Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in its Golden Age

By Michael Barrier
New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN, 0-19-503759-6, xviii + 648 pp., £25 (hbk)
Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation Edited by Kevin S. Sandler

Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation

Edited by Kevin S. Sandler

London: Rutgers University Press, 1998, ISBN, 0-8135-2538-1, x + 271 pp. £41.50 (hbk)

Understanding Animation

By Paul Wells

London: Routledge, 1998, ISBN, 0-415-11597-3, x + 265 pp. £13.99 (pbk)

A review by George S. Larke, University of Sunderland, UK

Academic work on animation, as a subset of film studies, is interesting for many reasons, not least because it encourages yet another re-examination of the age old question; are such neglected subject areas "worthy" of academic study? Animation has often been described as "children's entertainment"; a sure sign of consequent academic neglect. However, as any film historian will tell you, animation was not originally aimed at a child audience and thus, it is a significant part of the development of popular cinema. In any case, this subject is finding its way into university study and publishing inevitably follows.

The three texts I have chosen to review are very different, not only in their approaches but in subject matter as well. Michael Barrier's book, *Hollywood Cartoons,* focuses primarily on the history of Disney Studios, although he also covers the post-war fortunes of Warner Bros., MGM and UPA. The book can be summarised as a history of production techniques, costs, distribution, finance and management decision-making. However, it also includes a liberal splash of insights into the gradual formulation of particular styles and characters; from paper to cel animation and rotoscoping; and from Felix the Cat, through Mickey Mouse, to Bugs Bunny and Huckleberry Hound. It is densely researched and a fascinating, if perhaps heavy-going read.

Reading the Rabbit is a collection of essays, edited, introduced and contributed to by Kevin S. Sandler. This book concentrates specifically on Warner Bros. cartoons and provides essays on the history of the studio, the history of animation theory and specific essays on representations of politics, gender and race in particular cartoons. This is the most immediately engaging, or accessible book out of the three, as its essays are short, precise and stick to "known" film theories re-directed onto the animated text. However, this is not to say that this is the best book overall.

Paul Wells' *Understanding Animation* goes the furthest in attempting to define a vocabulary that can be used specifically for the analysis of animated film. His book is not intended as a history, although he does provide some extremely interesting facts about the origins of animation that pre-date the beginnings of Michael Barrier's book. Wells also does not stick to just one particular studio, or even one country of production. Instead he provides a perspective on possible approaches to animation as a form (or set of forms). He tends to prioritise an essentially formalist approach for most of the book, but he does attempt to address issues surrounding audiences in the final chapter. This is not the easiest of the books to read, but it is the most "academic". It not only attempts to contextualise the production and form of animation within film history and film theory, but it also suggests ways in which animation requires different, or at least adapted, theories and then offers some possible solutions or frameworks.

To compare the three books against each other is not fair, as they all have very different agendas and readers in mind. However, there are points at which the analyses intersect. Therefore, this review will concentrate upon each book individually, but will compare the texts when appropriate.

Directed at fellow fans, the detail in Michael Barrier's book is very impressive. He details the careers of such as Winsor McCay, "the first American animator of consequence" (10), who created *Little Nemo* (1911) first in newspapers and then in film, and also *Gertie* (1914), the dinosaur. Obviously, a large chunk of the book details the rise of the Disney Studios and its distinctive style. He explores early arguments over patents and the evolution of particular production processes. Nearly a whole chapter, "Disney 1936-1938", is given over to the production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. What this does is provide insights into scripting and animation methods. Barrier writes from the point of view of a "behind the scenes" observer, and provides information on animation authorship. For instance, in *Snow White* the sheer number of primary characters meant that having one animator to one character meant that anything upwards of eight animators might be working on one scene. The impracticalities of achieving spatial continuity with so many different artists were too immense. However, as Disney later told his daughter and biographer, using different animators "made it hard not to prevent variations in the personality of each dwarf" (219). Having two extremely unique animators, Bill Tytla and Fred Moore, develop the original drawings of the dwarves further complicated this. Thus, Barrier's work provides technical insights into the complicated area of authorship when so many people are involved. Barrier documents script changes, technical problems and perhaps most importantly the relationship between Disney and his animators:

> From a technical standpoint, he couldn't tell you a damned thing. But he could say, …'That guy isn't looking left long enough.' Or 'That fellow in the background is too active, he's taking your eye off the guy in the front.' (Art Babbit cited in Barrier: 225).

This, along with discussions on the tension between factory-style production processes and artistic goals, details Disney's role as overall artistic director and script editor. His vision did not always take into account the technical problems of achieving particular goals; in fact *Snow White* was changed significantly throughout production at the cost of animators' time and Disney's money. However, this does provide evidence of Disney's compulsion to be taken seriously as a feature filmmaker and not just a provider of animated short films for pre-feature entertainment. Barrier does not attempt to analyse this role. Disney is evidently a hero and the book's intention is to document rather than judge. Later, when the book moves over to Warner Bros. *et al* it is the animators, not the studio heads, who get the praise. The invention of *Looney Tunes* at Leon Schlesinger's cartoon studios (later taken over by Warner Bros.) is viewed as a maverick school of individual animators, including Bob Clampett, Friz Freleng, Tex Avery and Frank Tashlin. The impression is that these animators succeeded despite, rather than because of their studio head. Schlesinger was not a "cartoon man", as Tashlin states: "he was a man who thought in money terms. He never let personalities interfere too long; his wallet spoke" (335). In this sense the book is a gold mine of gossip and attitudes. It is clear that what matters above all is the finished product, but the journey there can be just as fascinating. The first chapter on Warner Bros. (1933-1940) details the development of specific film techniques, close-ups, deep focus, oblique camera angles and rapid editing; a style that was less like Disney's "animation" and more like slapstick live-action comedy. Again, Barrier is not particularly judgmental about different styles. It is evident that he defines the "Golden Age" as the thirties and forties, an era defined mainly by Disney, and secondly by its nemesis *Looney Tunes*:

> The best Hollywood cartoons of the forties […] were intensely personal even as they respected genre conventions; the governing conventions are different now [1990s], but the critical change is that they have become all-consuming" (571).

Thus, the book becomes an elegy to a forgotten time where individuals had "a say" over the finished product. The conglomeration of businesses such as Disney and Time Warner has meant that product and franchising takes precedent over content. Barrier's book is a nostalgic look back at a time of innovation and risk-taking. It is a fantastic book for anyone who is interested in American cartoons, but one must remember that, as with many American analyses, it does tend to deny the existence of any influences or contributions from other countries. However, as a book of backroom gossip and technical insights into the work of Walt Disney studios and some of its competitors the book will prove hard to beat.

If Michael Barrier laments the golden age of the Disney Studios, Kevin S. Sandler in *Reading the Rabbit* attempts to do the same for Warner Bros. Even though it is a collection of essays and takes a much more academic stance toward its subject, the book is essentially a celebration of the "impertinence" of early *Looney Tunes* products. It does not discuss Disney, except as a benchmark against which Warners has always defined itself. It also, again, does not consider many European influences, preferring to isolate its subject within American cinema and cultural history. Included in the contributors are such names as Timothy R. White and Donald Crafton; the latter is credited with providing some of the first academic work on popular animation. The essays cover topics such as the early history, definitions in opposition to Disney, class, race, gender and the current trends in product line merchandising and live-action/animation hybrids. Thus, on first inspection the book is intriguing and wide-ranging in its approach. The introduction offers a well-written overview on the history of Warner Bros. animation. It is evident that Sandler, like Barrier, laments the passing of a golden age and

despises the current "management lead" production strategies that stifle distinctive creativity. However, in opposition to Barrier, Sandler would suggest that Disney always tended towards "overtly moralistic", or "safe" characterisations and Warner Bros. developed its characters in direct opposition to this. However, Sandler is also quick to acknowledge that some of Warner's output can be viewed as offensive in retrospect. The introduction charts parts of "animation's ugly past, an ignoble history of political, racial, ethnic and sexual insensitivity" (1). It is suggested that Warner's freedom of speech/visuals (in contrast to the moral sterility of Disney) allowed for some politically suspect stereotypes and general attacks on minorities such as the Japanese (especially during World War II), hillbillies, Afro-Americans and women. Donald Crafton's chapter "The View from Termite Terrace: Caricature and Parody in Warner Bros. Animation" talks of the ideological power of "fun". This includes an excellent analysis of *Swooner Crooner* (1944), wherein a chicken farm's female egg-laying inhabitants are spellbound (and eggbound) by the presence of a Sinatra-like rooster. Eventually, the farm owner (Porky Pig) brings in a Bing Crosby rooster, whose more fatherly, calming voice has the hens back producing more eggs than ever. Crafton notes that this decidedly masculine view of women as "passive dupes of male sexual power" (109) works to warn young female workers of the perils of overt sexuality and to concentrate on the war effort. This view certainly coincides with contemporary concerns over sexually independent young women in America.

