

# A Long Hard Look at Psycho

By Raymond Durnat

London: BFI, 2002. ISBN 0-85170-929-6. 200 illustrations, 248 pp. £11.99 (pbk)

## A review by Frances Pheasant-Kelly, University of Nottingham, UK

The title of this book does exactly what it professes to do, examining and re-examining the minutiae of a film that is rightly claimed to be a pivotal point in the history of the thriller, in terms of both the fan and the critic. *A Long Hard Look at Psycho* targets the critical audience rather than the cinema-goer, although it does approach *Psycho* from a number of angles, all developed within the main section of the book.

The book is divided into three chapters, "Developing the Film," "A Long Hard Look at *Psycho*" and "Matters Arising." In his introduction, Durnat discusses the possibility of *Psycho* as a collaborative product, but generally sees Hitchcock as an *auteur*. His consideration that *Psycho* was developed with a collaborative approach is valid, in that the film's visual themes are balanced by other equally significant aspects, such as Hermann's musical score. However, Durnat counters this view as he reminds the reader that, despite evidence of collaborative approaches to many of his films, Hitchcock more frequently molded scripts to his own vision. Overall, Durnat underscores the point that *Psycho* means different things to different audiences, with interpretations that result from its moral and dramatic aspects, to an appreciation of its pure cinematic formalism. It is this multidisciplinary approach that flavours the structure of the main section of the book, although Durnat argues that it is the 'reality principle' that really engages the audience, not metaphors or cinematic devices (Whilst this might explain audience responses to *Psycho*, it does not so easily explain those to *Marnie* or *Vertigo*, in which numerous anti-realist devices are apparent).

The first chapter, "Developing the Film," charts the production history of *Psycho*, tracing the inspirations for the plot through to the final script. There is a detailed account of the crimes that provided the sources for the novel by Robert Bloch (on which the film is based). Durnat also looks at the publicity campaign, and the unusual marketing strategy that preceded and accompanied the film's release. The book then moves on to its main section, 'A Long Hard Look' (which is of a formidable length). This central chapter is broken down into easily readable segments, most of which seem very relevant, reverberating between analyses centred around narrative structure, cinematography, normative audience response and critical readings. Although this tactic offers something for everyone, it is an approach that sometimes makes for uneven reading, and frequent repetition. Nevertheless, Durnat offers a thorough analysis of the film from its technical, theoretical, and psychoanalytical complexities to its formal aspects, examining the opening credits through to the final scene. He offers new readings for *Psycho*, whilst repudiating some generally accepted ones, notably the notion that the knife used in the shower scene is phallic. However Durnat's rather awkward phraseology seems here to be doubly in error; one quote reads 'the vulgar Freudian equation of long weapons generally with the phallus overlooks some intriguing differences: no knives desire a

woman or give pleasure to the person in whom they're stuck, or start a new life' (112). Surely, Hitchcock's point is that the shower scene is representative of rape, and therefore undesirable? Durnat, in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, also proposes the unlikely scenario that the mop in the bucket is symbolic of "a degraded sex act" (142), which he then argues is not highly probable. He does, at times, therefore run the risk of over-interpretation (as an act of provocation?). The book finishes with "Matter Arising," which provides some closure to the questions that the main body of text raises. It also looks at sequels and other art works that *Psycho* has inspired.

With around two hundred illustrations, *A Long Hard Look at Psycho* is likely to be a useful adjunct to the study of Hitchcock. Although Durnat's 'relaxed' writing style and colloquial lapses occasionally undermine the authority of the text, the book is indisputably well informed and informative, and fully acknowledges the complexity and sophistication of the film.

# Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema

By Lalitha Gopalan

London: British Film Institute, 2002. ISBN 0-85170-922-2. 34 illustrations, vi +218 pp.  
£15.99 (pbk) £48.00 (hbk)

## A review by Oindrila Mukherjee, University of Florida, USA

Ramesh Sippy's landmark film *Sholay* (1975) was India's reply to the Hollywood western. Its phenomenal success not only catapulted it to cult status, but also set the trend for a spate of Indian films that were an appropriation of the Hollywood action genre. Lalitha Gopalan's book looks at how global and local conventions combine in Indian action cinema, to produce a reconfiguration of the original archetype.

Gopalan argues that the narrative form of Indian cinema is subject to three kinds of interruptions, namely, censorship regulations, 'the interval,' and song and dance sequences. *Cinema of Interruptions* discusses how the first of these 're-routes the spectator's pleasure' in the 'avenging woman' films of the early 1990s, while the interval modifies films (such as those by J.P. Dutta), celebrating masculine bonds in a manner that makes them more than just copies of Hollywood westerns, gangster and war films.

According to the Gopalan, 'interruptions' rule the narrative of Indian films: 'Song and dance sequences work as a delaying device; the interval defies resolutions, postpones endings and doubles beginnings; and censorship blocks the narrative flow, redirects the spectator's pleasure towards and away from the state.' These interruptions -- instead of ruining the viewer's experience -- actually offer pleasure, much as continuity does in classical Hollywood narrative.

An example of censorship's influence on cinema, for instance, is what the author refers to as "*coitus interruptus*", a term used to describe the ways in which Indian filmmakers negotiate obscenity codes to 'finally produce the female body on screen.' This technique, familiar to Indian viewers, involves the withdrawal of the camera just before a steamy love scene, which is then represented symbolically by shots of waterfalls, flowers and other natural objects. Gopalan stresses that the Indian film industry, 'despite its laments about state control, has been preoccupied with the withdrawal-of-the-camera technique as a crucial source of surplus pleasure.'

The escalation of violence in contemporary Indian cinema is considered by many to have originated from the state-of-emergency imposed from 1975 to 1977. Following the success of N. Chandra's *Pratighat* (1987), the early 1990s witnessed the growing popularity of avenging women- themed films in Hindi cinema, such as *Sherni*, *Khoon Bhari Maang* and *Kali Ganga*. These rape-revenge dramas, characterised by sexually violent scenes, are actually an

acknowledgement of the indispensability of state censorship regulations, according to Gopalan, who reads these narratives as representations of 'aggressive strands of feminism.'

The section on J.P. Dutta's films (including *Ghulami* [1985], *Batwara* and *Hathiyar* [1989]) discusses his reworking of well-known masculine genres such as the western, 'within the rubric of Indian cinematic conventions' such as the multi-star cast, multiple narrative strands and song and dance sequences.

However, this is not a book about Bollywood alone. Gopalan examines Mani Ratnam's Tamil gangster film *Nayakan* (1987) alongside popular Hindi films such as Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Parinda* (1989) and Ram Gopal Verma's *Satya* (1998). The biographies of the films' gangster protagonists are read as analogies to biographies of the post-colonial state.

*Cinema of Interruptions*' illustrations include production stills, posters and shots from many of the films discussed. Gopalan aptly explores trends in Indian action cinema, pausing to examine a few films in detail and providing an overview of others, attempting to theorise her findings. The book also offers a useful (if sketchy) historical perspective of this particular genre. In her own words, 'perhaps the most ambitious aspect of this book is to identify points of intersection between different national cinemas or between different language cinemas, points of intersection that acknowledge the global circulation and influence of different cinematic styles.'

*Cinema of Interruptions* comes at a time when popular Indian cinema, and Bollywood in particular, has captured the imagination of the West, and the book attempts to place it in a global perspective, identifying its appropriation of dominant Hollywood genres, while emphasising its unique local characteristics. The result is an exciting new hybrid cinema that not only entertains but also helps 'write' the nation-state.

# Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America

By Peter Knight (ed.)

New York and London: New York University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8174-4735-3. 3 illustrations, viii + 278pp. £18.50 (pbk) £55.00 (hbk)

## A review by Christopher H. Smith, University of Southern California, USA

Considering the unfolding post-September 11th era of surveillance, paranoia, and covert paramilitary engagement, Peter Knight's *Conspiracy Nation* anthology appears fortuitous. Conspiracy, after all, seems an appropriate interpretive mode for an unsettling structure of feeling constituted by 'Jihad,' 'regime change,' 'weapons of mass destruction,' 'undisclosed locations,' and 'total information awareness,' not to mention 'hanging chads,' 'document shredding,' and 'whistle-blowing.' In one of the theoretical critiques contributed to the collection, Fran Mason suggests that we all occupy conspiratorial subject positions amid a disquieting social milieu; we wage an interminable struggle to map the truth of our increasingly fragmented, yet perilously connected, world. Indeed, the uncanny restlessness of everyday life has been exacerbated post-9/11 by the abiding suspicion that significant disclosures on mechanisms of national security and economic prosperity are being withheld, perhaps 'for our own good,' or perhaps because these revelations would reveal malfeasance by those 'in the know.' The most apt metaphor for our age is thus that of 'the smoking gun.'

