

African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor

By Robin R. Means-Coleman

New York and London: Garland, 1998. ISBN 0-8153-3125-8. xvii + 349 pp., 12 illustrations. £40.00 (hbk)

An American Family: A Televised Life By Jeffrey Ruoff

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By Jeffrey Ruoff

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8166-3561-7. xxv + 163 pp., 46 illustrations. £41.00 (pbk)

A review by Gordon Alley-Young, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA

Growing up in Canada, I unquestioningly accepted many of the images that I devoured from American television. In the 1980s especially, television mediated an America where black families, beginning with the Cosby's, faced no colour line and regularly occupied the upper middle classes. Other television families managed divorce, single parenting, infidelity, and (homo)sexuality with an ease and "can-do" optimism that assuaged skittish viewers that the American Dream was not dead but merely evolving. It is popular now to view 1980s television nostalgically, in the spirit of the VH1 cable channel's recent series *I Love the 80s*. Yet, as Stephanie Coontz writes of America's love affair with the 1950s TV family, nostalgia is a trap, one in which pleasing images mask a complex social reality. *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* by Robin R. Means-Coleman and *An American Family: A Televised Life* by Jeffrey Ruoff both seek to circumvent the nostalgia surrounding much of television history writing to ask how images like those I describe came to be. Means-Coleman probes black audiences' reception of black situation comedies by first situating these images within the traditions of "blackface" and "blackvoice" that helped create a set of enduring negative black archetypes. Ruoff examines the public television series *An American Family* in his book of the same title to show how it shaped the genre of observational cinema and changed Americans' expectations of families on TV and in real life.

Evoking the series' title, *An American Family* lures the reader to expect that Ruoff's book will revive the buzz that surrounded the debut of this television phenomenon that introduced America to the Loud family. Ruoff resists the urge to confuse his interpretation with the popular criticism of the series that he notes was largely unoriginal because critics merely rewrote the network's promotional materials for the series. Instead, part one of the book gives

readers a rare look behind the scenes of the series. Through extensive interviews with the film production team and family members, Ruoff shows how what may seem like minute details of filmmaking and production have shaped the format of this series, and the relationships between producer Craig Gilbert, his team, and the Loud family. For those less interested in the technical choices made in filmmaking, Ruoff's attention to detail in section one will seem painfully redundant for the points he is trying to make. Yet to his credit he also applies the same analytical sense in conveying the personalities, and subsequent personality clashes, within the production team.

Ruoff cannot stress enough the specificity of the socio-historical context that allowed for such a program to be made. At the time public television (then National Educational Television) made programming choices without the need for the unanimous approval of a board (there was no board) and with a secure source of funding from the government and its affiliates. These conditions allowed for individual decisions to be made to produce a program that set standards for future work in the observational genres and would change forever how American families were portrayed in fiction and non-fiction television. Ruoff asserts that public broadcasting today, with its reliance on corporate underwriting and use of boards to make programming decisions, could never hope to recapture the spirit or the innovation that the series established.

In the second part of the book, Ruoff situates the series *An American Family* within its contributing genres. The series represents elements of observational cinema and *cinema verité* while relying heavily on the soap opera format with multiple character identifications and a serial narrative. In chapter four of this section, Ruoff deconstructs the first episode to show how this amalgam of influences and formats came together in the editing room. Ruoff argues that the series' use of voice over, direct interview, music, and the camera-seeking antics of the Loud's gay son Lance violated, for that time, a strictly observational style of filmmaking. Ruoff rejects the series as purely observational or *verité* but shows how these genres taken together with the codes of popular television were setting the stage for what we know today as reality television.

The third and final section examines the reception of the series. Ruoff asserts that critics of the show were mostly parroting the network's publicity campaign and in turn their unoriginal criticism flavoured viewers' reception of the show. Instead of providing support for this position by interviewing actual viewers, Ruoff instead focuses exclusively on the same professional critics that he dismisses as unoriginal and downplays the criticism in favour of examining the rhetoric deployed below the surface level of critique. No surprise to readers is the fact that the series prompted the reality effect whereby viewers and critics talked about the series in a way that blurred its distinction from everyday life. Ruoff suggests that this reality effect also prompted sitcoms like *One Day at a Time* to provide fictional depictions of a family in flux and thus capitalize on the reality of *An American Family*. The Loud's desire for celebrity, Pat Loud's emerging feminist consciousness, and the lack of goals of the American family are other readings of the series that are also explored.

Means-Coleman, in her study of African-Americans' reception of black situation comedies, differs from Ruoff in her understanding of the effect of criticism and publicity on her subjects. She takes for granted that her subjects have been shaped by other media texts, specifically, the negative stereotypes of black television characters. For her, this does preclude their ability to think and talk about television in ways other than those that are preferred by the media. Giving black viewers a voice takes on extra significance in Means-

Coleman's research because she concludes that most television reception research is done on white audiences.

Means-Coleman lays out her book in two parts. Part one situates current black situation comedies within a tradition of hyper-racialised humour that begins on the vaudeville stage. Starting with minstrel shows, Means-Coleman shows how white actors in "blackface" performed happy, ignorant, and benign black characters to comfort whites audiences anxious of racial conflicts. With radio, "blackface" led to "blackvoice," with white actors still controlling black representation. By the time of television, when black actors were finally allowed to self-represent, the victory was moot because, as Means-Coleman explains, a stable of black archetypal characters created by whites restricted the roles that black actors were allowed to appear in. Means-Coleman details how the protests of stereotypical black situation comedies like *Amos 'n Andy* and *Beulah* by the NAACP resulted in the cancellation of such shows and the resulting virtual absence of blacks on television until the mid-1960s. Means-Coleman argues, with tongue in cheek, that any sitcom is a black sitcom because techniques that define the genre (i.e., end of program resolution, cliff-hangers) were innovations of the *Amos 'n Andy* radio program that were incorporated into television.

The second half of the book introduces the reception study. Thirty subjects were asked to respond to a list of black sitcoms airing on the major networks at the time of the study. *The Cosby Show* is significant enough to warrant exclusive treatment in chapter six. It is a show that is both praised for its positive portrayals of an educated, loving, culturally aware black family and problematised for its "pull up your bootstraps" philosophy that allowed conservative white viewers to dismiss the struggle of blacks. Means-Coleman chooses not to "hyper-interpret" her subjects' responses to instead allow their voices, and ethnic perspective, to dominate this section of the text. Her treatment of subject responses reflects her belief in the multiple possible readings of the sitcoms in question. She acknowledges that her standards of "positive", which allow for only a handful of positive sitcoms, differ from that of her subjects who often seize on a single event, character, or episode as positive in a series that taken as a whole can be problematic.

I have reservations with how Means-Coleman deploys her method when she allows subjects to address the comments of others. My concern is not one of anonymity, as she presents the transcripts anonymously. Rather, I take exception with what she believes this will accomplish. She argues that: "In some cases, one participant could 'walk in the shoes' of another, understanding where some beliefs are coming from" (177). The example that she provides is of a man, Gene, who takes the preferred readings of black sitcoms without questioning their politics. In response, two other male subjects insult him and call his blackness into question for taking this view. The exchange provides no deeper understanding of how her subjects read these texts. The author is seeking synergistic responses so I wonder if a focus group would yield better results with less insult. Finally, I respect her desire to let the voices speak for themselves, yet I am uncomfortable when she lets her subjects take homophobic or anti-Semitic stances without challenging them within the context of the interview or within her interpretation.

In essence, Ruoff's work is consistently detailed as he simultaneously avoids overemphasising the media chatter surrounding the Louds while resisting the urge to take readers on a wistful journey down memory lane. This makes for an absorbing look into the process and not the content of making *An American Family*. In some ways, Means-Coleman's work was more problematic for me but ultimately more rewarding. Means-Coleman is a

rigorous critic of popular media's dubious coding of race who will not be placated by the mere profusion of black faces on television for, as Thomas Jefferson once said, "Material abundance without character is the surest way to destruction" (Ruoff, 2002: 113).

References

Coontz, Stephanie (1992) *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.

Aristotle in Hollywood: The Anatomy of Successful Storytelling

By Ari Hiltunen

Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002. ISBN 1-84150-060-7. 6 diagrams, xix + 143 pp. £19.95 (pbk)

A review by Christopher S. Morrissey, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Aristotle in Hollywood begins with an attempt to understand what Aristotle means by the "proper pleasure" of tragic storytelling (chapters one-six). It then goes on to apply this understanding to explain successful Hollywood-style storytelling in movies, in best-selling novels, on TV, and in video games (chapters seven-ten). In the end, it discerns an anatomy, not a formula, that is common to all successful storytelling, and it warns that the economic future belongs to those who understand this anatomy (chapters eleven-twelve).

The book is interesting and eclectic. It is interesting because its inquiry is so wide-ranging. For example, it surveys story structure in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*; in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; in the movies *The Fugitive* (1993), *Ghost* (1990) and *Notorious* (1946); in John Grisham's novel *The Firm*, in TV's *ER*; and in the video game *Doom*. This eclectic approach is justified by the author's interpretation of what Aristotle in the *Poetics* means by "proper pleasure" ("oikeia hedone"). The author, Finnish TV executive Ari Hiltunen, interprets "proper" as describing the kind of "pleasure" generated by any deeply engaging narrative work that achieves a kind of widespread success. In Hiltunen's view, there are four dimensions to this pleasure: emotional, moral, intellectual, and symbolic.

Interpreting what Aristotle means by "fear", Hiltunen observes the need for an audience to empathetically identify with characters that are in distress. This is the affective dimension of the "proper pleasure". Interpreting what Aristotle means by "pity", Hiltunen notes that successful stories portray characters enduring undeserved suffering. This is the moral dimension. The intellectual dimension is related to Aristotle's descriptions of credibility and logic in plot structure. Plots portray an intellectual "puzzle" to be solved. This is more than an emotional or moral satisfaction in the catharsis of pity and fear, for it involves the resolution of intellectual mystery and the plot-logic of realistic surprises. The symbolic dimension is what relates the story to our own lives. Stories can help us solve life's problems, and we can see psychological value in "the hero's journey".

Hiltunen rightly observes that while the *Poetics* contains no theory of catharsis, it does contain an analysis of effective plot structure. His book does well when it seeks to understand the effective and non-formulaic plot structure prescribed by Aristotle, even when going beyond Greek tragedy to try and brainstorm what works well in the plot structures of other genres. But the book is seriously flawed by the way it brings Joseph Campbell's ideas about "the hero's journey" into the eclectic mix. This "snake oil" formula for successful stories gained currency in Hollywood thanks to *Star Wars* (1977) and George Lucas' championing of

Campbell, and it has been popularised by Christopher Vogler's manual for screenwriters. (Vogler writes a preface to and endorses Hiltunen's book.)

The idea that there is a "collective unconscious" out there that Hollywood can plug into in order to achieve box office success lends allure to any "magic formula" approach of screenwriting, for which Aristotle has sadly also been co-opted as an ancient guru. Hiltunen is correct to read Aristotle as not endorsing a formulaic account of plot structure, but he is guilty of overreach when he tries (in chapter eleven) to graft Vogler's Joseph Campbell plot structure, along with that of other Hollywood screenwriting gurus such as Syd Field, onto the structure prescribed by Aristotle. It's a bold experiment, but unfortunately the book presents no justification for this synthesis. It's merely an intuition that somehow all good storytelling must be related. The book's flaw lies in it not distinguishing Aristotle's methodological approach from that of these other gurus.

Hiltunen qualifies his investigation as a "personal interpretation" and issues the disclaimer that we can never know what Aristotle "really meant" in the *Poetics*. But he nonetheless chases after "the insight into the essence" of storytelling, which he sees Aristotle as first tapping into. It's a quixotic quest from the outset, because Hiltunen gambles everything on the arresting phrase from Aristotle: "proper pleasure".

The phrase only occurs three times in the *Poetics* (chapters thirteen, fourteen, and twenty-three), and Aristotle uses it to distinguish what properly belongs to tragedy rather than to comedy (1453a36), why plot structure is superior to special effects in tragedy (1453b11), and what epic poetry has in common with the proper elements of tragedy (1459a21). Clearly, Aristotle's uses of the phrase indicate that he is analysing what is special to tragedy. While something of these special elements may be found elsewhere (in Homer's epic poetry, for example), they attain their best and proper form in tragedy. To mix up Aristotle's groundbreaking analysis of the high cultural form of tragedy with the Campbell/Vogler analysis of the folktale motifs of popular culture, while an intriguing comparison, is nowhere methodologically and aesthetically justified in this book. The willy-nilly blend of high and popular culture only produces an unsatisfactory witches' brew.

For economically motivated storytellers, it is a heady and intoxicating draught. But the more academically inclined would be advised to discard the book's misunderstanding of "proper pleasure". Readers would be better off studying in more detail the work of two excellent Aristotle scholars, Elizabeth S. Belfiore and William W. Fortenbaugh, whom Hiltunen lists in his bibliography, but does not properly footnote when he cannibalises their texts for his treatment of Aristotle on emotion.

British Cinema and the Second World War

By Robert Murphy

London: Continuum, 2000. ISBN 0-8264-5139-X. 25 illustrations, vii + 340pp. \$34.95 (pbk), \$91.95 (hbk)

A review by Andrew Gaskiewicz, Mansfield University, USA

British cinema in World War II is a subject that has been thoroughly explored in a number of works, including Philip Taylor's *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), Clive Coultass' *Images for Battle: British Film and the Second World War, 1939-45* (University of Delaware Press, 1989), and Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richard's *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Blackwell, 1986). Robert Murphy's *British Cinema and the Second World War* thus treads well-covered ground, yet still succeeds in providing perhaps the most comprehensive overview of British cinema in the Second World War to date. Using a plethora of secondary and some primary sources, Murphy spends much of the first six chapters of his book delving into the various aspects of British cinema during the war, such as comedies, film as propaganda, resistance films, realism in film, and the role of women in wartime films. The final three chapters go beyond the subject of British filmmaking during the war and explore how post-war films looked at the war experience. Many of the chapters on cinema during the war lend themselves, due to Murphy's thematic approach, to analysis of the (dis)continuities between British wartime film and post-1945 cinema. In his chapter on resistance films, for example, Murphy devotes a section at the end on post-war films of resistance, particularly *Odette* (1950) and *Carve Her Name with Pride* (1958), two films that figure prominently in 1950s British war cinema, a topic covered in more depth in chapters seven and eight.

Murphy's core argument is that, over the course of World War Two, "British film production transformed itself from a slump-ridden industry which inspired little loyalty from audiences or critics into a popular and vital element of national culture" (5). The war itself provided the grist for the story-telling mill, but it was the emergence of a new British national film style that combined elements of continental European and Hollywood cinema as well as "the British theatrical style" (5) that best characterized this transformation. This national film style was "manifested . . . as a documentary influenced realism" (5), "a fusion of documentary and feature film techniques" (126). What was so important about this "fusion" was that documentary filmmakers, previously unaccepted in British feature film production circles before the war, were now accepted and able to inject "realist methods and a socially progressive outlook" into British feature filmmaking. However, this "fusion" also meant a blurring of the boundaries between documentary and feature film production. Documentary filmmakers now used feature film elements in their films and vice versa. Naturally, this "fusion" was greatly facilitated by the creation of the British Ministry of Information and its Crown Film Unit, which made documentaries and feature films for propaganda purposes. The new realism in British cinema showed up in most areas of filmmaking during the war, from comedies to resistance films to home front films about the English countryside. Yet, Murphy argues that this new realism in the British cinema began to fall

apart towards the end of the war, when more escapist fare was produced, some of which entirely avoided the war as a topic. After the war, the British cinema's reliance on realism completely "disintegrated" (5) and British war films moved in a number of different directions, from dark macabre films like *The Man Who Never Was* (1956) to formulaic films dealing with the RAF, the British navy, the ground war, or prisoner of war camps. For post-war audiences, such films were not "cathartic" (194-195), as Nicholas Pronay has argued, but instead their appeal was based on the "idea that it was British courage and enterprise that won the war" (195). Murphy argues that it was not until the end of the 1970s that British films began to "question received myths about the war" (239).

In addition to the realism in British cinema during the war, Murphy also delves into the issues of class and gender in British films. He describes a cinema with increasingly populist attributes, one that attacked the supposed corruption and hide-bound ways of the old pre-World War II order. The best example in this regard was the most popular British film during the war, *In Which We Serve* (1942), which depicted three representatives of different classes who, stranded together on a life raft, represented how "all sections of the nation were pulling together to win the war" (64). With regard to gender, Murphy describes how British women were portrayed, from femme fatales to the so-called "land girls". He even touches on the subject of British women's romances with American GI's, something that was never explicitly portrayed in British wartime cinema, which preferred to show how English women always returned to English men.

What sets *British Cinema and the Second World War* apart from other works on the same subject is its interpretive originality. Throughout the book, Murphy is careful to offset his interpretations from those of authors like Nicholas Pronay and Clive Coultass. Yet, this is not a book of truly original research. Despite an exhaustive filmography, most of the written sources consulted are secondary and, on a more minor note, the mixture of parenthetical citations and chapter endnotes only serves to confuse the reader. Murphy's arguments might also have been strengthened with the addition of a distinct conclusion. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, Robert Murphy's *British Cinema and the Second World War* is an original contribution to the study of British cinema on the Second World War.

