From Antz to Titanic: Reinventing Film Analysis

A review by Ernest Mathijs, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

The works of Martin Barker are well-known for their straightforward, provocative argumentation, and with this book on film analysis he certainly isn't going to change that reputation. On the back cover of the book, and again in the acknowledgements, Barker refers to two "student comments" on film study that make explicit comments upon "traditional" and "theoretical" film analysis, calling it "rubbish" and "pants" (vii). Departing from these comments, as well as from a self-observed lack of "good working examples of film analysis", and flanked by Thomas Austin (who co-wrote one chapter) Barker sets out to reorient or, in his own words, "reinvent" academic film analysis.

The first step in Barker's mission is to show that every film analysis makes use of assumptions and anticipations of what audiences do with films. The second step is to use this notion to demonstrate that an understanding of how audiences watch and experience films, may enhance the potential of academics to offer convincing film analyses. In an extensive study of how several analyses of *It's a Wonderful Life* are constructed, Barker demonstrates "the presence of an invoked figure of the audience" that governs the arguments of film analysis (29). These audiences, argues Barker, are present in practically every single sample of film analysis, yet they hardly ever get mentioned, let alone acknowledged. By acknowledging them, as an implied audience, they might lead us to a better description of what film analysis comprises, and how academic analysis might differ from, say, simple comprehension of film stories. Barker employs two existing frameworks to support his notion of the implied audience, namely formalism (and neo-formalism) and literary criticism (especially New Criticism and reader response criticism). From these perspectives he derives two essential features of the implied audience. First, that it depends on an active audience involvement; and second, that it is a position, a "role" that members of the audience perform when making sense of a film. Together these two features allow Barker to come up with the following definition of the implied audience: "the role of the implied audience is (...) made up of the sequence and the sum-total of cued responses necessary for participation in the world of the story" (48). At this point in the argumentation, the book has indeed been living up to its self-proclaimed expectation, putting forward a model for doing film analysis, informed by audience activity, and without having to resort to shadowy theoretical inspirations.

In the next chapters Barker (and Austin) put their "model" into practice, analyzing seven recent Hollywood films (*The Usual Suspects*, *Antz*, *Titanic*, *The Lion King*, *Starship Troopers*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, and *Deep Impact*), and it is here that the book at moments becomes a bit less convincing. Instead of showing how the cognitive anticipation and reworking of the film's stories allow more detailed arguments about how the texts work, the

examples tend to get stuck in describing how viewers' activity may lead to general patterns that may be seen to govern the film's narrative. On many occasions, these observed patterns are instructive and well-funded, but they fail to rise above their specific analytic contexts and are therefore unable to gain general significance. This is, for instance, the case with several of the patterns present in the *Titanic* analysis. The epicness of the story, the cinematic intensifiers, and the use of voice-over narration are all aspects of the film text that are well worth isolating and that show how the film depends upon the anticipative and "knowing" audience in recognising these cues and putting them into meaning for understanding and enjoying it. But what do "epicness", "cinematic intensifier", and "voice-over" mean outside *Titanic*? It is, of course, a bit unfair to expect Barker to provide an answer to that question, but since this was exactly the question Barker did ask himself (see 2, 49), the insights that the patterns offer for understanding specific films somehow seem not enough.

On two important occassions Barker and Austin do offer these generalizations: when they deal with special effects, and in the concluding chapter of the book. Probably the most specific contribution that Barker and Austin make to film analysis is that they introduce the analysis of special effects as a fully fledged, integrated part of film analysis. Several of the films the authors study in detail, like *Deep Impact*, *Titanic*, *Starship Troopers* and *Antz*, make extensive use of effects, and Barker and Austin try to demonstrate that these effects play an important role in how audiences perceive these effects as part of the text, instead of a surplus (or excess). In the chapter on *Deep Impact* this leads the authors to elaborate on the meanings of effects, observing a "dual character" in how special effects demand audience attention (170). Instead of seeing, like others, effects as a signal of the death of narrative in favor of spectacle, Barker and Austin argue that in *Deep Impact*, and in disaster movies in general, "FX are only special to the extent that they momentarily alter the manner in which narrative is to be perceived and understood" (170-171). The emphasis on the effects by the publicity for these films (we wait for buildings to fall, volcanos to erupt, storms to burst, ...) makes audiences anticipate these effects as part of the narrative, in the case of even "completing" it. Given the importance of effects in Hollywood film today, this observation is crucial to any understanding of their narratives, a point well illustrated by Barker and Austin. The second occassion when Barker offers generalizations is in his conclusion. Here he attempts to bind together the argumentations on film analysis as well as the specific examples with previously conducted research, referring to his work on *Judge Dredd* (with Kate Brooks, 1998) and *Crash* (with Jane Arthurs and Ramaswami Harindranath, forthcoming), both empirical studies of audience activity in understanding film. The importance of audience activity as essential in the meaning making process of film even leads Barker to propose a new approach to film study in general, called "pro-filmic". For Barker, pro-filmic theory engages in a radically new investigation of responses to film, one which emphasizes audience activity and one which assumes that audiences interact with, rather than are seduced by, films. Pro-filmic theory then, might well be viewed as the real, and only, kind of approach that will engender the desired results of adequacy, transparency, acknowledgement, anti-idiosyncrasy, and research productivity, so essential to "good working examples" of film analysis. A provocative finish, as could be expected, but one that's so well-argued that it is hard to resist.

If we look around at the practice of film analysis today, *From Antz to Titanic* may not yet have reinvented film analysis as it set out to do, but the argumentation and paradigmatic scope of the book definitely set new standards for film analysis. Although not all examples deliver what they promise, and the theoretical notion of "pro filmic theory" still awaits tests, several concepts, like those that concern the implied audience and the narrative function of

special effects, are certainly ready to become pivotal to future models of analyses. A must read.

Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation

By Barbara M. Kennedy
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-7486-1134-7, 229 pp. £40.00 (hbk)

A review by David Martin-Jones, University of Glasgow, Scotland

This is a superb foray into the emergent area of Deleuzian inspired film-philosophy. Kennedy's book utilizes Deleuze's ideas in an attempt to radically re-address theories of spectatorship developed during the 1970s and 80s -- within the rather limiting binary framework of "cinepsychoanalysis" (38) -- and their attempts to theorize spectating as a subject position.

In contrast, Kennedy offers a new "subjectless" (17) spectator who experiences film on a molecular level, as sensation. A process, or "event", as opposed to a position, this is spectating as an experiential, rather than a representational phenomena. Not content to view spectatorial pleasure as purely scopic, Kennedy addresses instead the visceral pleasures experienced by the molecular body, as it forms a screen/body assemblage with the film.

