Australian National Cinema

By Tom O'Regan
London: Routledge, 1996. ISBN 0415057310. x + 403 pp. £14.99 (soft)

A review by Mike Walsh, Flinders University, Adelaide

While it has hitherto seemed commonsensical that there exist entities such as an Australian cinema, or a British cinema, or a French cinema, we have seen an increased self-consciousness over the past few years about national cinemas with the emphasis resting on the ways in which film industries, their products, and the debates circulating around them are engaged with processes described by Benedict Anderson as the imagining of common identity. The emphasis on the explicit theorising of the national extends, of course, beyond cinema studies, though a mass communication medium such as the cinema provides a particularly apt means for speculating on the large-scale internalisation of these imaginings. Looked at from the perspective of cinema studies, the possibility of linking these meanings with historically bounded and state-related institutions has allowed critics to reposition ideological analysis on a smaller, and more obviously historical, scale.

This theoretical context has clearly been the stimulus for Routledge's National Cinema series, of which Tom O'Regan's book on Australian national cinema is perhaps the most challenging and densely articulated example. Other works in this series, such as Susan Hayward's *French National Cinema* (1993) and Pierre Sorlin's *Italian National Cinema* (1996) retain chronological patterns of organisation based on the analysis of film production trends. Someone once put it to me that the Australian cinema had the greatest number of critical histories relative to the number of films produced. O'Regan's book puts me in mind of this statement as the films themselves tend to play a subsidiary role in this book, which is more properly a historiography of a national cinema. O'Regan is interested in the conditions under which Australian films are made and positioned by criticism. This book represents an opposite extreme to something like Richard Abel's book on French silent film, *The Cine Goes to Town* (1994), which assumes that it needs to rectify an unfamiliarity with a body of films. O'Regan assumes either (or perhaps both) a familiarity with the films, or a lack of interest in the films as aesthetic or stylistic objects in favour of a concentration on the ways in which they can be invoked to represent the conditions of production, and the representation of the nation to itself and to others.

The book is divided into three sections. In Part One O'Regan deploys the apparatuses of national cinema study, considering ways in which that term can be used. The richest part of this -- and, I think, of the whole book -- comes in those sections where he discusses the inevitably dialogic nature of national cinema, the varieties of ways in which Australian film exists in relation to international film industries, particularly Hollywood. This is particularly important work, linking industrial, textual and critical issues within an elaborate series of international interactions, without resorting to the simplistic evasions of cultural imperialism or strategic essentialism. Those not specifically concerned with Australian films will still find a great deal to think about concerning issues of globalisation, as Australia has always

imported the bulk of its popular media commodities, and has had to fashion a sense of the national in an explicit negotiation with international forces.

As with many small-scale national production industries supported by government intervention, the Australian cinema exists as much in political argumentation and critical discourse as it does on screens. Part Two of the book takes up the issue of how the specificity of a national industry can be established and held in place in both policy and critical practice. At this point O'Regan's metacritical impulses come to the fore and one of the central projects of the book becomes an analysis of the ways in which cinephiles, cultural critics, and film historians have attempted to reconstruct national cinema through criticism. Of these three groups, the concerns of cultural critics, most centrally those concerned with identity politics, are given most prominence here. While the maintenance of national difference can be invoked as a strategic defence by the weak against the strong, national identity criticism is likely to be handled roughly by identity politics critics who, depending on their theoretical stripe, will use the language of hegemony or of the Imaginary to reconcile this field of study with the mainstream of symptomatic criticism. Thus, O'Regan's final section seeks to "problematise" the specificity it has worked to identify. This problematization involves a concentration on the types of social, gender-based, ethnic and racial divisions which the language of national unity works to obscure.

O'Regan proclaims his approach to be "hybrid" in approaching the ways in which a film industry might register and influence the imagining of national identity. In short, he wants to gather up all the possible ways (save one) of defining and deploying the term national cinema, and set them all in play. (The one proposition that he rejects at the outset is that national cinemas reflect a generative national ontology.) The effect of this mode of organisation is that we are given theoretical overlay after theoretical overlay as he redescribes the perspectives within which one can situate Australian film. Toward the end of the book one encounters sentences such as: "Principled criticism favours demythologizing repetoires of discursivization and social problematization." (344) The problem here is not simply with the opacity of the prose, but with the number of theoretical balls which the author is trying to keep in the air. This density of approaches tends to obscure, or substitute for, a clear sense of how viewing subjects internalise sets of meanings from films which relate to social identity. (Though I think this is a criticism which goes beyond this book to much of the work being done in identity politics and the cinema at the moment.)

If this is a failing, it is one which stems from the ambitions of the book, the ambition to give us the broadest possible framework for the discussion of a national cinema, one which is simultaneously aware of the international dimension of the cinema and the divisions which structure it at an intranational level as well. In this sense, O'Regan's book is a major contribution to the study of the relation between the state, and national, contexts in which films are produced and consumed.

British National Cinema

By Sarah Street
London & New York: Routledge, 1997. ISBN0415067367. 232 pp., 29 illustrations. £12.99 (soft)

A review by J. Emmett Winn, Auburn University

Author Sarah Street in *British National Cinema* assumes an ambitious and intriguing project and completes it successfully. This research focuses on two significant issues concerning filmmaking in Britain while also providing the reader with a brief but solid history of British movie-making. The first issue concerns itself with the existence of "a typical British movie" and the second addresses whether or not British cinema is worthy of study.

Street demonstrates that "there is no such thing as a typical British film" (198) and in so doing produces a much more interesting study by demonstrating the diversity in British movie making while elucidating the distinguishable trends within its history. Street is equally successful in taking on critics who have long held that British cinema was not "particularly interesting or worthy of study" (199). The author's work on the economics of filmmaking, studios and genres, acting and stars, modernism, and counter-cinema demonstrates that British filmmaking is, indeed, a rich source of research and one that benefits the international film studies community.

The study produces five important themes that have affected British filmmaking: "Hollywood's economic and aesthetic prominence; Britain's weak production base; the stylistic and thematic variety of British cinema; the importance of class and gender; and…film culture" (197). The first, concerning Hollywood's prominence, is especially well developed. Street outlines the major eras in the development of the British film industry and economic politics, both in Hollywood and Britain, that allowed and sometimes even encouraged Hollywood's advantageous position. The second theme is inextricably tied to the first as Hollywood's dominance of the British market, and lack of governmental intervention on behalf of the British industry adversely affected Britain's production base. Throughout the volume the author provides an interesting and valuable resource concerning Hollywood's efforts to dominate the British film market and both the British industry's and governmental reaction.

