# Variety International Film Guide 1999

By Peter Cowie (ed.)
London: Faber and Faber, 1998, ISBN 0-571-19411-7. 416 pp + illustration. £14.99

## A review by Robert McMinn, University of Nottingham, UK

This is *Variety*'s annual snapshot of the state of the world-wide film industry, coupled with lists of useful addresses and references for national film archives, festivals, and the like.

Its survey does its best to be as international as possible, with sections dedicated to 71 national industries, from Algeria to Zimbabwe. Each section is written by someone with local knowledge and local concerns, though inevitably a recurring theme is how the national industry suffers in comparison to the runaway success of the multiplex American film. So, in the United Kingdom the complaint (by Philip Kemp) is that successful films like *The Full Monty* and *Bean* are made with American money, while in Australia, we learn, local product doesn't get distribution outside large urban centres.

One only needs to turn to the "World Box-Office Survey" section to see the evidence. If you could go back a couple of years and grab a small percentage point of just one film, it would be *Men in Black*, which features in the top ten films of almost every country listed, a phenomenal international success. The most successful British product, on this evidence, is not *The Full Monty* but *Bean*, showing that the almost-silent slapstick face-pulling comedy of Rowan Atkinson goes down well in Finland, Croatia, and Serbia alike. It's astonishing to see that, with over 1 million admissions, *Bean* was by far the most popular film in the Netherlands in 1997, with the all-conquering *Men in Black* beaten into fourth place.

But for the film student dedicated to collating such information and comparing it to, say, the awards given out at prestigious national festivals, frustration ensues, because there seems to be no rhyme or reason to the listings. Thus, we get a run down of the 1998 Oscars and BAFTAs, but the 1997 European Film Awards and French Caesars. The Box-Office survey gives us 1997 figures for the most part, but leaks into the first half of 1998 for some countries. In other words, you need the Variety Guides for several years around the year in which you are interested.

Still, it's interesting to note that although more than 13 million German bottoms voted *Men in Black* and *Bean* the top two films of 1997, the German Film Award for "Best Film" went to *Comedian Harmonists* and "Best Foreign Film" was shared between *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*.

It's a fascinating insight into a cognoscenti that's hopelessly snobbish about the films the ignorant masses want to see and therefore hopeless at sustaining a viable national industry -- a fact then blamed on governments, multiplexes, distributors and Will Smith. And yet with India, Pakistan, and even Hong Kong (with six of its own films in its top ten AND *Face/Off*) able to produce local films successfully, it is clearly not impossible.

# Dissident Voices: The Politics of Television and Cultural Change

By Mike Wayne (ed.)
London: Pluto Press, 1998. ISBN: 0745313248. viii + 187pp.£40.00 (Hb) £ 12.99 (Pb)

## A review by Rita Lago, University of Stirling, UK

With *Dissident Voices*, Mike Wayne has successfully edited a compilation of challenging, thought provoking essays. Covering a broad range of themes, the book questions accepted notions of dissidence, popular culture and the contemporary role of television in society. In addition, it carefully examines the inter-relationship of the above elements and their impact upon television production, namely by looking at how a variety of genres and formats of popular television production engage, reflect and reproduce these themes. Such themes emerge from a multitude of academic and non-academic backgrounds, including media, cultural and film studies; documentary production, sport studies, popular fiction writing and scriptwriting amongst others.

This collection of essays critically examines and questions how certain forms and genres of popular television production have reflected and adapted to the galvanisation of constant institutional, social and structural change. Not only does this book carefully reflect the variety of imagery of relevant contemporary issues, such as class, gender and sexuality, questions of identity, nationhood and the monarchy, it also does this by observing an equally broad spectrum of television form, format and genre. Indeed, the book's own index mirrors a myriad of television programming, ranging from the factual *World in Action* and *Panorama*, to the fictional such as *The Bill* and *The Teletubbies*, travelling through comedy, documentary, film, but also programming which reflects public participation in television production, such as the *Video Diaries* and *You've Been Framed*.

In a collection of passionate debates, the book is permeated with the overall theme of attempting to establish, describe and characterise the ever-changing relationship between dissidence, hegemony and television, taking as a starting point the need to move away from the customarily polarised views of television as an hegemonic force and its underlying challenge to the status quo. Thus, the overall suggestion is that 'the relationship between dissidence and popular television is a shifting and complex terrain of possibilities and blockages, subversion and incorporation, successful articulation of dissidence and equally successful evisceration of such voices' (1).

Although a collection of essays, which Madeleine MacMurraugh-Kavanagh has suggested is a compelling reading for every student, academic, or anyone interested in contemporary television culture, it is nevertheless occasionally permeated by somewhat of an inaccessible style of language. Perhaps the greatest criticism of the book does not reside in its content or in its ideas, which are at times remarkable, but in its style of writing which is occasionally problematic. In a complex interplay of meaning, the book sometimes borders the somewhat rather formal and inaccessible field of academia. In a sense it is this same characteristic

which might at times discourage the reader from actually engaging and submerging in its truly fascinating and timely debates.

Furthermore, addressing the relationship between dissidence, hegemony and television programming and determining the extent and ways in which popular television programming challenge predominant views, this use of case studies has proved to be an ingenious attempt to address a rather difficult and abstract field of research. In a sense, it is in this particular form of analysis that the appeal of the book resides, in that the reader, in particular a student reader, can rapidly move from the theoretical debate to engage in a more practical examination of concepts, whilst still having a familiar object of study.

At the same time, the absence of an overall concluding argument, re-addressing the questions that Mike Wayne raises in his introduction, appears to be the major absence in the book. In particular, since there is no such concept of a static form of popular television, nor is there a static form of societal, institutional and organisation influence upon it. Thus, this would have been an excellent opportunity to address the impact of the crisis upon popular television programming, currently emerging from the growing competition and pressure to succeed. Furthermore, Mike Wayne and his fellow contributors could perhaps have also taken the opportunity in a concluding comment to re-address the changing role of popular television and the threats it faces as an institution in British culture and society. In a sense, it is this absence that gives the book a sense of incompleteness.

Overall, perhaps the most exciting element of Wayne's book is that, whilst challenging notions of dissidence, the relationship between dissidence, popular television and the overall institutional impact upon one of the most popular forms of contemporary info-tainment, it also challenges our own beliefs of right and wrong, of inclusion and exclusion and above all, the role of popular television in contemporary culture and society.

# The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era

By Thomas Schatz
London: Faber and Faber, 1998. xiv + 514 pp., 93 illustrations, £14.99 (soft)

## A review by Christofer Meissner, University of Kansas

The Hollywood studio system has been alternately the bane and the boon of contemporary film studies. Many contemporary scholars have used the studio system as an adversary, but one strain of film history has recognized that the studio system offers an abundance of understanding regarding cinematic art, business and organizational dynamics, and American culture during its nearly forty-year existence. Thomas Schatz's book The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era falls firmly into this latter category.

Schatz examines the business and production operations at four of Hollywood's studios: Universal, Warner Bros., MGM, and the various production concerns of David O. Selznick. Schatz's methodological interest is in examining how these studios "worked" in terms of production operations, marketing and sales strategies, and management structure. Schatz justifies limiting his study to four studios in terms of simple efficacy: "looking at one studio cannot convey the richness and diversity of Hollywood filmmaking, while looking closely at them all in a single volume would be impossible due to the mass of information involved" (9). The limitation does not hinder but rather enhances Schatz's analysis. The choice to include and emphasize Selznick is particularly interesting and, in the context of the book's examination of the studio system, enlightening. Because Selznick actually worked at several other studios (including MGM, Paramount, and RKO), the story of his career within the studio system serves both as a professional biography of a studio-era executive and an example of independent production which existed in strict symbiosis with the industrial matrix from which it was supposedly "independent."

Although it causes a certain distortion in the portrait of studio-era Hollywood that he is trying to create, Schatz's focus on these four studios allows for a relatively fine-grained and highly coherent industrial history. Besides Selznick, the "professional biographies" of a number of other notable Hollywood personages are emphasized: Irving Thalberg, whose rise from "boy wonder" at Universal to ailing and embattled production chief at MGM is chronicled; Daryl Zanuck, whose early career at Warner Bros. is highlighted; and Alfred Hitchcock, whose Hollywood career is documented from his early association with Selznick through his free-lance status in the 1950s and his decline in the 1960s. Additionally, dozens of smaller-scale accounts of filmmakers' and actors' careers are used to demonstrate the workings of the studio system: Bette Davis, Erich von Stroheim, Ingrid Bergman, Humphrey Bogart, Abbott and Costello, James Cagney, Joan Crawford, Deanna Durbin, Paul Muni, and Katharine Hepburn, as well as Ben Hecht, Mervyn LeRoy, Dore Schary, Walter Wanger, and producers Henry Blanke, Hunt Stromberg, and Arthur Freed are all given this type of treatment. Schatz also provides -- in the intricate industrial context in which they were made -- detailed production

histories for films such as Grand Hotel, I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, The Life of Emile Zola, Jezebel, Meet Me in St. Louis, and Mildred Pierce.

