Consuming Audiences?: Production and Reception in Media Research

By Ingunn Hagen and Janet Wasko (ed.)
Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2000. ISBN: 1-572-73176-1, 330 pp., $26.50, (pbk)

A review by Cynthia Baron, Bowling Green State University, US

The anthology offers readers a condensed introduction to the work of several media and communication scholars whose sustained research has been published in many journals, collections, and individual volumes. Co-editor Janet Wasko's book-length studies include *Movies and Money: Financing the American Film Industry* (1982), *Hollywood in the Information Age* (1994), and *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (2001). Contributor Herbert I. Schiller's solo publications stretch from *Mass Communications and American Empire* (1969) to more recent books such as *Information Inequality: the Deepening Social Crisis in America* (1996). John Sinclair's studies of global television exist as a backdrop for his co-authored chapter on "Diasporic Identities: Chinese Communities and Their Media Use in Australia," just as Richard Maxwell's *The Spectacle of Democracy: Spanish Television, Nationalism, and Political Tradition* (1995) and Jesus Martin-Barbero's *Communication, Culture and Hegemony--From the Media to Mediations* (1987) inform their contributions to the edited collection. By presenting readers with original, thematically-related essays by scholars in different areas of communication research, *Consuming Audiences?* suggests points of contact between the work of the contributing scholars and potential connections between their work and research in other disciplines.

In their introduction, Hagen and Wasko explain that the anthology originates in panels jointly sponsored by scholars in the Political Economy Section and the Network for Qualitative Audience Research at the 1994 and 1996 International Association for Mass Communication Research conferences. These two panels, like the anthology itself, represent an effort to (a) inquire how political economy perspectives can temper and contextualize conclusions drawn in audience reception studies; (b) ask how cultural studies and reception analysis research can make political economy studies more nuanced; and (c) explore the possibility of common ground in the theoretical assumptions that have, on the one hand, shaped work in political economy that considers "interrelationships between communications industries, the State, other economic sectors, and key power bases" (11), and, on the other, stimulated work in reception analysis that draws on Hall's encoding/decoding model to do reception research that considers how audiences interpret media or ethnographic research that is "more focused on media use as practice" (9).

The strength of the anthology is that it invites readers to see the essays in the collection as contributing complimentary rather than contradictory insights. Its value also resides in the fact that contributors consistently articulate potential areas of common interest. Graham Murdock notes that while "many scholars in cultural studies refuse to consider any move that defines texts as also cultural commodities," and that "political economists resist any dilution

of their central focus" on the way corporate profit motives increasing drive everyday acts of consumption, if researchers would begin from the "idea of the audience itself as a commodity," there could be fundamental points of contact in the work of political economists and reception analysts (57). Eileen Meehan argues that "the connection between fan ethnographers and political economists [can seem quite] obvious: whereas ethnographers explain how fans deal with media, political economists provide a larger context for understanding fandom as a social and economic phenomenon" (72). Abstracting the point Meehan makes in noting that fan ethnography allows researchers to identify "sites where people exercise their agency," while studies in political economy offer a way to identify "the economic structures that limit such exercise" (72), Hagen and Wasko propose that "what political economists and reception analysts may have in common is an interest to understand where power is located" (23). Vincent Mosco and Lewis Kaye's study of "the usage of the term *audience* within the field of mass communications" is just one of the chapters that demonstrates how the two areas of research can compliment rather than contradict one another. Their essay draws on perspectives central to political economy by calling attention to the fact that "the roots of systematic audience research can be traced to the early activities of radio broadcasters in attempting to count listeners" (35). It also shows how studies in political economy can use insights central to cultural studies; their concluding position is that research should "decline to accept audience status as a fundamentally determinant social relation" (42) because "audience members . . . exist not only in relation to the media text itself but are also constituted out of the entire set of social production relations" (44).

That the anthology was published some four years after the second conference panel is indicative perhaps of the extended development and production schedule that marks academic publishing. The delay might also be linked to publishers' perceptions that the collection includes or seems to include material already addressed, or more effectively addressed elsewhere. For example, Janet Wasko, Eileen R. Meehan, and Vincent Mosco's essay, "Rethinking Political Economy: Change and Continuity," in the Autumn 1993 issue of *Journal of Communication*, and Mosco's book, *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal* (1996), already called for re-imagined research in media and communication. Graham Murdock and Peter Golding's chapter on "Culture, Communications, and Political Economy" in the 1996 anthology *Mass Media and Society*, and the 1997 two volume compendium, *The Political Economy of the Media*, edited by Golding and Murdock are other publications that make it possible to see Hagen and Wasko's anthology as anticlimactic. In addition, if one believes that Lawrence Grossberg's 1995 essay "Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy: Is Anybody Else Bored with This Debate?" in Critical Studies in Mass Communication is representative rather than rhetorical, then it will seem that *Consuming Audiences?* is not especially timely.

Readers will, of course, make determinations on such issues themselves. This reviewer would argue that *Consuming Audiences?* could be a very useful text for various courses in media studies. It serves as an introduction to the work of scholars active in the field; the introduction offers a clear outline of distinct methodological approaches; early chapters problematize basic questions; later chapters provide a brief but comprehensive survey of global media production and reception. In addition, the "Introduction" and the chapters assembled under the rubrics of "Defining the Audience" and "Studying the Audience" make the anthology suitable for interdisciplinary courses that ask students to consider relationships between texts and production and reception contexts.

Film Parody

By Dan Harries
London: BFI, 2000, ISBN 0-85170-803-X, 153 pp., 25 illustrations. £15.99 (pbk)
Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone By Susan Smith

Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone

By Susan Smith

London: BFI, 2000, ISBN 0-85170-779-3, xiii + 162 pp., 69 illustrations. £15.99 (pbk)

A review by Martin Flanagan, University of Sheffield, UK

In an interpretive era where postmodernism has unseated the claims of the text to univocal and stable meaning, and where theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin have worked extensively on the counter-hegemonic potential of popular culture, film parody occupies an intriguing role in cinema's self-reflexive machinery. While films such as *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (Jay Roach, 1999) and *Scary Movie* (Keenan Ivory Wayans, 2000) may not hit the merry heights of textual transgression scaled by *Blazing Saddles* (Mel Brooks, 1974) and *This is Spinal Tap* (Rob Reiner, 1984) a couple of decades ago, they still address the intermittent desires of film audiences to see Hollywood lift the curtain on its own artifice and arbitrariness. Such films, while not exactly immune to rejection by mass audiences, can in the right circumstances achieve huge grosses (over $300 million worldwide for the *Austin Powers* sequel); as Dan Harries observes, film parodies are a serious business for the studios. The problem for the contemporary writer on parody, as Harries also acknowledges, is locating the point where audience preferences slide from the everyday ironic spectatorial mode used to view undeniably silly mainstream Hollywood fare, into the rather more specialised parodic mode employed for viewing the film that identifies itself as *parody*. Do we inhabit a different spectatorial mindset in watching, say, *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), than we do in viewing *Spy Hard* (Rick Friedberg, 1996)? While admitting that this is not an easy question in an age where much theory encourages us to view filmic discourse as endlessly mutable, one cannot help but feel that Harries' study does not provide a convincing answer, or even an adequate problematisation, of this key question.