The third and fourth themes, the variety of films and the significance of gender and class issues, are the strongest and most fully developed findings of the work. Street analyzes the history of British movie-making, elucidating the distinctive characteristics of genre films and their cultural and political milieu. Street charts the development of filmmaking from its earliest days in the "cinema of attractions", the influence of the musical hall tradition, through the reliance on adaptations of traditional drama, to the embracing of middle-class values in the 1930s with the major genres revolving around historical costume films, the genre of empire films that highlighted the white man's imperialist "burden", comedies and musicals. The Second World War brought about the "melodramas of everyday life" and revealed an "ethos of community" that was prevalent across genres. Continuing with these themes Street

takes into account many aspects of genre films in post-war Britain. The author continues to illustrate the development of historical costume dramas and comedies but also offers intelligent and well informed discussions on Spiv films that "dealt with criminal activity, particularly arising out of wartime restrictions" (71), film noir and war films. Further, science fiction, horror films, social problem films and the films of the British New Wave are explored. Most significantly, however, is that Street foregrounds the genre discourse by pointing out how the films belie the class divisions in Britain and the male-dominated film industry, therefore illuminating the importance of gender and class issues in British movies.

The fifth and final theme relating to film culture is traceable throughout the work, but I believe the author's attention to British acting is a worthwhile addition to this research and furthers the development of the study of British stardom. In this vein, Street's focus on Anna Neagle goes a long way to helping explain "her image as a British icon and signifier of national identity [and]…her articulation of Britishness" (125). Moreover, Street balances this work by investigating the influences of modernism and counter-cinema in British filmmaking. The strengths of these sections are the treatment of elitist critical discussions in early British criticism and film culture and the sections on Black British films and Gay and Lesbian filmmaking.

In criticism, at times, particularly in the later part of the volume, the writing suffers from too much listing rather than explanation or interpretation, but this is forgivable given the broadness of the topic. Further, Street states that Thatcherism was the "political-cultural background to the revival of British cinema in the 1980s" (102), yet the author only provides a short investigation of this significant influence and I believe that a fuller treatment of the topic would enhance this study and offer a nice balance to the well developed critique of the first several decades of filmmaking. I recommend Sarah Street's *British National Cinema* for its informative and thought provoking treatment of the British film industry and for its insightful and valuable criticism.

Double Takes: Culture and Gender in French Films and Their American Remakes

By Carolyn A. Durham
Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998. ISBN 0874518741. xi + 246 pp. $21.95 (soft)

A review by Dayna Oscherwitz, The University of Texas at Austin

In her introduction to *Double Takes*, Carolyn A. Durham explains that an analysis of French films and their American remakes seems particularly timely given the Hollywood penchant for remaking foreign (especially French) films. As she explains, "France and the United States have traditionally provided each other with a contrasting context that has allowed each to articulate its own particular notion of culture" (13). For this reason, Durham asserts that a comparative analysis of Hollywood remakes and their French originals would function as a means of demonstrating the ways in which "national cultures are embodied in material practices" (14). It seems evident both from the title of the book and from Durham's own introduction that *Double Takes* aims at just such an analysis of the ways in which French and American cultural norms are encoded in their respective cinemas. Furthermore, since the book focuses particularly on the phenomenon of the cross-national remake, it would seem reasonable to expect from Durham's analyses a clear understanding of American and French cultural differences. In this respect, however, *Double Takes* is doubly disappointing.

First and foremost, *Double Takes* is not what it claims to be. Although the book contains some very interesting analyses of both French and American films, these analyses focus far more on gender than on culture. To her credit, Durham does acknowledge this bias towards gender analysis in her conclusion to the book, stating that her focus on gender leads her to an exploration of "the cultural construction of masculinity" (200). The problem is that no such exploration is developed in the body of the book. Instead, the analysis of gender is limited to an investigation of patterns of gender representation in particular cinematic texts. In her reading of Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout de souffle* and Jim McBride's *Breathless*, for example, Durham focuses on the representation of masculinity in both films, but says nothing about how such representation conforms to or differs from the masculine ideal in French and American society. The same can be said of the chapter on Leonard Nimoy's *Three Men and a Baby* and Colline Serreau's *Trois hommes et un couffin*. While it is true that gender and culture may be closely intertwined, nothing in the analyses of any of these films leads to an understanding of how this interrelationship functions. In addition to this analytical shortcoming, two of the chapters contained in the book (there are five) do not even deal with cross-national remakes, or with remakes of any kind. The first chapter is a reading of Alain Resnais' film, *I Want to Go Home*, and the fourth chapter is a reading of *French in Action*, a series of instructional videos used to teach beginning French.

What is most disappointing about this book, however, is the haphazard way in which Durham engages in cultural analysis on those occasions she attempts it. At no point, for example, does

she investigate the cultural and social climate of France or the United States at the moment at which any of the films she analyzes were in production. At no point does she even attempt to situate any of the cinematic texts with which she deals in a specific cultural moment. Instead, she seems content to assume that culture is static and to infer the existence of cultural norms and ideals from the presence or absence of certain elements in a handful of films made over a period of fifty years. In her analysis of Jean-Charles Tacchella's *Cousin, Cousine* and Joel Schumacher's *Cousins*, for example, Durham reads the representation of adultery in each film (made in 1975 and 1989, respectively) as characteristic of differing attitudes towards adultery (personal freedom or betrayal) which exist in the two cultures. As evidence of these differing attitudes, she provides the examples of public reaction to François Mitterand and Bill Clinton's respective extra-marital affairs (both of which were revealed in the late 1990s). While the conclusions Durham draws from such an analysis may not be entirely false, the practice of reading two films which are themselves fifteen years apart against a cultural background which postdates both films by at least ten years is highly questionable.

Ultimately, *Double Takes* is an interesting, if flawed, work. Durham's reading of filmparticularly her reading of gender representationis done with a great deal of competence and skill. As a result, there are several useful and intelligent interpretations of several films that have been largely overlooked by other scholars. What is disappointing about this book is that it offers little that is new in the realm of cultural analysis. In fact, in some ways, it may even set cultural analysis back by engaging in the very practices most objected to by critics of cultural studies.

Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation

By Lidia Curti
London: Macmillan Press, 1998. ISBN 0333471652. xvii + 232 pp. £13.99 (soft)

A review by Katrina Daly Thompson, University of Wisconsin-Madison

In *Female Stories, Female Bodies*, Lidia Curti sets out to examine images of women in literature, film, and television, especially in writing by women. She does this primarily through two lenses, postmodernism and feminism, exploring the links between these branches of literary and film theory. In the preface, Curti begins her book with an autobiographical note: "To write is to find my own voice . . ." (viii). In chapters three and, to a greater extent, six, Curti achieves this goal. Unfortunately, in the other chapters Curti relies too heavily on the work of other theorists and does not sufficiently develop her own analyses of the texts she purports to examine.

The book is divided into seven chapters, the first two of which provide a sweeping overview of the theories with which Curti works. "Introduction: The Swing of Theory," the book's formal literature review, explores the intersections between feminism, postmodernism, and to a lesser extent, postcolonialism. Curti is concerned with the politics of the real, the differences between images and reality, the importance of mimicry, of margins, and of revisions. "'D' for Difference: Gender, Genre, Writing," promises something more than this first chapter, but never moves beyond the literature review. Here, as the title promises, Curti takes on the relationship between gender and genre, attempting to show that women writers are blurring the once rigid notions of literary genre. The chapter's chief departure from the previous one is that here Curti reviews primary sources (examples of both high and popular art) rather than theory or the work of other critics. But still she does not move beyond the review: the chapter cursorily examines at least fifteen novels, and mentions at least as many others. Even Antonia Byatt's *Possession*, which according to Curti, "offers the most sophisticated example of the contamination between the fantastic and the critical code" (42) receives a mere three pages of treatment, largely summary.

Curti at times overcomes her tendency to summarize and to rely on the work of others, most notably in parts of chapter three and all of chapter six. Chapter three, "The Lure of the Image: Fe/male Serial Narratives," begins with an interesting discussion of soap opera, which Curti calls "women's telefilm" (56), sustained by a focus on the disdain with which this genre is treated by critics, on the constantly changing identities of its female characters, and on the various relationships that exist among female characters and female viewers. Curti notes that "[a]ny story can be inscribed in the text through contradictions, reversals and constant erasings" (59), a link between her discussion of soap opera and of women's revisionary writing. At the end of the chapter, though, Curti returns to her look at gender and genre, this time in relation to television serials, from *Charlie's Angels* to *The X-Files*. Again, she summarizes and skims, mentioning thirty serials in the space of six pages. Curti concludes:

"Videotape recording and other technologies have . . .[led] to the creation of a new type of seriality . . . . In these new modes the suspended circular narrativity of soap opera invades the thriller and enigma enters the claustrophobic rooms of soaps" (77). Were this in fact the focus of chapter three, developed more fully, the chapter might be of great interest to film and television critics.

Curti is at her best in chapter six, "Alterity and the Female Traveler: Jane Bowles." Here she works largely with primary sources, exploring the relationship between Jane Bowles' real life, her fiction, and her depiction in fiction and film by men. Focusing on Jane Bowles' sojourn in Tangiers and her sexual relationship with an Arab woman named Cherifa, Curti demonstrates parallels and inconsistencies between the depiction of this relationship in Bowles' short stories, her letters to friends, her husband Paul Bowles' novel *The Sheltering Sky*, Bernardo Bertolucci's film version, William Burrough's *Naked Lunch*, and David Cronenberg's film version. Curti advances the argument that Jane Bowles "lives and seeks the encounter with alterity" (154), and that she became the (feminine) other for the men in her life.

Other chapters include "Hybrid Fictions . . .", ". . . and Monstrous Bodies in Contemporary Women's Writing", and "The Empty Place of Melancholia: Female Characters in *Hamlet*". Among the seven chapters, chapter six stands out as an invitation to read Curti's *Female Stories, Female Bodies* as it might have been: an insightful comparison between film, literature, and reality, an analysis strengthened by, but not derived from, the work of other theorists and critics. Unfortunately, the rest of the book does not live up to this promise.

Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film

By Harry M. Benshoff
Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-7190-4473-1. viii + 328 pp. £14.99 (soft)

A review by Steven Schneider, Harvard University / New York University

In his seminal 1986 essay, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," Robin Wood identifies homophobia as "one of the clearest instances of the repression/projection mechanism" in horror cinema, whereby "what is repressed (though never destroyed) in the self [is] projected outward in order to be hated and disowned." Throughout *Monsters in the Closet*, Harry Benshoff's 300-page look at queer signification in the horror film, Wood's influence is apparent. Relying on primary source materials, sociohistorical background information, and close textual analysis, Benshoff demonstrates the extent to which society's contradictory feelings about same-sex attraction get reflected in the horror genre's iconography and formal structures. He also shows how representatives of the mainstream media employ the "monster as homosexual" metaphor even while aspiring (at times) to a more progressive attitude towards queer culture. A provocative, well-researched, and timely book, *Monsters in the Closet* at once efforts to decode the "monster-queer," making manifest its gender-bending connotations, while critiquing the all-too-often homophobic narratives in which it appears.

Benshoff presents his two-part thesis early on:

> The figure of the monster throughout the history of the English-language horror film can in some way be understood as a metaphoric construct standing in for the figure of the homosexual. However…what this means from decade to decade and from film to film can be shown to change dramatically, according to the forces behind their production as well as the societal awareness and understanding of human sexuality as it is constructed in various historical periods (4).

In five, fairly lengthy chapters, Benshoff goes on to trace these "dramatic changes" in the horror genre's metaphoric construction of the homosexual, providing ample support for the second, particularistic claim above. It is the first, universalizing claim that some readers may find less than convincing. Does Benshoff really want to assert that queerness -- even when taken in a broad sense to include all forms of non-heterosexual attraction -- is an attribute of *every* English-language horror film monster? The obvious and extreme heterogeneity of these monsters makes such a proposition difficult to support; as Wood notes, bisexuality is just one of a *multitude* of culturally repressed phenomena brought to light by the monstrous Other in cinematic horror.

