Production Design: Architects of the Screen

By Jane Barnwell
London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003. ISBN 1-903364-74-4. 15 illustrations, 169pp, £12.99 (pbk), £40.00 (hbk)
Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema By Wheeler Winston Dixon

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By Wheeler Winston Dixon

London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004. ISBN 1-903364-55-8. 13 illustrations, 135pp, £12.99 (pbk).

A review by Kevin Hunt, University of Nottingham, UK

These two books from Wallflower Press offer very different perspectives on spectacle in Hollywood cinema. As part of the *Short Cuts: Introductions to Film Studies* series, *Production Design: Architects of the Screen* describes the role of the production designer throughout film history, the practical aspects of their work, and how issues such as the representation of space, time and identity aid the construction of narrative. By contrast, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* offers a more theoretical analysis of Hollywood's fascination with images of mass destruction and how society currently promotes the passive consumption of fantasy worlds over active citizenry in the real world.

Wheeler Winston Dixon focuses upon the homogeneity and "juvenilization of contemporary cinema" (32) to deliver a cultural analysis concerned with political economy and mass culture theory. Based around the mantra "nothing new, nothing original; all is the same" (18), he argues that this culture of conformity is driven by "the fear of the new" (15). Not the fear of new technology, but the fear of advancing ways of human interaction that deviate from the "hyperconglomerized new order" (15) and threaten to upset the status quo. Dixon sees America's post-9/11 social and political climate as marked by an acute sensitivity to change that "ensures …all deviations from what are perceived to be normative values will be immediately censured" (15). In a culture of sameness everything is equally and endlessly replaceable. Dominant value systems persist, in a static sense (i.e. stagnating rather than developing or attempting to progress), and this understanding enables Dixon to read contemporary Hollywood output as a metaphor for American society (even Western society) in microcosm.

As a comparative text, Jane Barnwell's pragmatic description of production design is less engaging. Written in an accessible and informative manner it fulfils its obligation to outline the role of the production designer but fails to explore some of the more interesting aspects of film architecture. The semiotic element of film is, for instance, addressed in a fairly superficial manner and the desire to clarify, reiterate and signpost some quite basic key points tends to favour repetition and simplicity over detailed analysis. Although capable of offering rewarding insights to someone completely new to film studies, straightforward statements suggesting that Norman Bates' stuffed birds in *Psycho* "indicate his mental state" (27) and that the sets for television programmes like *The Weakest Link*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and *Pop Idol* are designed as "futuristic, shiny areas of blue and metal" (99) will quickly tire a more seasoned reader.

The final chapter of *Production Design*, on the role of technology, comes closest to the issues examined in *Visions of the Apocalypse*. However, where Dixon attacks the increasing reliance on computer generated imagery (CGI) to create spectacular but purposeless images, Barnwell is more restrained and also more positive. From the production designer's point of view, new technology enables the realisation of effects not previously attainable and can be used to enhance the quality of a film – providing its use is in context with the "overall production concerns" (116). Taking *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001) as an example, Barnwell points towards the significance of magic in relation to the story and how a character's ability to pass through solid walls or fly on a broomstick is integral to the narrative rather than an effect included in spite of it.

Nevertheless, Barnwell and Dixon do agree that the recent *Star Wars* films, *The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999) and *Attack of the Clones* (George Lucas, 2002), are devoid of meaning and epitomise the increasingly evident problem of style over substance. In *Attack of the Clones* the special effects seem to operate independently from the bounded reality of the environment described on screen, making it "the perfect postfilm movie; it lacks soul, inspiration, originality and style" (Dixon: 9). For Dixon in particular the continuing saga of *Star Wars* represents a benchmark of Hollywood cynicism, whereby production is driven by technology and profit margins rather than "creativity" (11-12). In an ongoing roll call of mainstream Hollywood fare, which Dixon names and shames for its blatant commercialisation, the *Harry Potter* franchise is mixed in with *Halloween H2O* (Steve Miner, 1998), *American Pie* (Paul Weitz, 1999) and *The Fast and the Furious* (Rob Cohen, 2001) as easily reproducible series and sequels born of the "increased brand awareness (that now) makes subsequent films in a series more profitable than the original" (13).

Dixon's propensity to list examples is presumably intended to reveal the banality of so much recent cinematic output – reminiscent of Patrick Bateman's endless cataloguing of clothing labels and male beauty products in *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000) – but, to contextualise his arguments, Dixon also references a wide range of independent, European and Asian films. This breadth and depth of knowledge enables him to move between an analysis of the film industry and questions relating more broadly to society and politics. The limitations on copyright for the benefit of conglomerates, the destructive nature of media imperialism, the limitations corporate bodies enforce upon viewer choice (such as stepping up DVD region encoding, which is soon going to prevent the use of multi-region DVD players) and the jingoistic character of post-9/11 America, and American filmmaking, enable him to make connections between past and present social discourses. Most notably he builds his argument around the belief that "we are now living in one of the most deeply repressive and conservative eras since Joseph McCarthy first entered the public consciousness" (114).

While Dixon's political and social concerns are passionately expressed in a more original and interesting manner than his introductory references to Orwell's "telescreens" (1), *1984* and "perpetual hypersurveillance" (1) initially suggest, his sustained attack on contemporary cinema seems a little premature as well as rather absolute. The sweeping pessimism of his argument leaves me wanting to ask where a film like *Super Size Me* (Morgan Spurlock, 2004) fits into his analysis as a small scale, low budget, independent documentary with an anti-corporate message that made a significant impact at the box office. There are also some apparent inconsistencies, such as deriding *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002) as a "conventional Hollywood product" (31) before later citing the director, Paul Thomas Anderson, as one of a select number of American filmmakers "possessing a unique and original vision" (110) that informs the creation of their work.

Dixon is willing to praise Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), but, much like Moore's film, he attempts to deconstruct the politics of fear even while employing similar scare tactics in order to present his perspective on the world as *the* legitimate one. Just as those in power (the neo-cons) use imagined and exaggerated threats to control the populous, committed socialists and left-wing theorists tend to overstate the destructive influence of Western governments, corporate culture and globalisation. Both sides employ the self-fulfilling prophesy of social disintegration – encouraged and upheld by a perpetual alarmism – in order to prove their point and garner support for a polemicised argument.

Although well structured and theoretically astute, Dixon's final conclusion about our fading ability to apprehend the real world – brought about through a negation of all meaningful values and engendered by our wilful retreat into a simulated world of video games and CGI – assumes we already have the capability to analyse and correctly interpret current events. History might yet reveal Dixon's nostalgic earning for a time when "a modestly budgeted film about the forlorn love life of a Bronx butcher" (14) could win an Academy Award, as *Marty* did in 1955, relates primarily to an outmoded analytical framework rather than providing a dependable base from which to predict a twenty-first century fear of living and the subsequent acceptance of a disengaged, submissive, and therefore apocalyptic, mentality. Perhaps, as Barnwell's *Production Design* more tentatively seems to suggest, a new visual and technological landscape could provide a broader horizon – indicative of a new, increasingly dynamic, era of communication – rather than simply signifying the definitive and unqualified end to the current one.

Contemporary World Television

By John Sinclair and Graeme Turner (eds.)
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The Television History Book Edited by Michele Hilmes

The Television History Book

Edited by Michele Hilmes

London: BFI, 2003. ISBN 0-85170-988-5. 45 illustrations, xii + 163 pp. £15.99 (pbk)

A review by Dan Leopard, University of Southern California, USA

Contemporary World Television and *The Television History Book* are two of a four-book series by the British Film Institute that, when compiled as a single book, will form a textbook on the disciplinary field of Television Studies parallel to *The Cinema Book*, edited by Pam Cook for BFI in 1985. As such, Sinclair and Turner's book constitutes a survey of contemporary global television, focusing on the effects of deregulation and convergence on national television systems, while Hilmes' book provides a cross-comparative study of the distinct but historically co-determinant development of television in the US and the UK. The two other books in the BFI series have covered genre and theory, rounding out an introduction to scholarly approaches to the study of television. Since it is difficult at best to review books comprised of short topical essays, this review will concentrate on detailing the overall structure of each book in relation to its specific topic while signaling the importance of a few key essays.

Both books are structured around essays clustered into thematic units such as 'Institutions: From Origins to Stability,' 'Programming: New Venues, New Forms,' and 'Audiences' (from Hilmes), and 'Television and the Public Interest,' and 'National Television Systems' (from Sinclair and Turner). The scholars contributing essays range from PhD candidates to well-known experts and use a variety of critical and historical approaches to their chosen aspect of television study. Because of this broad set of disciplinary voices, the essays are mixed in quality and thoroughness. Some essays are bland in style, though chockablock with information, while others are both more balanced in content and explication and written with a more lively hand. Unfortunately, several of the essays discussing the economic and institutional structure of various television systems plod through a sober litany of facts and figures while only minimally connecting these details to the larger social stakes involved. For readers unfamiliar with either the national or historical context, and as these books are meant to be introductory texts, this lack of a big picture view on some topics tends to smudge the implications of what is in fact solid analysis and is thus a critical weakness in each book.

Hilmes' book, due to its emphasis on two parallel national systems, that of the UK and the US, manages to cover the historical aspects of television in greater depth than does Sinclair and Turner's book on the comparable topic of global television systems. This is a fault necessitated by covering the 'world' of contemporary television in what amounts to essay bites – short essays covering not just contemporary television in Australia, Italy, or China but also by necessity providing sufficient historical background to allow the reader to understand how each national system developed into that which holds sway today. *The Television History Book* does a thorough job detailing the origins of UK television as a public service oriented system in distinct contrast to the US system and its commercial organisation. The development of these two dominant models of broadcasting is followed up through the recent past, shifting back and forth between the UK and US with contributors providing perspectives from their varied disciplinary and historical specialties. The contours of these two systems, including the contrasts in the development and counter-development of each in response to economic and regulatory factors, provide the overall structure to Hilmes' book. Some of the essays touch on the formal and cultural characteristics of specific programs within each system, but for the most part the emphasis on institutional change blurs the individual significance of all but the most crucial programmatic developments over the past fifty years.

Some of the more interesting sections of *The Television History Book* focus on early television in the UK (and this might evidence simply a routine familiarity with US television on my part), the development of 'format' television such as *Big Brother* (and its origins in early format exchanges from the UK to the US around the programs *Till Death Us Do Part* and *All in the Family*), and the difficult adaptations by the BBC and the US networks in response to competition from cable and satellite television systems. These responses, situated as they are in the 1960s (for the BBC responding to the introduction of commercial television stations) and the 1980s (both US and UK terrestrial systems responding to cable and satellite systems), provide a historical vantage point from which to begin to look at the issues brought up throughout the *Contemporary World Television* book. While Hilmes' book features sections on convergence and new technologies, the thrust of the overall argument details the formal and content changes that were necessitated by the increased commercialisation of the public service model in the UK and the multiple competitors that developed after what was essentially a three-way monopoly by the US networks. In the US each network jockeyed for dominance, but there was a tacit assumption that the race had only three possible winners. With the introduction of cable some of this hegemonic system was seen as vulnerable, and with the addition of Murdoch's Fox Network the cracks in the three-network edifice became apparent to those concerned. While the innovations in response to social and cultural changes in the society at large are covered superficially, this again due to the nature of the short essay format, there are in each section 'grey box' sidebar features that allow contributors to analyse particular shows in more depth. For instance Alisa Perren's grey box focusing on Fox's *Married with Children* does a good job of explaining the importance of a program that was routinely reviled at the time by critics and 'enlightened' audiences. She provides a production context for the program and examines the implications of the show's stance as the anti-*Cosby Show*.

Sinclair and Turner's book sets up a largely political economy approach to television institutions. Many of the essays in their book discuss regulation of television industries by the national, and at times transnational, policy that governs them. These national developments are drawn against a background, increasingly unstable, of the transformation of television systems through 'multichannel' environments and the influence of digitalisation and the Internet on what had once been largely terrestrial television systems in most national

contexts. (Except for some countries such as Germany, most national television systems were composed of at best three or four stations founded on either a state-controlled, public service mandated, or commercially predicated basis.) Ironically, as is touched on by the essays that make up the section on convergence, at the moment when television studies begins to secure its legitimacy within the academy its object of study, television, is itself being transformed through a saprophytic relationship with a set of technologies, the Internet and interactive media, that undermine the modernist specificity of TV as a medium. John Thornton Caldwell in his essay 'Is Television a Distinct Medium? TV and Convergence' situates this transformation not as a loss for television studies but as a gain of new critical and theoretical territory. Caldwell states, 'The World Wide Web increasingly looks far more like television than television or the web looks like the disembodied, virtual world being predicted by the prophets of cyberspace in the early 1990s' (Sinclair: 56). Many of the contributors to *Contemporary World Television* provide empirical evidence – the facts and figures mentioned above – that television systems throughout the world are changing from a model delimited by national sovereignty and 'imagined' citizenship into one increasingly defined by conglomerates and consumerism.

