

A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française

By Richard Roud

Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999; ISBN 0-8018-6206-X, Xxviii + 218 pp., 17 illustrations, £14.00 (pbk)

A review by Sachiko Shikoda, University of Nottingham, UK

In this most engaging biography Richard Roud draws an affectionate portrait of Henri Langlois, a co-founder and the director of the Cinémathèque Française, a film library and screening room in Paris, tracing from November 1914 when he was born in Turkey until his death in January 1977.

The author, Richard Roud, worked as the director of the London Film Festival from 1960 to 1969 and was involved in organising numerous other events in association with Langlois. This enabled him to rely on not only interviews with people involved in French and global film industries and archiving but also on his own experience. Thus Roud is extremely informative, telling the reader about the wide variety of activities accomplished by Langlois both in France and abroad including his teaching experience at a Canadian university from 1968 for three years, a series of lectures at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and then at Harvard (163).

It is truly amazing that Roud tells you not just about Langlois' prestigious big projects such as his collaboration with the Cannes/Venice/London/New York Film Festivals and receiving the special Oscar in 1974, but also scandal; most famously, the historical boycott executed by film-makers all over the world against his dismissal by André Malraux in 1968. His close research as well as friendship with Langlois and his associates enabled Roud to observe relatively minor moments that reveal the intriguingly audacious dimension of his subject. The episode of how an original print of *Senso* got to London in 1961 is quite thrilling. Roud needed the print for a Visconti retrospective he was programming in London in the autumn. So Langlois arranged that on his way back to London from the Venice Film Festival Roud would stay awake until he got to one of the Milan suburban stations, look out the window and be ready to take the cans of film into his sleeping compartment. Roud confesses that he was not sure the print would be there or that the person carrying it would have enough time to find him while the train made its brief stop, but it worked out fine (119). Roud also tells us about how the Cinémathèque offices functioned as a place to discover new talents. Thus the success story of a Cuban refugee cinematographer, Nestor Almendros, who later regularly worked with Rohmer and Truffaut is told here (122). These small but fascinating moments give the book a sense of tremendous excitement and humour.

In a way Roud's book could have been tremendously diverse and discursive in dealing with so many episodes and anecdotes. Yet what gives the whole book balance and integrity is the fact that the author's focus remains on Langlois' activities as an archivist who collects and

exhibits films to the public as opposed to an archivist who just collects and stores them in a locked place. Roud thus compares Langlois with Auguste and Louis Lumière in that Langlois took "films out of the cans and put them up on a screen where people could see them", just as the Lumière brothers took film out of the "Kinetoscope, the peep-show machine for one spectator at a time and put it up on a screen before an audience" (2). The most remarkable contribution to film culture Langlois made is to have enabled both French (including the young critics of *Cahiers du Cinema*) and international audiences to see "the films from the past: silent films and talkies, German Expressionism and Italian neorealist films, experimental films" (65). For instance, when Roud was in charge of programming for The New York Film Festival in 1963 they screened Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or* and a montage by Langlois of new prints of some of his Lumière films. This was so successful that they achieved the first screening of Feuillade's *Les Vampires* in America, and in addition, they showed the sound version of von Stroheim's *The Wedding March* and Keaton's *Seven Chances*. Roud also frequently highlights the way in which Langlois programmed the films as a key factor of his outstanding achievement; "[Langlois] would run three films every evening in unexpected yet revealing juxtapositions, placing an Eisenstein before a Raoul Walsh, or a Hitchcock after a Mizoguchi" (66).

Although Langlois's objection against bureaucratic administration imposed by either FIAF or the State is conveyed in several anecdotes, Roud's emphasis on Langlois's character as a "great archivist" coincides with an absence of an explicit debate on his political view. This is especially evident in the chapter covering the Cinémathèque's activity during the Occupation where Roud merely accepts the ambivalent nature of the connection between the Cinémathèque and a Nazi officer called Hensel. Nevertheless, Roud provides us with an intensely vivid and illustrative account of the man whom Truffaut once described as "a man as picturesque and as contradictory as a Dickens character", and the contribution he made to film culture both in France and abroad. The image of Henri Langlois which emerges from this book is certainly an intriguing figure with his absolutely extraordinary passion for films.

British Television: A Reader

By Edward Buscombe (ed.)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, ISBN: 0198742657, 362 pp., £15.99, (pbk)

A review by Dianne Carr, University of Westminster, UK

In *British Television: A Reader*, editor Edward Buscombe has not assembled a reader in British television theory, he has produced a reader in British television histories. Buscombe is not concerned with contextualising British television output or consumption in contrast to television elsewhere. The technological mutations of the medium itself do not figure in his analysis. Difficult questions concerning the relationship between a specific national identity and an expansive global phenomenon are evaded. The notion of Britishness itself remains uninterrogated. Had the collection announced itself as being about histories from the outset, it may have avoided more completely the sense that its concerns are dated or anachronistic.

The anthology falls into two parts. The first contributions are concerned specifically with the histories of television institutions in Britain. These papers provide an engaging insight into the evolution of the various debates around notions of public service, impartiality and the BBC. The second section of the anthology moves towards discussing television programmes themselves. These contributions, while uneven, are generally perceptive and informative. The manner in which various influential institutions evolved is undoubtedly a valid subject of inquiry. The methods and creative decisions behind the production of television product are also, undoubtedly, worthy of investigation. Buscombe's problem is that rather than taking it as a given that these methodologies are valid in themselves, he feels obliged in the course of his introduction to champion these approaches while systematically and insistently rejecting others. Surely a subject as influential, multifarious and omnipresent as television supports and justifies a wide variety of theoretical approaches.

The arguments with which Buscombe dismisses those approaches he finds less than satisfying rely on problematic and reductive analysis. He repeatedly refers to critical or academic theory as a hostile or destructive force that involves the hurling of "intellectual asteroids" (9) at cultural product. In the course of a few pages, Buscombe whizzes through Marxist, Semiotic and reception based theory, all of which he is able to dismiss by extrapolating each line of enquiry to a deadlocked conclusion. He refers to the "overly politicised discourse of academic writing" (9) and to the "straitjacket within which political commitment seemed to have confined television analysis" (7). Why characterise critical enquiry as a negative endeavour? Critical scrutiny involves more than just arriving at various conclusions. In its more positive manifestations it is fuelled by curiosity and legitimate social concern, while the rejection of politicised theory may necessitate evading the most perplexing or crucial questions.

Buscombe focuses on the notion of public service (as opposed to commercial interests) as being the defining and distinguishing aspect of British television. While this may be a historically valid perspective, it would seem to be an approach that remains sound only as long as the changing nature of the medium itself is ignored. How relevant is it to limit

considerations within a commercial versus public interest dialectic when new technologies have so dramatically altered the parameters of the debate? And how can an assemblage of writings that document an institution's apparent commitment to public service exist credibly while it fails to question with any rigour the ways in which that institution is funded?

Buscombe writes that "the point of studying British television is, at the end of the day, to see how it can be made better...But what exactly is good television? ... How can we explain the evident enjoyment of television by millions of people? ... Isn't it because the programmes are good that people like them?" (8) Television is a valid object of investigation by virtue of its influence, regardless of subsequent or separate considerations of any perceived aesthetic value. Additionally, the dubious notion that "quality" is central to popularity is dismantled by even a cursory examination of the high profile, eagerly consumed and thoroughly diverting crap that fills a TV schedule. Television is consumed in a multitude of ways that are definitive and particular to the medium, and many of the pleasures of distraction, choice and diversion it offers have little to do with the attributes of particular programmes. Buscombe also suggests that the influence of television is commensurate with the credibility or veracity with which its audience perceive its propounding of "the real": "it matters that television is honest and truthful. If television believes it can ignore this, it will ultimately pay the price by losing the interest of the public." (10) While notions of fabrication and manipulation are certainly of crucial import, assuming that the audience's attention is conditional on our believing in what we see overlooks and understates the cocktail of culpability, credulity and simultaneous scepticism with which television is consumed and discussed by the viewing public.

The second half of the anthology deals with specific programmes or genres. All of the contributions are serious, thoroughly researched and informative. Unfortunately there is also the sense that analysis with a historical bent is not effectively contextualised. Various contributors, for example, discuss *Eastenders*, but the essays are not framed by any reference to more recent episodes. The papers are interesting, valid, but hardly contemporary. Of course this is not in itself a problem, other than that it remains unremarked. Many of the soap's early claims to social responsibility have been rendered problematic (or uprooted outright) by more recent storylines. The effect of this is to cast a shadow, retrospectively, over past claims made on behalf of the soap and its commitment to "social issues". Is issue driven content about social responsibility, or does it simply demonstrate the producers' willingness to capitalise on ready made publicity as generated by the latest salacious tabloid mania?