What Harries is rather better at, and what occupies the bulk of the volume, is constructing a taxonomy of the textual strategies employed by film parodies with respect to their target texts, genres or modes (or as Harries would have it, their target "logonomic systems"). Within a structure broadly determined by six key parodic strategies (reiteration, inversion, misdirection, literalization, extraneous inclusion, exaggeration), Harries embarks on a systematic, well-illustrated account of how each method operates across the three textual planes of lexicon, syntax and style. However, with such a structure, the risk of repetition and the blurring of categories is great, and it is no surprise that Harries' own style occasionally succumbs to these flaws. While far from opaque in the critical vocabulary it adopts, *Film*

Parody nevertheless puts the brakes on its own argument with an over-reliance on categories and classifications that are frequently borrowed from other theorists (notably Gérard Genette in the third chapter, "Transtextual Targets"). What should be the core section of the book, "Sketching Film Parody", soon outstays its welcome as we progress through elaborations of the six parodic strategies. Harries expects his (well-selected) textual examples to do more work in elucidating his terms than they are capable of, and as a result, we miss a sense of how each film exemplifies its accompanying category, or indeed how strategies such as inversion and misdirection are to be practically differentiated from each other. To take one of Harries' own examples, the "inverted" motif of a black sheriff (Cleavon Little) in *Blazing Saddles* is also, surely, a "misdirection" of audience expectations within the genre horizon of the western.

More successfully deployed is Bakhtin, whose writings on the transgressive, carnivalesque qualities of parody are invoked by Harries in an interrogation of the social function of parody at the book's conclusion. Harries' equivocality on this matter -- "[W]hile it does seem that film parody offers a potential platform for an ever-so-subtle shifting of social consciousness, its embodiment of authorized norms firmly keeps it within the hegemonic fold" (130) -- is predictable but understandable, and the wider claim that his book makes, concerning the increasing incorporation of anti-canonical parody within a sanitised commercial canon of its own, is well-made. Also useful is the concise survey of pre-1970s cinematic parody that constitutes chapter two, "Spoofing Traditions" (although the American bias rules out any discussion of successful parody cycles such as Britain's own *Carry On* series, which targeted, amongst others, the western, the horror movie, the porn film and the Roman epic). Ultimately, though, *Film Parody* is a rather schematic, inflexible affair that does not reveal enough about how parody is produced, disseminated or consumed, its taxonomic exactitude only pointing up its deficiencies elsewhere. Harries' analysis is sound enough within its somewhat limited scope, but its cardinal failing may be that, given the subject matter, it just isn't much fun for the reader.

One of the most frequently parodied directors of the classical Hollywood era -- whether you're talking about the out-and-out spoofing of Mel Brooks' *High Anxiety* (1977) or the only slightly more subtle "homages" of Brian De Palma -- is Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock's body of work represents one of the 'high-stakes' territories of contemporary film theory, and has been comprehensively dissected by heavyweight critics from Robin Wood to Tania Modleski, Raymond Bellour to Camille Paglia. To lay any new claims to this most contested of critical landscapes requires confidence, panache and, crucially, an approach that offers something different from previous orthodoxies. Susan Smith, in *Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone*, elects to shape her bid around the rather nebulous concept of "tone" in the director's work. An early hurdle that Smith comes across is defining her central term of 'tone'; for her, it is a property with the "potential to shape and inflect the nature and the relationship between film-maker, text and spectator" (viii), as well as a certain sensibility that indicates the presence of an authorial agency at work. The book privileges suspense and humour over the other 'tones' at work in Hitchcock because, according to Smith, these are the primary elements determining the generic make-up of Hitchcock's cinema. The introductory comments, while failing to pin down the elusive concept of tone, nevertheless insinuate that Smith intends to move from the familiar critical stance treating Hitchcock as arch-manipulator of a passive, unspecific audience to a more in-depth consideration of how various textual strategies cause us to be emotionally and cognitively engaged by the Hitchcock film. Pleasingly, although Smith's broad approach is not one that is readily

reducible in terms of concrete terminology, her critical proficiency when getting down to the business of textual analysis is cool, cogent and accessible.

The study is bookended by two sustained, powerful performances of critical analysis. Chapter One introduces the notion of sabotage, which becomes a dominant metaphor for Smith's discussion of Hitchcock's assault on the viewing conventions of popular cinematic audiences. If this concept is not exactly a new one, Smith's elucidation of the sabotage trope through a close reading of the mechanics of suspense in Hitchcock's 1936 Conrad adaptation *Sabotage* is convincing (even if Smith's willingness to pursue ideas of authorial surrogacy through the motif of the saboteur is taken a little too far to be particularly helpful; here we must note the almost irresistible cult of personality that pervades Hitchcock criticism). Chapter Five, "Tone and Meaning in *The Birds*", closes the book with a persuasive reading that affirms Smith's analytical strengths, employing a broadly psychoanalytical framework in the service of a refreshing rehabilitation of the maternal that is not afraid to contradict well-known readings by Paglia and others in which the blame for the mysterious avian attack is laid at the feet of protagonist Mitch's domineering mother. Smith's style is unadorned but precise; economy is one of her talents, as is evinced by the useful and neat condensations of critical arguments surrounding the point-of-view shot during her discussion of the Hitchcockian *mise-en-scène* (Chapter Four). Questions of gender are foregrounded throughout, and Smith is at her most engaged when dealing with such topics, although these concerns grow fairly organically out of the exploration of the shifting networks of power underpinning the Hitchcockian viewing experience.