In the 'National Television Systems' section in *Contemporary World Television* the interplay and tensions between internal audiences and external producers are shown to be happening in almost all of the nations surveyed regardless of the prevalence of a liberal or repressive system of media governance by the state (seen from the perspective of western democratic politics). One of the more intriguing chapters describes the rapid transformation of Russian television and its links to the overall change in media output following the collapse of the USSR. Vartanova's essay (and the accompanying 'grey box' sidebar on Russia's NTV network) can be seen as indicative of the systemic reorganisation of state run systems throughout the world. Though many of the same concerns are mentioned throughout the individual essays that examine the various national television systems (and therefore often leading to a sense of redundancy for the reader) a majority of the essays in this section use the contours of a particular system – for example the transition from state-run to market-based model in Vartanova's contribution – to highlight structural similarities that can be used for comparisons with other systems that intersect at specific points political, economic, cultural, or social.

As an introduction to two key aspects of television studies, *The Television History Book* and *Contemporary World Television* provide readers with a thorough, although sometimes repetitive, overview of the field. Both books could be most profitably skimmed for overall comprehension and then returned to for a thorough reading of essays that interest a reader most. Several of the essays stand out; in the Sinclair and Turner book, the section on convergence, the essay on 'Televising war,' and the profiles of 'Television in Greater China' and 'Television in the Arab-speaking World' bear examination for their currency in world events. In the Hilmes book the section on the historical study of audiences introduces readers to a particularly fecund area of research over the past twenty years. Overall the BFI Television Studies series is a sound, if at times overly sober, account of the field as it now stands.

Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture

By Shawn Michelle Smith
Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8223-3343-0. 24 plates and 62 figure illustrations, xviii+225pp. £16.95 (pbk), £57.00 (hbk)

A review by David A Gerstner, City University of New York, College of Staten Island

Shawn Michelle Smith's book, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, is an important contribution to the critical analyses, discussions, and methodologies dedicated to both visual culture and archival research. Though the obvious is stated in Smith's work—that is, the archive is an ideologically constructed institution, *de facto* white—she presses her investigation on two fronts by showing *what has been done with* the archive and then, in a key moment in the text, *puts the archive into practice*. Smith suggests, given the ideological constraints, that a study of the archive and archival practices 'demands a creative investigatory framework' (7). To make this case, *Photography on the Color Line* considers two significant productions of the archive and their assertion into cultural consciousness: 1) Du Bois's curatorial project that assembled photographs (a good many shot by African American photographer Thomas Askew) for the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition and, 2) the archive of 'photographic postcards' that serve as 'souvenirs' for whites attending, watching, and, sickeningly, celebrating the lynching of black (predominantly) men. In the former, Smith reveals Du Bois's turn to a visual medium as a gesture to counter trenchant (especially American) racism while, in the latter, she manufactures an archival-curatorial project of her own that offers a chilling perspective on the spectacle of the white gaze.

In this way, Smith's query (an extension of her work in *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture, 1999*) into 'how *viewing* creates *viewers*, how acts of looking are encouraged and circumscribed culturally, and how access to the gaze shapes subjectivity' (22) makes available the powerful and dynamic forces at work in the racial imaginary. Smith's book, therefore, is about the way cultural producers intervene in the production of cultural meaning. With the writerly detail of an art historian (albeit didactic in some instances), Smith describes not only the prescient images before the beholder but, with marked precision, provides a description of the way in which the archive is packaged for ideological consumption. "Du Bois's Georgia Negro albums," for example,

> are large horizontal folios filled with images rendered in the soft warm tones of albumen paper prints. Almost two-thirds of the photographs are portraits, generally paired on a page, and they typically offer two views of an individual, one frontal, the other in varying degrees of profile. The remaining photographs depict domestic interiors, homes, businesses, churches, rural scenes, street scenes, group portraits, and an occasional single portrait. The now decaying

> leather bindings on the albums present title, volume number, and the words *Du Bois* in gold-leaf lettering (4).

I note this passage in full because it is not an insignificant point given Smith's attention to the way Du Bois presents the photograph for the gaze of the white spectator. Du Bois's presentation of the archive was part and parcel of his strategy to achieve a representation of African Americans as intelligent and successful under the terms of Anglo-Saxon cultural capital. Indeed, a key holding of Smith's work is that Du Bois embraced certain aspects of white middle-class culture, including the belief that the black population housed a criminal class. Thus, Smith, as other recent scholars have done, is careful to avoid over-simplified panegyrics for Du Bois since his exhibition of photographs coincides with his worldview steeped in middle-class propriety. Hence, Smith's concern, here, is with the way Du Bois creates the archive through a specific set of cultural lenses.

By situating Du Bois's own ideological position in relation to the visual artefacts at hand, Smith's reading of and experience with the images illuminates important markers in the production of the archive. For example, in her examination of the photo she refers to as the 'piano portrait' (Plate 24) we see a young male teacher instructing a young woman to play the piano. The *mise-en-scène* in the photograph is that of a bourgeois drawing room; the figures in the frame are dressed in typical middle-class, turn-of-the-century finery. As Smith discovers, however, the photo is constructed (literally) with curious discrepancies. Why, for example, is the chair upon which the instructor sits rather simple compared to the other over-decorative furniture in the room? As Smith points out, the image is a composite, a montage of fragmented drawings and photographs. The piano instructor, the young woman, and the piano have been excised from elsewhere and inserted into a frame composed of hand-drawn drapery and other decorative appurtenances. The photograph strikingly supports Smith's claims for the urgency Du Bois placed on telling a 'particular story' that reaffirmed the 'progress of a "civilized," [African American] elite class' (111). By unveiling the production of the image, the story, and the archive itself in this single image, Smith lays bear the socio-political stakes at work in the production of the archive, or what she refers to as the 'counterarchive.'

If the 'counterarchive' appears a theoretically redundant proposition on Smith's part (several of her theoretical arguments in the book are a bit muddy), it is so to the extent that she concentrates—perhaps prolongedly—on Du Bois's visual archive as a negation of racist logic. To be sure, it is no secret that the place of the archive and the subsequent ordering of events that emerge from the archive always generate a 'counterarchive' (her term, I believe, is not the most precise articulation of what is potentially at work in her book since 'counter' suggests a simple dialectical formulation). Given what occurs later in the work, Smith's notion of the archive is, more positively, a mobile and generative discourse where the shifts in ideology unfold through the archive with endless readings and *re*contextualisations. The archive is, therefore, not the holder of meaning as such. It is, instead, a tool in the making of complex cultural meaning. Du Bois certainly recognised this vital aspect to the archive and prepared a visual encounter that redirected the white racist archive (criminology, phrenology, and so on) commonly accepted as visual, and thus, cultural truth.

If Smith is at pains to demonstrate Du Bois's working of the archive for ideological position, where do we find Smith? Is she merely the historian who marshals the details of history to re-establish overlooked 'facts'? Smith's meticulous account of the archive proves to be her strong and weak point. Her claim to 'restore the cultural contexts of [the archive's] originary

moment' (8) diffuses the impact evoked in a later chapter ('Spectacles of Whiteness: The Photography of Lynching') where the archival 'context' is re-written through her own methodology, research, and authorial gaze. Calling for the restoration of 'cultural contexts' and 'originary moments' is a strange assertion given her final analysis where she turns to Derrida's *Mal d'archive* where such 'originary moments' are mere ashes. Smith proves a more provocative archivist when she intervenes with her own reading of the archive. While the largest portion of her book interrogates Du Bois's re-writing of the visual archive, 'Spectacles of Whiteness' shows, more interestingly, the archivist putting the archive to work.

In this chapter, Smith takes her cue from Richard Dyer's book *White* (Routledge, 1997) that describes the paradoxical phenomenon of whiteness that is at once everywhere yet purportedly invisible. But, in an important move, Smith deftly suggests that through the photographic image of whites looking at and posing with their black victim and, thereby, acting as participants in the spectacle of lynching, the camera records and seals that which this spectator most covets: whiteness. With the camera, whites *see* their whiteness. 'Whiteness' is thus invisible only to the extent that its generative discourses are seldom articulated as a presence. Its visual articulation is altogether something different. Smith's work undoes the privilege of invisibility by foregrounding the archive's remains in a significantly different perspective.

Though relying on James Allen's published collection of lynching photographs, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), Smith revisits the collections where Allen housed the photographs with an eye precisely toward the white presence in the image. That is, rather than emphasising the recurring image of the victim ('the violated body [that] can function as a kind of fetish' (118)), Smith concentrates on the spectacle of white spectators because 'they represent a gruesome ritual of white identification that many white scholars, like myself, would, perhaps, rather not see' (118).

What we do see, in fact, is the startling celebration of violence attending white supremacy in its grotesque satisfaction with *seeing* itself, its very presence. Historically, the 'photographic postcard' served as a collectible for whites following a lynching; photographers attended the event and sold their services so that whites could have a visual keepsake of this momentous occasion to mark their white presence. On the back of the 'photographic postcard' spectators scribbled notes and mailed it off to family members and friends to authenticate their junket to a lynching. The postcard's symbolic stature as a recorded reminder for tourists' ventures into other lands and cultures is conjured here as a poisonous form of white cultural exchange enabled not only by the post office but by schools that gave children a holiday to attend the lynching or the railway that provided discount travel to the event. The violence that underlines this part of American (white) life is effectively driven home in Smith's reading.

Smith's work in the archive thoroughly recounts the materials that constitute the epistemology of visual culture and its ideological platforms. More importantly, *Photography on the Color Line* brings to focus the existence of whiteness not only as a concept but as a formidable and palatable presence.

Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema

By Timothy Shary
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. ISBN 0-292-77771-X. illustrations, xvi + 330 pp. £18.95 (pbk)

A review by Geoff Lealand, University of Waikato, New Zealand

The author of this comprehensive study of youth in contemporary American cinema warns against adult condescension about the state of being young, and too-quick dismissals of the cinematic, narrative and social values of youth films. I have long argued for a central place for child and adolescent media in academic study, pointing to the cultural value of such media, and its diverse aesthetic and narrative characteristics. Nevertheless, I have lately found myself being seduced by the temptations and dismissal, in respect of recent manifestations of youth culture. It is not just Britney Spears and the Olsen Twins; it is also about some of the films that Timothy Shary champions.

Some years ago, I went to an advance screening of *Can't Hardly Wait (*1998, Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan), a comedy about graduation days in an archetypal American high school, starring Jennifer Love Hewitt. Mid-way through the screening, I turned to a colleague and whispered in the dark, "This film ought to have the subtitle *…For This to Bloody Finish*!". So, does this make me a poor candidate to review this book?

In my defence, I could argue that even though my own teen years were way back last century, I now have continuous second-hand knowledge of contemporary youth culture through my own children, and the experiences of the hundreds of students who annually pass through my courses. My research activity features regular investigations of children's use of media, so I watch and listen to a great deal of 'age-inappropriate' media, from *SpongeBob SquarePants* to *South Park*. I don't think I suffer from "phebiphobia" or "fear of teenagers" ((4).

To write this review, I also turned to the Internet Movie Data Base (www. imdb.com) to see what others thought of *Can't Hardly Wait*. The middling viewer approval rating (6.2 out of possible 10) is accompanied by numerous positive reviews (comments such as "There is still hope for teen comedies!"), but also considerable criticism, as in one posting from Canada,

> This [film] is why most of the teen romance flicks are not really big at the box office. It's because they are predictable, they have been done a thousand times before and because everyone knows how it will turn out.

The author of this posting does acknowledge that genre films must follow the rules (in horror films, for example) but his/her objection is that films such as *Can't Hardly Wait* are overly-formulaic and squeeze out all invention and innovation. Film-makers' vision s and versions

of teen culture have been constructed through the blinkered lens of adult perceptions of youth, whereby all young people fall into character types (the jock, the nerd. the pretty-but-unattainable virgin) and familiar scenarios (the journey to loss of virginity, the nerd winning the affections of the now-attainable pretty virgin).

Shary makes a similar observation in his opening comments,

> One of the telling dilemmas of youth films since cinema began is that while they address young people they are not produced by young people, for children and teens are effectively restricted from the commercial filmmaking process. Thus, screen images of youth have always been traditionally filtered through adult perspectives (2).

He also points the central dilemma of youth studies (of all kinds), wherein 'Essentially all academic researchers have passed their teen age years' (258), adopting positions of outsiders studying the Other. This can be a constraint but it should not deter us, for critical (and chronological) distance offers significant advantages. Shary argues that "Youth films … reveal an enormous amount about who we are" (258) but they can also reveal an enormous amount about who we *were*.

As notion of the state-of-being-young shifts, so do film representations. Shary traces these changes over two decades (1980 to 1999) in great detail. Following a general discussion of genre categorisation and youth film as a genre, he divides his chapters into sub-genres, namely: youth in school, delinquent youth, the youth horror film, youth and science, youth and sex. This is a legitimate approach but it does lead to frequent messy co-referencing, especially where many examples escape a single category. Indeed, there is a persistent problem for all genre studies these days, as genre hybridisation and genre leakage accelerates, posing a serious challenge to entire endeavour of genre studies.