Opportunities to contextualise or propose specifically British elements in television product are not exploited. Disappointingly, in the most provocatively titled chapter in the anthology, "Framing 'the Real': *Oranges, Middlemarch, X-file*", content relating to the American science fiction programme was cut for the sake of brevity. I found this particularly disappointing, not least because the notion of considering costume drama and science fiction in the same paper is completely beguiling. The *X Files* is a programme that seems very differently received in Britain than in its country of origin. The question of national specificity is again evaded in the piece on *Gladiators*, which is a UK version of an American programme. I wondered if a discussion around the shifts undergone during that adaptation (if any) would have provided some kind of evidence of national specificity.

Another chance at justifying the consideration of British television as a geographically or nationally specific phenomenon is missed in the piece on British TV abroad. The author

explores the undoubted influence of British TV and the BBC internationally, but undermines himself by utilising the phrase "neo-European" to describe the USA and Australia and other primarily English speaking nations. Not only is the phrase deeply problematic (and borderline offensive) on racial and ethnic grounds, but it additionally serves, within the course of a discussion of influence, to obliterate very real and contentious tides of power. It is wrong to collapse Australia and the USA under one umbrella relative to manifestations of British cultural and political authority. TV in Australia tends to reproduce the trope of commercial versus public service on a transnational stage. American product (especially rerun situation comedies and daytime soaps) dominates the schedules of the local commercial channels.

In contrast, the local equivalent of the BBC is associated with factual programming and good intentions in a colonialist arena that makes the class address of such product even more starkly apparent than it is in the UK. In a way this particular chapter could thus be seen to embody both the strengths and the failings of Buscombe's anthology as a whole. On the one hand it functions as a valid resource in an emergent and evolving field of inquiry. On the other, opportunities to confront difficult questions and complex issues are missed, or prematurely dismissed.

Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender

By Michael J. Shapiro

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, ISBN 0 74861289 0, 176pp., 4 illustrations, £40.00 (hbk)

A review by George S. Larke, University of Northumbria at Newcastle, UK

This is a book about political thought, rather than a book about film. In each chapter, at least two thirds of the space is devoted to discussions of identity politics and historical contexts, rather than in application to any specific texts, or cinematic apparatus. This would not be a criticism if it wasn't for the fact that this focus is not made clear in the title, or the introduction to the book. Thus, I spent the first chapter searching for the relevance to film, which is not what the book is about at all. Cover reviews go part way to explain that the book is a "series of investigations into aspects of contemporary politics and a more general attempt to articulate a critical philosophical perspective with politically disposed treatments of contemporary cinema". In essence, this means that Shapiro is not really addressing issues *in* film, he is concerned with cultural politics and occasionally uses a film as a *reflection of* political thought. Once this is understood, the book becomes more interesting.

The book's overall premise is to "offer a politics of critique, which, in a Kantian spirit, specifies an attitude rather than a particular destination" (1). The intention is to move away from national, or fear-induced identity politics, or, in simple terms, identities derived from an over-reliance on signalling difference in others. To do this, Shapiro engages with Kant's philosophical works, which, he states, reject "closural models of interpretation" (3) and focus on thought as a productive, rather than representational act. Chapter one, "Towards a Politics of Now-Time", focuses on "time-value" relationships through the contemporary experience of sports, in particular "black bodies" in sport. He goes on to discuss various aspects of the politics of experience, value and meaning and the extent to which an individual has control over his/her movement. The purpose of this investigation is to assess the experience and implications of "now-time", explained under the philosophical question; what is different about today? Even as an open-ended discussion of experience and commodified culture, this chapter is still the most difficult to follow. It either does not express itself as well as the rest of the book, or, as it was chapter one, my brain was struggling to get used to the over-complicated vocabulary. Whichever is the case, the chapters become progressively more coherent in vocabulary and context as the book progresses. Chapter two and three, "Narrating the Nation" and "The Politics of Globalization" provide interesting debates on the politics of identity by exploring the arbitrary construction of state, or national boundaries in historical terms. Using the history of the state of Israel as an example, Shapiro details, not only the subjective nature of nationhood, but also the ways in which warring peoples are often fighting over political boundaries, rather than "real" ones. Chapter three develops this argument, by assessing fears of assimilation, and loss of identity through political perceptions of globalisation. Shapiro uses examples of colonialism in history to suggest that

contemporary notions of nationhood are politically constructed. He focuses on the ways in which constructions of shared-identity, based on any kind of collective, succeed by denying the arbitrary nature of their own unity; "the stability of various forms of collective 'being'...are always already afflicted by their repressions of the arbitrary events by which they have been produced and consolidated" (95). He uses works by historical and contemporary political extremists as examples of constructed collectivity through nationhood (i.e. the WASP identity in America, championed by such as Theodore Roosevelt, 1914), which is valid, but a little selective. However, this may be defended by the fact that Shapiro's concerns are with philosophical debates on identity, rather than assessing to what extent, or how extremists influence a culture. The final chapter, "Value Eruptions and Modalities: The Politics of Masculinity" uses the most film examples and links with the previous chapters to progress the arbitrary function of identity, this time aligning discourses of counterfeiting money with processes of sexual and gender identification. In effect, Shapiro offers fairly conventional readings of gender in film, from the point of view of political value-exchange in discourse and actions. Thus, he asserts that men behave according to peer pressure, in order to be accepted by a group, depending on how gender is perceived within that group. This approach to gender as performance underscores the politics of this whole book, which is basically providing an innovative perspective of identity as arbitrary and constructed, rather than stable and natural. While this approach may be interesting, in that it encourages critical political thinking, it also appears to assume that this is a unique and innovative perspective, when in fact, I believe film/cultural studies has been deconstructing the politics of identity in visual media for quite some time now. Therefore, as a discussion of cinema this book is frustrating, but as a philosophical antidote to single-issue, or single-minded political thought it does offer some contextualised enlightenment.

Feminisms

By Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.)

Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; ISBN 0-19-289270-3, xii + 599 pp., £11.99 (pbk)

A review by Sharon Lin Tay, University of East Anglia, UK

Given the immense influence that feminist theory has on academic discourses, an anthology that attempts to map feminism's various trajectories is necessarily ambitious. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires' 599 page tome very nicely and succinctly presents the multiple threads of feminist discourses in six sections containing a total of eighty-six essays and prefaced by their respective introductions. The six sections are arranged in this order and with the following headings: academics, epistemologies, subjectivities, sexualities, visualities, and technologies. The arrangement of the various sections in such a way presents the reader with the major issues that plague, and in the process enliven, feminist theory. Such organisation shows how the issues of each section build upon the concerns expressed in previous sections, and provides some sense of coherence to the discourse over time. However, the plural of the anthology's title and the respective section headings highlight the diversity of views, methodologies, and concerns amongst feminists, and the difficulties that emerge out of these differences.

Kemp and Squires' general introduction fleshes out feminist theory's development. As the editors rightly point out, feminism's battleground is now within academia despite its origins in the second-wave women's movement and the political realm. This movement away from political activism and towards academic institutionalisation is perhaps the singularly most profound split in feminist discourse. The section on academics provides an excellent selection of writings that explores this split between the political and the theoretical. The first essays in this section date back to the early 1980s. The profound need that these early writings express for a voice to articulate and validate women's experiences is moving; more so the frustration and anger, if not made explicit, that is always hovering over the arguments. While the editors, amongst feminist activists, bemoan the institutionalisation of feminist discourses and liken it to "selling out" (4), they also acknowledge that this shift towards theory and academia is inevitable, and in fact signals the progress and increasing sophistication of feminist investigations.

This anthology shows an impressive amount of interaction between feminist and film research. Essays by noted feminist film scholars assert their presence. The cross-fertilisation between film and feminist criticism is evident and as the editors note,

"[f]eminist theoretical endeavour has increasingly challenged the dominance of materialist theoretical perspectives, focusing in their place on processes of symbolization and representation. The search for depiction of women that escape the straitjacket of already-existing symbolic forms has led to analyses

of the relation between images and social representation, identity and the upholding of social orders" (7).