The naïve, or narrow politics of such cartoons are partly the result of the form's lowly status as comedy, or fantasy; those marginal genres that allow for subversive voices. Disney's move into feature films, and the suggestion that he wanted his animation to be taken seriously as more than "simply animation" had meant that his work had taken on a "safer", less contentious format. Warners were the poor relations, whose very identity relied on positioning themselves in direct opposition to Disney. Their characters - Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, and Road Runner - exude anarchy and excess. It is noted that the narrative structures remained quite simple, with "the chase" being the staple formula. Thus, it is suggested that the relationships between the secondary characters and the primary characters of Bugs *et al* provided the comedic depth and timelessness of the animation. Kevin Sandler's chapter "Gendered Evasion: Bugs Bunny in Drag" confronts the cross-dressing antics of Bugs Bunny and suggests that, rather than transgressing or blurring gender boundaries, such narrative themes reinforce the binary "ideals" of male and female gender roles. Using the theories of Judith Butler (the notion that all gender is drag), Sandler interestingly explores the idea that "gender imitation in animal characters does not copy that which is prior in humans since gender already is a fiction; it copies what is already assumed to exist in humans" (159). He states that it is only the female animal characters that are sexually coded with breasts, long eyelashes, red lips etc., whereas the male animal characters, such as Bugs and Daffy, are identified as male precisely because they lack any overt sexual signifiers. Sandler maintains that the transvestite gags remain safe because the joke relies on the fact that the audience understands that it is a disguise (to evade capture). Thus, when Bugs kisses his enemy, whether in drag or not, it is not viewed as transgressive because it is mediated through the act of "taunting" his opponent. This chapter, along with those on race and other ideological subtexts or insensitivities, implies that Warners' cartoon narratives, like Disney's, are explicitly white, heterosexual and male orientated. This is not explicitly criticised, possibly because of the nostalgic nature of the book as a whole. It is suggested that, although many of the cartoons are explicitly racist and/or sexist, this is a feature of society at the time (often the World War II years). This approach becomes slightly suspect in view of the fact that Sandler continually laments its passing in comparison to the bland production-line characters of modern Warner animation.

Finally, one chapter that does deal with the critical history of animation is Timothy R. White's chapter, "From Disney to Warner Bros. The Critical Shift". This article details how the critical valorization of Warner and MGM cartoons during the 1960s echoes that of the European art cinema during the same period. By the 1960s Disney was no longer viewed as an artist, but the manager of a factory. His output was uniformed, but lacked individuality. In contrast Warners, with Chuck Jones, Fred Tashlin, Friz Freleng and others had identifiable "authors" and characters. As Steve Schneider has asserted, "animation is probably the ultimate 'auteurist' cinema, as its directors can control every element of their films' content with a precision that extends down to the individual frame" (cited in Sandler: 44). Warners' directors were viewed as mavericks of their field, on a par with Bunuel or Godard. White suggests this as a positive move, in that it brought a critical spotlight to animation. However, he goes on to point out that it is high time critics had the confidence to appreciate cartoons/animation for its own history, without feeling the need to evoke similarities to live-action cinema to justify any appeal or worthiness. This is where *Reading the Rabbit* ends and *Understanding Animation* begins, because, even though Sandler's collection is extremely engaging it adheres to live-action film theories and takes a nostalgic approach to its subject. Paul Wells, by not sticking to just one studio, or just one type of animation travels the furthest towards a theory exclusively aimed at animation.

Understanding Animation by Paul Wells begins by referring back to the earliest years of cinema. He reminds us that one of the original debates about cinema was focused on the tensions of realism versus art. Animation, as exemplified by the work of Georges Melies, was over-shadowed by live-action work such as that of the Lumiere Bros. In the twentieth century, Disney has come to personify animation for popular audiences and thus, further marginalises other producers. Wells' intention is to construct a set of theories, perspectives and approaches to animation. The focus is on the form or text, rather than the production or reception of them. He does not totally ignore authors, or audiences, but his primary concern is to provide a framework for textual analysis. One such intention is to explore the unique abilities of animation to "redefine the everyday, subvert our accepted notions of 'reality', and challenge the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence" (11). It is evident that animation offers limitless possibilities, as it is not confined to temporal or spatial continuities in the same way as live-action film.

The chapters are divided into theory and case studies. Chapter one outlines the history of animation, its unique character and ability to "violate and compress any notion of time and space" (19). It also addresses the "realist" structure of many Disney productions. It is noted that Disney "insisted on verisimilitude in his characters, contexts and narratives. He wanted animated figures to move like real figures and be informed by a plausible motivation" (23). Wells argues that Disney's popularity means that realism remains at the centre of discussions on animation. Disney's "hyper-realism" is a benchmark against which all other cartoons are judged. In chapter two Wells categorises animation into roughly three areas: orthodox (narrative based cel animation), developmental (narrative based clay, puppet, collage animation) and experimental (non-objective, non-linear or abstract animation). Disney's style would obviously fit into orthodox animation, but it is interesting to note that Wells considers this orthodox primarily because of the popularity of Disney, rather than any claim to superiority of form. In chapter three he tackles some of the narrative strategies of animation. The approach is similar to that of classical Hollywood narrative, or genre theory, in that Wells describes and then categorises various scenarios, or actions, under headings such as "metamorphosis, condensation, fabrication, synecdoche etc". The intention is to provide a language for explaining animation; for instance, fabrication recalls "narrative out of

constructed objects and environments, natural forms and substances" (90). The work of Jan Svankmajer illustrates this concept through the use of wood, clay, stone etc. The natural properties of the object are included in the narrative process; i.e. stone retains its hardness and weight. Thus, although animated, the stone's natural properties are also embedded in the narrative meaning. As an example Wells draws attention to Svankmajer's *Jabberwocky* (1971) to illustrate how fabrication is used to "play out the ways in which a child would *uninhibitedly* imagine the life in each of the objects which shares the child's physical, psychological and emotional space" (92). Much of this approach to animation positions meaning within the text or authorial intention. This is a natural starting point because animation so often switches between "realism" and fantasy within seconds and thus, an understanding of the ways of "reading" the narrative is crucial. The section on choreography is especially useful in that it details the differences in movement in a character when it is aware of gravity and when it denies it. How the animator draws attention to weight, or lack of, through movement is part of all animation; either drawn or three-dimensional. Chapter four looks at comedy, chapter five, body politics and chapter six audiences. These chapters expand the narrative strategies to examine how cartoons structure their jokes, issues of race, gender and sexuality and audience responses to them. Chapter six recognises the lack of work on audience studies and notes the important issue of cartoons watched as children, but remembered as adults. This chapter does not attempt to address these issues in depth, in fact it is the shortest chapter in the book, but it does offer some points for further research. In chapter four Wells attempts another typology, this time of the "gags and comic structures" (127) in animation. He details "twenty-five ways to start laughing", but as with most analyses of comedy does not make the deconstruction of the processes very entertaining.