The 1999 cut-off date for this book also excludes some important films - such as *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001), *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2000), and *8 Mile* (Curtis Hanson, 2002) - which may have strengthened Shary's case. There is much of interest to be found in this book, in its detailed description of all notable American youth films of the 1980s and 1990s, and Shary does much to fill a considerable hole in film studies. Nevertheless, you have to trawl through a lot of writing to get to the good stuff and the structure of the book tends to betray its origins as a doctoral thesis. The book follows a schematic chapter structure, starting with a discussion of genre and sub-genre theory, elaboration of the sub-genres, extensive descriptions of individual examples (coupled with sweeping generalisations about those which don't fit), and a brief conclusion. Such an arrangement tends to be overly-schematic and does not encourage sustained nor engaged reading.

I cannot fully subscribe to Shary's argument that you have to include all examples of a genre (the good, the bad and the indifferent), to understand the nature of that genre. It is more profitable to concentrate on the key texts, even though Shary sees this as a failing of earlier critical writing on youth films. His emphasis on inclusivity also leads to some questionable decisions. He defines youth film as, "based on the ages of the films' characters … unlike other genres that are based on subject matter" (11), which often leads to tortuous justifications for inclusion or exclusion. Could all film versions of *Romeo and Juliet,* with their emphasis on the teenage protagonists, be considered 'youth movies'? On the other

hand, including *Man in the Moon* (Robert Mulligan, 1991) and *Lolita* (Adrian Lyne, 1998) in the discussion seems at odds with Shary's contention that youth films are defined by the age of the characters, rather than the subject matter. There is also an interesting commentary to be written on the spat of films which feature age reversal, such as *Big* (Penny Marshall, 1988) or *Freaky Friday* (Mark Waters, 2003).

Shary explains that, "Conditions of education, employment and lifestyle are too complex to analyze within the scope of this study" (14) but the addition of such considerations would have strengthened this book. The title promises an investigation of *Generation Multiplex* but there is an absence of any sense of an audience for teen films, and minimal information about their reception and little documented evidence of their social impact. There is little on factors of class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and nothing on the cultural impact of American youth film beyond American shores. I would have liked a discussion of youth film elsewhere in the world, and the dynamics of engagement of American youth films with film and youth in other countries (ideas of cultural borrowings, hybridisation and cultural resistance).

Shary defines 'youth' as occupying the age category of twelve to twenty and this is a problem. This definition does not acknowledge, for example, the changing idea of 'youth', whereby great numbers of pre-teens in Western countries are aging upwards (the phenomena of 'aspirational culture' and 'tweenies'), while even greater numbers are extending ideas of 'youth' beyond their chronological age. It can be argued, for example, that 'youth' is now more about a state of mind, a sensibility, and more about persistent taste formations than actual age. More connections could have been made between the themes of youth in film, and the proliferation of youth on American television drama (*Dawson's Creek* or *Buffy, The Vampire Slayer*, for example).

Shary does rightly point to the neglect of important aspects of teen life in American film, such as convincing portrayals of the darker side of growing up (sexual anxiety, abortion, drug use, suicide), and the curious absence of media use in the lives of teen film characters.

This book goes some way to describing and documenting an important body of work produced by mainstream American cinema. In the end, however, it was rather disappointing in that its objectives of marrying content analysis to social observations do not go far enough. The analyses and observations depend very much on the insights of the author and even though they are often valuable, I often wished for other voices and points of view.

I feel my review may read like an examiner's report on a doctoral thesis. This may be because this book still too closely resembles its origins, and more could have been done to have made a better book, for a wide readership, out of an academic thesis.

Cultural Sutures: Medicine and Media

By Lester D. Friedman (ed.)
Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8223-3294-9. 81 Illustrations, 452 pp. £18.95 (pbk)

A review by Frances Pheasant-Kelly, University of East Anglia, UK

At first glance, the discourses of medicine and media might seem to be polarised fields but *Cultural Sutures* reveals them as an increasingly double-stranded discipline, with pluralistic and fascinating interconnections. These interconnections are explored in an anthology of essays, edited by Lester Friedman, which gives both range and depth to discursive treatises of medical and scientific representations within the broad parameters of media. The theme of the healer in scientific Western medicine is explored via the whole compendium of visual culture, utilising advertising, newspaper reports, videotaped interviews, training films, fictional films, televised medical programmes and Internet resources. These divisions are used to signal each chapter, loosely charting the chronological evolution of media forms, culminating in current and anticipated computer technology. The production of this book is timely given the contemporaneous media attention devoted to medical issues, and the exponentially increasing popularity of medical documentaries, medical fictions, and postmodern artistic preoccupations with the human body.

One of the key strengths of *Cultural Sutures* is its uniformly analytical approach. This lends an authority to its claims, which seek to ascertain and quantify the misleading effects of representation as they are construed across Internet, television, cinema and literary forms of media. Further, while traversing key areas in thematic chapters, it also delineates some hitherto generally underexposed debates. One of its few limitations is its consideration of health care and media generated within an American context so that non-American readers may under-appreciate some of its arguments.

The opening chapter highlights the pervasive and persuasive power of print media through advertising and newspaper reports relevant to medicine by firstly delineating power relationships engendered by the medical gaze in pharmaceutical advertising. Secondly, press coverage of the Jack Kevorkian controversy is scrutinised statistically, providing convincing data that confirms media promotion of the culpability and vilification of Kevorkian's role in assisted suicide whilst simultaneously failing to address the key issues of euthanasia. Similar prejudices are revealed in a consideration of how mass media contributes to public knowledge of mental illness. This focuses on several key issues that result in a general demonising of psychiatric patients and that render public perception of mental illness as skewed, provocatively it seems in journalistic terms, towards violence and crime.

The highly diverse and innovative nature of *Cultural Sutures* is particularly evident in the second chapter, which provides one of few scholarly studies of television advertising in hospitals. This section also looks at the distinctions that were necessitated historically between real and fictitious depictions of medical authority, fundamentally so that viewers

would not be misled, self diagnose or self treat, and is followed by an assessment of the semiotics of medical insurance billboard advertising.

Moving onto the representational practices of cinema, the third chapter examines early links between scientific and visual culture and defines cinema's fascination with monstrosity with the use of key films such as *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910). The doctor-patient relationship is resumed in this debate, which moves on to consider various versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Island of Lost Souls* and more recent cinematic versions of monstrosity such as *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). This section continues to reinforce the general standpoint taken by *Cultural Sutures* of the relative vulnerability of the body in its relationship to medicine via textual and visual representation. The doctor-patient relationship theme continues to underpin the rest of the chapter examining individual aspects of empathy and medicine in *The Doctor* (Randa Haines, 1991), whilst the increasingly complex bureaucracy of hospitalisation is explored and critiqued in a consideration of *Lorenzo's Oil* (George Miller, 1992), *Awakenings* (Penny Marshall, 1990), *The Doctor* and *Wit* (TV) (Mike Nichols, 2001). The author uses these films to focus on societal debates around research ethics, the problems of individual research, financial obstruction and challenges to institutions and received scientific knowledge.

An examination of the representation of medicine by television begins with a historical overview that analyses lithographs, paintings and etchings. The authors chart the corresponding cultural and social shifts in the depiction of the medical profession noting that current visual media is seldom the vision of one artist as historical representations might have been. The authors also note that despite the use of realism as a backdrop, there tends to be an idealisation within contemporary representation which some medical professionals take issue with. Whilst recognising that programmes such as *ER* (1994-) feature previously marginalised groups, it may have been relevant here to give more detailed consideration to representations of disability, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, and the ideological imbalances of medical hierarchies that are ironed out in *ER*. Instead we find a focus on real life male scientists, with little discussion of women that have contributed to science. It may also be limiting to only consider the early series of *ER*, which is itself perpetually evolving in terms of representation. The ensuing section, 'From City Hospital to ER', examines the evolution of the medical professional, including such series as *Dr. Kildare* and *Ben Casey* (both 1961-66). Each new generation of medical series, the author claims, appears to have brought with it some exaggeration or diminution of health care issues, from astounding survival rates to unorthodox life and death decisions. He also comments on the relative positivism which many fictional medical programmes embrace, a positivism that he considers divorces audiences from some of the realities of medicine, although the author recognises a tendency towards more realistic representations in series such as *St. Elsewhere* (1982-88). However, the author describes how even the more relevant programmes 'placed medical realism secondary to the dramatic or entertainment needs of the show' (229). He also raises questions about the apparently limitless resources within fictionalised medical programmes such as *ER*, although there seems to be little in the way of evidence to support this questioning.

In some ways the section entitled 'The Fat Detective', seems incongruous, both in terms of its tenuous link to the overall approach of the book, and in its positioning, sandwiched between considerations of the changing role of doctors, and an analysis of the doctor shows. The significance of the fat detective would seem to be more attuned to considerations of masculinity rather than science or medicine, especially since there is a focus on the social and cultural contexts of obesity, and its impactions on the media.

The latter part of this chapter returns to the television doctor theme, with a comparative breakdown of the scenes in *ER* and *Chicago Hope* (1994-2000) during the 1996-97 season to show where the defining characteristics lie in terms of representation. Both *ER* and *Chicago Hope* are analysed quantitatively and qualitatively using scenes as units of analysis with patient, doctor and medical issues attracting scrutiny. While, unsurprisingly, the conclusion arrived at is that both *ER* and *Chicago Hope* primarily intend to frame medicine as drama, there are some uniquely revealing facts arising from this study.

Cultural Sutures also provides an insight into sex education, reproductive health and public health films, with a consideration of sexuality and ethnicity. The author here uncovers an underlying agenda, in that 'otherness' is aligned with bodily transgression and spread of disease. The author describes how these ideologies were transposed into popular culture, with themes of contagious disease underpinning science fiction films. Debates around the efficacies of factual film are further considered in relation to the videotaped evidence of the beating of Rodney King, and the *Please Let Him Die* film. The author's close analysis of these controversies succeeds in delineating the potential fallibilities of allegedly documentary filmmaking, and evidential videotaped recordings.

Cultural Sutures culminates in a fascinating and up to date reflection of how science and technology have become increasingly integrated into concepts of health care. The author considers how medical diagnosis increasingly depends on three-dimensional medical imagery and parameter-taking measurements of the body. This shift towards a media-centric defining of disease is contextualised within histories of technology. While the author articulates the potentially destabilising effects of technologies such as X-ray and Internet on doctor-patient relationships, 'The Shape of Things to Come' outlines a potent(ial) antidote for technophobes. The author explores the ultimate symbiosis of media and medicine through the possibility of remote cybersurgery, and computational reconstructive modelling, as well as the capacity of the Internet to develop forums for raising patient awareness, online support and online doctor patient interaction.

The final section of *Cultural Sutures* considers the Internet as a virtual utopian forum where gender, age, infirmity, and ethnicity may become fabricated. Although of some relevance to body image and technology, this final section, in exploring the potential for deceit when using the Internet, departs from the central issue of medicine and media.

Difficulties might have arisen in circumscribing this vast topic but the assembled essays from a number of scholars in different fields, articulate a coherent, detailed, illuminating and innovative approach to representations of medicine, with only relatively minor excursions outside of the field. It is both retrospective and futuristic in its contemplation of the interlocking features of medicine and media and one could easily envisage a second volume that might embrace the next generation hospital documentary, medicine and the comedy genre, televised death, and public autopsy. This book would be useful to undergraduate media, photography and film students looking at representational practices. In opening up some of the complexities that exist between medicine and media, *Cultural Sutures* re-examines some longstanding debates with refreshing and predominantly analytical methodologies, and has a particularly timely relevance given contemporary preoccupations with medical issues.

The Audience Studies Reader

By Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn (eds.)
London: Routledge, 2003. pp. v-347. ISBN 0-415-25434-5/0-415025435-3 £18.99 (pbk), £65.00 (hbk)

A review by Kerry Gough, University of Nottingham

Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn's book *The Audience Studies Reader* represents a long-awaited and much needed reader into the widespread and often multi-disciplinary field of audience research. This collection brings together the academic mainstays of audience research alongside new and parallel investigations into audiences as a field of cultural and critical interrogation. The reader is coherently organised into seven fields of investigation, and features an editor's introduction to each of these sections. The introductions thus serve as a guiding, overarching principle for the audience in the consumption of this book. Each of these introductions provide an ample and historically located contextualisation of the areas covered, alongside an exploration of the dialogue that occurs between the featured extracts contained within these sections.

The seven discrete sections that the book is broken down into cover a wide range of methodologies and approaches which are categorised as follows; 'Paradigm Shifts', 'Moral Panic and Censorship', 'Reading as Resistance', 'The Spectator and the Audience', 'The Fan Audience', 'Female Audiences' and 'Interpretive Communities'. These sections offer a neat and concise encapsulation of historically located approaches to the study of audiences which is exemplified through cross-disciplinary examples of audience research.

The first of these sections, 'Paradigm Shifts: From "Effect" to "Uses and Gratification,"' examines the methodological development of audiences research and its transition from the 'effects' model of Mass Culture theory, in which audiences are prefigured as 'passive dupes' who are hypodermically injected with cultural messages. Instead this sets out to examine the uses and gratifications approach which uncovers the inevitably more complicated and nuanced ways in which an inherently active audience selectively make sense of cultural texts. In tracing this development, *The Audience Studies Reader* cites examples from Lazarfeld, Berelson and Gaudet's study of the mass media and voting behaviour, Merton's analysis of US propaganda and war bonds, as well as Cooper and Dinerman, and Winick's interrogation of the undesired and oppositional meanings that active audiences have produced around US German-bashing propaganda and the anti-drugs message of Sinatra's *The Man with the Golden Arm* respectively.