British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit

By Samantha Lay

London: Wallflower Press, 2002. ISBN 1-903364-41-8. 7 illustrations, i + 134pp. \$18.50 (pbk)

A review by Ian Peddie, West Texas A&M University, USA

If social realism remains Britain's greatest cinematic export, then it stands opposed with much of mainstream American film. This observation is, of course, axiomatic, but it is an issue that moves uneasily behind Samantha Lay's study, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit Grit*. After all, market forces and the arthouse cinema that Lay argues serious British cinema produces seem inherently oppositional. I begin with such an economic observation because Lay spends a considerable amount of time on whether social realist film is less popular than mainstream film as a result of the former's relative dearth of financial backing. The question has added cultural importance if we pause to consider the author's concern over whether much of the class based social realism of British cinema is at risk of being assimilated into a realist hybrid, designed to accommodate American audiences. With this in mind Lay is right to express concerns over such exportable visions of a nation as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), all of which present a view of Britain that sits well with American audiences. But if assimilation really is the author's concern then one wonders about the merits of beginning and ending a book with quotations from Alan Parker, a filmmaker who surely represents the assimilationism about which Lay seems anxious?

Lay's work is designed as an introductory-level text for students. In that respect the book has much to commend it. As an overview, it provides a suitable synthesis of important issues such as the documentary tradition of the 1930s, the social dramas of the 1950s and 1960s, and the problems of representing masculinity in working class films of the 1990s. There are also a series of film "case studies," a number of which, notably *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *Nil By Mouth* (1997), provide insightful analysis. Similarly, the author's attempts to delineate the machinations of the notoriously slippery term "realism" are an honest attempt to define a genre that is at the heart of much of the best of British cinema. Whether that genre is changing emphasis from the public to the private is, as Lay is at pains to point out, an important point of debate. In this respect the author is encouragingly alert to the extent to which other hitherto applicable terms such as "British", "social", and "realism" are all subject to constant change. As Lay makes clear, post-devolution issues will only underscore the ambiguity inherent in what it means to be British or, more pointedly, what it means to represent any given experience under such terms.

For all that the book assumes a sense of tacit agreement around issues that remain highly problematic. For instance, in a discussion of realism's form and style, the author offers the following observation: "The poetic realism of the British New Wave films transformed the

scarred industrial landscapes of Northern England" (22). But from what to what? And how does this transformation work? What are its implications? In a similar vein, Lay describes Arthur Seaton, the principal character in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) as "an archetypal angry young man" (71). Yet one wonders if there is such an archetype. At times, there is a frustrating reluctance to take on the implications that such questions raise. Perhaps Lay's tendency to present arguments rather than engage with them is, in part, a reflection upon the book's intended audience. Nonetheless, while the student-oriented direction of the book mitigates against too much theoretical engagement, it seems at times as if the author is altogether too willing to avoid engaging in the kind of discussion that would have made for a better study.

Buster Keaton: The Man Who Wouldn't Lie Down

By Tom Dardis

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8166-4001-7. 80 illustrations, xii + 340 pp. \$18.95 (pbk)

A review by Cara McClintock-Walsh, Boston University, USA

Any biographer of Buster Keaton faces two immediate challenges to his or her enterprise. The first emerges from the words of Keaton himself: although his films invite interpretation, Keaton's accounts of his achievements are decidedly homespun, non-theoretic, and self-abnegating. One expects Keaton's accounts of his films to match the clear genius it took to make them, yet it becomes readily apparent that Keaton is barely aware of and mystified by the critical terminology others have used to depict, discuss, and dissect his work. One can hear this bewilderment when, in his autobiography, Keaton says, "my face has been called a sour puss, a dead pan, a frozen face, The Great Stone Face, and, believe it or not, 'a tragic mask.'" The second challenge emerges in the form of Rudi Blesh's exhaustive biography *Keaton* (Secker & Warburg, 1966). Blesh struck up an adoring friendship with Keaton, and the resulting work, though marred by its sentimentality, is remarkably thorough, particularly in its treatment of Keaton's vaudeville days. Tom Dardis, in his biography *Buster Keaton: The Man Who Wouldn't Lie Down*, takes Keaton's Great Stone Face and moulds it into the tragic mask that Keaton himself cannot fathom. In his effort to clear a new space for Keaton as a subject and for himself as a biographer, Dardis projects onto this mask of impassivity his own strident and overly insistent interpretation of childhood abuse and personal pain. To Dardis, Keaton's face is that "of someone who has undergone a terrible violation. It is a face that asks to be left alone."

Dardis cites two major shortcomings in Blesh's treatment that he aims to correct: Blesh's uncritical acceptance of Keaton's version of his own life and his tendency to downplay the more distressing aspects of Keaton's personal life; and the previous biography's incomplete treatment of Keaton's long fallow period "at MGM in the early 1930s". Dardis succeeds admirably in his latter aim, but fails in the first. His overeager reading of childhood abuse into every aspect of Keaton's life yields a reductive biography that diminishes the fullness and complexity of both the both the man and his art.

Dardis takes two facts from Keaton's vaudeville days and extrapolates them to suit his own needs: that The Three Keatons, the family vaudeville act, was extremely rough and that Joe Keaton, Buster's father, was a relentless publicity hound and an alcoholic. He claims, contrary to Keaton's own accounts of his life, that the roughhouse nature of the Keaton act physically, emotionally, and psychically scarred Keaton, and, in the absence of any hard evidence, Dardis instead seems to believe that a thudding repetition of this claim is enough to give it validity. On nearly every page of his discussion of Keaton's vaudeville days and early childhood, Dardis either casts aspersions on the character of Joe Keaton, ridicules Buster's

own assessment of the family's act, or, like the Gerry Society of the day, loudly cries abuse despite evidence to the contrary. Whereas Blesh believes too much, Dardis believes too little: Buster Keaton was "reportedly" named by Harry Houdini himself; "The Keatons were Irish, or at least Joe Keaton said they were"; Keaton "may have" lost the tip of his finger "in a clothes wringer." This second-guessing not only makes for turgid prose, it also calls into question matters irrelevant. Is there really any reason to doubt the Keatons' Irish heritage, when the name itself is identifiably Irish? Or to doubt that Joe Keaton picked up on a casual remark by Houdini (upon seeing the young Buster fall down a flight of steps without crying, Houdini remarked, "Well, he sure is a Buster!") and then gave his son the nickname? Houdini and his wife were close friends of the Keatons, and performed with them in medicine shows before either Keaton or Houdini had made a name for himself. Keaton certainly lost the tip of his finger *somehow* -- why cast dark shadows over the plausible reason that, as a curious child, he stuck it somewhere it should not have been? Dardis' sneering prose calls into question his credibility as a dispassionate biographer and severely tests the patience of the reader.

Next to demolishing the credibility of Joe Keaton, Dardis' main aim in his section on Keaton's early life is to portray him as a battered child. Again, Dardis opts for hyperbolic prose, and hence we find page after page cluttered with phrases such as "endless battering", "constant drinking", "constant wrangling" and "endless arguments". This shrillness only calls attention to the fact that Dardis has scant evidence to support these serious claims. Was the family act rough? Yes. Was Keaton's father an alcoholic? Most likely. But is there a way to take a fall in a roughhouse act so that one is not battered? Yes, and Keaton, as a student of the body and the godson of Harry Houdini, knew this, and learned it as a child. What we do know, finally, is that the skills Keaton learned in his vaudeville days allowed him to become the man who could do so much with his body in film. If you take away the nature of the Three Keatons' act, you take away the astounding physical capabilities that make Keaton a truly original figure in film history.

Dardis further ignores Keaton's own plainspoken openness about the difficult chapters of his life, and refuses to incorporate his explanation of why the family act broke up. Keaton's discussions of his own battles with alcoholism are disarmingly frank, and he was equally open about his father's alcoholism as the deciding factor that split up the family act. In his biography, Blesh gives Keaton's testimony several pages, whereas Dardis chooses to ignore this lengthy assessment. In Blesh's biography, Keaton draws a clear line between the artful physicality of their act at its best and the unacceptable violence of the act's last days: his father's late alcoholic antics *were* abusive, and hence he and his mother left the show. But Dardis wilfully blinds himself to this explanation and this distinction. In his effort to escape Blesh's long shadow, he builds a case that is, in the end, incomplete and irresponsible.

To reduce Dardis' book to its shortcomings would also be incomplete and irresponsible. Where Blesh casts no shadow, Dardis is free to cast one of his own, and he does just that in the later pages of the biography devoted to Keaton's days in sound films. Dardis performs a great and original service in his reconstruction of Keaton's career during its lowest points, and offers insightful and revelatory commentary about the types of projects Keaton longed to realise in the sound era versus the dispiriting roles in which he was confined. From the moment he begins discussing *The Cameraman* (1928), Keaton's last silent film and his first film for MGM, Dardis' prose becomes loose, lively, and insightful. He is sensitive to the surviving beautiful moments in otherwise forgettable films that bewilderingly paired Keaton with Jimmy Durante, and he is able to see these later films in relation to Keaton's early

masterpieces. This connection is a valuable one, and Dardis does a fine job of discussing the studio process -- so antithetical to Keaton's own -- under which these films were made.

Dardis challenges the assumption that the advent of sound killed Buster Keaton and shows instead that the very nature of Hollywood at the time killed Keaton and his art. He notes that, contrary to Keaton's practice of constructing freeform plotlines with his writers, "It took nearly nine months for the MGM story department to come up with an idea for Buster's first sound film." Dardis shows "how badly Keaton's talents were understood by his employers": they forced Keaton into the role of either the bumbling idiot or the pathetic clown, shot him in close-up rather than in long shots that would capture his physicality, and rather than "maintain ... basic gag techniques from [the] silent days and simply surround these gags with the necessary dialogue", placed the use of sound at a premium and let the technical innovations Keaton had helped pioneer slip away.

Further, Dardis places Keaton in a new context when discussing his work in the studio system of the time, a context that is as thought provoking as it is original. Certainly, Dardis compares Keaton's post-silent career to those of the other silent greats, but he also liberates Keaton from this pantheon and instead situates him in relation to other artists (such as Cecil B. DeMille) who struggled with the studio system. This comparison opens up new avenues for discussions of Keaton's work, and although Dardis is not writing about Keaton's strongest or most noteworthy work, he is making his own strongest and most noteworthy statements about Keaton's work here. Once Dardis releases himself from the pressure of adding anything new to Blesh's account of Keaton's early life, he provides ample new material in areas that Blesh does not make his focus. Dardis, remarkably, is able to look at Keaton's fallow period and note that, considering the system in which he worked, "it is amazing that he achieved what he did." This treatment is balanced, thorough, and innovative. Just as Keaton had glimmers of brilliance in his generally dismal sound days, Dardis here shows glimmers of what this book might have been.

What this book might have been is not a biography at all; Dardis might have been better served had he written a different kind of book altogether. He might have fashioned a book entirely devoted to Keaton's sound days and, based on the evidence of the second half of this biography, it would have been a fine and deeply informative one. But Dardis flirts with another context in which to place Keaton: as a professor of literature, Dardis frequently uses modernist authors as his frame of aesthetic and thematic reference. He peppers his biography with references to and quotations from Faulkner, Fitzgerald (both of whom wrote for Hollywood), Crane, Hemingway, Beckett (who worked with Keaton), and O'Neill. Although he leaves these parenthetical references unexplored, one wishes that Dardis had delved into this context fully. Had he discussed Keaton under the rubric of modernism, Dardis might have opened up yet another original context in which to consider Keaton and his art.

But what Dardis wrote was a biography, and as successful as the latter half of this biography is, his attempt to expose Keaton's personal life as overwhelmingly troubled and salacious nearly cripples the work as a whole. In his discussion of Keaton's post-silent career, Dardis notes the paradox that sound films robbed Keaton of his voice. In struggling to find a voice of his own in the world of Keaton biographies, Dardis ends up over-correcting Blesh's tendencies, and in the end does a disservice to the complexity of Keaton's history and films.

Contemporary British and Irish Film Directors

By Edited by Yoram Allon, Del Cullen and Hannah Patterson

London: Wallflower Press, 2001. ISBN 1-903364-21-3 (pbk), £17.99; 1-903364-22-1, + 384, £50.00 (hbk)

A review by Sarah Neely, University of Glasgow, Scotland

Wallflower's new critical guide provides an informed and useful resource for students and researchers of film and is evidence of British and Irish cinema's rich body of filmmakers. It perhaps comes as a surprise that a successful British filmmaker such as Mike Hodges, chosen to introduce this book, would opt to frame it as a sort of obituary to British cinema. Rather than embraced in whole-hearted celebration, the guide is seen as merely proof that a thriving industry *once* existed. Hodges' proclamation makes even more desolate reading when we recall the guide's contemporary focus and are forced to assume he relegates the contemporary successes detailed within its pages to an irretrievable past of British and Irish cinematic history. Still, Hodges identifies hope in the work of key filmmakers (Mike Leigh, Neil Jordan, and Lynne Ramsay, just to name a few), whom he praises for their ability to make thoughtful and original films in the current climate dominated by the homogenising influence of Hollywood.

Hodges' remarks aside, the guide's existence as one volume of four proves interesting. The project, whose first impressive volume focused on contemporary North American directors, aims to also include collections on European and World cinema in the future. The remarkable size of the first volume (almost double its British and Irish counterpart) might seem evidence of the burgeoning successes of the North American film industry when compared to the UK industry. More likely to be the case, this disparity reveals the complexities involved in applying the guide's approach to British and Irish cinema. While *Sight and Sound* editor Nick James, in the introduction to the North American guide, convincingly argues the director to be a key force in Hollywood -- a phenomena he explains serves as "a bastardised version of the European concept of the auteur director" -- the importance of the director over producers and writers in Britain and Ireland may not be as clear within the project's rigid framework. Instead, these other important figures are awkwardly confined to space allocated for their associated directors.

The project, like all projects of this design, is doubly complicated by its aims to essentially align directors not with filmmaking traditions but mere geographical locations. The complicated task of identifying a director with a national cinema is too often reduced to their place of birth or residence. This leads to the omission of several directors who helped define the various regions' film industries. The project's decision to abandon an original idea to lump British and Irish film with continental European is more than likely proof of the complexities of such groupings. The several entries from the North American volume repeated in the British and Irish one with little alteration is further evidence of the tenuous

nature of the superficial links forged. However, this is the challenge every study focusing on "National" cinemas must face.

The book's conception under the heading of 'British' cinema -- and arbitrarily linked to Ireland -- is also problematic. What is risked by this sort of framing -- as evidenced by Hodges' introduction -- is the unintentional omission of Ireland (or perhaps even Scotland or Wales) in favour of England. Any study adopting this approach must carefully balance its focus. In an effort to understand what is at stake in the term "British" cinema and offer a more diverse representation of the filmmaking climate, many other guides have favoured the term 'artist' or "filmmaker" over "director", or have chosen to focus on writers, producers, actors, and even particular movements.

Allon, Cullen, and Patterson's new guide may not set out to act as a comprehensive route map of British cinema. Yet, the thorough and engaging qualities of each entry, written by several academics, critics, and journalists, serve a rather different, but equally useful purpose. Considering the number of entries, the depth of analysis is impressive. For each director a brief biographical sketch, filmography, and an analysis of key films are provided. Even though other books might offer a more wide-ranging introductory guide to British and Irish cinema, Wallflower's latest offering and its detailed approach will no doubt prove an invaluable resource to anyone interested in British and Irish cinema.

Directed by Allen Smithee

By Edited by Jeremy Braddock and Stephen Hock

Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8166-3534-X. 34 illustrations, xviii + 316 pp. \$18.50 (pbk)

A review by Dan North, University of Exeter, UK

In the years since a selection of *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics first posited the *politique des auteurs*, this radical polemic has been smoothed into a quaint but largely redundant analytical pathway. The foregrounding of a film's director as the central creator of meaning, and aesthetic continuities across a number of films, was a convenient way to force an acceptance of film as an authored art -- as opposed to its perceived status as an industrial product, influenced principally by financial lust and the whims of the largest audience demographic. When film studies coat-tailed post-structuralism into a spectator-led conception of cinematic construction, the idea that a single artist could birth filmic visions unfettered by external or industrial influence, or that a unifying theory could single-handedly "explain" cinema suddenly seemed to have outlived its initial utility. This collection is addressed to the difficult task of re-invigorating the *auteur* debate via a decidedly high-concept motif: an appraisal of the work of Allen Smithee -- who doesn't exist.

It has become all too well known that Smithee was a pseudonym devised by the Director's Guild of America for when "creative differences" prompted the original director to demand that his name be removed from a film's credits, thus keeping his c.v. unscathed. Rather than release a film "unmanned" the DGA believed it was safer to allow a pseudonymous credit to disguise the director's disassociation from the work. Recently retired due to the public's over-familiarity with it, the Smithee name is all too frequently attached to straight-to-video thrillers, making an account of his worth all the more challenging. The scrappy nature of his virtual filmography is offset in this text by the cohesive efforts of a core of writers who form the Allen Smithee Group at the University of Pennsylvania. In selecting Smithee as an organising presence in their *auteur* studies, the writers gain access to a cache of backstage anecdotes: tales of studio interference and collisions between artistry and commerce can illustrate vividly the tensions between an *auteur's* singularity and the studio's pecuniary aspirations. Craig Saper revisits Tony Kaye's spectacular responses to his treatment on *American History X* (1998), where the Smithee title was wielded (though he was ultimately denied the use of it by the DGA) as an ostentatious sign of his disenfranchisement. Jessie Labov uses *Twilight Zone: the Movie* (1983), for which the second assistant director was granted the pseudonym to elide his involvement in a fatal accident on the set, to discuss how Smithee can be seen as a challenge to directorial eminence.

