

Book Reviews – June 2011

Screening Sex by Linda Williams

A Review by Caroline Walters..... 4

What Moroccan Cinema? A Historical and Critical Study, 1956-2006 by Sandra Gayle Carter

A Review by Monika Raesch 7

Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover by Denise Mann

100 American Independent Films, 2nd edition by Jason Wood

The Contemporary Hollywood Reader edited by Toby Miller

A Review by Gareth James 13

Documentary Display: Re-Viewing Nonfiction Film and Video by Keith Beattie

A Review by Jeffrey Gutierrez 20

Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's An Autumn's Tale by Stacilee Ford

John Woo's The Killer by Kenneth E. Hall

A Review by Lin Feng 23

Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit edited by Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne

Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals edited by Richard Porton

A Review by Linda Hutcheson..... 29

Book Reviews

Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies
 edited by Paul Cartledge and Fiona Rose Greenland

Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film by Christine Sprengler
 A Review by Andrew B.R. Elliott 35

Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies by Abe Mark Nornes and Aaron Gerow

The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs by Jinhee Choi
 A Review by Jonathan Wroot..... 41

Chapaev by Julian Graffy

Leni Riefenstahl: A Life by Jürgen Trimborn (translated from the German by Edna McCown)
 A Review by Andrei Rogatchevski 46

Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century by R. Bruce Elder

Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience by Carl Plantinga
 A Review by Caroline Hagood..... 49

Reworking the German Past: Adaptations in Film, the Arts, and Popular Culture
 edited by Susan G. Figge and Jenifer K. Ward

The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century edited by Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager
 A Review by Matthias Uecker 53

Stellar Encounters: Stardom in Popular European Cinema edited by Tytti Soila

Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice by David J. Skal, with Jessica Rains
 A Review by Rachael Johnson 59

Alternative Film Culture in Inter-War Britain by Jamie Sexton
The Lost World of Cliff Twemlow: The King of Manchester Exploitation Movies
 by C. P. Lee and Andy Willis
The British 'B' Film by Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane
 A Review by Laurence Raw 66

Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider by Brian Neve
Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Film, Pleasure and Digital Culture, Volume 1 edited by Scott Balcerzak and Jason Sperb
 A Review by Mildred Lewis 70

First Person Jewish by Alisa S. Lebow
Neo-Noir edited by Mark Gould, Kathrina Glitre and Greg Tuck
 A Review by Marat Grinberg 77

Screening Sex

By Linda Williams

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8223-4285-4.
129 b/w illustrations. 424 pp. £13.99 (pbk), £57.00 (hbk)

A Review by Caroline Walters, The University of Exeter, UK

Linda Williams is a name that has become synonymous in film criticism with sex, more specifically porn thanks to her canonical study *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (University of California Press, 1989), so it is unsurprising that this should be the topic of her most recent book – simply titled *Screening Sex*. Here, she aims to provide an in-depth examination of the history of sexual representation on the American cinema screen. She does not necessarily focus on "great cinema" but on the "films that we often went to see out of simple curiosity for sexual knowledge" (24). These range from the earliest fifteen-second screened kiss by Thomas Edison in 1896 through to *Shortbus* (Cameron Mitchell, 2006) via *In The Realm of the Senses* (Oshima Nagisa, 1976).

Through a clear chronological structure divided into seven chapters with just a few key films discussed that exemplify each specific topic, Williams presents an informative account of how American cinema has dealt with screening sex. Her aim is to explore the changing effect that screened representations of sex acts have on people's bodies and why they fascinate audiences. She claims that "no one has told the story of screening sex as a history of the relation between revelation and concealment" that are the fundamental governing forces in how a film treats sex (7). Williams succinctly justifies the need of this book because "to dismiss these "dirty parts" [of films] as gratuitous [...] is to fail to write the formal and cultural history of those moving pictures which have sometimes been the most moving" (7). Often it is sex, whether revealed or concealed, that sells and attracts an audience to a film, as was the case with *Secretary* (Steven Shainberg, 2002).

Williams argues that because our culture considers sex fascinating, it is now "one of the important reasons for screening moving pictures" (29). The tale begins with adolescent closed lip kisses that must be no more than three seconds as stated by the Hollywood Production Code. These guidelines are the reason that "kisses [have] become the key punctuation marks of narrative films" (57). After the demise of the Code, films such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Mike Nichols, 1966) used witty banter to talk about sex because the directors still seemed too afraid to be any more explicit about sex. It was with *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) that sex became more overt in Hollywood film, as

long as the scenes were accompanied by music – a trait that continues in most Hollywood cinema today (83).

Softly lit, gentle heterosexual sex is left behind and replaced with more brutal encounters. Williams focuses on *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) and *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972) both from the same year and about "just" sex. The latter treats its subject matter comically, finding a clitoris down a frustrated Linda Lovelace's throat, whilst the former shows the range of emotion involved in a sexual encounter and darkness that can accompany sex. Williams argues that European films, such as *Last Tango in Paris*, could be more explicit because of differing amounts of restriction. Yet, it is the Japanese film funded with French money *In The Realm of the Senses* (Oshima Nagisa, 1976) that manages to successfully blur the boundaries between art and pornography. Williams claims that this film's importance only became apparent in the late 1990s in other films such as *Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999) and *Nine Songs* (Michael Winterbottom, 2005). These later films use sex as the focus of their films because it "is too important to be left to pornographers" (181).

Whilst Williams carefully charts the progression from the early kisses (Eddison) via the female orgasm in *Barbarella: Queen of the Galaxy* (Roger Vadim, 1968) to the non-normative sex of *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), there are several notable omissions. The book focuses on heterosexuality and fails to discuss themes such as Queer cinema, or masturbation. Perhaps Williams felt there was not sufficient room in this volume or those issues can become the focus of future books. Whatever the reasoning, it would be nice to see these things featured more prominently in the main text itself, particularly in a book of this size and supposed scope.

Williams structures and centres some of her criticism of her key films on her own interpretation of and physical reaction to them. This is because she is adopting Vivian Sobchack's theory of embodied spectatorship, which refers to how the spectator has "an embodied vision in-formed by the knowledge of the other senses, "makes sense" of what it is to "see" a movie – both "in the flesh" and as it "matters"" (Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2004: 70-71). This conceptualisation of spectatorship relies upon a reciprocal relationship whereby the sensual experience represented on the screen returns to the spectator's own body (Douglas Morrey, 'Bodies that Matter', in *Film Philosophy*. 10.2. 2006: 11-22). To help the reader understand this idea and re-invention of spectatorship both Sobchack and Williams draw upon their own experiences and physical engagements with cinema. Whilst these interjections make the theory accessible, they can be frustrating, irrelevant and unnecessary. Do we really need to know that Williams first saw foreign films thanks to a friend's mother? (69). Such anecdotes add little to her argument.

Book Reviews

Williams is aiming to appeal to a wide-ranging group of readers. This book is not simply intended for academics but the interested public too, although I'd be curious to know how many would want to read a book that is so lengthy and explores the topics in such depth. Perhaps a lay reader might be better with an overview text that takes a thematic approach, such as Tanya Kryzwinska's slender volume *Sex and the Cinema* ((London: Wallflower Press, 2006). The close analysis of a few films in *Screening Sex* gives Williams the room to describe them in sufficient detail and with plenty of film stills, that the subtleties of her arguments are easy to follow regardless of whether the reader has seen the film in question. She uses Freud, Foucault and Bataille simply to enhance a point in her argument about the film. This is not a text that wants to engage in their theoretical nuances but rather presents their arguments unquestioningly. One must remember that this is meant to be an accessible volume of film history and not theory; as such Williams's use of theory is neither a weakness nor strength. *Screening Sex* excels at providing a descriptive account and synthesising a large volume of material, making it easily comprehensible and accessible to a varied audience.

Screening Sex charts how people's bodies have had to learn how to respond to sex on screen. Initially there was a sense of great uncertainty and apprehensiveness, yet now our bodies have become conditioned to and expect to see such images (311). We now (mostly) enjoy – or at least accept – rather than fear the feelings of desire, disgust and disquiet that sex acts on screen can instil in us. Our relationship with sex and the cinema has changed since the advent of video because now many people prefer to – or at least can – indulge in these films in a private not public space. Now people's sexuality is probably more informed by visual representation than ever before, as Williams concludes:

The very act of screening sex is desirable, sensual, and erotic in its own right. Screening sex [...] has, at each new stage, proffered an opportunity to see and to know what has not previously been seen so closely. This carnal knowledge never fully reveals the scratch we imagine "it" to be, but the itch that keeps us screening. (326)

Williams leaves the reader questioning and wondering about the future of screened sex. This book whets the reader's appetite for more. More sex. More films. More books. Just more. Williams seems to be right, cultural products that elicit our curiosity will always leave us wanting and her book, criticisms aside, is no different.

What Moroccan Cinema? A Historical and Critical Study, 1956-2006

By Sandra Gayle Carter

Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009. ISBN: 0-7391-3185-0. xii + 379 pp. \$85 (hbk)

A Review by Monika Raesch, Suffolk University, USA

Being a professor of World Cinema magnifies the absence of books and other materials about films and film industries in certain parts of the world. My students recently suggested that the only 'Moroccan film' they had watched was *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). While they know that this is a U.S. film, it was the closest they had ever come to watching a 'Moroccan' film. Sandra Gayle Carter's book fills a void in the publication market dedicated to Moroccan's film history. She opens a door to one of the thus far mostly overlooked film industries.

Carter's cultural studies' approach to her work is very important for reader positioning because it explains the content as well as the representation of said subject matter throughout the book. She feels that:

[s]ince culture is not static, but constantly in flux and adaptive to new impetuses, study into media culture should take into account several facets per levels of inquiry; the ideological, such as influences that political restraints and goals have on content and development; the economic, such as how funding of production, along with economic determinants on acquisition of technology and its use, effects film development and content; and the artistic influences on this medium, such as aesthetics, production techniques, and the interrelationship of film artistry with other cultures. (5)

She fulfils the first two objectives by taking into consideration both ideological and economic factors. The artistic aspect is also discussed, but the author does not reach the same depth as she does with the other two aspects. This is not a shortcoming of the book because the readers require the economic and ideological background knowledge in order to analyze a Moroccan film in more depth. Overall, Carter successfully takes a cultural studies approach, which permits the creation of a rich and vivid picture of the country, its people and media industries.

The book is segmented into four chapters, each focusing on respective significant developments in the Moroccan film industry. The first chapter covers the time period 1956-1970, the second chapter the years 1971-1985, and the third chapter studies the time period 1986-2006. Finally, Chapter Four provides

Book Reviews

a conclusion and summaries of recent developments. The introduction provides readers with concise summaries of all chapters, creating expectations that will be met fully after a chapter is read. Additionally, the introduction provides an overview of essential factors that have shaped contemporary Morocco and its citizens, such as religion, geographical location, economic and social situation.