Teresa De Lauretis' "Aesthetics and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema" that calls for a transformation of the aesthetics, politics, and language of women's cinema appears in the academics section that tackles the politics/theory split in feminist criticism. The section on visualities features essays by Jacqueline Rose, Kaja Silverman, Annette Kuhn, and E. Ann Kaplan. The issues raised by these essays, written in the 1980s, testify to the development of feminist film theory as founded upon psychoanalysis and that which interrogates women's representation, subjectivity, spectatorial pleasure, as well as the turn to postmodernism. Griselda Pollock's essay rethinks previous "images of women" discourses and allows the reader to revisit the sort of materialist discourse, especially dependent on reading textual details for ideological messages, that precedes the 1980s' preoccupation with psychoanalysis, subjectivity, and desire. In addition, the rest of the section features feminist writings on other visual mediums and includes two essays in particular that explore the feminist politics and aesthetics of works by photographer Francesca Woodman and Mexican artist Frida Kahlo.

After decades of wrangling over the notion of sexual difference, it nevertheless remains a sore point in feminist discourse. The last section of the anthology that focuses on the relationship between gender and technologies takes this contention further. Discussions of the reproductive system and its control by the patriarchal medical establishment are, of course, the mainstay in such debates. Discussions of sexual difference here take on another split: between ecofeminism that associates woman with nature, and "techno-feminism" that attempts to get rid of essentialism and the idea of woman as the second sex. Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto is, of course, the well-known founding document. As a departure from ecofeminism's technophobia, the essays here discuss how feminists may appropriate technology for their own ends. In relation to the media, Constance Penley writes of how women writers of *Star Trek* pornography form a subculture that resists oppressive norms. The promise of fluid and multiple sexual identities seems to be the attraction that technology holds for techno-feminists, although the essays here celebrate the appropriation of technology with healthy scepticism.

This book is an excellent compilation of essays on issues that feminists have engaged, and are engaging, with over the last twenty years. Together with the appended bibliography, the anthology serves well as a rich source for undergraduate teachers as well as a welcome refresher's course for readers who have forgotten the richness and intricacies of the field.

Feminist Discourse and Spanish Cinema: Sight Unseen

By Susan Martin-Márquez

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-19-815979-X, viii + 322 pp., 16 illustrations, £40.00 (hbk)

A review by Kathleen M. Vernon, State University of New York at Stony Brook, USA

The decade of the 1990s witnessed a boom in women's filmmaking in Spain, with some twenty new female directors making their feature debut. Seen from abroad this phenomenon might seem to provide confirmation of the much heralded cultural vitality of a pluralistic, post-Franco Spain that has definitively turned its back on a monolithic social, political and economic order that saw women confined to repressed and repressive traditional roles. One of the many values of Susan Martin-Márquez's thoroughly researched and thought-provoking study is its determination to question that Manichean vision--or division-- of Spanish history and culture and to explore seventy years of Spanish cultural and cinematic history in all its complexities and contradictions.

Taking as her point of departure, and a spur to action, a recent feminist cinema encyclopedia's declared lack of a "feminist voice" in Spanish cinema (1), Martin-Márquez pursues a dual approach to the study of women's place and participation in cinematic institutions in Spain. The first half of the book, "Women and Agency in Spanish Cinema," is devoted to the reconstruction and analysis of the careers and bodies of work of three important women directors from different historical moments: Rosario Pi during the 1930s, Ana Mariscal in the 1940s through the 1960s, and Pilar Miró in the 1970s to the 1990s. In Part Two, "Feminist Discourses in Spanish Cinema," Martin-Márquez analyzes three selected pairs of films, one each from Francoist and Post-Franco periods, by both male and female directors, for their treatment of issues of identity, desire and sexuality, and pleasure and power. This double focus points to the book's greatest strength: its combination of detailed archival research and historical reconstruction of the production and reception contexts of women-authored films largely absent from previous studies of Spanish cinema, together with extended textual analyses grounded in a rigorous theoretical framework of feminist film and critical theory.

The conjunction of feminism and cinema has had a vexed history in Spain. As Martin-Márquez explains, the terms feminist and feminism themselves have been viewed with suspicion by Spanish film historians and many women filmmakers alike, as denoting a separatist and anti-male culture on the one hand, and a self-imposed limitation to a ghettoized female audience on the other. Nevertheless, mainstream critical approaches have not served women's cinema well; where the work of early women directors is dismissed as too commercial, trivial, and/or complicit with the Franco regime, more recent films are criticized for their localism and lack of universality. While calling our attention to these "gender-specific blind spots" (5), Martin-Márquez is concerned to situate her own project within a larger conception of feminist film practice, informed by Continental and Anglo-American as

well as Spanish movements and theories. Following the exhortation of Patrice Petro, her goal is to "account for the history of [Spanish] national cinema from a feminist perspective" (11). The feminist history of Spanish cinema she would produce is anything but the separatist ghetto feared by Spanish critics and filmmakers. Convinced, with Lucy Fischer, that "women have no monopoly on feminist art" (41), Martin-Márquez provides convincing rereading of male-authored texts for their feminist subtexts. In line with a general emphasis on gender as performance, she establishes vital continuities between the films and filmmakers she studies and the critic's own active performative role. Rather than reproducing "old meanings" in texts construed as hegemonic within their original context, her interpretations set as their goal "bringing into being new meanings and new subjectivities." (17)

The chapters devoted to two of Spain's most prolific women directors, Ana Mariscal and Pilar Miró, in Part One of her study, offer insight into her method and concerns. Examining the multi-faceted career of actress turned director Mariscal, Martin-Márquez points to the inadequacy of dominant critical and ideological frameworks for understanding and evaluating the former's work. Heterogeneous in their subject matter, style, and modes of production, Mariscal's eleven films straddle a "no-man's land" alternating between art/auteur cinema and low budget commercial efforts. Judged from the perspective of (anti-)Francoist historiography, Mariscal's films as both actress and director fall outside the oppositional canon, and are thus deemed complicit with Francoist politics. Martin-Márquez undertakes a broader rereading of Mariscal's career, uncovering in her acting, writing, and directing a pattern of critical heterodoxy expressed within the limits of mid-century Spanish patriarchy.

Pilar Miró, the late film director and twice cultural official in the Socialist government of Felipe González, seemed to function as a lightning rod, a kind of Spanish Hilary Clinton (with obvious differences), in her capacity to incite intense reaction if not hostility as a visible symbol of the strong, female public figure. Martin-Márquez's approach to Miró's career explores that public persona while offering new, insightful readings of her most important and controversial films. Miró's early films, *La petición* (*The Engagement Party*, 1976) and *El crimen de Cuenca* (*The Cuenca Crime*, 1979-81) marked out the limits to a still fragile freedom of expression during the period of transition from dictatorship to democratic government in Spain. The director was brought before a military tribunal for supposed offenses against the Civil Guard in the historical drama, *Cuenca*, based on a well known case of mistaken prosecution that occurred during the 1920s. Finally released after two years following the reform of the military code, *Cuenca*, with its graphic scenes of torture of two innocent men, became the biggest grossing film in Spanish history. Martin-Márquez's rereading seeks out the sources of the film's stunning impact not as a simple succès de scandale but in its "reversal of . . . gendered cinematic norms," its specularization of male bodies as the object of violence.

Further chapters offer thoughtful rereadings of works by canonical male directors, Juan Antonio Bardem and Víctor Erice, as well as female filmmakers Josefina Molina and Margarita Aleixandre, co-director of Spain's first cinemascope feature in the 1956 *La gata* (*The Cat*). Martin-Márquez closes with an epilogue in which she surveys the women-authored cinema of the 1990s, highlighting its opening to further representations of difference beyond gender, notably of race and nation, sexual orientation, and the experiences of Spain's growing immigrant population.

Through its wide-ranging dialogue with feminist work throughout Europe and the Americas, *Feminist Discourse and Spanish Cinema: Sight Unseen* sets Spanish cinema and culture in a

challenging new context. It should be read by anyone with an interest in feminism and gender studies and/or modern Spanish culture and history.

Film Art: An Introduction

By David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson

New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1997; ISBN 0-07-114073-5, xiii + 496 pp., \$45.93 (hbk)

A review by Raymond J. Haberski, Jr, Ohio University, USA

In 1939, Lewis Jacobs, a former editor of the politically left journal *Experimental Cinema*, published a book entitled *The Rise of the American Film*. With that work, Jacobs made a significant contribution to the history of movies, mostly because he treated the subject so seriously. He made the case that not only did movies have a history comparable to the other arts, he argued that movies were in fact an artistic expression. That is now a standard assumption; students the world over can take courses in film studies and can even graduate from film departments and schools - something unthinkable sixty years ago. A product of this transition is the crop of scholars devoted to the study of motion pictures. Two at the top of that profession are David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

Bordwell and Thompson are authors of a well written and smartly conceived text entitled *Film Art: An Introduction*. They both teach at the prestigious Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin and both gained Ph.D.s from Iowa University's well-respected graduate program. They are fine teachers and scholars who have produced a lengthy list of monographs and survey textbooks. Bordwell has written on Theodore Dreyer, Ozu, Eisenstein, and the language of cinema. Thompson has published on Eisenstein as well, and the large and fascinating subject of American movie exports to Europe during the silent film era.