This new look at spectating also necessitates a re-appraisal of sexuality from Kennedy. If the spectatorial event is actually a material encounter, "a melding of mind/body/brain with the image" (55) then the biologically determined body (the phallus/lack split) of the psychoanalytic spectator can no longer be privileged within film theory. In its place Kennedy implants Deleuze's concept of the "body without organs", (58) a transversal plane constructed by spectator and screen, across which molecular sensations flow in the visceral process of spectating.

Kennedy's post-structuralist "neo-aesthetics" and "neo-sexuality" (50) also meshes with post-feminism through its focus on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "becoming-woman" (92). The idea being that under a patriarchal system of thought that privileges the biological, molar form of man as "being", all "becomings" must, by definition, first pass through a becoming-woman. Kennedy applies this idea to the experience of spectating, the process of "becoming-woman" encapsulating the movement into molecularity through which the spectator encounters the film. The "'becoming-woman' of cinema" (104) creates the spectator/screen assemblage, the body without organs of the subjectless spectator.

Kennedy analyses several films in order to show both their impact on the molar level -- as representations of characters, and events in the narrative, -- but also on the molecular. On this level characters are now merely figures, and the interplay between such elements as cinematography, music, décor, lighting, pace of editing, colour, movement in the shot, facial expressions, and costume, are all explored in her search for the rhythm of the film, its "aesthetic resonance" (129). Often reminiscent of a description of a musical symphony, this type of analysis is most effective when Kennedy brings it to bare on molecular movement, in

her discussion of the dance and skating scenes in *Orlando* (chapter six) the "Pollockian canvas" (189) of Bigelow's *Strange Days* (chapter nine) and the theatricality of the film event, experienced as intensity, in Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* (chapter eight).

The reader unfamiliar with Deleuze's ideas will find enough explanation of terminology to make this an accessible read, as Kennedy goes to great lengths to explain Deleuze's extremely complex ideas. Partly as a result of this, parts one and two are purely theoretical explorations of the ramifications of this shift in thinking from the aesthetics of the molar subject, to the neo-aesthetics of molecular spectating, with part three left for the analysis of the films. Moreover, her work shows a remarkable engagement not only with Deleuze's philosophical oeuvre, but also the canon of spectator theory already existent in film studies. The one noticeable absence of engagement, however, is with her most direct predecessor, Stephen Shaviro's, *The Cinematic Body* (1993).

The main problem with Kennedy's work arises through her somewhat narrow focus on cinema as a process of "becoming-woman". Her privileging of this term detracts slightly from the real recipient of becoming, molecularity itself. She performs an almost abortive reterritorialization of her own line of flight by privileging becoming-woman as her idée fixe, rather than choosing a more radical departure for cinematic spectatorship, (becoming-queer, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible, becoming-celluloid, becoming-light) or just leaving the destination gloriously unknown. For this reason a molar bias still haunts the text, continually threatening to reposition her work back within the macro-politics of binary sexual positions.

Becoming-woman is only privileged by Deleuze, as Kennedy herself acknowledges (92) because it is the first becoming through which all becoming-moleculars must flow, in their flight from the macro-political division of man/woman. Yet, if we were to review this situation slightly, and privilege the hetero/homo binary instead, all becomings would be seen to have to first pass through a becoming-queer before reaching their eventual becoming-molecular. By extension the theory would then have to be one of a "becoming-queer of cinema". At this delicate stage in the becoming-Deleuze of film studies, Kennedy's work is in some danger of enacting a similar exclusion as that of Mulvey (1989) with its overt stress on heterosexual divisions.

That said, at this point in time, the importance of this work as a potential Deleuzian line of flight within film studies cannot be stressed enough.

Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era

By Jane M. Gaines
University of Chicago Press: 2000. ISBN: 0-226-27875-1, xvi+239 pages, 31 illustrations, £31.00, (hbk)
Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux By J. Ronald Green

Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux

J. Ronald Green

Indiana University Press: 2000. ISBN:0-253-33753-4, xvi+295, £23.50, (hbk)

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

The scholarly interest and research of more than twenty years (arguably beginning with J. Hoberman's writings in 1975) around the cultural contributions of Oscar Micheaux have come to bear with several new books including those by Jane M. Gaines and J. Ronald Green. What is perhaps most exciting about the current research on Micheaux is that this body of work (and I refer to both the studies of Micheaux's cinematic accomplishments as well as the *raced body* that Micheaux represents) opens fresh critical discourse and rethinking about the state of film studies. Since the study of an individual filmmaker runs the risk of reinstituting "great men" theories, it is to their credit that both Gaines and Green provide provocative analyses where their arguments raise the stakes around questions of the *auteur* as marginal cultural producer in the American context.

These works, however, should also be seen as part of the historical groundwork additionally laid by Pearl Bowser's and Louise Spence's *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (2000). Bowser and Spence run into difficulty when situating the cultural and political position of Micheaux: On the one hand, Micheaux is described as "an assertive and enterprising salesman" (16) yet, on the other hand, his "[silent films and novels] should be seen within a cultural tradition of expression that rejects the modern Western and commercial separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics" (143). In contrast Gaines and Green engage Micheaux with an eye toward not so much a privileging of Micheaux as *auteur*. Rather, the often contradictory body of work *and* the body of the auteur (most especially for Gaines) serve as a point of departure to reevaluate the terrain of traditional film theories (here, in particular, psychoanalysis and feminism) through the filter of newer theoretical approaches initiated by queer and race studies as well as the philosophical concerns of Hegel and Sartre.

I highlight Gaines' approach here because her work on Micheaux, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era*, is magisterial in its attempt to bridge a transformed model of film theory with a textured, archival historical analysis. For Gaines, the idea of the auteur acts as a conduit to an interdisciplinary methodology of cinema and culture. She is served well in this endeavor by her breadth of film and socio-cultural knowledge that seeks to intervene in the difficult morass of the theoretical aporia entrenched in film studies (Gaines refers to this as the "Hegelian impasse"). This is to say that, whereas some recent so-called post-theorists claim a break or negation from film theory grounded in psychoanalysis or a tradition of "doublets," Gaines (following Deleuze and Guattari to an extent) critiques and situates past film theories in a dialogue with one another. In this way, Gaines rehearses a model of film criticism that doesn't negate the wealth of theory produced over the past thirty years or more. Instead Gaines eloquently turns to the productive possibilities of these theories so as to open new terrain on the study of film and its cultural significance. In truly Bakhtinian-dialogical fashion or, more appositely here, Deleuzian and Guattarian "lines of flight," Gaines posits both a new theory and an affirmative way to conceive of theory itself in film studies.