Tellingly, in the lead essay Skip Willman rephrases this metaphor as a definitive conundrum: 'Do we inhabit a conspiratorial universe in which mysterious forces manipulate history, or one driven by contingency in the forms of chance, accident, randomness, and chaos?' (25) While this potentially debilitating information gap threatens to obscure democratic process, American citizenry has been reassured that the discerning oversight of a vigilant executive branch will prevail over uncertainty. For many otherwise trusting and loyal citizens of the country, this benevolent claim has not made for a particularly good night's sleep.

Conceived at an academic conference in 1998, *Conspiracy Nation* does not delve directly into the labyrinth of post-9/11 speculative discourses, and therefore in certain respects the book's cumulative insights seem muted. The momentous historical cleavage of 9/11 aside, the eleven essays collected in this volume do succeed in offering a compelling assessment on the crises of knowledge endemic to globalization, multiculturalism, and postmodernity-- crises that many people in the United States increasingly identify and explain via conspiracy theories of often cosmic proportions. Ranging in scope from alien abduction sagas and the paranoid fiction of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, to the cult television sensation *The X-Files* and the mass-market paradigm of motivational research, the authors in this collection diagnose conspiratorial symptoms throughout the American social body. The primary ambition via this scholarly triage is to redeem conspiracy and paranoia from the pathologized margins of social relations, and for the most part this 'normalization' objective is attained with acuity.

Eithne Quinn's essay on Tupac Shakur exemplifies the quality of the writing in much of the collection and it offers an especially well-phrased analysis of the rapper's racially over-determined celebrity status, and his concomitant lyrical shift from black activist poetics to cryptic conspiratorial rhetoric. Quinn argues that Tupac's 'paranoid style' comprised performative gestures that 'laid bare the fractures produced by the combination of an inordinate sense of agency conferred by media spotlight and a genuine sense of responsibility he bore as [racial] representative, coupled with his debilitating lack of autonomy in the face of wider industrial, discursive, and political forces' (192). Unfortunately, the 'keeping it real' modernist code of the gangsta rap genre precluded Tupac from maintaining his spectacularly scattered subjectivity for very long.

While *Conspiracy Nation* amply introduces some of the formative texts of conspiracy scholarship, there is a sense of redundancy in its overall theoretical approach. References to Frederic Jameson's definitive text *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* seem to pop up on every other page, and passages from Slavoj Žižek and Jean-François Lyotard appear frequently as well. This somewhat narrow theoretical framework leads to some glaring blind-spots, the most telling of which is an inattention to the apocalyptic and millennial sensibilities that have defined significant aspects of the American mindset in the postwar era -- neither 'religion' nor 'Christianity' are to be found in the book's index. In his well-crafted essay on 'Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy,' Timothy Melly flirts with the apocalyptic nature of many American conspiracy cultures when he says that 'most conspiracy theories are virtually impossible to confirm', and 'require a form of quasi-religious conviction, a sense that the conspiracy in question is an entity with almost supernatural powers' (59). While this description certainly sounds like it could include prophetic belief, the anthology as a whole fails to notice the connection.

Perhaps the notion of religion is too difficult an area for this redemption project to take on. Ironically, the vexed relationship between certain conspiracy narratives and progressive political agendas is precisely the subject of Jack Bratich's essay, 'Injections and Truth Serums,' wherein he investigates the obstacle posed against Left-wing constituencies by AIDS conspiracy theorists. Rather than close the Left off from the forms of subjugated knowledge that challenge its monopoly on radical politics, Bratich calls for a 'politics of articulation, one that brings into question the very desire to *avoid* conspiracy theories and the aspiration to identify with a regime of truth' (147-48). Whether a willful omission or merely an oversight, this theoretical interpolation goes unheeded in *Conspiracy Nation* with respect to religion, and thus a prime opportunity to historicize postwar America's paranoid 'cognitive map' in theological terms is lost.

# Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory

By Annette Kuhn

New York: New York University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8147-4772-8. xii +273 pp. £14.95 (pbk)

## A review by Paul Grainge, University of Nottingham, UK

Memory has become a powerful cross-disciplinary field of enquiry in recent years. It has been taken up in the social sciences, as well as in varying strains of film, media and cultural studies, as a means of analysing the stakes and investments of the past as they are experienced in and constituted by the present. Cultural memory has become an especially influential category in the literature of 'memory studies,' moving away from psychoanalytic explorations of fantasy and repression and towards socially situated forms of collective remembering that lay bare the dialogic and highly negotiated nature of the past-present relation. Within film studies, cultural memory has been explored through frameworks that tend either to discuss issues of memory *in* film or that concentrate on film (and cinema culture more generally) *as* memory. *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger* contributes to the latter, using extensive interviews with British cinemagoers of the 1930s to construct a portrait of generational memory, while at the same time enriching a sense of the lived experience of cinema in the period.

Based on oral accounts and interviews taken across Britain over the last ten years, Kuhn describes her approach as 'ethnohistorical,' a particular triangulation of historical, ethnographic and textual investigation that attempts to 'enter imaginatively into the world of 1930s cinema culture by attending to the stories of those most closely involved' (7). *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger* is a significant work for the sheer scope of its methodological design. In rescuing a sample of the largely unrecorded memories of audience members from cinema's heyday, Kuhn presents a colourful and fascinating range of voices. The book is sensitive to the interpretive protocols of oral history and is as careful to draw meaning from laughter, stumbling and silence, as it is from the verbalisation of memory in the example transcripts that run through each chapter. Providing insight into the affective pleasures of cinema, Kuhn's key point is that memory of specific films is markedly less important than the activity of going to the cinema. Using generational reminiscence to explore the location and landscape of cinemagoing in the 1930s, cinema's relation to childhood culture and leisure practice, the place of cinema in daily/weekly routines, and cinema's bearing on feelings such as aspiration, love and consumer desire, *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger* helps rectify some of the blind-spots and theoretical abstractions that typically derive from giving film texts critical primacy.

There is a relentless categorising impulse in the book. Analytically, the work is driven by the attempt to draw patterns of memory from its body of evidentiary material, and to arrive at a specific typology that can situate and differentiate particular kinds of reminiscence. Kuhn seeks to identify the characteristic tropes of cinema memory, identifying four discursive

registers that she calls 'repetitive,' 'anecdotal,' 'impersonal' and 'past/present.' These reflect 'the degree or manner in which the informant implicates herself or himself in the story and/or its narration' (10). This typology is suggestive on certain terms, but can also lend itself to a descriptive mode of analysis rather than one that necessarily 'enhances, deepens and modifies understandings of the nature and operations of cultural memory' (238). While Kuhn is sensitive to the specific nature of memory as a form of discourse -- concerned with how people talk as much as what they say -- there is still a tendency to accentuate and draw out memory as a conduit to the past, rather than engage fully with the complex conditions that shape and make memory just as significantly about the present. In describing the collective imagination of a generation, Kuhn writes that: 'taken as a whole, informants' accounts of their investments in cinema yield a surprisingly consistent pattern of response' (219). This may appear less surprising if more consideration were given, for example, to the encoding of memory in local press narratives and their contemporary 'bygone' supplements, frequently targeting generational memory (of cinema) to foster and secure particular kinds of local readership. In other words, personal memory of cinema may already be significantly patterned in discursive terms, socially constructed according to generic formations of localized memory. This does not detract from the book's undoubted achievements in uncovering individual testimony, but does ask questions about whether Kuhn is perhaps more concerned with the operations of reminiscence than the complex, and present-based, dynamics of cultural memory.

The most successful chapters are those which live up to Kuhn's model of methodological triangulation. 'An Invitation to Dance' is especially good in this respect. Examining the enduring memory of films starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Kuhn skillfully blends a number of perspectives that probe the affective, and kinetic, memory of Fred and Ginger's dance routines and their bearing on leisure and cinematic pleasures of the time. While published as *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger* in the United States, the book was published as *An Everyday Magic* in Britain. Whatever the marketing rationale in each case, the book is a valuable contribution to the study of generational reminiscence and the texture of cinemagoing in the 1930s.

# Film: An Introduction (Second Edition)

By William H. Phillips

Bedford Books/St Martin's, 2002. ISBN 0-3122-5896-8. 582pp. \$65.35 (pbk)

## A review by Warren Buckland, Chapman University, USA

Let's get straight to the heart of the matter. What's wrong with textbooks? They typically fail to reveal to students the handful of fundamental ideas, or underlying organizing principles, that constitute the foundations of a discipline. In place of fundamental ideas, textbooks focus on surface information -- a wealth of loosely connected facts, dates, trivia, and anecdotes. The fundamental ideas organise facts and explain their significance and value. By ignoring the underlying organising principles of a discipline, textbooks remain on the surface, and thereby reify, isolate, and decontextualise information. Textbooks encourage students to memorise a surplus wealth of information rather than guide them towards a deep understanding of fundamental ideas. In addition, textbooks present information as pre-established truth. Little attention is paid to the fallible procedures and methods from which these truths are generated, why this information is significant, and how it can be engaged critically and revised. In technical terms, textbooks focus on declarative (propositional) rather than procedural (knowing how) or conditional (knowing why) knowledge. Textbooks need to motivate students to acquire new knowledge -- that is, need to explain the value for using new knowledge, how to acquire it and how and when to use it.

