

# **Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video**

By Peter X. Feng

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-82232-983-2. 44 illustrations, 304 pp. £16.95

Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Dragon By Leon Hunt & The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema By Kyung Hyun Kim & In the Realm of the Senses By Joan Mellen

## **Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Dragon**

By Leon Hunt

London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003. ISBN 1-90336-463-9. 12 illustrations, 224pp. £15.99

## **The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema**

By Kyung Hyun Kim

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-82233-267-1. 66 illustrations, 368pp. £10.80

## **In the Realm of the Senses**

By Joan Mellen

London: BFI, 2004. ISBN: 1 84457 034 7. 69 illustrations, 87pp. £8.99

## **A review by Brian Curtin, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand**

In 1995 the cultural critic and novelist Lawrence Chua wrote "The canon of Asian Pacific American filmmaking in this country is a library of victimization and self-deprecation". Writing of "dewy-eyed invocation of racial community", "the innocent construction of an essential Asian subject" and, with the example of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the family and the nation as purportedly the only redemptive models of resistance being articulated, he provided a particularly savage indictment of how 'Asians' in the US represent

and are represented ('The Postmodern Ethnic Brunch: Devouring Difference', Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (eds.), *In A Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, City Lights Books, 1995: 62).

Time-span notwithstanding, it is against this background that one could approach Peter X. Feng's *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video* in order to consider how well one of Feng's aims is delivered; to examine how Asian American film and video critically investigates the mutual implication of assimilation narratives and conventional cinematic forms. Moreover, a critical question for *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Dragon, The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* and *In the Realm of the Senses* is how an increased Anglophone focus on Asian cinema and Asian subjects constructs its ostensible objects, providing, as it were, an expansive range of insights, terms and methods. Leon Hunt's reductive characterization of the so-called West's flirtation with Asia, or 'Asian Romance', -- as either a controlled exposure to linguistic, racial and cultural difference or mindless consumption of the exotic -- needs to be challenged in this respect. In their own way, it is the necessary role of each of these books to do so.

Primarily each book produces the insight that nothing could be as neat as the term 'Asian' or 'cinema' suggests. Kim and Mellen trace the challenge of socio-political change to individuals' sense of collective identity; changes resulting from the aggressive impact of militarism and modernization. In Mellen's text, *Ai no Corrida*'s Sada and Kichizo pursue the authentic values of a liberated past by isolating themselves from the repressing present. Feng and Hunt are pointedly concerned with hybridity, be it the variable tools and genres of the filmmaker or the overlapping histories of nations and cultures. Each book crosses each other with questions of the fractured and debatable terms by which visual representation, or the moving image, constitutes itself and its objects.

The methods by which Kim and Feng establish their insights are psychoanalytic and reflect a fairly routine use of these methods. Hunt and Mellen aim towards quite exhaustive accounts of their subjects: Hunt maps the origin, transnational impact, and technical evolution of the kung fu movie since the early 1970s and Mellen moves from documenting how Oshima came to make *Ai no Corrida* to cinematic contexts and a reasonably satisfying account of the *mise en scene* and its subsequent impact in Japan, Europe and America.

As something of an aside, but necessary to mention, concerning the focus each book has on the visual, it is noteworthy that each book is testament to how writing on the visual image should offer little by way of a persuasive engagement with what the image is or how the image may function. Feng and Kim offer minimum reflection on why psychoanalysis should be considered relevant for the objects in question and, further, its application for visual images more generally. *Identities in Motion* follows academic convention and opens with a detailed theoretical structure that has only the most tangential relation to anything that could be understood as the 'visual' or 'image'. For Feng to write "writing cannot deceive me as to its authenticity -- for that we need cinema" he perpetuates a myth of mechanical reproduction that has long since been trashed (16). Granted, Mellen may have been given a remit to provide a summary description of the *mise en scene* of *Ai no Corrida* but one is left somewhat wanting in terms of how Oshima's devices can be substantially interpreted in terms of the dynamics of visual consumption. Finally, what challenges these movies pose for paradigms developed in the US and Europe apparently remains unanswered throughout. As one critical take on 'globalization', and writing from Bangkok, the standardization of theories developed largely in France and the US remains an unapproached problematic.

So be it; we can concede that it is necessary to approach the books on the terms they offer, or interpret their analyses according to what the authors set up as the necessary conditions for understanding.

*Ai no Corrida* is, or was, somewhat exemplary in terms of sexual representation and the challenge it posed to issues of art, erotica, and pornography. Or, in Mellen's characterization, the encompassing issue of sexism and representation; she quotes Oshima's insight that the male embrace of the 'feminine' was the most significant aspect of the spirit of political rebellion in the late 60s (21). Indeed, the male character Kichizo consistently places Sada's desires before his, leading to the ultimate act of possession. More broadly, and alongside *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) and *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (Robert Altman, 1972), Oshima's movie belonged to a historical context where sexuality was allegorized as an escape from political repression. Mellen here links countercultural trends in the US and Europe, to do with the idea that repressed sexuality is at the root of social ills, with the Japanese drive towards modernization that signalled the death of earlier, ostensibly uninhibited sexual cultures.

As this particular moment has passed, it could be useful to also see the movie in the context of Linda Williams' recent edited volume *Porn Studies* (Duke University Press, 2004). That is, in a less aggressively politicized context. Mellen does not touch on contemporary ideologies of sexual representation or the matter of race and spectatorship.

Matters of context, race and spectatorship produced Feng's volume. He writes, critically, in his introduction, "Asian Americans are not filmmakers, we produce guerrilla video, autoethnography, and autobiographical essay, labels which insert movies into different historical traditions" (15). He is not only concerned with how the conventions of cinema signify but also conceptual constraints on categories. Further, somewhat comparable to Robert G. Lee's *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Temple University Press, 2000) he aims to trace one of the conditions by which culture can define what is American and what is not. Cinema is understood as pivotal and he focuses how Asian American filmmakers employ cinema to actually critique itself. The title *Identities in Motion* refers to the idea of Asian bodies moving between East and West, alongside Asian negotiations of what it means to be American.

Feng is interested in the notion of 'gaps' in Asian American identities, gaps within official histories of the US that exclude Asians, gaps in representation as the disjuncture between ideology and lived experience and he signals tensions between essentialist and constructivist accounts of identity formation. Finally, Feng fingers the gaps between Asian American Studies and film studies (6-7). He is conscious of the problematic of notions of inclusion and exclusion within the term 'Asian American' which, after all, brings together disparate ethnic, cultural and national groups. The term Asian American is understood as instrumental and political, not as Feng describes it 'primordial' (17).

The selection of film is based on notions of disidentification, defined against oppositional positions. *Identities in Motion* proceeds with questions of the representation of Asia and the form of representation itself, such as ethnographic movies and their role in racist sciences, through to romance narratives set in the early years of Asian migration to the US (from the second half of the nineteenth century). Autobiographical movies by women who had been interned in the US during World War II are also examined. The second part of the volume

looks at travelogues made by Asians returning to Asia and the final section 'Performing Transformation' considers the contestation and inadequacy of labels around Asian identity.

*The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* is something of an accompaniment to Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (Routledge, 1992), but Silverman's approach is usefully complicated by Korean political history which fractures the sleekness of her notion of a 'dominant fiction' of masculinity. Rather, the images of masculinity, or masculinities, which Kim discusses attest to profound changes in South Korean society from the early 80s to the beginning of this millennium. These changes are to do with industrialization, military rule and the eventual process of democratization, all producing variable and highly contested notions of masculinity.

Kim's specific focus is the New Korean Cinema which emerged in the early eighties and waned by 2000; why he thinks the former is more worthy of scholarly examination than the 'crass comedy films' of 2001-2 is explained as the fact that the role of writers and directors was diminished in favor of corporate interests. Why corporate interests should not be of scholarly interest in an age when it can be argued that Hollywood values surf on myths of globalization is possibly a question for another book.

Kim's central thesis is that a series of images of emasculated men in Korean cinema, from the early 80s, foreclosed a normative inscription of ideal masculinities by the late 90s; from the self-loathing and pathetic to the sleek and desirable. While the earlier incarnation may have served possible critique of early political processes of masculinization, in Kim's terms, they ended up producing the desire for an ideal hero as a new symbol of modern, and globalized, Korea. The earlier images of alienation are understood as offering political, economic and cultural identification during a time of tyrannical military rule, including events such as the bloody massacre at Kwangju during 1980, which Kim describes as Korea's Tiananmen (18). As a spectre of powerlessness, images showed men as essentially victims.

The author's methods and conclusions are familiar; I was left wondering if there were any notable academics or writing in Asia which might challenge Kim's conventionality.

*Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Dragon* looks at the transcultural impact of 'kung fu' from the early 70s in Hong Kong through to the significance of Hong Kong stars, directors and choreographers in Hollywood. As we already guessed, Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* (Robert Clouse, 1973) was pivotal and by the 80s he had ensured that kung fu had entered the 'transnational imaginary'. The root of this impact, however, was a conscious decision on behalf of Hong Kong cinema to break through the Western market, beginning in 1966 with a five-year plan. *King Boxer* in 1972 achieved this.

Hunt's book importantly situates itself at the intersection of complex notions of east/west, postcolonialism and orientalist ideologies. While the kung fu phenomenon emerged from Hong Kong, it is hardly reducible to this island in any essential cultural or geographical sense, as the movies can be crossed with Japanese Samurai films and Shanghai's *wu xia pian* (martial chivalry film). Further, the movies have been mediated by the development of technology at the level of spectacle and iconography and are aimed at a diverse audience within and outside South-East Asia. The action, so to speak, of the modern-day movies has moved from an isolated world ('China') to the colonial urban space of Hong Kong while also crossing genres into comedy, among others. Hunt cites movies such as *Project A* (Jackie Chan, 1983), *Winners and Sinners* (Sammo Hung Kam-Bo, 1983) and *Police Story* (Jackie

Chan, 1985) in this respect. Further, while they can undoubtedly contain elements of nationalism, the movies appeal to aficionados mitigates this to a degree and figures such as Jackie Chan can be understood as functioning as part of a postcolonial project.

Hunt's book is in this respect exhaustive in terms of research. Framed by questions of the authentic, initially in terms of cinema and the human body's take on the 'real' and concluding with questions of mechanical reproduction in terms of computer games and the digital manipulations of movies like *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999). These chapters bracket case studies from the enduring myth of the Shaolin Temple through the identities of Bruce Lee, Jet Li, female martial arts stars stereotyped as 'Deadly China Dolls', and Hollywood's attempts to assimilate its Others and the challenges to this process.

This is the crux of the value Hunt's volume and the others; a wide set of examples and references with which to critically consider 'Asian' identity and cinema in an international context.

# Censorship in Theatre and Cinema

By Anthony Aldgate and James C. Robertson

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7486-1961-5. 196pp. £18.99

## A review by Francesca Saggini, Università della Tuscia at Viterbo, Italy

In the wake of the recent Cannes controversy over the alleged blasphemy of the big screen adaptation of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (Ron Howard, 2006), audiences have been given an unpleasantly fresh reminder of various forms of 'censorship', whatever their nature -- religious as much as intellectual. Just another episode in the ever-raging moralistic campaign which seems to shadow some of today's most controversial works *The Da Vinci Code* is the latest in a line that has recently enrolled amongst its ranks Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's play *Bezhti* (*Dishonour*, Birmingham Repertory Theatre), withdrawn early in 2005 after the violent protests of the Sikh community, and Stewart Lee and Richard Thomas's sensational *Jerry Springer. The Opera*, a parody of the famous American chat show. Indeed, the tree of works that may cause religious offence, civilian dissatisfaction, or raise accusations of pornography seems to be truly evergreen and ever-growing. Aldgate and Robertson's work helps to spread some light on the complex workings and negotiations staged by theatre and cinema censorship, looking back on the period that spans from Eugene de Brieux's 1902 *Damaged Goods*, a play about VD which had two equally unfortunate big screen versions (GB, 1919 and USA, 1938) to John Whiting's *The Devils*, which in 1971 Ken Russell made into a film whose complete, uncut version -- the two critics remind us -- "has never been seen in public in Britain or anywhere else, and now it seems likely that it is no longer extant" (179).

In the introduction to their study, Aldgate and Robertson provide a useful summary of the policy (as well as politics) of the 1909 Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on theatre censorship, according to which

any play would receive a licence unless (1) it was considered indecent, (2) contained the portrayal of offensive personalities, (3) depicted living people who had died only recently, (4) violated religious reverence, (5) encouraged crime and vice, (6) impaired relations with any foreign power, or (7) was calculated to cause or bring about a breach of the peace (1).

The structure of *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* follows this same thematic lay-out pretty closely, spreading out over six chapters plus a brief introduction (three pages with notes) and conclusion (just over four pages). Each chapter examines how the plot, language and thematic material of a number of plays were significantly toned down and extensively revised before reaching the stage, and then follows the fate of their big screen transpositions, charting the further post-production deletions and amendments these latter were victims of before the award of an appropriate certificate.

Each chapter of the book offers a detailed analysis of various case studies ranked by themes. This structure aims at making this study an easy tool of reference, yet at the same time it

forces upon the stage and screen properties it discusses too rigid a grid, which at times ends up somewhat oversimplifying matters.

The first section of *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* deals with nine case studies which address the impact of changing sexuality on stage and film censorship. Then we have 'Foreign Affairs', which focuses on three further case studies and explains how political interference may operate a form of hands-on control by allowing, cutting, or banning films which might prejudice diplomatic relations with foreign countries. 'The Quest for Quality' (two examples) examines the problems of appropriate standards in the depiction of youth, women, and the changing representations of masculinity. This section includes a discussion of Christopher Isherwood's *I am a Camera!* (Henry Cornelius, 1955), one of the most interesting pieces in the book. The part on violence and crime on stage and screen (Chapter 5) discusses only two case studies: the tracts-of-the-time *Cosh Boy* (Lewis Gilbert, 1952) and *Serious Charge* (Terrence Young, 1959). (Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, 1971, a strong candidate for discussion, is not considered since it is the adaptation of a novel.) The chapter on 'Homosexuality and Lesbianism' provides us with a further six case studies, whilst Chapter 7 -- with detailed discussions of *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1958) and *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) -- ferries the reader from the 'Angry' Fifties and the dim certainties of post-war Britain over the sexual liberation and cultural liberalism of the 'Swinging' Sixties. Maybe predictably, it thus appears that issues of sex and gender have received a great part of the censors' attention throughout the century and possibly beyond that, as we are reminded by David Cronenberg's unsettling *Crash* (1996). Accordingly, just about half of the case studies in the book directly address these two issues.

The expedient thematic taxonomy chosen by Aldgate and Robertson, however, shows its flaws at times. In effect, the authors need to include one final chapter entitled 'Sundry Genres' to hold together those works which would not seem to fit into any of the above slots, and here to gather such strange bedfellows as the blasphemous *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971), the anti-capital punishment campaign of *I Want to Live!* (Robert Wise, 1958) and the undesirable biopic *Parnell* (John M. Stahl, 1937).

The comparative enquiry carried out by *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* connects significantly and in an original way two media usually treated in isolation. It is striking to read some of the numerous reports the authors quote diffusely from, in which the playgoing audience is accused of being impressionable and scarcely discriminating. As we read about *The Trial of Oscar Wilde*, whose production was discouraged in 1946, "the Censorship is undoubtedly right in making perversion taboo as a dramatic theme. The theatre is an emotional place in which ugly things take on a false glamour" (109). And again, "What would happen to this play in the hands of bad actors or those themselves perverse, makes one shudders" (from the report of Charles Herriot, LCO reader of plays, quoted in full at 110). However, with cinema turning into burgeoning mass entertainment, just a few years on it was now the turn of cinemagoers to be in need of shelter from the potential pitfalls of moral decline, violence and blasphemy -- the playgoing public having by then become apparently more responsible in the searching eye of the censor. As one critic of the *Sunday Graphic* quite rightly quipped about the cinema adaptation of *Cosh Boy*, "I don't remember such an outcry when it was played on the London stage. I suppose they assume that theatregoers are far steadier fellows than the film public." (86). In point of fact, the 'X' certificate for movies -- which after 1951 Gordon Parry's film of Sylvia Rayman's *Women of Twilight* was intended to promote good quality entertainment aimed at an adult public -- avowed this significant line of

divide between the smaller crowds of 'adult' theatregoers and the masses of 'immature' cinemagoers, and the different effect diverse media productions might have on public morals.

Although the back cover of the book promises a coverage of "both American and British" works, *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* in fact discusses its topic mostly in terms of the censorship problems linked with such thoroughly British institutions as the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the BBFC (British Board of Film Censors) or other local licensing authorities as the London County Council. When America is mentioned, this is predominantly in connection with the role played by Hollywood producers and directors on the British productions, or the changes imposed to American movies in order to avoid any offence to British taste. In effect, despite the large number of Hollywood exports across the Atlantic, only rarely was "British censorship a factor influencing the initial production of American films" (2). My impression seems to be borne out by a quick glance at the three indexes, where not a single reference is made to either the Motion Picture Production Code, the House Un-American Activities Committee or the late 40's blacklist of Hollywood radicals, which would be quite obvious references in a study also addressing stage and screen censorship in the States. Likewise, *Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* winds up its narrative with the abolition of theatre censorship in Britain in 1968, and with a brief -- and once again exclusively British-based -- look at the transformation of the BBFC into the British Board of Film Classification in the 1980s. In the 'Conclusion' of the study no mention at all is made to what happened States-side in the same years -- or even later at that.

*Censorship in Theatre and Cinema* is a carefully researched book, addressing a crucial aspect of the cultural and social history of Britain in the last century. It uses to advantage many fascinating and hitherto often unexplored materials such as the Lord Chamberlain's plays correspondence files, the BBFC censors files and readers' reports, BBFC pre-production scenarios, as well as Cabinet minutes and Home Office papers. I can strongly advise it to specialists and researchers, yet I do not think it may be a suggested reading for the general readers. The twenty-nine case studies proposed by Aldgate and Robertson provide worthwhile examples of in-depth micro-analyses, yet the authors do not always manage to successfully bring to light the larger picture -- often reserving the briefest of nods to the larger historical and cultural issues the plays and the films they were adapted into needs be anchored in.



# Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation

By Andrew Klevan

London: Wallflower, 2005. ISBN 1-904764-24-X. 114pp. £12.99

## A review by Steve Masters, University of Sunderland, UK

Few other directors spent as much time reflecting upon the aesthetic distinctiveness of cinema and the function of actors, or 'models' as he preferred to describe them, within a film as Robert Bresson. His monograph *Notes on the Cinematographer* (in translation, Quartet, 1986) brings together hundreds of his observations, of which this is a typical example: "Your models must not *lend* themselves to your (camera or microphone) take. Render their attitude (what is singular about it) easy for them."

Bresson sees film as creating its own particular ontological reality, as other art forms construct theirs. What the actor does is part of this reality assemblage, and in such statements as the above, Bresson indicates how he thinks the actor fits into the film universe. For him, performance is not a flamboyant projection of theatrical talents, but rather the assumption of a series of sounds, actions and movements as befits the holistic integrity of the film as it progresses from scene to scene.

The type of filmmaking practised by Robert Bresson is very far from the Hollywood cinema of the period (1930-1960) that Andrew Klevan takes as his focus in the superbly realised *Film Performance*, an impressive addition to Wallflower's 'Short Cuts' series. Similarly, the minimalist acting style Bresson favours bears little relation to the 'movie star' performances of Dietrich or Cary Grant. Yet I was frequently reminded of the director's philosophy as I read Klevan's examination of Hollywood acting. Klevan immediately establishes what his scope is and what it is not, streamlining the study of the concerns of 'star studies' and theories of acting methodology in favour of an approach concerned with the actor's "intimate moment-by-moment engagement with surrounding structures" (5). In other words, he pursues a potentially myopic approach: the micro analysis of particular scenes that locates the skills of acting within the broader apparatus of the cinema. Like Bresson's model, Klevan's actor makes them self available to the medium -- film acting has no meaning without reference to editing, framing, camera movement, lighting, and so on. The delineated subject area of this study may seem limited and over-familiar (the distinctive styles of Chaplin, Dietrich, Grant and Katharine Hepburn all figure prominently in James Naremore's *Acting in the Cinema* [University of California, 1988]), and Klevan spends little time justifying his choice in the brief preface. Indeed, it becomes obvious that he sees his work as continuing and adding to an existing discourse, acknowledging for example that he is building upon William Rothman's interpretation of the ending of *City Lights* (Charles Chaplin, 1931) in his book *The 'I' of the Camera* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

At first glance, the introduction appears to string together in rote fashion a series of apt references in the field, sketching out a chain of influence that emphasises the work of

Rothman and Stanley Cavell. But it becomes increasingly clear that the author, rather than providing an annotated litany, is elaborating his line of enquiry with some elegance. This is evident in the use he makes of David Thomson's comments on the acting of stars in the (*New*) *Biographical Dictionary of Film* (Little, Brown, 2002). Many writers have appropriated Thomson's *bon mots* in order to decorate gratuitously their own thoughts on a particular performer, but Klevan shows how well Thomson grounds his seemingly impressionistic remarks in a detailed appreciation of actors' precise technique. Like Thomson, Klevan is unerringly judicious in his commentary, and he latches on to such excellent close analysis as V.F. Perkin's discussion of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, 1942). The introduction becomes an opening up of fertile avenues, allowing Klevan to negotiate his own position in readiness for the case studies that are found in the three chapters that follow.

Any fears as to the structure and subject of Klevan's study are soon dispelled as he ably puts into practice the grounded discursive analysis he espouses. Consistent to his introduction, he evacuates contextual concerns -- for example, how the star actors signify meaning from film to film and beyond the screen; how audiences bring their own socio-economic experience to bear upon their viewing -- in order to focus wholly on the narrative meaning available in the text itself. This makes for some exceptionally lucid readings: he has new things to say about the denouement of *City Lights* and the manner in which the coming together of Tramp and the flower seller occurs, and his language is every bit as expressive as Thomson's: 'as the film moves towards this epiphany of recognition, it immobilises and humbles the great performer, suspends him as it fades out -- forever at the mercy of her sight' (25). Time and again, Klevan revisits prime Hollywood entertainments -- the opening of a Sirk melodrama, the sequence leading up to the wedding in *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940) -- and illuminates their narrative fluency and effectiveness with nuanced accounts of how the performances harmonise with script, setting and cinematic technique. In doing so, he continues the vein of authoritative and meticulous exposition that made his earlier book, *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (Flicks Books, 2000) such an exhilarating intervention in the field of textual analysis. In his latest work, he hints at a real strength in the appraisal of male performance, adding to an appreciation of the pleasures of Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) with his reflections upon Joseph Cotten's 'bravely indeterminate' (94) turn. Indeed, I would have liked to have read more, and Klevan's episodic sampling can be maddening in the tantalising glimpses it provides of a more sustained study of particular subjects; for example, connection and comparison with Cotten's work in *Under Capricorn* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1949) would have been fascinating.

A possible danger of paying such close attention to the gestures and movements, looks and avoidances, intonations and silences of movie actors is that the filmmaking process may be presented as a mechanical, even predestined business in which the particularities of individual actors matter less than their ability to, say, glance meaningfully in synchronicity with the editing or position their body with suitable languor or self-confidence for the demands of the scene. Impishly, I wondered if the worst of Elvis Presley films might be saved through a reappraisal of his deft movements (don't even try it: he remains as rigid and adrift of his surroundings as you remember). But in truth Klevan is consistently thorough in anchoring his studies to the actors themselves, and I especially enjoyed his evaluation of what Richard Widmark brings to the role of the psychiatrist in Vincente Minnelli's *The Cobweb* (1955). Over the three chapters, he deploys such examples with great purpose, building up a rich composite of the actor's art in making his/her spatial presence meaningful in terms of movement, interaction and the way in which narrative development and plot progression is revealed in performance.

More problematic is the lack of a historicising perspective, which means that the references to the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood that frame the book are left dangling without elaboration. I understand the intention to hone in on the 'pure' moment of performance, but the study does not aim to address how performance might change over time as dominant film practices evolve and mutate -- for instance, what happens to song-and-dance performance in the light of the kinetic editing and rapid camera movements of films like *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) and *Chicago* (Rob Marshall, 2002)? The restricted canvas of this book does not require Klevan to take up the point, but it would be fascinating to see him progress his thesis along those lines, just as David Bordwell has tackled the changing aesthetics of popular cinema in *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (University of California Press, 2006).