Throughout the introduction as well as the chapters, the author's attention to detail is particularly successful. This attention to background information and the accompanying extensive footnotes ensures the readers realize the complexity of the study and understand how challenging it is to analyze Moroccan cinema as so many factors have to be taken into consideration. Nothing can be taken for granted or assumed.

In Chapter One, Carter successfully introduces the readers to Morocco's state of affairs in 1956 - after thirty years of filmmaking under French control the film industry suddenly was in the hands of the Moroccans; yet French influence, naturally, did not vanish. Another aspect concerns the state of filmmaking in the '40s and '50s, in particular financial decisions - whether State support is beneficial - and whether films which were produced were actually good and attracted audiences (44-45). This situation bares some similarities to the evolving financing situation in the UK over the past few decades. Moroccan licensing procedures to receive a green light for making a film parallels the current situation in New Iranian Cinema (48). The section on censorship further illustrates parallels between these two film industries (57-60).

Carter explains the financial challenges Morocco faces with the majority of distributors being located abroad, resulting in profits not being reinvested into Moroccan cinema but leaving the country (55). Uniquely, Carter elaborates that in 1960, children under the age of ten were prohibited from the cinema, unless the screening was specifically organized for young children (59). Such facts permit the reader to understand why films from the country have not received widespread international distribution and why not much information is known outside Morocco. Being tied up with internal problem concerning the film industry structure and local market Morocco is not ready to support and focus on a world market.

Interestingly, in the 1960s and 1970s cinema was the primary tool to unite Moroccan society, "to make distant regions to know each other, and to create a common fund of knowledge and information - and to make money" (63). While the government aimed for a unification of the masses via this strategy, given the state of Moroccan industry today the strategy has not worked, and even back then it did not have the same success as how propaganda worked in other countries. The cinema caravans deployed by the Moroccan government remind readers of the bicyclist in *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988) who had to disseminate film reels to various theaters to increase profit, to entertain and

also to unify the masses. The extensiveness of these caravans in Morocco, for both private and public screenings is surprising. Some caravans were operated by corporations such as Coca Cola, which used product placement as a way of marketing their consumer goods. Free movie screenings enabled them to introduce the products. Different arms of the government organized other caravans, including the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Films shown communicated specific messages for the masses that served the purpose of the respective Ministries.

Following such detailed information about the state of the industry, the author provides biographical information about the key filmmakers of the time period. The structure of Chapters One, Two and Three is very successful in this regard, as it permits the reader to place the filmmaker in the now-familiar film business the director worked in. Unfortunately, the majority of the mentioned films have no meaning for readers, because they do not know the films. Attempts to find these films on YouTube or other online video streaming sites do not provide a result (at the time of writing this piece). Mohamed Osfour's *Le Tresor Infernal* (1970) is not even listed on the Internet Movie Database (65). This stands in contrast to, for instance, Hollywood's silent cinema period, which has a strong online presence. For instance, YouTube provides many Georges Méliès and D.W. Griffith shorts. Reading a text on the silent cinema history of Hollywood, readers can find many films mentioned online and thus gain a deeper understanding. Due to the unavailability of Moroccan films, Carter's summaries remain abstract and thus do not resonate much with readers. The absence of information on the internet illustrates how peripheral Moroccan cinema has been positioned by film scholars; it also suggests that film studies is an incomplete field that only teaches fragments of film history. A book such as *A Short History of Movies* is only built on widely available materials (Bruce Kavin and Gerald Mast, Longman, 2011). Due to this lack *What Moroccan Cinema?* would be significantly enriched if it were to include a disc with film excerpts for audiences to visualize/see examples of the films the author discusses. Such compilations exist for Silent Cinema, even though so many films are available online. One such example is Brian Robb's *Silent Cinema* (Kamera Books, 2007).

Chapter Two 'Looking to Define a Moroccan Aesthetic, 1971-1985' starts with a focus on cinema's function in the Moroccan society. To fully follow Carter's explanations, readers need to have a background in film theory, in particular the auteur concept. Otherwise, statements such as "[t]he issues of whether cinema should be educational, entertaining, or nation-building, became issues of social versus auteur films" will remain unclear to the reader to some extent (89). Carter is clear in describing the different goals of filmmakers, distributors and exhibitors in the development of cinema. It enables readers to understand the complexity of any film industry and how development can be stilted if the various parties do not work together on one agreed upon aim (90). She clearly

Book Reviews

paints a division between audiences and filmmakers as well. For example, she explains that film reviews simultaneously functioned as criticism about the filmmakers who produced work that was not connecting with local audiences as it did not provide narratives that audiences could relate to (92). The other main factor of the unpopularity of local films was their technical deficiency in comparison with, for example, European films.

In Chapter Two, readers also begin to understand why older Moroccan films are unavailable. Carter explains that films aimed at popular entertainment in particular "were not archived or were allowed to disappear" (94). The reason was lack of support by Moroccan film historians and critics who favored auteur cinema or a 'third' cinema that aimed to "mobilize the masses" (96). The author is fully aware that she provides such an abundance of factual information that it is almost impossible to remember all the details. Fittingly, she provides brief summaries when she returns to a previously discussed topic before developing it further. For instance, Carter returns to a discussion of the CCM (Centre Cinematographique Marocain) in Chapter Two and reminds viewers of the institution's key functions. This enables readers to continue to follow her train of thought and deepen their understanding of the film industry. Changes made to the CCM in the '70s allowed the institution to be a monopoly in the sense that it was permitted and expected to influence all aspects of the film industry. As such, the Hollywood Studio System appears to be an oasis of freedom for both cast and crew. With the changes in rules the CCM basically became vertically integrated. In contrast to the American Studio System, this was not an advantage, and Carter explains the matter thoroughly:

Each time the CCM would raise taxes, theaters would close. In order to increase the number of theaters, the CCM would lower taxation, and less money would be available to fund Moroccan films. If taxation rose and more films were made, more theaters would again close. There was no system in place to allow both sectors, exhibition and production, to expand and improve throughout the country (103)

As Carter further elaborates, this was just one of many issues that eventually resulted in filmmakers forming groups to support each other financially and to get a film produced, distributed and exhibited (108). Carter continues to provide detailed examples, such as facts and figures concerning ticket prices, cinema renovations, taxes, and distribution of a film's income. These examples illustrate that the business aspect of the film industry is as important, if not more important than the filmmakers as the latter cannot function without financing that supports their work.

Unsurprisingly, Morocco also explored the possibility of a quota system, requiring exhibitors to show a certain number of local films along with foreign imports. This system helped the British film industry through some difficult times.

However, such a quota was not put in place in Morocco and was also dismissed in 1999 when it was suggested again (116). Equally a challenge to the filmmakers was the origin of film criticism, mostly provided by members of Moroccan cinema clubs who did not have formal training or much background knowledge. Yet their reviews were widely published, resulting in the public not wanting to see national films. Prospective audiences formed an opinion about films and filmmakers before seeing their work (126). The divisions within the film industry exemplify how a country's filmmaking can remain under the radar for foreigners as well, as such a large portion of Moroccans did not want to support the films and thus would not attempt to have them distributed outside the country. Nonetheless, some improvement was made with the emergence of film festivals, such as the International Festival of Youth Cinema (130). The First National Festival of Moroccan Cinema was held in 1982 and allowed various film sectors to meet and discuss problems that plagued the industry. The book creates the impression that these fragmented happenings kept Moroccan cinema alive and permitted it a future.

The extensive section on filmmakers and films (both short and feature) that concludes the second chapter provides insight into the types of films produced during this time period, but again descriptions cannot replace the actual viewing of a film (141-164). As such, the overview can only be viewed as a graveyard of all the films that the world never got to see. The abstractness that Moroccans felt about their national films is similar to Carter's book in this regard. Readers have to follow her judgment in the way Moroccans listened to cinema club critics and their opinions about worthiness of national films.

Carter is the only Western voice of Moroccan cinema and her work can only be compared to other works on national cinemas, such as Anna Lawton's *Imaging Russia 2000 - Film and Facts* (New Academia Publishing, 2004). Lawton manages to simplify the Russian industry in her writing and structure the information in such a way that the reader is less overwhelmed by the number of facts, figures and examples. While Lawton's book provides fewer headings, it nonetheless is able to guide the reader comfortably through the recent state of the Russian film industry. Nonetheless as a text for a film course, neither book is ideal, because the majority of students will get frustrated with the amount of factual information provided in a short segment and the blending of various topics. For presentation/teaching purposes, information of both books most likely needs to be repackaged and presented differently to reach a student audience.

Chapter Three continues the structure of the previous two. The one important exception is that (some of the) films discussed in this section are actually available to the readers. For instance, Nabil Ayouch's *Ali Zouoa: Prince of the Streets* (2000) is widely available in Western countries. This permits readers to

Book Reviews

have a deeper meaning of Carter's summaries and explanations of Ayouch's biography. Due to the availability of the films this chapter is the most successful one. Fittingly, the section on films and filmmakers is also the most substantial, spanning fifty-one pages (225-276). The CCM, film festivals and caravans, among others, are also revisited in this chapter and their respective development is summarized, providing consumers with a full picture of each agency or entity, from the beginning of the Moroccan industry in the 1950s until the early twenty-first century.

Chapter Four functions as much as a conclusion as a preview for a possibly future edition of this text. Carter introduces issues that Moroccan cinema is currently tackling, such as the changing role of women in the country and the role of other new media. It leaves the reader intrigued with how this country's industry will develop further. Overall, a successful and fascinating text about the current state and even more so the history of Moroccan cinema.

Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover**By Denise Mann**

Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780816645411 (pbk). viii + 324 pp. £15.50 (pbk), £46.50 (hbk)

100 American Independent Films, 2nd edition**By Jason Wood**

London: BFI, 2009. ISBN: 9781844572892 (pbk). vxix + 270 pp. £12.00 (pbk), £50.00 (hbk)

The Contemporary Hollywood Reader**Edited by Toby Miller**

London: Routledge, 2009. ISBN: 9780415452267 (pbk). xvii + 558 pp. £24.99 (pbk), £75.00 (hbk)

A Review by Gareth James, University of Exeter, UK

Revising and surveying the growth of contemporary Hollywood, Denise Mann's *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover*, Jason Wood's *100 American Independent Films* and the Toby Miller edited collection *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader* examine the conflicted rise of a 'New' Hollywood in the postwar era, trends in US independent cinema and the broader macro and micro-contexts of the global industry. As a key revisionist history of emerging business practices and precedents, Mann provides perhaps the most significant contribution to some of the origins and cultural tensions of late 1940s to early 1960s Hollywood, while Wood's BFI collection makes a concise addition to reference guides on the independent sector. Moreover, with Miller building on a prolific run of edited collections in the 2000s, *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader* is broad in scope, but remains fixed around a blend of political economy, critical cultural studies and some more eclectic examinations of text and theory.