Perhaps in anticipation of this objection, Benshoff repeatedly emphasizes that his project "rests upon the variable…responses between media texts and their spectators, in this case spectators whose individualized social subjectivities have already prepared and enabled them to acknowledge 'the complex range of queerness' that exists in the English language monster movie" (16). Here, I think Benshoff sells himself somewhat short: even those spectators whose "individualized social subjectivities" have not yet enabled them to acknowledge the degree of queer signification in cinematic horror are likely to come away from *Monsters in the Closet* with their eyes opened, at least a little bit. On the other hand, even sympathetic spectators/readers are bound to raise an eyebrow at some of the more tenuous connections Benshoff draws between (e.g.) the rumored sexual preferences of certain actors and the queer sensibility of horror films in which they appear.

The above qualification aside, there is much to be said in favor of *Monsters in the Closet*. The positives include Benshoff's use of primary source material to elucidate society's ever-changing take on issues surrounding homosexuality, the attention paid to both horror film classics and rarely-seen (but often illuminating) generic rip-offs, and interesting side discussions on such topics as postmodern aesthetic practices, amateur horror videos, and the possibility of a radical "homosexploitation" cinema (in which sympathetically-portrayed "queer avengers" rise up against their heterosexualized oppressors) based on the model of 70s blaxploitation films. Though at times things get a bit repetitive -- instead of alternating back and forth between cultural and textual analyses, *Monsters in the Closet* would have benefited from greater recourse to one or more theoretical paradigms -- any academic book on the horror genre that includes extended riffs on Vincent Price, Ed Wood, Jr., lesbian vampire films, the sado-masochistic coupling of Lugosi and Karloff, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 2: Freddy's Revenge*, is certainly worth picking up. It is a testimony to Benshoff's lucid prose and insightful commentary that his book is also difficult to put down.

References:

Wood, Robin., *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, New York; Columbia UP, 1986.

More Than Night: Film Noir In Its Contexts

By James Naremore
Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. ISBN 0-520-21293-2. xiv + 345 pp., 65 illustrations. $19.95 (soft)

A review by Ian Brookes, University of Nottingham

Is there anything further to say about *film noir*? Anything, at least, of any additional value? The overwhelming volume of writing on the subject might suggest that it is already the most thoroughly excavated category in film studies. Is that category now culturally exhausted? Much of the work on *noir* is predominantly concerned with the production - and replication - of the *noir* taxonomy: it is preoccupied with the identification, description and elaboration of the familiar series of stylistic and narrative features which together are held to be *noir*'s defining characteristics. These features have been crystallised by critical discourse into properties which are subsequently seen as indelibly inherent in the films themselves. But for the makers of these films and their audiences in the 1940s and 1950s, such properties were unknown. They were only retrospectively introduced and applied. It is with these cultural processes and their ramifications - processes, as it were, of "noirification" - that *More Than Night* is principally concerned. These processes are important because they reverberate with so many of the key cultural issues which have preoccupied the post-*noir* period and which, indeed, have become focal points of postmodernist concern. It is therefore no exaggeration for Naremore to assert "that *film noir* has become one of the dominant intellectual categories of the late twentieth century, operating across the entire cultural arena of art, popular memory, and criticism." (2) His approach to *film noir* is based on the recognition that it is a discursive formation, and that it "belongs to the history of ideas as much as to the history of cinema." (11) He consequently treats the term "as a kind of mythology" (2) which he then contextualises in a series of different historical frames.

Standardised definitions of *film noir* reproduce, more or less unproblematically, the formula which provides the basis for its classification: that is, for a particular category of films which were produced in America in the 1940s and 1950s from a synthesis of the native "hard-boiled" school of crime fiction (another problematic category) together with imported German Expressionism, and subsequently labelled by French critics as "*noir*." Naremore problematises the processes involved in the invention of the term as a culturally constructed category. Specifically, he examines how the prevailing conditions in post-war France produced a critical tendency which became predisposed to view Hollywood (and America) in particular ways. There was certainly within the French critical *milieu* a more highly developed regard for the artistic status of cinema and a more sophisticated cinéaste culture than existed in America. France also had its own pre-war "noir" tradition in film (such as *Pépé le Moko*) and in literature (exemplified in the crime fiction of *Série noire*). Consequently, it became possible for French critics to identify in several American crime films released immediately after the end of the war (notably *The Maltese Falcon*, *Double Indemnity*, *Laura* and *Murder, My Sweet*) similarities with their own "*noir* sensibility" and an evocation of the "golden age" of their own pre-war national cinema. Moreover, the two

prevailing trends in the intellectual culture of the Left Bank, existentialism and surrealism, were also to be found in French readings of the American films. In this context, *noir* cannot be reducible to the traditional formula: it is constructed through a much more complex set of national-cultural transactions.

Similarly, Naremore situates *noir* in relation to the influences of Modernism (itself, like *noir*, a retrospective construction) in new and unexpected ways. Indeed, he suggests that "modernism was an older, more wide-reaching manifestation of the same dialectic between Europe and America (or between vanguard art and mass culture) that produced the discourse on film noir itself." (42) In this context, the tenets of Modernism and *noir* are more closely related than they may have seemed: paradoxically, *noir* can be seen both as a specific version of Modernism *and* a particular type of commercial melodrama. Both are concerned with representations of a dystopian metropolis, nocturnal settings, subjective narration, labyrinthine plots, hard-boiled dialogue and destabilised sexuality.

By approaching the subject with the use of different framing contexts, Naremore uses *noir* not as a descriptive term but as a means of refracting a whole series of cultural concerns which were instrumental in its production. These concerns also include the production of *noir* in relation to the specific conditions of censorship; its complex situation within the high-low cultural continuum; the aesthetics and signification of black-and-white; the central metaphor of darkness in terms of ethnic and racial "Others"; and, in a wider perspective, *noir* as a pervasive kind of cultural inflection, mapped from its cultural antecedents to its contemporary manifestations.

One of the major problems of "*film noir*" as a conceptual term is that it always "gets in the way," intruding itself as a permanent obstacle to the kinds of analyses which seek to find specific historical meanings in the films themselves. *More Than Night* is therefore an important and necessary book which provides a much needed analysis not of what *noir* means, but how it was produced and how it functions within the contexts of its intellectual, social and cultural histories: how it "gets in the way." This is a brilliant account of the processes involved in the cultural production of *noir* and, without doubt, the best and most worthwhile book on the subject to date: astute, lucid, and compelling. An exceptional pleasure.

Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis

By Elizabeth Cowie
London: Macmillan, 1997. hardcover ISBN 0-333-30576-0, softcover ISBN 0-333-66013-7.
xi + 397 pp., [8] p.of plates. £50 (hard), £19.50 (soft)

A review by Suh-Young Catherine Kim, The University of Sheffield

Elizabeth Cowie's *Representing the Woman: Cinema And Psychoanalysis* is an excellent guide especially for readers who need a map in the jungle of psychoanalysis, cinema, and feminism. The book holds these three areas together and demonstrates where each theory is placed in relation to the others. Therefore the readers are invited to in-depth discussions relating to issues such as feminine sexuality, "identification" in cinema, the notion of fantasy, fetish and ideology. Although it appears that there is no clear connection between these issues, the author ties them together excellently through film analysis.

The book has an encyclopaedic character, in that it offers concise summaries of various contemporary theories in each of the above areas. For example, Cowie discusses the work of Christian Metz, Jacqueline Rose, Jean Laplanche, Laura Mulvey, Peter Brooks and Slavoj Zizek, making this an essential source in this complex area of cultural theory and psychoanalysis.

Cowie also gives concrete analyses of specific films throughout her text, providing insightful readings of, amongst others: Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Gertrude*, Irving Rapper's *Now Voyager*, Joseph von Sternberg's *Morocco*, Michael Crichton's *Coma*, and fourteen films directed by Howard Hawks. Throughout the book, the mirror image of a woman named Gertrude in the film with the same name is returned to many times. The image on the cover of the book is also that of Gertrude. However, this image is not the answer but the question to which Cowie starts unfolding her arguments.

At the beginning of the book, she argues that it aims at "a deconstruction of certain arguments within psychoanalytic film theory and within feminism" and challenges the idea that the image of woman in a film always serves a masculine spectator (11). She first reconsiders Levi-Strauss' thesis and attempts to shift its focus from the exchange of woman as "real" object to the structure which produces the category of "Woman". Using the example of Howard Hawks' films, which lack the "fixity of the conventional characteristics of masculine and feminine", Cowie argues that the viewer is presented not with a fixed image but "various codes in play in the film" (27-34).

Thus she rejects Mulvey's view that the film places the viewers in a masculine position - arguing instead that it is not a single look in cinema with which we identify, but the structure of the looks that continuously determines and shifts the place of the spectator. Questioning Metz's view that cinema is an imaginary signifier, she stresses a dynamic structure of

identification in which viewers identify not with a certain character but with various positions provided by a film. This is further discussed in relation to fantasy, since film is one of the public forms of fantasy. The notion of fantasy here, however, does not concern the object of fantasy, but rather fantasy as a setting for desire constructed in a film, within which the viewer finds a place to desire.

Psychoanalytic theories have shown that we are desiring subjects whose desire is impossible to satisfy. According to Lacan, we are all divided and fragmented beings who continuously search for the lost unity which never existed in the first place. This lost wholeness is the *objet petit a* - the cause of one's desire. In contrast to the fact that the *objet petit a* is a different name for lack, the fetish is a disavowal of this lack, in other words, a denial of reality. When Cowie turns to the notion of the fetish in cinema, however, the fetish here is rather connected to an absence -*objet petit a* - immediately following it.

According to Cowie, there are two kinds of cinema; one is illusory since it fixes the position of the subject-spectators by providing them with a wholeness of the imaginary, and the other is a cinema which acknowledges the subject as lacking and fragmented (283). This second kind of cinema represents substitution and displacement of the lack with fetish which soon turns into the impossible object of desire - the *objet petit a*. The central play in cinema, therefore, is not showing a concrete object of desire, for example, an image of woman, but dealing with the lack - the *objet petit a* - which sets our desire in motion. In other words, cinema serves not only the desire of the male spectators but also that of female spectators. Throughout this book, Cowie attempts to overcome the conventional view of woman as the object of desire for man. I think that this attempt has been successful and that, in the process of doing this, she has also succeeded in deconstructing misleading assumptions in psychoanalysis concerning feminism. *Representing the Woman: Cinema And Psychoanalysis* is, therefore, an excellent book that repays close reading.

Sisterhoods: Across the Literature/Media Divide

By Deborah Cartmell, I Q Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.)
London: Pluto Press, 1998. ISBN 0-7453-1218-7. 208 pp. £11.99 (soft), £35.00 (hard)

A review by Rosie White, University of Northumbria at Newcastle

This is the third volume in the Film/Fiction series from De Montfort University, and like its predecessors, *Pulping Fictions* (1996) and *Trash Aesthetics* (1997), *Sisterhoods* offers a vital and diverse range of essays. A fourth volume, *Alien Identities*, was published this year. The series has rapidly become an excellent forum for discussion, touching upon current debates within literary, media and cultural studies, and responding to other critical work in these fields in its mission to address "the developing interface between English and Media studies, in particular the cross-fertilisation of methods and debates applied to analyses of literature, film and popular culture". *Sisterhoods*, as the name implies, addresses "the differing portrayals of female relationships in literature and film and the ways in which feminist or pro-female perspectives are distorted or undermined by the mainstream" (1). As one might expect, this covers a very broad remit.

Some of the articles provide invaluable background material for both undergraduate and postgraduate readers; Aleks Sierz's essay on Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* includes a useful summary of the Angel in the House, while Paulina Palmer's piece on lesbian historical fiction provides an excellent summary of debates about lesbian historiography. These articles, in particular, offer accessible and interesting arguments on areas which are relatively under-researched. This, in a sense, is the collection's (and the series') greatest strength and weakness. A very broad range of topics is covered here - from an even broader range of perspectives - so that the experience of reading is rather like being on a rollercoaster. Bounding from the New Woman to the films of Marlene Gorris, or from *Little Women* to *The Body of Evidence*, can leave you with your heart in your mouth at times. Some essays are concise and informative; others tend to move very swiftly between different forms of knowledge. This may be an indication of the increasingly interdisciplinary and idiosyncratic character of film/media/literary scholarship, but it also made me wonder who would read the whole collection. Perhaps it is in the nature of edited gatherings that they are not designed to be read in their entirety but rather dipped into by a variety of readers. If there is an emphasis here, it is on the "Literature" side of the "divide", as many of the essays treat film as text - there is little acknowledgement of an audience out there in living rooms or dark cinemas.