Nonetheless, *Film Performance* achieves what it sets out to do expertly, providing a series of exemplary attentive readings that should help to instil a sharper sense of critical appreciation in those who read it. One of its many achievements is to give a timely nudge to all of us writing about film to be rigorous in observing not only what is happening in a particular scene, but also how it is being performed. As Klevan observes in his concluding comments, we "tend to talk or write about the characters in films without acknowledging their *presence* as human figures" (103). His work reveals the benefits of such receptivity and goes beyond the premise of creating a succinct, undergrad-friendly text to ask us to look afresh at basic critical method.

# Georges Franju

By Kate Ince

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005. ISBN 0719-06828-2.  
xv+172pp. £40 (hbk)

## A review by Katerina Loukopoulou, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

In Jonathan Coe's novel *What a Carve Up* (Penguin Books, 1995), the middle-aged protagonist recalls feeling immensely impressed by Georges Franju's *Blood of the Beasts* (1949), having seen it as a young student at his university's film society:

By the time it was over, the theatre was half empty. It was the usual film society audience: hardened connoisseurs of the horror film, in many cases for whom it was fashionable to admire low-budget movies about American teenagers being dismembered by psychopaths, or science-fiction nightmares full of bloodthirsty special effects. What was it about this film, then, so gentle and melancholy in some respects, that caused women to scream with revulsion, and men to rush for the exits? ...

I could not forget this film, and over the next few weeks, during bored moments in the university library, I would look through catalogues of film books and magazines to see if anything had been written about it: hoping, perhaps, that the poleaxe of academic criticism would deal a death blow to the images which continued to twitch horribly in my memory. It didn't happen that way: for instead, after a good deal of searching I came upon a long and brilliant essay by the writer who seemed to have unlocked the secret of its dreadful truthfulness. (252)

Coe acknowledges Raymond Durnat as the writer he refers to and whose analysis of *Blood of the Beasts* in *Franju* (Studio Vista, 1967) as an "organisation of deaths" suggested the title of the second part of the novel. It is striking how accurately the above account reflects the power of Franju's images to move even hardened connoisseurs, let alone film critics and film historians. It also gives us an entry point to the context of the "Franju enigma" (9) that Kate Ince seeks to unravel in her comprehensive book on Georges Franju's cinematic work. This enigma is suggested in Coe's depiction of the marginality of Franju's films in terms of exhibition and of the paucity of critical studies of them.

Thanks to Ince's new book, *Georges Franju*, some new light falls on these unjustifiably neglected films and their director, one of the most important French filmmakers and co-founder of the Cinémathèque française. With Durnat's book being the only English work of reference on Franju since 1967, this new contribution cannot but be welcomed with applause and praise for filling such a visible gap in film studies and film history scholarship. Not only does it revisit Franju's films and provide a synthesis of recent scholarship and criticism, but it also discusses for the first time his last two feature films -- *The Sin of Father Mouret* (1970)

and *Nuits Rouges* (a.k.a. *Shadowman*, 1974) -- and contextualises them in terms of his oeuvre. Most importantly, Ince's monograph should not be seen as a replacement for Durnat's book as the standard reference work on Franju, but as complementary to it, shifting the focus towards a more inclusive perspective by analysing the whole output thematically and conceptually through the prisms of genre, cinematic aesthetics and gender. Ince's thematic approach is substantially different from Durnat's chronological account, which discusses each film separately. For this reason alone, it should prove universally influential, since Franju seems a neglected figure even in his own country's film scholarship.

Notwithstanding the recent inauguration of the Salle Georges Franju in the Cinémathèque française, his name and importance as a filmmaker is not clearly highlighted in historiography. His films are rarely included in repertory screenings and they are hard to find on VHS or DVD, with the exception of the recent excellent 2004 restoration of *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) by Criterion which includes *Blood of the Beasts*, rare archival material and interviews with Franju. Since Raymond Durnat's *Franju* and Gabriel Vialle's *Georges Franju* (Seghers, 1968) in French, according to Ince there has been a dearth of interest in his films (especially in English), with just a Franju exhibition in Maison de la Villette in Paris in 1992 and Gérard Leblanc's recent French monograph, which revisited Franju's oeuvre in part only. Justifiably, therefore, Kate Ince promotes her thoroughly inclusive scholarly study as timely, unique and with its own case to make.

In her introduction, Ince outlines the three main reasons/symptoms for this neglect (6-7): a) limited critical literature, b) Franju being better known for his short films, a format which is not easily distributed and exhibited beyond the circle of film societies, and c) Franju's idiosyncratic relationship with film history and his contemporaries. These three concerns run through the book which is carefully structured across four chapters: primarily thematically and, on a second level, chronologically. The first, 'Documenting modernity: Franju's cinema in the age of the court métrage', looks at Franju's short films (1935-1958), grouped thematically, lucidly contextualised and positioned within the post-war reconstruction of the French cinema industry. What emerges from this account is a very different image of French cinema in the 1950s. Ince argues efficaciously that "if the rich heritage of courts métrages from the period is included in an overview of 1950s French cinema, which has not usually been the case, the 1950s emerge anew as a period in which artistic directing and interesting subject-matter underwent an unusual displacement from feature films to courts métrages." (12)

Ince's adoption of a revisionist approach towards a more inclusive film history brings to the fore the usually overlooked dialectical relationship between short and feature films, not only within the body of one filmmaker's work, but also within the overall film production system.

The second chapter, 'Beyond cinéma fantastique: genre in Franju's longs métrages', revisits the feature films (1959-1973) in terms of genre and convincingly problematises the pigeonholing of such films as *Eyes without a face* and *Judex* (1963) under narrow labels like 'horror film' or 'cinéma fantastique'. Ince argues compellingly against the "essentialist understanding of Franju as a director of the fantastique" (48) by emphasising his self-consciousness of the gamut of genres on which he drew and his persistent use of the documentary real for a surreal effect. The thematic grouping reveals a director who worked on an astoundingly wide range of genres and approach, such as horror, science fiction, the gothic, melodrama, and literary adaptation.

The third chapter is a comprehensive analysis of Franju's cinematic aesthetics, which is divided into several areas: décor, contrast and colour, the human figure and what Ince terms 'faciality', the cinema of science and the art of the real. These analyses unmask a cinematic and visual style which brought Franju to a distinct position within the nouvelle vague conjuncture, aligned more with the cinemas of Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Jacques Demy than those of François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol.

The last chapter, 'Surviving the reign of the father: gender, the family and eroticism', gives an original perspective of the gender politics re-enacted in Franju's films, an area generally overlooked in previous studies. Here, Ince discusses the unusually prominent role of female characters in all his films, central to Franju's critique of patriarchal structures and his anticlericalism.

Throughout all of the aforementioned chapters, Ince asserts that Franju's cinema is aesthetically remote from the nouvelle vague (1958-1964). Franju was quite critical of the brouhaha surrounding these films. Ince provides a detailed account of this relationship, emphasising the distance between the themes and cinematographic choices of Franju's films and those of the nouvelle vague directors. However, the aesthetics of the nouvelle vague can also be too easily pigeonholed. Indeed, while Franju's cinema was at one remove from the dominant nouvelle vague trends, it was not as dislocated as Ince suggests. Her argument can be too rigid and monolithic; she seems to have a fixed preconception of what the term nouvelle vague stands for in terms of cinematic themes and aesthetics: location shooting, improvisation, original stories. The production history of the films made under this banner is more complex than Ince allows.

Franju was actually one of ten directors interviewed in the documentary *La Nouvelle Vague par elle-même* (*The Nouvelle Vague by itself*, 1964) part of the seminal television programme on cinema *Cinéma de notre temps*, along with Claude Chabrol, Jacques Demy, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Jacques Rivette, Jean Rouch, Jacques Rozier, François Truffaut and Agnès Varda. The author does not take this invaluable source into consideration when she attempts to position Franju against the production contexts of the nouvelle vague in early 60s French cinema. Ince claims that Franju's influences of "surrealism and Jean Painlevé's scientific cinema" and being championed by *Positif*, the rival film magazine to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, set him apart from the nouvelle vague (6, 7, 21). The documentary shows this to be not entirely true. Though Franju frequently voiced his cynicism about the nouvelle vague's ostensible unity as a movement, here Franju voluntarily appeared as one of the group, discussing *Blood of the Beasts*. Besides, even if we itemise characteristics attributed to the nouvelle vague, *Blood of the Beasts* can be seen as anticipating them, with its location shooting, voice-over and preoccupation with the quotidian.

Franju's active role in the formation of the tendencies of the nouvelle vague is more complex than Ince argues. Watching Franju deliberating on his aesthetic choices alongside Truffaut, Chabrol and Godard makes us realise that at this specific moment Franju was an integral part of this group of filmmakers -- in so far as this group was an assembly of new talented directors brought together more by economic, social and historical circumstances than by a strictly shared artistic credo. Ince contrasts Franju's preference for the studio with the preponderance of location shooting in nouvelle vague films. However, such an opposition may create false impressions. As Franju himself strongly believed, the nouvelle vague was not a cohesive movement aesthetically and stylistically.

In general, though, the historical perspective Ince provides is detailed and thoroughly researched. Ince makes available French criticism on Franju, as well as the director's own views, none of which have been previously translated into English. Unfortunately, this leads to an over-abundance of frequently long quotes in French within the main text, with the translation given in the form of footnotes. No matter how welcome this might be to maintain the nuances of the original French, the intermingling of long quotes in French with the main body of English text produces disorientating interruptions in the flow of reading. Moreover, the terms *court métrage* (short film) and *long métrage* (feature film) are freely used without translation and none of the titles of the films is given in English, leaving non-speakers of French bemused.

The sense of French culture and context could be given with less dependence on the French language and with even more historicisation of the films. An example is Ince's account of one of Franju's later films, *The Sin of Father Mouret*. The film and its gender politics are analysed from the rather narrow perspective of film adaptation, that is by focussing on the ways Franju adapted Zola's novel and the meanings of the alterations for the portrayal of gender. However, the film's explicitly elliptical approach to the narrative precludes a comparative reading. Pace Ince, it could alternatively be argued that the film is less significant as an adaptation of Zola than as a treatise on the French Enlightenment's anti-clericalism and, especially, Jean Jacques Rousseau's call against institutionalised life and return to nature. Moreover, even if this were a long-cherished project of Franju since the mid-fifties and even if he kept a rather aloof stance towards the political upheavals of 1968, *The Sin of Father Mouret* smacks of the anti-establishment politics and ethics of the *Zeitgeist* which merit further exploration. Ince's account remains anchored in issues of gender, but only so far as they emerge from a comparison with Zola's original story. The narrowness of this approach fails to engage in sufficient depth with the film's anti-clericalism and anti-patriarchalism in terms of the French Enlightenment thought (strongly represented in the film by the atheist and enlightened uncle who has liberated the female character and the stunningly colourful shots of the wild garden), as rekindled within the political and social context of the sixties.

This challenging book should hopefully open up the study of Franju's oeuvre, so that research will broach aspects of his trajectory which are understandably glossed over in this study; its main purpose was to revisit the director's cinematic work. Franju's role as a film archivist and his work for television -- the latter just mentioned in a footnote -- are two areas that still remain obscure, but which would merit future research.

Kate Ince provides a thorough survey of almost forty years of sporadic writing on Franju in both English and French. However, this text is more than an excellent synthesis of existing scholarship on Franju. It offers a fresh and engaging approach, for the most part successfully detaching Franju's oeuvre from misconstrued labels and pigeonholing; for now, Ince has saved Franju's enigmatic films and images from being "deal[t] the death blow" which Coe's protagonist had anticipated from academic criticism. It may take a whole series of monographs on Franju before the "secret of [his] dreadful truthfulness" is truly "unlocked", but Ince's book is a significant step towards this goal.

# Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema

By Haidee Wasson

Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005. ISBN 0-520-24131-2. 20 b&w illustrations, 314pp. £15.95 (pbk), £38.95 (hbk)

## A review by Holly Rogers, University College Dublin, Ireland

Haidee Wasson's book traces the transformation of film from a public pastime to an engaged cultural activity, from fleeting artform to something worth preserving; something with a history. This shift began in the late 20s, and was a process initiated by art galleries rather than film companies. Resting between cinema and museum studies, *Museum Movies* engages with this often neglected area of study by concentrating on the distribution, exhibition and consumption of film during the interwar years. While cinema reception is a well nourished critical area, studies on film's interaction with the art community are few and far between. Wasson's focus on the integration of film into the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, thus represents an important area of enquiry. Focusing on art film (in its most literal sense), *Museum Movies* investigates the social spaces of film exhibition, highlighting the ways in which these spaces shaped our engagement with cinema at a time when both film and art required rapidly changing modes of engagement; a time when filmmakers and artists demanded new forms of attention from their audiences.

Of pivotal importance to filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Jean-Luc Godard and Stanley Kubrick, MoMA's Film Library was established in 1935 and, just four years later, was admitting over 500 viewers per day to its screenings. Wasson's study ends in 1939, by which time the Film Library had attained significant status both inside and outside the museum. The book moves through clearly articulated chapters that trace chronologically the Library's formative years, situating its fight for acceptance within a rapidly changing socio-cultural context. While acknowledging that the increasing availability of portable 16mm film stock encouraged amateur production and consumption, Wasson complements existing literature by demonstrating how this availability enabled MoMA's film *exhibits* to become mobile. Able to break from the containment of the gallery site, exhibitions began to engage with a wider, more diverse audience, transforming the museum into "a living, adaptable and expansive web" (72). Having identified the role of film in expanding the nature of the gallery, *Museum Movies* then introduces to us the people responsible for the Library's establishment in the 1920s -- most notably art historian Alfred Barr and film critic Iris Barry. Their Bauhaus-influenced belief that art was everywhere, combined with their desire to insert the museum and its art into the flow of modern life, was vital in integrating film into MoMA's exhibition programming. Such integration was a hard-won achievement, as objection came from many areas. Wasson highlights the hostility of the museum to the Library (which was initially housed in a storage closet). It was not simply that film was considered a 'low' artform that prevented easy integration into a gallery environment. There were also practical problems: a film cannot be hung on a wall for permanent display; and it does not acquire monetary value



over time. These issues threatened fundamentally to undermine the very nature of the museum. Then there was the problem of misbehaving audiences -- people were uncertain of how to conduct themselves in the new arena: was it a gallery or a cinema? (Wasson illustrates how film viewers "engaged in shouting matches, punctuated occasionally by projectile objects" [2]). Antagonism (or rather distrust) even came from the film industry, which voiced concern over the financial implications of the Library.

It was not, however, simply the introduction of film into a gallery space that was troublesome; defining art film and the preclusion such a definition naturally entails was also difficult for the early curators. After tracing Barry's extensive voyages through basements, attics, junk shops, scrap firms and the production company vaults in order to "catalogue, assemble, preserve, exhibit and circulate" film (107), Wasson identifies the decision processes that went into the Library's programming methods. Barry tackled the problem of justification innovatively, by including in her catalogue popular films that capture, in her own words, "a vanished moral judgement or mode of thinking" (113). The Library's films, then, were not only important as being the 'best' or 'the greatest' specimens; they also represented interest in "technique, in content, in promise, in trend" (114). Films were saved for their social as well as artistic significance and were fed to an audience gripped by a 1930's fervour for self-improvement and adult education. By treating film not only as artistic endeavour, but also as sociological judgement, Barry gave the Library an additional reason for its existence (although one wonders if these means of justification actually bespeak a failure of artistic acceptance).

While the book is extremely well researched both directly (materials referred to include contemporary adverts, personal letters, interviews, museum statistics, film criticism, press releases, radio programmes and popular magazines) and more generally (it traces a network of influence from universities, libraries, women's clubs, unions, schools, archives and department stores), the larger issues that arise are perhaps the most compelling part of Wasson's project. This book, for instance, does not only reposition the art community as a site responsible for saving much early film -- it is not simply a history of collecting and archiving -- it also investigates the ways in which select films were made visible "under the rubric of art and history" (7). Wasson traces the transformation of film from popular, disposable pastime into a 'high art' form exhibited alongside painting, sculpture and photography; a transformation into discrete objects, worthy of sustained theoretical engagement. While museology is a well established field, the exploration of film within museum environments has been, until recently, a rather neglected area. The reasons for this are perhaps the same as those that prevented a seamless integration of the Film Library into MoMA: the merging of perceived high and low cultures that the rise of film as art object entails is problematic. And the resistance to such a move did not come exclusively from the museum. Even film practitioners and audiences had difficulties with such an elevation: paradoxically, D.W.Griffith -- of the Library's most celebrated figures -- refused to believe that film had anything to do with art, while many visitors feared that MoMA's project would taint the pleasure of the cinema, and so rob "the rising generation of its gunmen and sex dramas" (171). Of course, the issue of artistic worth is one that continues to haunt the film theorist: Wasson's conclusion -- that the *same film* might embody various forms of value -- could prove an important one.

The identification of, and engagement with, the moment when film emerged as an 'artform' leads Wasson towards another significant area of enquiry. Rather than view the museum as simply a place of conservation and preservation, she rereads it as one of complex social and

pedagogical interdependence, a space that demands a reciprocal relationship between exhibition and public. She successfully fits the new type of curation that the Film Library required -- impermanent programmes, travelling exhibitions, etc. -- within larger museological shifts that were governed largely by visitor reception. The museum's new appetite for generating public attention through constant exposure in the ascendant mass media, for example, undoubtedly helped in the acceptance of film within its galleries. *Museum Movies*, then, is a reception history with twist: not only does it chart how film engagement developed during the 1920s and 30s, it also shows how this change initiated a new generation of museum and gallery operations.

Although situating the emergence of the Film Library within larger sociological and museological trends, however, Wasson's (admirable) ability to stick to her point means that many avenues remain unexplored. In order to maintain primary focus on the Library's administrative, cataloguing, advertising and other business operations rather than the specifics of its collections, for example, Wasson's tantalising allusions to the possibilities of a combinative history of art, cinema, museology, pedagogy and preservation are left unexplored. Rather, the Library is considered largely on its own, as an 'other' to MoMA's more traditionally curated exhibitions. To put this another way, if Wasson's interdisciplinarity had stretched to consideration of other art works, some interesting points of contact between different reception histories could have been made. Was the Library's audience demographic affected when the museum's other exhibitions changed, for instance? And how did film reception alter when the films shown were by artists? We learn that film also bled into the museum's static displays, but how were these new types of exhibition received? While unexplored opportunities are, perhaps, the fate of any multi-disciplinary history, the reader is nevertheless frequently left wanting to know more. An integrated engagement with the changing nature of art exhibition spaces would offer some significant conclusions.

However, Wasson's situation of the museum within its wider political and cultural context yields some fascinating ideas about anti-Europeanism and national pride in America at the time. With the threat of a second World War looming, for instance, the French were eager to have their films kept elsewhere, and with memories of films sacrificed for their nitro-glycerine content during the previous war continuing to "haunt French cinephiles", many reels were willingly donated to the Film Library (116). But many in America complained that the French were simply using this opportunity to circumvent possible censorship and commercial duty on their films. On a more sinister note, Barry was criticised for disseminating Nazi or communist principles by collecting Soviet and German films. Despite these circumstances, however, the fact that other countries treated their film history with such care served to legitimate the Film Library as a point of 'national pride', a place where American film could and should be preserved. By setting the Film Library within this socio-political arena, then, Wasson demonstrates just how complicated the collection and exhibition of film was, and how it was informed by political factors as much as artistic or social ones.

Rather than opt for a more material-centred approach to film art, this book focuses on the institutional factors that were instrumental in refreshing film reception. But perhaps most significant is Wasson's identification of the Film Library as a site vital to the dawning of film criticism. *Museum Movies* has less to do with the films themselves and more to do with their criticism. In this sense, Wasson's work complements the earlier ideas of Bordwell (*On the History of Film Style*, Harvard University Press, 1997), who argues that Barry's choice of which films to preserve and which to discard was responsible for shaping the early film canon. Wasson points out that endowing a film with a production date acknowledges that it

occurs at a particular point in history, and that viewing such historical 'objects' in a gallery context encouraged people to sit quietly and think about what they were viewing and why. So, under the aegis of the museum, writing about cinema began to change. Once visible only through an occasional derisive mention in the respectable press, film began gradually to command monographs and specialised journals that addressed the history, aesthetics, politics, and social and psychological impact of an emerging art form.

Wasson's work is, then, not only the history of a specific space. It is also a history of the rise of film as an educational tool and, consequently, as a site worthy of critical engagement. As an account of visual culture and its criticism, *Museum Movies* signals an interesting shift in film reception theory and signals one of the first attempts to consider together the histories of film and art.

# Hollywood's New Radicalism: War, Globalisation and the Movies from Reagan to George W. Bush

By Ben Dickenson

London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006. ISBN 1-84511-103-6. xvi + 216 pp. £14.99 (pbk), £45.00 (hbk)

## A review by David Krumwiede, Freiburg University, Germany

Hollywood celebrates itself at the Oscars. Strolling down the red carpet outside the Kodak Theatre actors, directors and film-producers exude glamour and beauty. Not only do they advertise for Prada, Dior or Westwood but also for the latest in Hollywood motion pictures. Perfect product-placement of a standardized industry dedicated to the alchemy of blockbuster-engineering? Sophisticated ceremony to lure the audiences world-wide into films that provide two hours of escapist pleasure devoid of any messages but rich in perforated happy-endings? Sceptics of the 'factory' Hollywood were dumbfounded in 2006: Among the Academy Award winners was a gay cowboy film, a drama about racial conflicts set in contemporary Los Angeles and a political thriller about the incessant circles of violence in the Middle East. Real people from the real world as we know it were shown confronting radically real problems at feature length.

Competing blockbusters such as Peter Jackson's *King Kong* (2005) or Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) failed to be nominated in the key categories. The political messages of the contenders were neither simmering at sub-interpretational level beneath layers of fast-forwarding action-sequences nor had to be distilled from amidst hectic cinematography: crass routine discrimination within the Los Angeles police department or blatant criticism of US-Middle East policies was openly presented. Furthermore its directors, actors and producers were neither shunned nor marginalized. Politics took the front entrance in Hollywood wearing Prada.

The old truism that politics and entertainment do not mix appeared strangely anachronistic this year. How did political messages find their way into recent Hollywood cinema? Are political films just temporarily *en vogue*, radicalism as the latest chic? What are today's conditions for politically ambitious film-making in Hollywood? Who are its protagonists? What are the reasons for the recent proliferation of political movies? Ben Dickenson examines these interesting questions in *Hollywood's New Radicalism*.

In his book the author embarks on "a journey into the contradictory relationship between film-makers, society, politics and movies of contemporary Hollywood." (xiv) The book focuses on liberal film-makers whose filmographies clearly display a commitment to the production of original films with a political agenda. Haskell Wexler (*Medium Cool*, 1969), Oliver Stone (*Wall Street*, 1987, *JFK*, 1991) George Clooney (*Good Night and Good Luck*,

2005, *Syriana*, 2005) or Steven Soderbergh (*Sex, Lies & Videotape*, 1989, *Traffic*, 2000), to name but a few, are among those contemporary film-makers who are concerned about more than proceeds and percentages. Together they form a group among the Hollywood creative community Dickenson refers to as the 'progressive camp', 'liberals' or the 'new radical Hollywood left'. Staunch support, apathetic passivity or radical protest: the relationships between US-politics and the Hollywoodites are manifold and take on different forms.

The author seeks to scrutinize the ever-changing relationship between politics and film covering the period from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush, thus spanning his analysis over 25 years. The setting of the Hollywood-'factory' changed dramatically within these years: From the demise of the studio-system to the gradual globalization of picturesque Hollywoodland into a "set of multinational entertainment conglomerates" (xiii) the conditions of film-making have undergone fundamental changes. Changes in industry and its effects both on the conditions and the aesthetics of film-making are sketched in the three main chapters of the book.