Moving easily through James Baldwin, W.E.B. Dubois, Judith Butler, Kojève, Ella Shohat, Vivian Sobchack, and Janet Staiger, Gaines locates Micheaux within the complex matrices that generate the history of ideas and their material effects. But importantly in this work, white-Eurocentric privilege is re-written and challenged so as to sketch an arena for African-American cultural production. This is certainly no easy matter given the deep inscription of white imperialist culture. Gaines seeks no easy response. How does one explore the work left behind by an African-American filmmaker (some of it lost) who lived *within* the often-insidious inscriptions of white-American institutional systems (i.e. racist Hollywood, the Arts, and government)? "Thus my sense is," Gaines writes, "that the key to Micheaux's cinematic formal style as well as his thematics is to be found in the way he transformed the existing without changing it" (182-183). Indeed, she continues, "For Micheaux was seeing this black culture through the eyes of the white culture for which his vision of an irredeemable black underclass was flattering and entirely functional" (183). If the failure of black uplift (something Micheaux strongly believed in) was its moral reliance on white middle-class values, black uplift was simultaneously the same *yet* different. The importance of such an historical suggestion is that cultural difference is not so much about negation and the privileging of something better. Cultural difference is marked by the way difference negotiates within and against or, "the conjuncture of the same and the other," as the author points out (267).

The pleasure of *Fire and Desire* is found in Gaines' beautiful writing as well as her eagerness to critically engage the difficult questions of race in film and cultural theory. Clearly, this challenge is met through her investigation of the "world of the race movie" where "race cinema was a thorough re-facialization of the space of the screen" while it "also looked just like the middle class [sic] white one, setting up equivalences and parallels while maintaining the principle of *all-black everything*. This, then is the paradox of uplift" (270). It is precisely the paradoxes, as Gaines demonstrates, that make the works and world of Oscar Micheaux such a rich area of study.

Through a more straightforward, but nonetheless valuable, study of Micheaux, J. Ronald Green's *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* works to understand the difficulties of black uplift in the "race film" through a reading of class. Although the book finds itself mired in either/or debates while battling over a Micheaux-v.-Griffith cinema or the scholarly methodologies of Thomas Cripp, Green opens the door to a rethinking about how we

conceive of black middle-class sensibilities in the early twentieth century and how it is represented in the Micheaux films. This is important since it provides us with a glance onto the filmmaker's own conception of what constituted African-American ideology in white America.

For Green, the "theoretically vexed" question of the *auteur* "remains vital to the politics of representation, including discussions of canon and the margins of canon" (xvi). To be sure, Green's return to the notion of the *auteur* brings to light Micheaux's raced body and the body of work associated with it especially through what Green seeks to identify as Micheaux's cinematic style of "moderation." Caught within the confines of the quickly emerging Hollywood-style narrative, Micheaux, according to Green draws upon African-American cultural traditions (such as the blues) to formulate black middle-class representation and storytelling. And, as Green further points out through his reading of Mark Reid's work, Micheaux's creative style although financed by white investment was not necessarily stripped of its integral relationship to black culture (122).

What was the black middle class that Micheaux aspired to? For Green, Micheaux's "filmmaking both represented and embodied uplift" and served as an important "contribution to the story of human anticipation" (231). Micheaux's idea of the black middle class is re-worked in Green's work so as to emphasize both the condition of sameness that underscores American middle-class sensibility yet the vital differences that are made manifest through the African-American experience of middle class*ness*. As I noted earlier with regard to Gaine's work, the complexity of identifying representations of race *as such* is no simple task. Green hopes to problematize the sometimes-reductive reading of class subsumed under white theoretical guidelines. If there are shortcomings in Green's book, it would be the rather frugal footnoting that might otherwise guide the reader toward a more thorough knowledge of how it is that Green arrives at some of his conclusions.

In this way, this reading of Micheaux lends itself to the possibility of further scholarship that envisages the myriad dynamics occurring at the levels of cultural production and representation. What these works on Micheaux illuminate, is that theory and cultural history need not stagnate. The intervention of works along the lines of Gaines and Green provide stimulating correctives to those that claim film studies (and theory in general) has been thoroughly tapped. It is revealing that such an intervention emerges through the body of Oscar Micheaux.

Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television

By Jeffrey Sconce
Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8223-2572-1, 264 pp., $18.95
(pbk)

A review by Annalee R. Ward, Trinity Christian College

Mysterious rappings, seances, aliens, monsters, and the paranormal. Not the usual scholarly history of the media. Jeffrey Sconce in *Haunted Media* writes a social history of the development of the media beginning with the telegraph in the middle 1800s through to today's interactions with virtual reality. He focuses not so much on the media, however, as the metaphors of presence that electrical technologies spawned and the resultant paranormal explorations. Ultimately he argues that postmodern theory is a direct descendant of these discussions. The metaphors move from the early beginnings of electric communication as a stream or flow to the electronic ocean, a vast and sometimes isolated opportunity for fishing (for sounds). Once radio became a viable commercial enterprise, the metaphors changed to that of the telecommunicative blanket or omnipresent net that now "catches" the audience. Finally, with the advent of television and then cyberspace, the idea of electronic limbo or oblivion emerged and expanded to the postmodern concepts of fragmentation and destabilization.

Sconce's opening chapter is a fascinating look at the parallel streams of development of the telegraph and the Spiritualist movement. The idea of a "spiritual" telegraph which could be used to contact the dead inspired many people with utopian visions including some of the age's better known such as Horace Greeley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Fenimore Cooper, and President and Mrs. Lincoln. The Spiritualist movement gave voice to women (acting as mediums) who could then discuss politics, beliefs, and concerns of the day. However, because of the strong involvement of women, the more male-dominated scientific community strove to discredit Spiritualism.

Presented in an objective voice, Sconce's material argues for a causal relationship between electricity and the paranormal interests, but Sconce himself refrains from any evaluation of the material at this point. As Sconce traces the interweavings of electronic presence with the "occult metaphysics," one may wonder why he is taking this so seriously. That question is not answered until the final chapter where we clearly hear his voice as he identifies the fascination with the paranormal and media as "fantasies of electronic disembodiment" (200).

With the development of radio, interests in contacting the dead remained, but the utopian visions cooled and a darker side of the ether emerged suggesting that explorations of this vast "ocean" of ether could be a lonely and alienating experience. The tragedy of the Titanic only contributed to the discussions of the wireless as a savior and as a murderer. Thus, the medium carried the "paradoxes of presence within absence, isolation within community, and intimacy within separation" (82). Nevertheless, the interest in radio as a medium of telepathy or as a

vehicle of the spirit world remained with even Thomas Edison developing devices to contact the dead.

As radio became a normal part of culture's conscience, the interest in the otherworldliness of the medium shifted to a focus on aliens. The "boy culture" of the day inundated its audience with images and descriptions of Martians and creatures from outer space. Programming often highlighted ways to contact aliens or furthered the fears of invasion. Of course, Sconce discusses the place of the "War of the Worlds" broadcast, highlighting its use as a "parable of oppressive presence" of broadcasting (116).

The advent of television brought new fears of ghosts residing in the medium. Sconce builds his argument on sometimes wacky stories and highly detailed accounts of specific broadcasts and people's responses. From a dead grandfather seen on the television to descriptions of specific television episodes of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits*, the audience faces questions of TV's "liveness" and its interaction with reality. In this fourth chapter, Sconce turns his history into an argument showing the beginnings of postmodern's theory of hyperreality.