Mann's *Hollywood Independents* focuses on changes to the industry from 1946 to 1960 as talent agency packaging of studio-financed independents and television saw the vertically integrated classic-era Hollywood redefine its strengths around intensified diversification and product differentiation as a New Hollywood. This is then used to contextualize industrial and cultural tensions between art film and classical style during a late 1960s 'Hollywood Renaissance' in studio-backed auteur filmmaking and an increasingly media synergy-driven economy by the mid-1970s. Arguing that "salient characteristics of the contemporary mass-entertainment scene are traceable, to a significant degree, to the seismic 1940s/1950s shift from the Old to the New Hollywood" (29), Mann provides a detailed revisionist history that suggests how re-focusing the "origins

Book Reviews

of an American art cinema in the early New Hollywood era, while not unique, does go against the prevailing wisdom that point to the Hollywood Renaissance period as the source of the art-film movement" (23) and subsequent debates over American independent cinema and mainstream studio practices.

More specifically exploring the "rise of independent production in the New Hollywood era, and the conflicting oppositional and recuperative forces this radically changed filmmaking climate brought to bear on a group of prominent talent-turned-producers" (2), Mann traces its individual and formal negotiations against a synthesis of modernism and classical Hollywood style in the prestige and reflexive entertainment picture. Structured through the turn to semi-independent production by major studios, packaged by talent agencies such as MCA, blurring lines between European art-film, modernist independence, B movies and prestige are set against the conflicts of independent producers. Considering Hollywood diversification as turning to long-term "branding opportunities for ever-expanding ancillary markets" (8-9), Mann specifically focuses here on MCA's bridging of television, film and merchandising in the context of individualism, mass advertising and 1950s America (47), connecting the value of the commodity performer and producer to the consolidating Hollywood and television industry.

By expanding on significant histories of broadcast and Hollywood interdependence, such as Christopher Anderson's *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Texas UP, 1994) and Michele Hilmes' *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Illinois UP, 1990), Mann re-emphasizes the importance of MCA to negotiating a mix of creative autonomy for politically progressive, formally inventive filmmakers with studio demands for adult melodramas and social problem pictures to attract adult audiences alongside intensifications of epic blockbusters. Taken against the duality of corporate and individualist trends in postwar US society (79), Mann considers how Hollywood's marriage of commercial and independent interests defined the "glaring paradox" that "fuels this revisionist history of the New Hollywood independents working during the postwar era" (80). These tensions, particularly for the attraction and complicity of big business (86) are then developed into case studies of reflexive entertainment pictures, prestige adult dramas and the work of Elia Kazan.

Arguing that filmmakers built traditions from left-wing realist and modernist theater and European art cinema into adult-targeted studio prestige pictures (11), Mann surveys how social criticism and formal reflexivity worked within classical filmmaking trends in "divergent but also overlapping ways" (14), while illustrating both criticism and displacement of Communist blacklisting, liberal progressive critiques, television, advertising and corporate satire (88). From *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960) to *The Hucksters* (Jack Conway, 1947) and Frank Tashlin's anarchic comedies, including *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957), the mediation of darker themes through irony and genre pastiche (113) are

presented as adding further precedent to the "theory-praxis hybrid associated with the films of the Hollywood Renaissance" (116). Incorporating reflexive trends from television and earlier 1930s anarchic comedies (120) against more radical European art cinema, Mann goes on to consider how prestige pictures *A Letter to Three Wives* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1949) and *Woman's World* (Jean Negulesco, 1954) merge progressive social criticism within reflexive variations on classical conventions (125).

On a more specific level, Mann provides an extended analysis of Elia Kazan's conflicted mix of liberal progressive themes and European and modernist influences on prestige studio work (148). Arguing for embodiments of these conflicts in Kazan's involvement in naming Communist sympathizers, the stretching of classical Hollywood forms in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) are mapped over behind-the-scenes tensions over the antihero and the alienated artist (163). Taken further, Mann uses *The Face in the Crowd* (1957), a collaboration between Kazan, screenwriter Budd Schulberg and Bertolt Brecht, to further trace the "outlines of an emerging independent American art cinema movement" (170).

Mediating criticism of artistic quality against agents and television within a combination of classical structure and expressionistic noir and mise-en-scene, Mann identifies a further hybridization with the "oppositional potential of the Brechtian reflexive analysis" to subvert and affirm classical trends (190). Finally bringing together the complicit role of the independent filmmaker and New Hollywood business practices, Mann's last case study explores 1957's *Sweet Smell of Success* (Alexander Mackendrick) as negotiating moral ambiguity over press agent hype, gossip, anti-Communist slurs and a synthesis of European art cinema psychological realism, noir, realist theater and New Hollywood media diversification. Moreover, framing this within behind-the-scenes clashes between independent producers Ben Hecht, James Hill and Burt Lancaster, Mann points to the intensification of the conflicting pulls of the individual artist and corporate consumer culture by the end of the decade (219-220).

As a revisionist history expanding on the early stages of the New Hollywood to add precedent to wider business and industrial practices (245), Mann succeeds in tying together industrial and aesthetic pulls with broader allegories of artistic modernism and corporate culture (247). Placing this into the wider importance of research projects proposed by John Thornton Caldwell (*Production Culture*, Duke UP, 2008) for examining the "intrinsic symmetries between the cultures of production and the production of culture" (Mann 24), she re-affirms the importance of closer study of some of the "most aesthetically original and ideologically progressive achievements of the early New Hollywood era" (252). By establishing core industrial and artistic tensions for future generations of filmmakers between the blurred lines of New Hollywood mainstream and niche

Book Reviews

production, she therefore suggests how "the lines of demarcation between studio and independent production are not now or were they ever so clear-cut" (22). In this respect *Hollywood Independents* is a significant contribution to wider debates, providing a rigorously developed analysis of an evolving New Hollywood, and broader period tensions.

Ongoing problems in defining and exploring the relationship between studio and independent production are also addressed, albeit in broader sketch form, through Jason Wood's reference guide *100 American Independent Films*. Updating a 2004 edition as part of the BFI's pocket-sized *100* imprint, Wood catalogues a range of notable contributions to postwar US cinema. Prefaces by filmmaker and instructor Tom Kalin (*Swoon* 1992) and Scott McGehee and David Sigel (*Suture* 1993) contextualize the current economic climate and the "diminishing returns of independent distribution" (x) after a 1990s and early 2000s boom, while noting his own debt to a thriving New York independent scene and documentary work from the 1980s. Offering a more tongue-in-cheek perspective, McGehee and Sigel reflect on the "ad-hoc affair" (xvi) of defining US independent film in general, and lay out some of the rules of independent film, from no film industry support, next to no money, poor distribution and perhaps most importantly, the "pure financial folly" of the whole enterprise (xviii).

Wood's own introduction thus sets itself within the changing industry climate and the difficulty of responding to the "multiple interpretations" (1) of independent cinema, its historical scope and key figures. Focusing on postwar pictures, and particularly the 1980s to the present, Wood argues that the "primary aim was to be contemporary" (3) and engage with current directors and trends. *100 American Independents'* alphabetical listing is consequently framed around some broader trends, from B movie, Poverty Row, avant-garde and documentary, with films such as *Detour* (Edgar U. Ulmer, 1945) *Lonesome Cowboys* (Andy Warhol, 1968) *On the Bowery* (Lionel Rogosin, 1956) to the mix of Hollywood Renaissance independence and studio support: *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper 1969) and *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese 1973) and into the distribution and financing options enabled by video, cable and European financing, Sundance and Miramax in the 1980s and early 1990s (8). With entries ranging through Jarmusch, Spike Lee, the Coen Brothers and Soderbergh, as well as more marginal directors such as Abel Ferrara and more radical feminist and political movements, Wood considers representation between studio financing and 'Indiewood' for highlighting contemporary independent cinema as "something of an oxymoron" (7).

Brought into the present with the continued blurring of directors between low-budget and wider distribution, giving notable mention to Spike Lee and Soderbergh, as well as the break-out success of *Brick* (Rian Johnson, 2005) and *Juno* (Jason Reitman, 2007), Wood notes how despite the current recession and speciality problems, digital, micro-distribution and cable funding has set

conditions for a "new era of financial independence in American independent cinema" (13). New entries on the low-budget minimalist style of mumblecore bring the collection up to date. Expanding the 2004 edition's scope, Wood's collection features twenty-five new entries, restates a focus on feature-length film and documentary for theatrical release, and while emphasizing the crucial role of key directors such as Spike Lee, John Cassavetes and John Sayles, limits titles to one per director for greater range (15). As a reference guide, with individual entries providing a concise mix of summary, formal analysis and historical context, *100 American Independent Films* is an accessible contribution to reference guides for students, and a useful addition to broader studies of contemporary independent cinema. By comparison, Toby Miller's *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader* provides a comprehensive, if still broadly focused anthology of macro-level New Hollywood and its overlaps within globalization trends.

Offering a range of reprinted articles from the past twenty or so years, Miller positions the collection as encouraging students to "think in an informed way about the most pervasive and powerful art form of the twentieth-century, with continuing relevance to the twenty-first" (xv). As a continuation of Miller's prolific output as editor and author, and most notably building on the macro-level industrial globalization and micro-level reception and cultural labor debates of *Global Hollywood 2* (Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria et al eds, BFI, 2004), the collection, by sheer virtue of scale, provides multiple entry points into current debates. Organized through broad sections on production (structure, artists, and globalization), the text (genre, pleasure, representation) and circulation (distribution, audiences, government and further examples of globalization), links between ownership, marketing and the division of labor establish a mix of quantitative and qualitative impact on local and international audiences.

First considering the structure of the industry and the "social inequalities that afflict economic life" (2), Part One, 'Production', surveys overlaps between labor, economy and globalization. Kapsis (3-16) and Harbord (17-26) analyze the industrial production of the horror genre in the 1980s, and the effect of digital cinema on late capitalism's blurred potential for global Hollywood and national cinemas, while Gomery (27-36) establishes a framework for understanding the contemporary industry as a closed oligopoly, laying out the concentration of global media since the 1980s as key to understanding national and international markets. Taken further, Blackstone and Bowman's (37-50) introduction to vertical integration within the motion picture industry considers both the combination of risk and the challenges for independents within theatrical distribution. Having established a basis for global centralization, contributions to labor survey continued gender inequality (Bielby and Bielby 51-70), and the

Book Reviews

inverse relationship of gender and aging to actor careers (Lincoln & Patrick Allen 71-86).

Reflecting on a history of labor and union disputes and inequality in below-the-line accidents, Tahiro's (87-95) case study of a death of the set of *The Twilight Zone: The Movie* (Joe Dante, John Landis, George Miller, Steven Spielberg 1983), emphasizes a focus on Hollywood's "abysmal labor practices" (90). On a more general level, Roberts (96-111) and Bozzola (112-123) situate the ethnic and masculine identity of Carmen Miranda and Warren Beatty through star theory, setting up a reprint of Barry King's (124-136) 1987 promotion of stars as shaped by the "recuperative play on what eludes commodification" (135) in the reproduction of persona and difference. Questions of identity then feed into Chao Shen's (137-154) concise analysis of the mediation of director Ang Lee's diasporic Chinese identity for global markets, while Zanker and Lealand's (155-161) call for closer intervention in global branding and child audiences (158) focuses analysis on local reception in New Zealand. With Scott (162-184) again surveying how global industrial structures work around "agglomerative locational pull" (166) between consolidated ownership and niche differentiation of overseas markets, Christopherson's (185-204) survey of transnational labour points to "political strategies" (187) for "inter-regional competition" (187) and its consequences for labor and independent production.