The first chapter, 'The Inheritance', analyses the demise of the studio-system and the takeover of Hollywood by Wall Street. In the Reagan years federal incentives for tax-deduction attracted large numbers of Wall Street companies into investing into the film-industry. Studios which had existed since the very inception of American cinema such as Twentieth Century Fox were suddenly run by business executives with no particular track record of motion picture management. Focused on 'maximum profit' the 1980s were shaped by a strategy of "downsizing existing operations and exploiting new markets" such as video home entertainment (4). The actual output of films produced regressed. Television companies, publishing businesses, theme parks and merchandizing became the new focus of studio operations. Only a few films such as Oliver Stone's *Salvador* (1986) and *Wall Street* stand out as fiercely critical anti-government films. Despite the fact that Hollywood organizations such as the 'Committee for Concern' or the 'Creative Coalition' were founded in response to Reagan's Central American policies or US-nuclear weapons production the protest was somewhat eclectic and hardly challenging. The "trajectory of progressive film-making was interrupted." (11)

In the second chapter 'The Crisis of Hollywood' Dickenson looks at the repercussions of the globalization of the economy on Hollywood during the presidency of Bill Clinton. The Fleetwood Mac song *Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow* inaugurated the Clinton presidency with a spirit of 'Avanti!' and 'Just do it!' His solemn determination to re-establish social justice and resurrect the communitarian spirit, undermined during the Reagan years, swept the liberals in Hollywood off their feet. It almost appeared as if Clinton had walked off the screen embodying all those liberal virtues which the liberal Hollywood mind finds so appealing: "A belief in charismatic leadership of special individuals, nostalgia for a bygone era and an inability to grapple with the modern neo-liberalist world (36)." Bill Clinton resembled the very model of an All-American hero. However, in the opinion of many Hollywoodites he proved to be poor casting. The initial enthusiasm quickly subsided once it became clear that Clinton could not live up to his promises: healthcare reforms were abandoned, civil liberties undermined and racial issues not addressed. Furthermore he continued cutting federal welfare programs, granted tax-breaks to corporations and, by signing the Telecommunications Act in 1996, he fostered the buy-out of global theatre chains by Columbia, Paramount or TimeWarner thus barring the distribution channels for many independent productions. Dickenson specifies how his politics were perceived among the 'progressives' such as Warren Beatty or Tim Robbins as betrayal of the liberal agenda. They

felt manipulated. *Primary Colours* (Mike Nichols, 1998) written by former Clinton admirer Joe Klein gave expression to these sentiments. After a brief interlude of highly successful independent film-making in the 1990s (*Sex, Lies & Videotape*, *The Crying Game*, Neil Jorda, 1992, *The Last of the Mohicans*, Michael Mann, 1992) the disappointment among the progressive camp grew when independent companies were also amalgamated into the larger logic of major companies such as Miramax or Sony. All formerly independent companies were gradually bought out so "that Hollywood talent could not enter the process of film-production without bumping into an executive connected to one of the major corporations." (158)

In his third chapter, 'The next Generation', the author attests the emergence of a new grass-roots activism in the United States. Initiated by demonstrations against the World Trade Organization summit in 1999 in Seattle, protesters later turned against George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Following the '9/ 11'-attacks the United States were all 'tricolore'. Yet as the 'United we stand!'-stance against global terrorism became synonymous with artistic conformity the progressives resisted. In fact, a "whole new immense body of activism" (144) emerged. Sean Penn travelled into Iraq condemning the US-unilateral intervention, Paul Newman openly opposed the government's plans for a nuclear missile defence shield and Martin Sheen had even been asked to run as vice-president to Ralph Nader. Political activism was wide-spread and diverse. Dickenson cautiously defines three key characteristic features: 1) they take protest seriously. 2) "They no longer trust the American state". 3) "A significant number have broken with the democrats". (145)

Dickenson's overall conclusion that various "social eruptions have continued to interact with the life of the American cinema, and [that] in that time Hollywood progressives have never yet left town" (202) leaves the avid reader slightly unsatisfied. Dickenson's book abounds with original statements and observations (such as the presidential product-placement *Dave* [Ivan Reitman, 1993], sketches of the Hollywood-Pentagon-Axis, the continuity between anti-globalization-protests and anti-war activism) yet his decision to dispense with a clear-cut methodology analysing the rich material he accumulated when interviewing such legendary Hollywood activists as Ed Asner or Haskell Wexler seems to be counter-productive. Merely to focus on "wider social situations" (xiv) appears to be too simplistic in the light of analysing such a complex topic, as it provides the reader with an entertaining array of anecdotes but rather little insight into the mutual relations between politics, film-makers and industry.

The restructuring of the film-industry and the transformation of the economic conditions for making films are repeatedly mentioned but Dickenson does not specify the repercussions of such transformations for the interaction of film-makers, production companies and politics. The 'capitalist invasion' is condemned and globalization tends to be demonized both by the author and the persons interviewed. But how do such processes translate on a micro-level? The book is guided by an industrial focus which clearly sees the Hollywood industry as the domineering element in film-making. Some quick glimpses into that very industrial substructure would facilitate the reading process. What about the role of the writer, the constraints of distribution and the project of the 'concept film' today?

Hollywood has doubtlessly undergone a tremendous process of change in the last three decades: from the first corporate invasion by Wall Street in the 1970s to the re-formation under the new millennium multinational media conglomerates (such as AOL-TimeWarner or Viacom), Hollywood has expanded. Despite all changes within the film-industry the author recognizes that the logic of production remains largely the same: "give people with ideas the

space to make things we can sell." (58) Cinema is first and foremost still an enterprise for the purpose of providing 90 minutes of entertainment. Yet does creative and political film-making necessarily yield to the 'Hollywood machine'? Has the scope for auteurist creativity been truly narrowed? Is creative control unilaterally asserted by calculating Gordon Gekkos?

Dissidence within the 'Hollywood machine' had always been possible as Dickenson aptly remarks when writing "that executives do not make films and, as the classic example of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) demonstrates, the talent who actually produce the film can manipulate their studio bosses if they are smart enough." (58) Yet such insights strangely clash with the rather monolithic depictions of Hollywood as a big factory propelled by the ubiquitous logic to yield profit. The book's infusion with anti-capitalist rhetoric seems neither fruitful nor illuminating for comprehending the political economy behind the big screen. The book's biggest asset is the analysis of aesthetics within political films during the past decades. *Wall Street*, boldly anti-Reaganite in nature, was still steeping in the individualizing aesthetics of a *Superman*-film (11 ff.) thus weakening Stone's critique of a society obsessed with the pursuit of individual happiness. Soderbergh's *Erin Brokovich* (1999) or Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (1999) have developed a set of techniques which prevent the characters on the screen from depicting a reality too 'purple-rosed' for the general public: the characters are neither special individual heroes nor avant-garde thinkers but rooted in the very fabric of US-society. Faux-documentary style to present the social environment or direct addresses to the audience demand attentiveness and provoke reflection. While a rewarding analysis of Hollywood politics is inevitably curbed by Dickenson's all too schematic dichotomy of capitalist vs. anti-capitalist Hollywood, his observations of the aesthetics of political movie-making are well-grounded. The reader leaves the book in a state of bewilderment.

# Les Diaboliques

By Susan Hayward

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. ISBN 0-252-07330-4. 118pp. £9.99

## A review by Alison Peirse, Lancaster University, UK

A free and easy adaptation of Pierre Boileau and Thomas Nercéjac's 1952 novel *Celle qui n'était plus* (*She Who Was No More*), Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955) is set in a private boy's school outside Paris in the mid-Fifties. The suspense-filled thriller charts the perverse relationships between cruel headmaster Michel Delasalle (Paul Meurisse), his timid wife, teacher Christina Delasalle (Vera Clouzot), and Michel's mistress, fellow teacher Nicole Horner (Simone Signoret). Remarkably, mistress and wife form a friendship in sympathy for the violence they both suffer at Michel's abusive hands, and plot to murder him. Needless to say, with its *film noir* influences -- indeed, this film is described by Hayward as "the French film noir to end all French film noirs" (41) -- *Les Diaboliques* unravels a plot that is anything but simple, offering a transgressive narrative revealing more to this triangular relationship than initially meets the eye.

For the *French Film Guides* series, Professor Susan Hayward deconstructs this stimulating filmic text in careful and precise detail. With an accessible and jargon-free writing style, Hayward picks out multiple layers of signification within the film, opening up whole new levels of understanding even to readers more than familiar with Clouzot's classic. Describing the film as a "transgressive and transcendent film noir" (60) her analysis includes a discussion of how "French noir is distinct from its American counterpart" (41), while arguing that *Les Diaboliques* is mould breaking in noir terms, for Clouzot "makes two women the centre of his narrative" (43). Additionally, Hayward sympathetically examines how Clouzot reduced the overt lesbian relationship between the female characters in Boileu and Narcjec's novel and instead relied on visual hints and subtle framings between Christina and Nicole. Furthermore, historical readings of the film are addressed, as Hayward considers how the film makes political reference to the French-Algerian war of the Fifties, "particularly in the use of 'clean torture'" (57), when Christina and Nicole viciously drown Michel in the bathtub.

In terms of auteur theory, Hayward offers many analogies between Clouzot and Alfred Hitchcock, particular in their approach to the spectator and the film text. Clouzot is quoted describing the filmic viewing experience as brutal, that the editing should be "a system of permanent shocks" (quoted 7) and that "the spectator is placed in a situation where he might react at the beginning of the film but where his face is being punched repeatedly, and as quickly as possible to annihilate him" (quoted 3). Hayward draws together Clouzot and Hitchcock as masters of suspense, arguing that they offer similar filmic practices, whereupon "actor, character, *mise en scène* and plot are in some kind of dramatic tension with the purpose, generally, of creating suspense" (6). However, while Hayward confidently claims "Clouzot was an auteur, and, with the passage of time, he has been recognised as one" (8), conferring upon him the same status as Hitchcock, she also finds innate differences in their work. Clouzot's "*mise-en-scène*" is bleaker, more oppressively detailed, and therefore darker in its horror than Hitchcock's" (8), and it can be argued that *Psycho*'s (Alfred Hitchcock,



1960) shock ending has nothing on *Les Diaboliques*, described in the Edinburgh Film Festival catalogue as "one of the most terrifying films ever made" (quoted 13).

Chapter Four is devoted to a series of sequence analyses involving the protagonists Michel, Christina and Nicole, in order "to observe more finely the dynamics between them, comment upon their performance as actors and, finally, examine more closely how camera work and *mise en scène* function in each instance to enhance performance, underline the atmosphere or convey a specific sense of space" (62). These detailed analyses are the highlight of the book and offer an incisive guide to all Film Studies students on the best way possible to write about film. The level of close textual analysis verges on spectacular, both in its lucid and confident study of the formal construction of the film and also in the fluid and engaging way that Hayward takes these technical findings to prove her wider theories around *Les Diaboliques*. In one instance, Hayward argues that Vera Clouzot (playing Christina) is a poor actress who is doted upon by her director husband and favoured in the film above the acting talents of Signoret and Meurisse. To make this statement evident, Hayward points out that "Vera Clouzot has 121 solo shots as opposed to Signoret's 72. Half of Clouzot's shots of Vera are in close-up or medium close-up (9 CU's and 51 MCU's), three times the number reserved for Signoret, who has only 18 (3 CU's and 15 MCU's)" (17). From this, Hayward truly can admonish "it was the Clouzot's wish that she, Vera, should stand out" (17).

A few pages are spared for a well-deserved diatribe in Chapter Five against the 1996 remake, *Diaboliques* directed by Jeremiah Chechik and starring Sharon Stone as Nicole. Described by Hayward as an "anti-feminist, backlash film" (98), *Diaboliques* controversially and overtly reinserted the lesbian plot; however Hayward bitterly argues that "any suggestion that there might be a lesbian link between the two women is so artificially contrived, so heavily flagged up ... that it gets in the way of the plot development" (97). Chapter Six on the 'Critical Reception of *Les Diaboliques*' would have been better served at the beginning of the book alongside the Introduction and a historical description of Clouzot's life. The fairly banal press and trade reviews that were accorded to the film jar after the fluid poetry of Hayward's filmic analysis and seem simply pedestrian in comparison to her detailed sequence analysis in earlier chapters.

While the background information on the film, the novel, Clouzot and the main actors is well-researched, clearly written and methodical, what really makes this book a joy to read is the detailed film analysis. So often, texts that purport to analyse films do nothing more than bend the filmic text to suit the author's pre-chosen critical theories and agenda. Instead Hayward takes as her point of departure *the film itself* and from her incredibly detailed study of its formal construction, unpicks the significant themes, motifs and the method of the film's address to the spectator. Her suggestive and perceptive critiques of key moments in *Les Diaboliques* thus become utterly substantiated as they emerge directly from close readings of film itself. When, in the book's final line, she announces "Clouzot remains most assuredly one of the great film director's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (113) we know this to be true, for Hayward has *proven* it throughout this study, time and time again.

# Lynda La Plante

By Julia Hallam

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7190-6548-8. 18 illustrations, vii + 166 pp. £47.50

## A review by Mark Broughton, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

There is a particularly memorable scene in *Prime Suspect*, when John Shefford (John Forgeham), a misogynist DCI investigating the brutal murder of a young woman, suddenly suffers a fatal heart attack in front of the detective chief superintendent. His demise is arguably the programme's most effective plot twist, immaculately choreographed; the director (Christopher Menaul) refrains from prolepsis, so that the audience is utterly astonished when Shefford becomes the second entry in the plot's body count. Most strikingly of all, this is the only death the audience witnesses. Other, female corpses appear on screen, mutilated and, in one case, horrifically decomposed, but these are discovered post-mortem. No act of brutality is committed on or off screen against a woman during the programme's plot-time.

The scene exemplifies the precision of Lynda La Plante's writing at its best, the near-comic timing far removed from the lacklustre fatalism of, say, *Widows II* (Thames TV/Euston Films, 1985). It also evidences one of La Plante's key interventions in the genre of the police procedural: men's bodily, as well as moral, degradations are fetishised. In La Plante's work, Jack Regan-style detectives are often depicted in a state of physical decay, like Quinlan in the final moments of *A Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958).

*Prime Suspect* (Granada) was first broadcast in the UK in 1991: the same year that another forensic melodrama, *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme), reached our cinema screens. As in Demme's film, elaborate post-mortem examinations are central to *Prime Suspect*'s rhetoric of the body. The female corpse becomes a multi-layered text which needs to be decoded in order to reconstruct the crime. Photographs of the victims are tacked to the walls of the incident room. As Julia Hallam remarks in *Lynda La Plante*, the first monograph on the writer/producer, these passive, still images are pointedly juxtaposed with the active figure of Helen Mirren as DCI Jane Tennison. Such macabre mise-en-scène is also a form of "observational realism"(78): it was, Hallam stresses, La Plante's characteristically meticulous research, shadowing Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford, which provided her with the means to rework the genre.

The profusion of subjective shots in *The Silence of the Lambs* -- from a female FBI trainee's point of view -- has been remarked upon. However, Clarice Starling's perspective is presented mainly in order to establish her singular vulnerability, in anticipation of the serial killer's pursuit of her at the end of the film, when darkness incapacitates her gaze. Hallam points out that Starling is one of a series of female investigators who become victims in 1990s Hollywood films. Conversely, Tennison's investigative gaze is never reduced to the subjectivity of a damsel in distress. Though there are repeated shots of her smoking and

running her hands through her hair, Tennison's physical composure is never seriously endangered.

In La Plante's crime series, male bodies become the indices of moral decline. Shefford's heart gives way under the weight of his own corruption and over-reaching ambition. As Hallam argues, the cancerous body of former DCI Resnick becomes a figure of "narrative disempowerment" in *Widows II* (55). To this list we could also add the body of Giorgio, the gangster's son in *Bella Mafia* (CBS, 1997), hidden away in a monastery; its gradual deterioration reflects his father's increasing degeneracy. Though female cadavers do tend to crop up regularly in La Plante's universe, until the mid-1990s an act of violence *being* committed against a woman is rarely seen in her television programmes. Unlike the gangster's moll in *Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953), in *Widows* (Thames TV/Euston Films, 1983) Shirley gets to throw freshly brewed coffee in a male gangster's face without having to endure the same treatment. It is male bodies which are seen in torment, in most cases seemingly racked by their own amorality. The female protagonist usually retains her physical integrity, no matter how much she compromises her own morality or how many cigarettes she smokes. It is this female body which becomes the subject of the more intriguing analyses in Hallam's book.

About two thirds of Hallam's broad study of La Plante's oeuvre comprises an account of the way La Plante supplied television producers, actresses and viewers with complex female characters, who claim and then realise agency in patriarchal milieux: from Dolly Rawlins in *Widows*, *Widows II* and *She's Out* (Cinema Verity and La Plante Productions/Carlton TV, 1995) to Helen Hewitt in *The Governor* (La Plante Productions/ITV, 1995). Some of La Plante's more idiosyncratic narratives, such as *Comics* (Cinema Verity/C4, 1993) are only mentioned in passing. At the same time, Hallam relates the parallel narrative of La Plante's transitions in the television industry: from being an actress bored of playing prostitutes in series like *The Sweeney*, through collaborations as a novice writer with female producers, to becoming a household name. The last section of the book addresses some of the programmes made in the fourth phase of her career, with La Plante now a producer in her own right.

Hallam's book has been published by Manchester University Press as part of its groundbreaking Television Series, which aims to redress the dearth of monographs in television studies. Each text in the series focuses on a single television creator. Hallam's book is significant not only for the reason that a career-spanning study of La Plante's writing was long overdue, but also because of the paucity of monographs on women television practitioners.

Taken as a whole, the amount of research underpinning the book is impressive; Hallam's secondary research has been meticulous to a fault. The first chapter, 'Women and Television' provides a thorough, politicised overview of the position of women, both in the English television industry and as characters in crime series, before the broadcast of *Widows* in 1983. Hallam thus weaves together an inclusive contextualisation of La Plante's early work in terms of industry and genre, drawing on a wide range of material. Unfortunately, there is little in the book's general history of women in television which has not already been said. At best Hallam navigates incisively through a synthesis of the available material, at worst she seems to be sailing on autopilot across an ocean of paraphrase and quotation.

As she admits, Hallam's primary research was put at a disadvantage by her subject's refusal to allow "access to press cuttings and interviews" -- the material which has informed La Plante's

writing (5). However, despite Hallam's emphasis on La Plante's collaborations with women producers (Verity Lambert, Linda Agran, Sally Head), there is no evidence that she has attempted to interview any of these in order to compensate for La Plante's lack of cooperation. Hallam's reliance on published interviews leads her at times into bad practice. For example, she reproduces several large chunks from an interview with Linda Agran from Alvarado and Stewart's *Made for Television: Euston Films Limited* (BFI, 1985); apart from recycling material from a well-known text, these quotations are overlong and too numerous (see pages 33-40).

Parts of the book descend into sloppiness. Hallam's plot summaries often contain inaccuracies. At the end of *She's Out*, the other thieves mistakenly believe that the police are talking to Dolly about the robbery. Hallam states that the real topic of conversation is "the licence for the children's home", which Dolly plans to open using the stolen cash (117). The scene's dramatic irony is actually stronger than Hallam's erroneous synopsis allows: the police visit Dolly in order to haggle over the compensation she has demanded for damage caused to her house during a police raid. The blue bottle which yields crucial forensic evidence in *Trial and Retribution* (La Plante Productions/ITV, 1996) is found and tested while the jury is reaching its verdict, and not, as Hallam states, a week after the trial. Here Hallam does La Plante's skilful construction of suspense a disservice. The frequency of such mistakes suggests Hallam has relied on another source for her information (perhaps La Plante's novelisations of the scripts), rather than on the actual programmes.

In neither the main text nor the appendix is there any mention of 'Hidden Talents', the episode La Plante wrote for the *Unnatural Causes* anthology series (Central, 1986). Other contributors to the series included Nigel Kneale and Beryl Bainbridge. Several of La Plante's other scripts, such as *Civvies*, were shelved during the late 1980s, but the fact that her script for this series was commissioned and produced, alongside those of highly revered writers, shows that she had to some extent established herself as a television creator, despite the critical failure of *Widows II* the year before.

Other errors are due simply to carelessness. Hallam attributes *Room at the Top* to John Osborne (it was by John Braine) and attempts to rewrite history: Watergate was, according to her, "a 1980s political scandal centred on election rigging" (103). There are also numerous typographical errors. Lynda La Plante worked with producer Linda Agran on *Widows*, which featured a character called Linda Perelli. When Hallam starts to refer to both character and producer as 'Lynda' and La Plante as 'Linda', the text becomes confusing. The occasional circular sentence is equally bewildering: La Plante, we are told, "was determined to create roles that featured women in challenging unconventional roles [sic]" (16).

Pedantry aside, though, it is Hallam's in-depth scrutiny of these roles which engages the reader. Her examination of the ways they have been embodied by actresses and choreographed on screen is impressive for its attention to detail, and for its emphasis on the contribution of La Plante's collaborators. In the cases of *Widows* and *Prime Suspect*, Hallam's argument is amply supported by a series of, albeit rather muddy, frame-grabs. Examples of her innovative textual analysis are also to be found in the last section of the book, 'Lynda goes to Hollywood': Hallam mounts a spirited defence of the much maligned split-screen masterpiece, *Trial and Retribution*, with which La Plante took genre hybridity to a logical extreme; she melded the police procedural with the courtroom drama (exploiting the renewed popularity *Kavanagh Q.C.* had brought the latter) to create an intensive fictional study of jurisprudence. Hallam's discussion of the "privileged position of knowledge" (127) conferred

on the viewer by the split-screen composition is particularly enlightening, as is her contextualisation of this in terms of the programme's "equal opportunities discourse" (128). The only problem here is that it is hard to tell exactly what La Plante's contribution to the split-screen composition was. We must presume she collaborated with the director, Aisling Walsh, who Hallam does not mention. It is essential to stress the collaborative nature of television authorship, but it is equally important to define as far as possible the contribution of each collaborator.

Hallam's attempts to defend *Bella Mafia* and *Killer Net* (La Plante Productions/C4, 1997) are shorter and less successful. As La Plante's narratives lose their forensic realism, Hallam argues that they gain in spectacular melodrama. "The first two hours [of *Bella Mafia*]", she asserts, "offer the nostalgic pleasures of historical costume drama and rural setting" (121). The assumption that a historical drama set in a rural landscape must be nostalgic has long been a tedious cliché in television studies. It is hard to perceive any form of history, let alone nostalgia in *Bella Mafia*; unlike *The Godfather*, this mafia saga appears to take place completely outside of history. Indeed, of late La Plante's work seems to draw far less inspiration from her research than it used to. Hallam admits that La Plante's writing has become more formulaic as she has sought to make a success of television production, but fails to fully consider the consequences of this for La Plante's representation of the female body. Just as her decaying males have all but vanished, so La Plante's police women are now regularly attacked by murderers: see, for example, *Killer Net*, *Mind Games* (La Plante Productions/ITV 2000) and *The Commander* (La Plante Productions/ITV, 2002).

The book's strongest contribution to La Plante studies is the balance it maintains between original, in-depth examinations of key programmes and an overview of the writer's career so far. The fact that the last of the three key programmes analysed at length is *Trial and Retribution* speaks volumes about the merits of La Plante's recent work, however large an audience it has managed to net. The problem is not that Hallam becomes an inflexible apologist for La Plante's latest writing. On the contrary, from the powerful feminist rhetoric of the first two thirds of the book, Hallam drifts into a somewhat disengaged position. Hallam chronicles the critical lambasting the recent programmes received, as well as La Plante's ripostes, but she fails to take a side, or even to offer a substantial third perspective. It may be that she does not wish to engage with the canonical status of any of La Plante's programmes, but her brilliant expositions of *Widows*, *Prime Suspect* and *Trial and Retribution* imply what should be in the canon and what should be left out.

The same equivocal nonchalance can be discerned in the over-use of inverted commas in the text. They appear on nearly every page. In and out of inverted commas go words like 'quality', perhaps sometimes invoked ironically, others not. The word 'quality' itself is problematic. It has been brought into television studies by the sociology of the medium, its production and its reception. The sociology of television demands that we take stock of the terms used in marketing and by television controllers, journalists and politicians. However, when they are grafted onto the history of television aesthetics, such ossified terms only obfuscate our taxonomy. The study of television aesthetics, long under the sway of sociology, now needs to find its own, diverse terminology if it is to progress from generalised television history into much-needed micro-histories. Hallam's diction in other parts of the book notwithstanding, *Lynda La Plante* contains exemplary analyses of *Widows*, *Prime Suspect* and *Trial and Retribution*, which point the way forward for case studies of television aesthetics.

# Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television

By Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds.)

London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006. ISBN 1-84511-179-6. xxxi+247 pp. £9.99 (pbk)

## A review by Sinéad Moynihan, University of Nottingham, UK

In their Preface to *Reading The L Word*, editors Kim Akass and Janet McCabe describe the volume as "Same text. Different voices," riffing upon the Showtime slogan advertising the drama series that is the subject of this book (xxx). Marketed as a queer successor to *Sex and the City*, which was just ending when *The L Word* piloted in January 2004, the series featured, according to Showtime's advertisements, "Same Sex. Different City." The challenge in a collection such as this -- which combines scholarly essays with actor interviews and episode guides -- is that the cacophony of "different voices" in the "same text" might not manage to hold together the very fine threads connecting the popular to the critical. Although these two may not necessarily be diametrically opposed, there is a risk that such a collection will prove too inaccessible for the average fan and too reverential for the scholarly reader. On the other hand, if successful, the volume promises to double its readership, the chances of which are certainly improved by its modest price. Notwithstanding the bewildering inclusion of certain essays and some slight problems with the book's structure, I am inclined to believe that the collection *does* succeed overall, balancing scholarly content with the kind of exhaustive detail and trivia that will appeal to fans, scholars and scholar-fans alike.

