones, with a Harold Pinter screenplay, responded not only to Kafka's text but as well to Orson Welles's stunning but very personal interpretation from 1963. Careful comparison of parallel scenes demonstrates how the later film tries to reproduce what Pinter believed to be the matter-of-fact nature of Kafka's narrative, an aspect that Welles's dream-logic treatment had obscured. In actuality, Malone shrewdly observes, the result is complementary films that "illuminate different levels of the original text" (190). Less informative, because far less detailed in its analysis, is Paul Wells's essay on Truman Capote's docu-novel *In Cold Blood*, the 1967 film adaptation, and the 1997 television serialization. Both adaptations are found to use an excessively explanatory realism and therefore to betray the book's portrayal of unexplainable murder.

Martin Halliwell's fine contribution entitled "Transcultural Aesthetics and the Film Adaptations of Henry James" argues that the various James adaptations of the 1990s are "self-conscious explorations of the constraints of the heritage film" (73). As such, the film versions of *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Wings of the Dove* successfully apply James's own preoccupations about cultural identity to our modern world, where these preoccupations have only intensified. Less successful, in the view of Lesley Higgins and Marie-Christine Leps, are the attempts in the 1990s to translate Virginia Woolf's novels into film. Sally Potter's *Orlando* and Marleen Gorris's *Mrs Dalloway*, these critics find, avoid

Woolf's "call upon the receiving subject to re-view her or his own position, its gender, racial and class distinctions" (129). As a result, the films "ultimately reiterate the liberal humanist dream of personal freedom and individual identity" (125).

My only persistent complaint with these essays is that they rarely analyze films in sufficient detail to support their generalizations. There are several excellent close readings (most notably in the Malone essay), but one wishes, as one too often wishes when reading about cinema, for more detailed engagement with the filmic text. This complaint cannot, however, be made about the two essays in the volume that discuss a single film. Stuart Burrows contributes a dazzling defense of Visconti's *Death in Venice*, a film that boldly eroticizes its protagonist's gaze and turns him from a writer into a composer, as "indeed faithful to Mann - on a metaphorical if not a literal level" (139). The meticulous elaboration of the intricacies of the film's "economy of the gaze" (152), and of its complementary use of music as "organizing narrative force" make this, in my view, the finest piece of critical writing on Visconti's frequently derided masterpiece. Although very different in approach, Deborah Ross's "Fear of Imagination in Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*" is similarly admirable for its nuance and detail. Ross combines consideration of Disney's reactionary politics, the gendered history of the romance genre, and the film's manipulative imagery into a somewhat alarming depiction of the way a major cultural influence shows a "tendency to encourage and then punish imagination" (210).

The remaining three essays stand apart in method. Nick Peim opens the volume with a provocative, if unnecessarily obscure, essay on the institutional practices of English teaching in the secondary school. Gide's *Symphonie Pastorale* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* are "yoked arbitrarily together" (16) to illustrate the ways in which teaching works from "different textual orders" (18) to facilitate a more progressive, theoretically informed pedagogy. The yoking is indeed arbitrary, but the principle of using such disparate works as a vehicle for teaching theory is sound; one only wonders why the author did use the abundant resources of genre theory to show why such pairings are inevitably productive. Sergio Rizzo puts together Roland Joffe's 1995 *The Scarlet Letter* and Nicholas Hytner's 1996 *The Crucible*, two Hollywood products unsuccessful in their portrayal of seventeenth-century Puritan sexual repression. Rizzo is most interesting when he describes the screen personalities of the two female leads, Demi Moore with her "apparently artless strategy of display," and Winona Ryder with her "artful strategy of disappearance" (98), but he develops little justification for including the two films in the same article beyond demonstrating that different films can fail by thwarting their female stars in different ways. Somewhat more successfully, Kay Young pairs the Lotus Eaters chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses* with Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. Demonstrating that Joyce moves his hero through the Dublin streets in the form of a movie camera, and that Hitchcock constructs his film space like that of a novel, which "more naturally makes as a site for its gaze the static inner room of the courtyard" (159), Young notes that a "classic" is not necessarily a "representative standard" (160) but can question its own generic identity.

Classics in Film and Fiction is an uneven collection, but even the less convincing essays are sufficiently bold in their framing of an issue to stimulate further thought. This will be an essential volume for readers interested in the theory and practice of film adaptation and canon formation.

For Documentary: Twelve Essays

By Dai Vaughan
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, ISBN 0-520-21694-6, 215pp, £24.50 (hard)
IBSN: 0-520-21695-4. £9.95 (pbk)
Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video By Catherine Russell & A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice By A.L.Rees

Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video

By Catherine Russell

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, IBSN: 0-8223-2287-0 (hbk); ISBN: 0-8223-2319-2 (pbk), 408pp. £43.50, (hbk); £14.95 (pbk)

A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice

By A.L.Rees

London: British Film Institute, 1999, ISBN 0-85170-684-3 (hbk); ISBN 0-85170-681-9 (pbk), 152pp. £35.00 (hbk); £13.99 (pbk)

A review by Graeme Harper, University of Wales, Bangor, UK

Is it possible to formally identify avant-garde art? The answer should be, undoubtedly, "No!" Not least because once it is formally identified it is, by this very definition, no longer avant-garde. An historical phenomenon, then, referring to the emergence and then disappearance or "mainstreaming" of the indefinable? Yet even this seems to be in opposition to the ethos of the term, which carries both the negative connotations of inaccessibility and incomprehensibility with the positive ones of invention, personalisation and cultural eclecticism.

Originally a nineteenth century French military term referring to a politically advanced Republican group, the assumption contained in the term is that, in some striking form, art labelled with it should be "beyond", "advanced", "new", "more developed", even identifiably "sublime".

It is in the notion of the sublime, with its multiple meanings from "an impressiveness of style" to "a bridge between the moral realm and the aesthetic realm" to "the transcendence of rules" which operates to disengage beauty from the avant-garde, and reflects strongly on what Dai Vaughan has referred to in *For Documentary* as "the genesis of film art" (1). If audiences, along with filmmakers, have sought out film genius, it has not always been beauty that has historically been the key to it. Rather, it is something much closer to sublimity: The capturing of something on film, some event, vista or performance which, either in the mode of its capturing, or in the sight and/or sound of it itself, inspires awe and respect and gives pleasure.

This then can be seen as the grounding of the avant-garde. Its relationship with the "experimental" would seem, at first glance, relatively obvious. Yet, the two terms are not the same. The use of the word "experimental" in the discussion of art does not necessarily lead to ideas of "advancement" or to those of "leadership". Indeed, the ways in which the discourses of the natural sciences have acquired the word "experiment" to refer to the formal development of a process or product does not sit surely with the term "experimental art".

For example, in relation to music, one use of the term "experimental music" is that referring to a prominent movement in America in the 1950s when composers, notably John Cage, sought to release music from composer-dominated hierarchies prominent in classical music, giving more freedom to the performer and, in essence, to the sound itself. This idea of freedom through experiment radically departs from the natural science definition of "experimental" which tends to refer to the proposing, empirical investigation, and either confirmation or challenging of hypotheses and theoretical models.

When Catherine Russell deals with the experimental in *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, she is not so much working between ideas of beauty and those of sublimity but in the impact zone between science and art. She writes:

> Ethnographic film is an inherently contradictory mode of film practice. Like experimental film, it has a canon of exemplary works, and a body of literature celebrating them and justifying their methods . . . Ethnographic film theory and criticism is an ongoing discussion of issues of objectivity, subjectivity, realism, narrative structure and ethical questions of representation. The links to social science imply a commitment to objectivity, and the role of film is principally to provide empirical evidence. (10)
>
> . . . Ethnographic film is in constant danger of becoming art. But what happens when we claim it as an art? What kind of art is it? It has always been an aesthetic practice, drawing from a wide range of formal devices to structure its treatment of culture . . . Ethnography may even be considered an experimental practice in which aesthetics and cultural theory are combined in a constantly evolving formal combination. (14)

Where the natural sciences and the arts meet, of course, is in the application and promotion of the imagination. It is neither more nor less imaginative to be a biologist than it is to be a filmmaker, neither more or less creative to be a film editor than an astronomer. However, as the philosopher Henri Bergson once pointed out, while the natural sciences represent the pinnacle of the intellect's achievement; they also show us where the intellect proves

inadequate. Most particularly the sciences are inadequate in the formulation of concepts of time and motion.

For film-makers and theorists, whose interests in the tenets of both time and motion are certainly heightened, this must surely be one of the profound condemnations of a monologic scientism and a confirmation of the importance of any number of versions of explanatory dualism which contrast with it. Even the instruments used to measure time "scientifically" are spatial. While these spatial abstractions are practical they in fact falsify the real nature of time and motion, and certainly have very little relationship to the *actual* practice of either making or consuming film.