These anecdotal detours serve to underpin a multi-directional approach to "Smithee studies". Craig Saper and Tom Conley's contributions cite a type of neo-*auteurism* in the re-appropriation of *auteur* theory as a marketing strategy to brand texts as artistically worthy. This follows Andrew Sarris' acquisition of the debate in the 1960s for English-language consumption, hinging on a willful mistranslation of the *politique* as a grand theory, which canonised certain (mostly American) filmmakers. Contributing a foreword transcribed from

his address at the Smithee-centred 1997 "Specters of Legitimacy" conference, Sarris' influence is palpable. Donald E. Pease argues persuasively that Sarris, by selective interpretation, made the principles of *auteurism* applicable to the Hollywood industrial complex.

What emerges from all of this is an understanding of how *auteurism* has been diluted from an initial firebrand status to the point where an artificial *auteur* can be created to stand-in for the artist. The synecdochic use of the name to replace the director is explained in the Smithee group's shared interest in the Derridean theory of *signateurism*, whereby the phonetic construction of proper nouns takes on associational significance. This is most notable in Stephen Hock's trial run of a signateurist reading of Hitchcock/Smithee's *The Birds/The Birds II* (Hitchcock referring to the rhyming of "bitch" and the phallic hitching of his own "cock," for instance), which generates some tenuous but stimulating connections. Christian Keathley re-examines André Bazin's ideas about film as a medium capable of capturing reality almost by accident, to locate Smithee as the film industry's denial of this automatism.

Other writers unearth fascinating precedents to the Smithee phenomenon, which ensure that the debate is never too insular: Laura Parigi discusses the importance of Americanised pseudonyms in the sustenance of an Italian national cinema after the Second World War, and Jonathan P. Eburne compares Smithee's completion of film texts to Marcel Duchamp's use of aliases and found objects to complete his ready-mades.

As a collection, this is a thrilling addition to the aged field of *auteur* studies, throwing out fresh ideas from its "Man-Who-Wasn't-There" premise. Smithee's mystique has prompted a lucid discussion of *auteurism* that is historically grounded enough to be of value to new scholars, and eccentric enough to break new ground.

Experimental Cinema, The Film Reader

By Edited by Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster

London and New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-27787-6. 20 illustrations, x + 356 pp. \$22.95

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

This collection of essays and interviews is released as part of Routledge's *In Focus* series of film readers, each designed to bring together key pieces on a given topic, making them ideally suited for their use in specific classroom settings. This volume is thicker than most, with twenty (barely edited) essays and a (mostly new) introduction. It is organised into four parts: "Origins of the American Avant-Garde Cinema, 1920-1959," "The 1960s Experimental Cinema Explosion," "Structuralism in the 1970s," and "Alternative Cinemas, 1980-2000." The volume's roughly historical structure is mirrored in the anthology's excellent introduction, which sketches out a brief history of the movement(s) in a concise sixteen pages. The introduction also helps "fill in the gaps" -- briefly discussing important figures and movements that are not discussed elsewhere in the book more fully (including Derek Jarman, Scott Bartlett, Nick Zedd, punk film, etc.).

The book's focus is almost exclusively on American avant-garde filmmaking. The major European avant-garde movements of the 1910s and 1920s (Surrealism, Impressionism, Expressionism, et al.) are given only a few brief passages in the introduction, although the first essay by Jan-Christopher Horak does explore how those movements impacted upon the first wave of American experimental films. (This essay also includes some interesting material on avant-garde exhibition and reception in the USA during the 1920s and 1930s.) In a contribution on women in the avant-garde, Judith Mayne discusses French filmmakers Germaine Dulac, Agnes Varda, and Chantal Akerman (along with Maya Deren and Trinh T. Minh-ha). Similarly, Kobena Mercer's essay on contemporary films by black gay men examines the work of British filmmaker Isaac Julien (along with that of Marlon Riggs). But the remainder of the book is almost exclusively centred on American films and filmmakers.

That is not necessarily a bad thing, for the American avant-garde as documented by this volume has been incredibly rich and diverse. Most of the major films and filmmakers one would expect to encounter are explored within these pages by their more-than-competent authors. Lauren Rabinovitz discusses Maya Deren and the circle of female New York avant-garde artists that supported and inspired her. Jonas Mekas's famous 1962 treatise from *Film Culture* on the "New American Cinema" is reprinted here, as is P. Adams Sitney's 1969 explanation of "Structural Film." Juan A. Suarez explores Kenneth Anger, *Scorpio Rising*, and mass culture, while Jerry Tartaglia muses on Jack Smith's films and performance pieces. Reva Wolf explores Andy Warhol's early films in relation to the Beats, and Chris Holmlund discusses the "dyke documentaries" of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich. Gloria J. Gibson, in "Black Women's Independent Cinema," examines the work of Ayoka Chenzira, Julie Dash, and Kathleen Collins.

A special strength of this anthology is that it also features interviews with many of the filmmakers discussed. Michael Snow is interviewed by Scott MacDonald on almost all of his films (including 1967's *Wavelength*), as well as his tendency to work across various media. Painter, performance artist, and filmmaker Carolee Schneemann discusses *Fuses*, 1960s feminism, and her own marginalisation within the world of avant-garde filmmaking. Hollis Frampton discusses with Peter Gidal the structuralist principles that comprise *Zorns Lemma*. A freewheeling interview with Stan Brakhage explores the artist's muses, methods, metaphors, and music, subtly capturing his unique vision. A provocative, fun, and funny interview with Barbara Hammer is a testament to her long and varied career (over seventy seven films and videos), indefatigable spirit, and theoretical sophistication. Also included are interviews with and essays about Yoko Ono and Warren Sonbert.

On the whole, this is an excellent collection, one that I would readily use in a class on the history and theory of experimental film. The book is comprehensive, well organised, and extremely dense. The varieties of experimental film practice, and the theoretical concerns they illuminate and explore are thoughtfully considered throughout by both critics and filmmakers. However, the essays selected are also relatively jargon-free, and that might make this book equally useful in a class devoted to experimental film production (where students may be less interested in or informed by critical theory). As a personal side note here: I do not teach production classes, but some of the best work I have ever seen come out of an undergraduate production class was from a course that melded critical essays on experimental filmmaking with actual production work. This volume would be an excellent choice for such a course, as well as for courses in the history and theory of experimental filmmaking. It is also a handy volume to have around for anyone remotely interested in the subject.

Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers

By Edited by Yvonne Tasker

London: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-18974-8. xxiii + 447 pp. Price £12.99 (pbk), £45 (hbk)

Contemporary North American Filmmakers: A Wallflower Critical Guide – Second Edition
Edited by Yoram Allon, Del Cullen and Hannah Patterson

Contemporary North American Filmmakers: A Wallflower Critical Guide (Second Edition)

Edited by Yoram Allon, Del Cullen and Hannah Patterson

London: Wallflower, 2002. ISBN 1-903364-52-3. xix + 619 pp. Price £18.99 (pbk), £50 (hbk)

A review by Andrew Neal, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

While the increasing recognition of cinema as a collaborative process has served to compromise auteurism as a critical approach, the publication of these two books indicates that directorial identity is still a significant facet of film analysis.

Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers consists of an analytical essay, brief biography, filmography and suggested further reading about each filmmaker. In the editor's introduction, Yvonne Tasker acknowledges the difficulty of determining which directors to feature and admits that those chosen do not constitute a definitive list of the best filmmakers, but reflect her own areas of interest: commercial and independent US cinema, women filmmakers and queer cinema. However, the eventual selection attempts to juxtapose directors at different stages of their careers and with varying critical reputations.

The book is structured so that directors are considered in alphabetical order rather than being grouped by genre, nationality or theme. As a consequence, it can result in a barrage of unrelated ideas following each other. However, this format does occasionally serve to emphasise unanticipated thematic similarities, such as the presence of problematic father-figures and children's experiences in the works of Steven Spielberg and Todd Solondz.

A potential problem with this sort of project is that the overviews naturally tend to refer to the most discussed elements of a director's work. However, even when the most familiar arguments are rehearsed (David Cronenberg's fascination with traumatised body and mind themes, Jim Jarmusch's insistence upon independence and Spike Lee's focus on issues of race), they are perceptively observed. As none of the essays exceed ten pages, there is limited space to develop themes. This predicament is especially apparent in Mary Wood's chapter

about Bernardo Bertolucci which considers his sensual use of colour, the influence of Marx and Freud and the emphasis upon the director in art cinema's structure, together with outlines of many of his films. In her attempt to cover so much ground, none of the themes are considered in the depth that they warrant. Equally, Alexandra Keller's assertion that James Cameron's *True Lies* (1994) "offends like few films since *Birth of the Nation* (1915)" (82) is such a strongly stated opinion that it merits elaboration. However, her discussion of his redefinition of the blockbuster and the contradictions in Cameron's films are a valuable contribution. In her essay about Jane Campion, Justine Ashby refers to scenes of sexual taboo in *Sweetie* (1989) without explicitly considering this as a recurrent theme of her work.

Even among the collection's best essays, the contributors take an array of approaches. Jon Lewis voices a number of criticisms of the Coen Brothers from reflecting "American cinema's descent into empty style (that) had already taken shape in studio Hollywood thanks to the popular Spielberg-Lucas cycle of light, commercial adventure films" (110) to the "anti-semitic caricatures" (113) of *Barton Fink* (1991). However, he finds value in their ability to treat as farcical violence which mainstream directors glorify and praises their qualities as "superb directors of actors" (115).

In contrast, the chapters about Julie Dash and Todd Haynes amount to enthusiastic endorsements of their films for providing representations of marginalised groups that avoid essentialism. Terry Moore presents Dash's work as an example of oppositional cinema that "embodies the radical potential of narrative cinema in its reclamation of African-American history and culture" (135). Pointing to the dangers of genre expectation, Moore outlines critical responses to *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) that attacked the film's beauty and draws upon B. Ruby Rich's observation that: "People of color are expected to produce films of victimization" (142). In expounding a case for Haynes, Justin Wyatt considers the relation between formal experimentation and audience reception in *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987) which utilises a cast of Barbie and Ken dolls but follows the dictates of the star story and "disease of the week" TV movies. He argues that these experiments are not empty games but an integral element of Haynes' critique of dominant ideology, whereby to provide "alternatives for those alienated and marginalized, he must forge a new filmmaking language" (174).

A profitably different approach is taken by Mark Jancovich and James Lyons in their discussion of John Sayles which contests the conventional portrayal of his work. Taking Michel Foucault's discussion of the author as a starting point, they argue that it is this notion of an individual creator's distinctive signature that serves to connect both a diverse series of texts and distinguish these texts from others. They interrogate the manner in which Sayles is constructed as being the epitome of autonomy and creative independence but suggest greater significance should be given to the contradictions provided by his other work scripting exploitation movies. The authors further contend that while the films he directs are seen as politically challenging: "the precise nature of Sayles' politics is rarely spelled out beyond the claims that he represents 'something different from what Hollywood was offering'" (285). As such, they argue that it is a paradox of a director "defined by an integrity that is... a refusal of all that 'integrity' embodies – wholeness, clarity, unity and the simple drawing of lines" (286). While this definition of integrity might be too straightforward in its unwillingness to recognise that integrity can acknowledge complexity in its construction of wholeness, their conclusion that Sayles' work as a hired writer, which refutes the borders between blockbusters, exploitation movies and many other genres, serves to make the idea of authorship more ambiguous is a welcome contribution to the debate.

This discussion about the nature of auteurism is given prominence by the inclusion of Ros Jennings' essay concerning independent film producer, Christine Vachon, which considers whether only directors deserve to be defined as auteurs. Noting Vachon's initial involvement with New Queer Cinema, followed by controversial films such as *Kids* (1995) and *Happiness* (1998), Jennings identifies consistency of theme to her work. Thus, while not being prepared to claim that Vachon is the author of the texts she produces, Jennings determines that she deserves "partial collaborative auteur status" (358).

In addition to discussing the work of individual filmmakers, these essays also serve as a forum for debating the validity of auteurism as a critical stance. In Mark Peranson's analysis of Jim Jarmusch, there is the suggestion that auteur status can be obtained merely through "repeating oneself" (178). In Ros Jennings' examination of Peter Weir, she argues that questions of authorship, genre and national cinema have been viewed as discrete. However, she provides an important reminder of the origins of auteurism which was originally developed to consider Hollywood directors but notes that subsequently the study of national cinema has often shown reverence for key directors with national filmmaking being constructed in opposition to the Hollywood style.

Further complicating matters, Scott Mackenzie contends that if auteurism is solely described as "the search for common stylistic and thematic tropes in a director's body of work, then Wayne Wang is the *anti-auteur* of contemporary film" (370). However, he identifies diversity and crises of identity as major elements in Wang's oeuvre. The notion of hybridity which appears in this, and other essays, is significant. Cinema itself has often been seen as a hybrid art form and this has been reflected in the nature of film studies. Appropriately, this vibrant collection of essays indicates the multitude of possibilities for discussing elements of film authorship.

In contrast, *Contemporary North American Directors* has more clearly defined parameters. It consists of essays on directors working in North America and lists their films. The boundaries extend not only to Canada but also to Inuit filmmaker Zacharius Kunuk and the range is extensive enough to stretch to underground filmmakers such as Bruce LaBruce. The film's country of production, rather than the director's nation of birth is the determining factor so, for example, Czech émigré Milos Forman is included but the essay also discusses his pre-Hollywood films. The essays are usually structured to include biographical details and a chronological précis of each film, often with references to leading actors and awards won. At best, they provide brief outlines of thematic and stylistic unities.

The book's prime function is as a reference tome and generally it fulfils that role in a reliable fashion. There are occasional inconsistencies, most notably Todd Harbour's assertion that *Short Cuts* (1993) marked Robert Altman's comeback which contradicts Nick James' introduction in which *The Player* (1992) is seen as being his return. Arguably, both are incorrect as Altman had continued to work regularly throughout the 1980s, albeit with less commercial and critical acclaim. There are also lapses into vague generalisation where accurate verification would be beneficial, exemplified by the contention that *Pleasantville* (1998) "was said to contain more visual effects than any other film in history" (459).

Given limited space, it is inevitable that the discussions focus on the most frequently discussed aspects of the various directors' work and it is unsurprising that no fresh insights about Martin Scorsese appear in a five page article that offers summaries of all his films. The most valuable and original pieces often concern directors whose auteurist credentials are less

regularly cited, especially the case Paul Bamford makes for Joe Dante undermining and subverting American mythologies and comparing him favourably with David Lynch and Tim Burton's coverage of similar areas. Notions of auteurism are highly pertinent to many of the essays but whereas all those in *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers* are deemed to some extent worthy of auteur status, the lack of a signature style or theme is used to dismiss the likes of Roger Donaldson as a "hired hack" (140).

Ultimately, *Contemporary North American Film Directors* will mainly be useful as a reference work and in its provision of introductory summaries that offer basic information for film students at the early stages of their studies. The essays in *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers* are far more compelling, suggesting potential for productive further work both about the individual directors and approaches to auteurist study.

Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson and Keanu Reeves

By Michael De Angelis

Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8223-2738-4. 33 Illustrations, x + 285pp.
£11.76 (pbk), £41.95 (hbk)

The Girls in the Backroom: Looking at the Lesbian Bar By Kelly Hankin

The Girls in the Backroom: Looking at the Lesbian Bar

By Kelly Hankin

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8166-3939-9. 20 Illustrations,
xxv + 202pp. \$18.95 (pbk)

A review by Kerry Gough, The University of Nottingham, UK

Together Michael De Angelis' *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom* and Kelly Hankin's *The Girls in the Backroom* make a much needed and refreshing contribution into the marginal space of queer academic film studies. The space carved out by these two authors has a significant impact upon, and creates wider implications for, the negotiation of identity and specifically queer identity within social space as a whole.

Michael De Angelis takes the star as his point of entry to the investigation of the crossover potential in, and between, straight and gay interventions with cinema. To this end he examines the use, appropriation and meaning that figures such as Keanu Reeves, James Dean and Mel Gibson have had upon the formation of queer identities, the negotiations that have taken place both at the level of audience utilisation and of the star's management of the meaning attached to their persona.

De Angelis performs a historical reception study of the role that these stars have played, as objects of both identification and desire, within the lives of gay men and of their pivotal role within gay culture. As De Angelis summarises:

This paradox becomes crucial to many gay men's strategies of making Reeves receptive to homosexual desire in fantasy. James Dean's struggle to attain coherence and meaning in an abruptly curtailed life echoed a similar propensity for coherence and wholeness for the homosexuals in the 1950s. Mel Gibson successfully recovered the lost object of his search in the mid 1980s by reintegrating with a nuclear family construct that alienated many gay men. The progressive melodramatic narrative of Keanu Reeves, however,

develops a figure whose essence is described in terms of instability and incoherence of identity. The instability itself becomes the sign of depth, prompted by the actor's ability to exceed the limitations of any single constitution of identity that individual character performances impose on him. (15)

As such the book maps the existence of the star persona and its articulation across the historical period of its reception. He examines Dean's role as accessible for queer reading in the 1950s, whereby within 1950s reception strategies, "homosexuality shared common discursive features with juvenile delinquency", thus making Dean available as a figure for homosexual identification (23). De Angelis highlights how this queering of space was made available in the review material in circulation at the time, material which, through its existence outside of the Production Code Administration's control, facilitated "reception strategies for the construction and identification of visible homosexual role models in culture" (34-35).