As a result of his reliance on industrial papers -- used in perhaps unprecedented fashion and including memos, correspondence, budgets, schedules, story conference notes, daily production reports, and censorship files -- Schatz's narrative includes many types of figures and information that are not generally found in studio-era histories. Heavily emphasized are film budgets; although accounts of current Hollywood filmmaking are rife with budgetary references, studio-era accounts less frequently seem to acknowledge the budgetary dynamics of filmmaking in that period. For example, Schatz emphasizes that the budget for Jezebel climbed from $783,000 to $1,073,000 as it fell five weeks behind schedule (225) and that half the budget of Meet Me in St. Louis consisted of sets and music (budgeted at $497,000 and $234,000 respectively) (374).

Two key phrases which serve as guideposts for Schatz's project are "the genius of the system" and "the whole equation of pictures." The first phrase, of course, is the title of Schatz's book and comes from critic-theorist Andre Bazin, who in 1957 said, "The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e., not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system" (8). Schatz uses the phrase primarily as the guiding principle around which his work is oriented: he is interested in examining not specific individuals or studios but the unique social, cultural, economic, aesthetic, and industrial system which was studio-era Hollywood. The second phrase is from F. Scott Fitzgerald, who said, "[Hollywood] can be understood ... but only dimly and in flashes. Not a half dozen men have been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads" (8). If "the genius of the system" describes Schatz's object, he appropriates this second phrase as his objective: to calculate the whole equation of pictures as best he can from the reams of industry documents available to him.

Schatz achieves his objective remarkably well but with one glaring historiographical deficiency. In utilizing the wealth of industrial documents to create an analysis of the Hollywood studio system, Schatz chose not to employ a rigorous method of citing his sources directly. The result is a dense narrative of the workings of the studio system that has no footnotes or endnotes, no way of accessing the nature of the information used to construct the story. Schatz defends his lack of notes and citations by saying that "precise and detailes notes on sources ... would be unwieldy and utterly impractical" (497). He further defends the lack of documentation and its presumed impracticality by claiming that it would add a hundred pages to the text; Schatz fails to recognize that by omitting any detailed documentation, he renders his otherwise remarkable text impractical in different ways, especially to historians who are interested in examining his text historiographically.

Despite this one glaring deficiency, Thomas Schatz's The Genius of the System is an eminently useful and eminently entertaining film history. By providing such a finely detailed account of the Hollywood studio system, Schatz not only tames the adversary that some scholars would like to confront, he offers even more avenues of potential research for those scholars who aim to understand.

# Hollywood Diva: A Biography of Jeanette MacDonald

By Edward Baron Turk
University of Califonia Press, 1998. ISBN: 0520212029. xix + 467 pp., 60 illustrations. £11.95 (pbk)

## A review by Eva Nunez, University of Houston, USA

Now is the time for a complete biography of Jeanette MacDonald and Edward Turk has successfully answered that call. Turk shows us the real diva through a professional, well-written biography that by no means disappoints the curious reader - and that certainly will satisfy MacDonald's most fervent fans.

Turk's organization of the book is clear and sensible. He works chronologically, narrating from Jeanette's first days of life to her final days as a Hollywood star. The book is divided into four parts. The first part, "Born to Sing", covers Jeanette's childhood until her father's death in 1924, when she was twenty-one years old. Born in West Philadelphia in 1903 of parents Daniel MacDonald and Anna May Wright, she was the youngest of three sisters. At age five and a half, Jeanette gave her first major public performance -- in *Charity*, a juvenile opera to benefit Philadelphia's Samaritan Hospital -- which as she later confessed, marked her for life. She grew up with the conviction that what she most wanted in life was to entertain others with her voice. Her first job was on Broadway in the Capitol Theater's chorus when she was seventeen. Years later, she met Jack Ohmeis, a New York University architecture student, who became her first serious pretender and eventually proposed, but the marriage never happened.

In part two, "A Fair Princess on Broadway", Turk reveals in MacDonald a newfound celebrity on her way to fame and success through the musical stage, not only in America but also in Europe. In 1926, with *Yes, Yes, Yvette*, better contracts arrived, but Jeanette was still not considered a genuine star on Broadway. In 1928, she met Robert G. Ritchie who became her long-term fiancé, personal business manager and devoted friend for years. By 1929, at age twenty-five, Jeanette MacDonald was a ten-year veteran of musical comedies and had become a true Broadway star. At this junction she made the leap into motion pictures with director Ernst Lubitsch to play opposite Maurice Chevalier in *Love Parade*. With this romantic operetta, MacDonald won the approval of Hollywood's royalty and her red hair and green eyes began to appear in movies such as *Monte Carlo*, *The Vagabond King*, *Let's Go Native*, *Oh, for a Man!*, *One Hour with You*, *Love me Tonight*, *The Cat and the Fiddle*, and *The Merry Widow*. Her first movies clinched her reputation as "Lingerie Queen of the Talkies" which demonstrates that the public was more susceptible to her sensuality than to her vocal charms.

Turk opens part three, "Hollywood Diva", with the pairing of MacDonald with Nelson Eddy in *Naughty Marietta*. Until then, Jeanette was associated on screen with the Lubitsch-Chevalier combination. Now it was the MacDonald-Eddy partnership that captivated the

public with eight movies including *Rose Marie*, *Maytime*, *Sweethearts*, *Bitter Sweet* and *I Married an Angel*. With *San Francisco* (1936, six Academy nominations) MacDonald became virtually unassailable and the press lauded her as the most versatile singing actress in movies. In 1935, Jeanette met Gene Raymond whom she married in 1937. Turk explains that this was the most eventful year in the life of the "Iron Butterfly" -- simultaneously with her film commitments came radio broadcasts, recordings, public appearances, singing lessons and the planning of her wedding! By 1939, when Hitler was invading Poland, she was making $10,000 a week shooting two pictures a year. During these years, Jeanette's increasing identification with opera and art songs began to alienate her from audiences with more down-to-earth tastes.

The final section of the book, "Echoes of Sweet Song", starts with MacDonald's opera career. Her debut as Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette* took place in Montreal in 1943. Turk explains that, although the Canadian tour was a success, it was a financial bust; MacDonald herself had to finance it. Her next opera was Gounod's *Faust* with Chicago Opera Company. After this performance MacDonald decided to abandon the opera world -- "it takes too much time and hard work" she later declared -- and concentrate on concertizing. However, she went back to movie-making with *Three Daring Daughters* (1946) and sang her last song on-screen in *The Sun Comes Up* (1949). By the mid 1950s, her health was tottering and she was diagnosed with valvulitis, a rheumatic heart disease. Although MacDonald never stopped thriving on live contact with the public, her deteriorating health forced her in March 1960 to cancel all plans for travel and public appearances. Jeanette MacDonald died on January 12, 1965 in Houston just before scheduled open-heart surgery.

The book concludes with a detailed list of MacDonald's stage work, films and recordings.

Turk confesses in the preface that he has been a great admirer of MacDonald for the last eighteen years. That adulation can be deduced from these pages as the star figure is rarely criticized or censured; and when she is, Turk is quick with justifications and excuses. He clearly idolizes her. Turk's Jeanette represents the perfect career woman -- she had beauty, grace, gallantry, intelligence, humor, honesty, dignity and femininity. All these qualities never appear diminished in the book and make the reader question whether MacDonald could truly have been so pristine. Still, *Hollywood Diva* is a sober, respectful book which reveals the "Iron Butterfly" as a fascinating diva and an entertainer mass marketed through many media: stage, screen, radio, concert halls, opera houses, Las Vegas saloons and television. Turk succeeds in placing MacDonald within the wider story of the performing arts in America and in returning her many achievements to their rightful place in the history of music and motion pictures. This biography views an important part of twentieth-century American heritage from a sweetly lyric perspective.

# Weirdsville USA: The Obsessive Universe of David Lynch

By Paul A. Woods
London: Plexus, 1997. ISBN: 0859652556. 192 pp., £12.99 (soft)
King Pulp: The Wild World of Quentin Tarantino By Paul A. Woods

## King Pulp: The Wild World of Quentin Tarantino

**By Paul A. Woods**

**London: Plexus, 1998. ISBN: 085965270X. 208 pp., £12.99 (soft)**

## A review by Paul Giles, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University

Both of these books by Paul A. Woods are carefully designed to appeal to popular as well as to academic audiences. Each of them is written in a bright and breezy style, with short paragraphs and lavish illustrations. They both dispense with footnotes, though the book on Tarantino substitutes a series of boxed inserts to provide the reader with further information on various relevant aspects of film history - *The Wild Bunch*, Harvey Keitel, Blaxploitation and so on. Both books also rely heavily on résumés of the films under consideration as well as on anecdotal observations from actors and friends. While production wrangles are recounted at some length, the overall effect of this kind of critical narrative remains biographical rather than analytical, so that Tarantino's films, for example, are seen as a trial for him personally rather than as exemplifying the dilemmas of cultural production in late-twentieth-century America.