There are reservations. The central concept of "sabotage" must be called into question when one considers that the other metaphor that Smith repeatedly favours centres on the "contract" into which Hitchcock engages the spectator. In a study that, for all its reflection on the cult of the auteur, is unusually sensitive to the experience of viewers, we can hardly ignore an uneasy contradiction: on the one hand, Hitchcock invites the audience into an active relationship with the text (Smith going so far as to suggest, in relation to *The Birds*, that the film beckons us into new ways of seeing and knowing the world) while, on the other, the director always retains his power to pull the rug from under us. If Smith had interrogated this tension, she may have uncovered a paradox that propels Hitchcock's cinema. Another drawback concerns the proper focus of Smith's textual analysis, which, while compelling in its own terms, does not always engage with the specifically *visual* techniques in Hitchcock's cinematic repertoire (separating issues of *mise-en-scène* into their own chapter is surely a false move, although, by way of compensation, there is a refreshingly serious attention to music in evidence here).

Smith's venture succeeds, however, because she is not afraid to follow her own critical instincts on a body of work that has been the subject of exhaustive interpretation elsewhere. Whereas Harries' numerous textual illustrations succeed in building the sense of a tradition but fail to shed any real light on the devices they are meant to be elaborating, thereby undermining the development of a broader argument to do with the function of parody, Smith luxuriates in the opportunities to hone her argument in lengthy, sustained case studies (while displaying an impressive familiarity with the entire Hitchcock oeuvre). Smith's is the more successful book, but hers was also, arguably, the more difficult task; while Harries' attempt to fill a promising, underdeveloped niche in the Film Studies field comes up slightly short, Smith zeroes in on an over-populated area and finds that there is still more to say.

The Film Studies Dictionary

By Steven Blandford, Barry Keith Grant & Jim Hillier
London: Arnold, 2001, ISBN 0 340 74191 0, vii + 287 pp., £12.00 (pbk)

A review by Karen Boyle, University of Wolverhampton, UK

The Film Studies Dictionary seeks to bridge the gap between academic and technical dictionaries, bringing together the key terms students are likely to encounter in their studies of film across a variety of disciplines. This dual focus sets this dictionary apart from other guides -- such as Susan Hayward's academically-orientated but extremely useful *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*. With entries ranging from "best boy" to "structuralism", *The Film Studies Dictionary* sets out to demystify both film jargon and academic language. This is an ambitious but largely successful project.

For the most part, entries are clearly written although the language used to explicate terms is not always readily accessible -- I can't imagine that all students at Level One will know the meaning of "quotidian" (7) for example. That said, the text has many student-friendly features, including thorough and consistent cross-referencing throughout. Indeed, some of the entries are only likely to be looked up in cross-reference -- it is difficult to imagine anyone picking up a Film Studies dictionary for definitions of such terms as "masculinity" or "television", for example. I was pleasantly surprised to find that organisations, academic journals and trade papers are included and these entries will provide helpful reference points for students finding their feet in Film Studies. That individuals and national cinemas are excluded will irk some readers, although, with plenty of other sources for biographical data and the near impossibility of writing a concise definition of any one national cinema, this does not strike me as a significant limitation. Students will almost certainly find the suggestions for further reading helpful and this could be usefully extended in future editions to include relevant websites and contact details for the many organisations listed.

As the authors acknowledge in the preface, for a book to be genuinely accessible to a wide range of today's students it has to be affordable, and at £12.99 this volume does represent very good value for those undertaking a three or four year programme in Film Studies. However, keeping the cost down has also meant excluding illustrations and this is a definite limitation, particularly in explaining technical aspects of shot composition and lighting. Students who have not come across the "180 degree rule" or the "thirty degree rule" before, are not likely to be much the wiser having read the definitions provided here (1). Line diagrams would significantly aid understanding of these and other terms.

Academic entries are, for the most part, clear. Complex theoretical debates are admittedly simplified, but students needing to engage with ideas at a more sophisticated level are provided with appropriate references for further study. Ironically, perhaps, it is some of the more straightforward terms that are less well explained. A prime example of this is the consideration of the classification system in the UK and US. Definitions of "certificate" and "rating system" do not explain whether certifications are legally enforceable, for example,

and, confusingly, only some of the classification categories merit their own entry. It is difficult to see the rationale for including a definition of PG but excluding NC-17 (a classification which is unknown to most UK students) and the definition of "R" -- as "suitable for those aged eighteen and over" (107) -- is misleading.

These are relatively minor criticisms of what is, overall, a good-value reference book that will have a clear appeal to students.

Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle

By Allison Graham
Baltimore:Johns Hopkins, 2001; ISBN0-8018-6615-4, 224pp., $32.00 (hbk)

A review by Sharon Monteith, University of Nottingham, UK

Framing the South is the best book I have found that discusses popular cinema and the American South -- and I wish I had written it. While Thomas Cripps, James Snead, Ed Guerrero and others have explored the ways in which black southerners have been represented in film and Jack Temple Kirby and J. W. Williamson have exposed some of the more pernicious stereotypes of the white South, Graham's is a groundbreaking study that locates both blacks and whites in post-World War II cultural history. Her scholarly monograph contributes significantly to historical and film studies.

Best known for co-producing and directing the award-winning documentary film *At The River I Stand* (1993) which focuses on the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike in 1968 and the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr., Graham is currently co- producing another documentary on school desegregation in small town Arkansas, *Hoxie: The First Stand* (2002). Her articles on southern popular culture are also often quoted, such as "Remapping Dogpatch: Northern Media on the Southern Circuit," and she published a little gem of a book on Lindsay Anderson. Here, Graham would seem to combine the best of her film and historical interests in turning her attention to the confusion of southern fact and fiction that is popular media representation during the civil rights movement.

Graham's book is lively, aesthetically informed, and teeming with insightful observations about a variety of topics: white women in race-conscious films; the "anarchic physicality" of the redneck; the centrality of the "cracker" to our understanding of American racism; the southern delinquent as social activist; the corrupt southern lawman and the redemptive southern lawyer. She takes us on an entertaining journey through southern cinema from *Pinky* to *Forrest Gump*. Underlying her study is a keen sense of the ironic, of the familiar as strange and the popular as ideologically saturated. Comedians and satirists Tom Lehrer, Lenny Bruce, and Brother Dave Gardner prove to be as telling social commentators as historians and critics but Graham's own voice is always to the fore. Graham has an historian's feel for the period and a film scholar's keen apprehension of the ways in which movies dramatize southern places and periods.