Conducting an analysis of the films *East of Eden* (1955), *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) and *Giant* (1956) he examines how these queer readings map onto the polymorphous relationships of the films themselves and their relation to the ambiguity of Dean's persona as a whole (54). As De Angelis writes:

Dean is constantly 'neither here nor there,' yet he is also portrayed as constantly emerging, and thus maintaining the promise that he might be revealed as a full presence that responds to the needs and desires of his audience... without in the process alienating either self-defined gay or straight audiences. (68-69)

De Angelis goes on to reinforce how Dean became a gay icon by the 70s, whereby his problematic on and offscreen ambiguity was emphasised within both the press and the studio construction of his image (71, 75).

While De Angelis examines how Dean's image came to represent a figure readily adapted to crossover fandom and appropriation, in contrast Gibson's persona is examined in terms of its contradictory nature. Examining how Gibson's initially receptive, ambiguous availability was undermined through Gibson's offending of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), through his stereotyping of homosexual identities in films such as *Bird on a Wire* (1990), *The Man Without a Face* (1993) and *Braveheart* (1995), De Angelis furthers this line of enquiry through Gibson's public homophobic comments for which he refused to apologise (119-120). Gibson's "conservatism" was revealed to be the problem and De Angelis identifies how gay fans responded to his anxieties over being labelled homosexual, by comparing his character in *The Road Warrior [Mad Max 2]* (1981) to gay porn star Jeff Stryker (120-121). In this way, De Angelis reveals how the potential for Gibson's crossover was reduced, an idea which is supported in relation to the politically conservative climate, the emphasis upon the stable nuclear family unit and the repathologisation of the homosexual in the light of AIDS (122, 160-161). Within this period, De Angelis maps a correlation of Gibson's star image to issues of conservatism and family values.

The non-narrative star texts of the mid-to late 1980s nonetheless gradually construct a more noticeably conservative version of his star persona that stands for the same family values that

ultraconservative factions were promoting to counteract a moral indecency that the gay lifestyle epitomized. (162)

Interestingly De Angelis documents that it is within this period that Gibson attempted to close down gay fans' desire for him, something for which Gibson was only partially successful (166, 170).

Reeves, on the other hand, is presented as a figure of "pansexuality" by De Angelis: "he has more often preferred to question the efficacy of labels and the positing of any stable sexual identity." (181) Here De Angelis identifies how Reeves is often, and sometimes simultaneously, referred to as bisexual, androgynous, homosexual and heterosexual (185). However, using the words of a fan, De Angelis highlights how through Reeves' intermediation of identity, Keanu is "not stupid. He may be straight, but if he leaves room for question it gives more incentive for gays to buy his films and music in the hope that he is gay. Same with straights. This way everyone can fantasize about him." (204) Thus in terms of his pansexuality, the possibility of his gayness or as a "gay-receptive figure" is of key importance (206). De Angelis goes on to explore this significance through the analysis of *Point Break* (1990), *Speed* (1994) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) to address how rumour and gossip have been significant in Reeves' positioning as gay icon. De Angelis thus successfully examines how

The star personas of Dean, Gibson, and Reeves have broadened the range of what constitutes dominant constructions of socially acceptable masculinity at specific historical moments, responding to the needs of spectators who find authorized definitions of masculinity to be either inaccessible, unattractive, or constraining, whether these spectators are men or women, straight or gay. (18)

And for this reason, I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone interested in the construction of queer identities, the negotiatory process of fandom and the star's management and negotiation of that fan attention.

While De Angelis' focus essentially concerns itself with the practices of crossover stardom and the role of the gay fan, Kelly Hankin's intervention begins with a historical analysis of the significance and role that the lesbian bar has played within cinema, as she argues

[...] bars are not simply a pervasive setting but also one of the central locations through which films tell ideological stories about the relationship between gender and sexuality to space... the lesbian bar is a supposedly clandestine space cordoned off for those who identify with or practice nonnormative sexualities, its visual production and representation reveal much about how sexuality and sexual identity inform and naturalize narratives about public identity and space. (x-xi)

For Hankin then, the lesbian bar is governed by "heterosexist logic" and for much of the first chapter, she does an admirable job of exposing its workings as such (xi, 1). Here Hankin explores the significance of the representation of the lesbian bar and its function in the formation of ideas surrounding lesbian coded space and identity, but also the problems associated with the way that heterosexuals appropriate and move through that space as though it were their own (xvi-xvii). She goes on to argue that this heterosexual appropriation

of the representational lesbian bar serves to maintain heterosexuality as the normative standard (53).

Hankin examines how some of these heterocentric ideas have translated into the production of films that contain representations of lesbian bar space. Here she demonstrates how in *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), the first use of real lesbian bar space within cinema, the production was actually "steered by dominant cultural scripts of lesbian bars and fraught with anxiety, sexual intrigue, deception, homophobia, and heterosexism." (55) Equally within this project, she reveals how the representation of lesbian space was one authenticated by heterosexuals, without the consent of the lesbian bar patrons (75).

Moving on to examine the relevance that these representations had upon lesbian culture, Hankin identifies how lesbian spectators negotiate their spectatorial position and reprioritise the ideological message of the lesbian bar within mainstream bar depictions (xx). To this end, Hankin takes issue with the lesbian bar depiction within films like *Foxy Brown* (1974) and assesses Inyang's use of the Pam Grier character within *Badass Supermama* (1996) as a significant figure for lesbian appropriation (89, 110).

Finally, Hankin concludes with an examination of the lesbian bar documentary and how this space, created by lesbian filmmakers and focusing upon real lesbian bar patrons, seeks to reframe the lesbian bar and its representation outside of the normative conventions laid out by mainstream representation. Lesbian filmmakers thus seek to reclaim this space for a lesbian audience (xii). *The Girls in the Backroom* therefore provides a fresh perspective on the representational space available to and for lesbian identities within culture, as Hankin herself writes:

[...] the representational lesbian bar plays a central role in ideological productions of space that are both oppressive and nourishing to lesbian identities and cultures. The visual lesbian bar is deployed not only to articulate and confirm lesbian visions of public life and identity but to confirm heterosexual visions of public life and identity but to confirm heterosexual visions as well. (xxv)

Thus while Hankin demonstrates shifts in the representation of the lesbian bar, the production of those representations and the use value that these representations have, De Angelis' focus remains upon the crossover potential of the star, industry intervention in that image and the star's management of the meaning attached to their persona. However, what the two books share is a common interest in the attaching of significance to the ways in which space and meaning are negotiated, to simultaneously accommodate both straight and queer relations, at the point of reception and fan appropriation for both mainstream and marginalised audiences.

Taken together, or in isolation, I would recommend both of these books to anyone with an academic interest in the construction and negotiation of identity or the queering of space within cinema and cinematic fandom. Equally I would recommend them for anyone interested more generally in gay and lesbian identities, as not only do they make a compelling read, but they are also both absorbing and informative and make a stimulating contribution to both Gay and Lesbian Studies and Film Studies alike.

Hitchcock and the Making of *Marnie*

By Tony Lee Moral

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-7190-6482-1. xvi + 215pp

A review by Liza J. Palmer, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) has enjoyed a varied reception in the nearly forty years since its release. Considered by contemporary critics to be a disappointment after the unqualified successes of *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963), *Marnie* resulted in mediocre box office returns -- particularly in the United States -- and was thought to be the beginning of the end of Hitchcock's impressive career trajectory. Subsequent to release, however, the film experienced a series of resurrections -- first, at the hands of the *Cahiers* critics during the flowering of the auteur theory in the 1960s; and, second, in the 1970s, when film scholarship turned towards psychoanalysis and semiotics, under the auspices of such theorists as Laura Mulvey and Raymond Bellour. Indeed, it would seem that *Marnie's* distinctive, yet always transparent style served to satisfy easily any scholar's theoretical agenda. Whether it has been loved or hated, though, *Marnie* is a film that has never strayed far from the critical consciousness of cinema -- a variant of success, to be sure.

Recent considerations of *Marnie* have been more kind -- and perhaps more grounded in textual and stylistic analysis as opposed to abstract interpretation -- with *Marnie* now often identified by critics and filmmakers as, if nothing else, an influential and interesting failure. Tony Lee Moral, with his new work *Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie*, joins this cadre of scholars determined to discover the pearl amongst the rough, arguing quite persuasively the importance of *Marnie* both as a Hitchcock text and as a film whose sophisticated subject matter, well before its time, still resonates with the issues and themes of today's society.

Moral has constructed an accessible, well-researched case study of a Hollywood film from source material to finished product. Regardless of whether the film *Marnie* is of interest to the reader, the structure of the book and its clear delineation of the commercial filmmaking process for a single film at the end of the studio system are reasons enough to value this book. In fact, such a work as this would be instructive -- and illuminating -- reading for any student engaged in an introduction to film course.

But, fortunately enough, the making of *Marnie* and the film itself are of great interest to the reader, thanks to Moral's thorough research and organized approach. He has consulted a number of primary resources -- most notably Hitchcock's files at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences and at the Alfred J. Hitchcock Trust -- and has conducted numerous interviews with the principal participants from all aspects of the production, including Tippi Hedren, Sean Connery, Winston Graham, Joseph Stefano, and Jay Presson Allen. Moral shapes his investigation of *Marnie* across eight, straightforward and self-contained chapters: Genesis, Writing, Pre-production, Filming, Post-production, Marketing,

Critical Reception, and Artistic Interpretation. Such organization allows for easy reference and extraction, as each chapter stands alone as a coherent part of the whole. Perhaps Moral's unique background in Zoology accounts for his excellent structure and description; but more film books should be as pointed and taut in their analysis and argumentation.

There are some weaknesses here, though they do not discredit Moral's work -- they are merely minor annoyances which, at worst, point to a certain naïveté on his part as far as film studies is concerned. Moral is very specific in the stating of his thesis; in the introduction, he lists five "objectives," which function more as feeble justifications for why he would possibly want to devote so much attention to the production of so contested a film text as *Marnie*. And because he seems so sensitive and preemptively defensive on this point, Moral tends to overreach, attempting to support arguments that are too ambitious for or wholly irrelevant to the scope of his work, for instance *Marnie's* importance to modern audiences "because it addresses deeply human problems" (xii). Such an assertion only serves to distill the impact of Moral's predominantly historical investigation. Too few books simply and accurately detail the production history of films; that alone is reason enough for a study like Moral's.

Moreover, Moral's casual use of such phrases as "spectacle of the male gaze" (68) when discussing the minutiae of *Marnie's* wardrobe belies his privileging of psychology at the expense of film style and grammar, an unfortunate tendency in current film writing. While such approaches to the study of film are valid in their proper place, it is imprecise to invoke such loaded terminology as if it were uncontested and accepted.

Lack of context also serves to weaken Moral's project. He is so focused on *Marnie* and its various creators that he sometimes fails to provide a more general sense of filmmaking practice at the end of the studio system. Those readers unaware of American commercial filmmaking at that time will have little understanding of how *Marnie's* process compared to the average classical Hollywood production of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, we are rarely given any clue as to how it even compared with Hitchcock's other films. Such contextual omissions are most glaring when Moral describes *Marnie's* writing process. A total of four very different writers worked successively on the script with Hitchcock; yet the significance of this fact is hardly explored either in relation to *Marnie* or to other films. Along these same lines, Moral sometimes does not know when to end a quote or else fails to underscore the importance of the speaker's words with his own commentary, effectively allowing the speaker's point to get lost in a tangent.

Another missed opportunity by Moral is his failure to adequately address the two storyboard sequences from *Marnie* included with this text. Such supplemental material, while hardly rare in a book on Hitchcock, is distinctive nonetheless, given their pertinence to the production. Moral sadly interacts with them briefly. More analysis is certainly warranted of an aspect so crucial to Hitchcock's style of direction.

However, when Moral is not leaping to untenable or outrageous conclusions as justification for his project, his book is a superior work of production history, reasonable in scope and supported by ample evidence, both textual and otherwise. Ultimately, *Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie* is an engaging -- and sorely needed -- case study of how a film is made, and will satisfy students of cinema and scholars of Hitchcock alike.

Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader

By Frank Krutnik (ed.)

London: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 0-415-23552-9. viii + 210pp. £14.99/\$22.95 (pbk)

A review by Jodi Egerton, The University of Texas at Austin, USA

Finally, a text that understands the value of comedy in academia. For most of the twentieth century, film comedians have enjoyed critical and popular success, but have been largely ignored by academic scholars. In the 1980s, scholars started paying comedy some serious attention, and that interest has expanded over the course of the subsequent two decades. With *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader*, Frank Krutnik has compiled a valuable resource of writings by the heavy-hitters of contemporary Hollywood comedian scholarship. Covering the entire span of work by Hollywood comedians, from the silent films of Keaton and Chaplin to contemporary films by Chris Rock and Jim Carrey, this text could easily form the basis for a course in Hollywood comedy or comedian-based films.

University professors and students especially should find the reader useful for the variety of approaches and subjects the authors tackle, and for the connections Krutnik draws across their scholarship. His introduction presents three main approaches to studying Hollywood comedian comedy; the collected essays model various methods of employing these approaches. The formal approach, focused on "the operative or structural logics of comedy" (2), performs an analysis of the ways the comedian used the major tools of comedy -- visual gags, physical stunts, wordplay and other language-based comedy. The historical approach observes the ways that "comic forms and cycles illuminate the history of US cinema and culture" (3). The ideological approach frequently emphasizes the comedian as outsider, and explores the interplay of societal "norms and deviance" (3). Krutnik's thorough introduction to these scholarly approaches draws instructive linkages across the collection's five parts.

As most of the works are previously published articles or excerpts from longer pieces, the ideas and prose are polished; they therefore serve as fine models of comedy scholarship. While a reader could progress linearly through the text, and thus receive a historically and topically focused history and analysis of comedian comedy, she could also follow Krutnik's introductory guidance and read by style of approach -- formal, historical, or ideological.

Part One, "Genre, Narrative and Performance," includes Steve Seidman's definition and analysis of "comedian comedy", based on comic film stars from the 1910s and 1920s. Peter Kramer's essay both applies Seidman's theories to a specific film, Buster Keaton's *The Blacksmith* (1922), and complicates and challenges some of Seidman's assertions. These texts model effective scholarship; Kramer engages with Seidman's work without being dismissive, and the reader emerges from the section with a more fully developed and complicated understanding of the Hollywood comedian. Parts Two and Three expand on these theories as they address the foundational comedians -- the silent film stars such as Chaplin and Keaton, and the vaudeville era stars such as The Marx Brothers.

I especially enjoyed the final two sections. The four essays in Part Four, "Comedian Comedy and Gender," by Kathleen Rowe, Patricia Mellencamp, Joanna E. Rapf, and Steven Cohan, take on gender from all angles. Rowe's and Mellencamp's articles on Mae West and Lucille Ball examine the methods used by women comedians to stretch the boundaries of "acceptable" behavior, and to undermine the enforcers of those boundaries. Rapf's article enacts a feminist analysis of Jerry Lewis's comedy, using a multitude of feminist theorists to argue for Lewis as a revolutionary comic. Cohan's article "Queering the Deal: On the Road with Hope and Crosby" explores the queer resonances of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby's buddy comedies of the 1940s. Including examinations of male comics and sexuality enhanced the section; it benefited from not being cordoned off as "the woman chapter".

The final section, "Post-Classical Comedian Comedy," includes the only two pieces that have not previously been published. Bambi L. Haggins's essay, "Laughing Mad: The Black Comedian's Place in American Comedy of the Post-Civil Rights Era," situates the work of black comedians such as Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, and Chris Rock within the socio-political climate that influenced the racial inflections of their comedy. Both Haggins's work and Phil Drake's fascinating exploration of Jim Carrey and the "dumb comedians" of the 1990s examine the terrain of comedian comedy after the demise of the Hollywood studio system. Each essay deserves a thorough read -- the authors use lively prose, and their analyses of contemporary comedians would serve as fine models for students who can't imagine how to write an academic essay on "that guy in the movies who makes me laugh."

Hollywood Comedians offers a fine argument for why popular and scholarly should not necessarily be separate entities. The authors all grapple with compelling theories, questions, actors, and films, and do so in a manner that makes the text challenging enough for a scholarly audience, and accessible enough for a popular one. Even the index provides another round of enjoyment, offering a veritable "who's who" of comedians, comic films, comedy scholars, and film theorists.

While my review is overwhelmingly positive for this book, I do have one major complaint. I find the cover disturbing; Jim Carrey's coiffed hair and goofy open-mouthed grinning gesture make me cringe. While this is certainly the least important aspect of a book, it seems an especially poor marker of its potential success as a reader in a university course. I disliked picking it up and flipping through it. To be fair, though, at least it wasn't Pauly Shore.

Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal

By Saverio Giovacchini

Temple University Press, 2001. ISBN 1-56639-862-2. (hbk) ISBN-1-56639-863-0 (pbk). x + 292 pages. \$68.50 (hbk); \$22.95 (pbk)

A review by Robert Keser, National-Louis University, Chicago, USA

This well-argued and wide-ranging work appears in the series *Culture and the Moving Image*, edited by Robert Sklar, and posits the emergence of a democratic modernism in studio-era Hollywood when two networks -- the New York leftist intellectuals and the European immigrants -- met in a unique but temporal confluence of cultural and political agendas.

Giovacchini traces this accommodation chronologically through the war years until the irreparable damage of the postwar HUAC hearings. With the most committed political screenwriters sidelined by the blacklist, and a new anti-realist avant-garde asserting itself on the East Coast with figures like Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, the atmosphere in Hollywood eventually led the Europeans to return to the old country to work (Lang, Siodmak, Sirk).

If academic literature's focus on the economic power of the studio corporations tends to discount the influence of Hollywood progressives, Giovacchini attempts a corrective by re-politicizing modernism (always a slippery term) in the context of opposition to fascism as well as the commitment to engagement with the mass audience. Seeing American culture split into high and low registers, and seeking to implement their faith in the proletariat, radical artists rejected vanguardism and sought to speak across classlines through a "poetics of hybridization" that would reconcile different genres, media and styles. Representing American reality beyond interpersonal conflicts was believed to be "the antidote to escapism".

Arriving amidst the unionization struggle of studio personnel, the New York intellectuals imported an urban passion for social justice, first realized in the chain gang cycle that began with *Hell's Highway* (1932), a marginal production but one portraying a surprisingly realistic racial equality. More significant because it involved a major star, director and budget, *I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932) suffered from a script rewritten by the conservative Howard Green which compromised the political content, recasting the story in individual terms.

Giovacchini views the German-speaking diaspora through the pages of the refugee magazine *Aufbau* as well as Jan-Christopher Horak's compilation of the 800 plus anti-Nazi émigrés to the film capital. Not all were escaping Hitler and not all were Jewish, but most organized around the anti-fascist struggle (although a right wing also existed). At first relegated to papier-mâché operetta films, the Hollywood Europeans increased their power through joining

the Hollywood New Yorkers to form a Cultural Front around the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. Together, they created pressures on the studio system that resulted in William Dieterle's highly successful biopics, which presented Zola and Juarez as anti-fascist figures.

The first Hollywood film to indict the National Socialists by name, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939) was not ultimately profitable, but became a model for progressive filmmaking. Its emphasis on the collective rather than individual agent (the star does not appear until halfway into the film), and its use of newsreel and documentary-like elements succeeded, yet the film purposely kept silent about anti-Semitism in America, possibly to preserve the idealization of the American people's moral health.

Despite the crisis of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 and unwelcome attention from early HUAC probes, the community was able to employ anti-Nazi metaphors in dramas like *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), and *The Sea Wolf* (1941), among others. Even the determinedly individualistic Billy Wilder fits into modernism's hybridization with *Ball of Fire* (1941), where the low culture Sugarpudd O'Shea character invades the ivory tower to reinvigorate professors by opening access to "the people" (in a rare lapse, Giovacchini describes the stripper as "a ballerina").

The war seemed a positive opportunity for modernist films, as the Office of War Information ostensibly endorsed the aesthetic of non-protagonist-centered narratives and the inevitable use of newsreel footage, as in the wartime documentaries of Ford, Wyler, Huston and Ivens. In opposition, Frank Capra's film unit employed an elitist stance where the filmmaker acts as "the expert who is able to reveal the truth behind the enemy's propaganda".

Giovacchini finds the modernist influence in films as disparate as *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Air Force* (1943), and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), which all shared a decentralized narrative, as well as deep-focus photography and other documentary elements. More mainstream entertainments like *A Song to Remember* (1945) and *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945) also reflected the progressive paradigm when they celebrated Chopin and Gershwin as artists able to bring culture to the masses, uniting high and low.

The postwar collapse of progressive Hollywood is traced to causes that were "internal as well as external, esthetic as well as political," which destabilized the community before the attack of McCarthyism finished the job. The idealization of the "people" -- mocked repeatedly by Preston Sturges -- was punctured by contemporary sociologists who disproved the myth of a unified audience, showing it as fragmented by cultural, educational and class factors. Postwar doubt and melancholy surfaced in "veteran noir" films like *Crossfire* (1947) and "films gris" like *Force of Evil* (1948), while the first wave of Cold War dramas like *The Iron Curtain* (1948) treated the people as suspects and probably dupes, and used the documentary style to suggest the authenticity of anti-communist ideology .

By 1948, Dieterle stated that "Hollywood is bankrupt", with the coalition's final split centered in the postwar debate about German guilt. Who was to blame for Nazism? The German elite or the ordinary German voter? One extreme response was *A Foreign Affair* (1948), which not only denied any functional de-Nazification of Germany, but added that the American occupiers assented to their own corruption. (Giovacchini does not, however, address Zinnemann's *The Search* (1948) or Litvak's *Decision Before Dawn* (1951), both progressive portraits of civilian Germans as victims).

Considering the book's fifty seven pages of end-notes, it seems appropriate to salute the extensive original research from clippings files, studio papers, and contemporary publications (including *New Masses* and *Daily Worker*), as well as letters, memoirs, oral histories, published interviews, and many scholarly studies. Although some arguments are more suggestive than conclusive (and an occasional misidentification creeps in: "the crooner Paul Whiteman" and "actress Marion Gering"), this is nonetheless an excellent and valuable work.

Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen

By Yosefa Loshitzky

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. ISBN 0 292 74723 3. 22 b&w photos, xvii + 226 pp.
£13.96 (pbk), £37.95 (hbk)

A review by Ranen Omer-Sherman, University of Miami, USA

Prior to Yosefa Loshitzky's remarkably accomplished study, the only comprehensive account of cultural developments in Israeli cinema's cultural politics was Ella Shohat's groundbreaking *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (University of Texas Press, 1989), a work that meticulously examines Israeli society's politics of representation vis-à-vis its films. To her credit, while acknowledging her critical debt to Shohat's important work, Loshitzky significantly updates and enlarges on the older work's perspectives by exploring more recent films (though there is occasional overlap) and illuminating complex issues of identity that are intrinsic to the films of Ashkenazic and Sephardic directors. Loshitzky also offers a substantially greater focus on feminist themes and sexuality, commenting provocatively on the ways that "transgressive" erotic unions, whether between homosexuals or heterosexuals, of Arabs and Jews constitute an important subgenre of Israeli cinema. The book's focus on such dramatic events (all subsequent to the history reflected in *Israeli Cinema*) such as the Intifada, the aftermath of the failed Oslo Accords, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the ascendancy to power of the ultranationalist Right, and the growing influence of religious-ethnic parties, offers readers, regardless of their familiarity with these events, a consistently accessible, fluidly written introduction to Israeli cultural politics. For those unfamiliar with Israeli cinema, the morally self-interrogating ethos that is at the heart of these films may prove a revelation.

Rather than merely limn the disparate group identities that complicate the cohesion of Israeli national identity, Loshitzky offers a nuanced and elaborate account of the interplay, overlapping, and conflicts among seemingly disparate communities: Jewish Holocaust survivors (and their children), the second generation of Mizrahim (Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries), Arab-Israelis, and Palestinians. As the author cogently demonstrates, in the national cinema, "violence as well as different practices of 'purification' are constantly inflicted and forced on the 'others' excluded from Israel's imagined collective identity" (xv). Though focused primarily on Israeli films, Loshitzky proceeds from an analysis of the film most likely to be familiar to many readers, *Exodus* (Otto Preminger, 1960), demonstrating its complex mapping of Old Jew/new Jew, Israel/Arab identities, which proves a useful exercise for setting the stage for the chapters that follow. As Loshitzky argues, *Exodus*, widely regarded as a simple celebration of the birth of the Jewish state, actually encodes "a parable of the 'love story' between America and Israel...the disappearance of Britain as the former key imperialist power broker in the Middle East, followed by the emergence of America and the Soviet Union as the new superpowers in the region" (7). This global dynamic is fleshed out in the way that the character of Kitty (a blonde Midwesterner played by Eva Marie Saint) gradually warms to the Jewish people as the lover of Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman), a Jewish freedom fighter.

In two incisive chapters on recent developments in Israel's nascent Holocaust cinema (once nearly silent on the catastrophe because of Zionist's ideology negation of diasporic consciousness), Loshitzky notices an important transition in the struggle of the individual artist to move toward private, rather than national, forms of grief and commemoration. She offers a moving account of what she labels "postmemory cinema" in which the children of survivors have begun to document the experiences of survivors for a society that was not always receptive to their plight in the past (particularly when those victims failed to conform to the heroic mold of the rugged, martial "new" Jew).

Her fourth chapter offers a particularly engrossing discussion of Hanna Azulay Hasfari's *Shchur* (1994), the story of an immigrant family from Morocco which Loshitzky dubs "the first 'art film' associated with Oriental ethnicity" in Israel. Examining a range of relatively unknown productions, Loshitzky argues that the new Jewish Oriental ethnographic films are "diasporic" -- embodying a cultural and political subversion of the presumed homogenous hegemony of the Israeli nation-state. Also worthy of note is her far-reaching examination of the provocative film tragedy *Hamsin* (1982), admirably uncovering this masterpiece's (Israel's first film to confront the controversy of Israel's land seizures in the Galilee) complex intermingling of mythic and political themes. Other films that highlight the transgressive nature of Arab-Jewish romantic unions are also addressed here. Unfortunately, of the latter group, she bleakly concludes that "the privilege accorded in all these films to the Israeli point of view shows that the space they open to Palestinian self-representation is ultimately [...] subjugated to the Israeli perspective...even the transgressive force of love fails to challenge it" (157). However, this may be as much an assessment of the current woeful status of the peace process as a statement about the achievements of the films themselves.

Offering a sustained focus on the complex interplay between a variety of marginalized victims of Zionist exclusions: Holocaust survivors, Oriental Jews, and Palestinians, this study makes important links between the creation of films by important documentary and fictional film directors such as Amos Gitai, Tzipi Reibenbach, Dan Wolman, Daniel Wachsmann, Nissim Dayan, and key developments in Israel's recent history -- especially in relation to its troubled relations with neighboring Arab states and the Arab Other within. Loshitzky also takes careful stock of the ambiguous achievements of films in which Palestinian actors play Arab roles. She is also to be admired for "reading" the imagery of these films against the grain of their ostensible liberal ideologies and intentions. For instance, when it comes to representations of Palestinian women, the author discovers that these characters strangely echo "the stereotype of the diasporic male Jew". While exhibiting an impressive familiarity with crucial developments in postcolonial film theory, particularly the emergence of hybrid cinema whose mixture of genres reflect identities and cultures in flux and transition, she writes almost consistently in a seemingly effortless, engaging manner that is rare for academics. But the real merits of this study reside in the fact that, besides paying eloquent heed to the conflicted moral conscience of Israeli artists, the historical and ideological tensions explored here promise to continue to fracture and divide the contemporary politics of Israeli society, and its cinema, for the foreseeable future.

Kids' Media Culture

By Marsha Kinder (ed.)

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. 0-8223-2371-0. viii + 338 pp. \$19.95 (pbk)

A review by Stephen Groening, University of Minnesota, USA

I was excited at the chance to review *Kids Media Culture* an anthology edited by Marsha Kinder, since the volume contains essays by Lynn Spigel, Henry Jenkins, Eileen Seiter, and Kinder, all scholars whose work I have admired. *Kids' Media Culture* wants to mark a shift away from thinking about children's television as a conveyor of role models and representations and towards analyzing how children interact with the mass media environment around them. Unfortunately I found the volume did not live up to my expectations, which perhaps were too high, but I want to attempt to explore why I found the volume less than satisfactory.

Somewhat arbitrarily focusing on the United States in the 1950s and 1990s, the essays manage, with varying degrees of success, to problematize the category of childhood. The essays do not do the same with either culture or media: the former is conceptualized as a commodity form, the latter is restricted mainly to television and commercialized spin-offs of television programs. As such, the volume focuses on consumption. This could be seen as a capitulation to capitalist logic: that culture does not exist in processes, practices, rituals, or anything that is not bought and sold. Yet television is quite clearly the most pervasive, ubiquitous, and influential cultural form in the contemporary United States. However, the readings of programs contained in the volume do not account for the viewing, distribution, or even production practices of television.

The first section of the book traces the history of commodities aimed at children in the United States subsequent to World War II. Spigel, Jenkins, and Sean Griffin analyze the comic strips *Dennis the Menace* and *Peanuts*, the children's book (and television show) *Lassie* and the Disney phenomenon of *Davy Crockett*, respectively. The second section, has the most international focus in the volume: Elissa Rashkin writes about blonde blue-eyed Brazilian celebrity Xuxa, Marsha Kinder takes a tour of Fox Kids Network and Heather Hendershot reassesses the public television hit *Sesame Street*. Hendershot's article is enviably thorough, ranging from an analysis of the production process of Children's Television workshop to a much-needed critique of the export of U.S. children's television. Hendershot engages the production, critical reception and distribution of *Sesame Street* in a valuable and compelling way.

By now, some two hundred pages in, I found myself thinking that no one seems anxious about representing children or giving children a voice, however problematic that endeavour might be. Take Marsha Kinder's essay in the second section, for example. Kinder goes on a search for educational programming by reviewing a morning's worth of programming on Fox Kids Network, analyzing *Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego*, *The Mighty Morphin' Power*

Rangers, *The Tick* and others. In the essay, Kinder relates witnessing a young boy on a sidewalk acting out moves from the *Power Rangers* television program. Rather than bother to ask the boy what he was doing and why, Kinder writes that "these moves functioned as a form of juvenile voguing -- like the kind performed in the documentary *Paris is Burning*" (183). These stretches of comparison and leaps of logic may be provocative, but are also good examples of why academic writings can be so easily dismissed by non-academics. To her credit, Kinder concludes simply and convincingly that the boy derived pleasure from performing the *Power Rangers*. However, that Kinder opts for comparison to a relatively obscure documentary film rather than actually interacting with the boy seems demonstrative of an attitude derived from Louis Althusser, that texts are more important than people.

The problem here is methodological. The method of analyzing television in the mold of United States cultural studies borrows heavily from literary theory and uses positivistic interpretive tools to decode texts, leaving out important questions. What are the decision-making processes behind the production of children's television? What sorts of logics are at play in policy level decisions at the Federal Communications Commission regarding children's television? What about the video rental market, or theatrically released films? What are kids doing with these programs?

So I welcomed the more situated analyses of the third section of the volume. Including articles about television in preschools, gender roles and computer gaming and a program designed to teach children to program their own computer games at a public inner city school in Boston, the third section of the volume is the most substantial effort to break away from textual analysis.

We would benefit from taking a step back and reassess why we would study children, mass media and culture in the first place. Kinder's introduction manages a few forays into this complex, thorny, and personal (not to mention potentially polemical) issue. Yet, most of the individual essays do not. I believe that the study of childhood and media are vital, crucial and flourishing fields, precisely because social and cultural conservatives attempt to assert control over these issues, institutions and practices. But without a more general analytic foray into what precisely is at stake when we study media and children, *Kids Media Culture* lacks appeal outside of the text-centric approaches of those already specializing in the study of so-called children's television.

Lars von Trier

By Jack Stevenson

London: BFI Publishing, 2002. ISBN 0 85170 903 6 (pbk), 0 85170 902 8 (hbk). 41 illustrations, viii + 216 pp. £13.99 (pbk), £48.00 (hbk)

A review by Alan Gibbs, The University of Nottingham, UK

One of the most evasive and self-contradictory filmmakers working in Europe over the last two decades, Lars von Trier presents a major challenge to any biographer or critic. How to deal with a subject who has declared (on *The Kingdom* [1994] DVD), "I gladly assert that everything said or written about me is a lie"? Jack Stevenson's monograph on von Trier, part of the BFI's growing series on world directors, attempts to get closer to this "post-modern wise guy" (129). For the most part, however, Stevenson's biography fails to probe far beneath the superficial. Von Trier's complex character, diverse artistic output and media-savvy playfulness is subject to a broad brushstroke approach, resulting in formulations lacking in critical sophistication. Stevenson's style often consists of short, gnomic sentences. He asserts, for example, that as a student filmmaker von Trier "knew what he wanted. Period" (15). Later, he begins a discussion of the reception of *Breaking the Waves* (1996) with "But like it they did. All over the world." Such stylistic tics rapidly become both analytically reductive and wearying for the reader.

Stevenson's language is likewise resolutely non-scholarly. This would be laudable if the aim were to demystify von Trier, but it results only in an insubstantial series of observations. For instance, in discussing the bemused reaction to *The Idiots* (1998) by American studios and critics, Stevenson declares, "That it had always been more important for [von Trier] to experiment, change and express himself than have a proper career was something the Hollywood boys would never understand" (127). Trite locutions such as these prevent the reader achieving a fuller understanding of the von Trier "enigma" (1).