William H. Phillips' *Film: An Introduction* became an immediate success after the publication of the first edition in 1999. Part of its success is due to its colloquial prose style. Phillips has been careful to write an accessible textbook that is easy for students to read. This in itself is an admirable accomplishment. Yet, Phillips has sacrificed design and especially curriculum to achieve readability. The book is full of pedestrian generic statements presenting information in a static form. There is little learning strategy embedded in the text, other than the simple presentation of 'pre-established truths' for students to memorise. Moreover, the book suffers from an anecdotal way of presenting information -- what I would call a 'mentioning style'. Phillips literally fills each chapter with a large number of examples with minimum or no acknowledgement of the underlying organizing principles that explain the significance and value of these numerous examples. The reader is not always clear what the examples are examples of.

To take just one example -- Phillips' short discussion of the techniques of continuity editing (115-17). In the main body of the text, his discussion remains on the surface, as he is content simply to list and describe these techniques:

In narrative films and certainly in classical Hollywood cinema, continuity editing is normally used. Shots seem to follow one another unobtrusively, and viewers always know where the subjects of a shot are in relation to other subjects and in relation to the setting. Continuity editing allows the omission of minor details within scenes yet maintains the illusion of completeness. Continuity may be achieved in various ways. For example, eyeline matches

may be used, in which a subject looks at something offscreen, and the next shot shows what was being looked at from approximately the point of view of the subject (Figure 3.11). Continuity is also maintained within scenes if all shots show the subjects from one side of an imaginary straight line drawn between them. This is sometimes referred to as the 180-degree system. (115)

In this paragraph, Phillips does not present the techniques of continuity editing in a systematic manner. Instead, the sentences are almost randomly strung together, with no statement of the underlying principles that regulate these techniques. The techniques themselves are simply the observable phenomena of unobservable principles (to create orientation and imaginary coherence, in imitation of Renaissance painting and the proscenium space of theatre). Although Phillips mentions these principles, they are buried in a loosely constructed text, rather than serving as the text's focal point.

Figure 3.12 (116) accompanies this short section on continuity editing. It is more coherent than the main body of the text, since it presents a systematic analysis, detailing how eight shots are linked by techniques of continuity editing. This illustrates a marked difference in quality between the main text and the figures in Phillips's book. Perhaps the main text is meant to offer an informal introduction to the topic, before students read the more detailed and technical analyses in the figures. But the lack of formality in the text is too off-putting, for it is too perfunctory and leaves many questions unanswered.

Phillips has significantly revised his presentation of continuity editing from the first edition (Phillips 1999: 138-40). He has compressed and reordered the text and eliminated a standard diagram illustrating continuity editing, which he has replaced with Figure 3.12. While the section gains from the addition of 3.12, it has suffered due to the reorganisation of the sentences and the loss of the diagram.

Phillips ends the section on continuity editing by stating that:

Continuity editing is the usual way narrative films are edited, though some filmmakers choose to ignore continuity from time to time, and other filmmakers -- such as the French actor and director Jacques Tati and the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu -- often reject the convention of continuity editing. (117)

There are only a few hints in the previous pages (primarily the opening paragraph [p. 115] quoted above) why continuity editing is 'the usual way narrative films are edited'. We do not find out why some filmmakers choose to ignore continuity editing from time to time, and why Tati and Ozu rejected these conventions. Phillips has decontextualised the information he presents, especially concerning Tati and Ozu. It is not a matter of choosing different examples, but of offering context and conditional knowledge -- that is, *explaining why* these directors are important in terms of their editing, hence motivating students to learn more about them. Instead, Phillips has restricted himself to decontextualised information. I have not decontextualised this paragraph from p. 117. It is a self-sufficient paragraph, and is followed by a new section ('Image on Image and Image After Image').

Furthermore, the language is colloquial and full of what linguists call 'hedges' and 'attitude markers': words that qualify reduce and render uncertain the propositional content of sentences. In the above paragraph, 'usual way', 'some', 'from time to time', and 'often' are

hedges and attitude markers. In themselves, hedges and attitude markers do not necessarily have a negative effect on writing. They sometimes express caution. But is the caution a function of the subject matter (is the subject matter inherently indeterminate?), or is the caution simply an expression of the writer's knowledge and opinion? In other words, is the caution appropriate? In the above examples, Phillips' caution simply attempts to replace his lack of explanation.

To examine *Film: An Introduction* in more detail, I shall analyse its design and curriculum. I shall first outline the concepts of design and curriculum (in accordance with a framework I have developed elsewhere [ Buckland 2001]), and then examine Chapter Eight of *Film: An Introduction*, called 'Narrative Components of Fictional Films' (261-98).

## Curriculum

In *Textbooks for Learning*, Marilyn Chambliss and Robert Calfee argue that 'the goal of a course of study should not be the accumulation of facts, but the acquisition of a lens for viewing experience [. . .] [This] means acquiring the expert's X-ray vision, the connoisseur's sense of taste, the scholar's capacity to appraise, the scientist's ability to analyze' (Chambliss and Calfee 1998: 47-8). The challenge of education is to move students from their naïve understandings towards the framework of the expert. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that it is unrealistic to expect students to judge, evaluate, and extract useful knowledge from a discipline without guidance. The key to curriculum design is therefore to be able to mediate between students' everyday, common sense understanding to the expert's understanding, by means of 'models, analogies, empirical reasoning, and discussion' (Chambliss and Calfee, 1989: 312).

The philosopher A.N. Whitehead argued that educationalists should not teach too many subjects, and what they do teach should be taught thoroughly. This is one step towards achieving deep learning, of teaching the big or fundamental ideas behind a discipline -- and therefore behind the expert's understanding (their critical way of knowing). This is in opposition to the attempt to simply present information, or a shopping list of facts. In writing textbooks around the perspective of an expert, we need to ask (as Chambliss and Calfee do: 1998: 47):

- What characterises the expert's knowledge?
- What can the expert do?
- What is the expert's attitude towards his or her discipline?
- How are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the expert linked?

The way to represent an expert's knowledge is not to write longer and more detailed textbooks, but books that teach a critical way of knowing, together with the handful of organizing principles and fundamental concepts. Textbooks should not complicate the fundamental ideas in a discipline by focusing too much on details. They should link up to everyday life. But then they should move beyond the everyday, and encourage students to adopt and understand the expert's perspective of a discipline. Textbooks should, ideally, enable students to study in depth the principles and concepts of a discipline, rather than expose them to a shopping list of facts.

## Design

In addition to curriculum, Chambliss and Calfee argue that textbooks need to be organised according to a coherent design. They distinguish descriptive designs (lists, topical nets, hierarchies, matrices) from sequential designs (linear strings, falling dominoes, or branching trees). Chambliss and Calfee define these terms in the following way (1998: 32-7):

- List: an enumeration of objects and attributes (a primitive type of link)
- Topical net: connects via association a topic to sub-topics of details or attributes
- Hierarchy: objects and their attributes are linked by relations of sub- and super-ordination
- Matrix: compares and contrasts attributes
- Linear string: the sequential equivalent of a list; it differs from a list in that it contains a temporal dimension
- Falling dominoes: events in a falling dominoes arrangement are linked by cause and effect
- Branching Tree: resembles a hierarchy, but with a temporal dimension.

### Design in *Film: An Introduction*

The title of Phillips' Chapter Eight, 'Narrative Components of Fictional Films', is descriptive and informative, for it emphasises that the chapter focuses on the constituents of narrative fiction films. The chapter has five main headings that name these constituents, plus subheadings listed under each heading. The main headings are:

Narratives

Structure

Time

Style

Summary

These sections are organised as a hierarchy, with 'Narratives' as the superordinate category, and 'Structure', 'Time', and 'Style' as the three subordinate categories. The chapter ends on a clear and informative Summary. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is that each chapter has an illuminating summary at the end.

Under the heading 'Structure', Phillips includes three subheadings:

Characters, Goals, Conflicts

Beginnings, Middles, and Endings

Plotlines

The section on structure is also a hierarchy, with 'Structure' the superordinate category, and the three subheadings just listed as the subordinate categories. The first subheading, 'Characters, Goals, Conflicts', is a topical net that names a topic ('Characters') and two subtopics associated with characters (their goals and the conflicts they experience). The

second heading ('Beginnings, Middles, and Endings') names a sequence commonly used to describe narratives. 'Plotlines' examines the multiple narrative strands of feature films, and considers the different ways to organise them (chronological, simultaneous, intersecting).