The best kind of scholarship, it seems to me, helps us to see things we believe are utterly familiar (*To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Elvis Presley*) in new and interesting ways. Graham alerts us to the ways in which the conventions of the western have been utilized to tell civil rights stories (*The Searchers* and *Mississippi Burning*); to the function of "cultural mulattos" in the "New South" (Jeanne Crain, Ava Gardner, Paul Newman and Marlon Brando) alongside the "black-inflected redneck," Elvis. She sees around

and between films to expose the ways in which the "hick" shadows the "hip" in popular cultural representations of the South. Perhaps most significantly for southern studies, she analyzes how the "cracker" as offered up as a scapegoat by film and TV has been redeemed in the "New South." Lawless sheriffs in the movies are re-presentations of those like Mississippi's Harold Strider ("I just want to tell all of those people who've been sending me those threatening letters that if they ever come down here, the same thing's gonna happen to them that happened to Emmett Till"), or Safety Commissioner Bull Connor who turned water cannons and dogs on black children in Birmingham in 1963. But interpenetrating such sovereign images of bigoted, blustering lawmen are sharp legal eagles like District Attorney Bobby DeLaughter, as re-presented in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, or John Grisham's committed defense lawyers in *A Time To Kill* and *The Chamber*. Graham convinces us that this seismic shift is as much movie-made as politically gauged; in her spirited analysis it begins with the convergence of Gregory Peck and Rod Steiger in *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *In The Heat of the Night* and it continues down the decades to the ubiquitous Forrest Gump, a disturbing variation on the theme. Even Nathan Bedford Forrest, founder of the Klu Klux Klan, finds himself redeemed in the form of Tom Hanks in Robert Zemeckis's collapsing of film history and American history so that the legacy of Nathan Bedford Forrest simply dissolves into hot southern air in the most popular movie of 1994, the year that Republicans swept the election board . As Graham remarks, "the Gumpified southerner heralds not only a reclaimed region but a redeemed race."

Too often class is elided in discussions of southern race relations but Graham's focus on the post-War white redemption story is carefully nuanced so that signifiers of class remain potent in her subtle readings and the ways in which race is displaced onto gender are also explored. In her analysis of *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Sayonara*, for example, she detects "the familiar class-bound logic," especially when racial tolerance is presented as a learning curve as in the latter film. She generates new meanings that transcend the individual content of the movies discussed (synthesizing all thirty-one of Elvis's movies must have been a Herculean task in itself!). She avoids the pitfalls of judging film or TV productions about racism with a moral yardstick, or treating them as uncomplicated reflections of social trends or historical events. Graham shows us that during the period in which civil rights struggles took place in the South, movies actively participated in creating ideas in the political arena: movies, like facts, travel under the aegis of power interests. Miscegenation has remained "the ghost in the machine" for many filmmakers, just as it did for right-wing watchdogs like the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. Graham shows how the Commission's belief in a "Paper Curtain' conspiracy of communist-inspired media lies was, in part, the result of the subversive images Hollywood put out amidst films that capitulated to the views of southern segregationists.

Framing the South is a well-paced, thoughtful exegesis of representations of race and racism in and around a turbulent period of southern history when intransigent southern segregationists were part of the public life of the region, appearing on TV screens each night alongside civil rights demonstrators. Graham shows that the intersection of race and class could be treacherous, fraught with violence and fear and that Hollywood morality tales could have profound social effects.

Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema

By Martin McLoone
London: BFI, 2000. ISBN 0-85170-79309, 240pp., £14.99 (pbk)

A review by Sarah Neely, University of Glasgow, UK

In 1987, Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill published the first detailed analysis of Irish cinema. Involving an overview of the history of film production in Ireland, it also examined the films themselves, alongside an analysis of images originating from outside Ireland. McLoone's new book begins where this work left off, and although he attends to the issues raised in *Cinema and Ireland*, it is always with a view to understanding recent film production in and beyond Ireland. McLoone recognises his indebtedness and explains in his acknowledgements that his work "adds and expands on the agenda that they so perceptively established back when an Irish film industry was still struggling to be born."

In fact, many of the films featured in that earlier study are British and American. The lack of films from Ireland at the time is explained by the authors as being down to inadequate government support to encourage new filmmakers, coupled with a loss of older films gone missing or damaged because of the absence of a film archive. As implied in his title, McLoone sets out to track "the emergence of a contemporary cinema." And although McLoone hardly maintains that support for filmmaking in Ireland is adequate, he maps out the positive features of the present industry, including the most significant journals, funding bodies, and workshops -- the many organisations necessary not only for film production, but for film research. The archives whose absence Rockett, Gibbons and Hill remarked upon in 1987 are now firmly established. McLoone thanks the Irish Film Centre in his acknowledgements, but also refers to its opening in 1992 as part of a larger discussion of the development of a "film culture" that witnessed the establishment of various festivals, film magazines, and the Galway Film Centre, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The still on the cover of McLoone's book, depicting a figure on horseback with the head of an insect riding through the apocalyptic Ireland of Francie Brady's imagination, is taken from a sequence only comprising a few minutes of *The Butcher Boy*. The image, hardly typical of Irish Cinema, locates Neil Jordan's film as a focus for future discussion. The concluding chapter, offering an in-depth analysis of Jordan's version of Patrick McCabe's novel, was originally published in abbreviated form in the *Cineaste* in 1998, and it provides fertile ground on which McLoone develops his debates around the idea of a National Cinema in Ireland. The film is referred to throughout, offered up as a model for Irish cinema in various ways. And as McLoone hastens to point out, it is a model which can be both revisionist and anti-revisionist at once. For McLoone, *The Butcher Boy* is "ultimately concerned with the problem of reconciling the traumatic past of Irish history, both colonial and nationalist, with the realities and contradictions of its affluent present."(223) His analysis of the film is convincing, and the unbuckling of this film (and perhaps the original essay) generates a thoughtful interpretation of the heated debates raging around recent filmmaking in Ireland.

The book begins its progression to this conclusion by examining the development of cultural nationalism in Ireland, exploring several aspects of Irish identity (country, city, language, religion, etc.), and the political developments that would prove crucial to cinematic representations, but also to the reception and development of popular culture in general. The next two chapters closely examine the cinematic results produced in response to myths of Irish Identity. The two primary myths McLoone focuses on, representations of violence and romantic depictions of landscape, are addressed through a mix of films (mostly American and British), identifying their control over accepted -- and acceptable -- images of Ireland. Representations of violence, as McLoone points out in this chapter and throughout the book, are also characterised by Oedipal frameworks, suggesting an inability for the films to engage wholeheartedly with politics, or develop new narratives to dispel old myths. Chapter four details the economic and social changes since 1960. Chapter five aligns indigenous filmmaking since the 1970s with the idea of a first, second and third cinema. This is important as it sets up a framework for McLoone's analysis of contemporary filmmaking in Ireland and abroad, in the proceeding chapters. His range of films excludes an analysis of documentary and limits itself to fiction; however, we benefit from this by being offered some excellent close readings of imaginative cinema, including an entire chapter examining the importance of the recent proliferation of short films. McLoone's study emerges as a significant step towards a form of film criticism, engaged and insightful, that does justice to the range and richness of contemporary Irish cinema.

Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society

By Shaun Moores
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. ISBN 0-7486-1179-7, viii + 168pp. $24.00, (pbk)

A review by Stephen Harper, University of Glasgow, UK

In *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society*, Shaun Moores emerges as a leading researcher into the ways in which the electronic media are "knotted into" the fabric of everyday life. Moores examines not only how these various media are used to sustain "mundane" activities such as "kinkeeping" and school gossip, but also how their incorporation into specific locales influences domestic discourses about what constitutes good taste or proper behaviour. In keeping with an increasing body of theory in cultural and media studies, Moores starts from the axiom that research into the audiences of broadcast media must acknowledge the "taken-for-grantedness" of those media among media audiences. "Novelty and transformation", he argues, "should be seen against a background of the familiar and the mundane" (11).

Media and Everyday Life is diverse in both method and content, as one might expect of a collection of mainly reworked published papers. In this relatively short book there are chapters on the social impact of early radio and satellite television and the human geography of television, as well as some theoretical reflections on the experience of modernity and a chapter on the importance of hybrid forms of film and television in the lives of young Pakistani Scots (in this last chapter Moores emphasis shifts slightly away from media and towards an ethnographic study of identity formation). Although each chapter is thoroughly researched and sensibly subdivided, there is a danger that so wide-ranging a book will lack coherence, a danger which Moores narrowly averts by ending with a synthesis of the book's main themes.

Perhaps the most interesting and well-organised (as well as the most original) chapter in the book is Chapter Four, in which Moores describes the generational conflict instigated by the arrival of satellite television in three different neighbourhoods. Here, as elsewhere in the book, Moores mobilises the ideas of an extraordinary array of media and cultural theorists (including Giddens, Goffman, Hall and Williams) in his interpretations of the interview responses of inhabitants in these socially differentiated locales. He usefully co-opts Bourdieu's theory of distinction to explain differing aesthetic assessments of the satellite dish, for example. His interviews with families who had recently acquired satellite television and with the Edinburgh Pakistani community are particularly fascinating, and often provide hilarious or sad commentaries on the gaps between genders and generations.

At times, Moores waxes polemical, particularly in the chapter on Giddens's account of modernity. While Moores draws profitably on Giddens's concept of "re-embedding" (the re-fixing of dislocated social relations into local conditions of space and time) to explain the

increasingly informal, "para-social" styles of television broadcasting, he also upbraids Giddens for his universalism (114-115). Moores is particularly sensitive to the limits of theories about globalisation and to the inequalities of the information age. Cautiously referring to "globalising tendencies" in Western culture, rather than *tout court* globalisation, Moores rightly identifies that the challenge to media studies now "is to construct a theory of modernity that focuses not just on what subjects share, but also on the consequences of social divisions for everyday experience" (115-116).

There are a number of stylistic and logical lapses in Moores's writing, which, while they do not necessarily compromise the force of his arguments, are sufficiently widespread to be worth mentioning. There are occasional lapses into unnecessary verbiage; on page 125, for instance, Moores describes how young Asian women often "feel positively about" traditional dress. At other times, the force of certain "signpost" words is not made clear: the "however" in the final paragraph of page 119, for example, seems to have no contrastive function. There is also a tendency to make obvious comments. Do we really need to be told, via a quotation from Anthony Giddens, that "TV and radio provide technological means by which an 'intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness' is possible" (109)? Or that "concepts which are chosen to describe and interpret an object of study are absolutely crucial in shaping the perspective taken by social researchers" (149)?

Moores's sometimes irksome theoretical transparency has the virtue, however, of making the book accessible to a very wide readership. The reader is never at a loss to understand arguments, and the topics covered are well summarised at the conclusion of the book. Moores's work will be of use to anybody seeking level-headed summaries of theories about broadcasting (Chapter Two), the human geography of television and its audiences (Chapter Five) or in issues related to space and time shifting in modern media (Chapter Six). It will also interest sociologists and cultural studies scholars working in the area of "quotidian culture" (Moores's own term), a field of growing importance in both cultural and media studies.

Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies

By Nick Lacey
London: Macmillan Press, 2000. ISBN 0-312230125, 268pp, $59.95, (hbk)

A review by Laurie E. Harnick, University of Western Ontario, Canada

Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies is a textbook meant for students in their final years of college or first undergraduate year at university. It is structured around six key concepts that Lacey identifies in his introduction: media agencies, media categories, media technologies, media languages, media audiences, and media representations. Lacey notes that his book "differentiates between the pre- and post-16 student" and that a consequence of this differentiation is that "each of the key concepts is dealt with, first, at a basic level, appropriate for students at the beginning of the course" and, in turn, in successive chapters which introduce more advanced theories. Its chapters work through an "Introduction to Narrative Theory," "A History of Narrative Theory," "Theory of Narrative Two," "Theory of Genre One" and, "Theory of Genre Two" and at the end of each chapter, there are exercises for students to complete. As a combination text and supplementary workbook, it is meant to "back-up...teacher/lecturer input" and encourage the students to apply the ideas they've learned. In all, it is a logically organized and concise introduction to the basic ideas related to narrative and genre.

The book "works" because it is structured the way the material might be taught -- in a cumulative manner. Concepts are introduced and discussed with concrete examples and, as the student becomes familiar with the concepts, more complex aspects of the theories are raised and discussed with more examples. The exercises use effective and identifiable sources to engage the student. For example, in discussing the differences between Story and Plot, Lacey provides a synopsis of *Trainspotting* and then deconstructs the way in which the story and plot are different. In his explanation, he raises the names of specific theorists and discusses their approaches to this differentiation. In this way, concrete examples, theorists and their theories are combined to raise and answer questions related to the nature of narrative and genre.