One of the pleasures of reading collections like this is the sense of debate, similar to that which (hopefully) emerges at academic conferences and seminars. Here we are in the presence of a number of speakers, each offering well-informed analyses of their areas of research. Some speakers you may not agree with, or may offer opinions which annoy you, but there are moments when the speakers enter into dialogue. It may be an implicit dialogue with other critical points of view, or even with other essays in the collection, but for me this is the

moment where the writing leaps off the page. A notable example of this in *Sisterhoods* is Charlotte Croft's essay on the literary source and cinematic adaptation of *The Company of Wolves*, which offers both a survey of Carter criticism and a response to earlier essays in the Film/Fiction series, providing an essential addition to what Crofts describes as "a lively and productive dialogue amongst a community of feminist critics [working on Carter] who expand and qualify each other's work." (57) If I have one quibble with this volume it is that certain essays seem to consciously avoid such dialogue.

"Sisterhood", as the editors note in their introduction, is perhaps "no longer relevant to postmodern consumers" (2). Certainly, if it is conceived as an homogenous unity "sisterhood" would seem to reside in only the most nostalgic accounts of second wave feminist community. What this collection exemplifies is the continuing diversity of communities and responses which emerge from such studies of women's relationships with one another and with feminist political theory. While the editors state that one of the questions posed by this volume is "whether or not it is possible to create a feminist heroine on film" (4), the experience of reading the articles it contains ironically points beyond such a destination. Perhaps we have stopped expecting heroines and just started looking for sisters.

Stanley Kubrick

By Vincent LoBrutto
London, Faber & Faber, 1998. ISBN 0571193935. 579 pp. £14.99 (soft cover)

A review by Elayne Chaplin, Northumbria University

The death of Stanley Kubrick earlier this year adds a belated note of poignancy to this biography. Though LoBrutto's book was written before Kubrick's death, the author ends on a sentimental note: "Stanley Kubrick, one of the greatest film directors produced by the United States, is still out there making movies…… and international audiences will be waiting to see what he has to reveal with his cinematic imagination - until he isn't out there anymore" (501). With the forthcoming cinematic release (Summer 1999) of Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (completed only days before his death), this biography is, sadly, a timely one.

For aficionados of Kubrick's work, the director has long been the J.D. Salinger of cinema. By maintaining a low media-profile, particularly during his "exile" in Hertfordshire, a perception of the director as a paranoid, hermitic auteur has been established. Anecdotes concerning Kubrick's maniacal approach to film-making and his eccentric behaviour (whether true or not) have repeatedly peppered discussions of his movies.

In the prologue to this lengthy account of the life and work of Stanley Kubrick, LoBrutto claims that this biography will both "shatter and inform" our understanding of the director, and delve beneath the mythology surrounding the "intense, cool, misanthropic, cinematic genius," in order to "understand the man" (1-2). Yet, the image of Kubrick constructed by LoBrutto confirms, rather than challenges the reader's preconceptions.

In Part One of the book, covering Kubrick's childhood and the beginning of his career in photo-journalism, LoBrutto portrays his subject as a visual savant, an emotionally distant loner who viewed life through the lens of his camera. LoBrutto offers the reader snapshots of Kubrick's youth that are repeatedly linked to the director's subsequent career. For example, in one particularly cringe-worthy passage, LoBrutto presents a lengthy description of Kubrick as a teenager standing outside of a New York deli, angrily tossing a Kosher pickle up into the air, "where it went end over end like the ape Moon-Watcher's bone in *2001: A Space Odyssey*" (14).

Kubrick's photographic assignments for *Look* magazine and the production of his early documentary films are covered in Part Two of the book, where LoBrutto maintains his reverential tone. When discussing *Day of the Fight*, Kubrick's first documentary, for example, LoBrutto asserts: "Kubrick's innate photographic sense and the passion he brought to the project result in a film devoid of the common pitfalls of novice filmmakers" (68). Throughout this section, LoBrutto's central assertion is that Kubrick came to cinema as a "fully formed" visionary.

Subsequent chapters of the book offer a chronological account of Kubrick's career, charting the pre-production, filming and release of each movie, from *The Killing* to *Lolita*, in his

American period, then from *Dr. Strangelove* to *Full Metal Jacket* and Kubrick's intervening relocation to England. In addition, LoBrutto discusses Kubrick's unrealised projects, most notably his proposed film-biography of Napoleon and his pre-production work with Marlon Brando on an embryonic *One Eyed Jacks*. The book becomes increasingly repetitive, however, with countless descriptions (from a variety of sources) of the director's penetrating stare, his shabby clothes, his demanding perfectionism and enduring self-confidence. LoBrutto discusses the process of film-making, rather than the films themselves and where Kubrick's modus operandi brings him into conflict with actors, writers and/or producers, LoBrutto assures us that his approach can always be justified by the excellence of the final result. Even Shelley Duvall (who appears to be at the point of total collapse in Vivian Kubrick's documentary, *The Making of the Shining*) is quoted in support of Kubrick's methods: "Stanley pushed me and prodded me further than I've ever been pushed before….. But Stanley makes you do things that you never thought you could" (442-3).

LoBrutto's biography of Stanley Kubrick is richly anecdotal (though quotes are mainly drawn from previously published material), and the account of Kubrick's private life is sometimes astonishing in its attention to detail. The reader can discover the contents of the last will and testament of Kubrick's mother, for example, or learn about the specific repairs made to Kubrick's Mercedes following a shopping trip into London to buy a pair of shoes. Yet, the minutiae of Kubrick's life collects in these pages like dust on a camera lens, blurring, rather than exposing his character for the reader.

Indeed, the central weakness of this biography of Stanley Kubrick is its lack of any critical perspective. There is no attempt to qualitatively differentiate between Kubrick's movies (all are equally lauded), no attempt to articulate a consistent Kubrick thematic, and, more seriously (in this biographical context) there is only scant illumination of the social, historical forces that surround and inflect Kubrick's work. Even when discussing *A Clockwork Orange* and its subsequent withdrawal from distribution, LoBrutto remains unequivocally supportive of Kubrick's contradictory response to the movie. (Initially Kubrick criticised attempts to censor *A Clockwork Orange*, but then persuaded Warner Brothers to shelve the film.) Negative reviews of the movie, in particular its representation of sexual violence, are quickly dismissed by LoBrutto, who then juxtaposes descriptions of the media panic surrounding the movie with a lengthy passage drawn from a magazine interview with Kubrick's wife, Christiane, extolling the middle-class familial contentment enjoyed by the couple and their daughters.