Discussion of von Trier's early works is more limited (although Stevenson throughout is thorough regarding critical and commercial reception), and the book is strongest when contemplating his most accomplished films, *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots*. The examination of the former, although much of it borrows from Peter Schepelern's earlier study, effectively traces its development from a sadomasochistic fantasy to the final meditation on excessive faith and love. As for *The Idiots*, Stevenson's illumination of Danish social mores, in particular the concept of "velfærdsdanskere", or, "The Group", the powerful hegemonic force binding Danes to the state, considerably enriched my understanding and enjoyment of the film.

Stevenson's aim, as stated in the introduction, is partly to use his position as an English-speaker dwelling in Denmark to bring to an anglophone audience a richer portrait of von Trier than the hitherto "heavily filtered" (vii) one previously conveyed. As such, this book represents a lost opportunity, in large part because Stevenson has not himself conducted any interviews. Instead, while his use of secondary sources is generally apposite, he also

rehearses episodes that seem to be at best speculation, at worst, thoroughly apocryphal. His description, for example, of a "near riot" breaking out before a screening of *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) in Cannes (151) sounds much more like the uncritical repetition of tabloid hyperbole than reliably documented experience.

Stevenson does bring some insight to von Trier's fraught relationship with actors. The nadir here is, of course, his monumental falling out with Björk during the shooting of *Dancer in the Dark*, but Stevenson dates von Trier's problems with actors from his first feature, *The Element of Crime* (1984). Stevenson goes on to describe how, during the making of von Trier's extraordinary television series, *The Kingdom*, a black comedy set in a hospital, his co-director Morten Arnfred was given primary responsibility for coaching the actors (81-82). Following *The Kingdom*, and the less polished aesthetic its rapid shooting necessarily inspired, Stevenson conforms to the widely-held opinion that *Breaking the Waves*, his next film, marked von Trier's transformation "from a director obsessed by control and technical mastery to a director who could now work with flesh-and-blood people" (96). As Stevenson subsequently discusses the Dogma 95 manifesto, I cannot help but feel he might have made more of the influential experience of making *The Kingdom*. He describes how the strict shooting schedule of this series enforced minimal rehearsal, use of available light, and hand-held cameras (83-84). From this necessity emerged the edginess of the series, and its concentration upon the power of performance. Given that these are all-important technical and aesthetic attributes of Dogma, it may have been worthwhile to see that link explored.

As for von Trier's still more peculiar side projects, Stevenson's take is here quite amusing. *Dimension 1991-2024*, for example, was von Trier's ambitious proposal for a thriller to be shot in numerous locations across Europe at a rate of three minutes every year, "with the completed ninety-minute film to premiere on 30 April 2024" (73). When we return, later in the book, to consider the current state of such projects, Stevenson's sardonic take for once effectively lays bare von Trier's disillusion. We move, here, beyond the *enfant terrible* cliché to recognise a plentiful but undisciplined talent with an extraordinarily low boredom threshold. Sadly, in the conclusion Stevenson returns to a simplistic and by now redundant consideration of whether von Trier deserves the epithet "genius". Echoing Stoffer's banal justification for the spazzers' behaviour in *The Idiots*, Stevenson mushily decrees that "In order to perceive his genius, you must get in touch with your own" (190).

Life Through a Lens: Memoirs of a Cinematographer

By Osmond Borradaile, edited by Anita Borradaile Hadley
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-7735-2297-2. xii + 224 pp. £35.50
The World in a Frame: What We See in Films By Leo Braudy & Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation By John Gibbs

The World in a Frame: What We See in Film

By Leo Braud

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. ISBN 0-226-07156-1. xiv + 274 pp. £1

Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretatio

By John Gibb

London: Wallflower, 2002. ISBN 1-903364-06-X. 128 pp. £12.9

A review by Kenneth Womack, Penn State Altoona, USA

There is little question that film studies is one of the most popular arenas of intellectual inquiry in the contemporary humanities. And why not? Our students consume vast quantities of celluloid, and they do so -- for the most part -- uncritically. To say that we have a duty to provide the necessary scholarly background for this very significant and often intellectually unmediated aspect of their lives is an understatement indeed. Not surprisingly, a variety of recent works have emerged in an obvious effort to fill this breach. While Osmond Borradaile's *Life Through a Lens: Memoirs of a Cinematographer* affords us with a valuable glimpse into the life and times of one of Hollywood's most esteemed cinematographers, Leo Braudy's *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* and John Gibbs's *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation* offer astute introductory guides to film study and appreciation. In their respective ways, each volume provides us with an illuminating inroad into the complex albeit infinitely rewarding world of film interpretation. Perhaps even more importantly in terms of the life of the mind, each work would make an admirable addition to the syllabus of virtually any introductory course on film studies.

Written with the editorial assistance of Anita Borradaile Hadley, Borradaile's *Life Through a Lens* chronicles the late cinematographer's formative experiences along the way to becoming the influential director of photography for Paramount Pictures. Known as "Bordie" among his closest friends in the industry, Borradaile affords readers with a fascinating examination of the radical technical innovations that reshaped cinematography, time and time again, during

his tenure at Paramount and beyond. In addition to detailing his intriguing experiences across the globe as an adventurer of sorts, Borradaile fondly recalls his early initiation into the world of the nickelodeon. In one instance, he narrates his literally explosive boyhood experience at a crude nickelodeon in Medicine Hat, the remote Canadian city known for its superfluity of natural gas deposits:

As he changed reels, the narrator promised us an even greater treat: a film starring the most famous of all comics, Happy Hooligan. But no sooner had the projector begun clacking again than a violent explosion rocked the building. Fire broke out simultaneously, enveloping the ceiling in a sheet of flames and shooting a huge fireball over our heads toward the screen. As the audience scrambled to escape the heat and flames, some got trampled in their wild rush for the exits. Being small, I was propelled along by the momentum: under the screen, across the kitchen, through the back door, and headlong into a barrel of stinking restaurant slop. I fled the terrifying pandemonium in a state of shock. (4)

While he may have been traumatized by such an unexpected -- and, for the projectionist, tragic -- turn of events, Borradaile was clearly exhilarated by the incident.

Although Borradaile enjoyed professional renown for his achievements at Paramount, his autobiography's finest moments concern his memories about the rigors and challenges of working as a wartime photographer in the Second World War's North African theater, where he participated in the Ethiopian campaign and later at the infamous siege of Tobruk. As a captain in the British Army's much-vaunted film unit, Borradaile often found himself acting both as a soldier and as a photographer. Working under the dictum that "guns take priority over cameras if ever we were attacked" (136), Borradaile configured a system of camera mounts and remote controls that allowed him to fire his guns and operate his cameras in tandem. Despite his yen for innovation, Borradaile often found life in peacetime England to be frustrating and inflexible. During principal photography in Scotland for *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1946), Borradaile recalled that "according to union rules, only electricians were entitled to handle the switch on an electrical apparatus. This new regulation meant I could no longer switch my own camera on and off. Unused to being dictated to on how to operate my own equipment, I called a meeting of the crew and informed them in no uncertain terms that no one but myself would ever stop and start my camera" (165). In many ways, Borradaile's conflict with the proliferation of unions underscores the increasingly complicated world of the feature film -- an industry beset by competing financial interests on one hand and a profundity of technological innovation on the other.

In the twenty fifth-anniversary edition of *The World in a Frame*, which was originally published in 1976, Braudy offers an entertaining and imminently learned history of American film from the 1930s through the 1970s. As one of the nation's leading film scholars and critics, Braudy devotes particular attention to the nature of visual style and film genres, as well as to various techniques regarding characterization and narrative development. In one of the volume's most useful moments, Braudy discusses his conception of the "recalcitrant object" -- his terminology for the found objects that writers and directors employ to capture their viewers' visual attention and to imbue their stories with greater symbolic meaning. As Braudy observes, "The interpretive weight on any one object (at one extreme, to make it symbolic) interplays with the continuous reality, the collection of objects in time, that defines the film. In film nothing exists in itself," Braudy adds, "only in the way it is used, whether it

be a river by Renoir, a crucifix by Buñuel, a gun by Lang, a car by Penn, or a beach by Bergman" (42). In Braudy's estimation, such objects find their power via the precision with which they are inserted into the textual landscape of film. In this way, they enjoy greater interpretive significance -- as with Ford's appropriation of light in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) or Hitchcock's application of color in *Torn Curtain* (1966) -- while also affording moviegoers with a more compelling and, in Braudy's phraseology, "hallucinatory" theatrical experience.

Braudy's most evocative chapter in *The World in a Frame* concerns the interconnections between film and society in 1970s cinema. Braudy astutely distinguishes a paradigm shift in the films of the late 1960s and early 1970s, an era in which audiences increasingly began to identify with directors *cum* storytellers -- *auteurs*, if you will -- as opposed to individual stars. "The shift of emphasis from the frame of the genre film to the creator of the genre film mirrors and accelerates a cultural shift from placing the weight of responsibility on society to placing it on the individual," Braudy writes. "The anxieties about impotence and failure reflect the search for myths of individual responsibility that can survive the collapse of the social forms outside the films" (174). In short, a larger cultural accent upon individualism trumps the bland heroism and melodrama inherent in the star system's heyday in the 1930s and 1940s. As Braudy remarks, "In 1940 society could absorb individual energy and make it work. In 1971 society warps and maims individual energy when it doesn't crush it entirely" (176). In yet another revealing chapter, Braudy examines the postulation of literary character on film. Braudy contends that postwar film owes much to an effective "collusion" of sorts between actors and directors. "The more intriguing and effective way to transmit character and meaning through film," Braudy writes, "is to enhance the illusion rather than break it down" (254). In this manner, Braudy implicitly demonstrates the ways in which film -- by deepening its formation of character as the driving force in its narratives -- establishes a more lasting and meaningful connection with its audience.

In *Mise-en-Scène*, Gibbs explores one of film's fundamental (and least understood) concepts. In addition to providing readers with a comprehensive history of *mise-en-scène*, Gibbs offers interpretive studies of *mise-en-scène*'s function in a wide range of films, including such texts as Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) and John Sayles's *Lone Star* (1996). In so doing, Gibbs highlights, in striking fashion, the manner in which a film's visual style contributes to the ways in which we think about cinema. In his introduction, Gibbs establishes a working definition of *mise-en-scène* that accounts for many of the concept's vast range of elements, from lighting, costumes, and décor to props, lenses, and the actors themselves. As Gibbs reminds us, "It is important to be able to describe the individual elements of *mise-en-scène*," yet it is also "worth remembering from the outset that these elements are most productively thought of in terms of their *interaction* rather than individually -- in practice, it is the interplay of elements that is significant" (26). Gibbs shrewdly underscores his arguments about the interactive nature of *mise-en-scène* via his discussion of the interrelationship between cinematic visual style and such issues as camera positioning and the mechanics of storytelling.

In his analysis of Sayles's *Lone Star*, for example, Gibbs reveals the ways in which stylistic elements interact to create a fascinating and highly textured *mise-en-scène*. In his film, Sayles employs a variety of elements -- including a very significant line in the sand -- in order to produce symbolic interconnections related to *Lone Star*'s thematic concern with the nature of borders and their interstices with ethnicity. In his investigation of Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, Gibbs reveals the manner in which the director's domestic melodrama imbues its remarkable

visual power from cinematographer Russell Metty's stunningly original *mise-en-scène*. Drawing upon the film's famous bedroom sequence, Gibbs notes the complex interplay amongst the sequence's décor, camera positioning, and the scene's overall framing and composition. These elements come together to produce an overarching ambience in which the narrative's larger meanings, in Gibbs's words, "are not spoken but shown and felt" (96).

As with the volumes by Borradaile and Braudy, Gibbs's *Mise-en-Scène* provides readers with a worthy introduction to film study and interpretation. While Braudy and Gibbs's texts offer informative sourcebooks related to film's expansive history and terminology, Borradaile's *Life Through a Lens* usefully reminds us, frame by frame, about the invariably *human* elements that attract us to film study in the first place.

Movie Blockbusters

By Julian Stringer (ed.)

London and New York: Routledge, 2003. ISBN 1-415-256089-7. xxiii + 276pp. £15.99 (pbk)

A review by Rayna Denison, The University of Nottingham, UK

This edited collection presents an important intervention into the way academics consider that biggest and brashest of all films: the blockbuster. However, perhaps the greatest problem faced by this book is its topic, and many of the contributors spend a disproportionate amount of their time grappling with the question of what, if anything in particular, is meant by the term blockbuster? Julian Stringer's introduction attempts to position the term in a similar light to James Naremore's categorisation of the nebulous *film noir* as an "idea". This does not, however, seem to have precluded many of the contributors from discussing the blockbuster as genre (Steve Neale and Peter Kramer) or through its periodisation (e.g. *Jaws* in 1975), and monotonously repetitious mentions of the Paramount Decree and the rise of television. The abiding sentiment of the book is not that the blockbuster is monolithic or concrete, but that it is almost wholly dependent on the context of its usage. The term "blockbuster" can be -- and indeed has been -- used to describe any number of types of films spanning disparate cultures and circumstances.

The range of meanings circulating the blockbuster in fact becomes the greatest strength of the collection. *Movie Blockbusters* runs the gamut of opinions on the subject. Jon Lewis's contribution is noticeably anti-Hollywood and conglomeration, but the majority of essays are more positive in their approach. The book begins by delving into the blockbuster and its academic history with Thomas Schatz's seminal piece "The New Hollywood", which generally stands the test of time. The chapters that immediately follow, conceptually based on "Industry Matters", are perhaps the weakest overall, alternately polemical and generalised. For example, Douglas Gomery's assertions about women audiences and blockbusters (76) could do more in underscoring the need for a reevaluation of that topic. Similar, though at times sparkingly inventive, is Steve Neale's discussion of the blockbuster as genre. Occasionally this amounts to little more than a list of blockbuster films, but he highlights a central problem in the blockbuster that rests on the recognition of films as such by the industry, critics and audiences alike. For example, by declaring that "the animated blockbuster feature has, in its own specific and particular way, helped revive not just the biblical epic... but ... the traditions of the Broadway-oriented musical as well" (54), Neale indicates the importance of including certain elided films back into the blockbuster pantheon.

It is when *Movie Blockbusters* is allowed the space to become tangential that its interventions into conceptualising blockbuster "theory" become most keen. For example, Chris Berry's piece on the blockbuster in China and South Korea is a wonderful reconceptualisation of the blockbuster that removes it from its American cultural and industrial context. Similarly, Peter Kramer's essay on *Contact* (1997), not a particularly successful calculated blockbuster movie, goes a long way towards redressing the Steven Spielberg/George Lucas-bias prevalent in much of the rest of the book. Kramer does this by discussing Robert Zemeckis as a

blockbuster auteur, and via this topic investigates the "intellectual" aspects of Zemeckis's blockbuster.

Thus Kramer begins the trend of introducing qualifying phrases like "controversial" (Rebecca Feasey), "cult" (Matt Hills) and "indigenous" (Kirsten Moana Thompson) to the blockbuster in an array of essays that are interesting, but also occasionally problematic when juxtaposed with the other entries in this collection. Feasey's discussion of "bonkbusters", specifically those of Paul Verhoeven, is undermined by what feels like a lack of space to develop ideas and the assumption that these films were ever intended to be blockbusters of the straightforward kind. If, as Stringer posits, the key term associated with the blockbuster is size, then the relatively low budget films Feasey discusses were probably not calculated to become blockbusters, but crossed over -- at least in the case of *Basic Instinct* (1992) -- between categories in order to become such. That this important qualification goes unremarked reflects a strong tendency in this collection of authors raising significant issues but not having the space to address them, as for instance in Gianluca Sergi's contribution on "blockbuster" sound as emphatic or exaggerated sound. He states at the end of his essay: "That elusive Holy Grail of any study of blockbusters, that is, the question of what the difference is between blockbuster movies and 'average' mainstream movies, cannot be gauged by investigating sound." (151)

Movie Blockbusters therefore does not achieve a definitive answer to the question of what a blockbuster "is". What it does do is go a long way towards indicating the amount of research still to be done on this topic -- from the relationship of women to blockbusters to the need for a serious reconsideration of the blockbuster as a non-American, non-Hollywood entity. While the book has mixed success in attempting to "talk with much greater clarity and deliberation about the subject of movie blockbusters" (1), it does attempt to redress the largely negative and declamatory view taken of the blockbuster as the vapid and unworthy cousin of arthouse cinema.

Only Entertainment: Second Edition

By Richard Dyer

London and New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-25497-3. 187pp. £13.99 (pbk)

A review by Rebecca Feasey, Bath Spa University, UK

Whether one is reading Richard Dyer's seminal study on stars (*Stars*, 1998; *Heavenly Bodies*, 2003), his work on gay culture (*Now You See it: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film*, 1990; *Culture of Queers*, 2001), his research on race (*White*, 1997) or his collection of essays on representation (*The Matter of Images*, 1993), the author is routinely entertaining, informative and enlightening. It will come as no surprise, therefore, to existing students of Dyer that the second edition of *Only Entertainment* is both a fascinating and forceful examination of the culture of entertainment.