Fortunately, the human species has, alongside a capacity for conceptual thought, a capacity for what Bergson labelled quite specifically "intuition." Unlike the intellect, which remains outside what it knows and reaches it only by symbols, "intuition" enters into what it knows. It is in "intuition" that the arts excel.

In the case of the artist, Bergson suggests, perception is nothing mystical or visionary but, rather, a refinement and concentration of normal perception. The "time" of a work of art is not then either the pure time of psychical experience or the pure space of pure perception but a new spatio-temporal. It exists in its own right within its own space-time and, in this respect, it transcends the moment of inspiration, the actual time of the conceiver.

What might Bergson have thought, therefore, of A.L.Rees's decidedly linear historiography in *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice*? It is certainly an intriguing historiographical choice, given that both the aesthetic and conceptual components, as well as the technological "non-parameters", of experimental filmmaking easily allow for a non-linear or thematic approach. Compounding the intrigue is the fact that a linear historiography would seem to play too easily to a fundamentally conservative version of history not at all in keeping with either the *mentalites* or diverse politics of filmic experimentalism. Rees fundamentally acknowledges this:

> The technologies which comprise the force-field of Cinema (film, video, sound, digital) and which are dedicated to comprehensive spectacle . . . at the same time are constellations which cannot align or cohere. They polarise around different ways to achieve their grand illusions; notably filmic discontinuity - "the flicks", where single images appear to move by time-exposure; and electronic continuity - "the telly", whose apparent images are streams of signals which record the breaking up of light by scanning. This ruptures it from the real which it attempts to denote. (5)

The reasons behind Rees's choice to emphasise historical continuity rather than rupture, lies primarily in the author's desire to ground this study in the material evidence of experiment.

A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice is, in fact, a very fine book on the material artefacts of filmic experimentation. It is both a book that defines and one that investigates film text as artefact, film form and style as primarily "evidential" and film construct as the recognisable remnant of interrelated holistic and individualistic epistemologies, the left-behind cinematic signs of ideas and concepts grounded in accessible public and personal history.

In this book then, there is a great deal on the "what", the "how" and the "when" of experimental film and video - but a great deal less on the "why". What we get is not a history of *mentalites* which draws on structurist ideas about human agency and individualist concepts of the person and of action, but essentially systemic-functionalist history which makes sense of filmic artefacts through ideas of self-regulation and of each element of the historical picture being integrated in a functional role within the whole. So we get, for example, passages such as this:

> Such problems were not simply economic, but also political. The broadly leftist politics of the avant-garde - both surrealist and abstract constructivists had complex links to communist and social organisations - were increasingly strained under two reciprocal policies which dominated the 1930s: the growth of German nationalism under Hitler from 1933, and the "popular front" opposition to Fascism which rose belatedly, under Moscow's lead, in 1935. (51)

No one can entirely criticise the author for this. Indeed, in so many ways, Rees's book is a job well done in a field that is often poorly explored. We only need think of the work of Clement Greenberg seeking to graduate "avant-garde" art from "mass" art based on degrees of active or passive involvement. A wonderfully nonsensical position if you consider the ways much avant-garde architecture has often entered the world. Include here also Gilles Deleuze's often discussed struggle with the distinction between signs and images which results in the difficult position that all definitions are infinitely mobile and the combining of filmic images relies on a "gaseous" state of perception. A very straightforward critical case of the position Umberto Eco once articulated as "there is nothing more meaningful than a text which asserts there is no meaning."

Rees does not fall for either such untenable relativism, or for culturally elitist positions. There is well argued definition in this book, a solid attempt to separate one aesthetic position from another, and enough lines of enquiry that are at least foregrounded to keep us interested as much in what is left out of the book as in what is contained within it.

Yet, unfortunately, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* takes the shortest known route, the smoothest historiographical ride, and in this creates a rhetorical position for experimental film and video that does not entirely do justice to its multifariousness.

In this, it is worthwhile returning to Bergson; specifically to his work on the creative process. While the tenets of the kind of philosophical and historical materialism, Rees inadvertently promotes, hold that mind or consciousness is either identical with brain activity or existentially dependent on brain activity, Bergson rejected both positions. He claimed there was vastly more in a given occasion of consciousness than in the corresponding brain state. The creative process, Bergson said, is one in which old forms are discarded to be taken up later in new transformations. Until new forms are taken up in this way, they fall back as disconnected, mechanised elements. Thus the difference, essentially, between the terms "experimental" art and the "avant-garde". That is, that the avant-garde is essentially a term associated with "time" and with "leadership". The "experimental", however, is not.

This is a position that was distinctively set out by well-known "experimental" film-maker Trinh T. Minh-ha in my recent discussion with her (recording: University of Wales, April 4th

2000): Trinh's aesthetics, which are discussed in *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* as being essentially in the "salvage paradigm"; "preoccupied", Russell says, "with rural Third World cultures" (4) are aimed squarely at a disintegration of notions of time and fixed place, a heightening of individualist position, and the articulation of a Bergsonian notion of "taking the outside within".

It is wrong to see Trinh's as a position as "salvaging". The intention of her films is to create what she sees as the "self in displacement", largely through the rhythm of her texts, through their repetition of sound and of image, and through the revealing of filmic language in the composition of the film itself. The recalling of the past, for Trinh, is done with the intention of "coming back to the old in order to reinvent the new". But also of uniting collective memory across a "shifting third ground". A ground that is, in fact, neither purely past nor purely present. Thus her challenging aesthetic. Is this "salvage" in Clifford's sense of the word, or is it more like foregrounding "displacement" in senses as diverse as those used in Freudian analysis and in colonial theory?

The fact that Trinh's latest film, *A Tale of Love*, perhaps came too late to be considered in Russell's book is certainly unfortunate. *A Tale of Love* is a work of fiction and therefore, if we were to follow arguments around the "salvage paradigm", an interesting aesthetic question mark to Russell's position on Trinh's "factual" work. This is all the more intriguing if we consider what happens when Russell turns to a film such as *Handsworth Songs* (1985). She writes:

> As a history of fiction, images, and disjunctive stories, it is an allegorical form of history in which the real remains outside, in the form of ghosts. (269)

What does this mean? Does the author mean, for example, that this is a form of historical document which contains a proliferation of "symbolic" elements and therefore is allegorical? Or does she mean that there is nothing real about *Handsworth Songs*? Or does she mean that the allegorical is, by definition, not real? Or does she mean that disjunctive stories are rhetorically allegorical?

When Trinh T. Minh-ha chooses to use poetic or lyrical language to make points about her cultural, aesthetic and/or methodological position she does so with the aim, she says, of encouraging a "multiplicity of meaning". Russell does not appear to have the same intention; yet her book frequently slips into a woolly language which detracts from the very important intention of the author to chart "non-mainstream" style and form in ethnographic filmmaking. This book, at half its current length (circa 400 pages), could well have been an excellent examination of the work of some distinctive filmmakers. As it stands, there is far too little that is concisely defined, far too much that is convoluted and ungrounded in any clear theoretical model, and far too many epistemological imprecisions to do the author's research justice. This is a great shame.

Perhaps it should come as no great surprise that Dai Vaughan's essays in *For Documentary* are able to make the bridge between theory and practice in a way that Russell does not quite pull off. Not least because Vaughan is himself a long-standing documentary film editor and a degree of pragmatic, common-sense philosophy at least alerts the author to the dangers of separating good intention from good application. But the reasons why Vaughan is able to take complete film texts and project debate around them are more complex than that.

Most significantly, Vaughan understands that theories are models, metaphoric projections, which exist only so long as their language remains true to empirical discoveries. Discussing what he calls his "bifocal" reaction after getting to know two women who had previously been the subject of a documentary he had edited, he writes:

> To the extent that I fed into the images, my subsequent knowledge of the characters and location, the film broke down into incoherence. To the extent that it did cohere, it projected a world that repudiated any connection with the people and place as I now knew them. Such an experience is the subjective correlative of the dual nature of film, which exists both as record and as language; and this duality, a source of paradox, has generated much confusion in the debates surrounding "observational cinema". (54-55)

Empirical evidence here, founded in the creative process, asks for a reconsideration of the debates around a particular film genre. Theory moves on. From playful essays such as "Competing With Reality" to theory re-modelling experiments such as "The Aesthetics of Ambiguity" and onward to cultural materialist analysis such as "Berlin versus Tokyo" Vaughan shows himself to be both a superb writer and perceptive theorist.

A book that ends ". . . in the act of perception lies, already, the germ of language" (208) knows exactly what it is offering and where it is going. We see in Vaughan's book the way in which we must write the history of a creative art such as filmmaking.