In the final chapter, Sconce shows how the fascination with, and fear of, television led postmodern theory's positing of simulation, fragmentation, and the loss of subjectivity. But, notes Sconce, "postmodern theory is in itself simply another in a long series of occult fantasies inspired by electronic media" (170). Even current debate over cyber technologies echoes this history. This last chapter gives Sconce a voice as he pulls *Haunted Media* together into a cohesive argument with examples from movies, Baudrillard, Jameson, and film theory.

Other scholars have written media histories. For example, Daniel Czitrom's *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (1987) or editors David Crowley and Paul Heyer's *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society* (1995) which provides an overview of technological development in the context of a cultural perspective. Sconce, however, develops the cultural implications of electronic progress's metaphors on the broader society, particularly the otherworldliness that electricity suggested. His cultural history intersperses off-beat details with cultural insight. Employing strong writing skills and the ability to weave the details into a narrative, Sconce presents a readable and unique perspective on the topic. Ultimately, the book proffers a fresh historical argument for the conclusion that postmodern theory is a logical outgrowth of the trajectory of thoughts involving "fantasies of electronic disembodiment," and deserves serious reading.

The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media

By Marcia Landy (ed.)
London: The Athlone Press, 2001, ISBN 0 485 30096 6, pp. 350, £16 (pbk), £43 (hbk)

A review by Paul Grainge, University of Nottingham, UK

Memory has become a burgeoning topic of cross-disciplinary research in recent years and Marcia Landy's *The Historical Film* joins a growing body of work seeking to explore the articulation of the past within media culture. Positioning itself in the company of collections such as Vivien Sobchack's *The Persistence of History* (Routledge, 1996) and Robert Rosenstone's *Revisionising History* (Princeton UP, 1995), Landy's book is the first to anthologise previously published essays in the field; it gathers a diverse range of work considering the "historical film" in textual, cultural and philosophical terms. While by no means an introductory collection, *The Historical Film* attempts to make available "a representative example of how media critics and historians write about history as it is portrayed in film and television" (vii).

In a critical introduction that touches base with as many über-theorists of modern and postmodern history as it can legitimately muster -- Nietzche, Benjamin, Foucault, Gramsci, Derrida, Delueze -- Landy immediately ascribes the book with a magnanimous intellectual framework. In four relatively equal sections, the book interweaves theoretical questions about the experience of history with cultural questions about the representation of history. "Regarding History" looks at "what is at stake in the project of identifying the specific properties of the historical film" (12); the second section, titled "History as Trauma," provides a set of readings on the style and sources of the history film in Europe and America (ranging in reference from *Dance With a Stranger* to *Schindler's List*); the third part on "History, Fiction, and Postcolonial Memory" considers distinctions between official history and memory as they are mapped onto the effects of decolonisation; and the final section on "History and Television" considers the nature of historical representation within contemporary televisual media.

"History" is a more important term than "memory" in this collection. Clearly, the terms are complexly involved and are examined with deliberation in certain essays. Miriam Hansen provides an intelligent consideration of public memory in a comparative treatment of *Schindler's List* and *Shoah*, and Mbye Cham offers a treatise on popular memory in a short essay on the reconfiguration of the African past in the works of Ousmane Sembene. Memory is an undercurrent in *The Historical Film* but it is not the conceptual anchor. Despite the book's subtitle, the seventeen essays in the collection do not engage in a sustained manner with debates that emerge from "memory studies"; little attention is drawn to variations of remembrance such as nostalgia, amnesia, fantasy and forgetting. Instead, the collection builds a set of arguments and methodological positions based on the important task of overturning "conventional (and often negative) judgements about the historicizing potential of the media"

(1). In a critical climate prone to castigating historical and memory practices shaped by media industries, this is a welcome line of argument.

As with any edited collection, the conceptual agenda of *The Historical Film* is built via the strategic organization and juxtaposition of its contributions. There is certainly a desire to illustrate perspectives that emerge from different disciplinary fields. For example, Robert Rosenstone's attempt to redeem the significance of the history film for other professional (and less cinematically disposed) historians is usefully followed up by a rigorous demonstration by George Custen of Hollywood's construction of public history in the early biopic. Shifting the disciplinary grounds from history to cinema studies thickens the picture of the historical film as a focus of scholarly attention, as well as a site for discussion about critical method. It also establishes points of disagreement. Just as soon as Gary Edgerton finishes his essay on Ken Burns's *The Civil War* by describing it as "a masterful historical documentary" (313), Shawn Rosenheim invokes Burns and *The Civil War* as an example of the "intellectual poverty of historical documentaries on television" (316). *The Historical Film* is not an argumentative collection but Landy has managed to select essays that provide a good covering of debates, especially those figured around modern/postmodern axes.

Many essays in *The Historical Film* provide incisive treatments of particular media genres, including the Hollywood biopic (George Custen), the costume melodrama (Sue Harper), and the Roman historical epic (Maria Wyke). Others set up more general discussions of history and historicism in contemporary culture. While Pierre Sorlin probes the conceptual issue of "how to look at a historical film," Marcia Landy explores the "intertextual layers of popular history" (15) that so often, and almost unavoidably, implicate film. *The Historical Film* is a suggestive collection that gathers conceptually provocative work. While many of the essays are perhaps rather familiar to those working in the field -- there is nothing especially new in this book -- *The Historical Film* is effective in showcasing different frameworks of analysis. Eschewing critique that attempts simply to check and test the veracity of historical films, the book is a valuable collection of work that takes the mediation of history seriously, and that demonstrates critical work undertaken from a range of historical and culturalist positions.

The Internet and Society

A review by Karen Orr Vered, Flinders University, Australia

The Internet and Society is an ambitious title but one appropriate to the task Slevin sets himself: to explain how the Internet impacts on society. The work is best described as a grand theory of late modernity, which examines the activities and potential of the Internet as part of that project. Slevin positions his argument in opposition to what we might call utopian and optimistic strands of Internet theorisation, those that suggest the Internet is radically altering society and individuals. In particular he critiques the views of Howard Rheingold, Sherry Turkle, and Elizabeth Reid. Slevin also confronts the view that new media will only extend and reiterate patterns of cultural domination as practiced by established media conglomerates. He attributes this position to the Frankfurt School but directs his criticism at the early works of Herbert Schiller, *particularly Mass Communications and American Empire* (1971) and *The Mind Managers* (1973). Society, for Slevin, has been transformed and the Internet is but one result, and not a cause of complex change. He challenges the notion that the Internet is generating fundamentally new forms of culture, social organisation, or processes of identity formation or performance; he disavows theories that Internet activity is symptomatic of postmodernity. Instead, Slevin aims to show how the Internet is situated within the processes of change that characterise late modernity, as outlined by Anthony Giddens.