*King Pulp*, then, does scant justice to the idiosyncratic brilliance of Tarantino's films precisely because it focusses, in its rather geekish way, upon the "wild world" of the man himself. Woods quotes reviews of *Reservoir Dogs* from Julie Burchill and *Screen International*, and seems to offer these ill-considered opinions as serious analysis of the film. This is not to suggest that Woods's own views are simplistic or reductive. He makes some interesting remarks about how Pulp Fiction plays "subversive games with a cherished movie genre" (119), for example, but shies away from following up this perception, as if aware of a pressure from the publishers to stick with what is more obvious and accessible. Consequently, this book will be most useful for the academic community as a sourcebook, a collection of information about the contexts of Tarantino's filmmaking. Judged in this light, the book works quite well. It is interesting to know about the details of Tarantino's rows with Oliver Stone over the violence in *Natural Born Killers*, and with Spike Lee over the use of the word "nigger" in *Jackie Brown*. It is also helpful to hear Tarantino's views on a range of other film directors, from Jean-Luc Godard to Samuel Fuller. *King Pulp* puts together this

biographical pot-pourri efficiently enough and, as such, it will be an asset to scholars, while managing not to alienate those who might prefer to look at its splendid colour photographs of John Travolta and Uma Thurman.

Though of the same genre, *Weirdsville USA* comes across as a more satisfying book, partly because the cultural milieux of Lynch's projects are more various and interesting than those of Tarantino, even if his finished products are generally not so compelling. Woods traces Lynch's progress through childhood in Montana and youth in Eisenhower's America through to his "moving painting" experiments in art school during the 1960s. Lynch's continuing interests in multimedia-his exhibition of paintings at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1989, his book of photographs focussing on fragments of the human body and his "baroque opera" composed in collaboration with Angelo Badalamenti-provide an empirical counterpart to many of the formal experiments in his better-known features: the subordination of dialogue to imagery in *Eraserhead*, for example, or the eerie use of sound in the *Twin Peaks* projects. Woods's contextual approach, therefore, opens up Lynch's work in a way that he never quite manages with Tarantino. Again, there are plenty of simple plot summaries here, but also provocative references to Beckett, Goya and Francis Bacon, as Woods seeks to elaborate his thesis of Lynch as "mainstream pop culture's only respected artist of the perverse" (147). The author writes interestingly about the controversial representation of sexuality in these films, including a balanced discussion of the erotic violence in *Blue Velvet*, though he also notes sympathetically Lara Flynn Boyle's refusal to appear in *Fire Walk With Me*, the "prequel" to *Twin Peaks*, because of her concern that the director was implicitly glamorizing incest and sexual abuse. Lynch, for his part, abhors what he sees as politically correct generalizations about "women" or "the American dream," preferring to situate his work within a more ambiguous realm where illicit phenomena appear attractive and repulsive in equal measure.

Woods's critical readings of the various forms of incoherence within Lynch's texts are often very perceptive. He discusses the disorienting use of irrelevant close-ups in *Twin Peaks*, for instance, and makes a good case for *Fire Walk With Me* as a "vastly underrated" film (150), particularly by comparison with the more predictable, and therefore more popular, Wild at Heart. He also argues convincingly that the paranormal themes in *Twin Peaks* helped to generate television's subsequent obsession with paranoia and the occult which culminated in the huge success of *The X Files*. Only in his final discussion of the 1997 film, L*ost Highway*, does he seem to lapse back into the catalogue of names and production anecdotes that characterizes the more journalistic style of King Pulp.

In both of these books, then, Woods presents himself as a diligent chronicler of information and, when he gives himself enough time and space, a perceptive film critic. Both of these volumes are reasonably priced, and they should appeal widely to the broad market at which they are obviously aimed. The Lynch book is better researched and more intellectually coherent, even if the Tarantino book has the glossier pictures and the sharper production values.

# The Language of Cinema

By Kevin Jackson
Manchester: Caranet Press, 1998. ISBN: 1857542320. 290pp. £12.95 (soft)

## A review by Andy Willis, University of Salford

*The Language of Cinema* by Kevin Jackson is designed to provide short, simple definitions of the terms and terminology associated with the cinema. As such, it is a useful resource for the enthusiastic cinemagoer. However, how useful the text is beyond that audience is questionable. Certainly, the volume would not provide the sort of detail film or media students may need in relation to their academic courses, but then this may not be its aim.

The definitions that are contained within this book are for the most part short and clear. For example, 'ashcan', it informs us, is a type of floodlight. The choice of words to include seems to favour industrial terms rather than those that may be found in more academic contexts. Those that do appear to come from a more critical perspective tend to be well-known, even crossover, terms such as 'Auteur', 'Film Noir' and 'Genre', and some terms that are included seem to be simplified for the purpose of the volume. So for example, the entry for 'Blaxploitation' states that *Shaft* is one of the most well known films of this type. However, the inclusion of this studio picture, directed by the well-respected photographer Gordon Parks, is often a source of debate within discussions of what constitutes a blaxploitation picture. The entry for 'Blaxploitation' also wrongly informs the reader that another well-known 1970s film, *Superfly*, was also directed by Parks whereas, in fact, it was directed by his son, Gordon Parks Jnr. A more academically focused volume may have found the space to enter into these debates, even if only in a limited way.

Indeed, for academic purposes Susan Hayward's *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* and O'Sullivan et. al. *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies* (both Routledge) offer more in depth and critically informed definitions of terms. Jackson's book however, does seem to achieve what it sets out to do - that is provide short and accessible definitions of words originating from or associated with the cinema. The cover of the book states that 'it offers a history of each major word, showing how it came into being', This certainly would be overstating the books purpose and ambition. It certainly cannot compare with the benchmark text for such an approach, Raymond Williams' *Key Words* (Fontana), as most of its entries lack his rigorous examination.

One other major criticism I have of the choices of entry within *The Language of Cinema* is that they seem to fall back on accepted notions of what thinking about cinema might involve. In a sense, it supports rather old-fashioned views of a critical perspective on cinema. Therefore, the entries for terms such as 'exploitation' and 'Bollywood' would seem to demand further exploration and consideration. Jackson also chooses to offer further reading at moments; whilst of course this is useful, the choices of when and where to direct readers seems a little arbitrary. Hence Christopher Frayling's *Spaghetti Westerns* and Kim Newman's *Nightmare Movies* (in relation to 'splatter film') are suggested, but no titles are put forward in relation to, for example, 'stars' or the 'star system'.

# A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies

By Martin Scorsese and Michael Henry Wilson
London: Faber, 1997. ISBN: 0571192424. 191pp., 135 Illustrations £20 (hard)

## A review by Peter Hutchings, Northumbria University

*A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* opens with a quote from American film director Frank Capra: 'Film is a disease. When it infects your bloodstream, it takes over as the number one hormone; it bosses the enzymes; directs the pineal gland; plays Iago to your psyche. As with heroin, the antidote to film is more film.' As metaphorical statements go, this is a particularly incoherent one; diseases generally don't take over as hormones or boss enzymes and heroin addiction is not usually seen as a disease. (In addition, the idea that the antidote to heroine addiction is more heroin is, to put it mildly, problematic.) However, it is obviously not meant metaphorically here but instead functions as an expression of cinephilia comparable to Sam Fuller's well known view of cinema as being like a battlefield (which is also quoted in the book). For a cinephile, cinema is more than just an entertainment medium, more even than an art form; it is a passion and an obsession, something which demands a rapt, quasi-religious response from the worshipful spectator. In seeking to communicate this experience, cinephile writings often adopt an appropriately epiphanic, revelatory tone. By installing the Capra quote at the start of the book, Scorsese, along with his collaborator Michael Henry Wilson, nails his cinephile colours to the mast. This is not going to be a straightforward potted history of American film; as the book's title indicates, it will be much more partial and more subjective. At the same time, Scorsese brings a certain authority to the book, not only as one of the most distinguished American filmmakers of his generation but also as someone who possesses an impressively detailed awareness of film history and film aesthetics.

The resulting book - based on the television series of the same name - focuses almost entirely on the figure of the director as the source of artistic value (and cinephile surplus value) in the Hollywood system - the director seen variously as a storyteller, an illusionist, a smuggler and an iconoclast. Clearly what is in play here is a very romantic notion of artistic creativity with the artist-director standing in opposition to, and sometimes working subversively within, a philistine, capitalist institution. The limitations of this model of film authorship are well-known, particularly its failure to address film production as a collaborative process (although Scorsese does include a brief discussion of cinematographers) and its inability to see Hollywood itself as a system capable of producing works of cultural and artistic merit (the 'genius of the system' to use André Bazin's term).

Yet when confronted with such a well-informed, enthusiastic and downright pleasurable book, to make the standard criticisms somehow seems rather churlish (although, I think, such criticisms still need to be registered). Ultimately there is something very old-fashioned about *A Personal Journey*, not only in its adherence to an auteurist method long since superseded in academic film studies but also in the model of film spectatorship it offers. The book speaks of

Scorsese's lifelong fascination with cinema - beginning in true cinephile style with a revelatory encounter with King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* at the tender age of four - and his extensive movie-going activities; clearly Scorsese has seen just about everything. This essentially cinephile way of experiencing movies, of obsessively viewing as many as possible in search of that magic 'something' which is cinema, is most visible generally as an activity in Western culture in the 1950s and 1960s, precisely when Scorsese (born in 1942) is growing up. Its more tangible products include the influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* and the French New Wave as well as the generation of American filmmakers (including Scorsese himself) who come to professional maturity in the 1970s.