The dangers of attempting to tick too many readership boxes are exemplified, I think, in the excessive preamble to the volume, a three-parter consisting of a Foreword, a Preface *and* an Introduction. Sandwiched between the Foreword, by scholarly heavyweight in queer theory Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (author of, most notably *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1991) and the Introduction, by Sarah Warn, founder and editor of AfterEllen.com, "the leading entertainment site for lesbian and bisexual women" (xvi), is the Preface by the editors which represents, presumably, an effort to bridge these potentially disparate cultural commentators. The Introduction is the first of five contributions by Sarah Warn, the others being three interviews originally published on AfterEllen.com (two with *L Word* actors; one with an *L Word* screenwriter) and an essay on the biraciality of one of the show's main characters, Bette Porter (Jennifer Beals). The editors readily acknowledge their debt to Warn, whose was the "inspiration" behind the book and whose vision "saw its inception" (x). However, I think the over-reliance on Warn's contributions detracts somewhat from the impact of the book.

In particular, Warn is out of her depth in her essay, 'Radical Acts: Biraciality and *The L Word*'. Warn's rather clumsy analysis of the show's relatively sophisticated treatment of race is indicated in her otherwise engaging Introduction, in which she persistently conflates the 'othernesses' of being a lesbian and a person of colour. Thankfully, she does not do this to the extent that the categories emerge (misleadingly) as mutually exclusive. "To those who are straight or white (or both)", Warn writes, "it's difficult to adequately describe what it feels

like to not see reflections of yourself anywhere (1). Subsequently, Warn compares the impact of *The L Word* with the extent to which *Queer as Folk* polarised gay viewers and *The Jeffersons*, African American viewers (3). In the Introduction, however, she does contextualise *The L Word* convincingly among other forays into lesbian lifestyles on TV -- in *Ellen*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and so on. In 'Radical Acts', she is on much shakier ground in making a claim for "the scarcity of images of explicitly biracial and multiracial people in American entertainment" (190). Tiger 'Cablinasian' Woods, Tyra Banks, Halle Berry, anyone? In fact, Jennifer Beals, the subject of the essay, and who is herself of mixed racial ancestry, has often been compared negatively to Halle Berry because Beals has always been reluctant to identify as anything other than biracial whereas Berry is quick to assert herself as African American. Warn's observation that Bette's biracial identity is "an indelible part of her" is a clumsy turn-of-phrase considering the long legacy in the US of attempts to read 'blackness' on bodies perceived as racially ambiguous -- and thus threatening to the binary logic of race -- a legacy of which Beals and the show's writers are well aware and which is explored in *The L Word* (190).

The other problem with Warn's contributions is the placement of her interviews with cast members and screenwriter Guinevere Turner which, admittedly, was probably beyond her control. The editors have chosen to distribute them among the volume rather than collect them in one section, along with the episode guides, at the end of the book. While I understand the likely rationale behind this -- an attempt at integrating more 'scholarly' and 'populist' contributions -- it is, at times, unclear how the actor interviews, in particular, relate to the overarching theme of the section in question. Notwithstanding this small issue, however, the structure of the volume is largely successful, with the individual contributions slotting well into their relevant sections. The book is divided into four parts, each of which, mirroring the show's episode titles ('Loneliest Number', 'Labyrinth' etc.) is cleverly headed by an 'L word' -- 'Lesbians on TV', 'Looking', 'Loving' and 'Labels'.

Where *Reading The L Word* is particularly strong is in the 'Looking' section, which features two exceptional -- though quite similar -- essays on spectatorship and voyeurism by Susan J. Wolfe and Lee Ann Roripaugh, and Dana Heller, respectively. Otherwise, the scholarly content of the volume is, on the whole, quite evenly distributed. The pick of the 'Loving' section is Samuel A. Chambers's essay, 'Heteronormativity and *The L Word*: From a Politics of Representation to a Politics of Norms'. Chambers takes issue with the tendency in existing commentary on *The L Word* -- including much of what is published in *Reading The L Word* -- to debate endlessly the issue of lesbian visibility in mainstream television. As the debates over 'good' visibility and 'bad' visibility show and Chambers reiterates, representation alone "can provide absolutely no political guarantees" (83). Instead, Chambers shifts the debate from a politics of representation to "a politics of norms," arguing that television "proves political because of the way it participates in the reproduction of norms (and therefore culture, and therefore reality)" (85). Chambers subsequently argues persuasively that *The L Word* is "a heteronormative show about homosexuals" (82). Meanwhile, the standout essay in Part Four ('Labels') is the analysis by Candace Moore and Kristen Schilt of female masculinities on the show.

On the whole, the volume succeeds in maintaining the delicate balance of personal responses to *The L Word* and more scholarly critiques of the show. This is a particularly impressive achievement given the relatively short period of time that has elapsed between the pilot episode and the appearance of the book. Each individual contributor must, at the very least, be congratulated for their remarkably up-to-date engagements with *The L Word*. Most deal

with the first *and* second seasons, while the third season has only just concluded in the US. Although the relative lack of time for meditation is evident in some of the responses to the series, several nuanced, perspicacious readings of the show compensate for these shortcomings. Slickly packaged in paperback, with an attractive cover in pinks and purples and featuring a photo of show star Leisha Hailey on the back, *Reading The L Word* makes for compulsory reading both for Television Studies scholars and fans of the show.



# Reframing British Cinema, 1918–1928: Between Restraint and Passion

By Christine Gledhill

London: BFI Publishing, 2003. ISBN 0-85170-889-7. 214 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

## A review by Jane Smith

British cinema has had its luminous moments -- in the 1950s and 60s, certainly, and in the 80s and 90s -- but for most of its history, it's had a wallflower problem. Beside other Western cinemas, particularly Hollywood, the British fiction film has appeared downright dowdy: a pale, awkward thing in second-hand clothes, hardly worth a look.

Christine Gledhill's *Reframing British Cinema, 1918–1928: Between Restraint and Passion* is part of an impulse within film studies to give British films a good long look, but not for the purpose of discovering strangely neglected beauties. Instead, books like Andrew Higson's *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1995) and Sarah Street's *British National Cinema* (Routledge, 1997) have sought to demonstrate the productive part movies have played in the fashioning of British culture and nationhood. The scope of *Reframing British Cinema* is narrower, the ten years between the end of the First World War and the advent of talking pictures, a time when English society was negotiating the chasm between the Victorian age and the modern world opened up by the First World War. By the end of the 1920s, Gledhill says, "a formidable filmmaking practice had emerged, melding the range of transformation pictorial, performing and storytelling practices [that formed] the bedrock of a distinctive cinematic poetics" (175). She maintains that studying this filmic poetics will let us glimpse how this stratified society hashed out a code of middle-class values and behaviour.

Revisiting the 150 extant films of the 1920s took a lot of hard work. This corner of film history had been surveyed only twice before, by Rachael Low in *The History of the British Film, 1918–1929* (Allen & Unwin, 1971) and Kenton Bamford in *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s* (I. B. Tauris, 1999). Within a cinema history that has, generally speaking, been considered drab stuff, the films of the twenties have the reputation of being remarkably lifeless and silly, just stage plays somebody thought to film. They boasted no star as bright as Charlie Chaplin (who was, ironically, English), no story as sexy as *The Sheik*, no clear-cut genres, few cinematic innovations, and none of the prized American qualities of 'punch,' 'pep,' and 'vim' in editing or storytelling. If any those films are familiar to us now, it's *The Lodger* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1926) on account of its director, its cinematic experiments, and Ivor Novello, Britain's answer to Valentino. Few film scholars have been interested in seeing what the films of the twenties *did* have.

It turns out they have plenty of quirks: odd juxtapositions of locations, characters, situations, genres that seem to be forever barging into each other. "It was not always easy," writes Gledhill, "Friday after Friday in the NFTVA's basement cubicles, to fathom these films that offered often opaque and bemusing images such as the bizarre skiffle-playing, animal skin-

clad troupe in *She* (1925), scattered like comic-book cutouts across hillsides, strumming their makeshift instruments" (2).

Right off the bat, Gledhill turns the criticism of the early screen's being too stagey on its head. Far from being a flaw, its staginess is a fascinating aspect of British cinema. Theatricality appeals to class-based societies, particularly in times of social and economic transition, because it offers opportunities for reimagining one's place in society. She points out that the theatricality of British cinema goes far deeper than its borrowings of stage plays as sources. Characters are often performers of one kind or another: in *The Lure of Crooning Water* (Arthur Rooke, 1920) a weary actress seeks some peace and quiet and in *The Little People* (George Pearson, 1926) a family of Italian puppeteers struggles to survive. These films are full of disguises and costumes, and performances of one kind or another often function as key story moments, as in *Guns at Loos* (Sinclair Hill, 1928), in which cross-dressed servicemen stage a show before the ill-fated First World War battle.

Unsurprisingly, the actors Britain came to value in the 1920s were those who were noticeably playing a part, a far cry from the actor Hollywood preferred, whose on-and off-screen personas were indistinguishable. Being able to perceive a gap between actor and role was useful to a class-based society, for it suggested that behavioural codes signifying status could be put on or taken off, at least imaginatively.

Gledhill, who has written widely about melodrama, shows that the acting style of the straight or non-character roles in 1920s films derived from the late-Victorian stage melodrama aimed squarely at middle-class audiences -- the class of spectator films wanted, too. Whereas earlier blood-and-thunder stage melodramas required over-the-top expressions and gestures that appealed to the lower classes, the later stage and screen valued a restrained acting that hinted at powerful emotions beneath a character's carefully controlled façade. Gledhill notes that, as Lord Adrian St. Clair in *The Passionate Adventure* (Graham Cutts, 1924), Clive Brook's "most energetic move is to examine his nails, puff laconically on a cigarette or make a sardonic little twitch of his head" (64). She again draws attention to the peculiarly British insistence on the disjunction between exteriors and interiors -- here between a character's public persona and a bottled-up self -- and notes that underplaying one's passions like an aristocrat became the kind of behaviour considered proper for middle-class drawing rooms.

The author shows how the Victorian proclivity for looking at the world through the medium of pictures -- paintings, photography, magic-lantern shows -- also influenced the films of the 20s, especially those earlier in the decade. For Victorians a picture *was* a story. Odd as it may seem now, more than a few early films were inspired by or incorporated famous paintings. The source of director Maurice Elvey's first film (*The Fallen Idol*, 1913), for instance, was a painting by a cleric depicting an erring wife prostrate before a long-suffering husband, a work that was itself a reference to the mid-nineteenth-century triptych, *Past and Present*, by Augustus Egg. Unlike Hollywood pictures of the 1920s, whose narratives were constructed linearly through cause-and-effect scenes, the basic unit of the British film tended to be the tableau, a frozen picture. As a result the films of the early 1920s exhibit a peculiar tension between movement and containment -- once again, the aesthetic of restraint and passion.

No monolithic genres emerged from the films of the decade, which favoured flexible modes like the melodrama and romance that could accommodate characters, locations, and situations from different social strata: dukes and kitchen maids, ballrooms and sculleries, aristocratic ennui and East End criminality. In an effective passage from the second half of the book,

Gledhill turns again to *The Passionate Adventurer* to show the cultural utility of genres bumping up against each other. Midway through the film, the world-weary Lord Adrian St. Clair (Clive Brook) hies for London, takes on the guise of a bank robber, and gets involved with a working-class girl with a heart of gold. Gledhill points out that, at this point, St. Clair is "operating in two generic scenarios -- the sub-criminal and the drawing room melodrama ... The film's clash of class styles promises to dynamise repression, creating a dialectic between stasis and performance, fixed and transmutable identities, repression and passion" (142).

Gledhill also discovered that these films tended to tell stories their audiences were well acquainted with. Adaptations of literary works were common (films of *Bleak House* and *Daniel Deronda* were made in 1920 and 1921, respectively), as were filmic versions of popular legends, such as *Sweeney Todd*. They offered their audiences the comforts and aesthetics of recognition, a pleasure linked with the storytelling of childhood and emphasized by film titles like "Once upon a time..." Sometimes, the voice of the storyteller becomes so pronounced that it threatens to overtake the visual narrative, as in *The Bump* (Adrian Brunel, 1920) when a cheeky intertitle comments, "It's just possible he may be the hero. We are not sure yet. Have another look in case." Gledhill uses *The Garden of Resurrection* (Arthur Rooke, 1919), in which the protagonist constructs an imaginary life for a girl he doesn't know, to argue that the "re-immersion in storytelling promises a kind of makeover in fantasy of a world that in reality has proved so disillusioning and intractable" -- a world upended by the trauma of the First World War (170).

Now for the disclaimer. *Reframing British Cinema* is a book that demands rereading, not for pleasure, but for the cruder purpose of just trying to make out what the author is saying. The reader of this review should be warned that I'm still not sure I succeeded. The problem stems, in part, from an extravagant use of cultural studies jargon. For example, of Matheson Lang's performance in *Mr. Wu* (Maurice Elvey, 1919), she writes that "the doubling involved in oriental impersonations taps into the neuralgic conjuncture of restraint and passion through ethnic rather than high-society personae, generating overdetermined and sexualised encounters at the boundaries of racial, cultural and gender differences" (129). Matters aren't helped by the taxonomic organization of the book, which obeys a complex logic all its own. Writing about the curious subject of early British cinema in a way that may sour readers on the subject forever is a mighty big problem.

Yet in the end, as Gledhill puts it, this study amounts to "more than an archival exercise," a masterpiece of British understatement if ever there were one (183). She's done a heck of a lot of spadework for future scholars and put wrong-headed old aesthetic judgments to bed. What she wasn't able to accomplish in this book more than superficially -- connect the aesthetic practices of the 1920s British cinema with contemporary social and ideological anxieties -- other, surely less exhausted scholars (and less prolix ones, it is to be hoped) can take up.

# Spaces in European Cinema

By Myrto Konstantarakos (ed.)

Exeter: Intellect, 2000. ISBN 1-84150-004-6. 9 illustrations, 188 pp. £ 14.95 (pbk)

## A review by Kimberly Coulter, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Bonn

*Spaces in European Cinema* is a collection of fifteen fascinating essays by many leading scholars in modern language and film studies, loosely organized around the theme 'space.' The collection presents approaches to a variety of spatial themes: urban and rural settings, the use of the camera to create or discipline space, and social-spatial metaphors of marginality or confinement. Invoking the recent 'spatial turn' in cultural studies, editor Myrto Konstantarakos asks: "Is space just the latest fashionable frame of reference in the academic world ... or is it what founds the film's identity?" (6). She claims that the essays demonstrate "a specificity to the European representation of space, which clearly characterises it and makes it unique" (5). Taken together, do these spatial approaches and subjects really distinguish a unique "European cinema"? If so, what is the space of European cinema? *Spaces in European Cinema*, as a collection, ultimately works to stabilize 'national' and 'European' categories of cinema. This is problematic, if only because film, as Konstantarakos points out in her introduction, has the power to "re-map space" (6). Indeed, discourse about space performs and materializes its subject.

Although the larger *raison d'être* for the volume as a whole seems to be not an intervention into the meaning of space for film studies, but rather to present 'truly European' films and filmmakers, the individual essays offer many interesting insights on spatial aspects of cinema. Spanning the entire twentieth century, these contributions range from in-depth readings of single films, to *auteur* profiles, to films' political contexts, to state or municipal policy initiatives. Many of the contributors draw out intriguing aspects of space in cinema, such as the question of film funding and the insider/outside status of production staff members (Deniz Göktürk); municipal films about health and hygiene that aim to mobilize a national body (Elizabeth Lebas); and representations of spatial order in Mussolini's Rome (Leonardo Ciacci). Marginality is mainstream in this collection; it concentrates heavily on "examples of spatial challenges to class, gender and ethnic exclusion, which occur often by representing forbidden movements across frontiers" (6). The frontiers of Europe, however, are not seriously questioned, excepting Graham Roberts' essay 'East meets West' and Deniz Göktürk's mention of government subsidies. For what purposes, against what 'others,' and through what mechanisms a European cinema has come to be defined (consider Eurimages, Europa Cinemas, MEDIA+), remains unaddressed. Nor does the collection consider why 'national' state cinemas fail to dissolve in its shadow. The book's structure serves the categories of national and European cinema; the contributions are grouped by nation: four about France, three each about Germany and Italy, one each on films from Spain, UK, Switzerland, Finland, and, finally Russia (but with a window to Paris).

Paris, in this collection, is given pride of place. In 'Underground Cinema: French Visions of the Metro,' David Berry discusses French films' use of the Parisian *métro* and their often

'intestinal' associations, successfully evoking the creepiness of these subterranean labyrinths. In 'Subtext: Paris of Alexandre Trauner,' Keith Reader offers a tribute to the beloved set designer (also of *métro* sets), who survived the occupation despite constraints on his work and severe conditions. In 'The City as Narrative: Corporeal Paris in Contemporary French Cinema (1950s-1990s),' Susan Hayward considers how space and time master bodies, focusing in particular on the city of Paris as a body (misrecognized as female). In 'Countryside/Cityscape and Homelessness in Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* and Leos Carax's *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*,' bodies are located at the spatial margins; Raynalle Udris discusses here the visual anatomy of spatial metaphors of homelessness, bridges, and wanderings.

German cinema is allocated three spaces in the collection. Carol Diethe explores 'Anxious Spaces in German Expressionist Films,' examining how associations between interior space and the feminine on the one hand, and exterior space and the masculine on the other, are employed to express fear. The motif of confinement is then taken up by Göktürk, who considers 'Turkish Women on German Streets: Closure and Exposure in Transnational Cinema.' Göktürk considers production and representation of native citizens and foreigners as well as subsidy frameworks and institutions' roles in supporting or marginalizing films. In his essay 'The Sky over Berlin as Transcendental Space: Wenders, Döblin and the "Angel of History"' Martin Jesinghausen presents Walter Benjamin's discussion of the auratic (distancing) effect of film and considers its influence on Wim Wenders, particularly in his two Berlin films.

The next three essays concern Italian filmmakers. David Forgacs's contribution, 'Antonioni: Space, Place, Sexuality,' considers how an erotic gaze 'troubles space.' Forgacs crosses disciplinary boundaries in his engagement with spatial theory, drawing on contemporary philosophical and geographical work such as that of Edward Casey. Leonardo Ciacchi's essay 'The Rome of Mussolini: An Entrenched Stereotype in Film,' shows how spatial rhetoric (such as orderly rows of cabbages and other foodstuffs) in a 1937 newsreel is employed to persuade and fascinate the audience of fascist Italy's organization and efficiency. In her own essay, 'Is Pasolini an Urban Filmmaker?', Konstantarakos compares social and spatial peripheries in considering how Pasolini's camera observes adolescent boys in urban and rural landscapes around Rome.

Cinematic manifestations of ideology receive attention in the next four contributions concerning films of Spain, the UK, Switzerland, and Finland. In 'Transformations of the Urban Landscape in Spanish *Film Noir*,' Alberto Mira focuses on the political implications of representing cities, highlighting how Spanish *film noir* was stunted by the impossibility of representing corruption under Franco. Elizabeth Lebas's contribution, 'The Clinic, the Street and the Garden: Municipal Film-making in Britain between the Wars,' offers a rare glimpse at municipally produced social service short films, considering the institutional roles in their production, the site of their screenings, and how they were used to construct a national body politic. Returning to the screen to consider how space and movement affects narrative in 'Centre, Periphery and Marginality in the Films of Alain Tanner,' Lieve Spaas distinguishes between visible space and evoked space in the *oeuvre* of this Swiss film-maker. In 'Between the Two: Dimensions of Space in Finnish Cinema,' Jukka Sihvonen offers an evocative portrayal of Finland and Finnish cinema in her exploration of Romantic narratives on urban and rural 'scenic stages.'

Finally, Graham Roberts' 'East meets West: Mapping the New Europe in Yury Mamin's *A Window to Paris*' contrasts themes of openness and enclosure, especially the magical window in St. Petersburg that opens to Paris. This short essay hints at the potential for future work on 'spaces in European cinema' -- particularly the material and ideational borders of Europe. Perhaps more excursions to the margins will help to define the project of constructing Europe, which is itself a dynamic and contested scene of identity construction that should be high on interdisciplinary research agendas.

*Spaces in European Cinema* should be of interest to film aficionados, critics, and the curious, all of whom will come away with new ideas for further viewing. For use in university classrooms, this small and inexpensive paperback could be supplemented with newer scholarship on space and cinema (such as M. Hjort and S. MacKenzie, eds. *Cinema and Nation* [Routledge, 2000]; D. Morley and K. Robins. *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* [Routledge, 1995]; T. Cresswell and D. Dixon, eds., *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* [Rowman & Littlefield, 2002]; and D. Dixon and L. Zonn, 'Film Networks and the Place(s) of Technology,' in *Geography and Technology*, edited by S. Brunn, S. Cutter, and J. W. Harrington, Jr. [Kluwer, 2004]). Although the book would have benefited a sense of dialogue among its contributors, the collection is rich in ideas and suggestive of opportunities for future work, such as interventions into the emergence of cinematic links between space and identity. *Spaces in European Cinema* enhances the discussion about space in cinema studies and will undoubtedly inspire new discussion about spatial understandings of 'European' cinema.

# Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now

By Mark A. Reid

Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. ISBN 0-7425-2642-9. viii+135 pp. £16.99

## A review by Donna-Marie Tuck, University of Nottingham, UK

In his introduction Reid states that *Black Lenses, Black Voices* is "a book [that] discusses both African American and black-oriented film types, which, when taken together, constitute black film." (1) Within this framework, he further comments that *Black Lenses, Black Voices* "is about the actors, writers, filmmakers, technicians, businesspersons, and audiences who, through their participation as both producers and consumers, give life to this particular art form." (5-6). The book only runs to 136 pages including bibliographies, selected filmography, dedications, acknowledgements and notes about the author. Thus, the challenge in attempting to cover such a wide area of research in such a limited space is the ability to strike a balance between popular culture and critical comment. The book is organised into six chapters, with five chapters covering a specific film genre, namely, black family, black action, horror, black female-centred film and black independent films respectively. Each chapter analyses a number of Post Civil Rights films from both major Hollywood and independent studios. The opening chapter gives a brief history of black film from 1912 to the present. Each subsequent chapter is broken down into separate headings, which enables Reid to analysis a variety of films to suit his particular point of view. Some of the films discussed include *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, 1993), *Waiting to Exhale* (Forest Whitaker, 1993), *Eve's Bayou* (Kasi Lemmons, 1997), *Soul Food* (George Tillman, Jr., 1997) and *The Associate* (Donald Petrie, 1996).

This book is well written with a punchy fluid writing style and some insightful observations. Reid's desire to stay within the black film industry highlights his commitment to raising the profile of black cinema. However, in his need to cover such a wide range of material, he has left little room for an in-depth analysis of any of the genres he refers to. As a result, this book lacks the critical analysis of *Black American Cinema* by Manthia Diawara (Routledge, 1993) or *Black Frames: Critical Perspectives on Independent Black Cinema* by Mbye B. Cham (The MIT Press, 1988), but serves rather as a generalized overview of the trends in contemporary black filmmaking. Unfortunately, while the appeal of such a broad book might extend his readership to a larger consumer audience, the scholarly reader may be left somewhat disappointed.

What this book does really well is uphold Reid's observation that "There is no unified African American audience, nor should there be one." (92) By echoing this philosophy in offering objective, albeit somewhat brief, discussions of cultural and media images of African Americans, Reid is able to highlight the unique nature of black films post Civil Rights. His discussion on the contemporary black 'gangsta' films is particularly useful, especially in respect of tracing the trajectory of this genre from the early gangster films of the 1940s.

Where I feel that Reid is out of his depth is in his attempt to "use a womanist postNegritude approach ... [to] investigate recent African American film" (p.3). A single paragraph on the opening page of his introduction is given over to Reid's interpretation of this womanist postNegritude approach. As a result, his working definition and how he intends to employ this approach is not very clear. In addition, his somewhat haphazard peppering of this theory throughout the book does little to strengthen his interrogation of the film narratives and in some instances is in danger of confusing the reader.

Reid's strength lies within his chapters on the Black Family and Black Female-Centred Film. In his chapter 'Black Family Film: The 1990s' Reid examines "different socioeconomic classes of the contemporary African American family" (19) through his analysis of a selection of films that have been written and directed by African Americans. By commenting that many black family films are intergenerational and examining contemporary social issues such as father-son/father-daughter relationships, male masculinity, the division of the extended family unit and the acceptability/unacceptability of adultery across a large selection of films, Reid is able to initiate many interesting debates that future scholars may wish to examine in more detail. His brief inclusion at the end of the chapter on the pre-production processes of *Eve's Bayou* is an interesting addition. The anecdotes and comments provided by writer-director Kasi Lemmons enable a deeper understanding towards her choices when making this film along with character structures and narrative techniques. These insights also grant the reader with a first hand knowledge of the continuing difficulties and prejudices that African American writer-directors encounter when attempting to get their films financed or distributed.