Slevin correctly identifies three factors that have fuelled "euphoric interpretations and the excesses of futurology" in media theory. (3) First is the glossary use of the indefinite term, "new media," because it is used to describe such disparate practices and applications from interactive TV to asynchronous e-mail. Second he asserts that communication and media theories have too long ignored political and social theory. Finally, and perhaps most problematically, Slevin claims that "specialist literature in the field of communications" has tended to adopt a "limited and uncritical concept of culture" that has not recognised how "symbolic content and online interaction are embedded in social and historical contexts of various kinds." (ix)

The problem, as he sees it, is that we need to "come to terms with the theoretical and practical implications of the Internet on modern culture." (4) Slevin takes on both the theoretical and the practical in this ambitious book. The difficulty with his pursuit is not that it is wrong-headed but that Slevin's argument then proceeds with heavy reliance on the social theories of Anthony Giddens and the media theories of John B. Thompson without acknowledging that these discourses, like those he criticises, are also bound by the specificity of academic disciplines. The book's audience will certainly be found amongst sociologists and those who take Giddens and Thompson to be fundamental to the study of mass media. The book is foremost a work of social theory rather than one of media theory or ethnography about Internet use or media in general. This is not necessarily a fault but it does limit the book's readership.

The book is written in an accessible style, appropriate for use in a range of course levels and the chapters can be used independently of one another. While demonstrating that on-line activities and communities do not signal new cultural formations but are instead generated from within existing cultural practices and social organisations, Slevin criticises communication studies for not having taken this approach sooner. Unfortunately, Slevin overlooks many works that have examined "new media" as cultural practice. The following anthologies each contain several studies of computer media use conducted from a cultural perspective: *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia* (ed. Julian Sefton-Green, 1998), *Culture of the Internet* (ed. Sara Kiesler, 1997), *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (ed. Steven G. Jones, 1995), *Women and Technology* (ed. Urs E. Gattiker, 1994) and the invaluable, *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces* (eds. Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch, 1992). Reading *The Internet and Society* reminds me that we are far from achieving interdisciplinarity because, as Slevin's oversights prove, we are not *inter* enough and, we are far too disciplined in our academic divisions. It is as though Slevin and I have completely different canons, and yet, I agree with his insistence that to understand the Internet in society, we must approach our object of study as a cultural one.

In his 1989 collection, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, James W. Carey argues that American social science has "represented communication within an overarching transmission view, in terms of either a power or an anxiety model." Carey demonstrates that, historically, there have been two definitions of communication, one as transmission and the other as ritual. For Carey, "the ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs." *The Internet and Society* aims to demonstrate how different social organisations, from on-line chat groups to corporations and nation-states, use Internet communication services to, as Carey would say, represent their "shared beliefs." Oddly, Slevin uses the term "transmission" to describe the cultural work of communication media when he is, in effect, making an argument for what Carey would call the ritual dimension of communication media use. Slevin's argument needs a more explicit recognition of the ritual view of communication because this is precisely what he means when he asks that we embed our understanding of Internet practices within the context of social structures that support the existence and development of the Internet. Even though Slevin is concerned with the transmission of culture via new media, in communication theory and much practice, transmission has been figured as a predominantly one-way process, while ritual implies the type of community participation that Slevin would prefer to emphasise.

The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg

By Michael Grant (ed.)
Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000. ISBN 1 86236 001 4 (hbk); ISBN 1 86236 000 6 (pbk); 218pp. £36.95 (hbk); £14.95 (pbk)

A review by Robin Griffiths, University of Gloucestershire, UK

With David Cronenberg, probably the most written about horror auteur of the twentieth century, as his subject matter, editor Michael Grant certainly had his work cut out for him. Comprised of seven critical essays, *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg* makes a notable contribution to the debates surrounding such a highly controversial and contentious director, commonly known (particularly within a British context) by the more derogatory appellative of "the Baron of Blood" (22). As a leading figure in the horror "new wave" of the late seventies, much emphasis in the critical reception of Cronenberg's work has been placed upon his early "body horror" phase and the visceral spectacle of corporeal crisis, which as Ian Conrich discusses in his opening essay, "An aesthetic sense: Cronenberg and neo-horror film culture", led to "considerable hostility from the British press" (37); particularly in relation to the "video nasty" witch hunts of the early eighties.

By analysing the volatile media response to his early work, in comparison with the more celebratory rhetoric of such US fanzines as *Fangoria*, Conrich traces the dissemination of Cronenberg's work in parallel with both the emerging dominance of the home video market and the opening of a number of specialist cult cinemas dedicated to "reaching out to an audience more attuned to his sensibilities and aesthetic assumptions" (23). However, he concludes that whilst Cronenberg's "apocalyptic cinema of panic narratives" was of immense appeal to the "post-punk generation" (41), his surreal aesthetics and avant-garde influences clearly elevated him above the "splatter-genre" to which his work was commonly sutured, by both critics and fans alike.

Despite the critical and historical importance of Cronenberg's early avant-garde and "body horror" phases however, the main "body" of *The Modern Fantastic* appears to be more concerned with his later literary phase, with particular critical attention placed upon *Dead Ringers*, *Naked Lunch* and *Crash*. Disappointingly, very little is said about what could possibly be a new development in Cronenberg's oeuvre with the release of *eXistenZ* in 1999, a film that marks a possible return to the type of thematic of such earlier films as *Videodrome*.

Essays such as Jonathan Crane's "A body apart: Cronenberg and genre", question whether Cronenberg should be truly seen as a horror director at all, since his focus upon the iconic figure of the "mad scientist" and the consistent lack of irony or referentiality in his work marks a departure from his contemporaries in the postmodern horror genre. Murray Smith on the other hand in "A(moral) monstrosity", discusses the unique way in which contrary to

other works in the genre, Cronenberg dispels our sympathy for the human "victims" of his narratives, and questions the validity of common psychoanalytical readings. Ironically, this is followed by Barbara Creed's application of a Freudian critical paradigm to later works *Dead Ringers* and *Crash* in her exploration of Cronenberg's homoeroticism. In one of the strongest essays in the collection "The naked crunch: Cronenberg's homoerotic bodies", Creed draws upon Freud's account of the Schreber case and the way in which cinema has "conventionally represented the 'gay body as text' " (90), to explore the inherent "queerness" of Cronenberg's later work within which "we find an oscillation between male and female, an emphasis on the feminisation of the male, the prominence of surrogate figures, bodily alterations, paranoia, self-delusion, and a desire for bliss or *jouissance*" (84).