As Bergson points out, the work of the (film) artist, in transcending the moment of inspiration and the actual time of the conceiver, belongs to an eclectic structurationist history, where individual agency, public or cultural intention, and chance occurrence meet in the remaining filmic artefact.

How we interpret this filmic artefact must be equally historiographically eclectic. If it is not, no amount of theoretical positioning or evidential support will help us to think through its meanings, intentions or reasons for existing. Great film criticism, like great filmmaking, relies on this kind of fluidity of understanding.

Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America

By Alan Nadel
New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8135-2440-7, xii + 239 pp., 50 illustrations, £13.50

A review by Nick Redfern, University of Kent at Canterbury, UK

Despite its status as the dominant cultural form of the twentieth century in the United States, it is the cinema that is absent from the overwhelming majority of "American studies" textbooks. This may be attributed to the presence of "film studies" as a separate academic field, but even here the idea of national cinemas works against American films, which have enjoyed success not only at home but have also dominated the international motion picture market. Paradoxically, as one of the United States' most successful exports, Hollywood has become such a feature of international culture - a brand as recognisable as Coca-Cola or MacDonalds - that the cinema is rarely considered to be an "American" event. Alan Nadel's study of "President Reagan's America" - roughly from 1983 to 1990 - is to be welcomed by scholars in both fields, addressing the cinema and American culture as inseparable and confronting the myths of a nation where "reality is defined by the movies" (18).

Nadel's starting point is that the American public is so tuned in to understanding narrative cinema that a president with the ability to manipulate the "narrative image" of America would prove to be highly successful. It was perhaps only a matter of time before a Hollywood star was to take the ultimate leading role of commander-in-chief, though few would have picked Ronald Reagan. However, as an actor, it was Reagan who was far better suited to play a president than the anti-media Richard M. Nixon:

> To put it simply, we have learned to understand conventional presentations of moving images so well that the process seems "natural." To this sense of the natural, Reagan naturally appealed. Because as a performer he was more or less a natural - certainly not a method actor burdened with a tempestuous unconscious or impeded by introspection - Reagan had a style of delivery that did not disrupt the illusion of naturalness from which television and film media benefit (14-15).

The image of President Reagan is the point at which "reality" and "movies" collide, and it is through looking at Reagan's presidency that we might better understand how the cinema and society exist together. Nadel reveals a set of themes that are as cinematic as much as they are political:

> [Reagan] is the set of beliefs and practices valorized in the eight years between recessions, during which time an extension of credit, a production of waste, a fetishization of details, and a glorification of image - the qualities of the Hollywood film - became manifest as themes in public policy (22).

Nadel then goes on to analyse the dominant types of narratives that characterize "President Reagan's America," all of which demonstrate a unique concern for economics as both a theme and structuring device in the cinema. As Nadel states, it is in President Reagan's America that "cinema triumphs over economics as the primary producer of social realities" (13). Thus it is through time travel, and through the ability of the cinema to manipulate time, that Marty McFly gains an unlimited time credit to acquire the family and lifestyle he desires in *Back to the Future*. Reaganomics is not only an economic policy but also a pattern of editing that distorts the time-space continuum: "The supply side of the cinematic credit formula can be seen in those instances when the same technological code can be used not to escape the limits of 'real' time but to infuse real time with an artificial surplus…" (76). A number of films, such as *Field of Dreams*, *Ghost*, *Chances Are*, and *Beetlejuice*, narrate the protection of conservative America by the dead; the cinema affording life after death in maintaining the image of the deceased. In *Beetlejuice*, it is small-town America that is reclaimed through cinematic representation; a simulacrum to be acquired like any other consumer product. Nadel also offers an insightful reading of the theme of acquisition and class in *The Little Mermaid*, where the happy-ending allows Ariel to gain her legs, and therefore the ability to move "up" to the human world, at absolutely no cost. Here we see a further symptom of "President Reagan's America" that Hollywood cinema so repeatedly reinforces: "the credit need never be balanced with the debt, so long as the narrative remains convincing" (76).

Flatlining on the Field of Dreams is tremendously successful on two counts. Firstly, it is written with a wit and style missing from too many academic books on the cinema. The reader will be engaged from start to finish, and it is very easy to read Nadel's book in one sitting. Secondly, through Nadel's careful analysis of the films of "President Reagan's America" the reader will be left with a far greater knowledge of what Reagan meant to America than any number of history textbooks could provide. But then this is more than a history, as the author states "Reaganism is still with us." (202)

Heroes in Hard Times: Cop Action Movies in the US

By Neal King
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. ISBN I-56639-701-4 (hbk); ISBN 1-56639-702-2 (pbk). xi + 282 pp., 15 illustrations, $59.50, (hbk); $19.95 (pbk)

A review by Mark Bould, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, UK

Irked by critics examining individual cop-action movies in isolation from generic contexts, King has heeded Jameson's observation that genres are built on the fact of repetition rather than an *ur*-text, and has studied the 193 movies of the genre's second-wave (1980-1997). One might quibble with his selections - to omit countless straight-to-video examples is not unreasonable, I suppose; but having included several SF movies that match the emergent pattern, why exclude the westerns? However, the central thesis of his work, an elaborated description of typical characters and plot, seems sound, if unambitious.

In these movies a straight-white-male, working-class professional, proficient at his job but socially and emotionally incompetent, "stands in for [the] embattled middle-American populace [...] most frustrated with recent shifts in American life" (14). He perceives his job, the only thing he is good at, to be threatened by bureaucracy/corruption/affirmative action/the feminisation of the workplace in a service industry-based economy. Actually/imminently separated/divorced from a woman who can no longer respect him or his career, he is saddled with an African-American/Hispanic/female partner who is of a higher social class, has a homelife and greater social and emotional (but less physical) competence. At odds with friends/colleagues/middle-management/big business, he develops some kind of sympathy/affinity with a social outgroup to which he does not belong. He tries to convince others of the value of his work by exposing them to, then rescuing them from, danger, or by grieving over a slain partner. Eventually, in a city where street crime is performed by non-whites, he goes up against the rich, corrupt, and perverse Big White Villain, receiving and inflicting severe physical punishment before killing him. However, his own situation, and that of his city/country, remains pretty much unchanged.

Critics, many of whom seem to be offended by such movies, find them "racist, homophobic, individualist, pro-Reagan, capitalist, or misogynist" and full of "loopy subtexts, homoerotic mainly" (viii). King instead argues that neither the movies nor their protagonists are ignorant of straight-white-male privilege. The cop-hero, like the movie, addresses fantasies of rage in a world where ground seems to have been lost, where privileges like "prestige, autonomy, proud individualism, a working- or professional-class standard of living, the experience of being able to make it if they really try, and the sense of never being accountable as members of minorities" (8), often mistaken for rights, are under threat.

King has other interesting, if underdeveloped, insights. For example, others have noted the exaggerated racial markers borne by Big White Villains, but King suggests that rather than

being some displaced version of a racial out-group, they actually function to make whiteness visible. The cop-hero is implicated in the excesses of power and corruption by the very fact of his whiteness, but by siding with out-groups and thus distancing himself from visible whiteness, the contrast makes the cop-hero seem like a halfway decent man. Unfortunately, King does not consider the consolation offered by this rather obvious displacement of straight-white-male culpability onto corrupt individuals. And, of course, it is always corruption and individuals that are to blame, not the glaring mismatch between liberal ideals and capitalist economics.

King's complaint that critics often mistake genre norms for evidence of an individual movie's ideological contradictions is rather more valid than is his obliviousness to the importance of specific differences within repetition, and the possibility of genre norms themselves being ideological. Antagonistic to any tendency to regard the product of the culture industries as instruments of domination, he dismisses such criticism as merely representing the "opportunity to contrast one's political consciousness to those of one's neighbours and the popular culture all share"' (226). Rather "than trumpet [his] own greater consistency or perceptiveness by imputing contradictions or deceit", he approaches movies as he would "human communities or interview subjects - as objects that make sense within some discoverable set of terms" or "moral logic" that he is "obliged to learn" (232-233). Obviously, such accusations are guilty of the fault he detects in others. His stance as a dispassionate "scientific" observer is as preposterous as it is unconvincing, and by attacking the perceived political agendas of other critics while refusing to criticise the genre's typical politics, he reveals a troubling sympathy for the reactionary scape-goating of those who are not straight white men.

King calls, in conclusion, for "a cultural studies as complex as the culture it studies" (235). Unfortunately, he mistakes painstakingly-collected data for complexity, and his reductionism (which ranges from never going any further than plot and dialogue in the analysis of a movie, to his denial of any and all displacement mechanisms) results in a ploddingly repetitive, unsubtle volume, whose real value is as a preliminary map of the cop-action genre. Consequently, King's preference for brandishing rather than properly tabulating statistics becomes an even more significant failing.