Overall, Wells' book has to stand out as the most useful academic text. It is wide-ranging and practical. However, it lacks the engaging and enthusiastic character of Kevin Sandler's collection, which is the most entertaining to read. All three books are excellent in their own field. Barrier's historical journalism is beyond criticism, while Wells' careful attention to form and structure is reminiscent of Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art*; an essential teaching text. In conclusion, each book compliments the other and therefore it would be unfair to judge them against each other too harshly. The study of animation is a growing field in academia, and thus, Paul Wells' book may be the best investment as a teaching tool. However, its dry and studious approach to the subject is best bolstered by Sandler's more enthusiastic approach, while the history of the American studios, the invention of production processes and characters requires Barrier's experience and knowledge. These books go to show how large the subject of animation already is and hopefully they will stand to encourage even more research into such a popular form of entertainment.

Cat People

By Kim Newman
London: BFI, 1999. ISBN: 0-85170-741-6, 79 pp. $10.95 (pbk)
The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film Edited by Barry Keith Grant

The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film

Edited by Barry Keith Grant

Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. ISBN: 0-292-72794-1, 456 pp. $24.95 (pbk)

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

In a genre (in)famous for its repeated depiction of male monsters snatching nubile young ladies from their bedrooms, masked psychopaths stalking innocent "virgins" (in demeanor, if not in deed), and insane transvestites running around with butcher's knives and razor blades, it should come as little surprise to find that most recent academic inquiries into the horror film take gender issues as their point of departure. Books such as Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), Barbara Creed's *Horror and the Monstrous- Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), and Isabel Pinedo's *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (1997) have successfully wrested shelf space away from the less sensitive, more naïve genre analyses of previous decades.

Two recent books - *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, and *Cat People*, by horror novelist and afficianado Kim Newman - would appear to confirm the above point. But besides their vast difference in size (Grant's book is five times that of Newman's) and conception (Newman's book is an historically-informed close reading of the eponymous title film, while Grant's is made up almost exclusively of theoretically-motivated essays), these volumes differ widely with respect to emphasis. On the one hand, Grant's second collection of essays on the horror genre (his first, *Planks of Reason* (1984), can still be found in the footnotes of most articles on the subject), finds interesting and important gender dynamics wherever it looks, even in such unlikely films as *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Stepfather*. On the other hand, Kim Newman's lively and informative discussion of the 1942 Val Lewton-Jacques Tourneur horror hit, *Cat People*, has surprisingly little to say on the issue of gender, considering how unusual the film was for its time in associating monstrosity with femininity. An interesting point of intersection can be found in Karen Hollinger's "The Monster as Woman: Two Generations of *Cat People*" (Chapter Thirteen in *The Dread of Difference*), where it is argued that Tourneur's version (the remake, directed by Paul Schrader, came out in 1982) "attempts…to utilize the traditional monster

film's methods of disavowing the female sexual threat, but these are exposed…as [being] pitifully inadequate to control the horror of the female monster" (301).

Despite its lack of theoretical ambition, Newman's book is thorougly-researched, well-written, and engaging - a perfect fit for the popular (if arbitrarily selected) BFI Film Classics series. Sprinkled throughout are insights into the origins and legacy of *Cat People*. We learn, for example, that "Lewton was less concerned with finding original material than he was with tackling it in an original manner" (12), and that "*Cat People* was the first major supernatural horror film with a contemporary, urban American setting and 'normal people, engaged in normal occupations' as leading characters" (65). Newman also elaborates on the nature of Tourneur's collaboration with Lewton (with whom he would team up again on *I Walked With a Zombie* and *The Leopard Man*), as well as the creation of *Cat People*'s memorable and still-effective startle sequences, popularly known as "busses" (named for the bus screeching into the frame from screen right at the end of the Irena-Alice stalking scene). Though not much new is contributed to popular understanding of the film, Newman succeeds in conveying its numerous charms, and in defending Lewton from the familiar charge that, as a "serious" filmmaker, he was embarrassed to have worked in such a disreputable genre. This serves as a welcome antidote to the many revisionist accounts of Lewton's professional career.

The Dread of Difference is composed of three sections, each one longer than the last. Section One reprints three "landmark accounts of the horror film in the context of gender that have influenced the scope of contemporary critical debate" (8). Grant, who certainly knows the territory, chooses wisely here, as the essays by Clover ("Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film"), Creed ("Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection") and Linda Williams ("When the Woman Looks", perhaps the best piece in the entire book) have been among the most widely discussed and debated in recent years. The only question is whether or not these essays really need reprinting here, considering how easily available they are elsewhere.

Section Two is at once the least uniform and the most interesting one of the book, with essays on the work of particular directors or specific periods of horror film production. Included here are new pieces on Italian horror-meister Dario Argento, the corpus of David Cronenberg, family horror in the 1980s, and the first three *Alien* movies. In part because of the insights they offer, in part because of their freshness (the rest of the chapters, save for one, are republications), these contributions are among the book's very best.

Finally, Section Three includes chapters on such classics of the genre as *King Kong*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Carrie*, and *Rosemary's Baby*, plus a trilogy by Vera Dika, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Robin Wood on *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, lesbian vampire movies, and John Badham's 1979 *Dracula* (a seriously underrated work), respectively. With such a wide range of pieces covering so many films and so much theoretical ground, Grant has plenty of evidence to support his introductory claim that "the treatment of gender in the horror genre is…markedly heterogenous" (7). This makes it difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions - which may be nothing to worry about. In any event, Grant does a good job of picking useful, provocative essays, and whether or not *The Dread of Difference* manages to keep readers riveted throughout, there is sure to be something in it for everyone with an interest in the horror genre.

Deconstructing Disney

By Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan
London: Pluto Press, 1999. ISBN, 0-7453-1451-1. vii + 209 pp. £13.99 (pbk

A review by Annalee R. Ward, Trinity Christian College, USA

What could be more innocent than Disney animated films? Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan set out to prove how wrong that assumption is in their ideological critique. They join the growing number of critics who argue that Disney's hegemony in the contemporary world - not just in American culture - calls for increased scrutiny.

The authors analyze Disney animated films produced since 1989 from a Marxian orientation in the mode of deconstructionism. By clearly identifying their presuppositions, they leave no question of how they are approaching the films: speculatively. Reading these films means finding the American political culture at work and assigning a political interpretation to Disney's animated entertainment. Their introduction justifies what they call yet another deconstruction of Disney by arguing for a "wider contextual frame" that includes the entire Disney corporation (3) and that locates the film readings in "historical specificity" (10).

Once the terms of their engagement with Disney are established, the authors take on *The Little Mermaid*, briefly demonstrate why *The Rescuers Down Under* need not be taken as seriously as other films, and then add chapters which argue from examples in *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Hercules*, and *Mulan* as well as sample liberally from older films. The arguments, which draw heavily on Derrida and Baudrillard, focus on American cultural imperialism, the domestication of women and Disney's gendered worldview, the simulacra of the images as they mask political machinations and the prevalent racism. The underlying capitalist drive that reifies commodification and American political dominance worldwide, the negotiation of sexuality, the emergence of a Disney-Clinton political space, and the appropriation of otherness are also considered.

The book is organized around themed chapters, which generally focus on two films in each chapter. Chapter one begins with Disney's entrance into Europe through EuroDisney arguing that *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* funded EuroDisney and that these texts posit the idea that Europe is part of the West. Suggesting that Ariel is forced to choose between "Marxist social science" or "Western philosophy" (28), the authors use clever twists of interpretations to read the horrors of capitalism into almost every plot twist. For example, "Ursula . . . offers Ariel a fate worse than debt" (29-30).