It could be argued that this cinephile experience of cinema - which was largely dependent on regular visits to repertory cinemas - is no longer a viable one. Now that cinema itself has become dispersed across a range of media and formats - television (terrestrial, satellite, cable, digital, premium channels, pay per view), video (rental, retail, widescreen versions, director's cut), DVD - to the extent that it can be thought of as multiply accessible, the sense of an originating moment when in the dark of a cinema auditorium a rapt cinephile can experience film in its purely cinematic state has more or less disappeared.

In this sense, *A Personal Journey* can be seen as a nostalgic project, nostalgic not only for a certain type of cinema - classical Hollywood - but also for a particularly intense spectatorial involvement with the filmic medium. One dictionary definition of nostalgia reads 'homesickness as a disease' and on a certain level *A Personal Journey* is 'homesick', although in this instance home figures as a lost object accessible only via memories of filmgoing. Hence the sense of loss and of elegy that permeates Scorsese's journey through cinema. It is interesting in this respect that near the beginning of the book, Scorsese mentions how as a boy he was so fascinated by a library book containing film stills that he actually stole some of the stills. It is unimaginable that someone as cineliterate as Scorsese would be unaware of the equivalent scene in Truffaut's *Day for Night* where a boy who will grow up to be a film director steals stills of *Citizen Kane* from a cinema. In each case, cinephilia is presented as childlike in its adoration of the medium, anti-social to the point of criminality and, at the same time, as a furtive act of worship. ( A useful comparison here would be with the 'postmodern' spectatorship offered by self-professed film geek Quentin Tarantino for whom cinema history appears to be not unlike the video store in which he used to work.) *A Personal Journey* genuflects impressively in the church of cinema. It is handsomely illustrated (with stolen stills?) and contains a number of fascinating insights into particular films. But it is also a rather sad book, aware as it appears to be that the desire for cinema that it celebrates is no longer a significant feature in our culture.

# Postmodern Cartographies

By Brian Jarvis
London: Pluto Press, 1998, ISBN 0-7453-1285-3. 216pp. £13.99 (soft), £40.00 (hard)

## A review by James Lyons, University of Nottingham

The elucidatory subtitle of Brian Jarvis's *Postmodern Cartographies* is "the geographical imagination in contemporary American culture." Jarvis's stated aim is to "establish whether there is an essential continuity" across the history of the American geographical imagination, or "whether postmodern mappings constitute a decisive break with previous traditions" (6). After taking the reader on a brisk orientation trip through Puritan theology, past Frederick Jackson Turner and on to *The Great Gatsby*, Jarvis makes a persuasive case for the essential continuity between postmodern cartography and previous phases, with their shared obsession with reading the landscape, textualised spatiality, and recourse to dystopian and utopian extremes.

The book's first section is a re-examination of some of postmodern cartography's heavy-hitters - in the right corner; Daniel Bell, Marshall McLuhan, and Jean Baudrillard, in the left; Frederick Jameson, David Harvey and Edward Soja. Both groups are taken to task for selective mappings of postmodern America - eliding issues of gender and race in broad theoretical brush strokes that, Jarvis argues "tend to obscure critical details and differences." (46) For Jarvis, Mike Davis stands out as a cartographer who manages to combine a mapping of both macro and micro geographical processes, and he takes Davis's concern with the "dialectical relations of power and resistance" (48) as a model for the rest of the book's concern with what he characterises as paradigmatic postmodern works of fiction and film.

The book's interrogation of postmodernism's "usual suspects" is essential for setting the theoretical co-ordinates for the journey through contemporary fiction and film the author wishes us to take. Yet in subsequently mapping out the terrain of postmodern cartography, Jarvis does take us to some rather familiar landmarks; Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster, and Toni Morrison on the literary tour, *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *Alien* and the work of David Lynch on the film set. What Jarvis shows us when we get there is overwhelmingly excellent - sharp appraisals of the varying effectiveness of postmodern fictions in undermining, problematising or affirming the hegemony of the post-industrial mappings of Bell, Baudrillard, et al. In particular, the chapter on Paul Auster is astute in plumbing the depthlessness of *The New York Trilogy*, as is the detailed examination of the obsession with "mappings of the body" prevalent in postmodern culture, and especially in Sci Fi movies.

Yet there is a sense that it would be interesting if we could get off the beaten track a little - Jarvis's stated aim is to recognise "the significant omissions that are present in all cartographies," (193) yet his own map of postmodern culture is one marked with all the obvious places of interest. It is also interesting to see who gets valorised as cartographers - auteurs Lynch, Cronenberg and Ridley Scott are picked out, whilst James Cameron is missing from the discussion of the *Terminator* movies. Overall, *Postmodern Cartographies* presents a sharp, engaging and thoroughly readable re-consideration of issues of spatial representation

in contemporary culture, if, in line with a recent conference at University College Dublin on "The Cinema and the City," showing how hard it is when travelling through the postmodern landscape, not to get off at the stop marked *Blade Runner*.

# Pulping Fictions: Consuming Literature across the Literature / Media Divide

By Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.)
London: Pluto Press, 1996. ISBN: 0745310702. vi + 160 pp. £10.99 (soft)

## A review by E J M Duggan, Suffolk College and UEA

Novel-film adaptation is hardly a burgeoning area, more a trickle than a flow (cf the 1990s Cultural Studies publishing boom). A handful of the most recent publications spans the entire decade: Robert Giddings, et al, *Screening the Novel* (1990); Peter Reynolds, *Novel Images* (1993); and Brian MacFarlane, *Novel to Film* (1996). *Pulping Fictions*, edited by Cartmell, et al, is then a welcome addition to the corpus, the more so as it is the first volume in Pluto's new Film/Fiction series.

Cartmell, et al's brief introduction is partly a rationale for the series, partly a resume of this original collection of essays. The introduction sets the tone for both series and volume: the 'original' novel text or the 'literary classic' is not afforded primacy over the film text, rather the tension between literary production and media consumption provides the terrain to be explored.

In 'Film Adaptation and the Mystery of the Original', John O. Thompson discusses George Sluizer's two adaptations of Tim Krabbes' *The Golden Egg*, the 1988 Dutch/French *Spoorloos* (aka *The Vanishing*) and the 1993 American The Vanishing. Thompson discusses adaptation in terms of what he calls 'concretisation'-the imaginable or signified of the literary text and the 'something that can be filmed'-the filmic signifier-mounting a fascinating, idiosyncratic argument for adaptation-as-allegory, as a precaution-against-loss which, ultimately, is rather sad.

Ken Gelder continues the theme of adaptation-and-loss in 'The Vampire Writes Back', discussing the 'un-dead' author of *Interview with the Vampire* in terms of the loss-or fear of the loss-of authorship. Anne Rice's histrionic relationship to the film seeks to re-negotiate the 'lost' authorial position in relation to Tom Cruise's portrayal of Lestat, and in relation to Neil Jordan's direction and script.

In her 1926 essay 'The Cinema', Virginia Woolf describes the relationship between film and literature as 'unnatural'. Nicola Shaughnessy's discussion of *Orlando* begins with an epigramattical quote from Woolfe's essay, evoking a masculinised notion of ('immensly rapacious') film and a feminised literature (film's 'unfortunate victim'). For Shaugnessy, however, the relationship between Woolf's *Orlando* and Sally Potter's *Orlando* is not as distressing for the literary text as Woolf's essay anticipates. For Shaughnessy, Potter's *Orlando* is not so much a queer film (Shaughnessy doesn't use the term) as one which plays with gender identity in a way which allows for the relationship between film and novel to be 'one of mutual sexual exchange', as well as a form of 'giv[ing] birth' (44).

Heidi Kaye offers an insightful critique of Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. While the title asserts a relationship (implies a fidelity) between film and novel, it also negotiates the obstacle of Universal's copyright of the title of James Whale's 1931 film. Kaye argues that, despite its title, Branagh's film is 'about' the conditions of its own production: it is not only 'a Kenneth Branagh film', but also a 'serious' adaptation, albeit one which seeks to assert Branagh's own author-ity over others, for it is also, of course, 'Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*'. With Branagh's directorial and scriptorial interventions it is a film of and for the 1990s-a working through of 1990's ideas about motherhood-as well as a film 'of' and 'about' Mary Shelley's life and novel.

Jenny Rice and Carol Saunders' essay, 'Consuming *Middlemarch*', considers the BBC adaptation as one of a range of experiences to be consumed, along with, for example, videos, weekend breaks to Stamford, and such like. This rather pessimistic view of consumption, refracted through Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, sees the consumption of nostalgia as a sign of an economy in decline, and suggests that the construction and consumption of nostalgia serves to divert attention away from the present, therby preventing critical appraisal.