In comparison to another recent biography of Stanley Kubrick (*Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* by John Baxter, Harper Collins, 1998), Vincent LoBrutto's study is more rigorously detailed, but much less readable. Obviously, this has been a labour of love for LoBrutto, but I found his reverence increasingly cloying. In the final analysis, this is a conventional biography of a film director that proclaims Kubrick's genius without question, or analysis. Despite LoBrutto's exhaustive research (seemingly as extensive as Kubrick's own preparation for his films), Kubrick remains at the end of LoBrutto's biography an elusive figure. In that sense, this is a book for those who already appreciate the work of this director, but also one that Kubrick himself may well have enjoyed.

Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and its Audience

By Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.)
London: Pluto Press, 1997. ISBN 0745312020. vi + 176 pp. £10.99 (soft)

A review by Antonio Lazaro-Reboll, University of Nottingham

Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and its Audience deals with those banal, disreputable and neglected popular cultural forms which have been deemed unworthy of critical attention; in other words, those "low" mass market cultural products that have been restricted to the world of specialised constituencies, to the world of fandom. The title is explicit in advancing the aim of this collection of essays: to criticize severely that type of criticism that rejects popular cultural forms on aesthetic grounds and to consider audiences as active participants in the production and consumption of culture.

From comics to film adaptations, from big-budget horror movies to low-budget exploitation movies, the collection explores the complex relationship established between texts and specific audiences. Its audience-centred approach is clearly stated in the introduction: "audiences are no longer envisaged as passive consumers but as active producers of popular culture" (1). I.Q. Hunter and Heidi Kaye situate the collection of essays in opposition to those theories of mass culture which consider the audience and, by extension, the consumer as homogeneous and passive. This old model addresses the negative media effects of mass culture on the viewer and pathologizes mass taste by presenting popular taste as aesthetically and politically dangerous. Hence popular culture is inferior, unworthy of investigation and devoid of political intentions. Borrowing from post-structuralism and post-modernism but without the political apathy associated with certain trends, the contributors to the book argue for the political dimension of popular culture and its audience. Herein lies the crux of the collection: "readers construct rather than simply receive meanings" (2), people's cultural capital can be politically valuable.

Like most collections, the essays could have been clustered around certain issues and concerns. However, there are some points of intersection: one, the breaking down of the active/passive understanding of the audience and consumerism as essentially passive; two, the acknowledgement of, and, in some cases, the attempt to break down, the boundaries between academics and fans; and, third, the intention to dislodge popular culture from the high/low binary.

The act of criticism is addressed in several essays.The case studies of Martin Barker, Helen Merrick, Steve Chibnall, Paul Watson and Roberta Pearson pose questions such as: where does the critic position herself or himself in relation to the reader or fan?; what is the value of a critic's account or what is the value of a fan's account? The study of mass media fan culture raises these issues and explores the possible interactions between fans and critics. In Merrick's "The Readers Feminism Doesn't See: Feminist Fans, Critics and Science Fiction",

the reading experiences of female fans are fundamental in the construction of feminist science fiction. The extratextual involvement in the genre as well as the active role in producing science fiction represents the creation of a space in which "texts are utilised by readers and fans to produce a forum for feminist organization, action and debate"(62). In "Double Exposures: Observations on *The Flesh and Blood Show*", Steve Chibnall traces the recuperation of trash cinema in the United States and the phenomenon of the cultish appropriation of "disreputable" films over the last three decades. His reference to cineastes (academic film culture) and cinephiles (extramural fan culture) centers around the present interest in exploitation movies. Both fans and critics should work together in the analysis of exploitation movies by taking into account not just the textual features but also the different discourses mobilized in the constitution and understanding of exploitation cinema. As Paul Watson shows, the ostracism of exploitation to the "province of cinephilia" as well as its postmodern recuperation of trash and cult cinema in film circles has the effect of placing exploitation "beyond or outside of mainstream cinema" (67). Watson suggests in "There's No Accounting for Taste: Exploitation and the Limits of Film Theory" that if the concept of exploitation is to be retained today, then "its significance relates not to the realms of the paracinema, but rather to the fundamental aesthetic and economic axioms by which Hollywood operates" (67). From its inception, exploitation has been operating in the same way all cinema operates. Watson even claims that "all cinema is, to a greater or lesser extent, exploitation cinema" (82). This provocative conclusion points to the fact that the distinction between exploitation and the mainstream is artificial, socially constructed and theoretically disabling. Both Chibnall and Watson conclude that the interaction of historical, social and economic discourses on the one hand, and the interaction of fans and critics, on the other, exposes and challenges the limits of film theory and historiography.

From a different perspective and through the analysis of different media, though in a similar manner, Martin Barker and Roberta Pearson talk about the researcher's moral and ethical responsibility to the world they inhabit and the readerships they are analyzing. Barker focuses on an individual reader of the British comic 2000AD and the influence which the central character, Judge Dredd, has on him. This individual fan reads against the grain of dominant assumptions on the comic and describes himself as fascist, but Barker's position is not informed by the moral panic so common to media studies, rather he explores the "sociological" dimension and the investment of the reader in Judge Dredd. Roberta Pearson's contribution ranks high in the collection for its important and promising observations on how computer mediated communication (CMC) affects fan culture and the nature of historical memory. Her analysis of a "virtual community" (whose status is subject to legal debate), that of the Hounds of the Internet, examines the appropriation of the figure of Sherlock Holmes by fan enthusiasts and its effects on the fans' understanding of history and historical representations.