The section on 'Time' is also a hierarchy with three subordinate categories:

Present Time, Flashforwards, and Flashbacks

Chronological and non-chronological time

Running and story times

Although the first subordinate heading 'Present Time, Flashforwards, and Flashbacks' appears to be a sequence, as with previous subheadings ('Characters, Goals, Conflicts' and 'Beginnings, Middles, and Endings'), a close examination of the text itself reveals Phillips comparing and contrasting a film's representation of past, present, and future time. This emphasis on comparison and contrast makes the subsection a matrix structure. The other two subordinate sections are also matrix structures, in which the subtopics listed in each subheading are compared and contrasted.

These three sections are interrupted by two detailed figures in which Phillips analyses the complex temporal structure of *Run Lola Run* (282-3) and *Citizen Kane* (288-9). The contrast between the informally written main text and these carefully written systematic figures is again striking.

The final heading, 'Style', has no subheadings, and Phillips uses this term in much the same way as we use the term 'genre'.

Curriculum in *Film: An Introduction*

Phillips' 'mentioning style', in which he fills his chapters with innumerable examples, accumulates many facts, figures, film titles, and dates. He also reproduces, in his writing style and content, the students' common sense understanding of film, which accounts for his book's popularity. That is, it is popular because it does not progress very far into the expert's level of understanding. Of course, no book should *begin* with the expert's understanding. However, the crucial test for a textbook is: Can it lead the reader from common sense understanding to the expert's understanding of a discipline? Or: How does the book mediate between the student's everyday understanding and the expert's understanding?

The expert's understanding consists of the fundamental organising principles that constitute the foundations of a discipline, the principles that regulate the surface facts, figures, and details. Phillips focuses too much on the surface facts of film studies in themselves, rather than using these facts to examine fundamental principles. On the occasions he attempts to teach the principles, they become lost in the wealth of examples.

For example, the four pages of 'Beginnings, Middles, and Endings' (271-4) begins with the intended reader's (the novice student's) common sense, everyday understanding of film. He informs the reader that a film's beginning establishes setting, the main characters and their goals, and provides exposition (or back story); that the middle section of a film includes obstacles; and that endings 'show the consequences of the major, previous events', thereby

providing closure (272). He also draws the reader's attention to inconsistent or improbable film endings.

In these four pages, Phillips mentions eight different films, ranging from *Finzan*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Schindler's List*, *Unforgiven*, *Wonder Boys*, *Not One Less*, *The Crying Game*, and *L.A. Confidential*. Phillips quickly introduces these examples into the text to illustrate a principle about narrative that he has not sufficiently established. His discussion of how film beginnings introduce characters and their goals covers one paragraph, and includes a discussion of two films. The entire paragraph reads as follows (notice again the hedges and attitude markers):

Usually beginnings introduce the major characters and allow viewers to infer their goals. The events of fictional films are so intertwined that often something missing in a character's life at the story's beginning largely determines the story's ending. Early in *Finzan (A Dance for the Heroes)* (1990), a man wants to force his late brother's widow to marry him (Figure 8.6). *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) begins with the main character wanting to talk to her lover. Much of the film shows her trying to connect with him, but only in the penultimate scene does she succeed. (272)

The discussion of *Finzan* is sufficiently developed in Figure 8.6 (272), again highlighting the strength of the figures and the weakness of the main text. There is no further mention of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* in this section (and it is only mentioned once again in the entire book). Only the first two sentences in the above quotation (and, indeed, in the entire book) outline how characters and their goals are introduced into films. The two brief examples in the middle of the quotation are then meant to carry the weight of the discussion. However, how does the mentioning of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* enrich the discussion of characters, their goals and way they are introduced into a film, other than providing another instance of these narrative principles? These final two sentences are too vague and insubstantial to enrich the understanding of the novice reader. They simply provide superficial information.

In conclusion, this paragraph, and many more throughout the book, does not attempt to mediate between the novice student's common sense, everyday understanding of film and the expert's specialised knowledge. This specialised knowledge has been (deliberately?) kept to a minimum so as not to alienate the novice reader. Yet, the aim of textbooks, as I have already mentioned, is to lead readers gradually from their common sense understanding to the expert's specialised knowledge. This is a very difficult task, for it involves revealing to readers methods and procedures, explaining how the information is generated and why it is significant. Like many textbook writers, Phillips does not rise to this difficult challenge. Rather than gradually introduce readers to the expert's knowledge and understanding, he simply presents them with information.

## References

Buckland, Warren (2001), 'Promoting Deep Learning Through the Use of Effective Textbooks', *Cinema Journal*, 41, 1, 121-7.

Calfee, Robert C. and Marilyn J. Chambliss (1998), *Textbooks for Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chambliss, Marilyn J. and Robert C. Calfee (1989), 'Designing Science Textbooks to Enhance Student Understanding,' *Educational Psychologist*, 24: 307-22.

Phillips, William H. (1999), *Film: An Introduction*, First Edition. Bedford/St Martin's.

\_\_\_\_\_, (2002), *Film: An Introduction*, Second Edition. Bedford/St Martin's.

Whitehead, A.N. (1929), *The Aims of Education*. New York: MacMillan.

# Global Hollywood

By Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, and Richard Maxwell (eds.)  
London: BFI, 2001. ISBN 0-85170-845-5. \$27.95(pbk)

## A review by Daniel Chamberlain, University of Southern California, USA

*Global Hollywood* is concerned with understanding the film industry in the age of globalization. It rejects an uncritical celebration of Hollywood as a purveyor of universal stories, and dismisses a neo-conservative belief in the primacy of markets, advancing instead a model grounded in cultural studies and critical political economy, which suggests Hollywood's dominance can be best explained by its division of labor. In elaborating their argument, the authors synthesize a tremendous amount of existing research, and support their case with a broad array of facts and figures. In addition to offering a holistic view of the Hollywood economy, *Global Hollywood* provides detailed arguments concerning international co-production, the state of Intellectual Protection law, the industry's reliance on marketing, and the role of audiences. The authors conclude with a series of radical cultural policy prescriptions that would have the effect of de-concentrating the power held by Hollywood film distributors in favor of an open system that takes a more generous account of the work of audiences and below-the-line cultural workers. While these policy prescriptions will be of particular interest to those critical of the corporate nature of Hollywood's power, *Global Hollywood's* detailed examination of the factors at work in the construction of Hollywood's worldwide supremacy are valuable to anyone interested in globalization or the film industry.

The book is most effective when it shatters myths about the manner in which Hollywood has achieved its success. The authors are convincing in their attack on the concept of Hollywood as a *laissez-faire* industry, detailing how the industry is supported on a local, state, and national level. After presenting examples of government subsidies and interventions at work, the authors argue that the United States government's creation, regulation, and enforcement of intellectual property provisions provide the most significant support for the industry. This timely topic is incisively analyzed through a discussion of the establishment and evolution of intellectual property rights, including globalization-era developments such as international piracy and the shift in focus from copyright to trademark law. The authors extend their argument to critique the structure of the intellectual property system as one that 'permits access to cultural knowledge only via an elaborate system of generating scarcity by *renting* consumers access.' While they see opportunities for improvement as the laws are modified to deal with digital issues, the authors ultimately push for an overhaul of the entire system. This argument is on the right track, as intellectual property law should certainly move away from its current focus on simply granting and protecting corporate rights, but their solution, a 'reorganization of property rights towards labor rights,' would seem to create too great a gulf between practice and potential. Nevertheless, the book raises these issues in a meaningful way, and suggests an interesting path that corresponds to the alternative models of citizenship and consumption advanced by George Yúdice and Nestor García-Canclini.

Another of *Global Hollywood's* powerful contributions is its understanding of the film industry as part of a 'New International Division of Cultural Labour' (NICL). Within this framework the authors explain the globalization of Hollywood in terms of its capital flows, investment structure, and production locations. This model also counters the cultural-imperialist belief that Hollywood is dominant because of a superior understanding of the filmmaking process, suggesting instead that: 'historical patterns of ownership and control over distribution have largely determined the scales of production.' Furthermore, the NICL is a useful analytical approach because it accounts for the fact that 'Hollywood' does not prescribe the geographic extent of the business; many of the studios are and have been owned by foreign companies, much Hollywood film production occurs overseas (for financial reasons ever more than aesthetic ones), and non-US directors and stars have long been co-opted into Hollywood productions. Armed with this framework, the authors express particular concern for the treatment of the global labor pool and national/regional responses to Hollywood's authority.

In separate chapters, *Global Hollywood* also examines Hollywood marketing and the trend toward increased audience surveillance. Just as the intellectual property and NICL sections raise concerns about how Hollywood interacts with government, these chapters address Hollywood's treatment of consumers. Again, the authors are critical of these interactions, noting particularly the invasive measures Hollywood uses to track consumer desire.