In producing the book under review here, the authors set out to survey the world of film aesthetics. Their approach is fairly straight-forward: they look at individual films as one might a painting or a sculpture and seek to place movies in a larger stream of history. They explain that each film is "an artifact - made in particular ways, having a certain wholeness and unity, existing in history" (x). They avoid unnecessary jargon; explain difficult ideas (such as *mise-en-scene*) briefly but clearly; and offer a very satisfying work for students as well as teachers looking for a useful text.

It is clear from the organization of their book as well as the central themes it proposes that both authors are intellectual children of the 1950s and 1960s. They accept the efforts of the French New Wave to catalog and analyze movies by directors and use the formal construction of the film as a window onto its social meaning and historical implications. For example, early in the book they write "it is through the director's control of the shooting and assembly phases that the film's form and style crystallize" (28). Thus readers will be treated to extended discussions of Alfred Hitchcock, Spike Lee, Martin Scorsese, Orson Welles, and other directors and documentarians whose work is probably either familiar to most people or whose films tend to distinguish them from their contemporaries.

And, yet, this book does not resemble Andrew Sarris's latest work, *You Ain't Heard Nothin Yet*, because it does not dwell on particular directors, rather it uses them and their movies to illustrate larger points about the composition of a film. For example, Bordwell and Thompson conduct an involved discussion of *The Wizard of Oz* in order to explore different ways to tell a story and the various levels of meaning one might glean from a movie's narrative. The authors suggest that when moviegoers attempt to analyze a film they should:

Not leave behind the *particular* and *concrete* features of a film. We should strive to make our interpretations precise by seeing how each film's thematic meanings are suggested by the film's total system. In a film, both explicit and implicit meanings depend closely on the relations between narrative and style (75).

In regard to *The Wizard of Oz*, they offer multiple meanings of the film - one more detailed than the last - that correspond to the density of context into which one fits the film. The authors do not, however, subscribe to a limitless analytical universe in which meaning can be found through cascading levels of abstraction. "As analysts," they warn, "we must balance our concern for that concrete system with our urge to assign it wider significance" (77). In other words, as good students, we should consider a film's technical form along with its historical context and its makers intentions - even if they are not fully known.

One of the greatest values of this book is its level-headed approach to evaluating movies. In a brief section entitled "Evaluation," Bordwell and Thompson provide basic criteria that make a movie good. Their list includes coherence, intensity of effect, complexity, and originality. Viewers should, of course, weigh such criteria according to the type of film under review. But the authors believe that some immutable standards exist that can help students judge movies. "Ninety minutes of a black screen," they write, "would make for an original film but not a very complex one. A 'slasher' movie may create great intensity in certain scenes but be wholly unoriginal, as well as disorganized and simplistic" (78).

This last statement intimates the sometimes strange dilemma posed by evaluating movies. Can we really take "slasher" films seriously? Should we subject a medium made by committee for mass consumption on Friday night dates to the same or similar standards that we would apply to a serious work of art? As the authors make clear in their book, we can and should take films seriously but do so selectively. Excluded from their survey, therefore, are movies simply not worth discussing. By including those films and directors who take their craft seriously and strive to create a product worth more than the price of popcorn, the authors sensibly articulate the dynamics of film art. They make it relatively easy to determine what makes a movie such as *Raging Bull* both a technical and narrative masterpiece. Even more than that, though, by the end of the book, I found myself competently considering both the technical as well as the intellectual composition of movies. Perhaps that is the highest praise I can give this work.

The book also has a few technical features worth noting. At the end of each chapter the authors include a section called "Notes and Queries" that serves as a collection of brief bibliographic essays. They also include a brief glossary as well as a two-page list of internet web sites for information on a variety of subjects ranging from studios to museums. And while the chapter on film history is an extremely brief thirty pages, there is a fair bibliography attached to it. For a more exhaustive survey of the subject, see Bordwell and Thompson's other major textbook, *Film History: An Introduction*.

Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon

By Alexander Doty

Routledge: New York and London, 2000, ISBN: 0-415-92345-X, 256 pp., 14 photographs, £11.99, (pbk)

A review by Harry Benshoff, University of North Texas, USA

Alexander Doty is the author of *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993) and co-editor with Corey Creekmur of *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture* (Duke University Press, 1995). Those books, along with numerous other published essays, have made him one of the leading critics and theorists of queer media studies during the last decade. *Flaming Classics*, Doty's most recent book, is an extension of his previous work applying queer theory to issues of textual production and reception. While the book does not break considerable "new ground" (as some of his earlier work had done), it is nonetheless a highly informative, well-researched and fun-to-read exploration of the queerness that can be found in many mainstream texts, in this case the film classics *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Women* (1939), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), and *Psycho* (1960). Smaller queer exegeses of *Intolerance* and *Citizen Kane* are also included within the book's introduction.

In this collection of essays (half of which have been published elsewhere), Doty argues that all people - queers included - often have intense "cultural and erotic investments in so-called mainstream and classic popular culture texts" and that often those texts "can be more queer-suggestive than 'openly' gay, lesbian, or bisexual texts" (1). For the uninitiated, Doty reviews the various meanings and ideas that the term "queer" has come to signify since its academic recouping a decade ago, from its reductive use as a mere synonym for either gay or lesbian, to its various uses as an "umbrella" term referring collectively to all forms of non-straight sexualities. The book aims to use queer primarily as a descriptor of "those aspects of spectatorship, cultural readership, production, and textual coding that seem to establish spaces not described by, or contained within, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or transgendered understandings and categorizations of gender and sexuality" (6-7). Doty's work seeks to explore the "complex circumstances in texts, spectators, and production that resist easy categorization, but that definitely escape or defy the heteronormative" (7). As such, queer readings are just as "real" as the preferred readings that are sanctioned by dominant culture.

Each of the book's chapters, devoted to a single film, is exhaustively researched with both primary and secondary sources. Doty analyzes not only the films themselves, but frequently their cultural and authorial milieus, and past reviews of each film become texts themselves as Doty draws out the queerer implications in them. For example, the chapter on *Caligari* explores the film in relation to Weimar Germany's conflicted take on sexuality as well as its homosexual star Conrad Veidt, who was simultaneously onscreen in *Anders als die Andern* (1919), one of the first films ever made about male homosexuality. The chapter on *The Red*

Shoes draws upon unpublished correspondences between Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger as a starting point for exploring the complex nexuses of masculinity, homosociality, and homoeroticism within both text and textual production, especially artistic collaboration between men. In his discussion of *The Women*, Doty examines a variety of discourses including "the sociopolitical, star cult, gossip/extratextuality, auteurism, identification," erotics and camp that queer spectator response to the film (81). Ultimately, comedy is itself "fundamentally queer since it encourages rule-breaking, risk-taking, inversions, and perversions in the face of straight patriarchal norms" (81). Likewise, *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* is scrutinized within the formal auteurist and homosocial impulses of director Howard Hawks, and found to be "a narrative filled with bisexual joie de vivre" (135).

Doty also calls for the "coming out" of the "scholar-fan," i.e. the need for scholars to acknowledge their personal investments in the work they do, in order to problematize in the first place concepts such as "the canon" as well as other institutionalized hierarchies. As such, several essays stress a more personal and idiosyncratic exploration of how popular culture texts can interact in changing ways with one's own queerness. For example, in his essay on *The Wizard of Oz*, Doty treats us to some personal childhood memories of play acting the film with his brothers and sisters (but you'll have to read the book to find out who played what parts), as well as the film's changing meaning within queer communities over the years. In a brilliant take on the film, Doty explains Dorothy's fantastic journey as a young lesbian's search for identity, constantly buffeted between the gendered poles of the traditional and ultra-feminine (Aunt Em/Glinda the Good Witch) and the butch (Almira Gulch/the Wicked Witch of the West). Although the chapter on *Psycho* seems a bit obvious to this queer horror movie maven, overall *Flaming Classics* is a scholarly and enjoyable read. It could also serve as a good introduction to queer media studies for the novice.