Shohei Imamura

By James Quandt (ed.)
Toronto: Toronto International Film. Festival Group, 1997. ISBN 0-9682969-0-4. ii + 183pp. 29 illustrations. $13.00 (pbk)
The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On: Yukiyukite shingun By Jeffrey Ruoff and Kenneth Ruoff

The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On: Yukiyukite shingun

By Jeffrey Ruoff and Kenneth Ruoff

Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1998. ISBN 0-948911-05-0. vi + 57pp. £9.95 (pbk)

A review by Lori Hitchcock, Indiana University, USA

These two volumes, each concerned with filmmakers and works existing on the periphery of mainstream Japanese film, are long-overdue contributions to English-language writing on Japanese film. Produced in conjunction with a 1997-1998 retrospective tour of films, *Shohei Imamura* is a comprehensive introduction to the eclectic oeuvre of a director renowned for his depictions of Japanese society's "lower dregs" (113). Although Imamura is the recipient of two Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, for *The Ballad of Narayama* (*Narayama Bushiko*, 1983) and *The Eel* (*Unagi*, 1997), this volume, as editor James Quandt notes, is "the first in English to concentrate on the work of Shohei Imamura" (i), and, indeed, it provides a multifaceted, if occasionally uneven, look at the director, his works, and his influences. Featured are a variety of essays and interviews, largely reprinted from primary sources such as *Film Comment* and *Cahiers du Cinema*, and penned by such scholars and film historians as Max Tessier, Audie Bock, and Donald Richie. Each takes a somewhat different approach to the director and his films, with essays such as Richie's "Notes for a Study on Shohei Imamura" and Tessier's "Shohei Imamura: Modern Japan's Entomologist" providing general overviews of Imamura's career and most representative works, and others, such as Yann Lardeau's "*The Ballad of Narayama*: Ascent to the Beyond," offering more in-depth analyses of specific films.

Two interviews with Imamura, as well as selected translations from the director's own writings, are particularly useful to Western scholars of Japanese film. Filmmaker Nakata Toichi's interview with the director, conducted in the United Kingdom in 1994, is notable for its insight into Imamura's early career as assistant to both Ozu Yasujiro and Kawashima Yuzo, as well as his experiences within Japan's rigid studio system. A 1977 interview, conducted by Tessier, Bock, and Ian Buruma, further probes two characteristics of Imamura's films that have continued to intrigue Western scholars of Japanese film: namely, his

unconventional use of female characters and actresses, as well as the metaphorical cinematic language through which he critiques urban Japanese society.

Dave Kehr's essay "The Last Rising Sun" offers an engaging analysis of Imamura's aesthetics, with his observations on the director's use of space in the construction of film metaphor particularly intriguing. Similarly, Tessier's exceptional overview essay, Bock's essay, "Shohei Imamura: No Confucianist," an unfortunately too-short examination of Imamura's cinematic confounding of sentiment and Confucian morality, and Linda C. Ehrlich's "Erasing and Refocusing: Two Films of the Occupation" each effectively interrogate Imamura's works through a satisfying combination of cultural and theoretical analysis.

Ultimately, however, such essays seem to be more the exception than the rule of Quandt's compilation. *Shohei Imamura* is plagued throughout by two troubling tropes characteristic of much writing on Japanese cinema in general. The first is an over-reliance on Western scholarship of Japanese film, to the extent that the casual reader might be forgiven for an erroneous impression that little has been written on Imamura in the director's native language. This is evidenced not only by the dearth of contributions from Japanese critics (indeed, Nakata's interview and the translations of Imamura's own writings constitute the only Japanese contributions to the volume), but also, and more pointedly, to an insular relationship between the Western critics represented here. Gilles Laprevotte, Allan Casebier, and even Richie each choose in varying degrees to speak through Imamura's Western interlocutors in formulating their own discussions of the director, perhaps with the intention of making him more palatable to Western readers. However, this practice instead serves to distance these readers from Imamura's Japanese context, to the extent that Casebier is able to argue "one single audience, Japanese and Western alike" (90) for Imamura's films; an argument made all the more paradoxical by his parallel reliance on certain well-worn tropes of "Japanese psychology" (94) in his analysis of Imamura's "search for identity of true Japaneseness [sic]" (98).

This distancing effect reaches almost absurd proportions in the case of Imamura's own writings included in the book: although valuable to the Western scholar for their rare insights into the director's aesthetics and influences, two selections are third-generation translations of excerpts first translated from Japanese into Dutch for a Rotterdam International Film Festival programme. While it is unclear if these English-language translations were specifically commissioned for this volume or existed in translation prior to their publication here, such heavy reliance on Western interlocutions, to the general disregard of Japanese writing on Imamura, jeopardizes the overall academic integrity of *Shohei Imamura*.

Shohei Imamura also unwittingly enacts certain problematic characteristics of English-language studies of Japanese film, as identified by Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (author of the recently-published volume, *Kurosawa*): namely, an uneasy division between theoretical/aesthetic analyses of Imamura's films, on the one hand, and cultural/historical readings, on the other. The result, in the case of more theoretical readings, is the nearly complete universalization of Imamura's subject matter, as witnessed in Antoine de Baecque's "Murder of the Pink Pig," in which Imamura's examination of a primitive society in *Profound Desire of the Gods* (*Kamigami no fukaki yokubo*, 1968) is bereft of its implicit critique of modern Japanese society through de Baecque's broad interpretation of the film as a fable of weakness, cruelty, and victimization. Similarly, several essays of the cultural/historical bent come dangerously close to over-particularization, in which Imamura's films become

examinations of what Richie describes as the "true nature of the Japanese" (9), the "true nature of the Japanese woman" (11), or, as Casebier argues, "a certain unique Japaneseness" (89). Thus, while *Shohei Imamura* is a comprehensive and informative introduction to Imamura's films - as well as themes such as marginality and modernity that characterize those works - these two tendencies unwittingly combine to reinforce an anachronistic sense of Japanese film studies as something largely unrelated to Japanese scholarship and spectatorship of its own cinema. It is in this sense that *Shohei Imamura* represents a somewhat retrogressive text for the serious student of Japanese film.

In contrast, the authors of *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On/Yukiyukite shingun* succeed in circumventing such problems by virtue of the various strengths each brings to their analysis of Hara Kazuo's 1987 documentary of the same name. Jeffrey Ruoff, described as a film historian and documentary filmmaker, and Kenneth Ruoff, a scholar of Japanese history, examine Hara's controversial film from a variety of cultural, historical, and theoretical perspectives, with their analysis benefiting from first-hand interviews with both Hara and his wife/producer Kobayashi Sachiko.

The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On makes for compelling reading if for no other reason than its subject matter. Originally commissioned by World War II veteran Okuzaki Kenzo as a project for Imamura, the documentary concerns Okuzaki's attempts to come to terms with Japanese military involvement in Southeast Asia during the war, detailing his own political activities in the wake of the Japanese surrender (including a notorious attack on the Showa Emperor in 1969). The project was passed on to Hara, Imamura's assistant cameraman on two films, who spent five years preparing the documentary with the participation of the often-volatile Okuzaki.

Ruoff and Ruoff's slim volume is particularly noteworthy for its careful descriptions of the film's production, providing insight into the broader conditions of documentary filmmaking in Japan. Their dramatic accounts of the filmmakers' attempts to record Okuzaki's return to New Guinea, sabotaged at the last minute by Okuzaki himself, as well as Hara's subsequent difficulties in seeing the project to completion, constitute an invaluable backdrop to the finished documentary. Moreover, the authors confront issues of the film's translation to the international sphere head-on. Their description of the controversy surrounding the film's English-language title is revealing in this sense: noting the difference in nuance between the Japanese and English titles of the documentary, Ruoff and Ruoff quote Hara as observing, "It's a little embarrassing. The sense is different in English than in the original Japanese…The English title suggests that Okuzaki continues to fight for the emperor" (18). The authors continue, "Furthermore, this problem was not limited to the English-speaking world. *Cahiers du Cinema*, for example, cites the French title as *L'armee de l'empereur s'avance* ("The Emperor's Army Marches On"), an even more deceptive translation" (18). Such observations confound easy assumptions of the film's transparency to Western audiences (and, by extension, scholars).

The book also benefits from the inclusion of a rare analysis of the film's Japanese reception, with observations of its unexpected and paradoxical reception by Japan's leading political parties being of particular interest. A section entitled "Okuzaki as Action Hero" is less effective; although Hara is quoted as saying "I love Hollywood action films, and I wanted Okuzaki to act like an action star" (19), little attention is given to the ways in which Hara, as director, may have deliberately positioned Okuzaki as such a star in his film (although Hara's

own relationship to the material is explored in more depth in a subsequent analysis of the film's narrative structure).