'Black Female-Centered Film' opens the debates surrounding the depiction of black females in lead roles and the more commonly recognised stereotypical supporting role, eg. maidservant, side-kick to a white person, female-confidant or 'nanny' to a white family's children. In acknowledging that the female lead role has evolved to a more equal level standing in terms of socioeconomic class and intelligence to their white counterparts, this chapter traces the trajectory of black female roles. However, it is Reid's acknowledgement that it was the issues surrounding interracial romances that broke new ground in black cinema that are most perceptive. Citing a number of films that range from homosexual to heterosexual cross-cultural romances, his examination of the attitudes towards interracial relationships is compelling and raises interesting questions in relation to contemporary society's perception of intra and interracial relationships and multiculturalism. These astute observations pave the way for what could be again, further in-depth investigatory work by future scholars. His objective examination of Whoopi Goldberg and Halle Berry in relation to their movies and their personas gives validity to the various types of film narratives and brings a good structure to the chapter.

Where Reid's initial chapter focused on the history of black film, his final chapter focuses on the dichotomy between Hollywood and independent film makers. He uses as his focal point two films produced by independent film maker Haile Gerima (*Bush Mama* (Haile Gerima, 1979 and *Sankofa*). With an emphasis on the socio-political climate of the 1990s which saw African Americans receiving national and international negative news coverage in light of the Rodney King trial, the O.J. Simpson trial and the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas scandal, Reid recognises that *Sankofa* "offered its viewers a moment of self-reflection and healing." (107). Through a utilisation of the same technique that Reid set out at the end of Chapter 2, Gerima is given his own voice which highlights the issues surrounding the continuing existence of Hollywood censorship at both the pre and post production stages of film-making.



In conclusion, I would suggest that this book is a welcome addition to the literature on black film. It features an interesting overview of some of the more popular films that have been produced during the post civil rights cinematic period, and introduces the reader to a wider array of films that might encourage a closer analysis. It is an engaging text and would be useful as a supplementary source on courses such as African American film, film genre and African American studies. Through Reid's artful presentation of a variety of films and genres, he has certainly opened the door for future scholarly research in an area that is still clearly under-researched.

# **La Haine (French Film Guides Series)**

By Ginette Vincendeau

Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press/I. B. Tauris, 2005. ISBN 0-252-07332-0 (pbk). 55 illustrations+118 pages. £9.99 (pbk)

La Reine Margot (French Film Guides Series) By Julianne Pidduck & Leos Carax (French Film Directors Series) By Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd

## **La Reine Margot (French Film Guides Series)**

By Julianne Pidduck

Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press/I. B. Tauris, 2005. ISBN 0-252-07331-2 (pbk). 12 illustrations+112 pages. £9.99 (pbk)

## **Leos Carax (French Film Directors Series)**

By Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-7190-6314-0 (hbk), 0-7190-6315-9 (pbk). 6 illustrations+188 pages. £11.99 (pbk)

## **A review by Cristina Johnston, University of Stirling, UK**

The recent development of Manchester University Press's French Film Directors series and the University of Illinois and I.B. Tauris's Ciné-files French Film Guides can be seen as confirmation of the often privileged position held by French cinema within Film Studies. However, it is also a clear indication of the ways in which national cinemas are benefiting from the increasing permeability of boundaries between academic disciplines, and the development of an ever-more transnational critical framework. Both series rely explicitly (if at times tentatively) on the perceived prestige and specificity of French cinema -- Ginette Vincendeau, in her foreword as series editor of the French Film Guides, for example, describes France as "home to perhaps the most consistently vibrant film culture in the world." And both also strive to embed French cinema within a global cultural landscape, rather than constructing it as a cinematic exception to the norm.

The three books under review here -- Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd's study of the films of Leos Carax, Vincendeau's own guide to Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), and Julianne Pidduck's examination of Patrice Chéreau's *La Reine Margot* (1994) -- all appear to be renegotiating a role for French cinema within this constantly evolving framework. However, they appear equally keen to underline the complexities *within* French cinema and the challenges posed by the films and film-makers analysed, questioning the very terms of

definition of movements such as the *cinéma du look* of the 1980s, *banlieue* cinema, and heritage film with which Carax, *La Haine*, and *La Reine Margot* are sometimes associated.

Of the three, Vincendeau's study of *La Haine* deals with perhaps the best-known subject matter. Indeed, some might argue that there is little more to be said about Kassovitz's oft-cited work and the *cinéma de banlieue* movement it is frequently seen as heralding. And yet, by drawing together disparate strands of analysis incorporating the production, narrative content, and reception of the film, Vincendeau provides a wide-ranging, useful, and often stimulating resource. Although the approach adopted by Vincendeau is primarily auteurist, she also acknowledges the complex social, cultural, and cinematic interactions which result in the emergence of the film text, as well as drawing on examinations of star personae and aspects of reception studies. This multi-layered approach allows for a variety of points of access onto the central film text which, in turn, paves the way for a range of critical readings of Kassovitz's work. This is not to say that Vincendeau's study is exhaustive but it certainly offers analysis which is in-depth without losing the reader in detail, well-structured and signposted throughout, and comprehensive.

The guide offers, in broad terms, a chronological approach to the film, with its three central chapters focusing in turn on production; narrative, style, and ideology of the film itself; and its popular and critical reception both in France and elsewhere. It also offers a succinct synopsis in the opening pages, and a series of appendices containing the film's credits, a scene breakdown, filmographies and awards, a *verlan* (French backslang) glossary, a bibliography, and Vincendeau's highly personal account of her visit to the suburb where the film was shot. As is indicated by the inclusion of a glossary in the appendices, explanation is offered throughout of almost all elements of analysis whose meaning could be considered dependent on awareness or knowledge of a broader French cultural or political backdrop. Accordingly, with very few exceptions, brief explanations and/or translations are given for such French terms as *beur* or *banlieue*, in ways which are helpful to the anglophone reader unfamiliar with the French context, without detracting from the flow of the analysis for other readers. At times, these explanations could perhaps have benefited from further detail -- little detail, if any at all, is given as to the significance of May '68 in French cultural terms -- but, on the whole, they contribute positively to the analysis and serve to further embed the film within a broader framework.

As well as outlining the debates which surrounded the birth -- or otherwise -- of the *banlieue* cinema movement in the mid-1990s and the role played by Kassovitz/*La Haine*, Vincendeau is also keen to highlight the importance of transatlantic exchanges to each stage of the film's development, from production through to reception. In keeping with the predominantly auteurist approach, much is made, on the one hand, of Kassovitz's own cinephilia -- highlighting, for example, his interest in the production values of 'non-French' genres such as sci-fi and horror -- and, on the other hand, of parallels between his cinematic output and the work of such directors as Scorsese and Spike Lee. However, whereas other analyses of Kassovitz and *La Haine* have at times reduced the latter to a pale imitation of the director's American idols, Vincendeau succeeds in illustrating the complexities of the exchange. For example, parallels are discussed -- albeit too briefly -- between the broader movements of *banlieue*, *beur*, and 'hood films', while, at the same time, underlining the ways in which *La Haine* also emerges as part of a response to evolutions within French national cinema and a strand of new realism, often characterised by works made by young directors. As the study progresses, the transatlantic exchange is broadened to encompass some discussion of the onscreen personae of the film's three stars: Vincent Cassel, Saïd Taghmaoui, and Hubert

Koundé. Particularly interesting discussion is offered of the exploitation of commodified forms of US culture onscreen. This aspect of the study benefits greatly from the recognition of two distinct, yet overlapping, strands of Americanophilia -- in terms of the director and within the characters represented onscreen. However, it is also strengthened by the reliance, not only on reference to French critical responses, but also to those emanating from critics Stateside, which ultimately serve to construct *La Haine* as a transnational film text.

Insofar as the study demonstrates any weaknesses, they perhaps lie more in the chapter which concentrates on the 'narrative, style, and ideology' of the film. Whereas, in the other two chapters, every effort is made to take each point to its fullest conclusion, there is a tendency here to 'under-analyse'. While this may, on the one hand, serve to secure the possibility of multiple readings discussed earlier, it also leaves the reader, at times, with the impression that the surface has been skimmed without any real depth being achieved. In a section focusing on sound and music, for example, little reference is made to the use of dialogue, or indeed silence (56-7). This is returned to in later stages, but the almost exclusive equation of 'sound and music' with musical soundtrack would seem to undermine the complexity of analysis elsewhere. Similarly, while the question of *beur* identity is touched upon, at some length, at various points throughout the book, that of Jewish identity (65) remains very much underdeveloped. It is hinted at throughout but never analysed in any depth. It is perhaps in this chapter that Vincendeau relies more heavily on the background knowledge of her reader, with references to films and cinema movements -- *cinéma du look*, Jean-Francois Richet's *Etat des lieux* (1995), Malik Chibane's *Douce France* (1995) -- thrown in but not integrated within the analysis as they may have been in the preceding and the following chapters.

While Vincendeau's study benefits from the cult status and relative accessibility of Kassovitz's work, Julianne Pidduck faces much more of an uphill struggle in her analysis of Patrice Chéreau's brutal and epic historical drama *La Reine Margot*. Published in the same series as *La Haine*, Pidduck's work is constructed around the same basic framework -- synopsis, followed by three central chapters looking, in turn, at production contexts, the film itself, and its reception, and a selection of brief appendices listing credits, filmographies (for Chéreau and the film's main star, Isabelle Adjani), bibliography, and a very useful historical timeline.

However, while *La Haine* lends itself to a snappy and succinct synopsis spanning a page in all, the plot of *La Reine Margot* is so complex and imbricated in a fiercely complicated historical backdrop, that its synopsis runs over four pages. Bearing this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that Pidduck's study suffers, from time to time, from an excessive wordiness and a degree of historical, cultural, and filmic detail which demands a high level of concentration from the reader. The sheer level of detail required in order to express the complexities of Chéreau's work may even, at times, lead the reader to question whether *Margot* in fact lends itself to such an approach. Pidduck herself refers to a number of other lavish heritage productions -- *Le Hussard sur le toit* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1995), for example, and more frequently Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990) -- which would perhaps have provided a more straightforward primary source, while allowing for analysis of many of the same issues. However, the sharp concentration required of the reader is frequently rewarded by a stimulating examination of an intelligent, original, and, perhaps most crucially, under researched film.

Much of the first chapter is taken up with detailed accounts of the various genealogies and courtly intrigues which form the historical basis of *Margot*. However, Pidduck also succeeds,

for example, in highlighting the ways in which the aesthetic roots of Chéreau's film stretch back as far as the European Romantic movement, both in visual and literary terms. She is equally quick to underscore the potential for contemporaneity inherent in the work, simultaneously focusing on possible metaphorical readings of the film text (drawing parallels with the barbarism of the Bosnian conflict and the Rwandan genocide, but also foregrounding its focus on blood and the contemporary resonance thereof) and the centrality of the star persona of Isabelle Adjani as Margot. While the focus in some analysis of heritage cinema tends to be on the genre's ability to offer an onscreen embodiment of a nation's nostalgia for an idealised past, it is to Pidduck's credit that her study here successfully offers a far more complex examination of *Margot* as simultaneously historical and contemporary text.

The second of the central chapters centres on the film text itself and frames its analysis, loosely speaking, through three broad themes: gender, sexuality, and death. These categories are examined in and of themselves, but they also serve to mediate a further engagement with such topics as Chéreau's onscreen representation of the body, accusations of a 'gendered dismissal' of costume drama as a genre, and the key role played by Adjani's star image which is described as "fractured into a simulacrum of cinema" (27). Pidduck's analysis here introduces her reader to a critical framework which brings 'pure' film theory into dialogue with a broader swathe of cultural theory, drawing on Barthes and Bourdieu, as much as it does on such filmic notions as, for instance, 'the gaze'. And just as Pidduck, overall, succeeds in interweaving the historical with the contemporary, so too does she reach a delicate balance here between film text and cultural text which opens her analysis up, not only to students of film, but to readers approaching the work from other disciplines.

Pidduck's final chapter concentrates on questions related to the film's national and international release and reception, and again, it is the multilayered approach which is favoured. The film's position within complex marketing systems is foregrounded, highlighting the role played by Canal+ as both production company and television channel, in the production, distribution, and marketing of the film. Just as Vincendeau's study of *La Haine* pointed towards the importance of the film's screening at Cannes, so too does Pidduck focus on the fact that *Margot*'s release coincided with the festival. In this chapter, it is the discussion of criticisms levelled at *Margot* as 'popular cinema' which is most intriguing, pointing, as it does, towards the contradictions inherent in the film's reception which have, nevertheless, contributed to constructions of meaning around it. Pidduck discusses these criticisms and contradictions in both the French and the transatlantic context, describing, for example, the rather complex series of releases and re-releases which saw the film re-edited for an American market, with the US cut subsequently re-released in the domestic market.

Although, on the whole, Pidduck's analysis is sharp and tightly focused, there are points at which the reader is left either questioning the justification of particular positions adopted, or looking for particular strands of analysis to be pushed further still. Particularly dubitable is the unquestioning connection Pidduck seems to suggest exists between Chéreau's status as an openly gay director and readings of the film which see its "saturated corporeal imagery [which] also foregrounds blood and poison, desire and death" (82) as an allegory of contemporary responses to AIDS and HIV. Pidduck seems to undermine her own position here. While she sees no difficulty stating that Chéreau's "publicly acknowledged homosexuality would suggest a heightened sensitivity to the spreading poison signified by tainted blood," she sees no need to place any emphasis on Adjani's heterosexuality as she goes on to observe that the actress had "herself been 'tainted' by rumours of HIV infection

and even death." (83) Such facile connections between male homosexuality and HIV/AIDS would seem to weaken the overall strength and depth of the analysis offered at other points.

In terms of aspects of analysis which are left somewhat underdeveloped, it is worth noting that, although details are scattered throughout the book regarding the complexity of Adjani's star image, particularly in terms of her national/ethnic identity, it is predominantly left up to the reader to collect these references and draw them together. Pidduck herself, while mentioning, almost in passing, that Adjani has a German mother and an Algerian father, then proceeds to refer to her as a "French actress" and yet then expects the reader to latch onto the significance of a reference to Adjani's "dramatic insistence on her Algerian roots." (67) It seems, at times, as though the author's decision that Chéreau's desire to focus on the male body and the complex constructions of masculinity emerging onscreen dominates, in fact serves to weaken her analysis of the work as a whole. It is almost as though she has accepted, without much persuasion, one of the premises of her own argument which then severs access to another layer of meaning within the text. Obviously, such choices have to be made, not least in order to maintain the coherence of an overall critical framework, but it is unfortunate here, in a study that otherwise seems eager to foreground the multifaceted and the multilayered, that this particular choice should foreclose a strand of analysis whose existence is, nevertheless, hinted at.

Putting these quibbles to one side, however, Pidduck's study is, overall, an impressive and courageous piece of work. Rather than going for the easier option of, for example, *Cyrano de Bergerac* or *Germinal* (Claude Berri, 1993), both of which are referred to and both of which would have allowed for parallel discussions of literary and historical influences, alongside an engagement with the role played by star personae and the troubled category of heritage/historical/costume drama, Pidduck has chosen a film which is complex and challenging in terms of production, content, and reception. If the aim of the Ciné-files series is, as the series editor's foreword states, to "build on" the new audience for French films constructed through the arrival of DVDs, but also to offer "authoritative and entertaining guides", then both Vincendeau's *La Haine* and Pidduck's *La Reine Margot* certainly live up to expectations, all the while demonstrating the diversity of contemporary French cinematic output.

The final book under review here is drawn from a series which focuses, not on individual film texts, but rather on the work of key French directors, looking at the oeuvre of contemporary film-maker Leos Carax. Carax has, to date, only directed four feature-length works and, having started his career in the early 1980s, he tends to be mentioned in the same breath as such figures as Beineix and Besson, and the glossy *cinéma du look* movement. However, it is the contention of Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd here, that this labelling does not do full justice to the work of Carax, and that his films would, in fact, better be described as 'neo-baroque', placing him within a genealogy that encompasses Godard, Ruiz, and Garrel. Daly and Dowd offer an introduction which examines what they term the "genesis of Carax's system" (1), before moving on to the three central chapters which are grouped around Carax's four films to date -- chapter 1 looks at *Boy Meets Girl* (1984) and *Mauvais Sang* (1986), chapter 2 moves on to examine *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* (1991), and the third chapter ends on *Pola X* (1999).

Although the series editors' foreword clearly states that the aim is "both to provide informative and original English-language studies of established figures, and to extend the range of French directors known to anglophone students of cinema", on a linguistic and

presentational level, Daly and Dowd's study fails to offer this promised degree of accessibility. While Vincendeau and Pidduck both made allowances for readers coming at French film from a non-francophone background, Daly and Dowd have opted here for an approach which combines quotations in French followed by bracketed English translation, longer quotations in French which are translated into English in footnotes, and, in some cases, far shorter phrases and expressions used in French with no attempt to offer any explanation or translation. This lack of textual uniformity and the decision to leave some expressions untranslated seems, from the outset, to undermine the premise that this is a guide aimed explicitly at an anglophone readership and, rather than broadening access to the work of a lesser-known French director, in fact serves to privilege those readers who already have a degree of awareness of the broader French cultural landscape.

The question of the accessibility of Daly and Dowd's text also arises in relation to the theoretical framework they use to direct their analysis of Carax's work, a framework which relies, primarily, on a solid working knowledge of the writings of Gilles Deleuze, as well as a nodding acquaintance with such diverse figures as Michel Serres and Lucretius. Clearly the reliance on Deleuzian terms of analysis both within a readership schooled in film theory and one approaching Carax from a French Studies background is entirely justified. However, in a study which is supposed to be offering something of an introduction to Carax as director, it is at times difficult to disentangle commentary, analysis, and criticism of his work from a more sustained engagement with Deleuze in which Carax's films serve only as illustrative examples. There is much merit in an approach which, rather than leading its reader gently towards the introduction of theory, entwines theory and film from the outset. However, within the context of a series of guides to French Film Directors, it is, from time to time, difficult to identify where the true focus of interest lies for the authors.

Putting these concerns to one side, however, Daly and Dowd do succeed, overall, in demonstrating that Carax is more than simply the lesser-known representative of the oft-disparaged *cinéma du look* movement. Their insistence on the importance of the ongoing development of a filmmaker's genealogy and their awareness of the dangers inherent in this 'genealogical' model -- all too often resulting in directors being viewed as little more than pale imitations of their idols -- allows them to argue for the positioning of their analysis of Carax's work in a spectrum that includes such figures as Godard and Ruiz. Their intention throughout, it would seem, is not only to examine works and directors which have inspired Carax, but also the impact of Carax on other directors, on the development of French cinema, indeed even on aspects of transatlantic cinema, offering examples of US films which have incorporated "Caraxian influences" (3).

Their categorisation of his earlier works as 'neo-baroque' is detailed and well-constructed (although it might, arguably, have benefited from the inclusion of stills drawn from the visual arts, and not only from the films), indeed the terms of analysis they *develop* -- as opposed to those they draw more straightforwardly from Deleuze -- tend to be clearly structured and explained at length which greatly strengthens their analysis of Carax's four films as representative of an oeuvre. They convincingly argue that a concern with falsity, be it of the world or the universe, lies at the heart of much of Carax's work, and is illustrated by a peculiarly Caraxian take on doubling, reflexivity, and ambiguity. They further identify three particular types of character which can be said to inhabit, at the very least, the first two of Carax's films, namely "the orphan of chaos, the *autiste-bavarde* and the *enfant-vieillard* ('autistic man-chatterbox', 'elderly child')", (4) and they go on to illustrate and analyse the ways in which the characters in *Boy Meets Girl* and *Mauvais Sang* interact with these

categories, if not always with each other. Their analysis of the ways in which Carax's characters can be said to be invisible to each other onscreen is particularly interesting. (67)

Overall, however, the reader is left a little frustrated, on the one hand, by the insistence on the imposition, apparently at any cost, of the Deleuzian framework, and, on the other hand, by a parallel tendency to leave underdeveloped strands of analysis which hint at further originality and depth. For instance, from time to time, references are thrown in to aspects of 1980s pop culture (David Bowie in particular) which seem to offer a distinctive approach to, for example, the notion of the auteur, but, on the whole, these references are simply left dangling. Similarly, a very interesting comparison of the onscreen personae of Denis Lavant, Guillaume Depardieu, and Christophe Lambert is ventured (85) but does not feature heavily in the rest of the study and no reference is made to the status of Juliette Binoche, for example. Frequent passing reference is made to the use of acrobatics and dance, and yet, despite the theory-heavy nature of the rest of the study, these remain paradoxically under-theorised. All in all, there are numerous points at which the authors seem to be indicating that there is more to be said but that it falls (somewhat inexplicably) outside the remit of the approach adopted here.

The one aspect of Daly and Dowd's study which does, however, impress throughout is their sustained analysis of the use of sound, music, and dialogue in Carax's work. Rather than simply equating discussions of the audio to the musical soundtrack, they engage with the full complexities of film as audio-visual medium, offering, for example, a particularly stimulating consideration of the interplay between voice-in and voice-off in *Boy Meets Girl*, but also describing Carax's approach as, at times, embodying a "purely cinematic speech act". (72) It would have been all too easy, in discussion of a director whose work is imbued with a highly stylised visual ethic, to allow the visual to take centre-stage, yet Dowd and Daly repeatedly return to the notion of the audio-visual tandem. They do not allow their analysis to be distracted by a focus on Carax's use of the acrobatic body or the spectacle of fireworks as used in *Pont-Neuf*, despite the iconic status of these within his work, but rather strive towards an analysis of Caraxian characters which allows them to inhabit both the visual and the aural space of the screen. Furthermore, it is in their analysis of the use of soundtrack that Daly and Dowd succeed in going beyond a purely Deleuzian framing device, bringing into play a far broader span of film and cultural theory. Had this strategy been adopted throughout, their analysis of an oft-overlooked director would doubtless have been rendered more accessible to their broader readership.



# **Art in the Cinematic Imagination**

By Susan Felleman

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. ISBN 0-292-70941-2. xi+199pp. £14.95

Film, Form and Phantasy: Adrian Stokes and Film Aesthetics By Michael O'Pray

## **Film, Form and Phantasy: Adrian Stokes and Film Aesthetics**

By Michael O'Pray

Basingstroke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. ISBN 0-333-53762-9. xiv+252pp. £50.00

### **A review by Brian E. Butler, The University of North Carolina, US**

*Art in the Cinematic Imagination* and *Film, Form and Phantasy* are two recent books that analyse the intersection of artistic expression and film. While both raise important questions as to the nature of artistic creation, they utilize drastically different methods and exemplify disparate attitudes towards critical engagement and theoretical strategy.

In *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, Susan Felleman investigates the relationships between art, artists and gender as they are portrayed in film. The basic idea is that fine art and the feminine are both an 'other' to film and therefore both can serve as a mirror to film as a cultural product. While Felleman's work is methodologically pluralistic with an emphasis upon empirical descriptions of specific films, the main analytic tools used are a loose combination of the psychoanalytic (mostly post-structural) and the feminist varieties. In fact, Felleman claims that gender is the 'foundational difference' implicated in every aspect of human society.

It is argued that in film this foundational difference overlaps with the other 'other' of fine art. While the feminine is a constant challenge to cultural norms in a patriarchal society, fine art is anxiety producing in the context of a popular film. The assumption here is that popular film, when operating according to its own logic, 'sutures' the viewer to its internal viewpoint - therefore immersing the passive viewer into the films unavowed but ever-present ideology. But when fine art is portrayed as a major subject in film, is foregrounded, then both the film, as a work of art itself, and the viewer, are implicated in a more reflective and self-conscious activity. This, in turn, creates a dynamic where the viewer is both seduced by the image, and conscious of the artificiality of the entity doing the seduction. Indeed, the desire becomes conscious and, therefore, the danger inherent in seduction more obvious. This is paralleled with the status of women in film. The female body, most specially, is used as a naturalized and 'obvious' object of heterosexual desire and yet also occupies a dangerous and anxiety producing place as other in film. That is, the female body both stands in for the naked truth,

and for the excess and monstrous aspects of nature that cannot be fully understood or controlled. So, the claim in *Art and the Cinematic Imagination* is that by investigating the overlap of the portrayal of fine art and the feminine in film, the repressed in culture and film can be revealed in informative ways.