Imagination: Popular Images of Genetics

By José Van Dijck

Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Press, 1998, ISBN 0-333-64952-4; ISBN 0-333-64953-2. 248pp. £52.50 (hbk); £19.99, (pbk)

A review by Aylish Wood, University of Aberdeen, UK

Imagination: Popular Images of Genetics sets out to examine the complex ways in which the late twentieth century phenomenon of the gene appears in popular images. By popular José Van Dijck means the presentation of "science in a generally understandable form" in a non-specialist forum; the texts included in this study, which are both fictional and non-fictional accounts, are primarily written ones, although there are occasional references to television and film. In order to keep the scope of her book manageable, Van Dijck has chosen to focus only on human genetics, and begins her commentary in the 1950s with the elucidation of the structure of DNA, moving forward to the contemporary period of the human genome project. In this chronological account, Van Dijck argues that the gene has undergone a series of transformations in the public arena. As she says: this transformation of "popular images of genetics [is] not created by either social or professional groups, but evolve[s] from the continuous interaction between these groups in the realm of culture." (179) This continuous interaction does not simply mean a meeting of discourses utilised by competing groups - journalists, scientists, writers of novels and short stories, and activists of various persuasions - in the public arena; rather, it involves the creation of a particular discourse at the points of intersection, a discourse which can then be appropriated for different ends by the competing groups. To expand on this process Van Dijck uses the idea that "public science can be seen as a theatre, a site of performance where dramas are staged, which allow an audience to watch and interpret its content." (16) The staging of this "theatre of representation" enables the audience to be brought into interaction with the plots of the gene narratives, the characterisations of both the scientists and the gene, as they unfold. However, this unfolding is presented as a historical process. For example, a key term such as the gene is examined as it transforms from early associations with the relatively abstract notion of a code or language of life, through to associations with potential environmental catastrophe as an engineered bug able to escape, as well as socio-biological uses of the term in which the gene is perceived as a manager. More recent uses of the gene within the human genome project has returned to some of the associations of a code of life, but a code which has taken on new resonances through an intersection with modern electronic metaphors of networks, programming and so on.

Imagination is on the whole an accessible and engaging commentary on the life story of the human gene in the second half of the twentieth century. However, there are some questions which remain unconsidered in Van Dijck's study. The first is a question of which portion of the public arena is addressed by *Imagination*. The materials drawn upon are primarily from the written media, including journals, SF novel and magazine fictions and non-fictions. Although films and television programs do feature occasionally, they are a minor component of this analysis. Given this, it might be more appropriate to locate this work as an exploration of written media, rather than anything more encompassing. A second question emerges in relation to this first: whose popular image is this? One of the most obvious and surprising

omissions is a clearer contextualisation of the materials discussed by the author - *Imagination* is really a book about the gene in the USA. Although there are occasional exceptions - such as the London based journals *Nature* and *New Scientist*, and the work of the UK based author Richard Dawkins - the sources cited and the various agencies mentioned are located in the USA. Obviously there is nothing wrong with writing about the United States as a theatre of representation for the gene, but some mention of this specific context seems essential - a reader who is unfamiliar with the publications used as the primary sources in this study will not necessarily be aware of the specificities of the debates. A further issue which emerges from these questions is that of the audience for these debates. Although the answer is probably beyond the scope of this particular project, the potential readership of the publications mentioned, and hence the spread of these images into the public domain, is not without relevance. Despite these criticisms, *Imagination: Popular Images of Genetics* is an interesting book, a useful and accessible introduction to discourses around the human gene.

Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles

By Tim Dant

Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999; ISBN 033519821X. ix + 227 pp., £14.99 (pbk)
Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture By Mike Budd, Steve Craig
and Clay Steinman

Consuming Environments: Television and Commercial Culture

By Mike Budd, Steve Craig and Clay Steinman

New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999; ISBN 0813525926. xix +
225 pp., 17 illustrations, £17.50 (pbk)

A review by Rory Drummond, Blundell's School, UK

The two books under review have many concerns and assumptions in common, confronting as they both do the most significant given of contemporary Western culture: the individual's right, even duty, to the ownership and consumption of things. They could scarcely be more different, however, in their attitudes to this phenomenon. Where one seems ultimately to celebrate commercialism, showing how things - houses, cars, clothes, television sets - contribute to and even enrich our lives, the other starts out from the assumption that almost all products are unnecessary, and lays at the door of television much of the blame for a rampant materialism that is doing irreparable harm to the planet.

Tim Dant's entertaining *Material Culture in the Social World* concerns human relationships with things. Historians, archeologists and anthropologists have always relied heavily on retrieved objects to construct perspectives on the lives of past eras and civilisations. But sociologists, Dant argues, have been slow to make use of contemporary objects to explore how we live now: "until they are put in a museum or turn up in a strange context, we do not notice that they are culturally distinctive, that they are part of our lives alongside the people we live with" (15). It is this unaccountable, but exciting gap in scholarship that he sets himself to fill. Moving away from a classically Marxist concentration on consumption - "the selling of goods and the moment of their exchange for money" (17) - Dant chooses to train his thoughts instead on the subsequent business of "living with things" (17). It is to his credit that the possibilities opened up by this decision are immediately apparent to the reader; it is one of those ideas so brilliantly obvious you can't believe it hasn't been done before.

Of course, in a way it has. After the book's fine opening - witty, detailed analyses of two well-chosen examples of material culture: the cairn and the mini-strip - Dant gives lucid

accounts of the works of such pioneering sociologists as Baudrillard and Bourdieu. While admitting to predecessors, however, he manages to convince the reader that their approaches were fatally limited while his is expansive. The academic space-clearing of these early chapters does make for slightly heavy-going, but the appetite is effectively whetted for the juicier material to come.

The real fun begins with chapter four, entitled "Building and Dwelling". Here Dant argues convincingly that "the home is a site for material expression by people that is unparalleled elsewhere in their lives" (70), and goes on to explore in detail some of the forms this expression takes. He has a neat way of rendering the everyday newly interesting, and it would be a determined reader who could get through the chapter without letting his eyes wander over his own surroundings, his chairs, kitchen cabinets and electrical appliances. All these things, Dant argues, carry meaning and reveal something about those who use them. Buying an object is only the start; it is in the day-by-day use, wear and adaptation of things that consumption, in its fullest sense, really takes place.

Similarly provocative chapters on clothes, play and the objects we put on and in our bodies follow, with such individual specimens as jeans, windsurfers and navel rings coming under Dant's playful microscope. Again, while some cultural criticism can make materialism seem a bleak affair, Dant's book works towards what amounts to a defence, even a celebration, of the western world's dominant ideology. To own and interact with such a range of interesting things is made to seem like a lifelong adventure, even an art form. This is a highly liberating and, importantly, highly democratic vision, with all capable of shaping, and being shaped by, their material environments. It is a democratic spirit that is implicit, too, in the book's style, with the reader persistently urged to look to his own life for further examples of Dant's central thesis. The book has a pleasingly unfinished feel, as if it were a manifesto for a whole body of work yet to come, and to which we all might contribute.

On the television, Dant is typically upbeat. Interested in how TV is attended to, rather than what is watched, he argues that the television has been fully integrated into the home and adapted to human needs, rather than the other way around. "Gone," he writes, perhaps rather too optimistically, "is the fear of the 'goggle box' which seduces young children into watching it when it is on and which goggles vacantly at everyone in the room when it is off" (172). The authors of *Consuming Environments* would not agree. From George Gerbner's portentous Foreword on, they present television as an altogether malign entity, serving purely commercial interests and manipulating all of us. Their pious concern is focused on the environment and on "the children of the world," (xvi) both of which are apparently done irreparable harm by the primacy of commercial values in the medium, something which can only be reversed by turning television off. Their book is an unashamed call-to-arms: "if there is light at the end of the tunnel of these times, we can find it only in the cares and struggles of each other, not in the flickering of screens" (xvii).

Consuming Environments is very much a product of the American academic environment, and deals almost exclusively with American television. The authors provide exhaustive and undeniably worrying detail on the economics of the industry - the small number of large corporations who control it, the excessive power wielded by advertisers, the profits reaped by the most popular programmes and stars - to further their argument that the technology of television and the ideology of commercialism are indivisibly conjoined. But the few passing references to the way things are done elsewhere suggest otherwise. If the authors do not have much to say about the BBC and other public service institutions, it is perhaps because it

would not suit their argument to dwell on varieties of television which are not primarily commercial.

The best material in the book comes in chapters four to six, where large-scale claims give way for a time to close analysis of actual TV output. The authors attempt shot-by-shot commentaries on a soap powder commercial, an episode of the sit-com *Home Improvement* and the opening of an episode of *Northern Exposure*, aiming, as they put it, "to deliberately make television strange" (86). The results are highly revealing, if not entirely surprising, and show what can be done with the application of basic Media Studies skills to everyday texts. Not only do these studies throw up the proofs of commercialism their authors went in search of, but they also provide useful insights into other, more general aspects of television production: the conventions of mise-en-scène, editing techniques and the contribution made by soundtrack music.