Catherine Neale discusses 'gaps and silences' in the reception of Angela Carter's work which, for Neale, is polarised as 'hagiography' and 'sympathetic explication' (99). One of the 'potential contradictions' (99) identified by Neale is the way Carter simultaneously celebrates folk literature's 'anonymity' while exploiting her own authorial position for pecuniary gain. Neale implies that Carter 'sold out' to crass commercialism as she reminds us 'anything was to be done "to make money"' (108), a sentiment echoed in Uncle Phillip's assertion in *The Magic Toyshop* that 'entertainment must now always be paid for' (102). Ultimately, for Neale, Carter's adaptations are 'curiously downbeat hybrids' (101) which suggest that Carter's 'strengths and interests lay in the sphere of the written word, and not in [...] film' (107).

I. Q. Hunter locates *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* in the 'Dumb White Guy' cycle which emerged during the late 1980s (other examples include *Wayne's World*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Beavis and Butthead*). Hunter identifies typical aspects of the criticism the film received on its release: castigated for its celebration of 'dumbness' and 'trash culture', and its attack on 'respectability' and 'intellectualism'. Hunter argues however that the 'dumb white guy' movies can be seen as a working through of the contradictions of what Fukiyama called 'the end of history'. Hunter elaborates: 'the dumb white guys are the shock troops of the end of history, who benevolently further the spread of consumerism by trashing morality, high culture and taste' (113). Hunter suggests *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* is the 'utopian counterpart' to the dystopianism of *Blade Runner*. Ultimately, however, Bill and Ted offer more than a simple utopian vision, as Hunter identifies within the film 'fragments of other, more critical perspectives' (121).

In his essay, '*Robin Hood, Men in Tights*: Fitting the Tradition snugly', Stephen Knight seeks to recuperate Mel Brooks's film, castigated by reviewers as low-brow farce, by identifying its setting, borrowings, and irreverant, transgressive humour as typical elements in the Robin Hood tradition.

Peter and Will Brooker's essay, 'Pulpmodernism: Tarantino's Affirmitive Action', finds some common ground among some apparently contrasting critical views of Tarantino's 'cinema of viscera'. For the Brookers, this common ground consitiutes something of a consensus: Tarantino's films are 'empty of social and moral content' (137). They argue, however, that *Resevoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* explore relationships and identity despite-because of-the use

of stereotypical characters and plot situations. Violence and postmodernity are also discussed in an essay which concludes that Tarantino 'give[s] new life to the familiar and conventional' (150).

The essays are linked: a theme in one essay is picked up-sometimes obliquely-in the next. For example, 'loss' links Thompson's essay to Gelder's; 'vampirism' links Gelder to Shaughnessy; 'motherhood' links Shaughnessy's essay to Kaye's, and so on. As these links are not discussed in the introduction, it may be they appear by chance rather than design.

Other links can be found between the essays. For example, Hunter's essay refers to Fukiyama's notion of 'the last man', a phrase which resonates with Carol Clover's figure of 'the final girl', discussed in Thompson's essay. Similarly Lorna Sage's anti-barthesian construction, 'the proliferation of the author', cited in Neale's discussion of Carter, is echoed in Gelder's term, the un-dead author. An image described by Kaye, Victor dancing with the Creaturess, is strikingly similar to Lestat's dancing with the corpse in *Interview with the Vampire*, decried by John Ezard as 'just about acceptable on the page [but degrading] in the cinema' (32). One wonders also how Bill and Ted might 'do' Stamford. While these links are not discussed in the essays, they might be fruitfully explored in the seminar room.

# The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910

By Richard Abel
Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1999. xix + 301pp
Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema Edited by John Fullerton

## Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema

**Edited by John Fullerton**

**Sydney: John Libbey and Company Pty Ltd, 1998. xvi + 288pp**

## A review by Lee Grieveson, University of Exeter

The last two decades have seen an intense interest in the study of early cinema. Much of this work has emerged from increased access to archival collections of films and other primary materials, coupled with a revisionist historiography that sought to challenge existing accounts of the emergence and development of cinema (principally readdressing the role of individual agents and moving beyond teleological assumptions). Some of the most intriguing work in the *Celebrating 1895* collection, alongside Richard Abel's important new book, seeks to push this project further on, interrogating the institutional power-structures underpinning the writing of film history and in turn revising, as it were, the revisionists.

This is perhaps most immediately apparent in William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson's intriguing essay 'Corruption, Criminality and the Nickelodeon' in the Fullerton collection. Uricchio and Pearson contend that what they call the period's 'archiving practices' - the selecting of records for preservation - was generated by institutions of social control and that these practices have strongly influenced subsequent historical accounts. 'Films historians relying upon this record', they claim, 'have perforce worked within the period's own interpretive framework' and have consequently ignored the perspective of marginalised social formations (83). This focus on the effect of 'archiving practices' on the writing of cinema history is visible more widely in some of the essays in the collection. Michael Harvey, the Curator of Cinematography at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, presents a fascinating overview of the history of the cinematographic collection from 1913 onwards, which emerged from out of the Science Museum that was set in place in 1883, showing how the institutional agenda centred on a 'nineteenth-century concept of technological progress which ignores social, economic or philosophical concerns' (7-8). Simon Popple's essay in the same collection shows how the museum's institutional remit worked to shape accounts of early British cinema that focused on technology and invention, which implicitly argued that technology developed in a logical and linear manner untouched by social and cultural context and in turn facilitated aesthetic developments. This institutional focus on the scientific context of cinema, it is worth noting, is broached in varying ways by

other essays in the collection. Alison Griffith's fascinating essay examines the efforts of the American Museum of Natural History to police the borders between science and spectacle in the reception of early ethnographic filmmaking; Richard Crangle's wonderfully titled 'Saturday Night at the X-Rays' shows how moving pictures, unlike X-rays, developed beyond their initial origins in scientific experimentation and novelty-spectacle to become a form of mass entertainment.

The status of research archives, and of broader archiving practices, emerges then as a central issue in a number of essays throughout the Fullerton collection. Thomas Elsaesser addresses this in his essay 'Early German Cinema: A Case for "Case Studies" or For "Recasting it All"?', suggesting that a focus on German (so-called) Expressionist cinema of the 1920s has had 'regrettable consequences', principally in the neglect of preservation and archiving which has rendered pre-1920s German cinema a 'blank spot on the map of early cinema' (265). Histories, it seems, have effects on archiving practices just as archiving practices have effects on histories. Insofar as any critical literature exists on this period, Elsaesser notes, it conceptualises film history mainly as the history of films, and 'the history of films as primarily that of their production, and the status as authored, self-contained, singular "works"' (265), and not on the broader questions that must preoccupy *cinema history* (questions about production certainly but also about exhibition and distribution in turn alongside questions emerging 'beyond the confines of the discipline' in, for example, work on the broader social and cultural transformations fundamental to modernity). Nicholas Hiley, in his essay '"At the Picture Palace": The British Cinema Audience, 1895-1920', also strongly argues for a refocusing of cinema history away from the focus on film texts (and 'cans in the archives' (102)) and towards the exhibition context and the effects of the desires of the cinema audience. 'Film history is not the history of a medium', Hiley contends, 'it is the story of how that medium was transformed by the intervention of a mass audience, with its own desires and demands' (to hear music, for example, to get warm, to gain privacy from families and so on (102)). These 'awkward, dirty and unruly' audiences have been ignored by historians focusing on film texts and on film art (102); Hiley's attempts to readdress those audiences mirrors Uricchio and Pearson's to readdress the experience of marginalized social formations in New York City.

This recent work on the terrain of early cinema thus interrogates the practices of cinema history and brings into focus a series of hitherto occluded histories. Richard Abel's outstanding book *The Red Rooster Scare* can also be sited in this context, for Abel elucidates the history of the dominance of French films on the American market prior to 1910 and makes a case for the importance of these films in determining 'what would become an "American" cinema' (xi). Aside from the main thrust of this argument, which I want to detail below, Abel presents his book as a 'textual experiment in how one "does history"' (xiv), structuring it 'like a vaudeville programme' by interrupting the chronological argument by a series of short 'entr'actes' that present issues relatively neglected in the study of early cinema (on trademarks, colour, the trade press, music) and also by reprinting a number of primary documents from newspapers, the trade press and reform discourses, and a number of graphic illustrations (xiv). The inclusion of these documents turns the book into a sort of archive in itself, making it analogous, Abel suggests, to 'a museum space or wonder cabinet' and, very simply, presenting scholars with material that can be difficult to access (xiv). It is apparent also that Abel's interest here in the discursive construction of cinema in the United States in the context of broader discourses of nationalism has effected a shift in his historical practice, away from the meticulous analysis of archive film prints that characterises his other books and towards a focus - and an equally meticulous one, given that the book has 99 pages of

notes! -- on the trade press, on newspaper and magazine articles about cinema, and on collections of documents relating to exhibition and distribution. This material is taken up in the context of a wider argument about the positioning of cinema in the contexts of modernity and discourses of nationalism: this is a cinema history that accords with Elsaesser's call for a looking beyond disciplinary boundaries and that operates in a productive dialogue with theoretical questions.