As a (relatively) small book that takes on very big topics, Lacey's text does what it sets out to do -- it introduces various concepts and encourages further study and thought. For example, it would be impossible to explore, say, "A History of Narrative" in detail. Instead, Lacey uses "The Epic of Gilgamesh" as the "world's oldest known narrative" to consider whether "narrative is a social construct, like realism, or an expression of 'universal' structure." From there, he moves rapidly through formal considerations of narrative and discusses Aristotle's theory of art, the oral tradition, Shakespeare, and the novel (with a brief description of Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism). In this way, he provides a kind of bird's-eye view of literary form. By setting up these foundations, he is able, in the next chapter, to discuss semiotics and a structuralist approach to narrative. A similar technique is used when

he discusses theories of genre. By laying down the basics (identifying patterns, forms, styles, and structures) and considering generic conventions, Lacey is able to move beyond this material in the next chapter and discuss more complicated concepts such as "Genre as Jungian myth."

Overall, Lacey's book is an interesting and well-constructed introduction to narrative and genre. His strategy of interweaving concrete examples and theoretical concepts is particularly effective. Its exercises have been thoughtfully conceived to encourage students to think laterally about the concepts and it effectively and successfully accomplishes the goals Lacey sets out in his introduction.

Postmodern Media Culture

By Jonathan Bignell
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, ISBN 0 7486 0988 1, viii + 240 pp., £25.00, (pbk)

A review by William Cummings, University of South Florida, USA

Jonathan Bignell's latest offering is already making its way onto university reading lists. Indeed, *Postmodern Media Culture* is ideally suited to push buttons and spark responses from students. Bignell fixes his attention on the role of media examples -- films, television, computer games, photographs, virtual reality -- in postmodern theory. "The postmodern," he writes, "is a discursive construct which depends on the citation of particular kinds of objects, be they texts, institutions, audiences, or ways of conceptualising these and other aspects of media culture" (1). This examination in turn facilitates a better understanding of the relationships between the media, the notion of the postmodern and contemporary culture.

Having announced this task in the opening pages, Bignell then embarks on a wandering survey of varied conceptions of postmodernism followed by brief capitulations of work by Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas, Benjamin, Baudrillard, McLuhan, Lyotard, Jameson, and Eco. Neither clearly necessary nor sufficient to its task, too much of the introduction and first chapter read like an odd kind of delaying tactic, and readers are encouraged to fast-forward to page sixty-one, where Bignell gets to the topic at hand.

Bignell prefers to identify what he calls "consonances" or "resonances" between media and many of the most prominent aspects of postmodern theory. These include the dissolution of grand historical narratives ("the end of history"), the problematising of hierarchies of value and judgment (especially the blurring of the boundary between high and low culture), and the question of periodisation (is postmodernity historically distinct?).

By seeking out consonances Bignell wants to distance himself from readings of films as evidence of the postmodern:

> An example brings with it an implicit claim to stand in the place of a larger number of equivalent objects, while also containing within itself the potential to represent not only the features of its class but also a particularity rendering it worthy of selection. (62)

In such readings postmodernism itself comes to be regarded as merely a set of features that particular films and other media can *have*. Here his more significant point emerges: "I argue for the conception of the postmodern not as a particular technological or representational form in the media"-- not as an institutional apparatus or stylistic genre -- "but as a kind of analytical approach to media culture which prioritises difference and heterogeneity within that culture." (13) In other words, we should stop reading films in order to label them modern or postmodern, and instead explore the degree to which cinema and postmodern theory exist

in parallel. "The relations between theoretical writing and particular films are not those of illustration or proof, but of consonance, interimplication and shared aporias." (84)

For example, Bignell discusses the apocalyptic detective films *The Name of the Rose* and *Seven* alongside the postmodern prognosis about the end of history. All share a "common set of concerns" and their narratives are symptomatic of a crisis in masculinity in which a struggle against male passivity is dramatized through violence against the female body. Yet despite Bignell's careful reminder that there are elements in each of these films quite at odds with what we typically think of as postmodern, it becomes very difficult to tell if this preference for identifying consonances results in practical or methodological gains. His readings of *The Name of the Rose* and *Seven* do not differ from the kind of readings one would perform in order to reveal their proposed postmodern character. Are we simply backpeddling from the certainty that the term "example" connotates?

Bignell examines the difficulties that arise when postmodern theory cites media examples as evidence in the context of photography, especially Gulf War coverage. The instantaneous character and simultaneity of transmission, circulation of digitised images through global networks, absence of corporeal bodies, and similarity of news footage to computer combat games all have been highlighted as evidence that Gulf War footage was postmodern. Too often, however, such conclusions ignore the modern roots of these features, asserting a false rupture which is itself a foundational move in postmodern theory. Bignell also objects to the universalization of the assumption in, for example, Jean Baudrillard's famous declaration that the war did not really take place, but was an experience inherently virtual and mediated. Such pronouncements ignore the role of audiences in constructing diverse meanings from televised war coverage. More interesting to Bignell than adjudicating whether this facet of media culture is or is not postmodern is the conclusion that these inconsistencies, oscillations, and divisions (in the media culture surrounding the Gulf War and in postmodern theoretical discourse) are both indicative of our postmodern condition.

Postmodern Media Culture is thus a mixed bag. Overall its chapters do not hang together well, and some of the connections are forced to the point where Bignell's larger investigation gets lost. Yet despite its faults it contains much that is provocative, so whatever your particular postmodern predilications, it is worth a look.

Pulp Fiction

By Dana Polan
London: British Film Institute, 2000, ISBN 0-85170-808-0, 96 pp., 59 illustrations. £8.99, (pbk)

A review by Karen Boyle, University of Wolverhampton, UK

If the choice of student dissertation and essay topics in my institution is anything to go by, then *Pulp Fiction* and its director have lost none of their appeal in the seven years since the film's release. While there are a range of excellent reviews and articles on the film and its director, there have been no critical book length studies devoted to either, making the film an obvious choice for inclusion in the BFI's Modern Classics series. Regrettably, Dana Polan's volume will tell Tarantino-philes little they don't already know and offer students few critical pointers for advanced engagements with the film and its popular and critical reception.

Polan opens with a claim that *Pulp Fiction* is "not so much a film as a phenomenon" (7) and he goes on to provide a number of interesting examples of this phenomenon in its cyber-manifestations. Noting that Quentin Tarantino is himself "quite cyber-illiterate" (9), Polan focuses on cyber-fandom. The detailed descriptions of websites devoted (in every sense of the word) to the film and its director, prompt questions about the creative, if often obsessive, nature of fandom. However, Polan's text often seems to mirror these obsessions -- and indeed, the film's preoccupation with popular culture -- spending much of the book *listing* and *linking* popular cultural references. This is most obvious in the song lyric sub-headings he uses throughout which offer (often cryptic) clues as to what lies ahead rather than the clear signposts which make texts reader-friendly and provide structure to any argument. Polan offers detailed listings of the film's inter-textual references, many of which will be new to the casual-viewer, and the use of illustrations makes these comparisons come alive. However, these lists (like Tarantino's allusions) can be excessive, to the extent that the text almost becomes unreadable (the 36-line sentence between pages 18-21 is a case in point), and the *significance* of these accumulated "facts" is often lost.