Further historicisation of audience research can be found in Part Two which is targeted specifically around censorship, morality and the vulnerable audience, and maps the shifts in the development of the censorship debate. Here samples taken from Adorno, Wertham and Hoggart raise the question of the effects and influence that mass media forms have upon a vulnerable audience, while Martin Barker's extract serves as a response to the claims of mass media corruption, instead illustrating how through the targeted focus upon a vulnerable child

audience, those who campaigned for censorship were essentially utilising and manipulating the conventions of vulnerability in order to win support for their case.

In Part Three, the final of these historicising sections, Brooker and Jermyn explore the resistant reading strategies that active readers employ in their engagement with a cultural text. Through the selection of extracts from Morley, de Certeau, Fiske and Woods, this section explores Reading as Resistance to examine how readers can and do create their own meanings -- meanings which resist the preferred reading promoted by the text. Here the extracts examine how sophisticated audiences create space for their own interpretations, negotiating a cultural space which makes sense for them, through an act of 'bricolage' in which the signs and symbols are re-appropriated in order to shape meaning, resistant interpretations which are albeit contained within the cultural milieu.

The Audience Studies Reader also makes room for an analysis of the shifts in Screen Theory and Spectatorship in the fourth section of the book. Here the extracts cover the shifts in audience research from the articulation of the audience as a hypothetical phenomenon, to recognition of the 'distinct socio-historical contexts' out of which the audiences emerge. The extracts covered include Mulvey's conceptualisation of the patriarchal viewing relations of Classical Hollywood cinema, Hansen's exploration of the viewing relations within US silent cinema and Stacey's examination of how real audiences use and make sense of cinema texts and the star personas contained within them. Schlesinger, Dobash and Dobash, and Weaver's contribution to this section adds to the examination of how audiences use texts, in their case *The Accused* (Michael Kaplan, 1988), through an analysis of the effects that the specific viewing relations of race, class and socio-cultural experience have upon an audience's relationship to a film text. In turn Cook adds to this equation, to identify cinema's 'dual address,' highlighting instead how these apparently oppositional meanings can in fact exist alongside one another, thus presenting a more fluid conceptualisation of cinematic viewing relations.

The fifth section, 'The Fan Audience: Cult Texts and Community' takes as its starting point the analysis of fandom and how cultural texts are made sense of within the fan community. This section explores how fans actively appropriate and use texts, examining Muggleton's work on the construction of sub-cultural boundaries of belonging, Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs' research into *The Beatles* fan communities, as well as female *Star Trek* fans (Bacon-Smith), queer *Star Trek* fans (Jenkins) and lesbian *Xena: Warrior Princess* fan communities (Gwenllian-Jones). Through its focus upon the specialised fan audience, this section develops upon ideas of the resistant reader, as featured in the previous section, to demonstrate how fan groups are particularly vociferous in the construction of their own meanings and communities.

The final two sections of *The Audience Studies Reader* highlight gendered specificity in the focus upon the female audience, and examines 'Interpretive Communities' through an analysis of nation and ethnicity. The section on the 'Female Audience' utilises extracts from Radway, Ang, McRobbie, Currie and Sonnet to demonstrate how female audiences actively participate in the consumption of cultural texts in order to highlight the functions of female consumption of romance and erotic fiction, as well as soap operas and adolescent girls' use of teen magazines. The section on 'Interpretive Communities', however, uses the work of Jhally and Lewis, Katz and Liebes, Bobo and Gillespie to examine how racial and cultural identities, along with questions of nationality, constructs the reading strategies employed by an

audience and the cultural negotiations the occur between texts and everyday lived experiences.

The Audience Studies Reader if taken as a whole serves as a core resource for a wide-ranging engagement with the study of audiences, examining the historical shifts in audience research, how audiences figure within questions of censorship, spectatorship and gender, in addition to an examination of the fan audience and interpretive communities in relation to issues of race and nationality. Collating together some of the most important academic engagements with the audience, *The Audience Studies Reader* also provides a topical resource which can be used selectively, with the audience appropriating extracts on a thematic cue.

Whether taken as a critical overview or for its topical insights, this book represents a worthy intervention into the study of the audience that has a use value for multiplicit disciplines and audiences.

Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture

By Charles R. Acland
Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8223-3163-2. xii + 337 pp. £17.50 (pbk)
SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film By Robert Beuka

SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film

By Robert Beuka

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. ISBN 1-4039-6340-1. 9 illustrations. 284 pp. £16.99 (pbk).

A review by Sarah Heaton, University of Central Lancashire

Increasingly, all aspects of various disciplines are looking to, and borrowing from, spatial theory to read texts in new ways. The use of spatial theory facilitates a dynamic understanding of the multi-faceted manner in which texts operate. Within a spatial approach there is a recognition of the spatial both within and without the text and an understanding of the dynamic interplay between the analysis of the text itself and how it operates within culture. The texts become mobile within our culture and the connections between things are highlighted to permit a generative performance of the text itself. Spatial theory is key to both texts reviewed here, allowing the authors to reread the cultural representation of suburbia and the cultural dissemination of cinema in all its forms. Both texts look to Michel Foucault and his concepts of heterotopia as a touchstone and whilst Robert Bueka in *SuburbiaNation* follows the likes of Gaston Bachelard, Pierre Bordieu, Felix Guattari and David Harvey, Charles Acland follows Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Michael Sorkin, so that although they both look to spatial theory they take substantively different approaches.

Inevitably Bueka's *SuburbiaNation* spends a substantial amount of time with the cultural theorists of the 1950s: Betty Freidan, William Whyte and C. Wright Mills. However, he moves away from a simple discussion of 1950s nostalgia to look back to the representations of Suburbia in The Great Gatsby series through *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), *The Stepford Wives* (Bryan Forbes, 1975) and *The Swimmer* (Frank Perry, 1968) to the more recent texts of *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999). And it is this bringing together such a breadth of representations of suburbia which makes the text particularly appealing. Further, his take on suburbia is quite unique. He does

not let it remain in the 1950s perfect housewives and alienation angst, but rather he takes spatial theory into the green lawns and swimming pools to argue that the suburbs are a mirror to American society per se. No longer are the suburbs left on the outskirts of town but are firmly located as central to the American consciousness.

From the outset Bueka sets out the dynamic interplay between the environment/landscape and American cultural consciousness. Foucault allows him to step away from the predictable utopia/dystopia discourse that surrounds suburbia. He develops concepts of cultural representations in television, film and literature as the modes of staging and shaping suburbia, so that such iconography comes to stand as the standard for what suburbia is and should be. The study steps away from the two-dimensional accounts and considers the increasing complexity of suburbia and its cultural representations as creator of meaning, specifically American meaning. Thus it is both the psychological and cultural constructs of suburbia which are under scrutiny here. In this context, he considers the paradox of suburbia as 'place' and 'no-place' and that it has moved from being a new and revolutionary landscape to being the dominant landscape. He argues that it is the place where identity is forged and that for American society, however alienating it might be, remains home.

Acland's landscapes of concern are those of film culture. In particular it is a text that recognises different film cultures of consumption. Acland looks closely at the landscapes of circulation and how film texts move about in the world. Further, the text considers the temporal and spatial elements of popular cultural experience that surround the encounter with the text. Thus, he considers the global reach of cinema in all its forms. He deals extensively and thoroughly with issues such as industry information that surrounds the film as part of the process of consumption of that film and further part of popular discourses that surround film. The industry figures are no longer merely the realm of the film fanatic but are everyday conversation. Central to the text is the recognition of the ready conflation, by both the cinema and the culture industry of global cinema audiences and, by extension, audience response. Here, Acland uses to spatial theory to argue for the differences in spatial cultural productions of actually attending the cinema. His argument is for generative, differentiated conditions, dependent on the localised space of consumption. Thus the transnational cinema culture becomes dynamically interlinked with an equally transnational local culture. Whilst, on the one hand, there is a generative level to this Acland also considers the complex issues arising when that transnational culture becomes a globalised culture, specifically American dominated globalisation and in particular case-studying Canada.

Acland uses Foucault's *Knowledge and Power* to question the actual production of given perceptions of the cultural practices of film culture, regimes of knowledge, and how accepted discourses come into being, and uses the work of Antonio Gramsci to interrogate the mapping of popular taste. Through Gramsci and spatial analysis of the transnational local landscape, through a consideration of the everyday of film consumption, the contexts, actual sites and knowledge surrounding everyday film consumption, Acland argues that there is a dynamic interplay between the dominant and subordinate discourses that surround film consumption practices which allow the latter to intervene and disrupt the dominant. What is so interesting about the analysis is that it considers every aspect of film production to consumption, from trade publications to consultancy reports, promotional material to ratings, to the film form itself, stars and genres and finally the spaces of engagement, the multiplexes, the video stores and living rooms. Further, he looks at the cultural practices that surround each of these aspects. So it is not simply an analysis of the soporific dream like state that multiplexes induce in the auditorium to enhance our getting lost in the movie, Acland

considers the routes we take to the multiplex and their architectural construction. He shows us that even within the dominant discourses of globalisation there are different experiences both offered and received.

This book is particularly appealing in that there is a good balance between theory, analysis and statistical data. Rather than looking at any particular films in-depth this is an insightful analysis of the movie culture industry as a whole. With this in mind there is an enormous breadth to the text and it is essential reading for anyone needing an understanding of that breadth.

I particularly enjoyed reading both these apt and timely texts. Both the authors demonstrate how the use of spatial theory can open up, not just readings of texts themselves, but also allow us to recognise a dynamic engagement with those texts and the cultural implications of the processes of consumption practices in the everyday.

Simone Signoret. The Star as Cultural Sign

By Susan Hayward
London and New York: Continuum, 2004. ISBN 0-8264-1394-3. 34 illustrations, ix+289pp. £18.99 (pbk)
The French Cinema Book Edited by Michael Temple and Michael Witt

The French Cinema Book

Edited by Michael Temple and Michael Witt

London: BFI Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1-84457-012-6. 45 illustrations, x+294pp. £16.99 (pbk).

A review by Cristina Johnston, University of Aberdeen, UK

From the outset, Susan Hayward's aim in this impressive study is not to offer a simple biography and annotated filmography of Simone Signoret, but rather to examine her position as an icon of Frenchness and French cinema, as well as a significant political figure of the twentieth century. Having said that, however, the first chapter does then go on to provide a biography of sorts but the chapter's title – 'Signoret, a Life: Chronotopes or Topographies of Space and Time' - indicates that it seeks to contextualise Signoret's work in relation to her life and, indeed, vice versa, through reference to the Bakhtinian notion of the Chronotope, which Hayward adapts to examine 'the intrinsic connection between time and space and the structures of Signoret's own life' (1). Throughout this first chapter, Hayward offers an interesting and helpful interweaving of straight biographical information and an analysis of how specific elements feed into Signoret's filmic and political development. She discusses, for instance, Signoret's friendship with Chris Marker, the importance to Signoret of the specific rectangle of Paris within which she lived much of her adult life, and the influence on Signoret's career of broader national and international societal developments in the postwar period. This combination of an analysis of Signoret at local, national, and international level is maintained throughout the study and provides a strong, constant backdrop for close examination of key film texts.

Before moving on to four substantial chapters dealing with the four major stages of Signoret's career as identified by Hayward ('Postwar Films: 1946-1951', 'Trajectory to International Stardom: 1952-1959', 'Working the International Scene: 1960-1968', and 'The *monstre sacré* Returns to the French Screen: 1969-1982), she first considers the four different types of star texts embodied by Signoret: the 'beautiful star body-text', the 'political star body-text', the 'international star body-text', and the 'aging star body-text' (27). As in the opening chapter, discussion here encompasses references to different periods of Signoret's output, thus constructing a unity and making it easier, at all stages, for the reader to ensure that their focus

is not solely on Signoret, but rather on Signoret as original product and representative of her times. In this chapter, there is a further mixing of discussions of the body-text in both performative and political terms, drawing at once on parallels with such figures as Louise Brooks and Brigitte Bardot, but also on Bakhtinian examinations of the body and the grotesque.

In all, Hayward divides her book into eight chapters - the introductory section discussed above and seven other major chapters – followed by a detailed filmography and bibliography, useful information regarding audience figures in France, details of other (radio, television, theatre, authorial) work produced by Signoret, and substantial notes on each of the chapters. The four central chapters focussing on periods of Signoret's career encompass an interesting variety of approaches, from more theoretical Freudian analysis of particular roles and films to extremely detailed shot-by-shot breakdowns, from an attempt to place Signoret against a backdrop of broader cultural trends to a reliance on a critique of key political events to explain particular career moves.