In another example, they note that the meaning of Ariel's name is literally "of the air," which ultimately suggests a "deprived dissident's desire for the amenities of the West" (23). They comment further that her name has more suggestiveness in it because "Ariel" is a well-known soap in Western Europe, as well as that "aerial" (note how freely they appropriate words with related sounds or spellings) is the television antenna that picks up outside signals.

Consequently, Ariel embodies the consumer drive and the way the Western messages penetrate the Eastern bloc countries.

The next chapter discusses *Beauty and the Beast*, a film that Byrne and McQuillan interpret as focusing on hospitality. From here the book shifts from Disney's place in the world to focusing on its use of key themes. Using examples from several films, the third chapter describes how Disney domesticates its characters, particularly the females, while the fourth chapter describes how Disney "ontologizes" by focusing on various ghosts of communism, real or perceived, in other countries. Disney, as a representative of America, embodies the imperialistic drive. And the fifth chapter revisits Disney's racism going over old territory with only a brief look at *Pocahontas*. The last three chapters approach the topics of historical revisionism, friendship and homosexuality, and American democracy all in the context of the Clinton administration.

Byrne and McQuillan offer many creative insights about the political context of the particular film under analysis, but those insights are often buried in excessive speculation and overshadowed by that excess. While the interpretation is metaphoric, opening the texts up to a parallel structure of meaning, this method of speculation, so common to cultural studies, can also seem strained by reaching for and stretching the metaphorical reading to support a Marxian ideology. In so doing, the authors often abuse basic logic by defining and redefining terms to conveniently support the particular point. The book feels like an "Alice in Wonderland" declaration that meaning is what the authors say it is, which, of course, is somewhat inherent in deconstructionism, but it takes away from the insights into the films, turning the critique into caricature.

Deconstructing Disney is an entertaining read of Disney as political. Byrne and McQuillan manage to avoid the excessive use of jargon and focus instead on illustrating their arguments with examples from the films. The parallels between the films and the political context can be both insightful and uncanny provoking appreciation, argument and, yes, skepticism.

Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business

By Colin Hoskins, Stuart McFadyen and Adam Finn
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN, 0-19-871147-8711476. x + 176 pp. £15.99 (pbk)

A review by Martin Flanagan, University of Sheffield, UK

The economic conditions of the global film industry are cited regularly by cultural studies/film studies commentators but rarely, perhaps, with anything more than a superficial understanding of these conditions within the terms of a purely economic sphere. We feel that we know "the business" fairly well, and perhaps rarely feel that our textual analyses could benefit from a more substantial engagement with the specifics of its structure. Reading this book, which is designed as an introduction to the field and is ostensibly aimed at non-economists, left me with the sense that this structure is actually more complex than I first thought. However, this reflects less on the clarity of the book than on the limitations of an academic positioning within cultural discourse that is less grounded in the industrial basis of film production than it is perhaps comfortable to admit.

Having said that, the rather arid prose style of this book does not help its apparent mission: to entice those with a non-economic background. However, it is more successful in its appeal to those students familiar with its methodology and style. The feeling throughout is that this is indeed a substantial study, detailed, methodical, and expansive in scope (the trajectory of film and television product is examined from the moment that "dollar one" of the budget is spent until it reaches its last market "window"), and written from a perspective that is informed by the effects of globalization and new distribution technologies. However, as a creature of cultural and textual analysis, I felt that a lot of cold information had washed over me in the course of the book and left little analytical residue. In short, the style and approach rarely gets "under the skin" of the topic; I declare my own stylistic prejudices fully here, but the book often reads like some kind of pan-European policy document on the benefits of international co-production. The book has been exhaustively researched and carefully put together, but is ultimately not as useful or as revealing as one would like.

The industry is dissected effectively, especially in its complex regulatory aspects and the rationale behind its trade standards and flows. Emphasis is put upon the "fairness", or otherwise, of U.S. policy in dissemination of its entertainment products. The question of "dumping" (the deliberate pricing of exports below production cost and below the domestic rate to make them more financially attractive than "home-grown" offerings) is raised, dragging up with it the interesting theme of cultural imperialism, but then perhaps too neatly despatched with talk of how this practice does not contravene any market regulations. Such a conclusion fails to address the wider ideological implications of the question. Perhaps the

authors feel that a more cynical view is something best left to develop in the reader, but the narrowness of such an approach repeatedly begs the more pertinent questions.

The book hits its mark most effectively in the topicality and breadth of its discursive scope. Media convergence, always a hot topic but currently boiling after the Time Warner/AOL merger and its promise of further industrial upheaval, is a theme that is always helpfully woven through the analysis. The role and potential of digital technology is, perhaps sensibly, dealt with briefly but with precision in a final chapter that is more open to the implications of such developments than concerned with guessing their effect before the revolution has even scratched the surface of its possibilities. Several concepts that have their genesis in conventional economics, such as the "cultural discount" (the factor of cultural difference that must be added when determining the economic value of entertainment transactions), help to orient the non-economist in this somewhat unwelcoming and dry academic climate.

Underdeveloped, though, are such areas as the different requirements that individuals make on film and television (which might add depth to the fact that U.S. film is much easier to sell to foreign markets than TV programming, a condition that cannot be explained by recourse to linguistic factors); the relationship between film and television itself (the two media are always treated as separable in the book), and the issue of where the consumer is left in this world of global hard sell; what use do we make of cultural products? How will new technology such as digital TV change our relationship with the text?

In a way, many of these faults are undoubtedly produced by a frustration that comes from being largely unfamiliar with the academic methodology of the book and its sterile, fact-driven and under-analysed style. This book will surely be of use as reference for the film student seeking to bolster their analysis with some hard economic fact; but taken as a whole the book is rather joyless and uninspiring. Not even the excellent chapter title "Does Anyone Really Watch *The Kung-Fu Shark Meets the Boston Strangler*, *Extreme Sports Bloopers*, and *The Home Shopping Channel*?" (119) can save the book from the doldrums, but then I think it must be stated that I am certainly not the person best intellectually equipped to fully assess its benefits to the economics or marketing student.

The Magic Mirror: Moviemaking in Russia 1908-1918

By Denise J. Youngblood
Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. ISBN 0-299-16230-3; (hbk) ISBN 0-299-16234-6 (pbk). xvii+197 pp.,. £37.50 (hbk); £14.95. (pbk)

A review by Birgit Beumers, University of Bristol, UK

Denise Youngblood's study of early Russian cinema is a complement, as she herself points out, to Yuri Tsivian's *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (1994). Youngblood approaches the area from the "low culture" angle, and perceives cinema as a reflection of the everyday on screen. She follows this line of argument in her Introduction, convincingly presenting cinema as an art form that expands the "high culture" of the Silver Age while at the same time reflecting everyday life and domains of "low culture" such as fashion, behaviour or furniture. Cinema is thus, she argues, a synthesis of high and low culture, which explains both the interest and involvement of the middle classes in its production and consumption.

Part One provides, in a vivid narrative, the background information for the nascent film industry in Russia: producers and their biographical backgrounds; sensations in the press and disasters at cinematic venues; biographies of actors and directors. Although there is a good deal of statistical evidence, analysis is too often not carried far enough. Did producers break even, did films recoup production costs? Was film production a profit-making business? How much did a cinema ticket cost by comparison with a theatre ticket? The occasional information on a salary or a ticket price is not quite enough to answer these questions clearly, and even if sources are not available, then such questions may at least have been raised or speculated upon. Overall, the context of the cultural industry is not explored.

Part Two combines, rather unsuccessfully, a thematic and generic approach to the thematic issues at the heart of early Russian cinema. It is unsuccessful because this combination leads to repetition. The themes of sex and violence, murder and mayhem are explored well in interesting and detailed plot accounts. Youngblood identifies male trauma in view of the growing power of women as a common feature of these early films. Her chapter on historical films and literary adaptations is genre-based and limited to plot accounts of events and novels that are quite well known. Finally, the themes already thoroughly developed in the earlier (thematic) chapters are summarised once more: public and private space, the manners taught through the new medium of cinema, and issues of class and gender. At the end of this section the question arises: how do these themes fit into the context of early twentieth century culture? Are they unique to cinema?