Overall, *Global Hollywood* is a compelling exploration of Hollywood's global business practices. The six chapters are interesting as individual studies, as each is a compelling account of an important aspect of the industry. Moreover, the authors have succeeded in connecting these individual critiques into a broader explanation of Hollywood's path to dominance, as they demonstrate how the cultural-imperialist and free-market explanations are insufficient explanations of Hollywood's rule. In the end, while the book's prescriptions seem too radical to have a serious chance at adoption, they are promising in their engagement with progressive conceptions of labor and property rights.

# Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy

By Peter Stanfield

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. ISBN 0-252-07049-6. 19 illustrations, ix +180 pp. \$37.50 (hbk) \$16.95 (pbk)

## A review by Sean Griffin, Southern Methodist University, USA

As the title indicates, the main focus of Peter Stanfield's analysis is the under-examined area of the 'singing cowboy' stars (and their films). As Stanfield notes in his introduction, the multitude of histories of the western genre tend to shunt the 'singing cowboy' to the sidelines with a few perfunctory sentences (usually of contempt for both the films and their audience), before moving on to the 'important' westerns of the late 1930s (such as *Stagecoach*, *Union Pacific* and *Destry Rides Again* [all 1939]). He goes on to dispel the usual description of 'singing cowboy' fans as 'kiddie matinee' audiences, with evidence that many adults (both men *and* women) enjoyed these films. Further, he theorizes that middle-class critics dismissed these largely working or rural-class adults by regarding them as infantile.

Stanfield then examines the diverse ways in which audiences enjoyed these films, focusing mainly on Gene Autry's pictures, but extending out to the work of Tex Ritter, Dick Foran, Fred Scott, and the early Roy Rogers. Stanfield points out how these films' consistent blending of traditional and modern elements (such as the hero on horseback chasing the villains in cars) spoke to rural audiences (dealing with the encroachment of modern industry into their lives) more directly than most other Hollywood films of the period. He also analyzes how Depression-era working-class audiences could engage with the recurrent narrative tropes of the singing cowboy being mistaken for an outlaw, while the antagonist hides as a respected banker or local official. The 'disguise motif' extends to issues of gender as well -- as singing cowboys, their comic relief buddies and the lead female actresses often hegemonically negotiate shifting roles for men and women (and Stanfield points out how many women were involved behind the camera for these films). Comic performers such as Smiley Burnett often cross-dress, the women often take on traditionally masculine duties (as farm owners or sheriffs, for example), and the singing cowboy balances traditionally masculine attributes (strength and gun dexterity) with traditionally feminine (decorative outfits and, of course, singing). Stanfield also describes how the music of the singing cowboy disguises musical traditions taken from predominantly southern rural and African-American cultures as white and Western, making them part of the national character, rather than a minority or regional identity.

While this is enough in itself to mark a significant and original contribution to Western studies, Stanfield takes an even more daring gambit by arguing for a full-scale reevaluation of the entire Western genre. Unlike the hallowed coterie of 'classic westerns,' singing cowboy films exemplify another extensive list of westerns that display the influence of women, the lower classes and African Americans in a more complicated and potentially carnivalesque

manner. Consequently, the first three chapters of Stanfield's book do not deal with singing cowboy films at all. Rather, he practically proposes an alternate history of the genre -- examining the development of the genre in painting, stage entertainment and literature, then the development of the genre in silent film, and then the development of western music in the recording industry. In all instances, he draws parallels between the 'accepted classics' and the enormous popularity of 'lowbrow' items (comparing Owen Wister's *The Virginian* to the novels of Bertha Muzzy Bower, William S. Hart to Tom Mix, and John A. Lomax's publication of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* to Gene Autry's recording career). While some readers may be anxious to get to the main topic of the book, positioning the singing cowboy films as one part of the larger realm of the genre (rather than a problematic aberration, as they are usually viewed) makes Stanfield's work even more important.

Largely (and admirably) succeeding in his goals, there are nonetheless some areas of discussion left unaddressed. Stanfield's invocation of the carnivalesque would have been richer if he had spent some space situating these films within the *musical*, for example. Studies of the film musical have *also* tended to avoid the singing cowboy, possibly indicating a similar genre dynamic occurring that is ripe for analysis. Secondly, as the title indicates, the book ends its discussion as the 1940s begin. Yet, the singing cowboy did not fade away in 1939: Stanfield points out that by 1940 Gene Autry was America's fourth top box-office draw. Roy Rogers did not surpass Autry in popularity until the 1940s. Consequently, the book feels as if it ends too soon. One can only hope that Stanfield is preparing future volumes on the 1940s and 1950s, perhaps creating his own 'Ring Cycle' of *Horse Opera* tomes. If so, and if they maintain the same standards as this volume, they should be outstanding reads.

# Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema

By David Foster

University of Texas Press, 2002. ISBN 0-2927-2542-6. 216pp. \$21.95 (pbk)

## A review by Karen Anijar and Nicole Teyechea, Arizona State University, USA

Mexico City is a teeming, geometrically expanding megalopolis. The location of the 'greatest urban growth in the world' (158) is the text and context for David Foster's extraordinarily ambitious book *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema*. Exploring the complex interactions between cinema and geography, Foster sees space as a subjective presence 'invested with human meaning,' (160), meaning is engendered in interaction and inter-animation, 'with the space in which' (160) human interactions transpire. Mexico City, Foster argues, is constitutive in and of the national social imaginary of the Mexican nation. Indeed, the enormous consciousness surrounding *El Distrito Federal* moves 'beyond being only the sort of center of national life a capital customarily is: the city is a presence that is as significant as any character in the films he examines. However, 'none of the films' (159) he interrogates in this volume 'makes the city the protagonist in the sense of pursuing a social anthropological point of view about the city as it is lived through individual and personal narratives' (159). In other words, Mexico City is far more than just a 'backdrop for human events' (xiii) -- it is a significant dimension of any interpretive or narrative project/product discussed in the volume.

Foster's examination surrounding the role the city plays in cinematic narratives seeks to capture 'selective realities' (160), realities going 'beyond the unspoken assumption that the city is merely *there* and that [. . .] it is merely there because it has to take place somewhere' (159). This role 'may be correlative, it may be contrapuntal, it may be ironic, or it may be synergetic. It may not even be immediately present'. (159) Nevertheless, the city remains a 'locus for human lives and involve interaction with the dimensions, parameters, and convolutions of the city in whatever literal and metaphoric ways such terms may be understood' (ix).

Foster negotiates a difficult terrain between macro- and micro-analyses, between aesthetics, politics, gender, class, race and ethnicity, mapping unexplored epistemic territory while raising complicated questions concerning relationships between society, geography, cultural production processes and national identity, seen through the lens of film. *Mexico City in the Contemporary Mexican Cinema* transcends traditional paradigmatic structures and parameters, going beyond dualistic notions of production-reception. Meticulous in detail, ambitious in scope and breadth, the implications embedded in the books' 160 pages are enormous.

Identity in Community and Nationhood

Mexico negotiates a peculiar dialectic between essentialism and postmodernism, revolutionary zeal and post-positivist universality, past, present and the future. These tensions are present in the juxtapositions that comprise the text, and the context that describes the prosaic experience in the District. This is a contrast of massive skyscrapers standing alongside colonial buildings, set against pre-Colombian monuments, while hordes of cars, buses and people walk the streets rushing somewhere. The Mexican subway system, a sleek modernist machine, contrasts against subway station stop signs written in pictograms, for a population who may not be able to read the words in Spanish. There is also Chapultepec Park (an area larger than Central Park in New York City), which houses a zoo, a castle, and a variety of museums. Chapultepec Park has been present as a central green space since the days of Aztec nobility. All of these human artifacts (and artifice) betray the ephemeral nature of geologic and geographic space in which everything instantaneously could be destroyed (by an earthquake).

Grappling with the complexity of a nation, whose largest city is much like an enigma in a conundrum, Mexico is a nation that reifies that static notion of a mythical once-upon-a-time homogeneity 'whose center is the legendary Museo de Anthropologia [...] predicated on the assumption of a glorious shared identity' (13). This is a shared identity the city both betrays and celebrates, an identity constituted upon 'celebrations of largely symbolic indigenous culture, [which] excludes many Mexicans including indigenous peoples who are considered not fully Mexican' (13). The tension engendered by the idea that 'all inhabitants of Mexico were welcome to subscribe to the national identity, but only those who could adequately fulfill its requisites could be Mexican' (13-14) comprises some of the most compelling discussion in the book, what Foster aptly terms 'hard core identity ideology [. . .] excluded from the banquet of full national identity: women, ethnic minorities, lesbians and gays and other disenfranchised groups that perhaps still remain to be fully identified and represented by Mexico's cultural production' (14).