It should be noted that *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* is one in an intriguing Cinetek series produced by Flicks Books, devoted to explorations of "neglected, 'difficult' or confrontational" films from around the world. In addition to analysis of the film, this volume also includes a comprehensive cast listing, main credits, a list of scenes in the film, and an index. Ruoff and Ruoff's work provides an invaluable look into the world of Japanese documentary filmmaking, as well as a comprehensive and scholarly analysis of a film that remains controversial to the present day.

Lance Comfort

By Brian McFarlane
Manchester University Press, 1999, ISBN 0719054842, xii + 225 pp., 16 illustrations. £9.99 (pbk)

A review by Melanie Williams, Hull University, UK

"Why Lance Comfort?" is the question posed by Brian McFarlane at the beginning of his book, although for the uninitiated, the preliminary question of "Who is Lance Comfort?" might be more pressing. According to McFarlane at least, Lance Comfort is the most unjustly neglected director in British film history and this study, the first book in Manchester University Press's new series on British filmmakers, seeks to rescue him from critical obscurity.

Obscurity was not always Comfort's lot. His second film as director, *Hatter's Castle* (1941), featuring a young James Mason, was a huge success and at one point he was lauded as the great white hope of the British cinema, a plaudit which has been an albatross around the neck of many a promising director. By 1946, he was bankable and successful enough to be entrusted with the directorship of *Bedelia*, a vehicle for the most popular star in Britain at the time, Margaret Lockwood. But after this initial burst of activity, Comfort, like so many other British film makers, found himself adrift in the changed film industry of the 1950s, the turning point probably being the disastrous reception of his romantic melodrama *Portrait of Clare* (1950). After this, he moved into co-features and "B" pictures, as well as TV work, before his premature death in 1966 at the age of fifty-eight.

McFarlane's book steers away from any kind of old-school auteurism in its appraisal of Lance Comfort, and in fact, argues forcefully that auteurist-influenced isolated critical focus on the giants of British cinema, the David Leans and Carol Reeds, has been detrimental to study of the field, because it has resulted in the neglect of more marginal figures like Lance Comfort who, after all, make up the majority of a national film culture. One thing this book does very successfully is make a case for Comfort's films as an attractive and engaging body of work, and it manages to overcome the obvious problem that many readers will not have seen all (if indeed any) of the films discussed by explaining the films' plots fully and vividly without resorting to tedious pages of plot synopsis. At the end of the book (rounded off with an extensive filmography) you *want* to see these films; the clearest and most obvious vindication of McFarlane's whole project.

This is particularly true of the book's central chapter, "Dark Achievement: Six Melodramas", which discusses some fascinating-sounding films directed by Comfort and examines how their use of melodramatic modes caused them to be sidelined, ignored or reviled by the critical establishment in Britain at the time, for whom melodrama was primarily a term of abuse. In particular, the critic C. A. Lejeune comes in for a real drubbing from McFarlane:

> One of the leading critical taste-makers of the day, Lejeune, read now, seems to have had no feeling for cinema at all, only a kind of debilitating middle-

> class 'good taste' that wanted people to behave well and for films to be a credit to the nation (75-6).

Several of the protagonists in these six films, as McFarlane notes, are precisely the opposite of this: they refuse to "behave well" and often their behaviour verges on the obsessive and the criminal. *Great Day*'s (1945) title refers to the coming of Mrs Roosevelt to visit the Women's Institute of Denley village. Whilst Mrs Ellis, head of the W.I., is busy with preparations, her husband Captain Ellis, a First World War hero clinging resolutely to the past, is forced to consider the aimlessness of his current life, culminating in a suicidal crisis. *Great Day* explores the personal unhappiness that lies beneath the happy pastoral facade of village life, just as *Temptation Harbour* (1947) with Robert Newton as a decent man caught in the grip of erotic obsession for Simone Simon, and *Bedelia* with its serial husband-poisoner heroine, reveal convincingly the dark undercurrents beneath apparently ordinary lives. This may be melodrama, but it is melodrama firmly ensconced in humdrum everyday British life, and all the more powerful for that.

The other major point of interest about *Lance Comfort* is the window it affords onto the rich and strange world of British "B" pictures, Comfort's chief mode of production in the 1950s and 1960s. McFarlane has done some interesting work on these films before and here he gets the chance to expand upon it with a survey of Comfort's work in these tightly-budgeted programme fillers. Although Comfort was no longer, in Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, an autonomous cultural producer, McFarlane argues persuasively that one of Comfort's real strengths is his adaptability:

> [Comfort] adjusted to the idea of the 'field of cultural production [as] the site of struggles', with more confidence than any of his peers and, on low budgets and against daunting schedules, produced work which is due for reappraisal, because it is lively, inventive and generically knowing... (116)

McFarlane suggests there is a really attractive threadbare poetry to Comfort's films, equivalent to but very different from the beloved American "B" thrillers, with a melancholy topography of bedsits and bombsites rather than motels and diners, and just as deserving of cult lionisation. This book might help it to happen and then "Who is Lance Comfort?" will be an obsolete question.

Media Studies: A Reader (Second Edition)

By Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (eds.)
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1999, ISBN: 0 7486 1206 8, xvii + 869 pp. £18.95 (pbk)

A review by Rita Lago, University of Stirling, UK

Comprising sixty-five essays, this second edition of *Media Studies: A Reader* is a comprehensive and well-produced collection of mainly British based academic research in the field of media studies. Compared to its predecessor, this most recent edition is, unfortunately, rarely cited in subsequent British academic books in the field of media studies. Instead of the usual, limited and minimalist face-lifts and the obvious updating, the second edition of *Media Studies: A Reader* has, in fact, been deeply but not drastically changed. The result is that of its sixty-five essays, twenty-four of these are new additions to the volume, making it a worthwhile purchase even for those who already own a copy of the first. Underlying these modifications are not just the obvious necessities of having to keep the work in tune with more recent debates and trends in the field of media studies, but also in parallel with the developments in what is a constantly changing industry. Equally important, yet often neglected, are those changes which were made in response to the experiences of readers of its first edition, in particular the authors highlight those of teachers and students.

Organised around Stuart Hall's model for media studies ("encoding", "meaningful discourse" and "decoding"), the book is composed of two parts. The first section in part one looks at the different theoretical traditions in studying the media, whilst the subsequent three sections look at the three stages of Hall's model, the production process, text and reception. The second part of the book concentrates on four case studies, which examine soap opera, news, advertising and the new electronic media.

However, while this reader covers a broad range of subject material and theoretical approaches, amongst others, its focus on the press and broadcasting is nevertheless somewhat problematic. As the authors argue:

> Most of the readings focus on broadcasting and the press, and this limitation is quite deliberate. Film Studies have a well-established critical tradition, which can be traced elsewhere. Popular music, comics and popular fiction might have been given more attention, but a number of collections have been published which have as their focus, the analysis of popular media culture, and the student may turn to those. Broadcasting and the press have been central to the study of the mass media within a range of theoretical traditions, and this anthology echoes that centrality (xii).

This is increasingly debatable, especially if one questions whether such an approach still accurately reflects the field of study and the media as an industry as it becomes increasingly more globalised. Thus, to what extent should the patterns of globalisation, visible in the industry, not result in a similar approach in academic writing: rather than pursuing existent

divisions in the field of study, shouldn't these instead be examined in a more unifying manner? In other words, if the actual industry, which is the subject of study here, is characterised by a growing convergence between its different fields, such as broadcasting and film, and is becoming increasingly more unified, should this not be reflected in the academic writing of media studies?

What is perhaps bizarre, is that there is an element of globalisation in the book, as this second edition, although mainly composed of British academic work, nevertheless includes some work from the United States, Australia and the Netherlands. However, what the authors still seem reticent about is the convergence of the actual fields of study, such as press, broadcasting, film and music.

Whilst it is obviously virtually impossible to compile a single book which is capable of adequately addressing the vast arena of media studies, it is nevertheless important to address the increasing overlap between the different fields within media studies, rather than dismiss it on the basis that valuable material exists elsewhere. Instead, what is really necessary, not so much from the point of view of researchers, but more so from the perspective of students, who have repeatedly been informed of the impacts of globalisation, convergence and the creation of a critical mass, is to see these changes mirrored in the books they use in their studies.

Overall, the production of this second edition of *Media Studies: A Reader* is a welcomed and positive contribution to the study, understanding and teaching of media studies. However, it should nevertheless have gone one step further and have engaged and imitated more what is happening in the industry.