Of more interest, is Polan's discussion of how the film facilitates this cyber-fandom. However, he largely bases this discussion on his (selective) reading of the film and a small number of websites, rather than on any sustained engagement with the fan community. Indeed, the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of Polan's discussion are far from clear. This is a problem with the book as a whole, as critical debates are hinted at, but rarely explored in detail. On the film's controversial racial politics, for example, Polan writes: "That racial difference can be constructed as an enviable source of cool has its own ideological problems -- what does it mean to appropriate another culture? -- but it is a different stance than one that imputes inferiority." (59) Unfortunately, the parenthetical question is left hanging although this issue has been of concern to both popular and academic debates about the film and, indeed, about Tarantino's work in general. The treatment of gender is even more disappointing, with cursory critical discussion of the representation of masculinity and scarce

acknowledgement of the female characters -- a particularly glaring omission given the extensive discussion of infantilisation.

Part of the problem here would seem to be that -- as Polan notes -- *Pulp Fiction* presents its universe not as meaningful, but "simply *to be seen*", with the allusions to a history of popular culture "float[ing] up from the film as so many "cool" moments, hip instances to be appreciated, ingested, obsessed about, but rarely to be interpreted, rarely to be made meaningful" (79). Thus, even *interpreting Pulp Fiction* is, Polan suggests, only possible if the film is *not* seen "as experience, as game, as visuality, as cinema" (83). There is undoubtedly a question here about the status of textual analysis within studies of film, a question with which film studies scholars have only recently begun to grapple. However, Polan is on shaky ground in claiming that any attempt to interpret the film automatically negates these other aspects. Rather, this reads as a justification for his own limited engagement with the film and, specifically, its representational politics and controversies.

There is much more to be said about *Pulp Fiction* and so long as students, in particular, retain their interest in the film and its director, there is still a book waiting to be written.

Rome Open City (Roma Città Aperta)

By David Forgacs
London: BFI Publishing, 2000. ISBN 0-85170-804-8. 79 p., £8.99 (pbk)
Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real Edited by David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real

Edited by David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

London: BFI Publishing, 2001. ISBN 0-85170-795-5, 208 p., £14.99, (pbk)

A review by Luca Prono, The University of Nottingham, UK

The received critical construction of Roberto Rossellini has managed to tame the director's complexities and contradictions into a clear-cut schematic periodisation which has invented several Rossellinis and has downplayed the continuities throughout the director's *oeuvre*. The first phase is that of the Fascist War Trilogy (*La nave bianca*, 1941; *Un pilota ritorna*, 1942; *L'uomo della croce*, 1943) which is usually remembered with embarrassment and unease by both the director himself and his scholars. This is due in part to the fact that, in the first instance, Rossellini owed his international recognition to the following Anti-Fascist War Trilogy (*Roma, città aperta*, 1945; *Paisà*, 1946; *Germania anno zero*, 1947) which also established him as one of the founding fathers of Italian Neo-realism. The next phase is usually known as the "Bergman cycle" and includes *Stromboli terra di Dio* (1950), *Europa '51* (1952), *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), *Angst* (1954). As the heading given to this phase suggests, Ingrid Bergman, whose affair and subsequent marriage with Rossellini was one of the most talked about scandals of the 1950s both in Europe and in the States, starred in all these films. Her star status did not save the film's from being box-office failures. The cycle was condemned by Italian left-wing intellectuals as a betrayal of the Neo-realist criteria of verisimilitude and attention of larger social conditions with a particular emphasis on the plight of poorer classes. According to these critics, Rossellini was guilty of an inward turn which resulted in a focus on individual psychological portraits and spiritual quests. Yet the Bergman cycle was highly appreciated by the *Cahiers du cinema* critics who often took them as a source of inspiration for their own movies. Rossellini thus became a central point of reference for the cultural production of the French New Wave (for example, the influence of *Viaggio in Italia* has been traced in Godard's *Le mèpris*, 1963, and *Tout va bien*, 1971). The last phase usually detected by Rossellini scholars marks his detachment from cinema and his preference for films and documentary made for television with an educational intent such as *India* (1958), *Blaise Pascal* (1972), *L'età di Cosimo de' Medici* (1972) and *Cartesius* (1973). The chronological limits of this phase are quite loose and range from the early 1960s to the death of the director in 1977. The films that Rossellini made for cinematic release during

these almost twenty years of his career such as Viva l'Italia (1960, on Garibaldi) and *Anno Uno* (1974, on Alcide De Gasperi, Italy's first Prime Minister after the II World War) are usually neglected.

The strength of the monographic study *Rome Open City* by David Forgacs, published in the series of BFI Film Classics, and of the collection of essays *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, co-edited by Forgacs with Sarah Lutton and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, resides in their attempts to problematise the schematic reception of Rossellini sketched above and to cover areas of Rossellini's production so far neglected or little explored (see, for example, Adriano Aprà's essay "Rossellini's Historical Encyclopedia" on the director's educational films made for television). The collection of essays edited by Forgacs, Lutton and Nowell-Smith also reprints, in its final section, a series of documents (interviews with Rossellini, polemical exchanges between the critics and the admirers of the director) that will be useful to readers as a means to historicise Rossellini's films.

Both Forgacs's study on Rossellini's first anti-fascist film and various essays in the collection are interested in finding continuities throughout the director's career. Thus Forgacs defines convincingly *Roma, città aperta* as "a transitional film" (11) rather than a wholly new kind of work as the film has been constructed for decades. The film is "a hybrid" product combining formal as well as ideological continuities and discontinuities with the past rather than being a simple break with it:

> cinematic innovation is grafted onto dramatic convention, the values of anti-Fascism and working-class collectivism onto a narrative with a conservative sexual and social ethos … photographic documentation and historical testimony coexist with a mythical reconstruction of the past in which good memories are made to drive out bad (12).