The story of the industry and the film plots are narrated in an articulate and captivating way. Youngblood's book is an ideal introduction for any course on early Russian cinema, and in fact a perfect companion to the BFI's ten-volume video collection of Early Russian Cinema.

Media in Global Context: A Reader

By Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, Dwayne Winseck, Jim McKenna, and Oliver Boyd-Barrett (eds.)
London: Arnold, 1997. ISBN, 0-340-67687-6., (pbk); ISBN, 0-340-67686-8 (hbk). xxx + 352 pp. £16.99 (pbk); £44.00 (hbk)

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

Sreberny-Mohammadi et al's *Media in Global Context: A Reader* is a compilation of articles by numerous international scholars in the field of communication. Its aim is to serve as an introduction to the field and a resource for media studies courses, one which maps out the intersection "between concepts of the media and the global" (ix). In one sense the book fulfills its purpose, in that it provides a newcomer to the field with a good sense of the current debates and research. However, in another sense the book fails because it pares down the chapters too extensively and does not achieve the wide scope it aims for: the media with which it deals is primarily television, and the globe, in the book's terms, is predominantly the more "developed" countries of the North.

The collection is divided into six sections, with four to five articles per section, for a total of twenty-seven articles, only eight of which have not been published previously. The first section is the most theory-based, with articles on "conceptualizing the global" by Roland Robertson, Ulf Hannerz, Anthony Giddens, Martin Shaw, and Leslie Sklair. In the second section, Jesus Martín-Barbero, Benedict Anderson, Philip Schlesinger, Sheila Chin, and Joseph Man Chan tackle "nation, culture, and the media" using examples from Colombia, Mexico, Europe, Taiwan, and more generally, Asia. The third section, "Global Media Actors," features articles by Laurien Alexandre, Janet Wasko, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, and Christopher Paterson. Section Four takes on media and the global from the perspective of policy, including segments by Dwayne Winseck and Marlene Cuthbert, Richard Hawkins, Edward A. Comor, and Leslie P. Hitchens, all writing on "regulating the means of global communication." One of the most interesting sections of the book, section five, "Challenge and Resistance in the Global Media System" comprises articles by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, John L. Hochheimer, Carolyn M. Byerly, and James Lull. In the sixth and final section, Keith Negus, Joseph D. Straubhaar, Stuart Cunningham and Elizabeth Jacka, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Marie Gillespie write on "transnational media texts and audiences."

Most chapters are very well-written, providing summaries of the relevant literature and theory followed by specific data based on research or observation. None of the chapters merit specific critique, except where some have been edited so much by the editors of the collection that valuable information is now absent; in this book, ellipses abound. One of the most striking examples occurs in James Lull's "China Turned On (Revisited): Television, Reform and Resistance," where ellipses end all paragraphs that threaten to provide historical background, examples to support generalizations, or the author's method of data collection. The absence of these leaves the reader with a great many unanswered questions. Such an

editorial strategy is understandable in those chapters reprinted from previous publications. Perhaps the originals contained ideas irrelevant to the aims of the book at hand. Moreover, the originals are still available, so the interested reader can seek them out to fill in the gaps found here. But in chapters published here for the first time, the editing detracts from otherwise valuable pieces.

A second flaw in this collection is its over-emphasis on television versus other forms of media. Except for the first five chapters, which address "the global" from a range of theoretical backgrounds, most chapters take up a specific form of media in terms of qualitative and quantitative research. Although radio, film, print, recording and telecommunications are also addressed, the topic which receives the most attention, by far, is television, the focus of eleven chapters and, next to globalization, the subject most frequently cited in the index. Notable exceptions to the overabundant examination of television are Jesus Martín-Barbero's chapter, "The Processes: from Nationalisms to Transnationals," which looks at film and print media in Mexico, Colombia and Chile, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi's "Small Media and Revolutionary Change: a New Model" which investigates popular reactions to "big media" such as television, film, radio, print, and telecommunications.

The editors boast in the introduction that "the empirical loci of the readings do not privilege Western industrial contexts. You will find material on Brazil, China, Egypt, Iran and Taiwan, as well as Europe and North America" (x). True, there are several chapters that do not focus on the West, but these are the exception rather than the rule. What of less industrialized countries? I was particularly disappointed, though not surprised, by the absence of research on media in sub-Saharan Africa. Several authors make reference to the impact of globalization and international media policies on the "developing" countries, but none takes a close look at the use of imported media in these countries. The book's sections on transnational media texts and audiences or challenge and resistance in the global media system, in particular, would have benefited greatly from the inclusion of research in African countries or other similarly less "developed" countries of Latin America or Asia.

Politics and Popular Culture

By John Street
Cambridge: Polity, 1997. ISBN, 0-7456-1214-8. x + 212 pp. £14.99 (pbk); £50.00 (hbk)

A review by Pedro Nunes, University of Stirling, UK

What is the meaning behind the image of Bill Clinton playing saxophone on MTV? And how about Tony Blair citing REM, Seal and Annie Lennox as the kind of pop artists he likes? And when Ronald Reagan, a former actor, becomes president of the United States, is it just coincidence that he moved from one stage - movies - to another - politics - still being seen by millions on the screen? What about Bob Geldof a former musician becoming a global statesman by organizing Live Aid? No special diploma is required to understand that politics and popular culture are extremely linked as politicians are becoming media icons and popular artists are becoming politicians. But the connection between the two is more than meets the eye. For instance, what does it mean to say that sixties music and films stand for the social and political upheaval of those years while punk stands for the economic downturn of the late seventies?

John Street's book departs from simple assumptions to examine the complex relationships that develop between politics and popular culture. He's careful enough to avoid simplistic or particular notions of popular culture and takes it as a multilevel concept whose meaning is ideologically constructed, and manages to cover all the gaps in the ways popular culture becomes political and politics becomes part of popular culture. Street considers three - though actually examining more deeply just two - angles of approaching the relationship between the two concepts. First, he considers how the meaning of popular culture is affected by political judgements "which implicitly separate high from low culture, the elite from the popular" (8). Second, he defines popular culture as politics by examining how our responses (i.e. judgements, tastes) to cultural texts are part of our identity and how the pleasure and passions revolving around popular culture are a source for political thought and action. Third, he examines how politics has become part of popular culture as the latter has become a powerful medium for politicians to reach "the people". In this sense, both popular culture and politics have become entwined in ways that were not evident before as both are part of one world "in which all choices - moral, political, aesthetic - are essentially consumer, lifestyle choices, arbitrated by the laws of supply and demand" (16). That is "the logic of populism, in politics and in culture" (16).

By using both politics and popular culture as concepts, rather than anchoring his approach on particular meanings - which in itself could be taken as a political judgement in an academic matter - Street offers us a good introductory book that takes an interdisciplinary approach to political science and popular culture. This is an extremely useful book for students of politics, because it provides a good account of how they should take popular culture as a subject of politics. Street's book will also assist students studying popular culture by showing how popular culture texts are politically shaped in ways that merge production, texts and response.

It is also a book that leaves you hoping for more. Street's critical approach to populism and how both politics and popular culture create "the people" requires a deep examination of the political processes that allow politicians, broadcasters, artists, and cultural analysts to claim that their actions represent "the people". In the same way, the problems in defining what popular culture actually is leave you wondering about the ideological implications of such a concept. To what extent does it relate to empirical evidence - the coming down of barriers between high and low culture, consumer society - or is it built to fulfil political agendas? It would be interesting to know how the concept is a subject of struggle between political and cultural populism and academic discussion. Street's book doesn't examine this deeply but in the questions it poses it suggests much more.