In the chapter entitled 'Politics of the City,' Foster engages the reader in an in-depth argument, contrasting essentialist hard core identity politics ['the modernist synthesis of the culture of the state following the Revolution of 1910' (1)] with the existence of subaltern groups. Of particular interest is Foster's sensitive discussion surrounding the Jewish community in Mexico City as portrayed in Guita Schyfter's film *Novia que te vea* (1993). Although Jews have been a presence in Latin America since the arrival of the Spaniards (a.k.a. crypto-Jews), being Jewish in Mexico (according to Schyfter, as interpreted through Foster) represents a unique dilemma. Foster intones: 'While Mexico City is hardly New York or Buenos Aires Jews have at least since the middle of the twentieth century, enjoyed considerable visibility, prosperity and accommodation in Mexican society [. . .] Schyfter's film [. . .] dramatically promotes the image of the closet' (17). Although the closet is traditionally a metaphor for gays and lesbians designating 'the private life of queers whose sexual preferences transgress what is allowed by patriarchal heteronormativity [. . .] contemporary theoretical writing on the concept of the closet underscores how similar strategies of concealment [. . .] just as powerfully for other subaltern identities (18). Foster's closet metaphor combines and blends with another juxtaposition that of the demarcation between the public and private in Mexican society. The threshold (between public and private) where Mexican Jews adopted a 'canonical Mexicanness in order to be accepted in daily life and enjoy the financial and political benefits of being taken fully as Mexican has meant that the door [. . .] demarcates very carefully the inside realm of Jewishness and the outside realm of Mexicanness' (17). Foster highlights the use of Ladino in the film (Ladino is an anachronistic version of Spanish): 'Schyfter's film [. . .] reaches back to the beginnings of

a modern Jewish presence in Mexico (as opposed to the slight Sephardic presence that can be traced back to the time of the Spanish conquest)' (17). The use of Ladino -- as opposed to the Yiddish spoken in the private experiences of most European Jews, who comprise the majority of the Jewish population in Mexico City -- serves to re-emphasize the insider/outside and outsider/inside metaphor therefore making Ladino 'a synecdoche of difference [. . .] [since] Ladino is not really a foreign language' (23-24). Yet in Mexico, where issues of assimilation go way beyond particular ethnic identities, the interplay of public/private and insider/outsider remain significant undercurrents, metaphors seen throughout the text.

### *Rojo Amanecer (Red Dawn)*

Another noteworthy discussion concerning the public/private metaphor focuses on the student protests of Tlatelolco, the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* (where the colonial, the Aztec and the modern meet) on October 2, 1968, an event which, according to Foster, represented the 'loss of innocence for Mexico' (4). This is seen through the film *Rojo Amanecer*. The film is shot almost entirely in an apartment, and, as Foster argues, 'could not have been made in any other way' (7). The apartment is representative of the life of the lower middle class in Mexico City, and is juxtaposed against a massacre of epic proportions (Foster compares it to a Greek Tragedy). The movie, although in itself a series of clichés, demonstrates urban life invading into, and penetrating, the private (domestic) realm. Foster describes the family in the film -- the grandfather is a 'retired military officer', the father a 'government employee', and the mother 'guardian of the prototypic Mexican household over which she presides' (17). The family discover too late the ways in which the PRI government 'drifted toward the same sort of police tactics Mexico officially deplored' (17), and the film details 'the way in which the family contemplates with horrified astonishment the collapse of the illusions of social and political security of the Mexico within whose revolutionary myth they have been raised' (7).

Foster's discussion surrounding Jorge Fon's cinematic technique heightens the sense of horror at the events that took place -- events for which the government still does not claim responsibility. The setting in Tlateloco where

the openness and the oxygen provided by its greenery [. . .] becomes a dead end, in which the army [. . .] deploying sharpshooters from the roof and the helicopters overhead, is able to pick off the protestors, like shooting fish in a barrel. And, if the protestors are cornered in the plaza, the families are cornered in their apartments, underscoring the way in which there is no chance of escaping the power of the State or countering its decision to exercise violence (9).

The geometric progression spatially throughout the film 'from street to plaza, to building to apartment to room' (9) culminates in the invasion of the private sphere where the domestic realm is blotted out 'in a bloodbath' (13).

### The Selection of Films

*Todo de poder ...* opens with a deliberately artificial view of the monstrosity of Mexico City's urban sprawl. The camera careens just off the ground, in what is meant to be an eagle-eye view of the city. The camera's flight is dramatically accelerated, as if to underscore the territory it must traverse, because of the immensity of the city (I chose to make reference to the view of an eagle here because the eagle as a founding symbol of the Aztec Tenochtitlan,

the pre-Colombian kernel of what today is Mexico City). As the camera reaches a high-rise office building into which it seems like it is about to crash, its flight decelerates into a more conventional pace, only then zooming in on the reporter interviewing urban assault victims. There are several other moments in the film when similar panoramic shots make use of alterations in a non-fore grounded pace. For example, the dense and complex movement of the city's traffic along the central arteries that crisscross the downtown area 'is portrayed through speeded up images that underscore how the movement constitutes an urban raging river' (79).

Throughout the text each slice of life represented through Foster's choice of films adds to the tapestry he weaves about "The City". In many ways, the book reads like a love poem (the prose is both beautiful and highly accessible) to a city whose vastness and complexity often seems impossible to grasp, yet the beauty of Foster's language does not diminish the academic importance of this volume. *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* not only represents a seminal work about Mexican Film, but a hallmark study for anyone engaged in any form of Film Studies. Given Foster's insightful cultural analysis, *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema* ought to be read by anyone interested in Latin American Studies, Cultural Studies, and Multicultural Studies. We concur with the words of Cynthia Steele (of the University of Washington): 'this book is superb and unprecedented' (from the back cover), and we have never read anything quite like it.

# Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era

By Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines and Charles Musser (eds.)

Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-2533-3994-4. 384pp. \$44.95 (hbk)

## A review by Celeste-Marie Bernier, University of Nottingham, UK

"Does a black actor do what pleases him or does he play 'the coon' and please his audience?" (22) *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* is an impressive volume edited by Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines and Charles Musser, extravagantly illustrated by rare stills. This work is notable for its comprehensive scholarship, which represents not only innovative research, but also a breathtaking commitment to the recovery of race films during the silent era. This collection of essays analyses the films of Oscar Micheaux and his contemporaries in the light of a range of themes relevant to early black cinema, which include: the politics of representation, early experimentation with and formulations of black aesthetics in film, the relationship between black directors and their audiences vis-à-vis popular stereotypes (such as those promulgated by D. W. Griffith in *The Birth of a Nation* [1915]), the competing debates surrounding censorship, the influence upon the reception of films in the black community by reviews printed in the black press, and finally, the changing nature of race content for individual oeuvres throughout the period. This book deepens its focus by examining Oscar Micheaux's films and novels in terms of his desire to view the "colored heart from close range" (45). These articles explore Micheaux's constructions of national identity and black masculinity in relation to his use of race melodrama, as well as his intellectual borrowings from earlier black writers such as Charles W. Chesnutt. The editors and contributors discuss Micheaux's historical context by assessing his engagement with the then popular and prevailing cultural assumptions concerning race, gender and sexuality. This material is set against a consideration of the varying strategies employed by his rivals and contemporaries the Norman Company, the Colored Players Film Corporation and the Maurice Film Company. This volume was designed as a catalogue to accompany a larger package of material with the same title which includes 'all of the surviving feature-length race films from the silent period as well as a selection of related shorts' (xvii). The definition of race cinema given in parenthesis at the start of *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* reads: 'films made for black audiences in the United States.' For this reviewer such a definition needs to be examined in much more substantive terms in order to preface with any accuracy the use of the term by the various essayists in this volume. This need is felt even more strongly in the light of statements such as those by Bowser et al that many of the films were 'not strictly race films, for they were meant to appeal to white and black audiences' (xx). Does the possibility of cross-racial appeal in these films, for these writers, automatically guarantee that their potential for radical politics and aesthetic complexity is ultimately withheld?

Clyde Taylor's essay combines an oversimplified treatment of 'unequal development' (3), concerning the ways in which black cinema has been marginalised in the movie-making business, with an interrogation of the relationship between censorship laws and miscegenation. Sister Francesca Thompson's thought-provoking discussion of the Lafayette Players refutes critical opinions that maintain that there were no good black actors until the WPA Federal Theatre Project. She discusses how early black theatrical groups proved to black and white audiences that black actors could be more than singers and dancers. They were therefore influential in combining educational issues with entertainment, as they inculcated race pride, social uplift and taught the significance of autobiography to performance. Charlene Register identifies the 'dual role' (34) played by the black press in denouncing negative portraits of African Americans on screen while encouraging their heightened participation in the industry. An essay by Michele Wallace considers Micheaux's interrogation of available black stereotypes, and Jane Gaines provides an account of his relationship to race melodrama for which she turns to nineteenth century forms. However, Gaines over-generalises the parameters of her discussion, particularly vis-à-vis her problematic understanding of the slave narrative as race melodrama. Charles Musser's essay compares Micheaux's film company with the Colored Players Film Corporation, to emphasise the extent to which his films were interracial in their inclusion of some white actors and cameramen.