In their final chapter, the authors' return to polemic, repeating their charges against television and providing a list of addresses for readers sufficiently moved to want to contact Green activist movements. The cause is a good one, no doubt, and the plight of the globe urgent, but such preaching does not sit well with this reader's understanding of academic study. Given the choice between a book, like Tim Dant's, which endeavours to make me think, and one, like *Consuming Environments*, that tells me what to think, I know which I prefer.

The American Film Musical

By Rick Altman

Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987; ISBN 025320514X, x + 400 pp., 213 b&w photos, 10 illustrations; £22.95 (pbk)

Genre and Hollywood By Steve Neale

Genre and Hollywood

By Steve Neale

London and New York: Routledge, 2000; ISBN 0415026067, viii + 344 pp., £45.00 (hbk); £13.99 (pbk)

A review by Timothy Connelly, Syracuse University, USA

Originally published over ten years ago, Rick Altman's book *The American Film Musical* still stands as the authoritative study of the musical film. This is however, as Altman himself claims in its opening sentence, only one half of the book, the other being devoted to a more general discussion of genre theory. For Altman, the key element of genre analysis lies in identifying the internal workings of a genre common to all texts within that genre. By moving beyond the surface similarities of genre texts, what he identifies as the semantic elements, and by paying attention to the internal workings of the genre as well, the syntactic elements, Altman argues in chapters one and five that critics can develop a better understanding of the workings of a genre as well as recognize the specificities of texts within that genre. For Altman, then, a "a group of texts may be recognized as constituting a genre if and only if they constitute a semantic type *and* if that semantic type is matched by a corresponding syntactic type as well" (115, his italics). That is, they must not only share common structural and stylistic elements, but an internal working as well.

It is this internal working which sits at the heart of the book, and constitutes its most important contribution to the study of the musical. In the second chapter Altman develops the "dual-focus narrative," a concept which not only organizes film musicals but our analysis of them as well. Through this, Altman argues that scenes and musical numbers within a musical should not be read sequentially through the standard logic of narrative. Rather, to truly understand film musicals their elements need to be read in parallel through "a dual-focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values" (19). This formulation demands that we read the film not through the plot but through the musical numbers and the couple for, as Altman repeats throughout the book, "the couple is the plot." Chapters three and four are then devoted to an analysis of the structure and style of the film musical and their relationship to the dual-focus narrative. As such, the chapter on structure argues among other things, that the basic dichotomy of the couple is overlaid onto a variety of other dichotomies. Central among these other dichotomies is a division between work and entertainment as the film musical, "self-conscious of its status as 'only' entertainment in a

world where work alone merits full value . . . has adopted society's work/entertainment dichotomy as its own thematic center" (49).

In chapters six, seven, and eight Altman lays out three types of film musical: the Fairy Tale Musical, the Show Musical, and the Folk Musical. Altman bases the distinction on the secondary dichotomies that are overlaid onto the formation of the couple within the type. In the Fairy Tale Musical, the formation of the couple parallels "the restoration of order to an imaginary kingdom," in the Show Musical, the formation of the couple "is associated with the creation of a work of art," and in the Folk Musical the formation of the couple "heralds the entire group's communion with each other and with the land that sustains them" (126).

In his final chapter, Altman returns to the work/entertainment dichotomy in attempting to explain the role of the musical in American culture. Assuming his structuralist mantle, Altman argues that the film musical also serves a dual purpose in working to resolve ideological contradictions for the spectator at the same time as the spectator serves the interest of Hollywood:

As [the spectator] become[s] involved with the film's fictional plot, they are thus implicitly working through the problems of their culture as well. . . . At the same time, of course, and by the very same process, the spectator has been lured into doing Hollywood's bidding, for the resolution which the film leads the spectator to is chosen by the film establishment for its greater glory, prestige, and profit (344).

The final chapter of the book, from which this line is lifted, reads as the most dated part of his argument and in light of the work done since on the complicated relationship between audience, Hollywood, and film text, reveals the limits of the methodology Altman was working from.

Other limitations of the work include the heterosexist bias by which he reads the dual-focus narrative. So, while acknowledging that films like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* or the Kelly-Sinatra films offer the spectator same-sex couples, he fails to acknowledge the way in which this coupling can produce a camp or alternative reading on the part of the spectator. This is linked to the primacy that Altman gives in the text to "genre" over an "interpretive community." In his first chapter, Altman argues that "genre" usurps the meaning making process of an "interpretive community" so that genres come to have a "repressive power" which "reduce[s] the field of play of individual texts" (4-5). Rather than read genre as "repressive" however we can read genre as enunciative in the way that it frames the negotiations between text, producer, and reader. Likewise, Altman's primacy of genre over interpretive community reinforces the inability to recognize resistant or camp readings of film musicals and their place within American culture.

While his strong sense of genre analysis produces a thorough documentation of the musical genre as a whole, his methods deep rooting in a structuralist framework fails to account for anomalies within the genre, a problem that Steve Neale attempts to address in *Genre and Hollywood*. Concerned with genre as a whole and its relationship to both Hollywood and Film Studies, Neale's book argues that the problem with Altman's work is shared by much genre theory and analysis which tends to overlook questions and texts in the name of sound and stable generic categories, and that this oversight has led to a simplified version of the relationship between genre, Hollywood, and audiences.

Neale, through a survey of various genres and theories of genre, continually demonstrates the ways in which genre boundaries are fluid and uncertain. He also demonstrates the ways in which this "genre hybridity" has been a feature of film from the its beginnings and that even in the period of the studio system, genre, as a unifying category used either by the studios, the press, or critics, was not as monolithic as it is often presented. He argues that the presentation of genres as monolithic during and before the Studio era are made more to characterize today's film as "better" in the way that they cross boundaries than as a means of understanding the role of those films to their culture.

Neale has divided his book into three sections, each with at least two chapters. The first section: "Genre: Definitions and Concepts," consists of two chapters; one which surveys the varying definitions and uses of genre as a term, the second which explores the "dimensions" of genre, arguing that in labeling genre "multi-dimensional" one must now focus as much on "the factors impinging on audience expectations, the construction of generic corpuses, and the processes of labeling and naming as [on] those that impinge upon the films themselves" (31).

Part two, "Genres," is divided into three chapters that deal with the sixteen major genres Neale identifies. In chapter three he briefly lays out the terrain of fourteen of the sixteen genres: action-adventure, biopics, comedy, contemporary crime (an overarching category which consists of detective films, gangster films, and suspense thrillers), epics and spectacles, horror and science fiction (a category which links the two, but keeps them as distinct genres), musicals, social problem films, teenpics, war films, and westerns. Each section follows a formula where Neale surveys the work done on the genre in the past and then, by putting the individual works together with one another and by bringing in films which constitute limit texts for the genres, begins to question the ways in which the genre has been defined in the past and poses questions as to how study of the genre could be pursued further.

With chapters four and five Neale looks more closely at two genres: *film noir* and melodrama, which stand at the center of both genre and Film Studies. Of *film noir*, Neale argues that the genre is inherently "incoherent" in that "the concept *film noir* seeks to homogenize a set of distinct and heterogeneous phenomena; it thus inevitably generates contradictions, exceptions, and anomalies and is doomed, in the end, to incoherence" (154). Chapter five evaluates melodrama and seeks to establish the relationship between the use of the term in Film Studies and the use of the term by the industry and more generally. He argues that the discrepancies between the use of the term industrially to connote "thriller" or "action-adventure" and the Film Studies use of the term which stress heightened emotion and sentiment warrant further study, which leads him to scrutinize the history of melodrama both in the theatre and in Film Studies and to flesh out their connections and divergences.

The third section of his book, "Hollywood's Genres: Theory, Industry, and History" is divided into two chapters. Chapter 6 surveys "aesthetic" and "socio-cultural" theories of genre, which see themselves as applying to more than one genre. Again, Neale surveys the varied works on genre from aesthetic and socio-cultural points of view in order to locate their strengths and weaknesses. In his final chapter Neale questions some of the tenets that underscore the relationship between genre and Hollywood, especially during the studio era, which include:

Those which assume that genres as traditionally defined were the sole or even principle units of production planning and practice, and those which underestimate the intermittent, mixed, generically heterogeneous and

sometimes even generically indeterminate nature of Hollywood's output in the studio era as measured in traditional terms (233).