More eclectic in scope, Part Two, entitled 'Text', considers the difficulty of defining a Hollywood film across genres and the fragmentation of contemporary Hollywood, the "vexed question" of cinematic pleasure (206) and representational choices. With Berry surveying the broad problems of categorizing genres (207-222), Paul Kerr's reprinted analysis of the B film noir (223-239) proposes a mix of industrial restraints and formal development. Studies of representation and wider theories of pleasure then provide mixed appeals. In the former, reprints of Guerrero's (287-301) survey of 1990s Black American cinema, Escamilla, Cradock and Kawachi's content analysis of women and smoking (302-306), Modleski's study of gender and the war film (307-319), Noriega's consideration of Chicano identity from 1935-1942 (320-333) and Shaheen's more recent study of Arabian vilification (334-350) collect key cultural and communication studies' interventions in Hollywood history. By contrast, a 1957 Papal letter calling for moderation of the media industries (240-261) and an extended debate between R.L. Rutsky and Justin Wyatt with Noel King in a 1990-1992 run of *Cinema Journal* juggles tongue-in-cheek perspectives on the "ability to place oneself in a non-hierarchical position, a position that is liable to fun" (273) and the legitimacy of "theoretical funsters" (282). While breaking up some of the heavier political economy of the collection, these selections feel somewhat out of place alongside a return to critical globalization debates in Part Three, 'Circulation', and overlaps between laissez-faire global and more nationally-focused policies (351-353).

Here studies of Bolivian reception (Hipele 355-375), French blockbuster marketing (Danan 376-386), the impact of critical reviews on box office (Basuroy, Chatterjee, Ravid 387-408), align with perception analysis of Native Americans (Shively 409-420), Hollywood and Europe for Belgian audiences (Meers 421-436) and the cross-cultural impact of Hollywood film in Hong Kong markets (437-452). Moreover, key studies of stardom and publicity (Coombe 453-471), government regulation and deregulation (Guback 472-485), and digital copyright (Gates 486-409) are brought back to broader contexts of cultural exchange (O'Regan 500-525), globalization (Olson 526-535) and France's relationship to Hollywood (536-543). *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader's* broad scope and plural range of scholarship therefore helps support Miller's ambitions. Some minor caution can be made though over accessibility as a general industrial study with the collection heavily weighted towards globalization, political economy and quantitative analysis, making Part Two the most distinctive but also the least-focused stop-gap between macro and micro-level analysis. In this respect, those looking for more concise primers might complement the reader with *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Janet Wasko and Paul McDonald, eds., Wiley, 2008), mixing global selections with more synoptic historical contexts.

As contributions to the ongoing study of the New Hollywood and its global contexts, Mann, Wood and Miller's collection provide a cross-section of revisionist and survey-based accounts. From Mann's engagingly detailed industrial, cultural and aesthetic history's expansion of more widespread debates over Hollywood Renaissance and the New Hollywood to Wood's concise catalogue of contemporary independent cycles, and the broader range of *The Contemporary Hollywood Reader*, rich opportunities are set up for further study. Considering the multi-dimensional origins and continuing tensions over independence within Hollywood, and the signposting of macro and micro-level analysis, understanding the stakes and contradictions within the contemporary industry remain key to what Miller describes as a "a fascinating, crisis-laden, but enduring labyrinth - Hollywood yesterday and today" (353).

Documentary Display: Re-Viewing Nonfiction Film and Video**By Keith Beattie**

London: Wallflower Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-905674-72-5. xii + 187 pp. £ 19.05 (pbk)

A Review by Jeffrey Gutierrez, Boston College, USA

Anyone who has ventured into the realm of documentary film probably knows that the term "documentary" has been controversial since its inception. John Grierson used the term "documentary" in the late 1920s as an attempt to distinguish it (with its emphasis on factual/real-life scenes) from other forms of "film" that were being produced in Britain and France. Even though "documentary" was too broad of a term, Grierson kept using it, even though it was faulty. Keith Beattie's *Documentary Display* attempts to minimize the confusion of "documentary" by re-evaluating its essence. Having published widely on film, particularly documentary film, and cultural theory, Beattie is prominent and resourceful in his study. His other works include *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (NYU Press, 2000) and *Documentary Screens: Non-fiction Film and Television* (Macmillan, 2004).

Chapter One shows the evolution of the purpose of documentary film into a melding of a new term, documentary display. Beginning with Grierson's emphasis on the relationship between documentary film and its use for public service and its emphasis on "actuality" (9) to his later argument that documentary film's purpose is in conjunction with an "anti-aesthetic" (10) movement against the Modernists, Beattie shows that the heart of Grierson's view is that documentary film is concerned with "social pedagogy" (10). Contrary to Grierson's view is Bill Nichol's emphasis on "voice" in documentary. By having a narrator or "the voice of God" (12), the style of the documentary turns from being objective to subjective, from "showing" to "telling" (13). With this "telling" comes the idea of "display", which flowed from the issue that merely showing an event on film often created dead-space in the sequence, which tended to distract an audience for the overall movement of the film. To counteract this deadness, documentary filmmakers attempted to portray their subjects in an interesting manner, though clever edits, though varying musical scores, through different camera angles, etc. In effect "documentary" is re-defined to include "display", or represent the world through a "stylized scopic textual system" (13). As documentary film has progressed through the decades its objective has somewhat changed from Grierson's original intention of merely "showing" an event. With all of these complex issues of style that Beattie suggests, the canon of documentary film needs to be widened.

Chapter Two considers the city-view in documentary film by reassessing and reviewing "the visual language and formal components of the documentary display of European films of the 1920s - the so-called city symphonies - and New York City films of the 1940s and 1950s" (33). The traditional focus of city-films has been, suggests Beattie, "to divert attention from the existence of representations of non-Western cities" (33). Reacting to a post-colonial view, the challenge of the city film is to give an authentic representation of the city without interacting with it. The New York City films in the 1940s and 50s portrayed the city, says Beattie, without any sense of political intrusion, but displayed not only a gaze, but a "return look" that challenged the viewer's subjectivity (37). To combat this "return look", Ruttman's *Berlin* (1927) attempted to conceal the camera, which bring about various ethical dilemmas. Other filmmakers attempted to portray the "other" in various ways, but at the heart of the argument is that the film that a viewer sees is not merely a documentation of a city, but a varied representation through "expressive capacities of the documentary display" (33).

Chapter Three discusses the relationship between documentary and rockumentary film, the latter seeming to be more in line with the principles of documentary display. The use of interviews and other display techniques displaces the topic of a rockumentary from its historical and or social moment and consequently, taking it out of line with typical documentaries (60). Also, rockumentaries tend to be more of an extended performance and an actual documentation. Even 'behind-the-scenes' footage can be viewed not as authentic, but as a further performance.

Chapter Four deals with found-footage and history and its relationship to and placement in documentary film. Mr. Beattie begins his argument by looking at Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), which placed archival photos and interviews into an argumentative focus, not objectively as a documentary should be. By editing the shots into a certain sequence, images of violence posited next to images of the U.S., de Antonio created an emotion or feeling not necessarily inherent in the isolated image. But not only is the placement of the images controversial, but also the commentaries and voice-overs, which seem to contradict the credibility of other commentators. This effect reveals that "no one witness holds the definite interpretation of events" (93). De Antonio's use of images and sound brings into question the stability of images and the "stability of history" (94). Should an archival-image speak for itself? Can it speak for itself? Beattie argues that even news-footage was argumentative, arranged in a certain way to obtain a certain perspective from the viewer. Can found-footage used in a documentary film still be classified as "documentary?"

Chapter Five deals with surf films and their tendency to be only truly understood by the surfing community (referred to as a sub-culture) and not the general

Book Reviews

public. But this idea refers to a larger context of an inherent meaning construed by sub-cultural groups and even references some ideas of the avant-garde. Beattie gives a few examples of those themes: personal freedom, hedonism, and pastoral ideas (110). Giving several examples of surf films, Beattie focuses on the avant-garde technique of George Greenough's *The Innermost Limits of Pure Fun* (1968), which placed the camera inside the surfer's wave, instead of the traditional focus from the viewers on the beach. Not only were these themes of great importance to the surf film, but the production of surf films not to theatres, but to video, further alienated the viewer and the viewing-audience. New surfing techniques ensured new video production sales. But the surf film form was not in the linear documentary sense; but challenged those views with "hardcore" surfing films, which often had surfers appearing on screen, then being briefly off screen back then back on screen.

Chapter Six deals with Microcinema and IMAX films and the seemingly larger-than life image projected on the screen. Microcinema, in the lines of Painleve, helped reveal that which was hidden to the ordinary human eye and projected for an audience to see. In this sense, Painleve's documentaries became "Surrealist Documentaries", because of its tendency to "explode realist boundaries" (135). Such nature-based films became popular with cable television and various channels, such as National Geographic and Discovery, focused on the exploited image of nature. But these micro-images produced a different aesthetic feel when they were no longer shown on a movie or television screen, but on an IMAX screen. The viewer can seemingly feel immersed in the image, somewhat becoming apart of the film.

Carefully researched and well-written, Beattie's treatise on a re-evaluation of the canon of documentary film is an important piece of literature for making another step toward clarity of documentary.

Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's An Autumn's Tale**By Stacilee Ford**

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-962-209-894-7, xvi + 126 pp. £16.95 (pbk)

John Woo's The Killer**By Kenneth E. Hall**

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-962-209-956-2, xiv + 125 pp. £16.95 (pbk)

A Review by Lin Feng, Independent Scholar

Hong Kong University Press has published a series of books on individual films in order to celebrate the achievements of Hong Kong cinema and to investigate the shifting sense of the city's cultural and social space since the 1980s. Without the obligation of adhering to one single theoretical position, contributors to the series are allowed to approach their chosen films from their own interests and expertise.

Stacilee Ford's *Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's An Autumn's Tale* is the first book in the series dedicated to a feature film directed by a female filmmaker. Through her detailed analysis of the film's female character Jenny (Cherie Chung) and director Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's personal experience, Ford argues that *An Autumn's Tale* provides a good case for investigating the conversation between the Hong Kong film industry, the diversity of women's experiences and changing ideas about gender identity. In the book, Ford details how Cheung has used her own experiences of being a Hong Kong student studying and living in New York as the basis for *An Autumn's Tale*'s theme of emigration from Hong Kong. Based on her interview with Cheung and the film's scriptwriter Alex Law (who is also Cheung's husband), Ford argues that *An Autumn's Tale* successfully portrays the main character – Jenny – as a bright, idealistic, attractive young woman who is willing to work hard and strives to find success and happiness despite the challenges she needs to face in the new place. In Ford's eyes, Jenny's progress from a spoiled girl at home to an independent woman in a foreign city represents the well-established "girl power" tradition in Hong Kong cinema history (69). With its strong focus on the gender implications of the film's contents and production, Ford's book recognises *An Autumn's Tale* as an important cultural text for investigating women's history.