The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary

By John Corner
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. ISBN, 0-7190-4687-4. 212 pp. £11.99 (pbk); £45.00 (hbk)
Doing Documentary Work By Robert Coles

Doing Documentary Work

By Robert Coles.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN, 0-19-512495-2. 278 pp. £21.00 (hbk); £21.00 (hbk).

A review by Anthony B. Chan, University of Washington, USA

That documentary production is not just the activity of "point, shoot and cut" is self-evident to any nonfiction producer who has gone through the exacting trauma of making sense of people's stories through film or video. Understanding that "filmmaking" has a well-known structure of research, story focus, storyboarding, scripting, cinematography, narration (voice-overs and/or sound bites) and rough and fine cuts augmented with graphics leaves guerilla "home-movie" producers in the dust with their "bohemian" attitude of "just being there is just enough." But just being there is definitely not enough. There are other essentials.

Besides the necessity of documentary production techniques, one of the essentials is the "intelligence" of the documentary, which forms, in fact, the foundation of the theories of nonfiction motion picture storytelling. For Professor John Corner in *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*, theory crystallizes the inherent differences in approaches to the film documentary form. This is readily apparent despite his declaration that:

> Throughout, I have tried to retain awareness of the fact that the practice has always been more various than the theory and, indeed, that it has often belied theory. That the shapes of documentary to-come will be determined by a mix of factors amongst which theoretical commentary is unlikely to figure should also 'go without saying'. (30)

Regardless of this disclaimer, Corner's theoretical obsessions are indeed relevant and timely as the nonfiction film is presently intent on reinventing and repositioning itself as television proves ever massive and voracious and the Internet seems poised to take its own pound of

flesh. Within these confines, he argues for "a firm connection with existing broadcast practice rather than with those which are premised on 'alternative' models." (24) While the broadcast argument may have been relevant thirty years ago, the nature of the industry, at least in Canada and the United States, suggests that relevancy, veracity and validity which lie at the heart of nonfiction film/video have always been subordinated to the bottom line. The result is a wide arena of independent producers with "alternative" models. These non-broadcast filmmakers are often assisted by government grants, film commissions, nonprofit distribution outlets, film festivals, low power channels and community access television which provide them with much needed exposure. Indeed, the nonfiction product from these "alternative" models is crucial if the free flow of information is to continue. No doubt, if the bottom line judges all documentary creativity, then democracy with its attendant freedom of speech is in trouble.

While the "alternative" models are here to stay, Corner disputes the meaningfulness of the documentaries produced by independent filmmakers. He argues that:

> For whilst a great deal of innovative work has been done within the 'independent sector' of small units, ones sometimes arranging their own distribution and mostly much less constrained politically and aesthetically by matters of institution and audience, *the public significance of documentary work is at its highest when it forms part of the major national and international currency of symbolic exchange* (my italics). (24)

As one of those independent producers to whom Corner refers, but one with considerable professional experience as an anchor/presenter, documentary producer, television journalist and senior producer of public affairs in traditional television stations (at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and at Television Broadcasts, Ltd. Hong Kong), this reviewer can reveal that traditional broadcast journalism has its own well-defined agenda which is often at odds with the educational or entertainment welfare of the general population.

Corner concurs that the bottom line does restrict air time for "alternative" models of nonfiction films. He calls it "an acute anxiety about ratings." (25) Not surprisingly, this reviewer is bemused by the kind of cinematic world that Corner has proposed for the creative filmmakers. Is it one with bountiful opportunities to be aired, but with an overt, corporate constraint that reduces or trivializes independent thought and work? Or should it be one with ample air time, but only within certain well-defined codes of behavior and standards?

While the utilization of broadcast television to air many documentary productions is highly problematic, Professor Corner's suggestion that documentary ought "to become more *reflexive*, to 'show its hand' more openly to the audience" is indeed a worthy consideration for documentary producers. Filmmakers ought to be cognizant of what the audience is exploring in its viewing moments. Nevertheless, whether the audience ought to know the most intricate details of the shooting segment, for example, is appropriate only if it contributes to the storytelling process of the filmmaker. After all, the most significant aspect of the documentary production process is storytelling. If nonfiction film documentary as "part of the interplay continues to involve referentiality, the appeal of the indexical, the authenticity of testimony, the revelation of the shot, and so on" (27) without interfering with the storytelling structure, then those parameters can coexist. But if referentiality, the indexical, testimonial authenticity and shot revelation, etc. hinder the continuity of the story itself, then those aspects are, at best, mere artifacts and at worst, annoying.

Storytelling is at the heart of any motion picture. Thus such variations or deviations as the "fly on the wall" or cinema verite and the drama-documentary or docudrama approaches may well be the next major form of documentary filmmaking that moves it drastically from the traditional paradigm of nonfiction documentary productions structured along the lines of the "clip and script" strategy. This is increasingly true with the recent spate of "reality" shows that depict the inner workings of cops on the prowl and physicians slaving in under-equipped gun shot emergency wards

While there is no quarrel about the immense impact of "reality" television on the documentary film tradition, the success of the *Blair Witch Project* with its touch of evil and intimation of nonfictional production values proved that this feature film was more mockudrama than docudrama. Corner is, indeed, succinct when he states that "this raises the question of the different levels of fabrication which a production can employ." (37) Herein lies the pertinent consideration! For many nonfiction filmmakers, including this reviewer, this is the litmus test that determines if a motion picture is truly a nonfiction documentary film, a nonfiction documentary film with some fictional elements employed merely to tell a more convincing story or a feature film (read: fiction) disguised with some nonfiction documentary tendencies. At this juncture if the "level of fabrication" is even considered then the question of veracity and validity is paramount.

Although Professor Corner is tentative at embracing the prominence of veracity and validity throughout *The Art of Record*, he is forthright in suggesting theoretical foundations for nonfiction film with his modalities of documentary language. (27-30) With these conceptual frameworks, he is able to inform his case studies: *Coalface and Housing Problems*, *Look in on London*, *Cathy Come Home*, *Living on the Edge*, *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, *When the Dog Bites*, *Roger and Me* and *Handsworth Songs*. This is where his book shines as these analyses capture the essence of documentary production.

As a record of theories on the documentary form, John Corner's *The Art of Record* would certainly fit in with this reviewer's undergraduate course, "Canadian Documentary Film Traditions" at the University of Washington. The issues are not only germane in Britain, but they also transcend national boundaries.

One filmmaker who single-handedly transcended the national boundaries of Britain and Canada was John Grierson. Corner rightly refers to his contribution to British filmmaking. He states that documentary production has evolved from Grierson's emphasis on nonfiction film as a "vital art form" with its features of the "original (or native) actor" and the "raw" (as opposed to the acted article) being paramount. However, Corner fails to acknowledge that the Griersonian influence was the foundation of Canada's documentary film traditions in the persona of the National Film Board.

Surprisingly, John Grierson as the key figure in the development of the international documentary film tradition is never mentioned in Robert Coles' *Doing Documentary Work*. Rather, Coles who was a founding member of the Center of Documentary Studies at Duke University contends that nonfiction filmmaking is just one of the many "documentary" styles. While some documentary film producers might fume at this assertion, Coles' eclectic permutations ought to be considered.

Coles had, in fact, expanded the documentary process by including such photographers as Dorothea Lang and her depression era exhibition, *White Angel Bread Line* (1932),

filmmakers such as Robert Flaherty (considered the first narrative documentary filmmaker) and his *Nanook of the North* (1922) and nonfiction authors like Stud Terkel and his *Division Street* (1967) and Anton Cherkov with his *The Island: Journey to Sakhalin* (1895). Cherkov's tale of the penal colony in Sakhalin Island mesmerized Coles so much that he stated that it was:

> a documentary project that called upon both a scientist's research and a short-story writer's command of narrative writing - a sense of what matters, an eye for the telling and the dramatic detail, and a moral sensibility that informed the effort but was kept under careful scrutiny, lest a doctor's decency, his righteousness, and his soulful responsiveness to others turn into a screech of self-righteousness. (258)

Consequently, the ideal "text" documentary ought to consider the laws of steady and solid research, complete detachment from personal and moral considerations and a journalistic or colloquial mode of telling.