It is in this final chapter that Neale's argument about the state of genre criticism comes into focus and that he brings together the work he has done in the book to disturb the notion that genres are fixed and stable and to argue that genre fluidity has been a constant in the history of Hollywood.

In the end, Neale's book is important in two ways. First, although the middle chapters drag in the way that he demonstrates over and over the ways in which one theorist points out the blind spot of another, the bringing together of so many different works on each genre provide an excellent starting point for those interested in genre study. Second, Neale's reevaluation of the role and place of genre in the studio era opens the field for further study and asks that one also reevaluate the place of genre in film and Film Studies today.

Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond

By Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (eds.)

Exeter: Intellect Books, 2000, ISBN number 1-84150-003-8, iv + 188 pp., 7 illustrations, £14.95 (pbk)

A review by Annette Davison, University of Leeds, UK

As discussed by the editors in their introduction to this collection of essays, most of the primary academic texts on musicals have up to now been based on a genre studies approach, and have most often focused on the Hollywood musical. It is appropriate and timely, therefore, that this book should consider a more inclusive and varied approach to this group of films, though some readers will undoubtedly question the rationality of broadening (or loosening?) the definition to the extent that it admits Woody Allen's *Manhattan*, *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Garner) and Kassovitz's *La Haine* (Cannon).

However, although I was initially apprehensive about the breadth of material offered, on the whole the collection coheres remarkably well. A number of recurrent themes can be identified. For example, while many European musicals have been interpreted as being organised around a negotiation with the genre conventions of the Hollywood musical, a number of the essays presented here focus productively on a contextualisation of such films in relation to national cinemas (Arroyo, Bergfelder, Claus and Jäckel, Papadimitriou, and Lindeperg and Marshall to a lesser extent). Some of the papers focus upon the musical's ability to speak for identities and communities marginalised in terms of sexuality, religion, and ethnicity (Arroyo, Fowler, Aaron, Pearl, Stanfield, Taylor). Related to this, Richard Dyer's reprinted "The Colour of Entertainment" - which asserts the whiteness of musical space in Hollywood - is offered alongside Kenneth MacKinnon's tempered corrective to Dyer's view. MacKinnon points out that while utopias presented in Hollywood musicals may be clearly tainted by racism, they may also often be appropriated by the marginalised; a belief in a better tomorrow is still a belief in a better tomorrow, whoever's singing it. His reminder that not all extension into space is colonising and that not all quotations of cultural forms from other ethnicities are derogatory does not operate to undermine Dyer's well-supported argument, however. Rather it may be read as an encouragement towards reception studies of the musical (in-roads to which have been made in film and media studies). Particular Hollywood musicals and their stars are also represented by essays on *The Band Wagon* (a psychoanalytic reading by Babington), Audrey Hepburn and *Funny Face* (Krämer), the Marx Brothers (Conrich), Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins* (Kemp). Notions of utopia are, as would be expected, central to many of the essays already mentioned and also to contributions by Osgerby, Laing, and Donnelly (dystopia in *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle*).

There is not space here to discuss all (or even many) of the twenty-one essays in the collection, so I shall focus on a few in particular. Laing's essay, "Emotion By Numbers: Music, Song and the Musical", draws attention to the dynamic relationship between music and words that takes place during integrated musical numbers. The structural coherence of the form of these songs works to contain, or make safe the "emotional, physical, and formal

excess" characteristic of such moments (10). In order to draw attention away from the song's autonomous structure, attention is focused instead on its performance, which is made impossibly intense (i.e., beyond what could reasonably be expected) through the post-synchronised nature of number production.

As mentioned above, there are several essays on the star persona in the Hollywood musical. These include Aaron's on Streisand's role as Yentl/Anshel (in *Yentl* (1983)), in which he draws productively on theories of cross-dressing (and passing) and transgendered identity, and also situates the film in relation to the historically constructed feminisation of the Jewish male, and more recent issues of Jewishness and feminism. This essay is clearly, therefore, also about minority identity and the musical. Other essays that fall into this category include Peter Stanfield's "American Vernacular and Blackface Minstrelsy in *Showboat*" - in which he demonstrates that while blackface was long disavowed by American culture it has often been invoked in musicals to present a past vernacular tradition - and Pearl's incisive essay on Greyson's *Zero Patience* (1993), a reincarnation film musical about AIDS, in which the virus itself is given a voice, a soprano (Miss HIV) which in turn enables it to speak for itself rather than giving it the authority (through journalists and scientists) to tell others' stories; the story of the so-called Patient Zero, in particular.

Several of the essays focus on European musicals. One of the most interesting of these is Claus and Jäckel's account of the production history of UFA's *Der Kongress Tanzt* (1931), which was shot and distributed in German, French, and English, using different actors, and altered scripts and set designs. They go on to highlight the commercial and political reasons for these differences.

Osgerby's essay, "Beach Bound: Exotica, Leisure Style and Popular Culture in Post-war America from *South Pacific* to *Beach Blanket Bingo*", highlights the connections between notions of the "exotic other" and "pleasure-seeking youth", suggesting that they offered the means by which white middle-class Americans dealt with changes in their Post-war situation. Osgerby argues that the rise of the counter-culture in the late 1960s was built upon earlier experimentation by the middle-classes with "*Tika* exotica and cocktail lounge muzak" (136) in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and also upon the surfing youth subculture of the same era with its hedonist lifestyle centred around the beach party. Osgerby also draws attention to the role that the cinema played in this shift, particularly in terms of musicals.

While I can see the logic of grouping the essays into categories, given that a number of them seem to fit into two or more (Osgerby's and Aaron's, for example) it may have been better not to do so. Furthermore, a standard list of contributors with biography information would have been helpful. Despite my disappointment at the lack of any material on Hindi film musicals (which is a little surprising given the aim to reach out beyond Hollywood), this is nonetheless a collection of impressive scope, which will prove an important reference for anyone interested in broadening the frame of reference for theorising the musical, and recontextualising its history.

Nursery Realms: Children in the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

By Gary Westfahl and George Slusser (eds.)

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999, ISBN 0-8203-2144-3, xiii + 223 pp., £31.95 (hbk); £15.95 (pbk)

A review by Bridget M. Marshall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA

Academics who focus on fantasy, science fiction, or horror, as well as fans of such fare, must often combat prejudices against the genres on the basis of their presumed "childish" or "juvenile" status. Thus the choice of topic for the most recent collection of essays in the field seems appropriate and necessary. Gary Westfahl and George Slusser's latest volume, a collection of essays originally presented in 1993 at the Fifteenth Annual Eaton Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, focuses on the theme of children. The scope of texts, including films, stories, and novels provides access for a wide variety of readers from film, cultural, and literary studies, and even for a general fan of the genre. The authors of the articles themselves also reflect this interdisciplinary intent; while the majority of the authors are from English or comparative literature departments, there are also representatives from the fields of biology and pharmacology, adding an interesting perspective to the collection.

As Westfahl explains in his introduction, children and childlike adults are key characters in a wide variety of texts in the genre, and they serve a wide variety of ends; they may be horrific figures, demon-possessed predators, heroic defenders, or innocent victims. Indeed the way children are presented within the genre - their roles, characterization, and ultimate ends - is the explicit central concern of the essays in this collection. As with previous collections from this conference, the essays are grouped under three categories. The sections themselves indicate the fluid nature of the categories "Fantasy," "Science Fiction," and "Horror," and it is not always clear why one essay (or text addressed) is included in one category and not another. There might have been other ways to organize these papers so that they would speak to each other in more useful ways.

Part One, "Fantastic Children: Overviews and Case Studies," opens with Eric Rabkin's article examining how childlike characters respond to difficulty through infantile fantasies. Rabkin manages to tie in not only S/F novels and stories, but also such diverse texts as the Bible and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Frances Deutsch Louis's "The Humpty Dumpty Effect" turns to the "coming of age" story central to much S/F and Fantasy, making a compelling argument that although such tales certainly appeal to younger readers, they are not merely for children. Such general conclusions are followed by Susan Kray's look at a comparatively narrow scope of S/F stories that use "little Jewish girls," and Gary Kern's "The Triumph of Teen Prop" which details, in colorful prose, a variety of categories of teen propaganda films, eventually moving towards a close reading of *Terminator II* as "the Apotheosis of Teen-Prop" (65).