One way Felleman explores the strangeness of gendered filmic desire is through an investigation of films that use portraiture in their plots. As the book shows, there are many films where painted portraits or photographs exhibit magical qualities. First, the portrait seems magical because it appears to avoid the problem of mortality (here there is drawn a parallel with film itself). Second, there is a whole sub-genre of films where a lover encounters a person who is taken to be the (visual) reincarnation of their dead or missing lover. The lover, in this genre, then proceeds to love the new person as if he/she is the actual lost person. Felleman describes this filmic activity as a form of necophilia and sees it as much the same as a film viewer's desire for a person portrayed in film. Importantly, when the living lover is male and the visual reincarnation is female there is an overwhelming tendency for the characters in the films to take the living woman as an actual reincarnation of the lost lover even though their characters are different, or, if what is even more likely, their characters (other than visually) are not known to be similar. In other words, women are almost fully equated with their status as a visual object. Here it seems that love of an image is much like love of the dead. (But how, it might be asked, if this love was always just love of image was there any 'life' to this love to begin with?) In any case, this analysis is held to highlight a strange aspect of film itself -- the figures in a film are not living, just presentations of light on a screen, images of the past.

Tellingly, as opposed to the virtually unquestioned identification of a female lover with her visual appearance, in films where a female encounters a male figure that is uncannily similar in appearance to her missing lover, there is almost universal scepticism within the films as to the validity of the identification of the lost lover and the present figure. For example in *The Majestic* (Frank Darabont, 2001) the film elaborated scepticism from both of the partners before unmasking the falsity of identification by the end. Felleman documents telling evidence that the nature of the female character in film is more visually determined than that of the male.

This visually constructed and determined nature of the female in film is further seen in the handling of the female as statuesque as well as mythic and psychologically mysterious. Here *Art and the Cinematic Imagination* investigates the nature of the female mythic specifically in relationship to films starring Ava Gardner. The implication of the analysis of films where Gardner is portrayed as mythic and as statue is that female Hollywood film goddess and the classical statue are both physically inaccessible, visual and not psychological or accessible through any interiority, and not subject but wholly object. Both the classical sculpture and the Hollywood film goddess are an idealization and a type safely distanced from the mortality and/or the corruption of the flesh.

Another image of woman in film, though related less explicitly to the intersection of female gender and fine art, is that of the mermaid -- what Felleman calls the monstrous feminine. Though this moves the female character from statue or goddess to biology (if only mythological) the films portraying women as mermaids still offer very little in the way of character other than visual embodiment. In a movie like *Splash* (Ron Howard, 1984) this might be expected. (Though why this is expected and natural is, of course, largely the question that Felleman effectively raises.) But in a film that carries itself with art-movie

seriousness such as *Children of a Lesser God* (Randa Haines, 1986) this same reduction to image, to body, is more troubling. Possibly even more theoretically troubling is the anxiety that sign-language and its bodily attachment is shown to cause in James, the main male character. Another image of the female investigated is that of the music box. In this image one can observe a very controlled, displayed and carefully circumscribed place for the female dancer. If this isn't a gendered image calculated to control the danger of the female to patriarchal values I think it legitimate to ask why there are not music boxes with fire men in the centre (or at least Chippendale dancers)?

Felleman's exploration of gender in relationship to visual artwork in film is both informative and often compelling. But there is another layer to her analysis. Instead of the standard male artist as creator-genius and woman as muse scenario, a few contemporary films portray a potentially more challenging situation -- woman as creative or fine artist. This might be thought to be the most subversive possibility where the woman as fine artist colonizes one of the most cherished of male roles -- artist as fecund source of cultural procreation. For instance, in *Backtrack* (Dennis Hopper, 1990) the plot revolves around a conceptual artist whose work is actually that of noted artist Jenny Holzer. But even here the movie reveals containment devices seemingly aimed at holding the position of 'real' artist for 'Milo' the male hit man role (he is shown to be more passionate and interested in more 'legitimate art' throughout the film). In fact, the character of Anne Benton (the female conceptual artist) is quickly reduced to an object of visual desire "wearing rather girlish, sexy short dresses and lingerie." (134) Even here in the role of artist the critique shows "the ease with which the female figure slips from a position of subject to that of object." (148)

As opposed to *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*, *Film, Form and Phantasy* is anything but pluralistic and takes theory to be central in importance. Michael O'Pray firmly grounds his analysis in a specific and well-articulated philosophical theory. According to O'Pray, "It is with a Wollheimian working of Stokes' ideas that it is possible to approach film using the Kleinian-based model." (92) There is much to unpack in this unwieldy sentence. From Klein is borrowed the technical notion of 'phantasy'. According to this theory art is able to express content because of a complex human ability to project emotions and thoughts onto objects in the world. Underlying all projection, in the Kleinian narrative of the mind, is a progress from a paranoid-schizoid to a depressive type of object experience. As opposed to wish-fulfillment, phantasy is actual experience of the world, but it is always and unavoidably also an 'experiencing as'. That is, phantasy takes the object in specific ways. In the paranoid-schizoid experience of the object is aggressive and fragmented, with good aspects and bad aspects of objects completely split into different object experiences. With the depressive, on the other hand, objects are experienced as complete wholes that combine the good and bad. Most importantly, in the depressive mode objects are accorded a separate existence and, in some way, ontologically respected. This, in turn, helps to explain the second aspect of O'Pray's theoretical apparatus -- Stokes' distinction between modelling and carving in art. For Stokes, modelling in art represents aspects of the paranoid-schizoid, in particular its aggressive attitude towards the world. Modeling attacks the world with an air of omnipotence -- attempting to overwhelm objects and subsume any worldly resistance to the subject's purposes. On the other hand, in the carving mode, associated with the depressive, an artwork is better thought of as a collaborative project between artist and medium. For Stokes this was best exemplified in successful stone sculpture where the result is a figure *in* stone (neither stone nor figure is dominant, but both combine into a complete whole). Finally, from Wollheim O'Pray takes, among other concepts, the issues of seeing-in and two-foldedness. 'Seeing-in' is Wollheim's way of avoiding the difficulties of analysing the structure of

representation. According to Wollheim, human beings have a natural capacity to see-in -- for example, a person might see a horse in a cloud formation. Seeing-in is claimed to precede representation as an intentional human activity. From this ability we have developed art as an expressive and intentional activity. But for Wollheim it is important that in art we don't fall so deeply into the experience of seeing in that the medium disappears -- hence the concept of two-foldedness. As applied to film, two-foldedness appears as follows; "In perceiving a film we see in its two-dimensional surface of light and shadow three-dimensional figures while being aware of the fact that it is a flat film surface." (21) Ultimately, for Wollheim it is this ability to see in a medium while being aware of the artworks existence as an expressive artefact that is an essential aspect of what is it to be an artwork.

From this psychological/philosophical system O'Pray develops an analysis of film that situates it firmly in the domain of visual art. Importantly, understanding film's ability to represent as parasitic upon seeing-in is thought to escape the reductionism of the semiological camp. Further, because art is taken to be essentially a conscious and intentional activity, O'Pray's theory avoids the tendency within the psychoanalytical analysis of art to reduce all to a search for latent content. Because seeing-in is primitive it is not language-dependent, and because artistic creation is irreducibly intentional it cannot be reduced in analysis to its latent content. In fact, art 'exhibits' intent.

How does this help explain film as an art? If correct, this theory gives a well-articulated theoretical explanation for film's expressive qualities. Film operates within our fundamental situation where phantasy projects upon objects expressive qualities. In art, intentional activity experiments with media and objects in the world to find compatible means and objects for specific human expression. While expression is largely a matter of projection, it is also the case that specific media and objects are more effective and compatible for such a task.

In *Film, Form and Phantasy* various director's works are described as falling into either the modelling or carving modes. Most surprising, perhaps, is the characterization of the great montage master Eisenstein as a modeller. But the characterization does make sense within the schema -- Eisenstein's work is full of the fragment due to the extensive use of montage. Objects are manipulated, cropped, and the world is deconstructed (disfigured) in order to rearrange it according to the director's vision. Here there is clearly a desire to immerse the viewer in an overwhelming experience. Another modeling director is Hitchcock. His films are representative of the modelling type of art because of their high level of orchestrated technique, frequent edits, and strong positioning or 'suturing' (not O'Pray's wording) of the viewer. O'Pray describes these techniques as controlling, ravishing and mercilessly overwhelming. These directors try to overcome the two-foldedness of the art object as well as the ontological resistance of objects in the world. Carvers, on the other hand, include John Ford, Rosellini, Antonioni and Dreyer. These directors allow the world its place. Their films are less controlling, less invasive. Some of the evidence for a film in the carving mode would be long-shots and less editing, though it is important to stress it is the underlying ability to capture a type of 'ontological wholeness' and not any specific techniques that ultimately shows itself as carving. These directors also allow the artifactuality of the artwork to be acknowledged in the experience.

It is clear that these two books are aimed at different aspects of film and art. *Art in the Cinematic Imagination* is not aimed at a theoretical explanation of film as art as much as how portrayal of art and gender in film can bring to awareness latent meanings and assumptions about gender and the artist/artwork. Here a theoretical pluralism is adopted because theory is

less the animating force than in service of a specific aim. In fact, the theoretical apparatus of the book is rather weak and formulaic. It is only saved from its theoretical thinness and predictability by the strong empirical film analysis. Through careful analysis of specific films Felleman creates a work with convincing examples of the problematic and anxiety-producing roles that gender and art can occupy in cinema. Due to her descriptive analysis it becomes very clear how the intersection of film, artworks and gender can highlight naturalized yet highly questionable assumptions about character, objecthood and visuality in relationship to gender, about the nature of gendered subjectivity and creativity, and of the retrograde ideas of the artist and artistic production currently reproduced within Hollywood culture. The analysis, though, might have been strengthened by a more thorough analysis of more contemporary ideas of the nature and role of the artist held within the contemporary artworld. It is not that her picture of that role is uninformed, or incorrect, but rather that she assumes too much knowledge of the contemporary artworld in the average reader. Ultimately, Felleman's book enters into a realm that is cliché-ridden with a set of theoretical tools that are more than somewhat tired clichés at this time as well. But, because of the careful empirical work in film analysis, the intersection of the clichés of Hollywood and the clichés of psychoanalytic post-structuralist feminist theory actually produces a powerful and compelling set of conclusions. As a cultural critique of art and gender within film, *Art in the Cinematic Imagination* is successful in its aims and highlights highly gendered aspects of artistic creation and subject formation within film.

*Film, Form and Phantasy*, on the other hand is much more aimed at philosophical analysis of the nature of film as an art. O'Pray develops a very careful and systematic theory with which to explain the status of film as artwork. As opposed to the theoretical clichés of psychoanalytic post-structuralist theory there is developed a more humanist theory based upon the psychoanalytic and philosophical work of Klein, Stokes and Wollheim. This whole tradition can be thought of as an under appreciated counter-point to the dominant thread of psychoanalytic and post-structuralist cultural analysis. Felleman's works rests on an analysis that takes the films content as expressive and cognitive for granted. O'Pray's agenda is to explain how a film can be both expressive and meaningful to begin with. Felleman looks to find the latent content in a set of films with specific subject matter. O'Pray's work is about explaining how film works can have enough interest, enough art presence, to be worth analyzing for both manifest or latent content.

The intellectual apparatus of *Film, Form and Phantasy* is compelling in its willingness to take on and accept stances that semiotic approaches seem to define out of the picture by fiat. Through the use of seeing-in and phantasy as foundation points O'Pray offers a thought out and systematic explanation of the underlying mechanisms of filmic expression. It is true, possibly, that some conclusions might be less supported than desired. For example, where O'Pray offers a defence of the realism of Bazin and others as being less naive than detractors would have it, there is a notable lack of explanation of just how the realist ontology in film works. But this only highlights the virtue of O'Pray's clear and systematic analysis -- the argument is written clearly enough to enable the weak points to be identified and pursued. *Film, Form and Phantasy* offers a compelling theory of expression and a thoughtful method with which to analyze film as an art. It is a noteworthy addition to the realm of the philosophy of film. As a work of systematic aesthetics it is admirable in its clarity and depth. And as opposed to Felleman's work, O'Pray's book offers both a set of empirical observations and a carefully thought out philosophical theory of artistic expression that takes film as a work of intentional artwork seriously.

# **Framed: Women in Law and Film**

By Orit Kamir

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. ISBN 0-8223-3624-3. xix+324pp. £14.95 (pbk), £64.00 (hbk)

Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film By Britta Sjogren

## **Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film**

By Britta Sjogren

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. ISBN 0-252-07267-7. 21 illustrations, xii+248 pp, £12.95 (pbk), £31.94 (hbk)

## **A review by Lucy Bolton, Queen Mary University of London, UK**

These books both demonstrate that the revolutionary, subversive project of feminist film theory is alive and kicking. Far removed, however, from defining the feminine or reclaiming elements of patriarchal cinema, Orit Kamir and Britta Sjogren both issue clarion calls for the recognition of difference on-screen -- a difference which is not confined to the sexual, but may also spring from that which is unearthed by their examination of women in film.

Kamir's analysis of woman in law and film demonstrates how fruitful an interdisciplinary approach to film criticism can be, and the consideration of women in law films (outside of the role of the female lawyer) is timely and welcome. Sjogren's approach to classical Hollywood cinema of the forties is a theoretically challenging and provocative exposition of the power and significance of the female voice in the structuring and enunciating of filmic texts. Both books ask for fresh eyes and a mind free from theoretical assumptions to be brought to bear on well-known films, some of which are almost canonical in film theory, and both writers require the reader to accompany them on a journey through their case studies from a different perspective, abandoning any preconceptions they may have about normative forms of criticism.

In her original and experimental book, Orit Kamir brings together the popular discourses of law and film, juxtaposing their respective functions and reading them together through the examination of selected case studies. Starting from the viewpoint that most people learn what they know about law from popular culture, Kamir demonstrates the way in which film creates and sustains a particular jurisprudence, whilst manipulating the spectator into various modalities of judicial assessment. Kamir situates herself within the discipline of 'law and film' -- an emerging field of study concerned with the exploration of the complex relationship between these two pivotal social discourses. This relationship entails similarities, differences

and compatibilities in terms of structures, symbols, ideologies and functions, and Kamir's book is an accessible, imaginative demonstration of how fruitful these comparisons can be.

There is of course a tradition of critical debate about whether or not a film can properly be considered a text, let alone a 'jurisprudential text', as Kamir names the films in her corpus. However, the analysis of this terminology and the justification for reading filmic texts in this legalistic light is both convincing and engaging. This group of 'law films' is loosely defined as "films that feature any type of legally oriented social or moral issue as subject matter" (2), but which are likely to support one or more of the following three premises. Firstly, that the discourses of law and film reflect and refract fundamental values and crises of their societies and cultures, echoing and reinforcing each other in their functions and modes of operation. Secondly, that law films perform large-scale legal indoctrination, training audiences in the active execution of judgment while reinforcing legal norms, logics and structures. The third premise is that a law film's cinematic judgment of its on-screen legal system can offer jurisprudential commentary, which although embedded in popular film may be sophisticated and illuminating. This trinity of law film characteristics, identified and clarified by Kamir, calls for a consideration of law films apart from their association with mass consumption and the entertainment industry, and free of the restrictions of legal language and restrictive rigour. In this way, law films are proposed as a site of potential theoretical and practical enrichment for the disciplines of law and film studies.

The book has a subversively skewed frame of reference in terms of the social values and hierarchies it draws upon in its analyses. Although acknowledging the book's grounding in Anglo-American common-law logic, and more specifically American legal principles, Kamir formulates the value systems of the legal and cinematic in terms of the antithetical notions of honour and dignity:

Whereas honor entails a structured hierarchy and strict gender roles, encouraging violent competition among men and sexual constraint of women, human dignity aims to promote an egalitarian society, based on utmost respect for authentic, diverse individual needs and aspirations (5).

The difference between these two positions with respect to the individual, Kamir contends, is that in an honour culture, an offence to one's honour necessitates the avenging of the dishonour; an attack on a person's dignity however is an attack on society and its fundamental values -- it does not burden the offended party, but challenges the social order. It is on this basis then that Kamir embarks on developing a perspective which she terms "a dignity-oriented, honor-sensitive, feminist law-and-film theory" (11).

Kamir also proposes that a feminist law-and-film analysis bridges the gap between the scholarly endeavours of feminist film theory and feminist jurisprudence, creating a dialogue that is both deconstructive and constructive. In this way, Kamir is calling for a type of law/film praxis -- a consideration of theoretical and practical debates and possibilities through a medium that is socially and politically significant. The process of deconstruction in the legal critique which Kamir outlines consists of identifying law and society's accepted norm, then presenting a feminist analysis of a convention not commonly associated with that norm, juxtaposing the two and proposing the abandonment of the norm and the establishment of an alternative. Kamir applies this model to the criminal definition of rape, identifying the traditional definition of rape as being illegitimate heterosexual intercourse consisting of forced vaginal penetration without consent. She then challenges the notion of consent by

highlighting that, in patriarchy, masculine use of at least some force is considered a natural component of legitimate sexual intercourse, thereby problematising the question of whether a woman consented to sex. The juxtaposition of these two models leads to the conclusion that, in the context of contemporary society and culture, criminal law's definition of rape as distinguishable from legitimate intercourse and thus criminally punishable is practically meaningless. The proposed alternative is that the existing legal definition of rape must be abandoned and replaced, and the new definition must challenge and undermine the conventional construction of legitimate sexual intercourse, which blurs the distinction between forced sexual intercourse without consent and mutually free intercourse.

It is here that the concept of the honour-based mentality comes in, as Kamir proposes the application of an 'honor test'. In the world of honour, argues Kamir, the only type of sexual intercourse considered legitimate is that in which penetration is performed by a man on his wife, whose sexuality he rightly controls. Any extramarital sex harms the honour of the man who controls sexual access to her. In other words, legitimacy of sex has nothing to do with force -- it concerns a violation of the honour code. Kamir proposes human dignity as the basis of a new definition of criminal rape, the criteria being whether both parties treated each other "as a human end, and not merely as a means for self-gratification" (21). Legitimate sexual contact would express every party's recognition of the humanity and dignity of the other, whereas rape would be an attempt to violate the other's dignity, treating the victim as an object and denying the victim's basic rights. In other words, this model proposes a 'why, not how' approach to sex. To a lawyer, this presents a minefield of potential obstacles and difficulties: jurisprudentially and legislatively, how would the specifics of this re-visioned offence be drawn? What would be the test of guilt? Would it be objective or subjective, i.e. who would assess whether dignity had been respected, and would there be degrees of respect? As a legal concept, this is far from straightforward. As a way of reconfiguring the parameters of legal discourse, however, in order to highlight the patriarchal values underpinning existing norms, this honour/dignity dichotomy serves a useful function.

Having demonstrated a model of feminist legal argument, Kamir goes on to consider feminist film theory, and begins with Laura Mulvey's analysis of the scopophilic male gaze and the woman's 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Kamir criticises Mulvey, and indeed feminist film theory as a whole, for accepting the premises of psychoanalysis and slowly using it against itself. For Kamir, the legal critique's fourth stage -- the proposal of the alternative to the norm -- takes reformative analysis further than film theory. Kamir's position is that the misogynist ideology of psychoanalysis cannot explore its own misogyny, so cannot explore women's emancipation. The book does not refer to areas of psychoanalysis that might in fact be helpful in this regard, such as Melanie Klein, Luce Irigaray, or E. Ann Kaplan. Rather it again suggests that the move to a distinction between honour and dignity-based value systems "can shift the sense of inescapable entrapment within psychoanalysis ... substantiating a more revolutionary feminist film critique, analogous to feminist jurisprudence" (27). It is a pity that Kamir does not consider, or at least acknowledge, the potential for a challenging, subversive application of psychoanalysis to film theory, in the way that Sjorgen does so successfully in her book: but of course the current project is to enrich the profitable relationship with legal studies and so Kamir proposes abandoning psychoanalysis and adopting a formula for cinematic pleasure derived from respect for the dignity of the other, as opposed to a subject/object analysis: cinematic pleasure being premised on sympathetic identification with an on-screen character, and vicarious other sympathetic interactions with other on-screen characters.



This proposed paradigm shift in feminist film theory, in particular in this legal context, is indeed interesting but at this stage in the book seems abstract and even morally portentous. Kamir swiftly moves on, however, to begin to demonstrate the application of these emotionally loaded terms, honour and dignity, through an analysis of films which centre on women involved in legal proceedings or criminal offences in some way. The case studies are divided into three sections, the first involving judgments and vilification of victimized women. The films considered in this section are *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950), *Pandora's Box* (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1928), *Blackmail* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1929) and *Anatomy of a Murder* (Otto Preminger, 1959). The basic premise for the analysis of all the films in this section is that they deny the systematic victimization of their women protagonists by men, society and the law, and portray them as mythological feminine archetypes and sexual stereotypes -- Eves, Liliths, Madonnas and Pandoras. Kamir argues that the women in these films are victims who are silenced and isolated, trapped between dominating men -- usually husbands, rapists and lawyers. Each film is analyzed along these lines, stressing the denial of rape and the construction of the women as guilty objects. This feminist law-and-film critique is convincingly argued and the films are well chosen case studies. There is a tendency to repeat observations and conclusions, linking the films together and essentially making the same points, albeit in different circumstances. However, Kamir's writing is fresh and stimulating enough to make each analysis engaging, and the chapters are spiced up by feminist readings against the grain, offering alternatives to androcentric analyses, and also by the consideration of the possibilities for interpreting other films, such as *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1991) and *Dolores Claiborne* (Taylor Hackford, 1995).

The second section of films involves women executing judgment. In *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949), *Nuts* (Martin Ritt, 1987) and *Death and the Maiden* (Roman Polanski, 1994), Kamir argues, women judge their oppressors on their own terms, inviting the spectator to share the woman's point of view and thereby participate in their judgments. Thus, Kamir argues, the films "endow the abstract notion of human dignity with specific, concrete contents" (38). In this section, the analysis of *Death and the Maiden* is particularly insightful and well observed. Kamir highlights the differences between Ariel Dorfman's play and Roman Polanski's film and demonstrates the impact of those differences in the implication of the spectator in the film's consideration of justice. The acute analysis of the formation, delivery and reception of testimony in this film adds value and meaning to Kamir's underlying premise of the denial of women's victim-hood, and powerfully demonstrates how the area of film criticism can be enhanced by a consideration of these jurisprudential and practical contexts.

The films discussed in the third section are concerned with providing female protagonists with supportive feminine communities, "emphasising the collective nature of women's plights and the feminist project" (40). Within these communities, women find support, understanding, assistance and, ultimately, their voices. *A Question of Silence* (Marleen Gorris, 1982) is analyzed as confronting the right to a fair judicial hearing and offering a vision of female camaraderie outside the legal domain. *Set it Off* (F. Gary Gray, 1996) tackles the treatment of poor, black women as already guilty through association and stereotype. In an alternative version of the white, Western-style *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), *Set it Off* suggests loyalty and friendship amongst these women as an alternative to legal norms. The final case study, Pedro Almodovar's *Taconer lejanos / High Heels* (1991), is a fascinating analysis of the meaning of guilt and calls into question the gendering of justice. This an appropriate note on which to conclude the analysis of films, demonstrating the possibility of challenging the sexed iconography of justice and the judiciary, and offering a

vision of caring and compassionate cinematic judgment -- "a legal system free of honor-based notions, fully respecting all parties and their human dignity" (281).

The book ends with the consideration of this film, and it is a pity that there is not a more lengthy concluding section returning to theory, drawing together the reformative strands of the films analyzed and perhaps elaborating a model for law-and-film praxis. This book is an extremely welcome discussion, however, of the positioning of women within law films and the value systems which shore up patriarchal, androcentric approaches to sex crimes. This is an extremely fruitful and important area for film studies, and it is also intriguing to consider how legal analysis might benefit from a realisation of the impact of film as popular jurisprudence. Kamir has provided a convincing rationale for the furtherance of this area of study, as well as an overdue focus on the hidden victims of courtroom dramas.

Also demanding a radical shift in critical perspective, Britta Sjogren's *In the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film*, considers whether feminine subjectivity can be expressed in the classical Hollywood cinema of the 1940s, "despite the objectifying force of the image" (196). Sjogren challenges feminist film theory on the basis that certain feminist writers have painted themselves into a theoretical corner by accepting certain strongly entrenched theoretical assumptions concerning the primacy of the image over sound, and causality and linearity over stasis and circularity within the narrative. Sjogren states at the outset of the book that she has a love for classical cinema and that she regrets the way in which these Hollywood films have been dismissed by critics as invariably and monolithically male-centred, catering to a phallogentric gaze alone. It is Sjogren's belief that "these texts need not be looked at so pessimistically" (1).