Overall, Hayward's study is impressive in its scope, depth and ability to remain focussed on the extensive task at hand. There are, however, aspects which are a little less convincing within the overall framework. For instance, as well as the chapters concentrating on Signoret's cinema career, there is also a chapter dedicated to her work on the stage which fails to achieve the level of sustained analysis maintained elsewhere. Hayward herself recognises the inherent difficulty in an analysis of stage performances which were not recorded and only exist in the shape of reviews or other archival material. And it is true that, in order to construct a truly all-encompassing examination of Signoret, reference to her stage work needed to be included. However, while discussion of her films remains acutely analytical throughout, this chapter lapses more into the anecdotal and drifts a little from the high standards set by the conceptual outline offered in the first two chapters. Similarly, in the chapter on Signoret's 'Trajectory to International Stardom', Hayward includes detailed sections discussing literary adaptation and the importance of costume and the star persona which also fail to convince and seem to stray from an otherwise tight and clear framework and progression, despite their (at times painstakingly) close attention to detail.

On the whole, however, this study is one which clearly sets out its (primarily Bahktinian) frame of reference from the initial pages and consistently adheres to the specific type of focus outlined in the introductory chapters, namely one which does not strive for a purely chronological, film-by-film analysis of Signoret's onscreen career, but one which seeks to place and understand her within broader national and international cinematic, theoretical, and political movements.

As suggested by its catch-all title, Michael Temple and Michael Witt's edited volume also aims for a similarly sweeping consideration of a variety of aspects of its chosen subject matter (in this case, French Cinema) but, overall, it is less successful in achieving those aims. The editors' remit, according to their introductory essay 'Rethinking French Cinema', is 'to provide the film student and film enthusiast with an accessible, structured and innovative history of French cinema from its origins to the present day' (1). And it is true to say that they certainly work hard at achieving this goal, both through the overall structure of the volume, and through the choice of essays by key scholars in the field. But, despite a number of interesting and, indeed, "innovative" contributions, the reader is left with the feeling that they have only skimmed the surface of the topic. Clearly, in a one-volume work, it may well be unfair to expect more, and certainly the individual bibliographies at the end of each essay,

along with the suggestions for 'further readings on films and film people' and the extremely helpful guide to online resources, ensure that the reader is able to pursue particular areas of research. Indeed, the editors make clear in their introduction that this is neither 'an encyclopaedia of French cinema' (4), nor 'a complete chronological survey of French film history' (4). Nevertheless, even within the remit they set out for themselves, they would appear to fall a little short.

The collection is, however, original in its structure which, in turn, leads to a novel way of thinking French cinema as a whole. The volume is divided into three distinct sections, each dealing with a particular portion of French cinema history (1890-1930, 1930-1960, and 1960-2004), divisions which, in themselves, offer nothing new to a broader consideration of French film in purely chronological terms, but it is worth noting that the editors have, in the second and third sections, included individual essays which question the 'map of French cinema' (1) which is drawn as a result of these divisions. Ginette Vincendeau, for instance, in her chapter entitled 'The Art of Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Classical French Cinema' (examining the period from 1930 to 1960) focuses precisely upon the 'continuities and the breaks that characterise French cinema' (137) over those years. Similarly, Nicole Brenez, in her chapter dealing with the period from 1960 to 2004 ("For It Is the Critical Faculty That Invents Fresh Forms" (Oscar Wilde)) explicitly sets out to examine French cinema since 1960 in terms of 'more or less abrasive or conciliatory responses to a fundamental split' (230) around 'two conceptions of the real' (230). The reader is thus, on the one hand, offered a traditional take on the historical structures of French cinema history, while, on the other hand, being encouraged to question these same structures as representing a unique take on that history.

This originality is further added to by the editors' decision to follow the same basic conceptual model within each of their chronological sections, namely one which allows for one essay each on 'People', 'Business', 'Technology', 'Forms', 'Representations', 'Spectators', and 'Debates'. As such, for instance, the subject matter dealt with in the 1890-1930 section ranges from Richard Abel's examination of 'The Men and Women Who Made French Cinema' (looking at such figures as the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès, but also at Charles Pathé and Léon Gaumont) to Elizabeth Ezra's study of 'The Cinemising Process: Filmgoing in the Silent Era' which examines the role of the men and women who could be said to have 'made French cinema' on the other side of the camera, namely early cinema-goers. The second section is centred around the concepts of 'Classicism and Conflict' (the title of Temple and Witt's introduction to the period) and includes, for instance, Keith Reader's discussion of 'The Geography and Topography of French Cinema' as its 'Representations' contribution and, under the 'Technologies' label, Charles O'Brien's article entitled 'Imported Technologies in French Film-Making' which discusses technological developments in French film particularly in relation to German and US cinema of the same period. The model is perhaps at its most interesting in the section dealing with the period from 1960 to 2004 which very much brings the volume full circle, offering, for example, an interesting and detailed study of cinema-going since its golden age ('The Decline, Fall and Rebirth in Cinemagoing' by Sue Harris), a focus on portrayals of Paris on the national screen (in Naomi Green's 'Parisian Images and National Transformations'), and an examination of film technicians who are too often overlooked in French film studies, namely 'The Other Auteurs: Producers, Cinematographers and Scriptwriters' studied by Alison Smith.

For all these commendable features, however, the volume overall leaves the reader with the impression that they could have been offered more. While it may be helpful to offer some kind of general introduction to each of the distinct time periods (as the Witt and Temple do in

three essays at the start of each section), it may well have been more beneficial to simply allow the individual essays to shape the volume, using (and indeed questioning) the tripartite chronological division, and relying on the useful seven-part structure to each individual portion. This would have given each author a little more scope to develop their ideas and would have lent more depth to individual contributions. The volume would still have served primarily as a taster, an indicator of paths of research the student, or teacher may wish to follow, but they would have done so from a firmer base.

Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers

By Lisa Kernan
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. ISBN 0-292-70558-1/0-292-70600-6. 59 B&W photos, 316pp. £11.99 (pbk), £48.00 (hbk)

A review by Deborah Allison, City University, UK

"Who do they think they're talking to?" (36) This is the question at the heart of Lisa Kernan's engaging survey of American film trailers. Studying trailers, she argues, can help us to understand the assumptions that film companies make about what audiences want. By examining the rhetorical devices they use it is possible to map the changing dialogue between their assumptions, the product itself, and the ways in which films are consumed by audiences.

Kernan argues that the rhetoric of trailers is centred on three textual features: genres, stories and stars. These priorities have existed throughout the period of her study, which spans from 1930 to 1999. Yet as she demonstrates, the ways in which they address audiences have changed significantly across this period. For example, she cites Vinzenz Hediger's argument that 'studio trailermakers started out in the classical era emphasising the withholding of story elements as much as possible (on the assumption that the story *is* the product)' but by the mid-1970s had moved to a formula that revealed approximately two thirds of the story arc (54). 'What is "the product" when it ceases to be the story?' she asks, going on to argue that 'in the contemporary era, the product becomes the movie event' (54).

This conclusion, like most of her others, is drawn from the series of twenty-seven case studies that occupies the greater part of the book. Taken individually, each case study provides an intelligent and rigorous examination of the workings of the trailer at hand. However, the extent to which this sample can speak for the genre at large is questionable at best. In describing her sampling methodology, Kernan reveals that she prioritised trailers which 'clearly and interestingly demonstrated the rhetorical inscription of assumptions about the film's audiences and its desires' and, secondarily, selected trailers 'representative of the larger group – whether of their era's trailers in general, or of specific aspects of trailer rhetoric' (33). By her own acknowledgement, a methodology which prioritises the texts that support the arguments she will make, above those that are deemed somehow typical (in a rather non-specific way), precludes an accurate history of trailer forms (34). Whilst her transparency of method is indeed admirable, it provokes a string of questions, such as: what proportion of the more than 700 trailers she viewed do the case studies typify? And what are the characteristics of the other, non-privileged types of trailer?

Kernan states, moreover, that in selecting the case study subjects, she has given precedence to well-known films (34). If films are well-known, it is normally because they have been widely seen. The sample is consequently dominated by successful films. Kernan accepts, as do her sources, that trailers can contribute significantly to the success of a film. This suggests an interesting syllogism. If the selected trailers are those which advertise successful films and

they are also those that most clearly inscribe their assumptions about their potential audience, might we conclude that their particular rhetorical strategies are more successful than others? The relationship between trailer rhetoric and commercial success is touched on only rarely, when discussing *Caddyshack* (Harold Ramis, 1980), for instance (177), and is an issue that would undoubtedly benefit from further exploration.

Further issues are raised by the order in which the case studies are arranged and the ways they have been classified. Although Kernan claims that an accurate history is not the objective of her study, it is difficult to avoid evaluating her conclusions according to such a benchmark. Two factors render this issue inescapable. The first is her decision to present her close analyses in a strictly chronological order. The second is the grouping of trailers into three distinct periods, which she refers to as the 'classical' (1930-1949), 'transitional' (1950-1974) and 'contemporary' (1975-1999) eras. In creating this taxonomy of trailers it is clear that she believes an evolution to have taken place that permits a strong association between certain rhetorical and stylistic features and their historical period.

Some features of this alleged development seem compelling. In particular, it is difficult to refute her account of shifts in the relative popularity of particular stylistic devices. These include the displacement of intertitles by an increasing reliance on voice-over, and a reduction in the use of wipes in favour of using sound effects to differentiate between segments of film. If the case studies are genuinely representative of their period (which is, of course, far from certain), then the evolutionary construct she posits would appear to meet with some success. Nevertheless, there are many instances when categorising certain features as intrinsic to one of the three time periods appears to require a degree of forcing. As Kernan herself acknowledges, some trailers of the transitional era, such as *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) and *Paper Moon* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1973), evince significant commonality with, as well as difference from, the rhetorical features highlighted in her analysis of the classical period (123-27, 146-55). This suggests that the evolutionary linearity which the division into time periods implies may be a simplification of the true complexities of historical change.

Kernan's explanations for the variations she observes over time are interesting but piecemeal. Her analysis posits a general shift in assumptions about the kinds of films that audiences wish to see, and in the features deemed most likely to attract them to a particular film. Trailers' shifting modes of address are shown to arise from a complex interrelation between stylistic devices, verbal rhetoric, the film excerpts included and the way that they are edited together. Industrial determinants, such as the breakdown of the studio system, are credited with influencing rhetorical change. The extent to which technological and aesthetic influences may have helped to shape the history of film trailers receives little attention however. Kernan notes, for instance, that wipes were widely used from 1935, but the reason for this delay, when the technique was common in American feature films by 1932, remains a mystery. Similarly, whilst intertextual relationships between trailers are occasionally referred to, with *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976) and *Twister* (John de Bont, 1996) both cited as influential (167, 190), a broader mapping of how trailers have influenced one another is substantially underdeveloped.

Kernan's categorisation of trailer features according to their era of production is not the only area in which her classification system shows signs of strain. Within each of the three time periods, she identifies each case study as being dominated and defined by the salesmanship of one of three features: star, story or genre, so that her typology of trailers effectively places

them in a nine-cell matrix. Her own analyses demonstrate the significant extent to which trailers resist such pigeonholing as she shows that most of them appeal to an audience's assumed desire to make viewing choices on the basis of familiar stars, stories *and* genres. This point is made explicit in her account of how the trailer for *Men in Black* (Barry, Sonnenfeld, 1997) 'typifies the contemporary era's seamless integration of the three rhetorical appeals'. (190) One can only wonder, therefore, what the purpose of this classification system is. Purely descriptive, it is not used to quantify or measure, and instead suggests only a desire to impose an order where one does not demonstrably exist.

Discussion of the various ways in which trailers evince rhetorical appeals to audiences' assumed desires draws attention to another feature of this study that is not adequately developed. The question at the heart of the analysis – 'who do they think they're talking to?' – begs a further question, which is 'who are "they"?' In a prehistory of the group of texts on which the study focuses, Kernan tells us:

> Attempts were made to advertise films with trailers as early as 1912, and beginning in 1919, a company called National Screen Service (NSS) made crude 35 mm film ads from transferred films stills (without the studios' permission) and sold them to exhibitors… The studios soon realized the potential of trailers and began supplying NSS with film footage (25).

Between 1928 and 1960, several major studios stopped outsourcing trailer production and assumed this task themselves. (27) More recently, the industry has turned at least some of its trailer production over to a range of advertising agencies (53). A number of different organisations have therefore been involved in producing trailers. Sometime they are also the maker of the film, and sometimes not.

Kernan does not offer any information about who was responsible for creating the trailers examined in the case studies. This absence presumably owes much to the difficulties inherent in obtaining such data. Nevertheless, the question of authorship is relevant for several reasons. For one thing, the prominence of her argument that trailer rhetoric embodies the assumptions producers make about the audiences they address would be more meaningful if greater clarity were offered about who these producers are. This issue is especially relevant in the light of her observations that in some cases, such as *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), there seems to be a distinct mismatch between the projected selling points of a film and its actual appeal to audiences (145). Moreover, the industrial sectors in which these companies operate (specialised trailer service, film production, or advertising agency) may help to set the individual agendas for trailer style and rhetoric. For instance, Kernan identifies a growing competitiveness between ad agencies as a factor impacting on the style of recent trailers (53). Providing information about the producer of each trailer might offer a useful indication of whether any systematic differences exist in terms of film style and/or mode of address. Although she claims that 'the look and structure of NSS trailers and the in-house trailers are very compatible during the classical era' (27), it is unclear whether such a similarity exists in later years.