Four more essays fall under the theme of the second grouping, "The Children of Science Fiction," which begins with George Slusser's article considering the child as not just a romantic figure (think Wordsworth's "seer blest") but as the often times vengeful and murderous child that appears in science fiction. The theme is continued in "The Child as Alien," where Joseph D. Miller, a neurophysiologist, offers information and examples from evolutionary biology and genetics, providing an interesting analysis of how S/F texts reflect science and our society's knowledge of the biology of children. The last two articles by Howard V. Hendrix and Andrew Gordon focus on major texts of the genre: *2001*, the *Dune* series, and *E.T.*

The final section of the book, entitled "The Children of Fantasy and Horror," includes articles on George MacDonald, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and *Peter Pan* (fulfilling the "Fantasy" part of the section) as well as *The Turn of the Screw* and several Stephen King novels (rounding out the "Horror" aspect). Lynne Lundquist and Gary Westfahl's "Coming of Age in Fantasyland," a look at the notoriously family-less children in Disney films, provides an interesting resonance with the earlier essay on teen-prop films. The one exception to this otherwise literary/film-based section is an article by Howard M. Lenhoff that explores the possibility of biological origins for pixie/elf/fairy characters in the medical condition known as Williams syndrome.

The strength of the collection lies in the wide variety of texts addressed and methodologies used; the book offers a wide-angle view of how childhood and children are represented in the genre. Some of the case studies tend towards a specificity that is not particularly useful for one trying to gain a general perspective of the field. But all of the essays provide interesting insights and useful close readings, even when they may be more narrowly focused than the reader requires. The volume does what the introduction claims it sets out to do: "provide a preliminary survey of the territory, a foundation for further inquiry, and many ideas for additional research" (xiii). Most of the essays are quite enjoyable, and will certainly inspire any science fiction, fantasy, or horror reader to consider the child not only within the narrative, but the one reading the narrative as well.

Taxi Driver

By Amy Taubin

London: BFI Publishing, 2000; ISBN 0-85170-393-3, 80pp., 49 illustrations, £7.99 (pbk)

A review by Jo Eadie, Staffordshire University, UK

The BFI's Film Classics series takes in a wide range of authors and styles: Amy Taubin's addition lies towards the journalistic end of the spectrum, making occasional sorties into academic territory, reminiscent of Michael Eaton's *Chinatown* and Adrian Martin's *Once Upon A Time in America*. The author's journalistic license to go for the pithy observation over the reasoned analysis, means that there are many ways in which an academic is bound to be the wrong sort of reader. For any academic who has spent chapters systematically defining the psychoanalytic dynamics of a film, the brevity of Taubin's casual judgement on Travis - "as a paranoiac, [he] has problems with boundaries and splitting" (22) - must elicit a groan of both horror and envy. Yet some of her best observations are also her most brief - for instance, that this story of a white man in the city is "an attempt to reclaim ... the urban landscape that had been revitalised by the blaxploitation films of the early 70s" (15). Such an approach relies largely on the goodwill of her readers (never a wise move for an academic audience, I might add). While some casual observations sparkle with insight, others are frustrating. For instance: a homoerotic charge between De Niro's Travis and Kietel's Sport? Well, maybe or maybe not but the question of what this might mean, or how we should integrate it into a reading of the film, goes unanswered.

But of course much of the pleasure of the BFI series is its ability to capture the moods, obsessions, and passions of its writers to convey something of the texture of one person's love of a film, in all their glorious, arbitrary idiosyncrasy. Isn't the sharpest viewer of a film fifty percent erudition, and fifty percent sheer bloody minded implausible interpretations? Perhaps the most extraordinary moment in Taubin's confession is her unexpected invocation of love. One strand of the film, she suggests, asks us to feel sympathy for "Travis the lonely guy, who's driven to kill for lack of love" (60). Unable to make friends or forge romances, Travis's violence is read as a response to his manifest failure to perform a correct heterosexual manhood, resulting in his frustrated attempt to become a legitimate male.

This notion of the outsider-spectator drives Taubin's reading of the film: all Travis can do is watch porn, watch out of his taxi, watch events in his rear-view mirror with which he cannot engage. In that sense, Travis is the archetypal cinema-goer haunted by dreams but never able to enter them. Taubin follows this thread through Travis's persistent figuration as spectator, which in turn connects him to her interest in those aberrant figures who claim to have been inspired by media violence - in particular, would-be assassin Arthur Bremer, whose diaries were the inspiration for Paul Schrader's script. She confesses:

While I have never had much of an emotional response to Travis Bickle, I find it horribly sad that Bremer has rotted in jail for his entire adult life without the possibility of experiencing the sexual contact with a woman that he wanted so desperately (40).

Lonely and unloved, like Travis, Bremer's violence is read as a sign of his disassociation from the world of human meanings - an idea captured by Scorsese in the haunting images of objects shorn of context: most famously, the glass of fizzing Alka-Seltzer.

Taubin seems to accept this account of male solipsism - Travis's problem is that he can relate to porn better than to real women - but the film itself is surely more circumspect. Insofar as Scorsese's own vision is so systematically mediated by intertextual references (well documented here by Taubin), the idea that an addiction to the image is somehow culpable seems oddly out of place. Surely, if anything *Taxi Driver* raises the possibility that a certain obsession with images is mandatory in the modern world. The much maligned geek mentality of the fan in which Scorsese gladly participates is a new direction for some conventionally masculine attributes. If Travis can't tell why he shouldn't take Betsy to a porn cinema, the joke for the audience is surely that we know cinema so much better than that - even down to the references to Bresson, Godard, and Ford. Travis is thus both fan and non-fan - both obsessed with the image and unable to read the image well enough. He is a sort of fan manqué, with the intense desires of the fan, but not the skills and the knowledge which make the fan into a Scorsese (or a Taubin) rather than a John Hinckley dreaming of Jodie Foster and shooting Ronald Reagan.

For Taubin, though, pathological masculinity is assumed to be that mode of masculinity that falls outside the status quo, rather than - as I would prefer to argue - something generated within it. When she says that such a figure "mirrors the most perverse aspects of the society that rejected him" (38), she makes it sound suspiciously as though these are merely accidental blemishes on a society whose heart is free from such perversity. And hence, the most culturally conventional of options - a good lay and a bit of female companionship - become the improbable solution to male madness.

Taubin knows, of course, that *Taxi Driver* absolutely rejects such facile solutions: "perhaps that's sentimental of me, and perhaps it's precisely that kind of sentimentality that *Taxi Driver* refuses" (40). Yet sentiment is also at the heart of the film, and she picks up on its insistent sorrow when she longs for a better solution to Travis's life. At such points it is suddenly clear how liberating Taubin's approach is, allowing her to risk comments on the film that a more scholarly style could never approach.

That wistful hope for a solution seems to me to define the structure of Taubin's book. Like other authors in the series, Taubin opts to retell the narrative in detail, commenting on the nuances of each scene, building up her own interpretation in tandem with the narrative. It is not an approach that I find adventurous - compared to, say, Laura Mulvey's more baroque tour through *Citizen Kane*. Yet in a sense even this is appropriate - for in a book about repetition-compulsion, the author's own compulsion to retell the story bears witness to the demand that the film puts upon us: to make sense of how this story turns out. Taubin is - as I think Scorsese wants us to be - frustrated by the ending of the film, and her audacious solution is to open the unresolved tensions of *Taxi Driver* out onto the whole of subsequent cinematic history. She suggests that Travis has become canonical, the man - by turns the unexorcised ghost, and the admired hero - whose story is given a series of endings by the films that take it up: *Reservoir Dogs*, *Unforgiven*, *The King of Comedy* ... and the list goes on. In a sense, he is the ur-figure for modern cinematic masculinity, and the refusal of Scorsese to resolve him in *Taxi Driver*, becomes the riddle to which cinema's men now apply themselves, retelling the story of white urban alienation with the same determination to follow it to its (absent) end that Taubin evinces here. Yet if there is no end to *Taxi Driver*, I

would suggest that that is because too many men *need* his story to be unresolvable. A particular kind of hegemonic masculinity needs to feel that it is without a solution, precisely because the possibility that it might be resolved or finished with is what most threatens its dominance. What more savage subversion of feminism than to accept that men are a mess, only to insist that they're too far gone to be improved?

And here I part company from Taubin: where she reads the film as a critical confrontation, I read it as a prevarication that is exemplary of this formation of male identity. The form of this male angst is that it must never be resolved or concluded, that it is irredeemable (isn't that what laddism amounts to?). Travis, returning to his taxi, going back onto the streets, to repeat his circular route, is the embodiment of a masculinity defined by an almost pathological self-hatred of its own failings. Yet since this essential narcissistic self-hatred must never be relinquished, the same journey of corrosive frustration and savage self-assertion must be repeated obsessively.