In addition, Ford examines the film from a transnational perspective. In doing so, she manages to engage her study of women in diaspora with that of urban space and the dynamic trans-Pacific cultural exchanges of the 1980s and 1990s.

Book Reviews

According to Ford, *An Autumn's Tale* not only expands the race narrative beyond the white-black binary in the study of American history and culture, but also provides the audience with an alternative cinematic image of the Chinese diaspora and of the Chinese American more generally, one which challenges the "essentialized and exoticization of Chinese people and culture" in Hollywood cinema (13). Ford argues that director Cheung, through the character of Jenny, explores how women can follow new paths to seek self-fulfilment and negotiate their "flexible citizenship" in the postcolonial era (22). From Ford's perspective, Jenny is neither patronized nor orientalist, which challenges many of the stereotypes of Chinese women in American popular culture, such as those of a suffering victim, exotic and sexual object, or controlling "dragon lady".

At the same time, Ford does not overlook the male character Figgy (Chow Yun-Fat) and his role in the film's narrative of gender, race and Chinese migrants' translocal and transnational mobility. According to Ford, Figgy's identity as an illegal immigrant, his lack of education, Chinatown living experience and his isolation from the other part of the American society, all contrast with Jenny's westernized education, knowledge about the United States and her global contacts (even before she moves to New York). As much as Ford identifies many differences between Figgy and Jenny, she convincingly argues that Figgy and Jenny both hold a common (American) dream – a belief that they can attain success and assimilate to American society through self-improvement and hard work. In addition, Ford points out that Figgy embodies a different kind of masculinity – he is caring and kind. By displaying qualities traditionally regarded as feminine, Ford urges readers to recognise the complexity and dynamics of the screen representations of masculinity and femininity. Ford argues that the character Figgy, as well as Chow's performance in the film, both challenge the stereotypes of Chinese men on screen, extending the paradigm beyond the representations of either enigmatic and emasculated characters or hyper-masculinized warriors in the Hollywood cinema.

As Ford reveals in the book, whilst the character Jenny is based on the director's own experiences, Figgy's portrayal is equally grounded in the experiences of an illegal immigrant living in New York's Chinatown. The comparison between Jenny's and Figgy's paths to success, according to Ford, demonstrates different cinematic treatments of the assimilation process of Asian immigrants seeking their American dream. Ford argues that whilst the film's fairy-tale narrative creates hope by telling a story of success, it also brings immigrants' suffering and the feeling of displacement into the light. Included in the appendix to the book, we find Ford's interview with Mabel Cheung and Alex Law, which reveals a lot of insightful information. According to the interview, Figgy's prototype – Cheung and Law's illegal immigrant friend – was sent to prison and never managed to move out of Chinatown in real life. Through her analysis of the screen characters, as well as referring back to the aforementioned interview, Ford argues that the film questions the notion of America as a melting pot by

presenting the difficult time that those labelled a "model minority" faced in a foreign land.

In addition to focusing on the complexities of gender identification of the individual Chinese man and woman in diaspora, Ford certainly possesses the detailed knowledge about New York. In the book, she demonstrates how the film uses the city's landmarks, neighbourhood, transport and various urban spaces to push the plot forward and delineate the process of how the city gradually becomes the home for Chinese immigrants (as represented by Jenny in particular). According to Ford, the film presents New York as a location of being both familiar and foreign for Chinese immigrants. Through her comparison of the ways in which Jenny and Figgy individually experience the city, Ford argues that New York's landscape and these two characters' attitude to the city's urban spaces are used by the director to differentiate the social and geographic mobility between Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong (as represented by Jenny) and mainland China (as represented by Figgy) during the 1980s.

Another important argument that Ford makes in the book is that Cheung has used the city's landscape to question racial tensions in America. As Ford notes, while *An Autumn's Tale* shares some common ground with other Hong Kong films, such as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987) and Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) in their portrayal of America as a wasteland of racism and violence, it at the same time surpasses others in terms of its narrative of multicultural America and its depiction of a range of nuanced characterisations of Chinese and Chinese American characters. The film's narrative of the dynamics and multiple experiences of the Chinese and Chinese American, as Ford argues, is delivered through the reinforcement of the stereotypical portrayal of other ethnic groups. The problematic portrayals of non-White and non-Chinese groups, according to Ford, indicate the film's limitations in exploring "the links between the individual and collective struggles of various minority groups to assimilate into the U.S. mainstream" (33).

In general, this book is well structured and provides readers an easy access to approach the film as a non-American popular and historical culture text. In addition, through her interview with the director, Ford offers many fresh details of the process of the film production and the background of the film story. Drawing reader's attention to the social-cultural context of the film's narrative as well as its production, the book illuminates the film's inter-disciplinary engagement with various disciplines. It is an important addition to Asian American scholarship and, beyond that, to the study of gender and to the field of Hong Kong and transnational studies.

Also included in the series of *Hong Kong New Cinema*, Kenneth E. Hall's *John Woo's The Killer* adopts a different approach. Following director John Woo's career, Hall gives a detailed analysis of the film's cinematic narrative, genre,

Book Reviews

style, photography, camera movement, film structure and character design. Through the lens of *auteurism* and genre study, Hall argues that *The Killer* (1989) is an important film extending the popularity of Hong Kong cinema beyond Asia and helping Woo and the film's leading star Chow Yun-Fat to launch their international careers.

Rather than seeing *The Killer* as an action film, Hall argues that the film demonstrates Hong Kong cinema's contribution to the narrative and style of film noir. According to Hall, the fragmentation and disruption of the film's main character John's (Chow Yun-Fat) life and his preternatural skill and intuitive bears many similarities of the character and plot design in the genre of film noir. Seeing film noir as a style of expressing marginality as well as containing many cross-cultural elements, Hall argues that the film is a model of the genre for its delivery of the traditional values in the modern society. In addition, Hall argues that one of the reasons of the film's impressive success in both Hollywood and European markets is its stylisation, which is both familiar and novel to the Western audience. According to Hall, Woo skilfully interweaves the Western cinematic technique and Chinese art and aesthetics together; and the film's combination of the Western hit man form and Asian *wuxia* tradition illustrates the cross-cultural influence in Hong Kong filmmaking.

If the female character and the female experiences can be said to be the main concern of Ford's *Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's An Autumn's Tale*, Hall's *John Woo's The Killer* places its focus on the male character and the film's treatment of masculinity. In the book, Hall points out that Woo fuses certain Christian ethical concepts with the traditional notions of the Chinese chivalry, and for that reason the romantic hero in his film does not easily fit in any simple (western or Chinese) perspectives on heroism, loyalty, integrity, redemption and self-sacrifice. According to Hall, the male hero in Woo's films often represents the ideals of errant knights, having a strong sense of *yi* (altruism), justice, individual freedom, personal loyalty, courage, faith, honour and generosity. However, these male characters, according to Hall, are also alienated from all social norms, quite often against their will. As many western noir protagonists, the main character in *The Killer* – John – is a good character who "simply cannot escape the consequences of past mistakes or of emotional entrapment" (30). The blend of the legal authority and outlawry determines the complex gender role of Woo's hero.

Through the detailed textual analysis of Woo's cinematic language, Hall picks out similarities and differences between Woo's works and those of his predecessors' – Jean-Pierre Melville and Chang Cheh. Hall also investigates the impact that *The Killer* had on films produced around the world, such as those directed by Johnnie To and Luc Besson. As Hall points out, Woo's cinematic language is not original, as he borrows a lot, in terms of filming techniques as well as aesthetics, from an older-generation of filmmakers from both West and Asia. Investigating Woo's

apprenticeship, Hall notices that Woo's *The Killer* carries notable similarities to the Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967), such as the plot, the character design of female roles, and the use of iconic stars. Hall also claims that Woo was greatly inspired by the Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and its famous final scenes and Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) for its use of multiple cameras running at different speeds. In addition to the western influences, Hall argues that the diversified filmmaking practices in Hong Kong and Japan have inspired Woo's filmmaking. Woo, according to Hall, has absorbed and developed the narrative of *yanggang* (manhood), male bonding (including a pair of two heroes fighting against odds) and of the problematized relationship between hero and villain from Chang Cheh's (who was Woo's mentor) *wuxia pian* (martial arts films). Moreover, Hall claims that Woo's use of telephone to capture the kinetic battles and the emphasis of the action choreography is inspired by a Japanese director Kurosawa Akira.

Although Woo's films show influences from a great number of filmmakers around the world, Woo, according to Hall, does not simply work as a craftsman who only borrows these skills or repeat the narrative. As Hall argues, Woo borrows techniques and stylistic features from his predecessors, but he is able to rework them and make them his own. For example, Hall argues that Woo, while paying attention to the protagonist's romantic characteristics and his tragic destiny, does not inherit Melville's cynical world-weariness, and therefore Woo's heroes are more "cool" or "more positive" than their French counterparts (49). Meantime, Woo, according to Hall, develops the techniques of using different camera angles, zoom lenses and handheld camera, which differentiates Woo from the earlier Hong Kong directors working for Shaw Brothers' studio. Although Woo's techniques may not be entirely original, he develops a unique style by combining different approaches and brings a new energy to the Hong Kong cinema.

Whilst Hall's book details Woo's narrative and style borrowings, it also recognises Woo's achievement in the industry and his impact on other filmmakers, including Hong Kong director Johnny To, French filmmaker Luc Besson and Jim Jarmusch. According to Hall, while To is also interested in the conflict between the cop and the outlaw, his construction of the struggle is much more ambiguous than Woo's. In terms of Besson and Jarmusch, Hall claims that the professional killer character in Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *Léon* (1994) parallel John from *The Killer*, and the philosophical roots and the knightly characteristics of Jarmusch's lone hit man has a close tie to the chivalric code in Woo's films as well. Moreover, Hall claims that Woo and *The Killer* have had a great impact on the works of New Wave Korean directors Kang Je-gyu and Park Chan-wook.

Book Reviews

Hall's book has offers readers a well-rounded illustration of Woo's innovation of the cinematic language and his contribution to Hong Kong, as well as global cinema. However, Hall over-relies on the textual analysis, which to some extent reduces his analysis to the level of personal reading. Although Hall's comparative approach provides readers with a detailed reading of the relationship between Woo's films and that of Hollywood, European and other Asian filmmakers', his conclusion on Woo's influences on other filmmakers would benefit from additional evidence. Hall's argument on *The Killer* demonstrates how Hong Kong films locate the social anxiety about the city's pending 1997 political transformation is not a particularly convincing one. According to Hall, *The Killer* and Woo's earlier films, such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), demonstrate the director's concerns about "the disappearance of older values and of a vanishing way of life" in the light of approaching transition (2). As Hall argues, the 1997 issue not only fits well with the themes of betrayal and loyalty, but also explains the reason of Woo's career move to Hollywood. However, while the 1997 reading is valuable for providing the social-political context of the film production, it also bears the risk of simplifying the social-cultural complexity during that period. Without an in-depth analysis of the social context and lack of the evidences of engaging the film production and the social changes, such a conclusion simply becomes a set of assumptions not grounded in evidence.