The central argument Abel presents looks like this. French films, and particularly the Melies 'spectaculars', generated interest in moving pictures on vaudeville programmes and fuelled the growing demand for story films from around 1903/1904 and the concomitant expansion of the American cinema market that accelerated during the 1903/1904 season. Alongside the growing commercial dominance of Pathe, then, French films 'provided the most significant condition of emergence for the nickelodeon' (cheap moving picture shows) from around 1905 (20); Pathe was the principal supplier of films to nickelodeons and, by fulfilling the basic economic imperatives of standardization and differentiation, the French company almost single-handedly assured the viability of the nickelodeons. The 'foreign bodies' of Pathe films, Abel thus contends, 'once played perhaps the determining role in the emergence of [American] cinema' (37). This dominance was challenged by American production companies and by the formation of various industrial combines from late 1907 onwards. Economic concerns were in turn combined with ideological anxieties about the effect of 'foreign' representations of social life and behaviour on the cinema's supposedly malleable spectators (recent immigrants in particular); the red rooster of Pathe (the company's trademark) was increasingly 'fenced in' in the context of an anxiety ridden nationalism and the discursive practices of 'Americanization'. There arose then around 1909 a concerted debate about what could be specific about American films compared with French films and this is the context, Abel suggests, that gave rise to the proliferation of early western films, which participated in a 'rejuvenated discourse of Americanization' that sought to privilege the '"Anglo-Saxon" (and the masculine)' as dominant in any conception of American national identity (152). Westerns functioned then to assert the primacy of 'a white male supremacy as the core of a new national identity' (159). By 1910 the dominance of Pathe had been curbed and there began the process of repositioning Pathe as a '"structuring absence"' in America's 'cultural memory' that still exists (179), Abel argues at the outset, in recent historical accounts of early American cinema.

The principal achievement of *The Red Rooster Scare* is that it shows clearly how the creation of American cinema was enmeshed with the broader discursive field of nationalism (a field addressed, it is worth noting, in different contexts in a number of pieces in the Fullerton collection: see in particular Karen J. Kenkel's excellent essay, which shows how the reform concern about cinema in Germany was enmeshed with nationalist concerns, and Andrew Higson's essay on early British heritage films and the attempted establishment of a sense of nationhood through cinema). The central argument of the book, that the viability of American cinema was both initially constituted by French filmmaking (in particular Pathe) and ultimately enabled by the marginalisation of Pathe, is undoubtedly of central importance to our understanding of early cinema generally. Nevertheless, there are moments when Abel's arguments about the importance of French films seem slightly overstated (for example, in the argument that French films constituted 'the single most significant condition of emergence' for the nickelodeon boom (20): important certainly, but is it possible to hierarchise the complex strands of causation here quite so simply?). This is perhaps an almost inevitable result of Abel's attempt to reinscribe the 'structuring absence' of French films in prevailing accounts of early American cinema. A different problem emerges though in Abel's argument

that the process of 'making cinema American' was at the same time a process of '"masculinizing" the cinema market' (171). Abel's practice of mapping discourses about nationalism and gender in this context is not entirely convincing (the writing itself seems to suggest this, for in this final chapter it becomes increasingly clogged with brackets that seek to juxtapose these two arguments). The genre of the western bears the weight of this argument but just how prominent and dominant was that genre? My sense is that cinema was constituted and created as a feminized cultural space, in line with the vaudeville traditions that Abel discusses, principally for economic reasons and in order to assuage regulatory concern. This was particularly prominent around 1909/1910, the years in which Abel perceives this process of 'masculinizination', in the main through an industrial and reform generated utilisation of the proto-feminist discourses of temperance to differentiate cinema from the homosocial space of the saloon. Different tendencies can of course co-exist but it is important to note that the creation of cinema as a feminized cultural space continued, as Gaylyn Studlar's work on the 1920s has suggested.

These comments are not meant to detract from the brilliance of Abel's book, which will undoubtedly become a central text in the study of early cinema and will be used and argued with over and over again (and not only in the study of early cinema, but by scholars interested in the relations between American and European cinema and in broader questions of nationalism and the media). Alongside the innovative essays in the *Celebrating 1895* collection that I have already discussed, and others such as Jan Olsson's wonderful essay on the status of the close-up in early Swedish cinema and Peter Kramer's fascinating piece on the broad cultural currency of the 'bad boy' genre, *The Red Rooster Scare* underscores the continuing vitality of work on this period of cinema history. Taken together, the two books suggest something of the challenges, pleasures and possibilities of working with - to paraphrase Foucault - a field of entangled and confused documents and films.

# Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film

By Clare Whatling
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. ISBN 07 19050677viii + 184pp., 8 illustrations

## A review by Jo Eadie, Staffordshire University

What is distinctive about the pleasures which lesbian viewers take in cinema ? What makes a film matter to its lesbian fans? Clare Whatling offers a selection of explorations into the attractions of a series of films, finding new ways to account for the attraction of canonical lesbian films such as *Desert Hearts* and *Salmonberries* (whose allure she ascribes partly to their cosily stereotypical treatments of race and class), via the thrill of bad girls (*Single White Female*, *The Hunger*), and on to the altogether more perverse pleasures of Meryl Streep. Her carefully theoretical work draws together the psychic dynamics, the political stakes, the cultural traditions and the personal yearnings which make these films matter.

Although much of the theoretical territory, and many of the analyses put forward, will be familiar to students in lesbian and/or feminist film studies, this is a scrupulous and self-reflexive argument, taking generous account of alternative positions, and swift to recognise its own possible shortcomings. It is quick to query the possibility of its own class and race biases; quick to note that the objects of lesbian desire might sometimes be men; quick to note that the academic reification of the lesbian gaze risks making heterosexuality seem untouched by queer longings. Perhaps in its eagerness to plug every loophole, it sacrifices some of its own sharpness - but it does so in the process of gaining a rich picture of the complexity of lesbian viewing experiences, and defining some of the key processes by which lesbian viewers take their pleasures: reclaiming the evil, mourning over the lost, constructing an invulnerable world of gossip, and hoping for a shag out of Jodie Foster.

A narrow minded empiricist might suggest that too many of these explanations for the appeal of the films in question remain persuasive but unproven. I may feel convinced by the claim that the very refusal of *Fried Green Tomatoes* to name its characters as lesbian, creates a privileged sense of 'insiderness' for lesbian viewers who decode the signs - but what would it take to confirm whether or not this is what actual audiences are doing? To some extent Whatling answers this objection by referencing the tastes and desires of other commentators on the films - although I couldn't help feeling that the viewers chosen seem unduly marked by their exposure to queer theory.

But her more interesting answer to such a problem is the careful and creative use of her own autobiography. The academic use of autobiography is never easy, but like the work of Elspeth Probyn or Clare Hemmings, Whatling's accounts are offered as complex and provocative experiences, often moving, and always with enough irony not to be passed off as moments of authentic self-revelation. Rather, they document how cinema enables an articulation of identity which buttresses much of our self-image, while still slyly subverting our

understandings of who we are. Although, as she herself notes, this is to risk assuming that her own experience is representative of a large part of the lesbian audience, it is a welcome solution to the question of how far film theory can connect to the lived experience of the filmgoer.

Putting the audience centre-stage is not new, of course: and Whatling's own anxieties about this seem clear enough when - in another moment of scrupulous self-reflexivity - she notes that affirming the fact of the viewer's capacity for mobile identifications "is a profoundly banal conclusion to come to" (71). But then to some extent the processes of audience-pleasure are banal: someone cute to fancy, a death to cry over, a triumphant figure to identify with, and someone who reminds you of that person you never did end up in bed with. Even if some of the particular objects that are discussed here as filling those roles might be unexpected - black viewers in the 1950s identifying with Joan Crawford - most of the preferences, desires, and pin-ups-of-choice of the lesbian viewer are, given recent lesbian scholarship, much as we would expect: Sharon Stone reclaimed in *Basic Instinct*, the failed 'romances' of *Butterfly Kiss* and *Heavenly Creatures* mourned over as the lesbians-who-might-have-been, and a propensity amongst elite First World lesbian viewers to favour slim, white, middle-class performers. Thus, as Whatling carefully assesses them, cinematic appropriations move in two directions: to defend a subculture against the violence of heterosexism, while also binding that subculture to the massive inequalities which structure the images that are appropriated.

This assertion of the power of the audience is itself a political move: to affirm the cultural creativity and sheer power of marginal audiences. Of course we want narratives in which audiences are in charge: in a homophobic society there are few enough places where we are. But I am left wondering if this might not do some disservice to these texts. In order to assert that it is the audience who is responsible for these readings, she is forced to explicitly shut out other possible generators of meaning. At some points this involves insisting - in a kind of auteur-homophobia - that affirmative imagery is ruled out because of the individual sensibilities of a director: thus *Fatal Attraction* must be unsympathetic "considering it's an Adrian Lynne film" (95), and *Bitter Moon* because its ground is "typical Polanski territory" (105). At other times it is 'Hollywood' - conceived of as a monolithically oppressive cultural force - which is used to assure us that the lesbian potential of cinema cannot have originated with the films.