As a study of specific phenomena, *Coming Attractions* is fascinating and informative. The range of trailers Kernan discusses, and her close observations of them, provides a valuable insight into a filmmaking practice that has been widely viewed but rarely studied in detail. In the extent to which trailers mediate between film texts, producers and audiences the topic has enormous potential to illuminate wider issues in the fields of film history and theory. Had her

methodology involved an unbiased sample, the implications of her findings for a broader history of American cinema would have been substantial. As it is, her case studies remain an absorbing footnote with only a limited capacity to throw light on wider phenomena. This limitation notwithstanding, Kernan's book amply demonstrates that trailers provide rich pickings for further study, which it must be hoped her work will inspire. Just as she characterises film trailers as a cinema of coming attractions, so we might think of this book as providing a taster of things to come, even while it intrigues and entertains us in its own right.

Underground U.S.A: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon

By Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider (eds.) with Foreword by Lloyd Kaufman
London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002. ISBN: 1-903364-49-3, xvii+235pp. £16.99 (pbk)

A review by Rebecca Feasey, Bath Spa University

Underground U.S.A: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon is the first of several texts in the *AlterImage* series, a series which aims to integrate theoretical work in the field of cult, horror, avant-garde, exploitation, alternative and experimental cinema with critical and production accounts of film and its audience (12). This first title combines a set of specially commissioned articles from leading film theorists, journalists, exhibitors and directors in the field including Jonathan Crane (*Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror. Film*, 1994), Joan Hawkins (*Cutting Edge: Art Horror and the Horrific* Avant-Garde, 2000), Sara Gwenllian Jones (*Fantastic Cult Television*, 2002) and Steven Jay Schneider (*Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, 2003).

In the introduction to this volume, Xavier Mendik points out that very few academic texts have been produced which critically explore the American underground scene. We are then informed that that those few volumes that do examine this marginalised area of film studies have restricted themselves to looking at a range of cult texts as specific case studies, without taking into account the various modes of production, distribution, exhibition and audience reception that such a study should embody. From this perspective then, we are told that this volume adds to existing work in the field by providing suitable methodologies which examine the 'historical, economic and cultural emergence' of a range of film experiences beyond the mainstream' (2). *Underground U.S.A. does offer an invaluable addition to the field, due in part, to the fact that the text covers such various and diverse strands of American underground cinema as 'a powerful and subversive medium functioning through a fragmentation of official modes of production and distribution' (2).*

Although I am not suggesting that this book represents the whole of the underground film experience, the text does in fact offer an important strategy for examining a range of auteurs, icons, films, film cycles and genres that have been 'typically dismissed, belittled or ignored by established film culture' (2). *Underground U.S.A* takes issue with films as diverse as *The Gore Gore Girls* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1972) and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) and genres that span the sexploitation text to the snuff film. However, what unites the articles in this volume is 'the belief that the American underground is a vibrant domain that defies the broad classifications of mainstream cinema. In this respect, many critics in this volume view the underground film scene as a space where art house stands shoulder to shoulder with spectacle-based atrocity, and where experimentation is a regular feature of exploitation' (2).

While all of the articles in the book are well-written and thought-provoking, I would recommend readers to pay particular attention to those articles that take issue with the

representation of sexuality and graphic nudity in the underground canon such as Gorfinkel's work on taste and aesthetic distinction, Sargeant's research on voyeurism and sadistic transgression and Bowen's work on the violent eroticism of what he terms the 'roughie.' The work on the sexploitation film is interesting in terms of a discussion of taste formations and cultural distinctions, but more importantly (in terms of the aim of this book), the sexploitation film is interesting due to the fact that such films provide a 'shadow history to cultural and social events' of particular historical periods. Such work will, in time, encourage further research to explain the social, sexual and political representations of such underground U.S.A filmmaking beyond the Hollywood canon.

I would strongly recommend this title to anyone interested in the avant-garde, experimental cinema or the cult film canon. Such readers may also be interested to learn that further editions of the *AlterImage* series are available from both the editors and the publisher with each specially themed edition containing 12-15 key academic articles alongside shorter critical accounts and interviews with cult filmmakers and exhibitors (12).

Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA

By Sarah Street
London and New York: Continuum, 2002. ISBN 0-8264-1396-X. 30 illustrations, xii + 280pp. £18.99 (pbk), £47.11 (hbk)
British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration Edited by Ian MacKillop and Neil Sinyard

British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration

Edited by Ian MacKillop and Neil Sinyard

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-7190-6489-9. xi + 236pp. £14.99 (pbk), £45 (hbk).

A review by Peter Hutchings, Northumbria University, UK

Francois Truffaut's claim that the terms 'Britain' and 'cinema' are incompatible continues to haunt the study of British film. The claim resurfaces in both *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* and *British Cinema of the 1950s: a Celebration*. Although in each case it is summarily dismissed, its mere presence suggests a lingering inferiority complex and an accompanying defensiveness about the status of British film culture. The persistence of Truffaut's words is all the more remarkable given the sheer volume of work done on British cinema in the past two decades, work which has significantly increased that cinema's critical profile and to which the writers involved with *Transatlantic Crossings* and *British Cinema of the 1950s* have been important contributors. The quality of much of this work should surely by now have led all those with an interest in and enthusiasm for British cinema to a position alongside British film-maker Stephen Frears who once responded to the 'incompatibility' claim with a robust 'Bollocks to Truffaut'. This minor quibble aside (and I have to own up to using the Truffaut quote myself on more than one occasion so this is as much self-criticism as anything else), there is much to be admired in both the books reviewed here as they provide further proof, if such proof is required, of the achievements of British cinema.

As its title indicates, Sarah Street's *Transatlantic Crossings* is a study of the fate of British films in the USA. The importance of Britain as an export market for Hollywood product has already been extensively explored in a range of books and articles, as has the apparently never-ending ambition of British film-makers to break into the American market (an ambition which all too often has ended in disappointment or, occasionally, in disaster). What is distinctive about Street's book is its focus on what actually happens to British films when they get to the United States. In doing this, Street throws into question some longstanding 'common sense' assumptions about the Anglo-American cinematic relationship, particularly

the belief that an oligopolistic American film industry has been overwhelmingly hostile to British cinema's attempts to place its films in American cinemas. Using extensive archival research, Street shows that sectors of the American film industry have actively welcomed British imports. Her exploration of US marketing strategies for the British product is especially interesting in this respect. Various forms of what we today would call niche marketing, and adjustments to the films themselves (in the form of some re-cutting and re-dubbing to soften accents) to make them more palatable or comprehensible to US audiences, are explored and explained in detail.

As Street indicates, there is often a tension involved in this marketing process between the rendering of these films as 'like' American films and the rendering of them as different or special. It seems to be the fate of British films overseas to hover, sometimes uneasily, between being familiar generic fare and acquiring an art-house status. It is clear from this that while there has undoubtedly been a space for British films within American cinema since the 1930s, that space has been subject to constant renegotiation as the industry and society have changed over time.

Transatlantic Crossings takes us from the 1920s to the present day. By any standard, this is a broad historical sweep and, inevitably, the book is more focussed and detailed in some places than in others. Most impressive is the material on the 1930s through to the 1960s. Here Street provides a fascinating account of the ways in which the American and the British film industries interacted and the roles played in this not just by state institutions and notable industry personalities but also by lowly film marketers and exhibitors. The material covering the 1970s to the present day is less striking, perhaps because this is more familiar terrain for anyone interested in British cinema. The fall of Goldcrest, for example, or the international popularity of the British heritage film have been dealt with elsewhere, so while *Transatlantic Crossings* handles this material deftly, this part of the book is not as groundbreaking as its earlier sections.

The principal strength of *Transatlantic Crossings* lies in the way it illuminates the industrial life of British films on their journeys abroad. The book becomes more tentative and to a certain extent speculative when analysing both the films themselves and their likely reception by American audiences. Clearly, traditional textual analysis does not sit easily within a study of film as commodity, and the few attempts made at it here are rather cursory. In a different way, the audiences for these films remain – as they so often do in film studies – decidedly enigmatic. While one can identify marketing strategies, one needs to guard against reading audience responses out of those strategies. To her credit, Street largely avoids this trap, concentrating instead on what is material, archivable and provable.

By contrast, *British Cinema of the 1950s: a Celebration* unashamedly embraces the joys of close textual analysis and frequently taps into the memories of its various contributors about being part of the audiences for the films being discussed. The book's title (as well as its cover image – an early 1950s line drawing of Robert Newton as a devil) is defiantly old-fashioned as are some of its notions of what is valuable about 1950s British cinema, especially its emphasis on the auteur-director. Personally, I found this quite refreshing. Certainly some of the more auteurist essays – including Charles Barr on Pat Jackson, Neil Sinyard on Joseph Losey, and Philip Kemp on Robert Hamer – manage to convey both through their insights and their enthusiasm for their subject a clear sense that a director-based approach to British cinema still has much to offer. Other essays deal with producers, writers, actors and critics, and studies of individual films are also included. While an attempt has been made to divide

the book up into sections, ultimately *British Cinema of the 1950s* turns out to be neither a history of 1950s British cinema nor a strongly themed collection, but instead is a loosely connected series of personal enthusiasms. There is nothing wrong with this in itself but it does mean that the book – unlike some other collections dealing with British cinema – firmly remains the sum of its parts.

A key point made in the book's introduction that has broader practical relevance for the study of British film relates to the current non-availability of many of the films discussed (and this also applies to some of the titles discussed in *Transatlantic Crossings*). For example, while Brian McFarlane's excellent chapter on Tempean Films, a 1950s B-movie outfit, might leave readers keen to see some of the films mentioned, they will quickly discover that this is not possible unless they have access to a film archive (and often not even then). As someone who, like some of the contributors to *British Cinema of the 1950s*, can remember seeing a wide range of British films via that most accessible of archives, the television, back in the 1970s and 1980s, I can only lament the passing of those matinee TV screenings that managed to keep old British films in circulation for new generations of audiences. If nothing else, *British Cinema of the 1950s* reminds us of what we, in our digital multichannel televisual world, are sadly missing.

Jacking in to the Matrix Franchise: Cultural Reception and Interpretation

By Matthew Kapell and William G. Doty (eds.)
New York: Continuum, 2004. ISBN 0-8264-1588-1. xiv + 215 pp. £14.99 (pbk)
Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society
By Danny Fingeroth

Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society

By Danny Fingeroth

New York: Continuum, 2004. ISBN 0-8264-1540-7. 192pp. £14.99 (pbk).

A review by Elizabeth Rosen, University College London, UK

Overloaded, not *Reloaded*

Fair disclosure: the reviewer originally proposed an essay to be included in this collection.

Sometimes it can be to one's advantage to be late to a party, say if one wants to make a grand entrance, or check out what everyone else is wearing before choosing one's own clothes. Other times - when all the beer is gone by the time one arrives, for example - it is a definite disadvantage to turn up late.

Jacking in to the Matrix Franchise: Cultural Reception and Interpretation is a late-comer to *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) love-fest, the latest of at least five books or collections on the film trilogy. This was potentially a tremendous advantage since it meant authors clearly had time and opportunity to get familiar with the other *Matrix*-related works already published, and could therefore avoid repeating any of it, and fill in the gap left by those other works. Being the 'last one in' to the published analysis of the *Matrix* phenomenon should have given these authors a unique opportunity to produce a body of deeper, more scholarly work because they had access to the prior scholarly debate and could engage with it, in addition to the film franchise. Only a few of the essayists use this late-comer status to its best advantage, however. This is a pity since, at this point, most of us are overloaded and not *Reloaded* on *Matrix*-matter.

Editors Kapell and Doty have deliberately given their authors an 'editorial mandate to "make it clear, eliminate technical scholarly debates, and express yourselves the way 'ordinary' people talk"' (2). While I applaud any mandate to make scholarly debate more accessible to

'real' people, we've had a number of collections which already do this, and it isn't what is most needed in *Matrix*-related studies presently. What is needed at this point is scholarly debate, rather than more essays detailing how a particular discipline (and its particular topics), are represented in the films.

But this scholarly debate is only present in some of the essays collected here. In fact, a number of the essays cover ground that is already covered elsewhere, and in more detail. In many cases, this collection follows the same pattern of introducing a sub-specialty and then applying that paradigm to the film franchise to see how the two overlap. We need to move beyond that; there's no point in including yet another essay recounting how the violence in the *Matrix* films contradicts its saviour/salvation motifs; it would be more fruitful at this point in the analysis for authors go deeper and engage the critical debate, as well as the franchise.

The collection does seek to differentiate itself. It proposes to address the whole of the *Matrix* franchise: the films, the online video game, the animated shorts of *The Animatrix* (Peter Chung and Andy Jones, 2003), and the comics. No other collection has addressed the totality of the phenomenon. Again, this was potentially a boon for the authors, but in many cases, it simply gave them another source of material from which to draw examples for their templates; in almost no cases did the individual medium which delivered these parts of the franchise get special analysis.

In terms of the essays, the quality often varies widely. The cultural studies diversity which Doty lauds in his introduction is on display in the variety of disciplines which the essays themselves cover: gender and race studies, religion, politics, philosophy, and postmodern theory. The essays range across topics such as posthumanism, the ethics of choosing a life of simulation, and whether *The Matrix* films are actually postmodern.