Hall's analysis of *The Killer* seems to one of Woo's films in general rather than a particularly illuminating case study on *The Killer*. Hall's observations may as easily be made on any other Woo's film, such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *Hard Boiled* (1992) for example, in terms of their aesthetic features. In this sense, the book falls in a trap of over-generalisation and fails to identify the film's unique contribution to the global cinema. Capturing the evolvement of John Woo's career and his cinematic aesthetics, this book however may be useful for those who have some general interest in Hong Kong cinema and Woo's films.

Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit**Edited by Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne**

St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies in collaboration with College Gate Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1906678043. 4 illustrations. vi + 225 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals**Edited by Richard Porton**

London: Wallflower Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-906660-06-2. 19 illustrations, ix + 188 pp. £12.00 (pbk)

A Review by Linda Hutcheson, University of Stirling, UK

Film festivals have been around for the best part of eighty years, yet academic engagement with this subject area has been sparse. 2009 saw the release of two books, *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit* edited by Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne and *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* edited by Richard Porton. Both publications begin to fill the gaps in this long neglected aspect of film studies. While both engage with the topic of film festivals, they do so in quite different and distinct ways.

The Festival Circuit is the first volume in the *Film Festival Yearbook* series, an annual publication from the University of St Andrews. The academic anthology features contributions from fifteen individuals from various backgrounds: academia, journalism, film festival organisers and programmers. The overarching objective of this first publication centres "on the international dynamics of festivals, on defining the place of festivals in international film distribution, exhibition and production, and on identifying the underlying forces that drive the growth of the festival phenomenon within the system of global culture" (3). Iordanova and Rhyne note in their introduction that the tendency in festival research is to employ a methodological approach that favours case study analysis. They state that, in order to further research within the field, it is necessary to begin to develop a theoretical framework that deepens our understanding of how film festivals operate. However, it is not their objective to do away with a case study approach in its entirety, for a substantial part of their publication is devoted to the study of individual festivals; rather their aim is to provide case studies that engage with the overarching objective of the book; to theorise and promote wider comprehension of the festival circuit.

In contrast, *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, the third book in the Wallflower series, employs a different approach. Porton, who guest edits this volume, writes in his introduction that "[t]he importance of harnessing the personal (although hopefully non-narcissistic) voice was uppermost in [his] mind while

Book Reviews

commissioning the essays, memoirs, interviews and impassioned polemics" (1) included in the publication. Porton's preference for those with first hand, practical experience of film festivals is evident in the makeup of those contributing to the anthology, as the text favours festival directors, programmers and film critics, rather than academics.

The result of these quite different means of tackling the complex field of film festival studies is evident through examination of the structure and content of the two publications. *Film Festival Yearbook*, which is split into four sections, the first entitled 'The Festival Circuit', focuses most directly on addressing the methodological reflections outlined in their introduction. Rhyne's opening chapter re-examines the popular theorising of film festivals as a cohesive network, instead arguing that from the 1980s (the end of the Cold War and the growth of an urban economy), festivals have typically taken on the formation of a non-profit agency. This organisational structure, she argues, allows for the negotiation of private and public funding and for the interaction of the various, and often conflicting, shareholders. Rhyne concludes that film festivals form what she terms a "new cultural industry" (20), rather than a cohesive network. Iordanova's chapter follows, in this she addresses the presumption that film festivals operate as an alternative distribution network for world cinema in the face of being overshadowed by Hollywood. She advocates instead for festivals to be viewed as sites of exhibition, though she too stresses that the circuit is not necessarily linked. Theorising that while film festivals are proliferating at an ever-increasing speed, many copying each other's structure, this is done so predominately on an individual basis and thus each festival provides only a location of temporary exhibition (26). The final chapter of this section is written by Janet Harbord, one of the leading academic authorities on film festivals; it is her work ('Film Festivals: Media Events and Spaces of Flow' in *Film Cultures*, Sage, 2002), along with Thomas Elsaesser ('Film Festival Network: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe' in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, Amsterdam University Press, 2005), that is most frequently referenced by the other contributors to the collection. Unlike Iordanova and Rhyne, Harbord does not challenge the conceptualisation of festivals as a network; rather, she puts forth a premise for analysing festivals as part of a circuit in which the concept of time is key. She advocates for the examination of the temporal properties of the circuit, a stark move away from the traditional approach that focuses on their spatial relationship with one another. The real strength of this opening section is that it provides some much needed theory to the notion of film festivals as networked entities.

The second part of the book, which is also by far the longest, is devoted to a series of case studies. Charles-Clemens Rüling opens with a piece on the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, illustrating the publication's desire to explore festivals further from the beaten track rather than the higher tiered Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Sundance, Toronto etc. He studies the history of this

festival through analysis of its organisational structure, situating it in relation to the film animation industry as a whole. Rahul Hamid then looks at The New York Film Festival, examining the motivation behind its inception in 1963 and its subsequent development in the early years. Following this, Kay Armatage is concerned with the establishment of the Toronto International Woman & Film Festival, which she participated in herself. While mourning the loss of archival documents to aid her analysis, Armatage situates the festival in relation to film history and feminism. After this, both Ruby Cheung and Ma Ran explore the role played by the Chinese government in relation to film festivals. Cheung focuses on the corporatisation of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, scrutinising its transition from a government run festival to one that is now increasingly guided by corporate sponsorship. Ran, on the other hand, is interested in the function of film festivals within underground Chinese cinema. She studies the way in which government policy and aesthetics jar in the films of the Urban Generation and illustrates how international film festivals provided a site of exhibition for their work, outwith the confines of Chinese bureaucracy. This section is rounded off by J. David Slocum who considers how notions of cultural diversity function within two African film festivals; the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou and the Zanzibar International Film Festival.

The third section, 'Dispatches from the Festival World', marks a transition from what, until this point, has been a decisively theoretical and academic tone, featuring instead pieces by those with first hand experience, namely festival critics and programmers. Mark Cousins, director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival in the 1990s and co-founder along with Tilda Swinton of the Cinema of Dreams festival, exhibits concern over the exponential growth in the number of film festivals competing annually, and ever more ferociously, for the 150 quality films on offer (155). He outlines convincingly what he sees as the dwindling quality and standardisation of contemporary film festivals. Next, film critic for *Sight & Sound*, Nick Roddick has edited together a collection of his articles on film festivals published in the aforementioned journal. Roddick states in his introduction that he has not tried to "reshape" the individual articles, as "columns have their own structure" (159), yet they are linked with the overarching theme; "broadly, that the role played by festivals in showcasing non-studio films and hopefully shepherding them into distribution is under threat from the digital technology which will soon come to dominate the film distribution process" (159). While this theme does emerge in his writings, the structure of the chapter never allows for what promises to be a truly fascinating argument to be developed in satisfactory depth. Nevertheless, this reinforces a point made by the editors in their introduction, regarding the predominance and wealth of material on film festivals available from material published by film critics, despite the lack of academic attention. Furthermore, in Roddick's work, the reader is able to gain a glimpse of the lifestyle and realities faced by those who actively participate in film festival culture. This is followed by Dimitris

Book Reviews

Kerkinos, who recalls his experience of programming Balkan films at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival.

However, it is perhaps in the concluding section that the full value of the publication is revealed. The first chapter by Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist entitled 'Film Festival Studies: An Overview of a Burgeoning Field', is dedicated to providing a summary of the work on film festivals that has been carried out to date, while it also signposts avenues for further work. Given that a large proportion of users of this text will be students and researchers, this is an invaluable research tool. The book is concluded by William Brown's piece, who writes a report on the International Film Festival workshop held at the University of St Andrews in 2009. This provides the reader with a summary of the main points of discussion and highlights some of the challenges that are associated with festival research. This supplements Iordanova and Rhyne's introduction nicely, as it rather honestly calls attention to some of the difficulties in the Film Festival Yearbook, in particular the inconsistent use of terminology and frameworks (4). They rightly extend this obstacle to work on film festivals as a whole and thus highlight the need for further workshops and publications.

In contrast, a different approach is present in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, which prefers instead a more personal tone, based on firsthand experience. This also has its virtues and the book proves an interesting read. For one, the geographic dispersal of film festivals, in combination with the sheer number of them, means that only a select few individuals have the money and time needed to experience a diverse range of festivals. Consequently, the accounts given by professionals, each of whom evidently has an extensive knowledge in this area, is exhilarating to read. In his introduction, Porton notes the need for impartial coverage of film festivals, condemning mainstream critics for being unduly positive in their writing. He attributes this largely to the fact that magazine reports are typically written in exchange (at least partially) for airfare, accommodation or festival access. Revealingly, Porton goes on to write that "[a]ll of the somewhat jaundiced, but certainly not jaded, contributions to this volume view the myriad contradictions of the contemporary festival milieu with a bracingly ambivalent mixture of affection and informed revulsion" (2). Consequently, the publication comprises of rather candid and seemingly honest accounts given by those with professional experience in festivals.

The edited collection is structured into four sections. The first, 'A Backward Glance', features a sole chapter by André Bazin which was first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1955 and has been translated into English, for the first time, by Emilie Bickerton. Entitled 'The Festival Viewed as a Religious Order', this chapter compares the development of Cannes to the structure of a Religious Order. He writes, that every year critics descend on Cannes to partake in a lifestyle that runs in stark contrast to their everyday experiences, entering into a rigid set of rituals based on the foundation of a power hierarchy, measured in

terms of who is awarded the most access to the festival, or who gets to stay in the most lavish hotel. This witty article, written by a giant in film criticism, effectively establishes the sceptical, yet enthusiastic tone of the book.

The chapters in the section that follows, 'Film Festivals: Between Art and Commerce', comprises, as the titles suggests, of pieces that explore the relationship between the artistic and business roles encompassed by film festivals. Mark Peranson describes what he sees as the two models of film festivals: business and audience (though he too acknowledges that these are ideal models and the majority of festivals will be placed somewhere between the two). Furthermore, he expands on this by outlining the various interest groups that have a stake in film festivals ranking them in order of importance to each model. Following this, Quintín, former director of the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Films (BAFICI) and past editor of *El Amante Cine*, provides a searing account of what he sees as the stifling influence of festival bureaucracy, which favours the standardised films of average quality over artistic innovation. He too voices his disapproval of the complacent critics who fail to expose this. Using his time as director of BAFICI as an example, he illustrates one possible way that a film festival can break from this mould. The next chapter marks a different methodological approach employed in the anthology. It is an interview with Simon Field, former director of the Rotterdam Film Festival and current consultant to the Dubai International Film Festival, conducted by James Quandt, chief programmer at the Toronto Cinematheque. Their discussion centres on the controversial "sandwich process" (56), whereby film festivals use large, more star studded films, to draw in an audience, and then screen smaller, lesser known films alongside them, in an attempt to boost their viability. This is followed by Robert Koehler, who examines the relationship between cinephilia and film festivals, noting that "any festival that matters has only one crucial task, and that is to defend cinema" (82). However, he sadly concludes that in reality, festivals are rarely adventurous and are far too quick to shun provocative films, favouring more mainstream productions. The final chapter in this section, 'Here and Elsewhere: The View from Australia', is written by Adrian Martin and it considers the relationship between the audience and festival content.