In nonfiction filmmaking, a critical eye for a story possibility is the first imperative. Like a "text" documentary, this then means sustained and relevant research in archival sources, pertinent interviews with judicious sound bites and record retrieval. A balanced approach to differing interpretations of the story must also be revealed or if possible, a detached view of the narrative and visual proceedings must be rendered. Linking applicable research with interpretation is the writing process.

Both Corner and Coles advocate the necessity of theory in documentary work. While Corner suggests what ought to be done in reconstructing nonfiction documentary films, Coles tells what has been done and what ought to be preserved. But one essential fact remains. It is that without the "human actuality," there is no dimension, no voice and no story.

Yet, simply extrapolating the relevant photographs, shots and testimonies while linking them with a narrative means that there is much that is left out. Coles interjects:

> We who cut, weave, edit, splice, crop, sequence, interpolate, interject, connect, pan, come up with our captions and comments, have our say (whenever and wherever and however) have thereby linked our lives to those we have attempted to document, creating a joint presentation for an audience that may or may not have been asked to consider all that has gone into what they are reading, hearing, or viewing. (100)

What is left aside is probably more crucial than what is left in because that means the investigators' frame of reference, social and educational background, personal values and political beliefs consciously intrude.

Documentarians, especially nonfiction filmmakers understand that many forces influence the process of creation and that documentary as a craft must be rendered into an art. But they also know that the actual process of documentary production lies in the very act of "doing" and not just theorizing. Corner and Coles no doubt understand this actual human process of "doing". Their books then do shed some light on the whole process of documenting the scope and nature of human existence. But the very act of "working in the trenches" and actually

reporting on people's lives can never be subordinate to mere remote cogitation that lacks a basis in reality.

Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender and Postmodern Culture

By Lynne Joyric
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. ISBN 0-253-21078-X (pbk). 244pp. 31 illustrations. $18.95 (pbk)

A review by Sarah A. Matheson, University of Southern California, USA

The association between television and femininity has had significant resonance within feminist television studies and has been approached by critics in various ways. Lynne Joyrich's lucid investigation of this relationship is a valuable contribution to this dialogue as she traces the diverse ways gender has been figured within discourses about television. Her study usefully examines not only representations of gender on TV, but also tackles the popular and critical dialogue that has emerged around the medium as a whole, thereby subjecting the critical and theoretical debates that have surrounded mass culture, consumerism, television and gender to the same rigorous analysis she affords the texts themselves. Thus, her book weaves together a consideration of scholarly work on TV - which often figures television in "feminine" terms - with TV's own strategies of representation in order to "…see what they reveal about the epistemological and discursive order of postmodern American culture - specifically, what they reveal about the places and uses of sexual difference(s) within that order." (5)

As the title suggests, *Re-Viewing Reception* is a useful revisiting of the concept of television reception itself. However, Joyrich's project stands in contrast to "reception studies" which is often identified with investigations into "active" modes of television viewing that reveal the subversive potential of viewers' "uses" of television (i.e. through fan fiction). While noting the value of this approach to television studies through the challenge it presents to the passive models of reception that have characterized critiques of mass culture in the past, Joyrich skillfully shifts the terms of debate from an ethnographic approach to television reception to an investigation of its critical discourses. Therefore, Joyrich's approach to notions of reception is not concerned with audience studies but rather interrogates the assumptions that underpin much of the work on television and spectatorship. The second chapter, for example, is especially enlightening as Joyrich probes the ways sexual difference can be seen as imbedded within the language of criticism itself, most notably in its use of gendered imagery. Tracing the debates that emerged through critiques of mass culture including, among others, those of the Frankfurt School, "effects" research and cultural studies, Joyrich dramatically illustrates the widespread and often covert ways these theories have mobilized tropes of femininity in constructing, for example, a "feminized" portrait of the television viewer. She then widens this notion of television's supposedly "feminizing" effects to include a consideration of the ways in which gender and TV become linked to characterizations of the tensions and anxieties associated with the postmodern era. In addition, by working this critique through a reading of specific TV texts, *Re-Viewing Reception* emphasizes what textual analysis may add to studies of the reception of television. In doing so, Joyrich does

not attempt to assign definitive interpretations of the texts she addresses, but rather works to reveal the multiplicity of TV's narrative strategies and modes of representation that structure our reading of gender in unstable and often contradictory ways.

While Joyrich's focus is on eighties network television in the United States, her book is not intended as a survey of series from this decade. Rather, she focuses on a range of texts as a way to ground her analysis in specific "signifying situations." When Joyrich turns her attention to the texts themselves, her analysis is lively and persuasive as she aptly illustrates the connections between broad strains of cultural critique and specific textual and representational strategies. By working her critique through select case studies (*Miami Vice*, *Moonlighting*, *Pee Wee's Playhouse* and *Max Headroom* serve as her main examples), Joyrich effectively exposes the myriad of ways television attempts to manage and contain notions of sexual difference. While her study touches on genres that have been of particular interest to feminist television criticism (such as melodrama), she extends this inquiry to include forms not typically identified as "feminine" or that address a specifically female audience. For example, she examines displays of "hypermasculinity" within the police and crime genre, representations of reproduction and familial constructions within the situation comedy and the romantic comedy as well as cyborg fantasies which foreground television's specificity. What results, is a comprehensive investigation into the widespread nature of tensions and contradictions that permeate television's negotiation of gender.

What is most striking about this book is the wide range of theory that Joyrich draws upon. By bringing together postmodern theory, psychoanalysis and feminist film theory while keeping the specificity of television in the fore, *Re-Viewing Reception* reveals the interconnectedness of TV's gendered mode of address and the theories that work to make sense of the medium and its reception. This book is an impressive and ambitious look at the complexity of television which at the same time manages to remain accessible and readable.

Shane

By Edward Countryman and Evonne von Heussen-Countryman
London: BFI Publishing, 1999. ISBN 0851707327. 78pp, 24 illustrations. £8.99 (pbk)

A review by Jo Eadie, Staffordshire University, UK

Contemporary film students, as the authors of this monograph note, find *Shane* funny. They laugh at its deification of the white-clad gunfighter; its reverence for the domestic hearth, its saccharine sanctification of boyhood hero-worship. But what seems to us to be classical purity - even naiveté - is rather, as André Bazin noted, a studied and self-reflexive mythologization, such as could only take place well after such naiveté had exhausted itself: "it is clear that the costume of Alan Ladd carries with it all the weighty significance of symbol, while on Tom Mix it was simply the costume of goodness and daring" ('The Evolution of the Western', in *What is Cinema II*, 152). *Shane* is naive only in a second-order sense: wilfully naive, naive in order to conceal its deeper scepticism and disappointment.

How curious, then, to read a book that presents the film as a straightforward exposition of traditional themes of family, land, heroism and violence - rather than as an attempted resolution of the crisis into which those themes had pushed themselves. We seem no longer able to see Shane as contrived, self-referential and *deliberately* stilted, as it was to Bazin: unable to differentiate between Alan Ladd and Tom Mix, we now believe that *all* "old" westerns were stilted and contrived without knowing it. Thus *Shane* now, strangely, seems to these authors to be the finest example of that genre from which Bazin, more cannily, recognised it to be the first cynical departure. To follow Bazin's reading, *Shane* is not the well-intentioned and honest distillation of John Ford and William S Hart, as the authors of this monograph would have it, but rather the start of that line of westerns - homage verging on the edge of parody - that would lead to Leone.