Even with the sometimes introductory tone, there is some interesting and thought-provoking work here. It is not surprising that the really intriguing essays are the ones that *challenge* assumptions about the films and thus do engage the prior critical analysis of the trilogy. John Shelton Lawrence, the author *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Eerdmans, 2002), writes one of the best of these. His essay 'Fascist Redemption or Democratic Hope?' challenges the idea that *The Matrix* upholds Democratic ideals, and suggests that its political values are more in line with fascism. Considering how Neo is often regarded as an archetypal American hero, one who symbolises American individualism and freedom (of choice, from control), Lawrence's argument is a radical (and persuasive) reconsideration of the political stance of the film.

Similarly, Stephanie J. Wilhelm and Matthew Kapell challenge the usual reading of *The Matrix* trilogy as 'postmodern', and offer equally compelling reasons for identifying the films as either 'classical' or 'modern' artefacts rather than postmodern ones. The bulk of this essay is understandably but regrettably taken up with having to define its terms, and any postmodernist might challenge it by arguing that part of postmodernism is exactly the kind of shifting, indeterminate paradigm which they note occurs in the films. This does not, however, make Wilhelm and Kapell's conclusion any less interesting. The authors suggest that the Wachowski Brothers want to undermine postmodernism and signal that, just as that sign of postmodernism in the film, Baudrillard's book *Simulacra and Simulation*, is hollow, so too is postmodernism a hollow, empty theory through which to understand the world. Whether or not one finds the essay's thesis convincing, it is an interesting position to argue given the fact

that *The Matrix* franchise is almost universally regarded as the poster-child for postmodern film.

C. Richard King and David J. Leonard do a much needed reading of the films based on race. Astoundingly, this is the only analysis of race in the franchise to date, and this in spite of the fact that so many critics have noted the preponderance of African-American and Asian faces in them. One would have thought that the appearance of Dr. Cornell West as one of the Zion council members would have immediately gotten race-studies scholars intrigued, but to my knowledge this is the only essay addressing the topic of race in the films. Any discussion of race in the franchise would be welcomed, but particularly this one which challenges the received wisdom that - because more ethnic faces are on show and more main characters played by people of colour - the franchise is somehow striking a blow for racism. Instead, King and Leonard argue that the *Matrix* franchise 'is a racial project that despite its pretension as a radical undertaking offers conservative, if not reactionary, interpretations of race' and that it 'reflects at most a continuation of Hollywood's (and America's) long-standing ideas, images, and ideologies of race' (32). While I occasionally disagreed with the authors' reading (they read Morpheus as an 'Uncle Tom' figure, whereas I assign him far more agency), or thought they didn't go far enough in a reading (they depict Morpheus's 'tutelage' of Neo as the stereotypical white character learning – and redeeming himself – 'on the back of' black characters, but don't mention the insidiously loaded image of a black man holding out drugs to a young white man, taunting him to take a pill), I was thrilled to see someone finally addressing the problematic issue of race in these films.

One last essay stands out, and this is Richard R. Jones's 'Religion, Community, and Revitalization', which begins by posing the question of why *The Matrix*, with its hodge-podge of world religions, appeals to Western society. Noting that the film's 'characters and symbols are generic enough to relate to nearly every major religious persuasion, yet specific enough to synthesize a new vision' (55), Jones argues that the films offer themselves (and their vision of the world), *as a religion*. He bases his conclusion on dual strands of thinking. First, he posits that 'the entertainment industry, not religion, now provides the shared symbols, myths, and the moods and motivations' necessary to create a 'single moral community' (57), and, second, that the franchise's *Weltanschauung* offers viewers both a way of understanding their 'splinter-in-the-mind' feelings of disconnection and a vision of the cosmos and transcendence which gibes with ideals and paranoia already part of contemporary life. Jones argues that the incredible popularity of the *Matrix* franchise is due to the fact that, like any of the world religions, it gives its 'converts' a believable ontology and a system of shared morals.

Of the other essays collected here, some are going over ground which has been covered already. Russell Blackford's contribution mostly recounts what others ethicists have written about choosing a simulated existence over a real one, an area where a reader is much better off taking up William Irwin's *The Matrix and Philosophy* collection (La Salle: Open Court, 2002) which addresses these and other philosophical questions in far more detail. The same is true of Frances Flannery-Dailey and Rachel L. Wagner's contribution, which not only echoes a similar article they wrote for *The Journal of Religion and Film* (and which is posted on the official Warner Brothers Matrix website http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/), but also attempts to summarise, in two paragraph bites, each of the world religions and how they are reflected in the films. As the majority of analysis of *the Matrix* films has been either in the area of philosophy or in religion, much of this essay seems old news, except for a curiously conservative concern on the parts of the authors about how viewers will be affected by the contradictory stances on violence the franchise endorses. Noting that the violence of

the films undermines the messages of peace which are the cornerstones of the world religions they discuss, the authors three times express concern about the 'real world' effect of this depiction, concluding their essay with a warning that 'we must engage in a conscious critique of the substance of media that we consume and reclaim the non-violent core of these religious traditions, if we are interested in stopping bullets' (111). Neither of these is a bad essay; they've just been done elsewhere and in more detail.

There's only one stinker here and it belongs to the two creative writers in the bunch. Timothy Mizelle and Elizabeth Baker contribute an 'essay' that is in love with the sound of its own voice and says very little. It's hard to imagine why it was included. Of the two non-traditional essays, this is one. The other is Michael Sexson's essay 'The Déjà Vu Glitch in the *Matrix* Trilogy', a piece which largely takes the form of a classroom discussion. Aside from being amusing, Sexson's essay doesn't come in for the same criticism as the Mizelle/Baker effort because it ultimately has a point. Asking his class to tell him what the Matrix is, one of his students finally cuts through all the detailed explanations about simulations and worlds-pulled-over-your-eyes to say 'It's a movie'. This allows Sexson to question the efficacy of using an 'unreal' technology to critique the idea of the 'unreal'. If the essay ultimately feels flat it is because it apologises for the franchise's shortcoming at the same time as it critiques it, and it relies too heavily on the classroom gimmick.

Jacking in to the Matrix Franchise is a mixed-bag. There are some challenging ideas in these essays, and the collection is at its best when it questions the received wisdom about *The Matrix*. But it is a collection which is uneven in quality and which is badly edited on top of that (I found comma splices, sentences missing words, and un-alphabetised Works Cited). Its introductory tone does make it accessible for non-scholars and will introduce that group of readers to ideas about posthumanism, postmodernism, and a number of other academic disciplines, but scholars may find the bulk of the essays in this collection either too general or too familiar for satisfaction.

Asking Danny Fingeroth to analyse the appeal of superheroes is a little like asking Betty Crocker to analyse what makes a superb cake: the best cooks can't always explain exactly what it is that makes a good recipe into a great one. Sometimes it is just a matter of a little extra dash of some unexpected ingredient in a moment of inspiration.

Superheroes are much like this. There are the perfectly adequate, serviceable ones, and then there are the great ones, the ones you can tell are the product of that little extra dash of inspiration. But what that inspiration is, whether it is some quirk of character development, or some fortunate confluence of character and historical moment, that's harder to figure out.

Danny Fingeroth takes his best shot at figuring it out, and if anyone is going to do it successfully you'd likely put your money on him. Not only has he written scripts for existing superhero comics and created superheroes of his own, he has been an editor at Marvel Comics for close to twenty years. As former editorial director of the Spider-Man line of comics, Fingeroth is in a better position than most to consider the question in his book's subtitle: *What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society*.

But Fingeroth's title, *Superman on the Couch*: *What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society*, is a little misleading, particularly when paired with the cover art showing a superhero lying on an analyst's couch while the analyst writes, 'Split Personality? Obsessive Compulsive? Savior Complex?' on his pad of paper. It suggests that we are going

to get a psychological reading of the superhero/reader relationship, or at least of the superheroes themselves. But Fingeroth has no expertise in the field of psychology and the book does not really do a psychologically-based reading of comics, as is apparent from the bibliography which only lists one psychology related text.

In fact, *Superman on the Couch* is not a scholarly text at all. Its bibliography is short and general, and the book doesn't engage with other comic criticism very often. Its psychological interpretations of superhero appeal is based less on knowledge of psychology and more on common sense and a lifetime of having to think about what makes one hero simply a hero, and another a superhero.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Fingeroth makes no pretence of writing a scholarly work here. As he says in his Afterword, *Superman on the Couch* is the culmination of a lifetime's interest in the topic and a lifetime of work in the field. The book is clearly written for general-interest readers who don't know a speech balloon from a gutter and who couldn't care less about Scott McCloud's definition of 'closure'. Those are issues for the professionals and academics to take up. Here, Fingeroth addresses more basic questions about superhero origins, value systems, sidekicks and personality traits.

But sometimes analysing why something works well and becomes a part of popular culture is harder than figuring out why something doesn't work at all. There is something strangely unfulfilling about the first half of Fingeroth's book, and I suspect it has to do with this difficulty. In part the lacklustre opening has to do with the difficulty of quantifying what a 'hero' is, and in part the first two chapters suffer because Fingeroth doesn't maintain as tight a grip on his chapter topics as he probably should. His meandering style, while easy to read, makes it easy to forget what the supposed point of each chapter is, and that is particularly a problem when trying to define one's terms, a practice that requires an increasingly stricter control of words and meaning contradicted by a meandering style.

The problem is partially that Fingeroth needlessly worries about defining what a superhero is. In addition to giving the most general of 'histories' of the hero figure (a topic which is surely due far more depth and time than can be afforded in this few pages), his first few chapters seek to differentiate 'heroes' from 'superheroes' and spend much of the time trying to convince the reader that superheroes have become part of the texture of popular culture. But this opening falls flat because he is preaching to the converted.

Graphic novels get their own section in bookshops and they are increasingly taught on university syllabi. There is a consistent line-up of superhero-based movies and television shows. We wear t-shirts with the logos of Batman or Superman on them, and everyone knows what the reference is to. My three year old nephews run around the house shooting imaginary webs at their mother and I, but their mother and I, when *we* were children, used to call our grapes 'Batman pills', popping them in our mouths and then wildly humming the theme of the 'Batman' television show. Let's face it: superheroes are out of the closet. They are mainstream, and have been for some time now. So when Fingeroth takes the time to defend his choice of topic, when he feels he has to *convince* us that popular culture is influenced by comic superheroes, the response is a puzzled, 'Well, of course. And?'

We do not need to be told that a 'superhero' isn't the same as a 'hero' of 9/11. In fact, we probably don't need a *definition* of 'superhero' at all. A 'superhero' *is* Batman (or Superman, or Wonder Woman, or Spider-Man, or Buffy the Vampire Slayer). It's a tautology of sorts:

they are superheroes, and superheroes are them. And because the word 'superhero' specifically refers to comic book heroes, we wonder why all the fuss over defining them.

It is when Fingeroth gets away from this vague, unnecessary opening that the book begins to turn around. Because of his experience in the comic industry, Fingeroth is in a wonderful position to break down the superhero comic into its component parts and address each one. Having helped compile character 'bibles' to maintain continuity and learned whole character histories in order to edit series, Fingeroth is able to state with authority when certain changes occurred in a superhero's depiction, and thus is able to draw conclusions about how events in the real world forced changes in the fictional world of the comic book heroes. The book is strongest when it leaves behind the issue of popular culture and grapples with the individual components of superhero comics instead.

The second half of the book is particularly interesting. Here Fingeroth discusses issues such as the surrogate 'families' of superheroes; the different ways that anger has been represented in superheroes; and the paradoxical fact that superheroes are representatives of the status quo, rather than progress.

In the first instance, Fingeroth looks at the kinds of groupings of superheroes which have occurred in the comic world, noting three in particular. There is the group based on meritocracy, in which only the best of the superheroes are invited to join. There is the group which is forced together by common affliction or problem, and is bond together because of their common sense of persecution. The third group more closely represents an actual family unit. It may have real familial bonds, as the Fantastic Four does, but it is represented as being similar to real families with their disputes, evolving relationship and faults. Fingeroth discusses the appeal of each of these 'families' and ties the appeal to the orphan status of the superhero. He argues that the 'family-less' superhero is no less desirous of belonging to a family than the reader is, and it is here that Fingeroth makes an interesting connection.

Teenagers, he suggests, are particularly likely to feel they do not fit in, whether at home or out in the world. This gives them a *de facto* 'orphan' status which makes identification with the orphaned superheroes and the desire for a surrogate family particularly strong. But Fingeroth argues that all of us, whether we are teenagers or not, are likely to identify with this need to belong, and the different representations of 'families' in comics thus appeal to a reader based on the different groups he or she might desire to join. Because they often feel 'out of joint' with the world, and persecuted by parents and other authorities, teenagers may respond very strongly to an X-Men idea of family which is based on this sense of alienation and persecution. Older readers who are presumably past this stage may identify more closely with more 'realistic' depictions of families such as the Fantastic Four, or be desirous of being part of a 'family' based on notions of excellence. Fingeroth briefly notes that comic readers themselves often identify with ideas of a family based on outsider status, simply because comic book fans have long been regarded as a weird sub-culture. This extrapolation into the real world of the reader is particularly interesting, and one wishes that the author had spent more time exploring the fan-culture's relationship to the idea of family.