The third section comprises of memoirs and case studies. Stephen Teo focuses on the developments of three Asian festivals (Hong Kong International Film Festival, Pusan International Film Festival and Singapore International Film Festival) and considers how external factors (such as the role of the government and changes in the economy) have influenced the shifting status of these festivals. Kong Rithdee then looks at the role of corruption and mismanagement played in the demise of the Bangkok Film Festival, while Christoph Huber discusses his memories of the Viennale festival. Olaf Möller provides the last case study, discussing the lesser known Kino Otok held in Slovenia and i 1000

Book Reviews

Occhi in Northern Italy, praising their innovation and resilience to succumbing to the tried and tested festival structure. Jonathan Rosenbaum's memoir, 'Some Festivals I've Known: A Few Rambling Recollections', rounds off this section. In it he lively recalls his experiences at various festivals including: New York, Cannes, San Sebastián, London, Toronto and BAFICI.

In the concluding section, Richard Porton rounds off the publication by considering the filmmaker's perspective. He does this through an interview with director Atom Egoyan in which they discuss the director's memories and experiences at film festivals as they have proven instrumental forces in the trajectory of his career. Similar to Rosenbaum's piece, Egoyan is compelling in recounting his festival escapades, both their thoughts exhibit an air of astute understanding that has resulted from their respective careers.

It is certainly true that *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit* and *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* are valuable publications. The former is bold in its ambitions to provide grounding to the underdeveloped area of film festival studies, yet it accomplishes this task. This is achieved through analysis and theorising of the festival circuit, but also through the overview of research that has been carried out to date and the subsequent avenues for further research. In comparison, while the *Dekalog* publication doesn't contribute to the theorisation of film festivals to quite the same extent, it is nonetheless an evocative read. Its greatest strength lies in the ability of its contributors to communicate the extent of their experience and knowledge, in a manner that not only celebrates the excitement and ethos of festivals, but too points out their less commendable attributes. While the study of film festivals has been a long neglected aspect of film studies, thankfully the release of both publications is indicative of the swelling interest in this burgeoning area of research.

Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies

Edited by Paul Cartledge and Fiona Rose Greenland

Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-299-23284-9. vii + 368 pp. \$26.95 (pbk)

Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film

By Christine Sprengler

New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84545-559-0. 20 illustrations, x+198 pp. £35.00 (hbk)

A Review by Andrew B.R. Elliott, University of Lincoln, UK

In the 1952 US Election Campaign, the Democratic Party slogan festooned the walls of public spaces with the declaration that "you've never had it so good", inviting voters to take stock of their comparative wealth and security. It is a slogan which could equally hold true for works on historical film in 2010, something of a bumper year for studies in what was once a minority field on the fringes of interdisciplinary enquiry. This is especially good news for the two works under discussion here, since the coming-of-age of this discipline provides a platform for both Sprengler's study and Greenland and Cartledge's collection of responses. Both works consequently profit from existing work in historical film, obviating the usual need for a contextual introduction which both summarises existing literature and justifies the validity of this line of enquiry, and which in turn allows them both to examine the effects of historical representation from a range of angles.

In the case of Christine Sprengler's study of the 1950s in film, *Screening Nostalgia*, this freedom of approach allows for an extensive and thorough examination of the concept of nostalgia – a subject already treated in some depth in Pam Cook's *Screening the Past* (Routledge, 2004) – and its evolution from medical affliction through to sociological phenomenon which, the author argues, leads us to produce our own images of the past based on a selective retention of key facts. This process of selective memory, Sprengler argues, leads us to produce a dual past, formed on the one hand by what she terms "the 1950s" – the historical time period – and on the other what she terms "the Fifties", which functions as a parallel era created outside of history and sculpted by the nostalgic recollection of idealised (though not necessarily always positive) images from our past (40-41). As evidence of this duality, Sprengler examines in particular the use of the titular 'populuxe props', which serve as tangible objects used to evoke the feel of the period, and which function as signifiers of the core

Book Reviews

tenets of the past. In one exceptionally persuasive chapter, she argues that tailfins, as purely decorative and non-functional additions to 1950s car culture, come to form a visible and visual symbol of US post-war profligacy and conspicuous consumption. What is interesting about her argument here is that in the context of filmic nostalgia, they have surfaced as an *ex post facto* symbol of the age: though emerging during the (historical) 1950s, she demonstrates that it was not until the reconstruction of the period in films like *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) that they come to symbolise a nostalgic recollection of the past. Such a use of props to evoke the wider 'feel' of a period is thus fed back into her theory to argue for a "deliberate archaism" (85) which pervades historical film as a whole and which becomes symptomatic of the "dominant strain of nostalgia" (33) in the recreation of the Fifties, rather than a surgical and precise evocation the 1950s itself.

Moving on from the theoretical framework elaborated in the first three chapters of the book, Sprengler devotes the remaining three chapters to a demonstration of this theory in practice, drawing on an in-depth analysis of three case studies, *The Aviator* (Martin Scorsese, 2004), *Sin City* (Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller, 2005) and *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes 2002). Thanks to rigorous and impressive attention to detail, the author argues persuasively that each of these films in some way constructs a nostalgic return to the Fifties (and not the 1950s), a return based on the 'feel' of the period developed through incidental details such as costume, camera lenses, automobiles, contextual reference and the deliberate archaism proposed in the earlier chapters.

Though her approach – rooted solidly in a great deal of painstaking archival and scholarly research – is undoubtedly thorough enough to carry forward her thesis, the choice of case studies does reveal an unrecognised limitation to the work as a whole. Given that all three films are broadly contemporary (having been released in 2004, 2005 and 2002 respectively), there is an extra concern about genre, audience and the relationship with the present which are not taken fully into account here. The release of three films dealing with the imaginary Fifties in a period which is itself characterised by a wholesale upheaval, not to mention the parallels which are frequently drawn between the 1950s Cold War and the 2000s' War on Terror, means that the *purpose* of nostalgia cannot be fully explored, to the extent that any ideological reasons motivating such distortion are perhaps inevitably overlooked. Furthermore, little is made of the fact that all three are in themselves adaptations not of the historical record but of fictional or idealised materials. *Sin City* is based on an amalgamation of Frank Miller's graphic novels; *The Aviator* is an avowedly embellished biopic; and *Far From Heaven*, more problematically, is a cinematic homage to Douglas Sirk's melodramas, which reflect his own contemporaneous response to the stifling conservatism of the 1950s – arguably an ideologically-charged 'imitation of life' more than any accurate reflection of reality of the period. Given that each of these sources, then, are in themselves either nostalgic recollections or

ideological extrapolations of the 'reality' of the 1950s, Sprengler's use of them as case studies in nostalgia becomes especially vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we are dealing with what might be termed (after Barthes) "second order nostalgia" (*Mythologies*, Vintage, 2000, 115) – that is, a reflection of a reflection.

Nevertheless, Sprengler herself recognises the shortcomings of this selection, and in fairness this was not the original purpose of the work; in her introduction she notes that "charting the history and applications of Fifties nostalgia is a necessary first step to gaining insight into the workings and significance of the contemporary nostalgia film" (8). The excellence of the scholarship (the bibliography alone covers a daunting range of fields from seventeenth-century medical case histories through to cutting edge critical theory) and the persuasive arguments which she presents do indeed develop a thorough and solid foundation for her theory of nostalgia in film, which can become an indispensable springboard for future research.

Similar concerns over the ideological choices inherent in the reconstruction of the past are brought to the fore in Greenland and Cartledge's collection *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History and Cultural Studies*. Though, of course, Alexander the Great's history lies much further back in time than that of Howard Hawks, what emerges from both works is that – regardless of historical distance – the attempt to recreate the past on screen is fraught with choices which have disproportionate ideological ramifications on the present. Beginning with only one film, *Alexander* (2004), the book has a distinct advantage over Sprengler's work in that the various contributors are able to track the ripples of these authorial choices over time, rather than focusing on the source of them. The breadth of disciplines involved in the project allows for an engaging, stimulating look at a film which helped to mark the return of the epic in the twenty-first century. Equally, the contributors' candid admissions of the film's shortcomings allows for a rare honesty when analysing the recreation of such a contested – and at times contradictory – historical figure. Indeed, the range of disciplines represented plays well in its favour here, since many of the contributions take debates about history on film even further into the cultural context of the film's reception than traditional scholarship has been able. John Cherry's essay, for example, traces the influence of the film through to museum exhibits on the historical Alexander the Great, which raises interesting (though seemingly paradoxical) questions about the extent to which historical films can retrospectively affect the historical record.

Drawing from a range of perspectives on the film also allows for a uniquely comprehensive overview of the many important issues emerging from Stone's film. Contributors' responses incorporate a broad spectrum of theoretical and disciplinary approaches from history, classical literature, adaptation theory and

Book Reviews

audience studies, via genre theory, queer theory and feminist studies which represent the cultural studies approach advertised in the book's subtitle. A particularly insightful essay by Jon Solomon (whose name is by now synonymous with excellent scholarship in the reception of Classical Antiquity) charts the popular reception of the film across a wide range of spheres, from the "flippant criticism" (37) of the popular press through to the emotional responses and preconceptions held by viewers before even viewing the film (42), culminating in a revealing suggestion that the film's reputed failure is simply the result of a disjuncture between audience expectations and Stone's individual vision of Alexander as a tragic hero. Interestingly, following this argument through would lead us to broadly the same conclusions as Sprengler's work on the Fifties, that there exist (at least) two contradictory versions of history which lie side by side, and whose reconstruction inevitably produces a disappointing mismatch.