Sisters on Screen: Siblings in Contemporary Cinema

By Eva Reuschmann
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, ISBN: 1-56639-747-2, x + 221pp, £14.20, (pbk)

A review by Hannah Patterson, Co-editor of *The Wallflower Critical Guide to Contemporary Directors*

Somewhat surprisingly, Eva Reuschmann's book on cinematic representations of sisterhood, *Sisters on Screen*, is one of the only existing in-depth studies of the subject. Despite the vast amount of films that focus on the sororal aspect of family, sisters have gained much more attention in literary theory, psychoanalysis and feminist studies. Although there is material written about early sister films - particularly those of the forties such as *The Dark Mirror* (1946) - these are not the focus of her attention, primarily because they "almost always articulated male views of women" (2). She chooses instead a post-sixties world cinema that offers a revisionist representation of women; films by directors who have been stylistically and narratively affected by the modernist cinema movement. With their emphasis on interiority, psychology and emotion, these films lend themselves particularly well to her topic.

Rather than tackle each film chronologically, Reuschmann wisely groups them according to particular aspects of their portrayal of sisterhood - adolescence, rites of passage and child-parent relationships. Not only does this make for much richer analysis, it is more interesting because it allows the reader to engage with the specific preoccupations of each director within the wider context of world cinema. Drawing from a range of varied material - the product of directors from different countries, ethnicities and stylistic persuasions - Reuschmann successfully manages to tease out and emphasise the dichotomy of sisterhood. At her most insightful she reveals how extreme and opposing emotions - love and hate, jealousy and adoration, admiration and spite - can exist side by side, affecting the way sisters relate to one another and crucially shaping their experience of life.

In Part I Reuschmann examines the representation of sisters as artists and focuses on two films about female writers: Gillian Armstrong's Hollywood production, *Little Women* (1994), and Jane Campion's *An Angel at My Table* (1990). They make good companion pieces: stylistically diverse, both deal explicitly with the link between sisters and creativity, and particularly the effect that siblings can have on the shaping of the imagination. Reuschmann articulates well the problematic nature of *Little Women*'s inherent nostalgia whilst also recognising how central the novel (and film) has been in shaping women's conception of feminism. She notes how the film skirts the contradictory nature of womanhood and differs from the book in that all the sisters appear to be happily united at the end. Through detailed and revealing textual analysis she reveals how *An Angel at My Table* goes much further to explore the realities of life for a woman negotiating patriarchal culture and dealing with her own burgeoning sexuality.

In Part II the author turns to an examination of sisters in adolescence. Here she picks films in which the visions of sisterhood are far less harmonious, often traumatic, either at the hand of a sibling or a parental figure. Split into three chapters, the first focuses on rites of passage in Diane Kury's *Peppermint Soda*, Allison Anders's *Gas Food Lodging* and Todd Solondz's *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, specifically focusing on the issue of an older sister's effect on a younger child. Reuschmann stresses how each director knowingly plays with point of view, privileging that of the ill-favoured, "invisible" sister, in an attempt to redress a balance and counteract more typical Hollywood fare.

Although occasionally underdeveloped, the next chapter importantly foregrounds ethnicity, exploring the issues of sister rivalry in relation to males (often fathers) in Mina Shum's *Double Happiness* and Kasi Lemmons' *Eve's Bayou*. In the final chapter of Part II, Reuschmann shifts the parental emphasis to discuss sisters and their mothers. In both Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* and Nancy Meckler's *Sister My Sister* the girls are ambivalent about their mothers and she emphasises the extent to which each director bravely probes the more taboo areas of family dislike, which can lead to violence.

Part III concentrates on sisters in adulthood, a subject which directors Ingmar Bergman and Margarethe von Trotta have returned to time again and time again throughout their careers. Bergman, Reuschmann argues, is "the director most consistently engaged with the exploration of female subjectivity" (127), familial communication or lack of it, and the potential grief caused by sisters' conditioned and unthinking behaviour. Declaring both his work *Cries and Whispers* and von Trotta's *Sisters, or The Balance of Happiness* to be the two films that prompted her to write the book, Reuschmann's treatment of each is suitably nuanced.

Reaching the end of the study, one realises that the strength of Rueschmann's work springs from her freedom to shape and develop her own arguments on the subject without having to endlessly reference previous studies or write within the confines of established theoretical models. While the subject clearly lends itself to psychoanalytic and feminist readings for instance, she only discusses these when it is appropriate and enlightening. That said, this lack of cohesion is also one of the book's failings. Brought together by the subject of sisterhood, the individual flavour of each film is sometimes diminished, particularly when forced into comparison with another.

Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture

By Cynthia Erb
Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8143-2686-2. 240 pp. £19.99 (pbk)

A review by Peter Hutchings, University of Northumbria, UK

In *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Cynthia Erb sets out to explore the production and reception contexts of the 1930s movie "classic", *King Kong*, as well as some of the ways in which the film - and Kong himself as a character - has been reinterpreted and appropriated since its initial release. Erb argues that the persistence of *King Kong* in western (and to a certain extent eastern) culture is to do with its "intertextual" character. The film's mobilisation of a range of different discourses and generic conventions seems to have facilitated numerous re-workings of the Kong story, notably those which perceive that story in terms of a racial politics and those which seek to assign cult status to it. The original film itself emerges from this as a decidedly ambivalent text, both offering a space within which various social tensions are registered while at the same time resisting any single fixed reading of it.

Tracking King Kong shares the emphasis of much contemporary film studies on the contextual and the intertextual; and it is accordingly suspicious of any form of textual analysis which posits the film text as an autonomous entity waiting to be explicated by the resourceful critic. At the same time, however - and I think this is one of the book's main strengths - Erb offers a clear sense of *King Kong* as a particular artefact, one that is definable through structure and intent and which, even as it encourages and generates a number of different responses to it, is not wholly reducible to any of those responses. (One sometimes feels that accounts of the audience reception of films occasionally lose sight of the film as an object that in various ways escapes the reception context, that is to a certain extent indifferent to or ignorant of that context.) In this respect, Erb tends to see *King Kong* as both symptomatic and somewhat peculiar; symptomatic inasmuch as it reveals some general principles of film production, especially its bricolage-like nature; peculiar because *King Kong* seems to embody a particularly extreme outcome of this assemblage process.

By far the strongest part of Erb's book is the first half, which deals with the production of *King Kong* itself. Here Erb provides a fascinating account both of the industrial imperatives guiding *Kong*'s production and of the way in which the production team sought to align the film in relation to particular marketing contexts. Nowadays *King Kong* is often thought of as part of the 1930s horror boom; but Erb convincingly demonstrates that a desire to tap into the horror market was only one motivation amongst many for the film-makers, and that in fact it makes more sense to think of the film in relation to the travel documentaries and jungle adventure movies that were proving so popular in the 1930s (and upon which some of the key *Kong* film-makers had previously worked) but which - with the exception of the Tarzan movies - are largely forgotten today.

One could argue that the main reason for the current obscurity of these "anthropological" films is that their representations of race, and particularly blackness, are now deemed to be too offensive for widespread circulation. Erb engages with this racial dimension - which has a clear significance for *King Kong*, a film that in many respects can be seen as racist - in a very interesting way, stressing the complexities of the white response to racial difference as evinced in films such as *Grass* and *Ingagi*. Throughout this, Erb maintains a clear awareness both of these films - and *King Kong*'s - projection of white supremacy and of the anxieties, difficulties and contradictions involved in this projection. In also considering gender difference - *King Kong* was written in part by a woman - Erb further underlines the complexities of difference as they manifest themselves in this area of representation in general and in *King Kong* in particular.

The second half of Erb's book is less satisfying than the first, primarily because it seems less focussed. There is an account of *Mighty Joe Young*, which convincingly demonstrates that this 1949 film about a giant ape sought to "domesticate" and tame some of the issues deployed within the original *King Kong*. (One would have welcomed in this respect a discussion of *Son of Kong*, the 1933 sequel to *King Kong* which, although it is mentioned here as the second part of the Kong "trilogy" that was completed by *Mighty Joe Young*, barely figures in Erb's argument.) The account then offered of the Japanese production of *Godzilla* is much skimpier and less interesting and serves only to underline the slightly misleading nature of the book's subtitle "A Hollywood Icon in World Culture". Virtually all the examples used by Erb - with the exception of *Godzilla* and a brief discussion of a South African play - are North American in origin. World culture barely gets a look in. Where are the British, for example, with *Konga* or *Queen Kong* or - an even more surprising omission given the stress in part of the book on camp appropriations of *King Kong - The Rocky Horror Picture Show*?