A filmmaker as well as an academic, Sjogren approaches the representation of the female characters in films such as *Letter to an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948), *Secret Behind the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1948) and *A Letter to Three Wives* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1949), via an original and expansive treatment of their subjectivities and enunciations. Crediting her filmmaking experience as having made her particularly sensitive to the possibilities of sound and voice, Sjogren stresses the manipulation and construction of the 'voice-off' and posits that the creation of a soundtrack is more often completely contrived than the image. It is this stress on independence from the image that leads Sjogren to use the term 'voice-off' rather than 'voice-over' -- the latter registering an operation in independent space, involving the tension of a dialectic to the image, whereas the former suggests a function supplementary to that of the image.

For Sjogren, feminine difference is a positive structuring force within these films, not a subversive thread that needs to be read against the grain. The close textual analysis in the book is focused on films from the 1940s, although Sjogren's project is not a historical one -- these films constitute an apt theoretical context to explore the theoretical issues, but the reach of her analysis is far broader than classical Hollywood. These films enable a theoretical analysis which departs from the classic tradition of feminist film theory of looking for 'gaps' in texts created in patriarchy, or to female authorship, or to 'subversive' film genres -- Sjogren's position is that these discordant elements structure the films which she examines in this book.

Although crediting Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman with making extremely valuable contributions to the field of the feminine and sound theory, Sjogren criticises their respective approaches as being misleading in the way they construct a hierarchy of voices and degrees

of embodiment, thereby overlooking the alterity that is "always present, always structuring the asynchronous voice in film" (7). It is this otherness that Sjogren foregrounds in her textual analysis, couching her consideration of her chosen films in the concepts of the vortex, paradox and contradiction.

Whilst seeking to establish the independent function of sound and the voice, Sjogren also stresses the need to keep sight of how filmic meaning is produced "through the perpetual interaction of voice, narration, editing, the spectator, the image and the excess that is always part of expression and communication" (8). In order to keep all these facets of meaning under consideration, it is therefore necessary to be able to account for change, paradox and contradiction, and Sjogren therefore embraces the voice-off as a "talisman of difference, it stands in to remind of all that it simultaneously is and is not" (8).

The films that Sjogren considers are commonly described as 'women's films'. Taking issue with Doane, Silverman and Mulvey, Sjogren argues that the voice-off in these films offers another perspective, which allows for multiple subjectivities rather than a centring, androcentric 'One'. For Sjogren, in order to conceptualise female subjectivity, and indeed enrich the analysis of male subjectivity, the traditional 'masculine' model is not appropriate. Sjogren's model proposes sound as opening onto heterogeneity, and female voice-off as operating to sustain difference: as these work in a paradoxical, dialectic sense, it is possible to account for the existence of contradiction on-screen. The logical extension of this position is that Sjogren's model is not a 'feminine' one -- it is about alterity, rather than 'femininity'.

Adopting close textual analysis as her methodology, she analyses speech and voice as it fluctuates throughout each text, accounting for change as an expansive, positive feature, elaborating the complexity of the subjectivity of the female characters. In terms of structure, Sjogren observes that the films operate in a vortexical nature, with spiralling, internally directed progression: a technique which Sjogren sets out to emulate in her own writing style, as themes and observations are constructed across the chapters in an engaging, inclusive prose.

The conceptual framework for this emphasis and analysis falls into three main areas. Firstly, Sjogren elucidates a meta-psychology in which the female voice-off is revealed to be responsible for 'the evocation of a fantasmatic dimension that "'deepens' the diegesis, *but not in terms of the image*" (39) -- sound is shown to signify both a body and a space simultaneous to an image but not signified by it, and the body of the voice-off can be seen to belong more to the space of the voice-off rather than to an image that may 'anchor' it in the diegesis. In this way, multiple spaces and multiple bodies can interact with the sound and image, thereby destroying the notion of an apparatus with a single perspective.

Strongly criticising Silverman for 'containing' the female subject in classical cinema through emphasising the embodiment of the female voice, Sjogren calls for the recognition of a female subject *with* a body, "vised through the heterogeneous signification of the female voice-off and the identification with a space of consciousness that it engenders" (52). To illustrate this perspective, Sjogren analyses Ophüls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Drawing upon pre-Oedipal notions concerning the voice and conducting a critique of the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, as interpreted by Denis Vasse and Guy Rosolato, Sjogren arrives at the possibility that "the voice speaks as of the traverse of a limit that is not as yet based on the symbolics of the visible, of the conscious and the unconscious". This voice may therefore be construed as evocative of difference that is not 'sexually' or gender

determined but which allows for simultaneous consciousness of self and other in a way that does not yet imply dissolution for the subject (63).

Sjogren considers *Letter from an Unknown Woman* in detail, analyzing the sounds, voices and music which constitute the soundtrack. She observes how the female voice-off connotes the dissolution of limits and the presence of a shared heterogeneous consciousness, one that the spectator may also assume. Lisa's voice can also be 'heard' through narrating voice-off and through her letter, at different stages in the film. The analysis of the letter is particularly interesting, as Sjogren explains the writing of the letter as an engagement in a relation between two subjectivities, articulated in the traverse of the voice, sustained in the difference in the writing/reading/speaking/hearing of the letter. This leads onto an interesting and original application of the concept of the middle voice, which is seen as articulating the coexistence of contradictory subjectivities and obliterating the subject/object distinction. Sjogren argues convincingly that the female voice-off frequently expresses the middle voice, and thereby establishes the existence of a psychological model in which passivity does not translate simplistically into objectification and non-agency. This heterogeneous constitution of subjectivity as pronounced by the middle voice, in which both subject and object signify in all their apparent contradiction, simultaneously, is essentially a way of figuring subjectivity that slips out of the subject/object paradigm: "As a type of 'middle voice,' the female voice-off similarly evokes textual heterogeneity and subjectivity-in-difference" (74).

In the next section of the book, Sjogren considers point of view and paradox, developing the concept of the middle voice to demonstrate how point of view can also emerge between sound and image, relating to the spectator's apprehension of characters as consciousnesses. Analyzing the female scream, silence and absence as devices in establishing perspective, she exemplifies these points with her analysis of *Secret Beyond the Door*. Here Sjogren also develops the idea of the spiralling, vortexical text which unfolds inwardly and the way in which the spectator is drawn into this spiral, aligned with Celia's consciousness, which is "in rapt communion with another" (106). This highly subjective point of view is shared by Celia, Mark and the spectator, who perceives their shared consciousness. This triangle, Sjogren argues, is created by the voice-off and elaborates a point of view that is thought rather than seen. "The film's use of voice-off, however, represents Celia's view, not Mark's, eliciting and articulating this heterogeneous point of view and the shared consciousness she desires for the viewer"(120).

In the final section, 'Discourse, Enunciation and Contradiction', Sjogren returns to the ideas of interiority and exteriority, challenging the association found in Silverman, amongst others, between 'interior' and 'inferior'. Sjogren considers the voices-off in these films which emerge from the centre of the text, having previously seemed to be silent, such as those in *The Locket* (John Brahm, 1946), or *The Barefoot Contessa* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1954), to be testament to the "contradictory experience of subjectivity for a woman in patriarchy" (143) and not 'contained' or 'embedded' in the diegesis as interiority. Rather Sjogren stresses the discursive plurality in these films and emphasizes the value in bringing forward possibilities of contradiction, and "of difference sustained, of dynamic paradox" (150). The female voice-off draws attention to itself as both speech and voice but also as a source of enunciation, hailing the spectator. For example, in *A Letter to Three Wives*, Addie Ross develops a strong relationship with the spectator from the beginning, referring directly to the viewer's presence and implicating them in the story. Rhetorical fluctuations are presented as being typical of female voice-off -- narrating, stream of consciousness, and imaginary conversation. With Addie's voice-off, discursive contradiction surfaces, "enunciating the patriarchal discourse of

suppressing the feminine *along with* a feminine discourse about the experience of being suppressed" (163). This analysis demonstrates how enunciation should not necessarily be conflated with ideology, and how the 'heterogenous flux' which the female voice-off represents in these films can enable a reading of how women's subjectivity can be represented through speaking difference. This is a remarkably erudite and skilful exegesis, which mobilises multiple subjectivities by accounting for the specificity of the operation of the female voice-off. Through an analysis of the individual female characters, psychoanalytic theoretical discourses can be expressed within these classical Hollywood texts, without acceding to any of the usual strictures of patriarchal apparatus theory. And these discourses need not be confined to the feminine -- they can be contradictory and plural. Therein lies the strength of Sjogren's remarkable argument -- its relevant subjectivities are as diverse as there are on-screen characters.

Both Sjogren's challenging and revelatory book and Kamir's original, subversive analysis breathe new life into feminist film theory. Not only in terms of reassessing the place of the feminine and the female in classic and contemporary film, but also in terms of representing, identifying and interpreting difference. Both books unsettle the accepted definitions and interpretations within their fields, whilst insisting on the maintenance of sexual difference as a tool. The text-based analysis of these books in no way disguises the magnitude of both projects: Sjogren's call for a reassessment by film theory of the fundamental dialectic of image to sound and Kamir's call for a paradigm shift in legal normative values on-screen and in society. It is also refreshing to be reminded of how close textual analysis of a cinematic text can create an alternative metapsychology, or at least frame of reference, facilitating new perspectives and fresh interpretations.

# Faith in Film

By Christopher Deacy

Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005. ISBN 0-7546-5158-4. x + 170 pp. £47.50 (hbk)

Shakespeare on Film By Judith Buchanan

## Shakespeare on Film

By Judith Buchanan

Harlow: Pearson, 2005. ISBN 0-582-43716-4. 22 illustrations, xii + 288 pp. £24.99 (pbk)

## A review by Kenneth R. Morefield, Campbell University, US

One of the attendant results of film's current popularity is the proliferation of cross-disciplinary books dealing with its effect on or integration with some other field of interest. When done well, these works can provide an informed, sideways entry into discussions too often choked by esoteric terminology or blithe pronouncements by self-appointed experts. When done less successfully, these works can read like the academic equivalent of fan-fiction, offering more enthusiasm for the subject than insight into it. *Faith in Film* and *Shakespeare on Film* may not be the polar ends of such a spectrum, but they are representative examples of either side of it. The former is a hodge-podge collation of public domain comments with a review of other literature on the topic. The latter is a broad overview of films from Shakespearean plays. Buchanan's work is the more successful.

Despite its generic title, Deacy's work explores only the Christian faith as it is portrayed in film. The pre-title introduction promises an "unprecedented" and "innovative" perspective of Christian theology used to explore how audiences wrestle with religious belief. The emphasis on the audience is the book's slant, with Deacy claiming that he is using "empirical data" (vi) to move away from the academic community's purported emphasis on film text and director. He also claims that changes in society change what constitutes 'religion' (emphasis his) and hence we should not be shocked to find religion in unexpected places.

This outline is not a bad one for a project, but the volume seems curiously unable to follow any one of these threads, much less tie them together. While the use of superlatives such as "unprecedented" and "innovative" can be forgiven, the lack of engagement with or even mention of seminal works in the field such as Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film* (de Capo Press, 1972) made me wonder if the emphasis on discussion boards and Internet sources was more of a convenience than a radical departure and whether the emphasis on contemporary American films was more a personal preference than a populist concession. Robert Bresson's work is mentioned once in 170 pages -- in a quick dismissal of Peter Fraser's *Images of Passion: The Sacramental Mode in Film* (Praeger, 1998).

The promise of empirical data translates mostly into a justification for looking exclusively at Hollywood studio films in the seven 'case studies' -- *Prince of Tides* (Barbara Striesand, 1991), *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993), *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980), *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960), *Billy Liar* (John Schlesinger, 1963), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985) -- while the innovation of letting audiences speak for themselves consists primarily of scouring public message boards for testimonial anecdotes as to various films' spiritual effect. Yet in the case studies themselves Deacy more often relies upon previous analysis (particularly Robert Jewett's) or epitextual writings and interviews of artists describing their spiritual intent rather than letting the audience describe a work's spiritual effect.

It is hard to see who the intended audience of this volume might be. It is virtually priced out of the range of casual readers or Christian readers interested in a new take on popular culture. Its broad scope and eclectic selection, however, make it unlikely to satisfy serious cinephiles or academic audiences. I was also left with many unanswered questions about his approach. Is the average filmgoer (or the average Christian, for that matter) a person who can be described in anything other than broad generalizations? Are those who comment on IMDB message boards "average" filmgoers? Are audience's experiences and assessments of the spiritual value of films so unframed by marketing that a consideration of this element is unnecessary? In contrast, *Shakespeare on Film* comes with a clear niche market, a major publisher, and an author in command of her subject rather than just beginning to explore it. Despite having a topic that is itself dauntingly broad, Buchanan does an admirable job of providing coverage of major trends in and directors of Shakesperean films. 'Part I' consists of chapters on British and American silent films, continental European approaches, the work of Akira Kurosawa, and 'Roguish Interventions' -- representative re-workings of the plays into contemporary stories. 'Part II' shifts gears, offering two chapters of historical juxtapositions -- analyses of different versions of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* -- a chapter on the work of Kenneth Branagh, and a chapter on recent, critically polarizing works such as Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999). The dual approaches of the parts -- at first historical then thematic -- allows Buchanan the flexibility to offer close analysis of later films with a confidence that their historical context has already been established.

Jettisoned, however, of any expectation of encyclopedic thoroughness, *Shakespeare on Film* comes across as rich rather than pedantic and insightful rather than belabored. The language is accessible to undergraduates (though it does resort to words like 'narrativising' now and then), while the analysis is sufficiently penetrating to engage scholars of film and Shakespeare alike. Equally comfortable discussing Shakespeare's attempts to balance the audience's demand for spectacle with his own love of poetry (in *Titus Andronicus*) as she is discussing Branagh's attempts to pay tribute to previous giants of stage and screen while carving out his own interpretive space, Buchanan evidences the breadth of knowledge necessary for such a project.

It is a cliché of film criticism that films with alternate story lines are only as interesting as either storyline would be without the other; inter-cutting two dull stories does not create one interesting one. Perhaps there is a corollary to this principle that may be applied to multi-disciplinary writing. I'm not sure that I would be particularly interested in listening to Deacy lecture about faith or film independently, but I would be happy to hear Buchanan discuss Shakespeare or film separately or together.

# The Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition & Spectatorship

By Therese Davis

Bristol, UK & Portland: Intellect, 2004. ISBN 1-84150-084-4. 8 b&w illustrations, v+122pp. £19.95

## A review by Maria Walsh, Chelsea College of Art & Design, University of the Arts, UK

In the 1960s Andre Bazin could claim that "the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death" (*What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, 1967:10). The (photographic) image keeps the subject alive in our memory. In *The Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition & Spectatorship*, Therese Davis examines the significance of the image of the face in contemporary media culture where the image's capacity to preserve or embalm time is questionable given the logic of speed and transience that dominate our technologies. Davis poignantly articulates this condition in a short chapter on the image of Princess Diana's face which loomed large in the collective imaginary preceding and following her tragic death, but was quickly relegated to the scrap heap of televisual media, a demise accelerated by her anniversary coinciding with the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, this was not simply a case of one media event overshadowing another, but more a question of how television's speed of transmission makes us forget figures and events. Televisual media ascribe a second imaginary death to the 'real' one.

Rather than this being an occasion for pessimism, the premise of Davis' book is that there is still some criticality inherent in the facial close-up. While the mystery Bela Balazs celebrated in relation to the cinematic close-up of the face has evaporated, Davis argues that by way of a certain kind of unrecognisability, the "talking heads" of televisual media engender, if not a "new mode of perception", then a new mode of recognition (1). In either becoming literally unrecognisable or disappearing from the cultural imaginary like Princess Diana, these televisual faces reveal what their proliferation attempts to conceal, i.e. "the powers of death" in contemporary representational technologies (75). Davis develops this point by threading a series of different televisual heads together. As well as Princess Diana, this includes: a television report of the death of comedy actor Paul Eddington, his face disfigured by a rare skin disease; screenwriter Dennis Potter's last televised interview, his face bearing the signs of dying of an incurable form of cancer; a documentary of the late Australian indigenous land rights leader, Eddie Mabo, whose grave was desecrated, a large gash remaining in the place of his life-size bust; and an analysis of Charlie Chaplin's face in *City Lights* (1931). The critical resonance of these faces is explored by way of early twentieth century theorists such as Siegfried Kracauer with the main emphasis of the book being given over to extensive, albeit selective, exegesis of Walter Benjamin's ideas, which presume some prior familiarity by the reader.



In balancing her idiosyncratic selection of mediatised 'talking heads' with theories of modernity dominated by Benjamin, the book's otherwise passionate argument tends at times to slightly unravel. While Davis' forays into less well-known aspects of Benjamin's ideas are lively and written convincingly, I would question whether Benjaminian redemption is the best model for conceiving of faces which make visible "the underside of the mask of personalisation" (69), i.e. a non-redemptive illumination of mortality and trauma. On the plus side, Davis offsets the weightiness and perhaps inappropriateness of Benjamin in considering contemporary televisual phenomena by her personalised readings of examples. Benjamin is an appropriate partner here with his notion that historical knowledge transmitted by shock encounters affects the viewing subject's sensorium rather than simply being occasions for the interpreting critic to read "cultural forms as images of social truth" as in his colleague Adorno's approach (35).

For Davis, in proffering transience and disappearance, televisual media can evoke personal and social memories that might otherwise have remained hidden. This is most apparent in the opening chapter on Paul Eddington. The particular facelessness rendered by his skin disease evokes Davis' memory of her dying grandfather's face. What occurs in this televisual moment is the peculiar temporality of suspended time characteristic of the imminence of mortality. Usually, this moment is repressed in television where death is continually presented and where one death easily replaces another, but Davis, as cultural user of images, here makes a link between the public and private that exceeds the usual boundary between screen and viewing subject. Confrontation of Eddington's "facelessness" leads Davis to consider Levinas' philosophy where "recognition of death in the face of the other is first and foremost an ethical experience" calling us to respond to the other (12). However, contrary to Levinas' emphasis on blindness in this encounter, his is still a philosophy of (mirror) reflection and Davis rightly raises some doubts as to whether it can help us understand the viewing experience of recognising death in the dialectic of recognition and unrecognisability set off in media reports of Eddington's facelessness. Davis explores another mode of recognition connected to memory and objectivity. Extending her memory of her dying grandfather's face with an example from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* where the narrator describes seeing his grandmother from the viewpoint of a stranger, Davis links this kind of recognition to Kracauer's notion of "crude existence" (14). In this trajectory, we get a glimpse of Davis' struggle between the messianism of Benjamin for whom the image can redeem the past and Kracauer for whom the photographic image reminds us of our material contingency.

This struggle is further played out in the chapter on Eddie Mabo. Mabo's name, standing for indigenous land rights, resonates for Australians coming to terms with a history of colonial violence. Trevor Graham's film *Mabo -- Life of an Island Man* (1997) sets out to personalise the man behind the name, but Davis' analysis shows that what surfaces in the film is a non-redemptive wound in relation to colonial violence which is exemplified by the absence of the figurehead that marked Mabo's grave and the unfillable hole in the cemetery on the mainland where his body was initially buried. However, it is in this chapter that Davis gets most carried away with Benjaminian metaphors, here mapping "intimacy as adjacency", a relation to the other without possession or unity suggested by Benjamin's angel of history, onto our relation with Mabo (69). Davis illuminatingly shows how Benjamin's notion of the other being 'beyond reach' is based on Benjamin's experience of unrequited love, which preserves the proximity of the lover from a distance. By contrast, in Davis' astute analysis of *Mabo -- Life of an Island Man*, what comes across is an irredeemable series of defacements and an absolute destruction of cultural traditions that cannot be rescued in the present.

In asking how we can deal with here-and-now transience in material terms, Davis sets herself a difficult, but worthwhile, task. At the end of the first episode of Dennis Potter's posthumously produced drama series, *Cold Lazarus* (1996), a human head suspended in a large tank of liquid nitrogen confronts a montage of image and sound projected onto a giant liquid screen, memories of a past life as it makes the transition from the world of the living to the dead. The images 'embody the modern experience of mediated existence: grabs from televised football finals, memorable key images from Potter's drama series, such as *Pennies From Heaven* and *The Singing Detective*, the unforgettable spectacle of carnival and early cinema' (53). Davis relates these fragments to the allegorical mode of revelation enabled by Benjamin's fossils, but it is difficult to see how what Davis refers to as 'a spectacular event for the duration' (54) opens onto the temporality of Benjamin's fossils.

A more poignant and perhaps apt metaphor for the confrontation with death that appears paradoxically via its disappearance in televisual media is suggested in the final chapter, which reads Chaplin's *City Lights* along with a series of testimonies and meditations on blindness. Davis recounts an example from German psychologist M. von Senden of a case from 1810 where a deaf and blind 14 year old boy builds circles of stones placing himself in the centre. According to von Senden, this blind perception of space differs from sighted consciousness of a circle in being based on touch sequences whereby the construction of a circle rather than being held whole in the mind is determined by the "temporal structure of change in perception", i.e. one stone after another and so forth (101). Davis compares this receptivity to change to how we as viewers organise "the shock effect of film", i.e. cinematic montage (101). However, we have long since recuperated any such shocks that cinema might have offered in Benjamin's day. That said, the disappearance of 'talking heads' into the archive of televisual history that Davis articulates might have something to do with the sequential nature of blind seeing. Discussing 'America Remembers', a media event on the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks which commemorated victims by recalling the names of dead, Davis observes that "television reproduces the names of the faceless only to then efface them yet again" (92). This form of 'public memory', which assures us that nothing goes away, reproduces the very process of disappearance that it seeks to cover over. Encapsulating this sentiment is an image of a firefighter's father wearing a poster-size photographic portrait of his missing son along the bottom of which were the words 'Remember Me'. According to Davis, it is too late to remember once the image is incorporated into the kind of defacement television engenders, yet this technology is one of our main sources of information and historical knowledge. The recent or the long-forgotten past returns in the televisual archive only to disappear again, but, in returning, another stone may be added to what can only ever be a partial picture. Television makes blind seers of us all, as the faces of the dead return to haunt us without hope of redemption, but proffering the injunction to narration. *The Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition & Spectatorship* opens much needed debate on the aesthetics of television in relation to memory, history and death, an aesthetics which has tended to be repressed in cultural theory. While television is on the one hand complicit with the social repression of death, in asking how a possible antidote to this might occur in those very faces that disappear into the ether of electricity, *The Face on the Screen: Death, Recognition & Spectatorship* offers an important revaluation of contemporary media's ability to preserve "the subject from a second spiritual death".

# Jean Vigo

By Michael Temple

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-71905-632-2. viii+178pp. £40.00 (hbk)

## A review by Jonathan Hartmann, The City University of New York, US

In his short life, French filmmaker Jean Vigo (1905-34) performed the work that has earned him recognition as one of the all-time greats. Born in Paris to activist parents working against the Third Republic, Vigo endured long periods of poverty and outcast status. His father, the anarchist-turned-socialist administrator Miguel Almereyda (the last name is an anagram for 'There's Shit!'), advocated peace in his newspaper *Le Bonnet Rouge* for longer than the government would allow. In 1917, Almereyda was imprisoned and soon died from a hanging that was labelled suicide. Gabriel Aubes, who adopted Jean, gave him lessons in still photography. Vigo finally achieved his baccalaureate seven years later and struggled with his mental health from 1926-28. He met his wife-to-be Elizabeth (Lydu) Lozinska during the autumn of 1926 while they were each taking a rest cure in the Pyrenees. Her father, Hirsch Lozinski, financed his debut film *A Propos de Nice* (1930). Vigo would die of tuberculosis only eight years later.

Vigo's three celebrated films, *A Propos de Nice* (1930), *Zero de Conduite* (1933), and *L'Atalante* (1934) owe much of their success to the circumstances of their production and reception. The 1930 press screenings of *A Propos de Nice* occurred when the impact of the October, 1929 stock market crash was still uncertain. Reviewers were intrigued by Vigo's juxtaposition of mindless pleasure with urban squalor, which played lounging bourgeois sunbathers against looming smokestacks and nude, reptilian, and disease-ravaged flesh (William Simon, *The Films of Jean Vigo*, UMI Research Press, 1981).