But this leaves us in the curious position of having a list of characters, stories, images and scenes which are fairly bursting at the seams with lesbian potential - while being unable to suggest that such a presence might have something to do with the intentions of directors, scriptwriters, or actors. Whether motivated by heterosexual liberalism, a recognition of the value of transgression, or - and given Whatling's psychoanalytical framing we ought to allow for this - an unconscious queer identification, surely the conditions of production of these films might be given some credit for their appeal to lesbian audiences? It may be that the audience "can lesbianise the focus of a film" (150): but might it not also be the case that someone, somewhere, got there and lesbianised the film first?

# A Short Guide to Writing about Film (Third Edition)

By Timothy Corrigan
Harlow, England: Longman, 1998. x + 182 pp

## A review by Andrew Willis, University of Salford

*A Short Guide to Writing About Film* by Timothy Corrigan is part of 'The Short Guide Series', published by Longman, which includes aids to writing about Art, Science and History. Whilst designed to be an introduction to students as they attempt to produce written work focused on film, it raises a number of interesting issues in relation to what the focus of writing about film might be, and the areas and methods of analysis students are directed towards.

The guide states that it has three aims (xi): firstly, to assist teachers, in that they rarely have time to teach the writing skills that students sometimes need. Secondly, to relieve student anxiety about writing about film. And finally, to fill a gap between writing handbooks, which tend to be very general, and film studies texts, which do not engage with the method and technique of writing. In order to achieve these it also aims to move students on from making observations and comments about film to a point where they are able to produce well structured, critically informed writings about film. As such, this book is certainly useful. However, to evaluate it's contribution to the field, I suggest that the approach contained within the pages of this book needs to be linked to a consideration of some key questions that relate to film analysis more generally. To begin with, what is the place of film within the academy? Certainly, here we are presented with the idea that most writing about film will focus on textual analysis. This seems to limit the usefulness of the book to students who are following more inter-disciplinary courses, in for example cultural studies or multidisciplinary courses such as media studies or American studies. Certainly, the approach to writing about film presented here lacks a real acknowledgement of recent trends within what might usefully be termed "cinema studies". It also does not engage with the fact that, certainly in the UK, the demands on students writing about film comes from a variety of, sometimes fragmented, perspectives.

Whilst in Chapter 2 Corrigan acknowledges that film is both an industry and an economic enterprise that seeks audiences for it's product, for the most part, the sorts of writing suggested sees these as being of secondary importance. For the most part, writing about film becomes the striving for understanding through the analysis of film as a text. These problems are most evident in the chapter entitled 'Six approaches to writing about film'. Here Corrigan outlines what he calls 'the major approaches or methods used in writing about film' (77): film history; national cinemas; genres; auteurs; kinds of formalism; and ideology. Many of these are certainly useful to students on film studies courses. However, when we consider how far textual analysis is privileged, we begin to get a certain view of writing about film. The emphasis on form, genre, ideology and auteur shows how entrenched these textually based approaches to film are. Corrigan does not totally ignore other approaches, he mentions historical analysis that focuses on economics and he acknowledges the need for film to be

placed into cultural contexts. This latter point is, however, presented problematically. The section in the chapter on national cinemas states that, in relation to Dovzhenko's 1929 film, Arsenal one must 'locate it first in the political and aesthetic climate of post-revolutionary Russia' (81), and in relation to Ray's 1973 film *Distant Thunder*, 'a writer should know something about the society and culture of India.' (81). The contextualizing of films is encouraged in relation to 'art' cinema, but not encouraged in relation to popular mainstream products. It would seem to me an enormous gap in this books outlook that it does not acknowledge more strongly the need for the contextualization of popular films, be they the product of Hollywood or other national cinemas. For example, Italian horror films, Hong Kong action movies, or American erotic thrillers.

Some of these limitations are also reflected in the bibliography of the book. Whilst the edition under review is the third (1998), the bibliography contains very few recent works that may be of assistance to students. Indeed, the two most recent entries are the 1992, fourth edition of Mast and Cohen's *Film Theory and Criticism* (Oxford) and the 1986 second edition of Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art: an introduction* (McGraw-Hill). Whilst this criticism may seem a little harsh, it is essential that film students and those new to writing about film should be directed to up to date texts as their points of reference.

Alongside these criticisms, it must be acknowledged that Corrigan's book is useful in a number of ways. Certainly, in many student focused works not enough space is given to assist them in how to think about their: preparation; note taking; film watching; structuring; use of language; research etc. These areas are all clearly covered within the book. Ultimately however, the problem with *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* is one that Corrigan himself acknowledges; a book of this size that attempts to introduce film theory and criticism and operate as a handbook on of writing is a difficult goal to achieve. Certainly, film studies students may find something useful within this text, however, students following courses such as media or cultural studies may find the book's usefulness very limited.

# The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music

By Jeff Smith
New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-231-10863-X. xxxii + 235pp., 8 illustrations, £13.50 (soft)

## A review by Ruth Doughty, University of Keele

*The Sound of Commerce* is an unusual insight into the realm of film music. Whereas most writers of this genre tend to focus on concert music, typical of composers such as Max Steiner and Wolfgang Korngold or on jazz scored by Duke Ellington and Miles Davis, Smith breaks this tradition and pursues the placement of popular music within cinematic history. With the evolving attitudes in a capitalist society the music of the people underwent a huge transformation. Rock 'n' Roll emerged alongside a teenage market ready to consume music and cinematic merchandise. In consequence, it is no wonder that the two media giants; the film industry and record companies, became synergised and in turn altered the sound of film forever.

Jeff Smith, who has written for various film journals including *Velvet Light Trap* and the *Cinema Journal* and recently contributed to the new David Bordwell book *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, examines the coalition between the two markets and explores their inevitable relationship. Smith, unlike his contemporaries, views film music from an interesting angle, that of marketing. Once the commercial potential of the soundtrack had been recognised popular music and popular music idioms became an integral part of film.

Despite Smith's intention to focus on youth music in order to assess the emergence of the popular music score, he chooses to analyse the stylistic techniques of three neoclassical composers, Henry Mancini, Ennio Morricone and John Barry. For a more contemporary angle it would have been more relevant to assess the music of more recent composers achieving high acclaim in the marketplace like James Horner, John Williams and Alan Silvestri. Smith also attempts to account for the increasing use of the compilation score found in many current motion pictures. In conjunction with excellent historical detail, the work includes many musical examples. Despite the infiltration of music and film terminology associated with academic theory, the book is surprisingly accessible to the novice.

The score for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, by Henry Mancini is discussed at some length in order to trace the infiltration of jazz as a popular idiom. Smith studies the soundtrack in depth and exposes Mancini's use of repetition and variation within the movie. The monotonous musical themes are excluded from the soundtrack due to their lack of marketability. In contrast the soundtrack is littered with many upbeat Calypso, Jazz and contemporary dance themes which are used within the film for their diegetic quality, for example, in the party scenes.

The James Bond films also prove of interest for Smith, due to their ratings with the general public. Smith looks at why the Bond soundtracks have been so successful. He defends Barry's

"Mickey Mouse" Wagneristic treatment of leitmotif and attempts to reveal a genius behind such simplicity, whereas most film music scholars dismiss John Barry due to his commercial appeal. However, despite the academic standard, it soon becomes apparent that Smith is in actual fact a James Bond anorak. At times he breaks from the analysis to point out connections that only a true Bond fan would know. However, the enthusiastic stand Smith takes is refreshing and stimulating.

Smith then explores the scoring of Ennio Morricone. The music for his Westerns under the direction of Sergio Leone, created a new texture through his unusual instrumentation. Smith, when describing the music in *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, uses the phrase "highly evocative postmodernist stew" (136). Despite this somewhat pretentious declaration, Smith captures the essence of the music in his writing. An interesting observation he makes is the influence of Morricone's music on the emergence of the Psychedelic Rock movement. He suggests that Morricone's music infiltrated the sounds of The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Animals, The Yardbirds and The Doors. An interesting assumption, but unfortunately lacking in substantial evidence.

The concluding chapter of the book explores the compilation soundtrack that is frequently utilised in modern films, such as *Forest Gump* and *Pulp Fiction*. To analyse the potential of the compilation soundtrack and its marketability Smith focuses on the George Lucas film *American Graffiti*, a somewhat unusual choice when far more recent examples could have proved more deserving. In this section Smith explores the preconceptions certain music has with a contemporary audience. In using music connected to a certain era, it helps recreate a fashion, a nostalgic atmosphere of times passed. If the music is being sung by an artist who died through a nihilistic lifestyle, then the audience will process this information and adapt it to the situation being presented on the screen. Therefore the compilation soundtrack, in contrast to the original score, can work on more than one level due to the audiences subjective status.

Disappointingly, Smith's analysis into the workings of popular film music appear somewhat dated. In choosing to explore the neoclassical sounds of Mancini, Morricone and Barry, Smith restricts his study to a specific period. It becomes increasingly disconcerting that in such a recent publication, Smith's exploration omits many popular idioms present in the film music canon. Despite many generalisations, Smith also refuses to acknowledge the emergence of dance and techno tracks within modern movies and more surprisingly the importance of Rap. Statistics prove that Rap is the best selling style of youth music and its utilization in current motion pictures exemplifies this fact. In fact, African American music is overlooked within the entire text despite its intrinsic place throughout cinematic history.