Given the skill and insight with which Erb has investigated the original *King Kong*, this loss of focus is all the more disappointing. While respecting Erb's concern to explore versions of Kong that exist apart from mainstream culture, one cannot help but feel that her argument would have benefited from a clearer sense of how Kong, and all he represents, continues to resonate within the mainstream itself. (*Jurassic Park*, for one, cries out for the sort of analysis Erb is capable of applying.) Ultimately, perhaps, *Tracking King Kong* is just too small a book. A mere 240 pages to encompass the Eighth Wonder of the World? More please!

On Media Violence

By W. James Potter
Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999. ISBN, 0-7619-1638-5. (hbk); 0-7619-1639-3 (pbk). vii + 304pp. £19.99 (pbk); £44.67 (hbk)
Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media Edited by Christopher Sharrett

Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media

Edited by Christopher Sharrett

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8143-2879-2. (pbk); 0-8143-2742-7 (hbk). 445 pp 31 illustrations. £21.50 (pbk); £42.50 (hbk)

A review by Martin Barker, University of Aberwystwith, UK

It is time, surely, to conclude that the concept of "violence" is one of the most ideologically-laden in modern society. If at minimum "ideology" seeks to designate concepts which defy empirical evidence, close off argument, and seem so obviously useful to their adherents that they just can't imagine thinking outside of them, then "violence" surely must take its place alongside such others as "magic", and "fate", "nature" and "competition". The effective force of the concept of "violence" is to make intelligent people stop thinking, and to accept as meaningful its arbitrary groupings of objects, processes, images and representations. But far more than "magic" or those others, it has the tendency to translate into various kinds of policy proposals and initiatives - hence it is considerably more dangerous. But, after more than a hundred years of living with its explanatory failures, how else do we explain its imperious hold?

Here are two books that *ought* to be radically opposite to each other, yet there is so evidently that taut wire connecting them. Potter's is an example, and by its own rights a very intelligent one, of the present state of (typically American) psychological thinking about the "effects of violence in the media". Take a look at its bibliography, with its more than 450 references - this man sure knows his field! And unlike many in his field, he can be properly critical of many of them, noting their empirical, and methodological limitations on a number of occasions.

Potter's book is a combination of general overview of the state of research, and a series of recommendations as to where research should go next. These proposals and protocols are always astute and alert to the weaknesses in much of the research tradition he inhabits. For instance, in a chapter on the need to reconceptualise "media effects", he distinguishes no less than eighteen different possible kinds of "effect" that violent media might have, from the purely physiological to the learning of social norms and any of these eighteen might occur in

combination and interaction with others. This, then, is no easy or simplistic account. He concludes this chapter with two recommendations, that "We need to develop a broader view of effects of exposure to media violence" and "We need to use effects terms more consistently" (137). You might think that this should lead to acknowledgement or even praise. Certainly if you are into this kind of stuff, this is a good example of it. The stingy in me can't help noticing the inherent limits in it all.

Take that word "exposure", a word that is at the heart of the psychometric approach to media and their audiences. As I have argued before, this is a counter-intuitive term. When people say they have been "exposed" to something, they usually mean that this was involuntary, and indeed unwanted. We use it for inadvertent encounters with radioactivity, sunburn, or viruses. When American "violence" researchers insist on using the term "exposure", they are borrowing on those meanings. For there is no other way that they can make the bridge from their dependence on laboratory studies (where they do indeed "expose" people to media materials they probably would not otherwise have *chosen*, let alone chosen to watch in these decontextualised settings) to ordinary life where people choose to watch and participate in media forms which the researchers disapprove of. So, think about the problems thus embedded within this example, from Potter's discussion of possible "Context-Context Interactions":

> Bryant, Carveth and Brown (1981) ran an experiment with two treatment groups. One group was exposed to programs offering a clear triumph of justice. The transgressive acts were punished by personal vengeance, by retribution provided by an affiliated agent, or through legal restitution. The other group saw an equal number of violent acts in which there was a preponderance of injustice - the majority of transgressive acts going unpunished. The viewers in the unpunished condition developed significantly increased levels of anxiety. (140)

The striking thing in this and several hundred such cases is the absence of any definitions of the situation by the viewers themselves (these "treatment" groups, did they agree that there were an equal number of "violent acts"? did they agree that they fell into these three categories? did they experience having a consistent response which they would have called "anxiety"?) along with the imposition of researchers' categories which only make any sense if a whole theory has already been accepted and adopted. The same presumption shows in the insistence on talking of "heavy" viewers (86) as against "experienced", for instance; or determining, without any tools for determining viewers' perceptions of this, that "realistic" narratives and settings are more likely to produce "stronger emotional reactions" (117).

This consistent refusal to countenance investigating and hearing viewers' own accounts of the nature of the materials, and of their reactions, is particularly perverse given Potter's own acknowledgement (103) that the psychological tradition has moved strongly towards recognising that it isn't socio-psychological characteristics which frame responses as much as interpretative frameworks: "The stronger explanatory variables are usually people's interpretations rather than their demographics". The reason for this absolute refusal emerges in the course of his one discussion of a non-psychological tradition, exemplified by the work of David Buckingham. I quote at length, because the passage is simultaneously revealing and astonishing. Faced with the fact that many viewers just fail to see as "violent" many of the (especially formulaic) materials with which he wishes to challenge them, he comments:

> When members of the public see this formula in action, they see no violence and no need to complain. When social scientists see this pattern, they see no reason to discount the actions. On the contrary, they see a high potential of viewer harm, and there are strong reasons to complain. The differences in definitions lead to an apparent problem of ecological validity. The definitions used by social scientists appear too abstract and out of touch with real people. We could close the definitional gap by simply accepting the public's definition of violence. But given what we know about effects, that would be unethical. We would then become part of this public health problem rather than using our knowledge to effect a solution. The definitional gap, of course, needs to be closed. But it is the public that needs to move its conception. The problem is not with our definition. Instead, the problem is with our failure to educate the public better. The public has much to learn from us. (76)

It is not simply the professional arrogance of this we need to note, it is its total inconsistency. On the next page Potter agrees that viewer interpretations *are* important … when they are in connection with *complaints* against the media. But when viewers choose, like, or enjoy film and television containing what Potter calls "violence", but deny that "violence" the status that he wants to give it, then he will simply discount them. This division is only possible because of a standard behaviourist model of what a human being is, that sits behind his research outlook and pre-structures it. To complain is to evidence rational responses; to enjoy is to evidence affective responses. The human mind has distinct regions. "Violence" works on and from the non-rational. Human responses to "violence" arise outside society and history, for explanatory purposes. Beware the Morlock within. Welcome the Eloi coming to rescue us. For violence is a "public health" issue.

There is no acceptable ground for arguing with Potter, because of this. The fact that many times in his book he has to note cases where research has come up with embarrassing findings (Potter is never less than honest, let it be said) does not discomfort him at all. It certainly does not lead him to question the project he is involved in. The fact, for instance, that one of Dolf Zillman's researches found that "aggressive" responses were as, if not more, likely to be aroused by materials that made people laugh does not shake his certainty. "Violence" *has* to be a distinguishable mode - we just haven't defined the conditions of its production well enough yet... Given another two hundred, million dollar grants, given another 500 pieces of research, given another twenty senate hearings …

I wish I could be more enthusiastic about the second book, which in certain respects is the exact opposite of Potter's. Here, for certain, is recognition of symbolic complexity in films and in their audiences. Here is recognition of society and history as contexts which frame and imbricate the materials which Potter would denature through content-analysing them. Sharrett's book, *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, gathers up a set of essays which examine in depth a series of recent film and television narratives in which the very issue of violence is explored. His focus is not so much the slasher tradition, as those films which try to ask questions about the causes, motives and contexts of violence, especially in America. The films thus investigated range across the Serial Murder genre; *Psycho* and the consequent tradition of psychiatric investigative films; *Raging Bull* and its portrayal of violence's class origins; Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*; and so on.

Some of the essays are fresh and original, let it be said. I was particularly impressed by Jane Smith's reconsideration of three New Zealand films (*The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*, and

Broken English) in which she makes a very persuasive case that attention to "violence", and in particular its association with masculinity, functions to remove from view issues about "race" and ethnicity. Also very striking is Elayne Rapping's exploration of American TV's crime series tradition. She demonstrates very interestingly a shift from images of criminals as comprehensible, motivated by the same kinds of desires as you and me, towards an image of them as utterly "other", almost alien in nature. What is most striking about these exceptional essays is that the concept and category "violence" here comes under review. The very depiction of these films and programmes as being concerned with "violence" is what is being questioned. Not so, in my view, in the bulk of the essays.