Other notable essays in the collection include Parveen Adams' "Death drive", which offers a complex analysis of the spatial organisation of *Crash* to demonstrate how the "flatness" and "nothingness" of Cronenberg's imagery envisages an actual "collapse" of the symbolic, "putting us at the join of the symbolic and the real" (117), whereas editor Grant draws parallels between Cronenberg's literary phase and the structures of symbolist poetry in "Cronenberg and the poetics of time". Taking a different approach however, Andrew Klevan's "The mysterious disappearance of style: some critical notes about the writing on *Dead Ringers*" provocatively exposes the evasiveness of modern film scholarship in dealing with notions of "film style", and considers how the languages, vocabularies and critical paradigms deployed in an interpretation or evaluation of Cronenberg's work influence the ways in which we "make sense of its style" (164). These are influences and interpretative strategies that Cronenberg himself finds disillusionment with in the final interview with Xavier Mendik that concludes the collection.

As a director with "an awareness of film debate and film theory" (170), Cronenberg acknowledges the importance of such ideas as a framework through which his films may be discussed, but is wary of modes of critical theory that attempt to impose specific readings from within dominant theoretical paradigms:

> Criticism is not in itself a tool for me to make films, though I know that there are some critics who think that there is a neat fit between the two. Some critics believe that theory allows a complete understanding of where the inspiration of your film has come from. Yet, … as a kind of analyst! (171)

As a director who actively engages with the discourses surrounding his work, Cronenberg re-iterates the need for a "plurality of interpretation" (169), that not only puts into question the critical frameworks through which his cinema is consistently read, but also the very critical essays that precede Mendik's interview in the collection.

Overall, *The Modern Fantastic* is a diverse and provocative addition to the metamorphosizing corpus of work on one of the leading visionaries of the horrific avant-garde.

Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity

By Allison Pease
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. ISBN 0 521 78076 4. vi + 244 pp. 24 Illustrations, $60.00, (hbk)
Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire By Robert Eberwein & Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry By Jon Lewis

Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire

By Robert Eberwein.

New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999. ISBN 0 8135 2636 1. ii + 267pp. 34 illustrations, $59.00, (hbk)

Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry

By Jon Lewis

New York: New York University Press, 2000. ISBN 0 8147 5142 3. Ii + 376pp. $51.45, (hbk)

A review by Janet Staiger, University of Texas at Austin, USA

The three books under review here are linked by their discussions of the representation of sexuality. However, they deal with very different time periods and subjects. Of the three, Allison Pease's *Modernism, Mass Culture and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* and Robert Eberwein's *Sex Ed: Film Video, and the Framework of Desire* are the far more successful; unfortunately, the promises of Jon Lewis's *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* are never fulfilled.

Pease's *Modernism, Mass Culture and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* is an argument about the historical trajectories of pornography within philosophical and literary discourses from the era of the Enlightenment. Her general claim is that pornography as a genre and aesthetics as a discourse about the body and the mind appear at the same time (the eighteenth century) but remain separate through the middle to end of the nineteenth century when several writers appropriate explicit sexual representations with pornographic conventions into works marketed to high and middle classes. The erosion of the separation between pornography and

tasteful art begins with Swinburne's 1866 *Poems and Ballads*. Tying this to philosophical connections of the body, sensations, and the masses as a "body politic" were also modernists Marx, Nietszche, and Freud -- all of whom accepted a sensation of the body as a source of knowledge and a dialectic of sense and reason.

Setting up the premise this way, Pease focuses on several transitional writers who exemplify various methods of incorporating pornography into their works. Beyond the sensual imagery of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Pease analyzes Aubrey Beardsey's drawings against James Joyce's incorporation of pornographic set pieces in *Ulysses*. Both of these artists are primary examples of what Pease characterizes as "an aesthetic of the obscene" (34). This introduction of desiring bodies appeals to cultural mainstream imagery, but critics tolerate the imagery by recognizing it as either parody or formalism. This use of form as a method of distancing the sexual content is exploited in the work of D. H. Lawrence who accelerates this practice while using sexuality both to titillate through scenarios of crossing class but to argue that the body is a class leveler. Critical responses to this modernism includes the theorizing of I.A Richards whom Pease considers the individual most prominent in articulating, promoting, and, eventually, sanitizing for the upper classes an aesthetics of obscenity.

Pease's book provides media scholars with a valuable context for considering twentieth-century analyses of sexuality, the body, visual pleasure, and sensations in moving image media. For one thing, she connects the individual body and its sensations to a discourse of the "body politic." While this is a slippage she does not emphasis, the conflation of notions is one articulated by some of the modernists whom she examines. To understand this metaphor, and its possible social and political implications, her analyses will be of assistance. Additionally, she notes that a general discourse of rethinking the separation of body and mind permeates mid-nineteenth century philosophy and, then, literature and drawing. As scholars of media question whether technologies of film altered notions of sensation, considering prior discourses on these matters would be necessary. That is, is the supposed association of modernism with "shocks" something due to technologies of modernity or is it a re-evaluation by cultural critics of the contributions of sensation in theorizing knowledge?

Applying Pease's work will need to be accomplished carefully, however. Her work is within British culture and is focused on the 1850s through the 1940s. While she draws out the implications for class in these trends in representing the obscene, she is writing about a particular nation-state that has a very different configuration than occurs elsewhere -- such as in the United States. The issues of religion and race/ethnicity do not enter her analysis while these would be explicitly of significance to the same period in the US (and perhaps ought as well to have been at least acknowledged as structuring absences in the material she studies -- although the orientalism of Beardsley's work might have raised these matters). This is not to be perceived as a fault of the work -- Pease covers class, sex, and sexuality differences very well. My note is merely to mark that a direct application to the US scene isn't possible. Additionally, and related to this, is the absence of discussion of legal discourse on these matters (except as obscenity and pornography are initially defined). A comparative study between Britain and the US of court discussions of these notions produces important variations in cultural, social, and aesthetic views of pornography and art. Incorporating these discussions would illuminate Pease's arguments about the process of aestheticization and massification of explicit sexual imagery within various taste and class-directed groups in Britain and would be helpful in subsequent contrast with the US. After all, the US and Britain have had very different twentieth-century practices regarding regulating obscenity in literature and moving pictures.

The second book under review here, Eberwein's *Sex Ed: Film Video, and the Framework of Desire*, takes up the issues of representing sexuality through a different ploy than articulating a dialectic of bodily sensation with formalism. In these cases, outright didacticism is the ploy to present evidence of bodily congress. As Eberwein notes in his introduction, the purpose of his study is to provide the historical context for sex education films along with gesturing toward "their cultural and ideological significance" (3). His ultimate claim in this regard is that while early twentieth-century sex education films described the negative implications of sexuality (specifically, the effects of venereal disease [VD]), in the last thirty years, a simultaneously produced strand of educating for pleasure also appears -- following Foucault, a move from a *scientia sexualis* to also an *ars amore*.