These essays interrogate Micheaux's tendency towards didacticism; they also problematise the naïve assumptions of other film companies that it was possible to produce 'simple' films for black audiences which sought only to entertain. *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* succeeds in denouncing -- powerfully -- the charge that black films in the silent era were only 'imitations' of white motion pictures' (xxiv). The book's contributors establish that Micheaux's abilities as a director, as well as his importance as a black filmmaker within the black community, derive from his complex treatment of race. Both his recovery and his subsequent renown rest upon the challenge Micheaux offered to prevailing assumptions associated with the caricature and burlesque, which typified representations of African Americans between Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance. An enormous addition to existing scholarship in the field, this volume lends powerful weight to the words of a contemporary African American reviewer that the 'moving picture, the Negro can offset so many insults to the race [and] can tell their side of the birth of this great nation' (36).

# Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis

By Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland

London: Arnold, 2002. ISBN 0-340-76206-3. x +309 pp. £16.99

## A review by Eugenie Brinkema, State University of New York at Buffalo, USA

The best film theory class I took as an undergraduate had a simple, but ingenious design: we studied various theoretical camps for two thirds of the semester, and spent the final third applying them to just one film. It was of course a Hitchcock film (*North by Northwest*), and it was, of course, a brilliant strategy for pointing out the convergences and divergences of various schools. In methodology and analytic result, it can be very difficult to adequately explain where and how semiotic-linguistic and psychoanalytic readers come together and pull forever apart; but once you have seen the different scenes to which they pay particular attention, and the different readings they pull out of a constant text, the lesson is more than adequately taught. Cognitivists have made reference to 'SLAB theory' (Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes) so often that new generations of film students may not understand the radical and important differences those authors maintained. Indeed, the de-monolithicizing of post-structuralist or psychoanalytic theory is one of the most important challenges certain theorists of my persuasion can do these days.

Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland adopt a similar and equally useful strategy in their new classroom manual *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis*. Though the title is strictly correct, it is an unfortunate choice -- the text has almost nothing to do with *American* film (other than the examples used for analysis) and everything to do with historical and contemporary film analysis. The subtitle speaks true, though: this is, in fact, a guide to movie analysis, a sort of how-to for the intellectual set, a lesson in what film theorists actually get paid (or not) to do all day. For this reason alone, it is invaluable to the advanced undergraduate or graduate student interested in how theory goes from its hermetic wrappings to the real-world application in practical analysis.

The unique structure of the text -- indeed, I have never seen anything quite like it, and it is one of its best selling points -- is stated as follows in the introduction: 'In each chapter we outline, in as clear and concise a manner as possible, the premises of a particular film theory, distil a method from it, and then analyse a particular film [. . .] we then analyse the same film again with a different method derived from another theory' (viii). The two theories used are related, for example, traditional psychoanalysis (find the mother, find Oedipus) with New Lacanian analysis (find the trauma, find the stain), thematic criticism with deconstructive analysis, and *mise-en-scène* criticism with statistical style analysis. The first theory in each chapter is more traditional or mainstream (e.g., classical Hollywood narrative, Bazinian realism, 1970's feminism), while the second is radical and very up-to-date (e.g., post-classical narrative, digital images, and Foucault/Deleuze, respectively). This structure is a refreshing change from the insistence on applying theory backwards (psychoanalysis on Chaucer, for

example) in that traditional film theory is shown to be well-equipped to analyze films like *The Matrix*.

Elsaesser and Buckland state at several points in the text that they are not prioritizing one set of methods, nor are they suggesting a bland, wishy-washy sameness. Their goal is a sort of academic complementarity, which utilizes a particular type of analysis for a particular type of film, producing a particular type of reading. Although they acknowledge that film theories have at their heart a set of values, at times the book fails to show this, and one wonders where the schools' similarities end. It would have been nice to have seen stated what non-negotiables exist for each camp, what one thing each will never give up for the sake of synthesis. For example, although cognitivism is well-represented here, its radically anti-psychoanalytic nature (indeed, the fact that the school itself is defined *against*, is purely reactionary) doesn't come across. And although one (like myself) might have preferred an angrier, more didactic insistence on the particular merits of some schools of analysis and the particular failings of others, the even-handed, generous tone of the book will give it wide appeal and make it particularly useful for students not familiar with the vocabulary or the vicious academic debates.

If this text's value lies in extraordinarily clear explanations of film theory, its beauty resides in its non-cinematic digressions, such as a reading of the five codes of Barthes' *S/Z* (Chapter Five), Greimas' semiotic square (Chapter Two), and one of the better descriptions of the New Lacanians (Copjec, Zizek) that I have ever seen (Chapter Eight). These little gems, only about five pages each, should be copied and given to students at various points in introductory theory (literature and film) classes -- they are invaluable, and far less dry than something like Robert Stam's indispensable *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*. The film choices are the least satisfying aspect of the text -- we are given the usual suspects like *Chinatown*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Lost Highway*. Elsaesser and Buckland are both good film readers, and though the great value of the book resides in its theoretical sections, the close analyses do not explicitly detract from the work. One wonders, though, why an international smattering wasn't chosen to give the book an even larger audience (other than the chapter on classical and post-classical Hollywood cinema, none of the other theoretical schools need to be applied to American films). And I fear that the choices will quickly date this excellent book -- while *Memento* and *Back to the Future* might make a go at a lasting cinematic presence, will *The Lost World*?

# Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: The Dialectics of a Filmmaker

By Paul A. Schroeder

New York and London: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-93664-0. xvi +208 pp., 6 b+w photos  
£60.00 (hbk)

Spanish National Cinema By Núria Triana-Toribio

## Spanish National Cinema

Núria Triana-Toribio

London and New York: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0-415-22060-2. 224 pp., 20 b+w photos  
£14.99 (pbk)

## A review by Mileta Roe, Simon's Rock College of Bard, USA

So profound has been the influence of one filmmaker in Cuba's history, that to think of Cuban cinema is to think first of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. But how does one make sense of a life's work that encompasses charged political and social change, aesthetic notoriety, and theoretical depth? Paul A. Schroeder's recent book admirably addresses all these features of Gutiérrez Alea's oeuvre. In so doing, the author has given us a much-needed volume that situates a discussion of Gutiérrez Alea's films and filmmaking within the extraordinary parameters that marked his career. In order to cast such a long view, Schroeder, by his own admission, strikes a path between cultural studies and cultural history so that his overall project creates a reading of revolutionary Cuba through Gutiérrez Alea and the perceived changes and complexities of his work.

Schroeder is charitable to those uninitiated in the history of Cuban film, and his introductory chapter provides a helpful background to Gutiérrez Alea and the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), as well as to the New Latin American Cinema. Here and throughout the book Schroeder distinguishes himself by including Gutiérrez Alea's familiarity and reactions to European cinema and Brechtian drama. The volume's subtitle, which promises an extended study, is also a nod to the filmmaker's theoretical writings, *The Viewer's Dialectic*, and, more subtly perhaps, to the political underpinnings of the Cuban Revolution.

Further chapters are organized in chronological groupings of films, which correspond to what Schroeder perceives as distinct aesthetic and personal moments for Gutiérrez Alea. His twelve feature films figure prominently and are examined in varying detail. The second chapter, which concerns *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968), is by far the longest and most impressive section. Beginning with the film's

complicated reception, Schroeder goes on to enumerate and describe all thirty-one sequences that form a collage of documentary and fictional episodes. The challenge to reassemble them in a meaningful way is then discussed via *The Viewer's Dialectic*. So thorough is Schroeder that he summarizes each essay in that book en route to convince us of the depth of interpretation required by the film. His honest, poised scholarship is justified, for Gutiérrez Alea himself uses *Memorias* as a case study in his theoretical spinning of the "relationship between show and spectator, that is, the viewer's dialectic" (51).

Other high points occur in sections on *La última cena* (*The Last Supper*, 1976) and *Fresa y Chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1993). In the former Schroeder takes on the dimensions of Marxism, a sugar-dependent economy, and the distortion of Christian ideals. In the latter he makes a careful discussion of homosexuality and machismo in a broad context to the film. Chapter Five, "Up to a Certain Point: Turning the Lens on Himself" (95) shows Schroeder at his most crisply analytical; it is an analytical gem, shedding light on this film whose two protagonists each personify "a pole of the dialectic between individual and society" (96).

For all its modest and judicious tone, *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: The Dialectics of a Filmmaker* is a must read, especially for those who are studying or teaching *Memorias*, *La última cena*, or *Fresa y Chocolate*. Adding to the text's credibility are liberal quotations from interviews with the filmmaker and his colleagues, reviews, scripts, and, of course, *The Viewer's Dialectic*.