Fingeroth also examines the representation of angry superheroes. Using the Hulk as the chapter centrepiece, the author is able to examine the paradox of turning a character who represents primal rage into a hero figure. The chapter is most interesting when Fingeroth dissects angry characters such as the Punisher, Elektra, or Batman from an editorial view. It is

easy, he writes, to understand the appeal of the Hulk's child-like, primal rage, but the character is also tremendously difficult to write.

> The Hulk is so one-dimensional that he must either be fleshed-out emotionally and psychologically – which risks losing the primal essence of the character – or he must be guided like an animal down pathways of heroism so that, in his rage, he ends up dong the right thing. His anger is something others can identify with, but the way he deals with it, after the initial catharsis, is almost always emotionally- and dramatically – extremely hard to pay off with on a consistent basis. (126)

This lets Fingeroth discuss the goal-oriented anger of a character like Batman vs. the undifferentiated fury of the Punisher. Anger by itself is problematic, he argues; more effective is 'an origin- and narrative-based rationale that shapes [a superhero's] anger' (127). The difference between a great superhero and a good one, Fingeroth suggests, is the constructive use to which he or she puts his anger.

Fingeroth also examines the figure of the 'sidekick' and the more recent movement away from sidekicks and toward adolescent heroes such as Peter Parker (Spider-Man). Problematically, he poses two related questions in the immediate paragraphs of the chapter that he chooses to skirt rather than confront directly. The first is the question why give a hero a boy sidekick instead of a companion female hero? This immediately raises the second question about the pederasty-inflected implications of the man/boy relationship which have long dogged the superhero genre. Fingeroth chooses to completely disregard these issues, and moves immediately to change the focus: 'Why a boy sidekick? And why are there so few of them now? Why, for that matter, are there now so few superheroes who are really children?' (140) It is an obvious dodge of a difficult question, and it would have been illuminating to hear what conclusions Fingeroth had reached based on his long working experience in an environment in which these issues almost certainly have been discussed among colleagues and creators.

Instead, he links the introduction of the teenage superhero to the postwar baby-boom and prosperity that allowed teenagers, for the first time, to be a market segment which drove popular culture. 'The trick,' he notes, 'with selling fantasy to children and teenagers is that no one wants to experience entertainment about their own group or younger ones. Everybody wants to see what the *next* stage of life will be like, to have a foretaste of it through the stories they consume' (144). This argument isn't terribly convincing, given that none of us will grow up to be superheroes, but Fingeroth does make a good point that a teenaged hero gives young readers more to identify with. Fingeroth suggests that the appeal of the teenage superhero is the *hope* he or she is capable of. 'What a teenager brings to the table is knowledge and experience without cynicism and bitterness' (148). Furthermore, these teenaged heroes are vehicles through which to express the fun of having superhero powers. Fingeroth suggests an interesting way of viewing teenaged heroes when he uses the phrase 'coming of age' in conjunction with their appeal.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book addresses the values which superheroes represent. Acknowledging that the 1980s trend to deconstruct the superhero genre was a necessary and timely one, Fingeroth reasserts the value of the traditional superhero who fights evil and is him or herself good. This is what a superhero *is*; he fights to uphold the ideals which society deems valuable. But, as Fingeroth points out, this means 'the superhero

is not an active agent of change in society' (161). His job is to maintain the status quo, not to reform it. If a superhero moves from being *reactive* and upholding the status quo, to being *proactive* and trying to reform society, he becomes a villain instead. This is a fascinating way to view villains. It means in theory that villains, with their progressive, can-do attitudes embracing change, are potentially just as American as the superhero who upholds 'truth, justice and the American way'.

Superman on the Couch makes for interesting reading when Fingeroth gets into the nitty-gritty of these sorts of issues. The book is at its strongest when it isolates elements of the superhero genre and asks the question: why does this work? Those expecting either a Freudian analysis of the genre or a scholarly treatise which engages with other criticism should look elsewhere. But a general reader who is looking for an introduction to some of the more interesting components of the genre will find Fingeroth's book a fun read. Similarly, a reader curious to learn how a good superhero becomes a great one will also find Danny Fingeroth's book worth picking up.

The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930 to 1960

By Larry Ceplair and Robert Englund
Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003 ed. ISBN: 0-252-07141-7. 28 illustrations, xxix + 544 pp. £18.95 (pbk)
Blacklisted: The Film Lover's Guide to the Hollywood Blacklist By Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner & Joseph Losey (British Film Makers Series) By Colin Gardner

Blacklisted: The Film Lover's Guide to the Hollywood Blacklist

By Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. ISBN: 1-403-96145-X. xx + 255 pp. £16.99 (pbk).

Joseph Losey (British Film Makers Series)

By Colin Gardner

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. ISBN: 0-719-06783-9. 12 illustrations + xi + 328 pages. £15.99 (pbk)

A review by Graham Barnfield, University of East London, UK

In the 'McCarthy Era', a term used to connote US domestic politics in the Cold War, the issue of the Hollywood Blacklist loomed large. To this day, familiar positions are restated on both sides of the political divide. Conservative critics of those blacklisted and, by extension, of books like those reviewed here, object to the sympathetic portrayal of their old enemies. Old allegations of espionage are bolstered by CPUSA materials released from former Soviet archives. Some of the polemical heat convects up to contemporary controversies over the Hollywood liberalism of Sean Penn or Tim Robbins.

Consensus suggests that Ceplair and Englund's *The Inquisition in Hollywood* is one of the most respected accounts of the Hollywood Blacklist. First published in 1979, its sources of credibility are twofold. First of all it drew heavily on oral histories and interviews to flesh out its basic themes, rather than depend on press clippings and the few academic sources existing at the time. They meticulously dissected the biographies and autobiographies appearing at the time, often penned by retired blacklistees.

Secondly, the book treats the film industry's anticommunist backlash of the 1950s – with informers, witnesses and congressional hearings – as more than a simple extension of the Cold War. Rather, such conflicts are seen as firmly rooted in the inter-war period, of New Deal politics and attempts to unionise the Hollywood studios. This emphasis shows how the studio bosses, although initially rather liberal since escaping from the East Coast-dominated film industry, closed ranks when their economic interests were threatened. A form of peaceful coexistence survived during the Second World War, when the political outlook of the screenwriter-dominated Hollywood left and the producers employing them coalesced, on the limited basis of the backing the war effort (and landing a few government contracts in the process).

After the war, there were scores to be settled, predicated on the reassertion of management prerogatives and in the aftermath of internecine warfare among left-liberals based on the fallout from the Nazi-Soviet pact and its impact on the CPUSA's line. Official perceptions of the potentially subversive character of cinema, given its mass audience, fused with the uses of glamour and film industry celebrity culture as points of contact in wider political discourse. It becomes apparent that some of the national conflict over 'UnAmerican activities' came to Hollywood on account of its symbolic value rather than any strategic importance.

Ceplair and Englund's supporting material, including a new introduction, frames the authors' 1979 work in the context of current debates, including the issue of espionage, where they also point to its ultimate irrelevance in this context. It also offers a chance to reply to some of their critics from over the years. The duo notes the polarisation of US Communist history as an academic field, between those who see the Communist Party as a satellite of Moscow and those who emphasise rank and file initiative. While broadly falling into the latter camp, the book concentrates on a sober assessment of the sheer difficulty of structuring studio system films around the political or aesthetic ambitions of committed screenwriters. With a few exceptions, often based on the exigencies of wartime propaganda or diluted down to vague pro-tolerance sentiments, it would appear that political work and employment-related output were separate entities for the future blacklistees. Their political careers, usually developing in the orbit of the Communist Party, drew on their campaigning and quasi-celebrity status. The wealth and prestige of the Hollywood film colony made it a significant area of Communist activity, at the heart of a battle of ideas. (Incidentally, the authors do not hesitate to point out when they thought that the Communists had the wrong ideas, including the limited co-operation of party veterans when preparing the previous editions of the book.)

Ceplair and Englund are less compelling in their treatment of actual Hollywood motion pictures. Little is offered to analyse how Inquisition-related films worked for their audiences, or the relationship between leftist screenplays and the finished product. Instead they are more or less treated, with the obvious exception of *Salt of the Earth* (Herbert J. Biberman, 1954) as entertainment, pure and simple. While this avoids some of the more fanciful readings of mainstream escapism that emerged in later years, one comes away thinking that, in production terms, the screenwriters could well have been shoemakers for all the lasting political impact they made. (Indeed, Ceplair and Englund demonstrate that the most frustrated left screenwriters were those who recognised that, as writers, they were politically impotent within the studio system.)

Ceplair and Englund provide a thorough chronicle of the left-right controversies of the blacklist era, which inevitably overshadowed the movies made at the time. If one wants an introduction to film content, a good place to start is with *Blacklisted* by Paul Buhle and Dave

Wagner. *Blacklisted* is an alphabetically arranged 'film lover's guide to Hollywood's darkest days', with over 2000 entries. This volume was probably conceived as a by-product of Buhle's mountainous body of research published elsewhere, principally *A Very Dangerous Citizen* (University of California Press, 2001), *Hide in Plain Sight* (Palgrave MacMilllan, 2003), *Radical Hollywood* (The New Press, 2002) and *Tender Comrades* (Saint Martin's Press, 1999), co-authored by Patrick McGilligan. (In a grim yet strangely apposite development, disputes over the prolific output of Buhle and his regular collaborators have almost become a sub-genre of Hollywood historical controversies, attracting allegations of bias and sloppy scholarship while suggesting somewhere his work may have may have a nerve.)

Emerging from this extensive workload is a practical volume designed to sit by the television and assist individual decisions about what to watch and when to hit the 'record' button. While the back-story of this book is its mode of production – as an offshoot of other works – the subsequent 'polish' makes it more useful. Wisely, the authors avoid a 'greatest hits' approach to their topic. Such obvious works as *Mission to Moscow* (Michael Curtiz, 1943) – 'the all-time stinker of apologies-for-Stalinism films' (150) – and *Salt of the Earth* – 'the grand film project of the blacklist' (192) are included. But these are accompanied by a wide range of movies, from the obscure to the downright bizarre. While the listings format reminds us of the extent to which *film noir* was the staple genre of left-wing writers, directors and actors, everything connected to the period is under scrutiny, from the cheap westerns and serials where cultural workers served their apprenticeships to relatively recent movies like *Guilty By Suspicion* (Irwin Winkler, 1991), drawing on the talents of blacklist-era survivors.

The criteria for inclusion in the volume are simple: were key personnel blacklisted or 'friendly witnesses', or both? An affirmative answer in either category adds a film to the guide. This applies equally to 'classics' and long-forgotten relics alike; most titles include indicative credits, in the style of a *Halliwells*-type film guide, followed by information arranged in a useful format: plot summaries of varying brevity, a biographical synopsis of how the role played by the relevant blacklistee(s) or informers, and an aesthetic assessment of how well a particular movie works. Pithy and often merciless, despite the political sympathies, Buhle and Wagner convey a clear sense of whether a viewer would be wasting her time and just what is retrievable of the left's cinematic legacy. Some of the reviews seem a little harsh, and occasionally the 'spoilers' are annoying as they give away too much plot. But these synopses also begin to modify the presentation of content in *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, by tracking how soft-edged political themes such as anti-consumerism recur time and again in the films associated with the Hollywood left.

Movies directed by Joseph Losey merit 29 entries in *Blacklisted*, around three quarters of his total output, including early public information films. Like many directors on the Hollywood left, he made his name with social commentary – *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948) – and a string of credible film noirs. So it's initially strange to find him featured as a Manchester University Press 'British director', until one considers the 21 years he spent working in the UK. Escaping the blacklist, he worked within a range of genres while continually subverting them. That, in essence, is where Colin Gardner's argument begins in this insightful and compact monograph. By the time Gardner closes, with Losey voluntarily tax-exiled from the UK, it's apparent that he transcended the limitations of genre cinema for something altogether more rounded and artistically satisfying.

Statements excerpted from the director's interviews tend to suggest that his take on the issues of the day, including questions of film form and content, tended to reflect the political outlook that took shape in the 1930s and ultimately contributed to his being blacklisted. Gardner tackles Losey's mature, post-'exile' work thematically, by outlining the ways he examined and re-examined class, power and war across a number of productions, many now in obscurity. He notes the recurrence of character archetypes and concerns, predicated on Losey's close collaboration with such actors as Stanley Baker and Dirk Bogarde. The director acquired a sense of the workings of social class in Britain, which was conveyed in a number of films, most notably *The Servant* (1963) and *Accident* (1967). Gardner tries to lay bare these strategies, but this discussion seldom proceeds in terms which Losey himself would recognise, all Derrida and harnessing 'the power of annihilating temporality' (177).

In short, through a series of close readings of Losey's oeuvre, Gardner goes some way to propelling Losey to the front ranks of European art house directors. He re-examines genre work as a source of rich, troubling and sometimes contradictory investigations of the modern condition. In the process, he also reminds us that the Hollywood left was the soil that nurtured the remarkable filmmaker Losey.