Dividing his book into five historical and categorical chapters, Eberwein reviews (1) narrative and expository sex education films from 1914 to 1939 focusing mostly on VD or birthing; (2) additional VD training films produced during World War II; (3) movies and videos for children and teens in an educational setting from the mid-1940s that discuss "normal" sexual practices and outcomes including masturbation, wet dreams, menstruation, and pregnancy; (4) post-1946 films dealing with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including VD but also AIDs and birth control as well as birthing; and (5) post-1960s manuals for enhancing sexual pleasure. Within each chapter and sub-grouping, Eberwein usually organizes his analysis by chronological discussion of all of the films located within the category. He describes the individual films as he has been able to see them (most of the older of these films are incomplete, in variant forms, or missing). Where supplemental information is available, Eberwein fleshes out the films' details, and he provides information about their public reception.

As he pledges in his introduction, Eberwein generally fulfills his promise to highlight several features of these films and their reception. One feature is that many of them articulate a "thematizing of vision and the dramatization of conditions of reception" in a relay system: an expert in the film invites individuals in the film to view the effects of VD; this viewing is simultaneously offered to the films' spectators (we see what the diegetic characters see), but is a viewing authorized by the expert's invitation. A second feature is that, at times, particularly for narrative films prior to post World War II, reception of the films indicates concern on some observers' parts that the pleasures in learning about sex may overwhelm the educational declaration. Thus, although the films purport to be about edification, more is going on! A third feature is that sex education films are involved in larger social and cultural dynamics constructing gender and race.

This exceptionally detailed and careful discussion opens the door for much more research. While I admire greatly the wealth of information Eberwein has assembled here, that richness only provokes many more questions. For instance, the individualized descriptions of these films suggest to me that formulas exist for sex education films. Indeed, Eberwein notes here and there some of the set pieces that might appear: the naive inquirer who unwittingly becomes diseased, the expert who enlightens the VD sufferer or the potential patient, the reflexive lecture, the microscope, the diseased penis, the mixed sex group discussions of questions about sexuality. Having from the start a sense of the conventions and formulas -- and I detect the potential for several formulas deriving from key introductory texts such as "Damaged Goods" - - would perhaps permit more historical claims about transformations in the formulas. For example, while the early experts are male doctors, sex education films in post-1940s classroom settings use female teachers as the sex experts. Is the cause for this variation a recognition that the effects of VD and sexuality in general matter to the woman

(and her ability to raise healthy children) or that classroom teachers are predominantly women? Is this a conservative ideology or a verisimiliar choice?

Indeed, overall, more context would help in understanding *why* these films are as they are. What are the medical knowledges informing the films at particular points? What are the competing moral arguments held by which social groups and classes? (Only occasionally does Eberwein delve into who is making the films and what difference this might have in the representations.) Who is in control of access to specific classrooms and what pedagogical foundations inform specific classroom sex education texts? (For example, how does changing notions of teaching and reinforcement of classroom material influence the representation of peer group discussions, directions to stop the projector for live discussions, or the use of experts or celebrities or stars to convey sexual guidance?) How does pornography fit in here? It might well be argued, for instance, that pornography is sex education, in which case an *ars amore* evidenced in the post-1970s sexual pleasure film manuals is not a recent trend but a confession of what was always on the other side of the traditional sex education movies -- films that stressed unhealthy consequences of sexual behavior as opposed to the exuberance of pornography as sex education.

The title of the third book reviewed here promises a rather grand conclusion: *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*, by Jon Lewis, seeks to prove that a move to a ratings system in 1968 by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) "made the new Hollywood not only possible but inevitable" (8). This occurred because "the rating system accompanied and seemed at least at first to encourage a glorious new Hollywood, a place dominated by terrific filmmakers: auteurs like Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Robert Altman" (8). However, the 1973 US Supreme Court ruling which pulled back on permission to exhibit sexually explicit films played into the hands of the MPAA; "Hollywood regained control of the theatrical marketplace and hasn't looked back since" (10).

Nowhere in his argument does Lewis deal with what seems to me to be the crux of the matter of what drives the modern theatrical film industry, and, that is, what kinds of films appealed to those people most willing in the era of television to pay to see movies at theaters outside the home? Beyond this basic question are several others which seem significant for a book discussing ratings and the last fifty years of American filmmaking. How does the ratings system create target audiences for films (from adult, to adolescent, to child)? Which films and which venues actually produce the significant incomes for Hollywood and independents? If we are going to understand the dynamics of the last fifty years of Hollywood, surely attention to box office and audience demographics requires significant attention in any hypothesis about why Hollywood is what it is, and to what degree ratings are "causal" in this configuration.

Built as a series of topics on film regulation, *Hollywood v. Hard Core* begins with a chapter on how anti-Semitism functioned in the 1940s HUAC hearings and how the producers used the HUAC witch hunts to snuff out the power of unions and guilds. Chapter Two is a survey of the background to the 1948 Paramount degree, concluding with broad strokes of industry changes through the present day. Chapter Three is a sketchy history of film regulation to the mid 1950s, with Chapter Four covering the shift in 1968 to a rating system. It is here in particular that Lewis claims that the rating system supported an *auteur* renaissance. Chapter Five covers the widespread and financially successful theatrical appearance of sexually explicit films such as *Deep Throat* and *The Devil in Miss Jones* and mentions the formation

of the Adult Film Association of America which is the regulatory body for the contemporary adult film industry. In his last two chapters, Lewis surveys the US history of legal definitions of obscenity (including several 1973 US Supreme Court rulings which permitted state regulation of publicly shown sexually explicit materials) and the continuing inconsistencies by the MPAA in its assignment of ratings to films.

The organization of the book might have been more logical. Why would the general history of obscenity be delayed until the last third of a book on content regulation? Significant gaps in its presentation of material occur. Where is a meaningful discussion of regulation of violence -- a crucial matter in modern Hollywood filmmaking and ratings debates? Why isn't the art cinema's competition with 1950s Hollywood or the shock impact of 1960s avant garde given some significant prominence? Where is the discussion of the confiscation and charges around *Flaming Creatures* in 1964 in relation to the clean-up of Times Square? Why is no history provided of audiences and cultural shifts that might explain why people would be watching porn films in public in 1972 or, in the 1950s, films about drugs, homosexuality, abortion, and other "tabooed" topics which put significant stress on the "approved/not approved" MPAA code? How has the rise of the adult video industry permitted Hollywood to continue its subjective ratings system?

Perhaps reading more of the trade papers and extensive and detailed scholarly articles on these matters would have improved the subtlety of the history (rather than relying on survey monographs on American film for much of the history presented in the first three chapters). Lewis informs us, for instance, that he will reveal how "content censorship functions to secure the long-term health of the industry as a whole" (6). This argument is at least fifteen years old in the literature. Or he writes astounding claims such as "The Motion Picture Patents Company trust, for example, was formed in 1908 in part to regulate and limit foreign-born Jewish ownership and management in the industry" (21) or "By the fall of 1947, the studios were convinced that they were going to lose the *Paramount* case" (50).

As with the other two books, however, Lewis's *Hollywood v. Hard Core* does open the door to many questions about the representation of sexuality. As such, these books do not provide the definite answers to any questions, but, enjoyably, ask for further work.