His single feature-length film *L'Atalante* has been the subject of much debate following its mishandling by its distributors; there is still no critical consensus as to either its best or its original (directorial) version. Finally, Vigo's semi-autobiographical short feature *Zero de Conduite*, banned for twelve years by the French censors, was lionized both at home and abroad following its French release in 1945. Filmmakers such as Francois Truffaut (*Les quatre cent coups*, 1959) and Bernardo Bertolucci (*Last Tango in Paris*, 1972) have paid cinematic homage to Vigo for inspiring their work from the distance of several decades.

Vigo's work appeals to the child in many audiences because it beckons to the creative imagination as our highest ideal. The early adolescent schoolboys in *Zero de Conduite* suggest natural curiosity at war with a despotic adult order. Vigo shows this tension most effectively in several presentations of the school dormitory, first viewed at wake-up time and later during the children's revolt. In the first sequence, reverse-motion photography is used to render the boys automatons; each student rises from his bed to salute the supervisor precisely as this authority passes his bed. In composing *Zero's* score, Maurice Jaubert makes analogous use of trick recording techniques, turning a military theme inside-out (Claudia Gorbman,

'Vigo/Jaubert', *Cine-Tracts* 1 (2), (Summer), 1977: 77). A second dorm scene presents the students as angels cavorting in slow motion amidst a soft snow of pillow feathers. A few seconds later, a subtitle announces that it is Sunday morning. The boys suddenly mock crucify an instructor by fastening him to his bed and setting it upright with him still sleeping. This last detail both heightens the hilarity of the rebellion and affirms its fantastic nature.

All three pictures are mandatory viewing for film lovers because they display an on-the-fly transition from silent to sound cinema. Several currents nourished Vigo's development during these years. First, he found visual models in French Impressionist film praxis, including Jean Epstein's 1926 *Le Cinematographe vu d'Etna* (likely supported by the experimental narrative of Epstein's *La Glace a Trois Faces*, 1927) and Louis Delluc's 1920 *Photogenie* (Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915 - 29*, Princeton U.P., 1984). Delluc's title 'photo-genius' refers to the sublime quality of actors and objects re-presented on film. Second, Vigo learned Soviet Formalism firsthand working alongside Boris Kaufman, brother of *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) director Dziga Vertov, who managed the camera on all three films. Finally, composer Maurice Jaubert's musical simulation of trains and crowded classrooms helped inform Vigo's views on sound. Watching Vigo's work in chronological order, one progresses from *Nice*'s formalist experimentation with vertical shots up skirts and high-rises to *Zero*'s fumbling with live and dubbed sound to the more naturalistic and conventional celebration of song, romantic love, and laughter in *L'Atalante*. Such a viewing will prepare students familiar with Classical Hollywood Cinema to Vigo's experimental, documentary, and surrealist influences in France and Europe as a whole.

Vigo's outstanding talent was his ability to locate and collaborate with actors, technicians, and financial backers. The critical success of *A Propos de Nice* helped him gain the support of open minded producer Jacques Louis-Nounez that gave him partial independence from studios GFFA and Gaumont, respectively, for his last two films. Vigo also knew when to give his team free reign. The performances of his actors are often exceptional. For example, *L'Atalante* maintains its peculiar balance thanks to the Falstaffian character of Pere Jules cooked up by veteran performer Michel Simon. Vigo himself rounded up the working class Parisian youths who did most of the acting for *Zero de Conduite*. Their characters look and sound just as wonderstruck as audiences observing their antics. For example, in the film's opening sequence, classmates Caussat and Bruel amuse themselves with enormous cigars and fondle the balloon 'breasts' they have dreamed up on board the train returning them to school after vacation. The boys' imaginations do not slow down even when they have disembarked from the train; they insist to the conductor that a sleeping schoolmate is a corpse. Vigo is known for never having deserted his creative impulses in order to make a living; despite its current critical status as one of the finest French cinematic achievements, *L'Atalante* failed to gain broad commercial distribution.

Temple's book, Manchester's nineteenth in its French Film Directors series, is an accessible and insightful guide to Vigo's life, work, and impact. Temple investigates but does not relinquish the popular notion of Vigo as the brief and inspirational apotheosis of French cinema. The book's five sections assess the Vigo mythology (Chapters One and Five) and his three celebrated films in terms of social context, financing, production, and reception. Temple's extended French quotation from Vigo's collaborators and reviewers and his introduction of basic French film terminology will be welcomed by students and instructors alike.

The vocabulary Temple has chosen indicates his wise decision to explore *auteur* theory in investigating his subject. For example, Temple makes reference to filmmaking to composing music, essays, and poetry. This approach, favored by the French Impressionists and romanticists in general, suffices to examine Vigo's brief collaboration with Jaubert and Kaufman prior to the filming of his larger project *L'Atalante*. Auteurism may indeed be the easiest way to introduce the work of a single filmmaker to new audiences.

Temple leaves room for teachers and scholars to roam outside *Jean Vigo* by giving short shrift to critical influences on the filmmaker. However, he adds important perspective in sketching the financing of the three films. The limitations in budget and recording time imposed by GFFA and Gaumont undoubtedly affected the structure of the finished films. For example, Temple suggests that given additional studio hours, *L'Atalante* might have turned out to be a more palatable melodrama for international exhibition. Analogously, *Zero* would have appeared as a more standardized narrative with fewer intellectual leaps from one sequence to the next.

The best feature in Temple's analysis is his breaking down each film into brief timed and headlined sequences. This technique works best for *Zero*, which also receives the most still photographic coverage relative to its length. While Temple helpfully divides *L'Atalante* into 23 segments of close to four minutes each, however, he does not provide enough photographs to bring the film to life. Doubling the eight pages devoted to photographs would accomplish this task effectively. Readers wishing more in-depth treatment of the films should consult Pierre Lherminier's encyclopedic collection of stills, scripts, and notes to real and would-be collaborators, *Jean Vigo: oeuvre de cinema* (Cinémathèque française/Lherminier, 1985). Claudia Gorbman's 'Vigo/Jaubert' provides an in depth treatment of the interrelationship of sound and image for *Zero de Conduite*, while Paulo Emilio Gomes Salles offers a more complete biography (Gomes Salles, *Jean Vigo*, Faber & Faber, 1998). Finally, students and instructors of *Zero* would do well to examine the study guide prepared at Webster University (St. Louis, <http://www.webster.edu/fatc/zero.html>).

The book's final chapter, 'Visions of Vigo', sketches the filmmaker's legacy. How, Temple wonders, would the French cinema have developed had *Zero de Conduite* not been banned and had *L'Atalante* been more competently managed and distributed? Since this question is unanswerable, one may give thanks that the two films have been made available for roughly fifty years. A DVD collection of Vigo's films, *L'Integrale Jean Vigo* (2001) is available from Gaumont. The strength of Temple's book is its presentation of the filmmaker's career and impact in an accessible format. *Jean Vigo* will prove a useful aid to undergraduates being introduced to film and French culture.

# **Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within**

By Neil Badmington

London: Routledge, 2004. ISBN 0-415-31022-9 (hbk), 0-415-31023-7 (pbk). x+203pp. £66.50 (hbk), £18.99 (pbk)

The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded By Stacy Gillis & Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology By Daniel Dinello

## **The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded**

By Stacy Gillis

London: Wallflower Press, 2005. ISBN 1-904764-32-0. 13 illustrations, x+195pp. £15.95 (pbk)

## **Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology**

By Daniel Dinello

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. ISBN 0-292-70986-2. 48 illustrations, 329pp. £16.95 (pbk)

## **A review by Timothy Iles, University of Victoria, Australia**

The phrase 'posthuman', used extensively after 1995 by such technologically-informed feminist theoreticians as Judith Halbertsam, Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, is one of those fortuitous neologisms that captures a wide range of meanings within a handy package, serving to designate not only much about its 'signified' but also about the person employing it. In this instance it has an undeniable cachet of 'cool', of theoretically informed 'insider status', of academic daring as well as the added benefit of actually describing in a useful way a particular attitude toward humanity's relationship with technology -- something difficult to say about other handy catch phrases, such as 'imagined community'. The posthuman is undeniably a *mot du jour* in this age of the Internet, email, digital photography, computer graphics, and the ever-increasing importance of the computer in virtually every aspect of daily (first world) life, from work to play and everything in between. However, the *substance* of that word, the contents within that handy package, are not unified, nor is the attitude which it connotes a simple one. The three titles under review here attest to the different dimensions of this attitude, ranging from a situation of the posthuman within the human to a distancing -- based on fear -- of technology far from the fundamentals of our shared humanity. That this term, 'posthuman', is applicable in all of these instances is

potentially a source of frustration for one hoping to define its substance succinctly, but, as with other *mots du jour*, succinctness of definition may itself be a detriment to the popularity of the phrase. As these three titles approach it, it stands for the beneficial though antagonistic relationship between the human community and those tools which increasingly assume aspects of sentient beings -- the 'helpers' which increasingly become the 'supervisors' of our daily lives. In a sense the way these three texts utilise this term is unfortunate because 'posthumanism' *could* become a way of surpassing the (historically useful) limitations of humanism, allowing for a relativisation of human beings within a wider context of existence. This is not exclusively the way these three titles handle this term, however, and fair enough, for within their *own* limitations, these three books succeed admirably in theorising the emerging role of new and more pervasive technologies as they affect lives, human and otherwise.

There are several shared issues which tie these three books together, not the least of which is their subject matter, of course, but most interesting is the ground upon which they choose to engage that subject. While all three books deal with the place of technology within daily life and the attitudinal relationship between the human and the non-human/posthuman, they do so through a discussion of the presentation of that relationship *in film*. This is quite interesting because film is certainly not the only area in which the relationship between humanity and its technologies receives critical attention -- everything from politics to economics, education, and transportation faces the reality of a changing use of technology, and this reality is reflected in drama, literature, music, sculpture, and painting, as well as in cinema -- and of course on television, that constant symbol of technological advance as oppression in, for example, Orwell's *1984*. The question 'why film?' however is not one which these titles answer, but speculation provides a plausible reason, and that is one of cultural iconicity: it is the science fiction film that has dealt most consistently with the utopic/dystopic duality of technology's potential, and it is cinema which, rightly or wrongly, holds the crown as the most accessible of the 'popular' art forms, being an industrial commodity which its producers design specifically for mass appeal. Thus film, as itself a product of technological advance capable of both great artistic effect and base, mass-market attraction, becomes the surrogate or scapegoat for the type of technological issues with which these texts deal.

Another thread that ties these three works together is their almost exclusive use of American films to support their arguments. This is unfortunate for many of the issues with which they deal are ones taken up with subtlety, intelligence, and depth in non-Hollywood cinemas, especially the cinema of Japan which itself has a long history of science-fiction film. Certainly I don't suggest that each of these books need devote a chapter to *Gojira* (*Godzilla*, Honda Ishiro, 1954), for example, but many of Japan's most interesting animated films deal extensively with the posthuman -- most notably *Kôkaku kidôtai* (*Ghost in the Shell*, Oshii Mamoru, 1995), for example, or *Metoroporisu* (*Metropolis*, Rintaro, 2001). There is much that at least a passing discussion of non-Hollywood films could have brought to each title here, to round out their arguments and allow other voices the opportunity to address the issue of technology's promise, on the one hand, and threat, on the other, which, after all, is certainly not something which will affect *only* the West. Nonetheless, this is a relatively small (though real) disappointment given the overall strength of these works to present aspects of this issue, aspects both optimistic and pessimistic of humanity's ability to utilise its technologies effectively and progressively.

I will allow Neil Badmington to set the tone of these three titles when he discusses the attitudinal shift towards all things extraterrestrial in his introduction to *Alien Chic*, situating

the contemporary fascination with aliens against the subtextual terror of Communist invasion present in 1950s' science fiction, and yet in setting this tone he inexplicably overlooks the very thing that starts it in motion: that self-same terror of Communist invasion that was so prevalent throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s in not only the United States, home to Hollywood and all that is clichéd about sci-fi 'B' movies, but much of western Europe as well. At the close of his first chapter, devoted to precisely this shift in attitude toward Mars and its potential for 'invasion', Badmington writes that "to read the 1950s alongside the present moment is to read difference, change, departure" (33) but most interestingly, at no point in this chapter has the word 'political' come to the surface. Such an omission might imply that a political explanation for the attitudinal shift in this post-Cold War present is either too obvious or too basic a starting point, but nonetheless any text considering the 1950s and its rhetoric of invasion must at least mention that obviousness and that basic starting point. That Badmington firmly resists doing so does not necessarily detract from his argument that a shift to an attitude *beyond* a simply humanist one is at work in the films he discusses, but it does beg the question what sort of political dimensions does the term 'posthumanism' contain. Badmington's study *is* interesting, and his movement towards a posthumanism is compelling in its potential for breadth, but his insistence on seeing the human/non-human as a binary of the human and the specifically extraterrestrial alien, while in keeping with his sci-fi focus, imposes a needless boundary on the breadth with which his work flirts.

*Alien Chic* despite its brevity is an ambitious though straightforwardly written work able to place subtle, Derridean-informed discussions of Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser alongside critical readings of contemporary science-fiction films in order to trace the growth in popular and artistic acceptance of work which relativises the position of humanity vis à vis technology and history. One of the defining problematics, of the central issues, of posthumanism for Badmington is that

Developments in genetics have prompted something of a shift in the way the human race understands and represents itself. The common assumption that genes contain the fundamental truth ... of human life tends to render the 'essence' of the human little more than a piece of readable, communicable, and malleable information. The intangible mystery -- the Cartesian 'soul' or 'mind' -- upon which humanism traditionally depended evaporates into a concrete code (31).

This 'evaporation' however is something which the films Badmington analyses seem able to overcome, for quite often he demonstrates through careful consideration of formal compositional features that the films typically unite their characters in metonymic instances of bonding indicative of cooperation amongst all of humanity. A case in point comes in his discussion of M. Night Shyamalan's 2002 film, *Signs*, when he explores the change in framing of the protagonist family in an extended sequence midway through the film: from a long shot including all of the family members, through twenty more shots which progress from each individual member opposed to one another, finally reuniting them in a concluding group shot. The writing here is lucid, precise, and quite insightful in the context of the film's place within the book, even as it fails completely to solve the riddle it has set for itself, to "account for that plurality" of the present which allows both an attraction to and repulsion from the alien/non-human to "court simultaneous credibility" (63). Ultimately, however, Badmington does not account for this plurality in a completely convincing fashion, despite his repeated appeal to Derrida's 'crisis of *versus*' as a defining discursive moment of the present, but nonetheless his work is compelling and valuable for the sincerity with which it



seeks to resolve the contradictions in popular culture's understanding of both the human and posthuman alike.

Stacy Gillis's collection of essays by diverse authors in *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* treads ground familiar to critics both technophilic and technophobic, in that it seeks to situate not only the films of *The Matrix Trilogy* but also the related cultural paraphernalia around them within a historically aware discussion of technology and its place within human life, through a context informed by literary studies of the cyberpunk and science fiction genres. As Gillis writes in her introduction, "The *Matrix* trilogy both celebrates and criticises technological change, an ambivalence which could be claimed as being the crux of postmodernity, through the medium of hardware, software, and cyberspace" (6). It is this ambivalence which instils in the films a critical tension, creating a multilayered appeal which draws in both filmgoers and critics. Gillis notes this when she writes, "The *Matrix* trilogy achieves [its popularity and power] not only through its wealth of references for the scholar and the film fan, but also through the complexity of the narrative which is contained within the Hollywood film structure. The potency of the films thus lies in their ability to appeal to both the popular audience and the cultural theorists" (3). It is with theorists, however, that this collection of essays most assuredly aligns itself: it groups its range of papers into two broad categories, 'Media Intertexts and Contexts' and 'The Politics of Modernity and Postmodernity,' within which the contributors cover subjects from transtextuality (Alysh Wood), *kung fu* and CGI (Dan North), cyber noir and postfeminism (Stacy Gillis), to dystopia (Kate O'Riordan) and Baudrillard (Catherine Constable). This is a collection aware of its academic pedigree and not hesitant to address issues around not only its subject matter but also that *mot du jour*, the 'posthuman', under whose rubric it stands. Again quoting Gillis's introduction, we read that "While the term 'posthuman' has gained increasing currency since the late 1990s, the perhaps too-quick bringing together of 'post' and 'human' often manages to obscure the unfinished debates surrounding the Enlightenment notion of the body" (4). Embodiment and technology's implications for it form a central thread in several of the essays here, but of course it is impossible to expect an ultimate resolution or determination of this relationship, given the nature of this project, uniting as it does thirteen relatively short essays each of which contributes only a portion to the argument as a whole. These contributions however are provocative, insightful, occasionally profound, but also occasionally too enamoured of their own theoretical pretensions to maintain the soundness of their arguments. A case in point comes quite early on in the collection, during Alysh Wood's chapter on transtextuality. Having identified the various spin-offs from the *Matrix Trilogy* as sources of a "destabilised authorial status of the Wachowski brothers" (12) (the scriptwriters and directors of the *Matrix Trilogy*), Wood then embarks on a tortuous project to trace "the emergence of non-linearity across the dimensions of its [the *Matrix* and its spin-offs] networked organisations" (12). A common-sense reading of the various components of the *Matrix* franchise -- animated series, video games, comic books, films -- suffices to account for this 'non-linearity' in a more satisfactory manner than the notion of transtextuality, for indeed these components are related though manifestly *separate* products revolving about a central conceit -- they remain a constellation of works which never deny their distinctness as discrete texts. Nonetheless Wood's essay raises the theoretically intriguing idea of a set of works taken together which "troubles the stability of claiming any particular element as an origin within the system" (13). This is potentially a very worthwhile point to pursue, as is Wood's reference to transtextuality itself, something going far beyond Kristevan intertextuality and able to take into account the industrial nature of contemporary cinema's product tie-ins, but in this instance, the essay is too brief and schematic to do justice to this rich avenue of enquiry. Other essays in this collection are more successful, however, if only

because they are more rigorous in the adherence to scholastic formality, such as Dan North's chapter on the relationship between the *Matrix Trilogy*, *kung fu* films, and special effects. Here we have a detailed argument that "special effects technologies can stimulate the spectator intellectually by connecting text with context, image with apparatus" (48). This chapter is also one of the contributions most concerned with *film*, that is, most concerned with a close analysis of the artistic qualities most particular to the cinema as medium, and for this reason, too, one of the more successful.

The essays here, as I've mentioned, are arranged under two main headings, but this grouping is perhaps more convenient than rigidly thematic, for there is no particular methodological or theoretical unity holding together the chapters in each section. This in itself is fine: a plurality of approaches is to be expected in this type of collection. However in comparison with other works bringing together diverse approaches to *The Matrix Trilogy*, notably *The Matrix and Philosophy* (William Irwin, ed., Open Court Publishing, 2002), the reader is left hoping for more cohesion and a greater sense of resolution. The thread of embodiment that runs through the essays is precisely that: a thread, and no more. While the writing is often clear and to the point, it is also often dense beyond the demands of the subject matter, and this is unfortunate for, despite its shortcomings, this is a collection that deserves a wide readership among academics, if only for its willingness to approach controversial issues provoked by the films and their place in popular culture. The general reader may find the texts here disconcertingly theoretical, while the beginning film student -- for whom, according to Gillis's Acknowledgements, this collection purportedly exists (vii) -- may be frustrated by the extra-cinematic elements of some of the essays. However the cultural theorist or scholar working in the areas of overlap between film, technology, and popular culture will find much here to spark further investigation.

While *Alien Chic* traces shifts in popular attitude toward technology through depictions of the alien in film, presenting evidence that the relationship between humanity and its alien Other is both complex and highly changeable over historical periods, and while *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* limits itself to discussing the ways in which the *Matrix* films both reflect and recreate cyberpunk, playing with issues both positive and negative in the posthuman, Daniel Dinello's *Technophobia!* presents a vision of technology far more focussed on its detrimental, adversarial qualities as it stands in relation to humanity. As Dinello writes, "in its obsession with mad scientists, rampaging robots, killer clones, cutthroat cyborgs, human-hating androids, satanic supercomputers, flesh-eating viruses, and genetically mutated monsters, science fiction expresses a technophobic fear of losing our human identity ... and our lives to machines" (2). His stated intention is to explain "the dramatic conflict between the techno-utopia promised by real-world scientists and the technodystopia predicted by science fiction" (2), and to do so, Dinello moves fluidly and masterfully through ten chapters devoted to "particular types of technological posthumans, including robots, computers, androids, cyborgs, and clones. In this way [the book] examine[s] concerns surrounding specific technology, rather than undertak[ing] a general demonizing, and make[s] connections between individual types of technology and webs of social and political influence" (6). That the text to follow will be highly political is clear from the very outset. This comes when Dinello discusses the United States' invasion in 2003 of Iraq, an event which he characterises as offering

a suggestive example of autonomous technology supported by religious, military, and corporate interests. An expansion of the American techno-empire, the invasion's security rationales -- Iraq's nuclear threat, its huge stores of chemical and biological weapons, and its

ties to the September 11 terrorists -- all proved wrong. Falsehood was expressed as certainty by the Bush administration, which fabricated, exaggerated, and distorted the prewar intelligence to justify the war (2-3).

This is writing that does not shy away from controversy, but Dinello does not seek merely to antagonise or provoke controversy for its own sake. Rather, his examination of technology and the apparent misuse of its potential demonstrates the ease with which even the most beneficial of tools, of progressive developments, can be subverted for unintended, malevolent, even criminal ends. In this regard there are echoes here of a lingering attitude which Badmington analyses in *Alien Chic*: "Subservient technology sustains life; autonomous technology leads only to death" (27). But whereas Badmington is fascinated by the growing acceptance of the alien/nonhuman/posthuman in popular culture and sees the acceptance as symptomatic of a growing comfort with technology in general, Dinello's text does not seek ultimately to redeem technology. Rather, he discusses the current reality in which, perhaps not yet fully realised by its scientist creators, "The melding of the organic and the mechanical or the organic and the alien [gives rise to cyborgs which] also include American Iraq War pilots integrated into cybernetic weapons systems as well as suicide terrorists who merge with technology to transform themselves into human bombs" (12).

Dinello's book makes good use of science fiction films which present dystopic visions of humanity's technologised future in order to present his case, but not exclusively so: he uses literature as well as non-fiction, scientific writing to support his argument that "Posthuman technology threatens to reengineer humanity into a new machinic species and extinguish the old one. Science fiction shows that this process will subvert human values like love and empathy, revealing that the intrinsic principles of these technologies fortify genetic discrimination, social fragmentation ... and destruction" (273). His project here is clear but also, because of his study's foundation in popular cultural products as accessible as sci-fi film and novels, able to appropriate those media's accessibility for itself, something helped enormously by the clarity and succinctness of his writing. While not averse to academia and academic sources, Dinello avoids the theoretical pitfalls that beset much writing centred on the posthuman, as well as the overly enthusiastic fervour which can plague both technophile and technophobe alike, providing instead a lucid genealogy and analysis of the "techno-totalitarian threat" presented within sci-fi's darker dreamings of the future it so hopes to resist as inevitable. This is a book for the general reader as well as for the scholar concerned with the paths along which humanity's scientists and their attendant politicians and industrialists -- or is it the other way round? -- may take us, but it is also a book fully informed by values which are not necessarily in theoretical favour: liberal humanist, and unashamedly so. But this is a refreshing stance in an age of *mots du jour* which often seek to mask a self-serving attitude as a progressive, theoretical contribution. Dinello's text needs a certain bravery to proclaim, as it does, that "Technology's inherent structure requires suppression of human spontaneity and obedience to its requirements of order and efficiency ... Science fiction demonstrates that technological operations often proceed autonomously without human intervention, hostile to human values and welfare" (273). Badmington's book may trace popular acceptance of the posthuman, and Gillis's collection may theorise the culturally iconic aspects of one of its more successful cinematic presentations, but *Technophobia!* in no uncertain terms places science fiction, perhaps counter-intuitively, amongst the more conservatively humanist artistic traditions.

Within the scopes of their own arguments these three texts are successful, to greater or lesser degree, in engaging the posthuman as an attitude toward technology. In their choices of

material through which to engage this term they are justified in their conclusions. That those conclusions may be contradictory is not surprising given, after all, the still contradictory notions of science fiction and the posthuman held in popular parlance. Taking these texts together provides a fascinating exercise in the critical/theoretical reception of science within contemporary literature and cinema. Each text offers a valid and worthwhile approach to issues that will grow in both complexity and importance as technology moves along its course of continuous change, yet I can't help but feel that, in the end, it is the text able to engage itself most politically in this arena that is the one most hopeful for humanity's ability to bend technology for its own purposes, rather than the opposite. I'll leave the final word for Daniel Dinello: "Science fiction helps us understand the magnitude of the techno-totalitarian threat so we might invent tactics for confronting it" (17). The nature of this confrontation is not yet determined, but that it will come is made certain in each of these three texts.