Two cultural objects, Tank Girl and Freddy Krueger, are the subject of Imelda Whelehan and Esther Sonnet's, and Ian Conrich's contributions, respectively. In "Regendered Reading: Tank Girl and Postmodern Intertextuality", Whelehan and Sonnet show how the image of the Tank Girl cannot be homogeneously constructed and how it is appropriated by different constituencies of readers due to its intertextual identity in the comic. Whereas the film's construction of "the female body as the site of display" lends itself to a univocal reading, this same construction confronts "a limit at the point of sexual transgression and gender disruption which always locates that space of confrontation 'elsewhere'" (46). Their essay raises issues on gender and the social. Conrich asks why Freddy Krueger is such a popular cultural phenomenon, especially among young children. His analysis draws on the series *The*

Nightmare on Elm Street and describes Freddy as a seducer of subjects. Comedian, performer, host, Freddy "entertains and 'acknowledges' the subject watching the performance" (123) in an attempt to seduce the subject into the space of illusion and triumph over him or her. Conrich seems to reach a very simplistic conclusion: children have allowed themselves to be "possessed" both by Freddy and consumerism. In my opinion, his essay, together with Mikita Brottman's "Faecal Phantoms: Oral and Anal Tensions in *The Tingler*" and Steve Cramer's "Cinematic Novels and 'Literary' Films: *The Shining* in the Context of the Modern Horror Film" are less satisfactory if we think of the overall aim of the book. Brottman starts with a promising analysis of William Castle's fascination with exploitation and audience-participation devices, which brings her close to the collection's main concerns. However, her psychoanalytical and anthropological reading of *The Tingler* distances her from them. Cramer's reassessment of Stephen King's novel *The Shining* and Stanley Kubrick's filmic adaptation through the haunted house film subgenre and the construction of the female character, Wendy Torrance, discloses the political agenda behind both works. His attention to the author's desires and the textual constructions do not leave enough space for the audience's involvement in creating and recreating the meanings of the fictional texts.

In general terms, *Trash Aesthetics* is a useful and interesting collection. It is an informed and varied account of audiences and their pleasures that will be attractive to students of contemporary media studies. At the same time most of the essays provide openings for further research on a series of concerns in the field of Media Studies, such as cultish fandom, the dual perspective of both critic and fan, or the yet uncharted territory of fan culture on the internet. Its range of perspectives and methodologies, mainly post-structuralism and ethnography, offers a step forward in the growing understanding of audiences and their political involvement with filmic and fictional texts.

Unspeakable Shaxxxspeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture

By Richard Burt
London: Macmillan, 1998. ISBN 0333753275. Xvii + 318 pp., 22 illustrations. £30 (hard)

A review by Mark Brownrigg, University of Stirling

An abiding animating genius of the English Renaissance, William Shakespeare remains a potent and evocative symbol in contemporary society. Perceptions of Shakespeare today differ, however, significantly from those of the Bard even as recently as the 1950s. What does his translation from high culture index to "mediatized" pop culture icon actually mean?

Richard Burt's analysis centres on American popular culture, with a primary emphasis on film and video, drawing on cultural, psychoanalytic and queer analysis to theorise this shift. Although the book's primary focus is on American films, the author also draws on films and videos made in England, Italy and Japan which are widely distributed and marketed in the States. There is also room for replays and citations of Shakespeare and his work on TV.

For Burt, American popular culture has a deeply ambivalent attitude towards Shakespeare as a symbol simultaneously of high culture and Old World British culture. The Bard is not simply a genius whose purity somehow transcends history, culture and politics. American pop, and increasingly academic, culture revalues, cancels out or destroys Shakespeare through citation and adaptation. Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) leaves the adaptation unmarked; Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) "drown[s] him out" (xi); *The Naked Gun* (1988) and *Last Action Hero* (1991) openly challenge Romantic notions of Shakespeare's wisdom and cultural value. Burt asks why Shakespeare is both invoked and "disappeared" in America, indeed why he is paradoxically cited so repeatedly. Through asking if American culture can do without the Bard, and identifying what it can do *with* him, Burt reads Shakespeare as a "queer symptom" of America's national unconscious.

Burt distinguishes between queer and gay theory, arguing that the mere "gaying" of Shakespeare limits analysis to a simple politics of identity in which some texts can be read as straight and others gay. Accordingly, the "queering" of Shakespeare is not defined in terms of simply labelling the author as gay or bisexual, but of opening up a queer space of "overlapping kinds of knowledge and reading practices" (75). As well as the battery of wryly amusing chapter headings customary to queer theory writing, Burt offers an intriguing catalogue of "queer moments" in Shakespearean adaptation and seeks to problematise and redefine many of the critical discourses he uses from a perspective motivated by queer theory's dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Rejecting traditional boundaries, Burt argues persuasively that the Shakespeare archive must be extended to include not only analysis of the poems, plays and their faithful adaptations, but also the many citations and appropriations of both the man and his work in contemporary

culture, no matter how remote they lie from the original. Indeed, the book is at its most friendly when collating and analysing an exciting array of representations of Shakespeare texts ranging from Branagh and Zeffirelli's full-blown adapations through to porn films using Shakespearean (con)texts as MacGuffins for hardcore action.

Also, through identifying and formalising the figure of "the Loser" in terms of contemporary film characterisation, youth lifestyle and academic practise, Burt argues, provocatively, that youth culture redefines intelligence as "dumbing down", choosing to champion the new, the cool, the trivial, the inane, the belated and the obsolete over the intelligent. For him, academia is in danger of embracing and promoting a similarly "dumbed down" version of Western culture. He perceives an academic flight from meaning, depth and complexity towards an attention seeking and media-friendly "cultural channel surfing" (11). Burt ventures to connect academic celebrities with porn stars: both are known very well by a very small number of people (25).

Popular culture is, he argues, now co-extensive with youth culture. This youth culture is not simply dumbed down, but has in fact transvalued "dumb" as "cool", and this is the "kiddie culture" identified in the book's subtitle. Whereas in the 60s youth culture was defined as being purer, more advanced and wiser than the existing, corrupt adult culture, today youth culture has emerged instead as a childish, regressive and immature celebration of nostalgic consumption. Shakespeare, as a signifier of "book" culture, lags behind "postbook" smart technology and has to be redefined, through casting, adaptation and film style, as something cool rather than something intellectual, effeminate or distasteful. The response of popular culture has been paradoxical: Shakespeare remains the measure of American culture and intelligence, but, equally, Mel Gibson and Hollywood are the measure of an intelligent Shakespeare. The response of academia has been, apparently, to echo the conceit.

High culture, then, is under concerted attack not just in the public sphere, but on University campuses where academics "slum it" by concentrating their teaching and research on pop culture and its contemporary avatars of old "high" culture texts and figures. Although Burt mourns this critical displacement of the literary by the cultural he doesn't, however, advocate a return to the reactionary, old-school "Three R's" perspective. The Academy needs rather to re-evaluate its position not just in relation to its analytic practice, but its own fantasies of its role in society. For Burt, Shakespeare's relocation in popular culture is read not just as a symptom of the American national consciousness, but of the national academic consciousness.