Screening Scotland

By Duncan Petrie
London: British Film Institute, 2000. IBSN 0-85170-785-8, vi + 250 pp., + 27 illustrations, £14.99 (pbk)

A review by Jonathan Murray, University of Glasgow, Scotland

The release of *That Sinking Feeling* (Bill Forsyth, GB, 1979) marked the simultaneous emergence of the most prolific British director of the early 1980s and the idea of a viable and distinctive Scottish cinema, whether conceived primarily as an industrial or national-cultural entity. The succeeding two decades have witnessed a steady, and during the mid-1990s an exponential, increase in production activity in Scotland. Unfortunately, critical activity on Scottish cinema has not expanded to nearly the same degree. Duncan Petrie's *Screening Scotland* constitutes only the second booklength overview of the subject. To date the most influential work on Scottish cinema has been found in two edited essay collections, Colin McArthur (ed), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Film and Television* (BFI, 1982) and Eddie Dick (ed), *From Limelight to Satellite* (BFI/SFC, 1990) Moreover, given that *Screening Scotland*'s sole booklength predecessor, Forsyth Hardy's *Scotland in Film* (EUP, 1990) was a volume of mostly anecdotal reminiscence, Petrie's book is the first to attempt a single critical overview of the topic. To the extent that it begins to fill a glaring lacuna in British film studies, the publication of *Screening Scotland* should be unconditionally welcomed.

The content of the book, however, provokes a more ambiguous response than the mere fact of its existence. One of the problems individual Scottish films faced in the past was the unbearable burden of national expectation and signification foisted upon them. In an indigenous production sector characterised by irregular and historically meagre levels of production, each new film seemed to take on, Atlas-like, the entire burden of national representation in the material absence of other texts across which such discursive work could be spread. *Screening Scotland* provides a telling literary analogue to this cinematic cultural dilemma. Faced with the apparent need to map out the entire contours of a relatively unexplored film culture and industry, the volume strives for comprehensiveness. This precludes a more substantial critical engagement with, for example, issues of national representation in 1980s and 1990s Scottish cinema and focuses instead on areas which might not possess as much use value for students of Scottish cinema and culture, such as a discussion of the Scot John Maxwell's leadership of the Associated British Picture Corporation in the 1920s.

The attempted comprehensiveness of the book works best in historiographical terms, on the many occasions when Petrie breaks new ground, partially by virtue of the content of his analysis, but more fundamentally by covering institutions, texts and individuals that have received little or no previous critical attention. Particularly valuable in this regard is his discussion of the sponsored documentary production sector run by the second Films of Scotland committee from the mid-1950s to 1980. Petrie illustrates how this created a small infrastructure of independent production companies who employed the individuals -- Bill

Forsyth, Charlie Gormley, Mike Alexander, Douglas Eadie and others -- who agitated, and produced the films which created the material basis for, the creation of a feature production sector in the 1970s. The sheer detail of Petrie's work on the expansion of infrastructural and funding agencies in the 1990s is also exemplary; the book manages to take full cognisance of institutional developments and initiatives up to the date of its own publication in summer 2000.

Where *Screening Scotland*'s comprehensiveness proves a hindrance is in the almost complete lack of sustained textual analysis, either in terms of texts' formal construction or the images of nation they produce. This lack would seem to be explicable in a number or ways. First, and most practically, by referencing so many films in one relatively short volume, the amount of analytic space devoted to any individual text is severely circumscribed. Second, Petrie's approach to textual analysis continues the concerns of some of his earlier work -- *Creativity and Constraint in British Cinema* (MacMillan, 1991) and *The British Cinematographer* (BFI, 1996) around notions of craftsmanship and artistic creativity exhibited by individual personnel. What becomes privileged is an oddly unpoliticised and uninformatively descriptive discourse of individual creative excellence and craft which tends to obscure or preclude the useful location of texts within ongoing debates about both historical and contemporary representations of nation and culture in Scotland. Atypically, the main comment about a film such as *Heavenly Pursuits* (Gormley, GB, 1986) is that its director had learned to "think bigger" than on his previous film: "the package contained two bona fide 'stars'... and a budget... more than double [Gormley's] previous film." (128); similarly, *Another Time, Another Place* (Radford, GB, 1983) provided a "larger canvas" for the director "to develop as a film-maker... this time both characterisation and relationships are more carefully and subtly drawn." (161) At worst, this approach lapses into opaque subjectivism: of *Blue Black Permanent* (Tait, GB, 1993) Petrie notes that Margaret Tait "is clearly out of her depth working within the conventions of feature film... she fails almost totally to capture or convey the elemental and ominous power of the sea." (164-5)

More positively, however, *Screening Scotland*'s approach to contemporary Scottish cinema, eschewing a politicised project of textual analysis in favour of descriptive institutional survey, is a self-conscious reaction on the part of the author to the historical terms in which debate around Scottish cinema, indeed Scottish culture more generally, has been conducted. Petrie notes the predominance of "the question of representation" (2) in Scottish cinema and culture, abstracted from more detailed consideration of the institutional and political contexts in which texts are produced and circulate. In this he finds an unlikely ally in Colin McArthur, the most prominent and vocal critic of Scottish cinema. McArthur too has noted that discussion of Scottish culture, even as sophisticated an example as David McCrone's deconstruction of the Scotch Reels thesis of Scottish cinema in his *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (Routledge, 1992) tends to essentialise issues of representation, discussing the characteristics of Scottish culture at a rarefied level which ignores pressing considerations of its material production. Petrie's approach, despite its weaknesses, provides a welcome corrective to such oversights, providing a sound basis in many areas for more historiographically informed projects of textual analysis.

Ultimately, the questions this volume leaves open are if, when and how such critical work will materialise. Unlike the early 1980s, a critical mass within Scottish and British film studies, willing to engage politically in questions of representation in a Scottish context, appears to be lacking. Perhaps symptomatically, Petrie quotes Steve McIntyre, now an officer for Scottish Screen, the public agency for film in Scotland, but once a member of the Scotch

Reels school of Marxist criticism. McIntyre's explanation of Scottish Screen's institutional discourse is indicative of a logic which echoes throughout this book and Scottish film culture as a whole, the rise of an economic and industrial pragmatism which willfully rejects politicised and polemical engagement with competing ways in which the meanings attached to Scottish national culture are appropriated and contested through the medium of film: "I don't think it is up to us to take any kind of substantial editorial line... Our view has to be culturally neutral, technologically neutral, genre-neutral." (184) *Screening Scotland*'s studied "neutrality" renders it readable as both symptom of, as well as commentary on, the development of the film culture whose historical and contemporary contours it so comprehensively outlines. But if neither current academic nor institutional orthodoxies are willing to provide a space for the formulation of "editorial lines" which have the potential to radically transform assumptions about Scottish film culture's past and challenge those about its future, then who will?