Only Entertainment is a collection of essays originally published in such esteemed journals as *Sight and Sound*, *New Statesman and Society*, *Movie* and *Screen*. Furthermore, this new edition features a revised introduction and five new chapters on a diverse range of topics from the *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) to Elizabeth Taylor. As a collection of previously published material, Dyer presents his work as "disparate in topic and tone" (1). However, it is clear that there is a theme running throughout these diverse articles, and that is the desire to understand entertainment on its own terms. The point here is that although we all know what we mean when we talk about entertainment, be it escapism, wish-fulfillment, utopia, the taking of pleasure, fantasy and excitement or the suspension of disbelief, the concept itself is often taken for granted without further scrutiny or debate (1). Therefore, *Only Entertainment* explores entertainment *as* entertainment, asking how and whether an emphasis on the primacy of pleasure sets it apart from other forms of art. The task, we are told, is to "identify the ideological implications – good and bad – of entertainment qualities themselves, rather than seeking to uncover hidden ideological meanings behind and separable from the façade of entertainment" (2).

Therefore, in order to explore entertainment as entertainment, Dyer takes issue with those films, film stars and starring genres most associated with entertainment in order to argue that entertainment itself "is part of a common sense, which is always historically and culturally constructed" (i). For example, *The Sound of Music* (1965) is studied through an examination of socialism in the text, *Speed* (1994) is examined through the sensation of movement, gay pornography is studied through the idea of narrative and disco is considered through an analysis of capitalism.

I would like to pay particular attention to the article entitled "The Colour of Entertainment" as it examines the *That's Entertainment* musical compilation shows, and the ways in which the series presented the actress Lena Horne as a victim of racism at MGM studios. Although the article, formerly published in *Sight and Sound*, is interesting in the ways in which it adds to the discussion of the nature of entertainment, it is also worth reading in its own right through notions of stardom, physical space and racial discrimination both in and beyond the classical Hollywood studio system.

In the final chapter of the book Dyer asks whether entertainment as we know it is on the wane. What he means by this is that the basis for entertainment through notions of wish-fulfilment and fantasy have "undergone such profound alterations in the past half-century that entertainment may now be ceasing to be a viable cultural category" (175). After all, with the introduction of reality television and the recent *Big Brother* phenomena, the collapse of realism and entertainment means that entertainment is available anywhere, anytime and looks like everyone, which means that the dynamic of escape that Dyer sees as the foundation of entertainment disappears (178).

Although I do not necessarily agree with Dyer's belief in the demise of entertainment as a treat, as something special to be savoured, I would still strongly recommend this text to anyone who is interested in film, cultural theory or popular culture more generally. Although *Only Entertainment* is an academic textbook by a leading theorist in the field of film studies, Dyer's writing style is, as always, approachable and entertaining, and as such, the content should be accessible to anyone interested in these areas of debate.

Teleparody: Predicting/ Preventing the TV Discourse of Tomorrow

By Angela Hague and David Lavery (eds.)

New York: Wallflower Press, 2002. ISBN 1-903364-39-6. xviii + 198 pages

A review by Stephen Groening, University of Minnesota, USA

Meaghan Morris once remarked that it seemed as if some publishing house had a master disk of cultural studies works and kept churning them out, changing the authors' and objects' names as necessary. Angela Hague and David Lavery may not have had Morris in mind when they embarked on this particular project, but the spirit of her remark runs through *Teleparody*. The volume gathers together mock book reviews of non-existent academic texts on television shows. As the editors comment, it has become possible now to know in advance what will be written and published about television without having to go to the bookstore or library and actually read the books. Lavery mentions *Mad Magazine* as one inspiration, while Hague recounts browsing through the book display at an academic conference and realizing that all the books were essentially the same.

Teleparody may seem cynical and polemic, but it is also laugh-out-loud funny. At first, the audience might seem rather limited for this book, since one does have to have a slight working knowledge of academic fashions to understand many of the jokes. However, the mock reviews manage to cover a wide range of intellectual formations and disciplines. There's something for philosophers ("Zipping the Great Minds: Max Headroom's BigTime Philosophy"), Deleuze and Guattari fans ("The Piano and the Trolley: The Rhizomatic Mister Rogers"), feminists ("A Creature Feminine: The Politics of T & A in Primetime Television, 1970-2000"), Marxists ("Howdy Doody: A Marxist Interpretation of the Manipulation of the Proletariat") and so on.

Beside the clever titles and the Pynchon-esque names (Martyn Dumfries and André Dross seem particularly inspired), the content of the mock reviews manages to skewer both the vapidness of a certain brand of popular culture studies and the specialization of scholarship. Bill Friend's mock review of a book on *Gidget* is a case in point:

DiTurno rocketed to fame with the publication of *Timmy's Down the Well, Again: The Life of the Lassies*, a metafictional biography/ ethnography of the dogs who played Lassie. This text led to the development of what has come to be known as Post-Domestication Studies (or, more pejoratively, Critter Crit). DiTurno quickly became a major force in cultural studies [...]. (20)

Friend's invented academic, DiTurno, is probably the most outrageously ridiculous figure in the entire volume (he gets in a fist fight with Jean Baudrillard at Eurodisney), but he serves a purpose. Academics continually on the search for something new to write about desperately comb the field of popular culture in efforts to wed their favorite theorist with their favorite

non-academic pastime (in the interests of full disclosure, this is how I wrote my master's thesis). This method can produce interesting, important, and compelling work; but the study of culture should not be reduced to a simple formula.

I realize, of course, that popular culture is an attractive object not simply because many of us engage with it daily, but there are publishing pressures as well. Quite simply, chain bookstores will more likely stock books on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The X-Files* than books on performance art, avant-garde video, or Iranian cinema. If we want to engage an audience outside of a few hundred professors, then writing on the popular seems an obvious choice. But we need to use our knowledge of the cultural economy to our advantage: as an opening in which to intervene. For instance, I know that a new volume on *The Matrix* franchise is in the works. While I do not charge the book to be as influential in media studies as the franchise has been in the entertainment industry, I do think it represents an excellent chance for media studies to interact with an audience that might otherwise be loathe to pick up academic work (*Harry Potter* is another such opportunity). This forthcoming volume may very well be the only media studies book fans of *The Matrix* ever buy. I don't much care whether Keanu Reeves read Baudrillard, as rumored in recent interviews, but it does matter if film audiences have the tools, capacity and wherewithal to engage the mediated world in a critical way.

Robert J. Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Center of the Study of Popular Television, closes the book by remarking that "the language of contemporary criticism, for all its abuses, can be of very great value" (176). I wholeheartedly agree, and believe that the study of popular culture can also be of very great value. In our efforts to reach wider audiences, take on new and exciting objects, apply the ideas of cultural theorists, and keep our jobs (no mean feat), we can not continue to claim that popular culture matters because it is so malleable and ubiquitous. Popular culture matters because, as C. Wright Mills pointed out, we live in a second-hand world, our daily lives are organized by mediated experiences.

Terence Fisher

By Peter Hutchings

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-7190-5637-3. 15 illustrations, x + 198 pp

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

Terence Fisher is best known for directing many of the "classic" Hammer horror films, including *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *Dracula* (1958), *The Mummy* (1959), *Brides of Dracula* (1960), and *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961). However, Fisher also directed several more baroque, late-period Hammer films, including *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) and his final film, *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* (made in 1972 but not released until 1974 as the Hammer boom was waning). In this volume, part of the British Film Makers series released by Manchester University Press, author Peter Hutchings gives us a concise overview of Fisher's fifty-film career, including not only his work at Hammer, but also his early work as a director at Highbury and Gainsborough studios (1947-1950) and his work making low-budget features throughout the 1950s. (Hutchings aptly compares these low-budget, generic support features to those produced by Hollywood's Poverty Row.)

An opening chapter entitled "Fisher in Context" attempts to situate this project amidst the currents of contemporary genre and auteur theory. Questions about British film's relation to realism and the fantastic are raised, as well as Fisher's questionable status as an "artist" working within a strict industrial context. Fisher, a self-described "director for hire," learned how to make low budget films with little time for preparation or rehearsal, and he rarely (if ever) contributed to the scripts he filmed. As he himself put it, "the script is your Bible! It's the guts you start with. All a director is, please, is an interpreter of the written word, or translator of the written word, into a visual form" (12). As Hutchings explains it, in reference to Truffaut's famous distinction, Fisher saw himself more as a *metteur-en-scene* than an *auteur*. Yet, in later analyses, Hutchings sometimes uses dialogue and story points as examples of Fisher's alleged authorial vision, a move that rests uneasily with what Hutchings has already told us about Fisher's lack of input into his scripts. Ultimately invoking auteur-structuralism, Hutchings locates Fisher's directorial contributions within specific studio spaces and the British film industry as a whole.

Stylistically, Fisher emerges as a director interested in the spatial relations between characters and sets. "A frequent emphasis on static camera set ups...which are obviously designed with editing patterns in mind, arguably reflects Fisher's own background as an editor" (36). Thus, *Dracula* is studied for the ways in which the Count appears (and disappears) before the camera. The blocking of "a threatening figure moving forwards through a setting towards an immobile camera" becomes a "kind of signature camera set-up" for Fisher, and can be found in early films such as *Portrait From Life* (1948) as well as in *Dracula* and *The Mummy* (52-53). Indeed, Fisher might be considered a sort of poor man's Douglas Sirk, wringing excess meaning out of expressive lighting and *mise-en-scene*. Hutchings' description of how Fisher

used blowing leaves to convey "the sexual passion Lucy clearly feels for Dracula" reminded this reviewer of their similar use in Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1955).

Hutchings argues that Fisher's work centers thematically on conflicted male authority figures, especially as they deal with sexuality and other forms of desire (usually forbidden and/or monstrous). "It seems that throughout his career, Fisher was either unable or unwilling to present the community in a positive light, and this might help explain his attraction to those charismatic authority figures who, in Hammer horror in particular, take charge" (131). This dichotomy "between a domineering [masculine] will and a flesh that is degrading and animalistic is one that informs a lot of Fisher's horrors, especially in their treatment of sexuality" (98). That thematic conflict became more pronounced as the 1960s progressed and films like *The Gorgon* (1964) and *Frankenstein Created Woman* began to deal more directly with female protagonists, albeit monstrous ones.

There is much to recommend *Terence Fisher*, even as the brevity of the work leaves this reviewer hungry for more. (Wheeler Winston Dixon's *The Charm of Evil: The Life and Films of Terence Fisher* (Scarecrow Press, 1991) outweighs Hutchings's study by over 300 pages.) I'd like to have known more about Fisher's actual life, his science fiction films (discussed here for eight pages), and his television work, especially the series *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* starring Boris Karloff. (Hutchings tried but failed to track down any of Fisher's television work.) Readers aware of Hutchings's *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester UP, 1993) will also note some overlap in the analyses offered. Nonetheless, this lively and well-written volume was a pleasure to read, and its focus on Fisher as a figure within British cinema might make it useful in classes on British film history, as well as in classes on horror and/or cinematic authorship.

The Cinema of Ken Loach: Art in the Service of the People

By Jacob Leigh

London: Wallflower Press, 2002. ISBN 1-903364-311-0. 24 illustrations, 3 + 211 pp.

A review by Ian Peddie, West Texas A&M University, USA

As one of the most important filmmakers in Europe, Ken Loach's work continues to illuminate the political and social problems that mark contemporary Britain. Both polemical and intensely political, Loach remains true to a left-wing aesthetic that began when he directed episodes of *Z Cars* in the 1960s. Jacob Leigh's study of Loach's impressive filmography offers an attempt to delineate aspects of the director's work, notably Loach's stylistic direction as well as certain thematic traits that characterize his films. In *Up the Junction* (1965) and *Cathy Come Home* (1966), two early plays that established Loach as an emerging director of some merit, Leigh suggests that Loach experimented with loosely Brechtian notions of individual drama and social analysis. These issues are arguably the mainstays of his work, and Leigh uses the development of these concepts as a means of guiding his readers through some thirty five years of filmmaking.

In *Cathy Come Home*, which Leigh defines as "fictional journalism", the author identifies Loach's desire to render problems of homelessness not as particular to the film's characters but as a systemic problem. In that sense, the film becomes a "melodrama of protest" (46), one in which the story of decline assumes precedence as the characters become "ciphers in a diagrammatic story" (46). In any form of art this is a persistent issue and Loach's search to find an appropriate way of expressing political attitudes without recourse to the kind of transparent polemic that marked parts of *Cathy Come Home* is at the core of his development as a filmmaker. Leigh is alert to this issue and in *Kes* (1969), he suggests that Loach began to address the problem. Loach made two important breakthroughs in *Kes*, both of which had a considerable impact on the rest of his career. First, the camerawork of Chris Menges shifted the emphasis from what Loach suggested had "until then been seen as like fictional journalism" (60) towards a sense of sympathetic observation. At issue here was what Loach calls Menges's ability to "to observe it more", to "let the action happen . . . and not be so busy all the time with the camera." Second, Loach's ability to organize a sense of sympathy for the character even when, like David Bradley in *Kes*, that character is not exclusively the victim of circumstance. As Leigh points out, this is especially important given that David Bradley is morally ambiguous: just as he is bullied so too does he bully, and just as things are wrongly taken from him so too does he steal. In effect, what this means is that the audience is required to consider the implications of transparent "identification" with a character. Hence one-dimensional protest is filtered through a number of issues that complicate, unnerve and unsettle an audience.

What all this amounts to of course is that as his career progressed Loach was moving to a more sophisticated means of representing social realism and political protest. Leigh's

analysis of Loach's attempts to achieve this is generally astute. Still, given that up until the late 1960s Loach's films had expressed considerable concerns with social injustice in a variety of ways, it may come as a surprise to learn that, as Leigh suggests, *The Big Flame* (1969) was the director's first encapsulation of "a coherent political philosophy" (92). Organized around a dock strike, *The Big Flame* attempts "to offer on mainstream television a hypothesis for political action" (96). Nevertheless, the notion that the working class share a collective experience is endemic to Loach's films, and given that fact Leigh may have been more critical of a film co-writer Terry Garnett described as "straightforward propaganda" (96). The ideological didacticism of *The Big Flame* largely escapes Leigh's critical eye.

Leigh is at his best when analyzing the aesthetic initiatives and techniques Loach employs. Hence his discussion of camerawork and lighting in much of the director's work is both welcome and enlightening. Analysis of the social and political aspects and implications of films such as *The Gamekeeper* (1980), Loach's second collaboration with Barry Hines, is, however, less convincing. In this film, Leigh has much to say about one of Loach's favorite techniques, one he employs in a number of alternative ways in other films: the long shot panning across a road. In *Kes* the road in question divides the Duke's estate from the council estate that it borders. The symbolic implications of such shots are largely self evident, but the political implications of this film and how those implications are represented, profound though they are, are never really afforded anything more than acknowledgement. Near the end of the film, for instance, when George (the gamekeeper) sits to eat his cellophane-wrapped meat pie, the author suggests that the image "prompts thoughts about class" (124). This comment requires but receives no qualification. Likewise when Mary (George's wife) complains of the isolation she feels in living in a cottage on the Duke's estate, the author simply concludes that she "feels trapped in a routine and isolated. The only break from keeping house comes when she cleans at the Duke's house three times a week or shops in the village. George does not respond to her complains; he simply returns to work" (127). Yes, but? There is, I think, much that might be made about Mary's complaints. In fairness, it is worth pointing out that the book makes no particular pretense towards political analysis. Instead Leigh's intention is to chart the aesthetic development of Loach's work. And in that sense there remains much of value in this book.

The Divine Comic: The Cinema of Roberto Benigni (Scarecrow Filmmakers Series #85)

By Carlo Celli

Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8108-4000-6. 6 b&w photographs, xiii + 155pp. \$27.50 (hbk)

A review by Dean DeFino, Iona College, New York, USA

Italian actor/director/writer Roberto Benigni achieved enormous international celebrity in 1999 with his Academy Award-winning *La Vita e Bella* [*Life is Beautiful*] (1997), after having made the two highest-grossing films in the history of Italian cinema: *Johnny Stecchino* (1991) and *Il Mostro* [*The Monster*] (1994). Though Benigni's star has fallen slightly with the recent critical and box office failure of *Pinocchio* (2002), his reputation for frenetic, highly sophisticated physical and verbal comedy, not to mention independent film credibility for stand-out performances in Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* (1986) and *Night on Earth* (1991), have earned him favorable comparisons to Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Groucho Marx. As both an introduction to Benigni's *oeuvre* and the first substantial critical engagement with its subject, Carlo Celli's *The Divine Comic* is meant to be far more than a justification for these comparisons.

The Divine Comic is actually the second book-length study published on Benigni, preceded by Stephano Masi's *Roberto Benigni* (Gremese Editore, 1999), but Masi's text, clearly intended for a mass-market audience, lacks the academic rigor of Celli's. A scholar of film and Italian language and culture, Celli attempts to situate Benigni's work within a series of literary and performance traditions reaching back to Dante, epic poetry, the Tuscan *poeti a braccio* (improvising poets) and the exorcist/clowns of ancient Orphic rites. Here we discover a child of poverty with no formal education, who learned to master the hendecasyllable (the eleven-syllable verse form favored by Dante and Petrarch) from his fellow Tuscan peasants; an admirer of Rabelais, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky and Whitman, who began his career as a stage performer among the post-War avant-garde; the film artist, who apprenticed with the great Italian mythmakers of twentieth century: Pasolini, Zavattini, Fellini.