The book begins well enough. Sharrett's introduction robustly counters the easy claims about "influence" by pointing to some embarrassing contexts. When for instance the American media were calling Charles Manson the "evilest man alive", jolly old Dicky Nixon was bombing Cambodia. The invitation is there to undertake complex investigations of both films and their contexts. Some of the essays, too - especially those which investigate the phenomenon of the Serial Killer - do draw on important research on the social world of the killers: their interstitial class situations, their vengeful choice of victims based on status uncertainty. But when they turn to the films themselves, strange things start happening, although they may be partly concealed by theoreticist language. For instance, when Barry Keith Grant writes of a generalised postmodern tendency in which we keep "failing to make meaning", and then moves to describing *Terminator II* as producing "bemused detachment" (33), is he being any less ascriptive than James Potter? Of whom is this meant to be true? He follows this with the assertion that *Forrest Gump* was so successful "because it comforted us in the knowledge that we are all simpletons who cannot possibly comprehend the complex workings of our modern world" (36). Really? As for me, I would argue that it was because we all realised that Gump was dim, and thus felt *superior* to him - it made him loveable, and forgiveable, and able to be intelligent *despite* himself. Now, that is a counter-reading, I grant. So, the question is, what kinds of evidence are adduced to persuade us of the account offered? After all, with such serious claims consequential on it, surely we should know how this is known?

The evidence is as altogether missing here as it was processed out of all meaning, in Potter's book. The trouble is, then, that the authors of many of these essays end up putting exactly the same conclusions as the psychologically-oriented researchers, just in different clothing. So, where moral panickers would worry about audiences "losing the distinction between fantasy and reality", and psychological researchers would talk of "disinhibition, desensitisation, and loss of reality cues", our postmodern researchers conclude that "People are increasingly unable and unwilling to maintain a distinction between reality and what is fictional, or simulated, in mass-produced images and things" (p.76). In this kind of account, audiences are every bit as much overwhelmed, formed and forged by the media they appear to choose, as they are in ultra-behaviourist accounts. And therefore the judgements also tend to coincide. So, is it any better to be told by a postmodernist writer that *Silence of the Lambs* and *Natural Born Killers* "gratuitously celebrate" the serial killer (p.398), than it would be by a Republican Senator hot on the censorship trail?

The trouble is that the predominant theorisation available to this book - some loose combination of postmodernism and psychoanalytic theory - just can't handle two distinctions. First, there is the distinction between fictions and the world; repeatedly, the essays slip between commenting on films, and commenting on the world those films are fictionalising, as though they are immediately commensurate. Postmodernism allows this, because it

imputes to us all a belief that the boundary between the real and the simulacrum is dissolving - no point in paying attention to such small distinctions then. Second, there is the distinction between films and their audiences. For example, Mark Pizzato, whilst rhetorically allowing that we can't "completely define the complexity of media images within the millions of minds of the mass audience" (p.86), still finds it OK to conclude that the "theatrical transcendent illusions" of the Serial Killer film require that "certain Dionysian demons act out the sacrificial desires and fears of the mass audience … somewhere off screen". Remove the clever prose-cover, and what is that saying other than that film images spill out of fiction into the world, that even if they began as fictional representations, their mode of effect is to bring out the demons in us all? Or when Grant ends his discussion of the same genre with this sentence "In this theater of cruelty, as in the real world, we are left to find our own way back from the land of the dead" (39) I am reduced to saying "Not me, guv! Fictions, films, are important to me, but I know very well all the manner of differences between filmic and real deaths. You take responsibility for your own 'we's'!"

The only differences I can see between this and Potter's tradition are these. Potter, like all those of the behaviourist tradition, deals in individuals abstracted from history. No matter where or when, films are conceived to have the same potential for "effect". The only difference "society" makes is the more or less insertion of protection. In contrast, the pomos see it all as especially arising now. Society is abolishing "our" capacity to defend ourselves against these invasive meanings. But curiously, where Potter primarily sees the "badness" being brought into being by the massed force of the images, the psychoanalytically-minded see the "evil" waiting to be uncorked. Weirdly, the behaviourists end up as the cultural optimists, against whom now would you welcome, please, the thoroughly defeatist, grimly pessimistic cultural analysts … Altogether now, for the "culture of violence".

"Violence". "Mass audiences". "Identification". The common language is striking. As I suggested at the start, the term "violence" may be one of the most ideologically-driven in modern society and culture. These books are among my evidence.

While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust

By Jeffrey Shandler
New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN: 0-19-511935-5, xviii + 316pp.
$30 (hbk)

A review by Nathan Abrams, Birkbeck College, UK

The subject of the Holocaust has certainly aroused much recent interest. Peter Novick published *The Holocaust in American Life*, a controversial and often polemical account of how the Holocaust has been used and abused in American political life, which was followed by Norman Finkelstein's even more controversial and polemical *The Holocaust Industry*. Two documentaries - *Mr. Death* and *The Holocaust on Trial* - examining two Holocaust deniers, David Irving and Fred Leuchter, Jr. respectively, were televised in May, as was another looking at the trial of Adolf Eichmann (*The Specialist*). The Irving-Lipstadt libel action received extensive coverage in the press and the Imperial War Museum recently opened its permanent Holocaust exhibit.

To these we can add Jeffrey Shandler's study of the Holocaust and television in American life. While Holocaust literature, film, art and memorialisation have been examined the topic of Holocaust, television is strangely absent. It is this gap in the scholarship that Shandler, a Teaching Fellow in Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, aims to fill: "Holocaust television is … an overlooked genre of Holocaust memory culture whose time for scrutiny has come" (xvi). Shandler surveys the history of televised manifestations of the Holocaust over five decades across a range of genres. He begins with newsreels of the liberated concentration camps and moves through survivor testimonies, TV dramas, documentaries, comedy and science fiction programmes. This material is organised into three parts: "Creating the Viewer (1945-1960)", "Into the Limelight (1961-1978)" and "A Household Word (1979-1995)".

Shandler's central thesis is that not only has the Holocaust become a "fixture" (xi) of American culture, but also that television was "instrumental" in putting it there (xvi). The small scale and private nature of the medium, he argues, has produced an intimacy with the Holocaust that other media cannot provide. Furthermore, unlike other media, television has incorporated the Holocaust into a broadcast flow, as just one scheduling component alongside others, which in some senses normalises it and incorporates it as a part of everyday life. Consequently, "the Holocaust has become - thanks in large measure, to television - a powerful and daunting presence in the nation's cultural landscape, achieving the status of a master, moral paradigm" (xviii).

While the Holocaust may not have been widely discussed during the 1940s and 1950s in America, the newly established television networks were not afraid to include it as part of their programming. Here we come to a paradox: most studies of this period tend to suggest that the Holocaust, for a variety of reasons, was submerged within the American

consciousness, yet Shandler presents evidence of its televisation, which surely would not have occurred unless it had some resonance with its audience. So while most studies suggest that mainstream America did not talk about the Holocaust, Shandler contends that they surely watched it.

The next two decades were framed by two major televisual events, the trial of Eichmann in 1961 and the premiere telecast of the *Holocaust* miniseries in 1978, which transformed the Holocaust "from the episodic to the epic" (154). According to Shandler, not only do they represent "major landmarks" in the history of Holocaust representations, but also within America's television industry (81). The years in between represented a transition in both television's status among the media in general, and the Holocaust's place on television in particular. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Holocaust appeared with increasing frequency on American television, becoming almost "routine" (133), as it popped up in all sorts of programmes, making what Shandler calls "[g]uest appearances" (152) in *The Defenders*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Star Trek* and *All in the Family*.

Shandler calls his section on the *Holocaust* miniseries, "The Big Event". In doing so, he suggests that television representation of the Holocaust thereafter did not reach the epic scale of it. The 1980s and 1990s featured dramas and survivor testimonies, but Holocaust television during those decades was superseded by non-televisual representations, in particular the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 and the release of *Schindler's List* the following year. It was during these decades though that the Holocaust became "a household word".

What makes *While America Watches* particularly interesting and different is the peculiarities of the nature of the medium of television itself. Museums, memorials, art, academic scholarship could be said to stand outside of the quotidian, separate and isolated from everyday life. Television, however, is incorporated into the very texture of life; it is, for some, the organising principle of their daily lives. Consequently, the televising of the Holocaust has led to its incorporation into people's individual routines in a way that other forms of representation have failed to do. The Holocaust has literally been imported into the living room, via television, as the focus of attention. Reading this book conjures images of the family gathered around a Holocaust programme in the same way that they may have gathered around the hearth or the radio in earlier eras. Thus, perhaps more than any other medium, it is responsible for the alleged "trivialisation" of the Holocaust, its transformation into *the* "master moral paradigm" and an almost meaningless "household word". For these reasons, Shandler's book is a very useful addition both to scholarship on the Holocaust and to that on television.