This latest contribution to the critical literature around *Shane* is a meticulous scene-by-scene analysis of the film. At its best, it unearths details that we might otherwise not know: that in a subplot edited out of the final-cut, the Rykers' henchman Chris Calloway conducted a courtship with one of the settlers; that in Jack Schaefer's original novel Shane's closeness to Marion is signified by his unusual familiarity with women's fashion. It is also painstakingly attentive to visual detail: capturing the significance of the arrangement of landscapes, buildings and poses with great care. I had, for instance, never registered that the settlers' nemesis, Ryker, appears to have no home, but lives always above the bar, thus cementing a neat opposition between his rootless commercialism and their domestic bliss.

And yet, its very care is also where its weakness lies. For as the previous example might suggest, *Shane* is framed in terms of (over)familiar western thematics. This reading never goes so far as to push an interpretation into new or unexpected territory. Images are interpreted in terms of the film's abiding moral questions: how to live in peace; how to preserve domestic life. In each case director George Stevens supposedly delivers a single, authoritative, coherent statement. In this account, *Shane* is a film without contradictions or ambivalences: it is the perfectly realised authorial vision. Any more provocative readings are

rendered impossible by this determination to read with, and never against, the grain of the text. Images mean only what they could reasonably be expected to have been intended to mean to a 1950s director, and a mainstream audience.

At many points, such an account lapses into banality: *Shane* is reduced to a series of trite (and distinctly literary) themes: "this shot makes several statements: about the grief that accompanies the end of a life, about guilt and callousness, and about the tininess of individual experience within the greater framework of the world" (29). It may well be that we had not paused to think about how this close-up or that piece of framing conveyed those themes, but in its identification and exposition of the themes themselves there is nothing that would surprise an A-level student. The book's best use then is perhaps as a model of close analysis for students new to film studies (although whether it adds much beyond the standard textbook examples of Bordwell and Thompson is debatable).

We might also wonder whether the analysis represents a kind of nostalgic impulse to do away both with certain kinds of film and certain kinds of film criticism. When we hear Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* dismissed as a "critical disaster" (71), we can only imagine the kind of puritanical cinematic vision which the authors have - and the spare critical tools by which they ask us to approach the text. For in the face of film theory's transformation of the way in which we think about cinema, there is perhaps something heroic about a "back to basics" endeavour like this - the wish to write about cinema as if the last thirty years had never happened.

Visual Culture: The Reader

By Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (eds.)
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A review by Francis Frascina, Keele University, UK

To this re-viewer, "seeing" and the "look", embedded in "gender", "racial difference", "pleasure" and "resistance", are immediately conveyed by the image on the front cover of *Visual Culture: The Reader*. The image is Robert Mapplethorpe's photograph of Roedel Middleton, 1986. Before I open up the book and survey its contents, the "face" that gazes back from the cover engages me in an interplay of meanings and references including Frantz Fanon's writings on colonization and resistance, essays by bell hooks on the black body politic and Glenn Ligon's installation *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book*, 1991-93, which is (as is work by hooks) a critique of Mappelthorpe's representations. Turning the book over I see, on the back cover, that the name "Roedel Middleton" is miss-cited as "Roedel Washington"; the interplay now includes the possibilities of an unconscious process producing the (proof reading) "error" and the resultant meanings of "Washington", not least what is signified by "Washington [D.C.]" in the midst of a Mapplethorpe reference.

Inside the covers there is Fanon's "The Fact of Blackness" (Chapter Twenty-Nine), but no bell hooks, though there is Kobena Mercer's important critique of Mapplethorpe's photographs (Chapter Thirty-One). Both of these extracts are in Part Three "Looking and Subjectivity". The other two Parts are "Cultures of the Visual" and "Regulating Photographic Meanings". Within the two subdivisions for each Part there are a total of thirty-three extracts ranging from classic texts by, for example, Althusser, Barthes, (Walter) Benjamin, Debord, Fanon, Foucault, and Freud, to more recent contributions by, for example, Bhabha, Burgin, Bryson, Crimp, Dyer, Hebdige, Krauss, (Jacqueline) Rose, Sekula, Solomon-Godeau, Tagg, and Watney. The three Parts have introductions and the Reader starts with an essay "What is Visual Culture?" by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. The latter provides a good overview of the possible ways of answering the editors' question as well as outlining the themes and structure of the Reader as a whole. Clearly, both in their discussion and the cited references, Evans and Hall are also concerned with the ways in which the conventional institutional demarcations of "cultural studies", "media studies" and "art history" might be transgressed by the turn to "visual culture". With respect to "art history", which institutionally is, arguably, least hospitable to the transforming experiences of such transgression, Evans and Hall draw positive attention to texts by Alpers, (Hal) Foster, Holland and Spence, and Tagg. Additionally, an essay that crops up both in the overview essay and in the introductions to Part One and Part Three is W.J.T. Mitchell's "The Pictorial Turn", from *Picture Theory*, 1994. One reason for the editors' references to Mitchell is his emphasis on the picture understood as "a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, bodies and figurality" (4-5 and 310). In part, Mitchell seeks to emphasize the complications of spectatorship and the inadequacies of the "model of textuality" in explaining "visual experience" or "visual literacy". A risk with Mitchell's arguments is that, after considering the crucial relationships and processes between the viewing subject, institutions and pictures or images, any claimed residual excess may be co-opted within claims about the "imaginative

life", the inexplicable characteristics of "pictures", and the repressed modernist traditions of aesthetic autonomy. To distance themselves from such possibilities, Evans and Hall rightly draw readers' attention to their "concern with how the study of visual images is subsumed under often unsubstantiated and metaphysical claims about contemporary cultural developments" (5).

The editors make reference (6) to the journal *October* and its special issue (number seventy-seven), from 1996, which included the results of a "Visual Culture Questionnaire". *October* has a particular disciplinary place within the institutional power structures of intellectual and academic life, or what O.K.Werckmeister has called "citadel culture", since its first issue in 1976. Significantly, the journal identified not with the "historical moment" of 1917 but with Eisenstein's film, 1927, as a requirement for consideration of the "aesthetic practices" since the late 1960s. Arguably too, the texts, debates and questionnaires published in *October* require an awareness of the issues and processes considered in, for example, Edward Said's essay "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" from 1982. My point here is not to make an idle digression but to query what Hal Foster regards (in *October* seventy-seven) as noteworthy in the displacement of art history by visual culture: what Evans and Hall characterize as "the dual shift from art to visual, and history to culture" (6). The risks, evident in *October*, include theories of "visual culture" being developed by way of new devices for the repression of history. It would be useful to be reminded of such risks here.

In the last paragraph of "What is Visual Culture?" Evans and Hall argue for critical analyses of both "visual and verbal communication" and the "cultural technologies designed to disseminate viewing and looking practices". What I miss is a further explicit emphasis on *histories* in the study of visual *cultures*. Such an emphasis is implied by the editors' references and examples: on the one hand, to Benjamin's work and the context of the use of mass media by German National Socialists, and, on the other hand, to more recent possible case-studies such as "the meaning of 'Hollywood', a contemporary lifestyle magazine, the advertising industry or an episode of the Jerry Springer Show" (7). Historical differences and contingencies are important implied aspects of the editors' juxtaposed examples. Do the editors mean to leave them as implied? Maybe, too, the emphasis on histories *and* cultures evident in, and between, extracts included in this Reader could have been more clearly signaled.

Visual Culture: The Reader forms part of an integrated sixteen-week module in an Open University MA programme. It has to stand, also, as a resource and critical intervention for a range of readers in a variety of situations, contexts and institutions. Amongst these readers are teachers and students in higher education. To those, including myself, who wish to encourage the critical crossings of conventional disciplines, this Reader will be greatly welcomed as an invaluable and well-presented publication with considerable potential to be realized in use.