Benigni's reputation has been well established in Italy since the 1970s, where he created a series of inventive theater performances and television programs that remain high water marks of modern Italian comedy. He is best known in Italy for a series of staged and filmed monologues featuring a character originally named Mario Cioni: a bawdy and exuberant persona whose maniacal "confessions" (as Cioni himself calls these discourses) border on boasting. Cioni is the Rabelaisian, the Whitmanesque Id: obscene, fecund, joyful, and self-content. He is the archetype, according to Celli, for all other Benigni characters, from the taxi driver recounting fantastic perversions to his clerical fare in *Night on Earth*, to Guido lustfully seeking out his wife in one of the final, tragic scenes of *La Vita e Bella*. Like Chaplin's Tramp and Keaton's Stoneface, Cioni is both a marginalized figure (a member of the working or peasant class) and a dynamo, whose verbal and physical acrobatics

immediately draw our attention and sympathy. Also like Chaplin (and Keaton implicitly), Benigni uses the character as a vehicle for a series of political and philosophical discourses on religion, government, history, myth, and desire.

Celli's primary purpose in *The Divine Comic* is to expose and codify these discourses, and to reveal an artist of considerable talent and conviction: from the staunch leftist who savagely criticized the centrism of the Italian Communist Party and U.S. expansionism in the 1970s, to the popular entertainer willing to risk his reputation (and perhaps his career) on a comedy about the Holocaust in the 1990s. This portrait is helped considerably by Celli's astute use of sources, particularly those concerning Italian cinema and comedy, and his sections concerning Benigni's less available work (for Italian television and the stage) are comprehensive without being summary. A reader unfamiliar with Benigni outside of *La Vita e Bella* or his work with Jim Jarmusch will have little difficulty navigating through Celli's critical remarks. Though a bit repetitive (chapters frequently overlap), the material is highly accessible and insightful.

But the jewel of the text is a thirty-two-page appendix containing a pair of interviews with Benigni: one conducted by the author, and a second by Vanina Pezzetti. These pieces are valuable not only because Benigni, known for his verbose and exuberant performances, rarely grants interviews (and never anything so extensive), but also because they serve as primary reference works for the text as a whole. The preceding chapters borrow largely from Benigni's own observations, amplifying, extending and corroborating them. One might find this troubling in light of the caveat that the artist is his least reliable critic, but Benigni's erudition on his work and influences is undeniable, and he is remarkably forthcoming concerning a variety of subjects, including family and politics, his contentious relationship with the Catholic Church, and the virtues of Rabelaisian or "lower body" humor. His discourses on "the embryonic guts, the mud of poetry" (129) reveal as much about the artist as any critical study could hope, and surely compel us to look again, and more deeply, at his body of work.

>The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory

By Slavoj Žižek

London: British Film Institute, 2001. ISBN 0 85170 754 8. 240 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

A review by Patricia Allmer, Loughborough University School of Art and Design, UK

Opposition to film studies' application of "theory" in general and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular has grown over the years. Slavoj Žižek's *The Fright of Real Tears* attempts to re-establish Lacan's theories and outline their importance in relation to film studies. The first part of this book is concerned with arguing that the "Post-Theory" of David Bordwell and others becomes in some ways "Pre-Theory" where notions of ideological causality and cultural specificity are erased and replaced with trans-cultural universal, ahistorical and apolitical beliefs.

The second part tries to demonstrate the importance of Lacanian analysis through readings of Krzysztof Kieślowski's oeuvre, ranging from the early documentary films to *Decalogue* (1988) and the *Three Colours* (1993-94) trilogy. Here, explorations of suture and the relation of *Decalogue* to the Ten Commandments understood as ethical rather than moral stances are investigated, along with diversions into literature, music, politics and philosophy. These readings repeatedly touch upon the question of "the fright of real tears", which originates in Kieślowski's recognition of the fictionalising effect of the camera when faced with "real tears" and their reverse, the "artificial tears" of actors that seem to become "more Real than reality".

Even though Žižek's readings are generally insightful, some problems are evident in this book. It remains unclear how the readings of Kieślowski's films support the hypothesis that a Lacanian analysis improves on Post-Theory -- there is no final discussion of this point nor a return to the issues set out in the introduction. The book finishes with a discussion of Kieślowski's use of tears.

Psychoanalysis and its terminology seem to get in the way of the readings rather than support them. So, for example, the following exploration:

[...] what Lacan calls *objet petit a* is the exact opposite of the phallic master-signifier: not the subjective supplement which sustains the objective order, but the objective supplement which sustains subjectivity in its contrast to the subjectless objective order. The *objet petit a* is that 'bone in the throat,' that disturbing stain which forever blurs our picture of reality, i.e. the *object* on account of which 'objective reality' is forever inaccessible to the subject. (65)

The question arises of how many ways one can express that our perception of reality is blurred.

A further problem is that theory is prioritised over the work of art. Žižek sometimes twists plots to fit the theory -- at best declaring that Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) is "missing the point" in regard to Patricia Highsmith's novel (begging the question of the relation between film and precursor novel), at worst offering different descriptions of the same scene to make the arguments fit. This happens with the scene in Kieślowski's *Red* where Julie's eye is shown in an extreme close up, after the accident; Žižek describes this "deservedly famous" (52) shot, earlier in the book and accurately, as follows: "The eye covers almost the whole screen, while the external reality (the doctor approaching Julie) is seen only as a reflection in the eye." (52) A still from the scene illustrates this description. However, when Žižek uses it to elaborate on partial objects, he writes: "[A]fter the crash, Julie is in the hospital bed lying silent in an atavistic state of complete shock. In an extreme close-up, almost the entire frame is filled by her eye, and we see the objects in the hospital room reflected in this eye as derealised, spectral apparitions of partial objects [...]" (171). On the one hand the film is misused and even re-written in order to fit the theory; on the other, this inaccuracy demolishes the whole argument that follows the second description.

Similar "amendments" occur on the linguistic level, as in Žižek's elaboration on *The Birds* (1963). Here he argues that Hitchcock switches, without the viewer's realisation, from an objective perspective to the perspective of the "evil aggressor": "The famous God's-view shot of the burning Bodega Bay, which is then, with the entry into the frame of the birds, resignified, subjectivised into the point of view of the evil aggressors themselves." (36) Here, to enhance the effect of the argument, the conventional term for such a perspective ("bird's-eye view") has been changed to "God's view". Such slips occur often -- there are seven survivors at the end of *Red*, not six; in *Blue*, Julie's dead husband's mistress is shown not touching her naked belly, but having a foetal scan.

Žižek's tendency to slip between reality and film may also be regarded as problematic. So for example he uses scenes from films such as Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946) and Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* (1936), to come to the conclusion that: "The *act* itself, the traumatic, violent focus of the narrative, is supplied with a dream-like quality -- a further demonstration of Lacan's thesis, that in a dream, the Real appears in the guise of a dream within the dream." (66) Here, the boundaries between the fictional content of a film and reality are, without any problematisation, overstepped -- film is here regarded wholly equivalent to a reality that "demonstrates" a theoretical thesis. Do these films (in particular Hitchcock's, being informed by psychoanalysis) really demonstrate Lacan's thesis or is this the point where we enter into a uroborus, a self-feeding and self-fulfilling structure?

Nevertheless, *The Fright of Real Tears* should not be dismissed. It is a highly intellectually informed contribution to our understanding of Kieślowski's oeuvre and Žižek's conjectures establish complex connections where one would not have expected them.

Toward Cinema and Its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis

By Laleen Jayamanne

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-253-33982-0. xv + 315 pp

A review by Olivia Khoo, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Toward Cinema and Its Double represents two decades of Laleen Jayamanne's research -- from early Sri Lankan cinema, to Italian neo-realism and slapstick comedy, to a discussion of her own filmic productions. In order to draw the disparate areas of research together in this collection, Jayamanne employs the concept of mimesis.

Jayamanne relies in the first instance on the work of anthropologist Michael Taussig on mimesis. Taussig in turn employs Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno for much of his language and framework. For a text concerned with forms of cross-cultural representation in the cinema, this in itself is an interesting critical manoeuvre. We are forced to ask: what happens when theoretical issues encounter sociological ones? How can we bring questions of cross-cultural representation to bear on a body of film criticism that is dominantly Euro-American?

As a self-proclaimed film critic and cinephile, Jayamanne negotiates a tense passage through the varied terrains of film criticism, cross-cultural politics, and a love of the film object itself. Her book plays out a tension between the need for an "exactness" in film criticism so as to reproduce, in loving detail, a description that might match this cherished film object (this exactness is almost "auratic", as when we love, there is only "one") -- and the fraught issues surrounding cross-cultural representation, which cannot help but split and bifurcate and create doubles in reading, writing and viewing. Jayamanne, very bravely, tackles the contradictions inherent in such a task, while resorting to some desperate (yet highly inventive) measures to split her own voice and create her own doubles. I will return to this in a moment.

Toward Cinema and Its Double opens with an introduction on the notion of an "exact fantasy" (borrowed from Theodor Adorno's discussion of musical performance). Jayamanne states that descriptions in film criticism can, and should be, rendered "correct" or "true" or "exact". However, the room for manoeuvre, and for the play of doubles, lies in the "fantastic" relations that a critic makes between descriptions. She writes, "If the description does not move, then criticism is no more than a dull copy or repetition of the object" (xi). Indeed, this would be devastating to her project since, as she outlines very early on, "This is a book of film criticism, nothing but film criticism..." (xi) Part of the affective resonance of Jayamanne's form of criticism lies in the way her descriptions create their own objects, as much as they are produced by them.

The book is organised into five sections, structured loosely around temporal and spatial (or geographical) co-ordinates. Part One consists of Jayamanne's work from the early 1990s on

"art" films from Australia. In two separate chapters, she addresses the public reception of Dennis O'Rourke's *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (1991) and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), in order to interrogate the role of film criticism in creating "media events". Jayamanne implicates herself as a critic who notes her own (capital) gains from assuming such a position. By far the most interesting chapter of this section, however, is her attempt to read Tracey Moffat's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989) from a Sri Lankan perspective, thus implicating herself in her criticism again. The chapter provides a wonderful reading of *Night Cries*, although as a "Sri Lankan reading" it failed to make sense to me (Jayamanne herself admits that she is not sure what such a reading might look like). This "failure" points perhaps to some of the difficulties inherent in speaking and thinking cross-culturally: a kind of *inexactitude* characterising mimesis, and cultural ambivalence more generally. Jayamanne reads Jimmy Little's role in *Night Cries* in relation to a politics of imitation and assimilation; her own positioning in relation to this seminal Aboriginal Australian film reinforces the need, within Australia, to continue to think and speak "cross-culturally" even when we can never be sure where this dialogue might lead us or what such an engagement might look like.

Part Two of the book stages a remarkable "performance of narcissism" that involves Jayamanne discussing her own films *A Song of Ceylon* and *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* with a fictional interviewer, Anna Rodrigo (who bears the name of Jayamanne's late mother). This mimetic doubling or narcissistic projection enables a working through of unfinished business by re-placing Jayamanne as the "little girl" again—a figure she finds so enabling in her own film work. In writing herself into her own critique, Jayamanne seeks to establish a different kind of relationship between film and criticism, and film and theory. This is more than simply "narcissism"; rather, this performance of narcissism engages *others* -- more specifically, it engages the reader in its own construction.

In Part Three, Jayamanne analyses the relatively undiscussed cinema of Sri Lanka, which is more often than not eclipsed by the dominance of Indian cinema. Jayamanne reads the Sri Lankan cinema of the period 1949-1989 in terms of melodrama and representations of femininity, and in doing so recuperates the degraded form of the Sri Lankan family melodrama.

Part Four brings together a number of disparate essays linked by the heading "Movements of Time". The first chapter is an engagement with Gilles Deleuze's reading of Bazin's theory of Italian neorealism. The second chapter is a reworking of an essay on Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1976), written by Jayamanne in 1980. This reworked chapter continues an interest in narcissism by reading the modes of performance in the film as enacted by Delphine Seyrig (the actress who plays Jeanne Dielman). The final chapter in this section reads allegory in the work of Raul Ruiz – a Chilean-born filmmaker now living in France.

Part Five again switches gear dramatically. The chapter on slapstick as mimetic performance is structured around a set of opposing concepts that together build Jayamanne's argument on mimesis and modernity: from Gilles Deleuze's Chronos vs. Aion, to Michel de Certeau's strategy vs. tactic, to Giorgio Agamben's Rite vs. Play; Ritual Object vs. Toy; Structure vs. Event. The chapter begins to feel too cluttered by having this many concepts. The chapter on *Blue Steel* (1990) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) almost succumbs to the same trap, although it is saved by its enticing and persuasive framing argument. Jayamanne asks how we might activate the mimetic faculty among film critics and academics, and in doing so really begin to "see" the film as an object. She approaches this query through the idea of learning,

positing how we might learn from the two female protagonists of *Blue Steel* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. Through the figures of these two female agents, Jayamanne offers a mimetic double of the "knowing critic" (a creature with eyes at the back of her head). Such a delicious reflection loses its clarity when the chapter leans again on the theoretical backbone of dense Deleuzian concepts. It is only in the final chapter of the book -- Jayamanne's self-proclaimed cinephilic critique of Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989) -- that the film object is again found -- this time through music, or the "sonic blocks" (239) that move us.

Toward Cinema and its Double has much to offer its readers. Jayamanne's recuperation of the film object is wonderful, although criticism's theoretical "double" also threatens to overtake the book on occasions (the chapter on *The Piano* is another example where this occurs). However, for anyone interested in the fraught issues surrounding cross-cultural representation and critique, this book provides invaluable lessons. The ways in which Jayamanne enacts her own struggle with these difficulties creates a form of writing that is honest and engaged, which is "exactly" as film criticism should be.

Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR

By Frederick Wasser

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. ISBN 0-292-79146-1 (pbk)

A review by Jennifer Holt, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Informed by both academic training and industry experience, Frederick Wasser presents a unique historical analysis of the seismic institutional shifts that were effected by the introduction of home video into the Hollywood landscape in the mid-1970s. Wasser's multi-layered history details a new technology that had a profound impact on everything in Hollywood from production, distribution, exhibition and marketing to audience activity and conglomerate culture. He integrates a significant array of statistics and data with industry analysis to develop his argument for video as the chief architect behind the forms and functions of the New Hollywood, or as he puts it, "the biggest thing to happen to film since sound."

Veni, Vidi, Video examines the trajectory of Hollywood's adaptation to this technological advance in a multi-dimensional manner that incorporates broadcast TV, radio, cable *and* film history. The book also maintains a prevalent focus on the audience and how the habits and activities of consumers worked to shape the social and institutional significance of video as much as any business strategy. Thus, the tensions between corporate vision, various media, and audience desire and demand are all highlighted throughout the book as having a profound influence on the ways in which the industry reacted to and understood the power of video.

In keeping with the assertions of industry historians such as Schatz and Gomery, Wasser maintains that domestic theatrical release is the primary market that bestows the earning power on any ancillary form of revenue, even video (although video revenues have exceeded theatrical earnings since the mid-1980s.) However, his theories about the place of video in the revenue stream and the institutional shifts enacted by the integration of video technology into the conglomerate/studio structure are a unique contribution. He examines the macro- and microeconomics of video rental, production, distribution and sale, as well as the role of video as reviving the global market for Hollywood and igniting the fire of synergy for today's multimedia conglomerates.

Wasser's emphasis on distribution as a focal point of video's role and legacy are constant. He examines the history of distribution companies (both studio related and independent) as well as their various release patterns and financing practices in order to have a barometer with which to measure the enormous change enacted by the introduction of video into this pipeline. The independent producer/distributors are characterized as building the video market with their successes and then falling victim to that success once the conglomerates began to take over the business. Ironically, these mergers were initiated by video, according to Wasser, as the new opportunities to capitalize on this growing ancillary market served to

attract the conglomerate takeovers in the first place. With case studies of Disney, Paramount, Vestron and Carolco, Wasser reveals the varying degrees of success with which independents and studios were able to negotiate the perils of video distribution, and how that ultimately sealed their fate in the New Hollywood.

This exploration of conglomerate culture and the onset of video implicitly argues for some measure of structural determinism. As Wasser explains, "the media landscape of today is largely a result of media corporations trying to be flexible enough to outflank the surprises of video technology." (14) He asserts that video saved the New Hollywood by reunifying the audience and delivering it back to the film industry. The timing of the video revolution, as he calls it, with the birth of the New Hollywood and the blockbuster film is more than just a chronological coincidence. Thus, Wasser essentially sees video and video revenue as the chief catalyst behind the development of everything from the mini-majors in the 1980s (i.e. Cannon, Orion, Carolco) to the media conglomerates of the 1990s (Time Warner, Viacom, Disney) and the mass audience that supported them both.

At times this overwhelming amount of information can feel like too much of a good thing, especially in the sections that are light on contextual relevance. Wasser's concluding remarks about the relationship of video to film form (as opposed to industrial structure and practices) are perhaps the weakest link of the study, as his notions of video as impacting genre and style in Hollywood are not well substantiated or explored. The direct causal links are hardest to substantiate, especially in terms of stylistic or directorial influence.

However, Wasser's insistence on viewing this history as a dialectic that involves many layers and dimensions contributes to an exciting, non-linear vision of "progress" and a rich tapestry of historical analysis. There is no other work that examines this pivotal technology and medium with such careful detail and focus. Ultimately, this focus contributes to the book's greatest strength: its ability to reformulate and redefine our understanding of video as much more than a technology or a medium or a market, but as a powerful institutional force that had a direct hand in shaping the corporate blueprint and business practices of the New Hollywood.