Núria Triana-Toribio's *Spanish National Cinema*, a new volume in the National Cinema Series edited by Susan Hayward, provides a new, ambitious look at the unique history of Spain's cinematic production. Whereas Schroeder's book suggests the multiple interpretations or realities possible in Gutiérrez Alea's Cuban films, Triana-Toribio's project revolves around the multiple interpretations of a so-called national character as it is projected for or by cinema.

Her mission is 'to examine not only the inscription of Spanish identity in cinema, but also its inscription in the broad discursive apparatus that surrounds and supports cinema' (8). She rightly insists that 'the demands for a national cinema' (8), whether official or popular, are part of the larger story. This inclusive approach to understanding national cinema positions Triana-Toribio's study in contrast to Marsha Kinder's *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (1993), which understands national identity through 'Spanish films that have found success, or at least selected audiences, outside Spain' (10). Triana-Toribio is clear that a discussion of Spanish national cinema needs to include popular films that were not exported (She does limit her study, however, to Spanish-language films, and does not attempt to take on the identity politics of Basque or Catalan productions, for example).

Organized chronologically, *Spanish National Cinema* charts the changing perceptions of national character, national interests related to cinema, and national cinematic productions. That narrative, in and of itself, is remarkable. *Costumbrismo* (a kind of folklorism), literary adaptations, historic melodrama, an uneasy 'plurality' (147), and 'appropriate realism' (159) all play a role on the big screen.

Most interesting to Anglophone readers may be the discussion of extra-film elements, particularly those occurring during the tumultuous 1960s -- the opinions expressed in popular film magazines such as *Primer Plano*, the complicated relationship of Viejo Cine Español (VCE) to Nuevo Cine Español (NCE), and the iconic status of teenage phenom Marisol. This

is one of the strongest sections in the book, beginning with the attempt to create a new, art cinema (NCE) to supplant the older, popular, nation-building narratives (VCE). But, as Triana-Toribio adroitly points out, in many respects the older comedies, which continued to be made, were the "box-office successes of the 1960s" (77) and effectively projected emerging aspects of modern life. Marisol, a musical star and darling of the Spanish public, represented older values and a newer Spanishness at the same time: a "blue-eyed blonde (dyed platinum in her first three films) who, nevertheless, sang and danced flamenco" (87). Censorship, the author tells us in her carefully woven argument, was implicated in both the NCE and the VCE. Its effect may have been strangest in the early 1970s just before it waned entirely. Triana-Toribio brilliantly exposes the compromises of two popular films, *No desearás al vecino del quinto* (*Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Fifth Floor Neighbour*, 1970) and *Experiencia prematrimonial* (*Pre-marital Experience*, 1972), as they straddle the need for continuity and adaptation.

Although *Spanish National Cinema* is not, admittedly, a "history" (9), it provides a balanced survey of moments and movements for which the concept of a national cinema was relevant. The text is moderated or informed by the observations of other prominent writers and critics, including Camporesi, Caparrós Lera, D'Lugo, Hopewell, and Kinder, so that one need not have read them all to get a sense of a bigger picture and the dialogue they create.

In the end much of Triana-Toribio's critical contribution consists of making subtle analyses of the tensions between the prescription for a national cinema by various entities and the description of national identity through selected film narratives, characters, stars, and genres. It is an important study for its bold exploration of many popular films which may not have received the full support or stamp of national agencies, but which captured recognizable situations or characters in the public's imagination.

Predictably, perhaps, it is hard to get a fix on the prescriptive element of cinematic production in more recent years. No one seems to agree on what the industry should be striving for -- the perennial social realism, or a gutsy pluralism, or art films more identifiably European? Triana-Toribio concludes by exploring some box-office successes from the 1990s and beyond that suggest the inevitability of transnational projects, productions that defy (at the beginning of a new century) the hold of any singular, national effort or character.

# Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers

By Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8166-4005-X. 319pp. \$19.95 (pbk)

## A review by Ambrose Uchenunu, University of Nottingham, UK

Just as cinema arrived to major parts of Africa 'late', the discourses and criticism on the subject of African Cinema are just waking up to international awareness -- unfortunately at a time that the industry is at a crossroad. Very little is dedicated to African cinema in books covering international cinema histories. This genuinely stems from the fact that little is known of African cinema, not just on the world platform, but in Africa itself, and sadly, even in regions where most of these films were or are produced. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike's *Questioning African Cinema: Conversation with Filmmakers* not only sheds more light on the challenges encountered by Black African Filmmakers, but dives deep into their hearts, to reveal the pains of filmmaking, and how incapacitated film producers have been by political dictates and financial constraints. Though many opined that the cinema industry should be a responsibility of private enterprise, the non-committed policy of African governments towards a viable cinema industry is not left un-chastised. It is quite revealing in this book how the cinema industry in the continent of Africa is plagued to death by one predicament or the another.

Ukadike narrowed his interviews to just twenty movie producers from twelve African countries, out of over fifty-five nations in the continent. The book consists of three sections: "The Tradition: Pioneering, Invention and Intervention," "Vision and Trends" and "Boundaries and Trajectories." From the titles, these are presented as three distinct area of study. The first section describes the pioneering and struggling periods of filmmakers in Africa, but as one proceeds through the other sections, the pioneers' struggle is still evident through all the following chapters. Similar questions keep recurring to the twenty filmmakers interviewed. In some other cases, the filmmakers repeatedly slip into discussing their problems, especially as it hampers their expected performance in the industry.

Fespaco is an annual African film festival meant to showcase new movies produced for that year, held in Ouagadougou capital of Burkina-Faso, a former French colony. The festival's shortcomings are examined in Ukadike's interviews. None of the twenty filmmakers featured subscribe to the festival, which, according to them, has failed in its objectives of shouldering the responsibility of distributing accredited African films even within Africa, not to mention the rest of the world. Most award-winning films that are shown in the festival do not grace the screens of African movie houses after the festival's conclusion. The major bane is the origin of financing: since he that pays the piper dictates the tune, the executives of Fespaco are forced to dance to the tunes of the financiers, who are French, therefore making the Festival appear very French-like. Anglophone, or to be more precise, non-French speaking

Filmmakers, are therefore kept in the dark, as the official language used is French and no translation. This had generated increasingly bad feelings towards the festival.

*Questioning African Cinema* discusses the cost intensive nature of filmmaking on celluloid, and how this led to international co-production. In some cases, where producers search for funds especially from the west, the tone of their movie is often altered to suit the financiers' motif. These types of producers are not spared of criticism in this book.

The most challenging aspect of movie production in Africa (and Africa in the Diaspora) has been the problem of distribution and exhibition. The acute unavailability of funds is traced to the poor distribution and exhibition of films in Africa. Seemingly all aspects of production are heaped on the producer. This sends a dangerous message, indicating the lack of a well-organised film industry in the black continent. A producer's inability to 'hawk' his film to recoup enough profit or production costs stalls or delays further production of films by this individual. Even if he/she overcomes the problem of distribution, scant exhibition venues further frustrates his/her efforts. The attendant effect of this on the African film industry cannot be measured. While some argue that video has accelerated the death of the industry, others are still hopeful that the African film industry can be wakened from its relapsed state.

*Questioning African Cinema* takes the reader on an imaginary visual journey into some of the optically impressive and challenging stories by these filmmakers. However, critics in search of an African film 'language' will meet with great disappointment in this book. The filmmakers, as if in unison, are of the opinion that there is not one film language that, which is universal. They believe there is nothing like an African film language, when it is obvious that in countries like Nigeria there are over 250 languages, which invariably means a multiplicity of cultures. These cultures, of course, often take on meaning in the films' plots, depending on where a film's producer is from, or which ethnic tribe the story is drawn from.

Ukadike's *Questioning African Cinema: Conversation with Filmmakers*, is politically inciting, sometimes veering into Marxist ideologies. The French and Americans are heavily berated for their un-encouraging roles in African cinema. Racial comments are passed freely with no sense of trepidation. Yet this book is a role-call of the well-educated class of filmmakers in Africa, the majority of whom were educated in Europe and America. Their contact with the western world has untold influence on their cultural upbringing (and choice of film content and message), and this could very well account for why many complain rather furiously. Their films are no longer down to earth, but replete with allegories, symbols and metaphors. It will likely take the lay African audience's explanation to directors, or the service of a *dibenshi*, to best help understand how to approach multicultural issues in conversation, especially when there is racial prejudice. African filmmakers and producers unfortunately too often take the story directly in front of them, like the Americans did with Cheick Oumar Sissoko's film *Finzan* (1990) (189-195).

*Questioning African Cinema* is constituted of filmmakers' experiences and voices, but with no authorial comment at the end of any interview, and no index at the book's end. Yet, the book presents a startling window into past and current challenges of African cinema. It is a good resource for researchers into the problems of film production in Africa. With hope that celluloid may be revived in Africa, the book closes with contact details of African film distributors in the United States.