Overall, *The Sounds of Commerce* is an intriguing read filled with up-to-date academic research. Smith introduces the reader into the more uncommon facets of cinema. At times the book can appear to be two separate entities due to the exploration of the soundtrack in the market place and the more traditional reading of the music in relation to cinematic images. Nevertheless, this fails to detract from the whole picture. *The Sounds of Commerce* is a fascinating and scholarly examination into the workings of the soundtrack through the emergence of the popular film score. Jeff Smith's work is a most useful edition to any specialist library but also of interest to the newcomer on their first initiation into the nuances of film music.

# Theorising Video Practice

By Mike Wayne
London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1997. 250pp. (soft)

## A review by Georgia Stone, Nottingham Trent University

What are my expectations of a book with such a title? The title contains the key terms for my teaching: theory, practice and video. This excites me because I feel I may get out of it something that I have been looking for for many years. How to connect theory and practice in the teaching of video (and other media forms) in a deep and complex way. We will see. But first, a context is needed. I will talk about myself and my own work for a little. Bear with me. There is a good reason for this. It does relate to the book I am reviewing.

I teach Media Practice to undergraduates on a range of Humanities Degrees. The modules I teach represent one sixth of a Degree - a minor element. The aims are manifold. To enable students to gain some technical skills, mainly in video. They will also pick up some practical skills in teamwork, communication and presentation techniques. More importantly, the modules aim to encourage students to make links between theory and practice. In terms of theory, this involves linking to the theoretical elements of other modules that the students take, but also to media, cultural and communication theory. The modules are not vocational in the narrow media career sense. They aim to develop some 'key skills' which are transferable to many areas (not just careers). Indeed, much of the content of the lectures is based on the critical analysis of the media industries and its products. Students are required to work on a group video project, an individual critical analysis and reflection essay or project (of a given or chosen media text or their own work depending on the year group they are in). Both elements are weighted at 50% which gives a measure of the balance between theory and practice. The essay is based on titles which encourage students to analyse their own practice in terms of such issues as representation, realism, stereotyping, censorship, genre, audience and market, and textual analysis. In the process of planning and producing their video, students are also encouraged to relate their practice not just to 'practical theory' (the techniques and conventions associated with the medium of video), but also to media, cultural and communication theory.

Why do I start a book review by talking about my own work? Well, it's to do with what I was looking for in this book before I read it. This is embedded in the recent history of the teaching of Media Practice at undergraduate level. When Universities began to employ people to teach Media Practice in the early 80's, on largely non-practical Degrees, it was done for political reasons. Students were demanding it. It made the courses seem more attractive. It might go some way to enabling a connection between theory and practice to be made. But there has always been a lack of respect for such courses. They are often seen as the 'easy option', having less of a place than the theoretical components of the Degree. In practice, the practical modules are estranged from the theoretical ones. It has been up to the lecturer to make the connections between the theory and the practice. There have been no course books which deal with this complex area. The lecturer has been left writing their own materials and working out strategies for encouraging real connections to be made between theory and

practice. In doing so, a huge number of books from a wide range of disciplines are needed to develop a basic theorising of practice. This is an onerous task, given that the practical theory and technical skills training also require attention, and form the main expectations of students following a Media Practice module. Many Lecturers simply rely on the 'practical theory' and see media, cultural and communication theory as the domain of teachers of their sister modules.

So, did the book fulfil my expectations? A resounding YES is my answer. It gave me what I had hoped for, and more. An interesting and inspiring read for any practitioner in what the author calls 'grass roots' video production. Also a valuable source for any teacher of Media Practice. This is the book I have been looking for. It is actually aimed at students who are engaged with video practice, but this seems to be rather too narrow an audience for such material. Teachers of Media Practice in any context will find this a very useful source book. The author uses film, media, cultural and political theory to make arguments about the possibilities for more dynamic video production to take place. He puts the 'technical manuals' on which many students and teachers of Media Practice rely, into an appropriate context, that of upholding the mainstream conventions of media production. He suggests that such material should be read critically, and that looking to a broad range of theory can usefully inform any practical video production. He offers some very accessible descriptions of some of the main theoretical debates that are appropriate to practice. He examines the historical context of video practice, and moves on to analyse issues of representation, the image, editing, narrative and sound. The many examples and case studies he uses are varied and detailed, including looking at student films. He provides some practical exercises which would be useful in helping to actualise the theory. More of these would be good. There are many good suggestions about how the reader can make best use of the limited technical resources, and the most use of theory, making this a positive virtue rather than a drawback. As the author writes by way of a conclusion:

'In making an argument for theorising your own cultural practice, I would not seek to claim that theory is a prerequisite for producing interesting cultural work, simply that it need not, as is often assumed, cast a stultifying shadow over creativity. I have advocated theorising practice because I think the video maker has more to gain than lose from such efforts.' (P. 238)

# Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema

By Yvonne Tasker
New York: Routledge, 1998. ISBN: 0415140056. vii +234 pp. 12 illustrations, £12.99 (soft)

## A review by Brenda A. Risch, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Tasker's analysis of the portrayal of 'working girls' in Hollywood cinema is squarely situated within the tradition of feminist film criticism, though she opens her book with the image of the prostitute, which has not, as she states 'particularly preoccupied feminist film criticism' (5). She masterfully utilizes key concepts from other feminist scholars such as Judith Mayne and Marjorie Garber, weaving together her analysis of the 'working girl' with issues of cross-dressing, the femme fatale, and gender relations. The result is a savvy, insightful, and often provocative examination of a wide variety of popular films such as *Working Girl*, *Pretty Woman*, *Bad Girls*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *True Lies*, and *Boys on the Side*. She brings to light the pervasive sexualization of women in the workplace, not only in films like *Disclosure*, or *The Last Seduction*, but also in films such as *Silence of the Lambs*, or *True Lies*, where there exists an unstated equation of women's work with sexual performance. In her work in Chapter 4 on police and crime thrillers, she reveals particularly disturbing connections between women, sexuality and victimhood, often positioning the woman both as investigator and object of investigation, as victimizer and victim.

Tasker stays firmly within the traditions of feminist film criticism by focusing her analysis on the roles that women play in film, and the visual transformations women undergo as they rise and fall in status within the fictional world of each film. She closely examines shifts in costuming, make-up and hair in films such as *Working Girl*, where she presents the subtleties of cross-class cross-dressing in the transformation of the female protagonist, and *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, where costuming and hair are used to signify the two opposed personality of the female protagonist. While Tasker plays, both in the title and body of her book *Working Girls*, with issues of class and the conflation of sexuality with women in the workplace, she does not actually analyze issues of class in Hollywood cinema. Though she does address the crucial issue of the necessity of cross-class cross dressing, as in her analysis of *Working Girl*, she backs away from extrapolating this idea to its most potent expression-how is the body *itself* of a 'working girl' inscribed with class? Tasker passes over, as does the bulk of feminist film criticism, the myriad of working class women who serve as the backdrop for the female stars in Hollywood cinema. She elides issues of the tangible, physical body in favor of a detailed and shrewd analysis of the clothes, hair, and make-up that cover these bodies. This seems odd, considering

Tasker's initial presentation of the concept of 'prostitution' not only as a 'notion of sexual exchange and exploitation' but as a trope to read 'femininity' as a 'raced and classed concept.' (5)

*Working Girls* does indeed delve into genres as different as the Western, action, suspense/thriller, and romantic comedy in order to examine sundry permutations of femininity in the 'new Hollywood cinema'. The analyses Tasker offers of the various films in her first six chapters are consistently insightful and provocative, while also being organized around interesting principles such as 'cross-dressing, aspiration and transformation' (Chapter 1) or a genre such as 'cowgirl tales' (Chapter 2). Though they add interesting information to Tasker's project, the final three chapters of her book 'Acting Funny: Comedy and Authority,' 'Music, Video, Cinema: Singers and Movie Stars,' and 'Performer and Producers' seem almost cursory compared to her preceding work. Partly this is due to the fact that these chapters are each roughly half the length of the meatier chapters, while referencing nearly as many films. The result is akin to a series of pithy vignettes about related films, which, while they contain individual gems of interpretation, fail to fashion a cohesive chapter. Not to be missed from this portion of the book, however, are Tasker's presentation of the 'star image' using Dolly Parton, which dovetails nicely into her discussion of the interactions between music and film stardom (179-184); or the final mini chapter (197-204) presenting the issues of women in non-performance roles, of producers, writers, and directors.

Overall, Working Girls presents useful analyses of the figure of the working woman in cinema that are thought-provoking and astute assessments of the cultural content of popular film. Much of this book is riveting, both in content and presentation. Tasker's analysis of Hannibal Lecter's cynical reading of Clarice Starling's personal history has certainly altered my perception of Silence of the Lambs forever. I wake in the middle of the night with sudden cross-class cross-dressing anxieties, with Anthony Hopkins voice ringing in my ears, 'your good bag and your cheap shoes … you're not more than one generation away from poor white trash'.