At the same time Forgacs is preoccupied to show how *Roma, città aperta* fits in with Rossellini's subsequent production and he does this by challenging the usual periodisation of the director's career: "It is relatively easy … to blur this schematic picture by drawing attention to continuities of theme between the various 'groups' (such as self-sacrifice, heroism, courage, faith) or by regrouping the films" (62). As an example of this possible regrouping Forgacs suggests that a unified notion of an Anti-Fascist War Trilogy breaks apart when one realises that "the long sequences without dialogue and the treatment of inner crisis in *Germany Year Zero* seem more akin to Stromboli than to *Rome Open City*" (62).

Several essays in the collection *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* show the same willingness to engage with the hermetically-sealed grouping that has been carried out with Rossellini's films. In the same vein as Forgacs, Christopher Wagstaff's piece on "Rossellini and Neo-realism" seeks to move beyond the a unified notion of an Anti-Fascist War Trilogy by offering a careful and detailed comparison of *Paisà* and *Roma, città aperta* in terms of narrative structures, points of view and generic conventions employed. Wagstaff finds that Roma, città aperta still clings to "an old dramaturgy which [Rossellini] will definitely abandon in *Paisà*" (40). In *Roma, città aperta* Rossellini still displays a "dramaturgy of 'givens' contained in genre cinema" which signals a Manichean conflict between "two 'given' positions: one right and one wrong, one good and one bad, one leading to progress and one leading to doom" (40). In contrast *Paisà* adopts a fragmented narrative and a mode of dramaturgy marked by "search and discovery" and Wagstaff interestingly suggests that the film be discussed in the context of other Neo-realist films such as Fellini's *La Strada* (1955),

which contributed to the development of the road movie genre (40-41). In his excellent and thought-provoking essay on "Rossellini's Landscapes: Nature, Myth, History", Sandro Bernardi offers a discussion of Rossellini as "the principal Italian anthropologist," (50) focusing on the director's continuing interest throughout his films in the discovery of the sacred. The theme of landscape is a major feature in several movies by the director that is usually kept apart in critical discussion. In his wide-ranging discussion of Rossellini's production from *Paisà to India*, Bernardi claims that:

> it is in landscape that characters, in their experience of vision, come out of themselves and discover the world they are part of. The relationship of the individual with the whole, the cult of the dead, love, the discovery and observation of the world these are the aspects that link landscape to myth as an epiphany of the sacred (50).

Alan Millen closes his discussion of *Francesco giullare di Dio* (*Francis God's Jester*, 1950) with a reference to *Anno uno* (*Year One*, 1974) and concludes that both films, "made at a distance of nearly twenty-five years from one another", show that the director had remained consistent in his preoccupation "with the potential unity of human experience and search for a harmonious force in human affairs" (93). Sam Rohdie finds similarities between episodes one, two and four of India and respectively *Francis God's Jester*, *Journey to Italy* and *Stromboli*.

The problem of continuity in Rossellini's development as a film-maker also raises the question of his politics and critics have usually been extremely reluctant to assess the importance of the three films that Rossellini shot during Fascism for his career as a whole. When *La nave bianca*; *Un pilota ritorna* (whose story-line was written by no less than Mussolini's son, Vittorio) and *L'uomo della croce* are discussed at all, critics highlight the discontinuities between them and Rossellini's subsequent films. As a result, the compromises that Rossellini made with the Fascist regime are traditionally downplayed. In contrast with this trend Forgacs's monography on *Rome Open City* is definitely vocal about Rossellini's status when the war ended: "a film-maker with a Fascist past who needed to remake himself" (63). His condition mirrored that of the Italian nation as a whole and *Rome Open City* was as much an act of personal as of national redemption:

> a patriotic myth to ease the transition from Fascism to the post-war state, substituting pride in the national liberation movement for the collective shame of having lived, without openly resisting, for twenty years under a political system that had ultimately proved so brutal and brought such damage upon the country (64).

The first two essays in the collection *Magician of the Real* deal directly with Rossellini's politics. Ruth Ben-Ghiat's "The Fascist War Trilogy" is an extremely perceptive analysis of Rossellini's productions during Fascism and a careful reconstruction of his cultural ties with the regime. Ben-Ghiat suggests that some of the rhetorical strategies and the aesthetic concerns of the Fascist trilogy will be employed in *Rome Open City* as well. The three films that Rossellini made under Fascism are therefore considered by Ben-Ghiat "as important moments in Rossellini's artistic formation" (31) which laid the foundations for the Neo-realist movement. In contrast with Ben-Ghiat's accomplished piece, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's "North and South, East and West: Rossellini and Politics" is a somewhat missed chance to throw further light on Rossellini's politics. In accordance with the convincing project of the

collection, Nowell-Smith starts by arguing persuasively that "politics, so far from being a distraction, … was actually a major source of consistency in [Rossellini's] career" (9). He then proceeds to discuss the theme of non-communication, a theme that, he argues, can be traced both in the films usually grouped under the Anti-Fascist War Trilogy and the Bergman cycle. This theme is read as a reflection on the multiple lacks of communication that affected the post-World War II and post-Yalta world, between the different classes of Italian society, between the Mediterranean world and Northen Europe, between Europe and the US. Nowell-Smith's discussion is convincing until he claims that Rossellini's vision was "that of a group of far-sighted, mainly Christian Democratic, ... politicians and thinkers", such as the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, committed to the construction of "a collective Europe strong enough to deal with the United States on equal terms" (15). The definition of Rossellini as a Christian Democratic needs to be problematised more; would he have agreed, for example, with the young Christian Democratic Minister Giulio Andreotti (who was also a minister and faithful political ally of De Gasperi) in his vicious attack against Neo-realism (mentioned in the essay by Wagstaff)? Given that Rossellini made a movie on De Gasperi, Nowell-Smith's discussion would have perhaps benefited from a closer analysis of this cinematic portrait.

Because the material in both books is usually of high critical standards, it is somewhat disappointing that the editors of *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* have not included in their collection at least an essay with a sustained discussion of any of the films that mark the transition of the director from cinema to television (these include *Il Generale Della Rovere*, 1959; *Era notte a Roma*, 1960; *Viva l'Italia*, 1960; *Vanina Vanini*, 1961). However, on the whole, both volumes make crucial contributions to advance critical discussions about Rossellini and Italian Neo-realism and bring them up to date with recent theoretical approaches (see, for example, Forgacs's shrewd use of DeCerteau to comment on the representation of urban space in *Rome Open City*). Both books are also eager to revise and dispel the mythical aura that still surrounds both the director and Neo-realism and come to terms with several of their shortcomings (once again, Forgacs's discussion of gender relations in *Rome Open City* is exemplary). Because of this, they deserve to be widely read and will be fundamental points of departure for any future studies in the field.