It is, however, precisely this wide-ranging approach which also becomes the chink in the armour of the collection, since such a breadth of scope risks an uneven approach in which thematic overlap can lead to seeming contradiction. Marilyn Skinner and Jeanne Reames, for instance, both offer shrewd readings of the complex character of Hephaestion (Jared Leto) in the film, but to my mind their two readings provoke a tension between what we know from the paucity of historical records about him and their interpretation in the film. This tension leads one to celebrate his role in the film (if only for renewing interest in this complex historical figure), and the other to condemn it (on the grounds of a betrayal of the extant sources). However, given that both understandably base their analysis on historical approaches rather than from the perspective of cinematographic analysis, neither conducts an in-depth analysis of the film itself, which in my view would have revealed that such a conflict is, in fact, inherent in his characterisation. The two critical positions of Skinner and Reames, for example, are reflected by the intriguing contrast between Leto's star persona as one part teen idol and two parts brooding adolescent; when translated to film, this tension is borne out by the highly ambiguous portrayal of his relationship with Alexander. In many ways, of course, this complexity is in any case a reflection of the original complexity of Hephaestion's character which, like debates raging today in history departments across the world, can never be resolved but simply construct plausible cases for several – often contradictory – interpretations. However, for a collection which aims to focus on the film and not longstanding disputes over the real Alexander, Stone's characterisation ought to claim priority over internecine historical differences.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged here that my criticism of this historical bias is almost certainly unfair, given that from the outset Cartledge and Greenland never claim to approach *Alexander* from the perspective of pure film criticism. They reject this perspective on the grounds that, in their view, "[a] book of twelve film reviews would have been redundant and boring" (5); their

intention was instead to "contribute to an understanding of the academic and media landscape in the aftermath of the release and reception of *Alexander*" (5). Of especial value here are the inclusions of perspectives from those who – like Robin Lane Fox and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones – actually worked on the film, which allows for a rare degree of insight into authorial decisions made in the process of bringing the past to life. This 'behind the scenes' approach is rounded off in the afterword by Oliver Stone himself, the collection's *coup-de-grâce*, and a cunning strategy which allows him to respond directly to the criticisms raised in the book, creating a cyclical response to the responses to the film. Rounding off the collection in this way brings us, therefore, back to where we began; having begun with the 'voice' of Oliver Stone, we are left once again with his explanation of what he was trying to do. This sets an interesting (if potentially confusing inter- and meta-textual) precedent for future works on historical film; more promisingly, I now wonder whether this 'olive-branch' approach might pave the way for more fruitful collaborations between the academy and the film industry in the production of historical films. If nothing else, such collaboration would give voice to historians and specialists before shooting even begins, rather than the regrettably frequent practice of setting about it immediately after its release.

Despite, then, the similarities of the topic, it emerges that the two works differ in one essential respect: the role of history in the creation of historical films. The various responses to *Alexander* offer insightful, interesting and well-researched commentaries on the various points at which Stone's film departs from the official historical record, and in several cases equally take into account the vagaries of both Hollywood and its mass audiences, which inevitably demand a very different kind of Ancient Greece to that most familiar to the experts. Sprengler's intriguing contribution, on the other hand, picks up precisely where these leave off, *beginning* with the thesis that there exist (at least) two kinds of past, neither of which is accessed directly, and both of which are re-invented, re-mythologised or, at the very least, subject to a kind of nostalgia. Taking the two together, we can see a point of contention between the two which is perhaps symptomatic of the two disciplines to which they rightly belong. By screening off the film criticisms, Cartledge and Greenland have been able to provide a coherent study of the range of loose threads which a historical film contains; pulling them further reveals that they lead to a whole series of contentious and contended issues which remain unresolved, and far from known facts in the public domain. Sprengler, however, is able to weave those threads back together in a filmic context, to show that it is precisely the unknowns of history which are used to fabricate a wholly new material altogether.

What both works share is an interesting engagement with history as presented in fictional film, and one which recognises that the process by which a filmmaker creates a historical past – by shaping narratives, selecting which facts most

Book Reviews

neatly fit within their conception of the past – bears a striking similarity to the methods of the historian whose facts, according to E.H. Carr's famous analogy in *What is History?* "are like fish swimming about in a vast (...) ocean" (Penguin, 1990, 23). "By and large", Carr suggests, "the historian will get the kind of fish he wants to catch" (23). Whatever our own techniques for 'doing history' might be, and whatever our responses to historical film, one thing is certain: both will serve as excellent platforms to launch future studies, allowing us finally to break free from the knee-jerk belief that historical films somehow inevitably distort the past. Both Spengler and Greenland/Cartledge have offered us here provocative, intriguing and innovative ideas about how we might begin the next phase of criticism in the wake of a slew of new historically-themed films emerging in 2010, and which seems set to continue into the next decade. And now that the theories are in place, and the films keep coming, it really does start to feel as though we've never had it so good.

Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies**By Abe Mark Nornes and Aaron Gerow**

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-929280-53-7. viii+197 pp. \$64.95 (hbk)

The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs**By Jinhee Choi**

Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8195-6940-0. 31 illustrations, xii+252 pp. £24.95 (pbk)

A Review by Jonathan Wroot, University of East Anglia, UK

The two books in this review mark particular milestones in studies of cinema in Japan and Korea. However, they both do so in very different ways – one is a reference guide of research sources, and the other is an in-depth analysis of two decades. Abe Mark Nornes and Aaron Gerow's *Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies* is the first resource of its kind for scholars in this field. Jinhee Choi's *The South Korean Film Renaissance* follows the trend of celebrating Korean cinema's growing popularity in the last twenty years. Works on Japanese film were in a similar situation shortly after 2000. This was due to a rise in interest following the commercial success of horrors, such as *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), and the critical success of other films, such as *The Twilight Samurai* (Yoji Yamada, 2002). Recent successes in Korean cinema, which Choi details, have led to books such as hers. However, Japanese film research has begun to focus on specific chronological periods through historical sources. For this reason, Nornes and Gerow's book is of particular value. And studies that investigate why Korean cinema has become so popular, such as Choi's, will hopefully lead to research guides on historical sources in Korea and other Asian countries.

Gerow, as mentioned above, has begun to look at specific historical periods in Japan's cultural and cinematic history as part of his research. His books of recent years, *A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan* (Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2008) and *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (University of California Press, 2010), show he is sufficiently knowledgeable to guide scholars through the resources he and Nornes detail. Nornes' experience is a worthy supplement to Gerow's, as he has written books such as *Japanese Documentary Film: From the Meiji Era to Hiroshima* (University of Minnesota, 2003). Therefore, not only is he familiar with resources to assist the study of such areas, but he also adds to the information in the book on how to access archives and specific films.

Book Reviews

It is clear that through their experiences in writing these other works, Nornes and Gerow wished to publish the *Research Guide*. This is stated in their introduction (5-7), but also throughout the book as both authors gladly inform us of the advantages and disadvantages of certain resources in Japan and other countries. Sometimes this is anecdotal; sometimes it is only a brief overview of a particular source and its uses; sometimes they provide both. Due to this style, the book tempts the reader to go against the authors' intentions. The book is clearly divided into sections that outline particular resources: 'Collections', 'Distributors', 'Used Book and Video Stores', 'Annotated Bibliography' and 'Online and Digital Resources'. This is obviously so a student or scholar can dip in and out of the pages according to a particular source they are after. Nornes and Gerow then present their anecdotal experiences, good and bad, in using these materials very well; so well that readers may desire to read the whole book just to find out how they get on and find out about the people they meet.

But Nornes and Gerow are modest in their venture – and this is not attempting to be a Bill Bryson-style travelogue on Japanese film research. They do not claim to be experts in all that is out there; and also make it clear in their introduction that they wish to hear from readers about any sources they have missed (viii). The length, 197 pages, suggests they wish to expand it to a much larger size in future. Hopefully not, as too much of an expansion may also undo their intentions. Nornes and Gerow correctly describe what is available in particular collections, archives and sources, but not down to every detail. As with any good student or scholar, the work must be done themselves to find out what material is relevant to them from these sources. Nornes and Gerow merely let you know how to get to it.

Therefore, hopefully the book will remain in similar length in future editions, so that it is not only a 'guide book', but a 'handbook' for the use of budding researchers as they track down sources. Nornes and Gerow make suggestions in their sections as to what is 'The Best' and what is 'The Rest'; though their descriptions still mean that readers can determine themselves if a particular source is worth seeking out. And for those not knowledgeable in tracking down sources from archives, or just on a particular topic, they provide a very helpful FAQ section at the back. In fact, I would recommend this as the starting point for anyone wishing to consult this book; and then be led on to any pages of interest through the comprehensive, but not confusing, five indexes at the back.

However, this may not be the best place to start in researching Japanese cinema or a particular topic within it. Nornes and Gerow have provided the first useful reference guide to Japanese Film Studies research sources. With that in mind, though, Japanese film scholars have always thoroughly cited their materials in previous works; as with the many books by Donald Richie, some of which are mentioned in the research guide. Nornes and Gerow make the point that such citations can be confusing due to spelling errors and incorrect translations (4).

While this is true, previous work on an area of interest lets you know what sources were consulted for certain conclusions. Nornes and Gerow then provide the next step – how to find these sources, as well as possibly suggest any others that a student or scholar may not have thought of. So while this is an essential book for finding primary sources in Japanese Film Studies, it is just as significant as books by Donald Richie, as well as Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer's edited collection, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Routledge, 2007). You may also have to hunt around for a copy – it's only available from the USA currently, while other books on Japanese film are readily available in the UK.

In contrast, Choi's *The South Korean Film Renaissance* provides a narrative history of twenty years in Korean cinema (1986-2006); as well as in-depth analyses suggesting why particular films were so successful, critically and commercially, in South Korea and abroad (and it's available in the UK). Examples start with those that readers may be familiar with, such as *Oldboy* (Park Chan-wook, 2003) and *The Host* (Bong Joon-Ho, 2006); and then move on to films that were largely successful in Korea and East Asia alone, such as *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999). Choi shows how she has used thorough research to come to her conclusions through her appendices (199-215). This would seem to show that she thinks that previous analyses of recent Korean films have not gone far enough to justify their conclusions. For example, Choi mentions several factors as to why certain films became so popular throughout the book – particularly in relation to South Korea's historical context, and adopting characteristics of films from other countries. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer included several articles in their edited collection, *New Korean Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), that focused on historical changes in society that affected the film industry in South Korea. And Anthony C.Y. Leong implies the influence of Hong Kong is the most important factor to Korea's "New Wave" through his book's title alone – *Korean Cinema: The New Hong Kong* (Trafford Publishing, 2002). Rather than keeping them as separate issues to address, or focusing on one reason over another, as these books have, Choi presents a multitude of factors as to why there has been a 'South Korean Film Renaissance' in recent years.

Choi also helpfully provides the historical context of changes in the South Korean film industry as a starting point, before explaining that this is not the only factor that explains its rising popularity. This is reflected in the overview of her structure of the book (12-14). Chapter One looks at economic and political factors that changed the South Korean film industry, as well as how they affected the development of film-making styles of particular directors. Choi names these directors as part of the '386 generation', a South Korean term for those who were in college during the 1980s, during a period of political turmoil (4). This combination of factors – politics, economic changes, new emerging talent – is immediately used to explain the upsurge in blockbuster-like productions in Chapter Two. And the directors themselves are also seen as

Book Reviews

responsible for the blockbusters' successful incorporation of Hollywood style with "a shared sense of Korean history" (35). The combination of commercially successful generic characteristics, influences from abroad, and distinct directorial styles are then constantly illustrated through examples in the other chapters. The examples in each chapter are gained from particular genres/cycles – Chapter Three on gangster films; Chapter Four on romance films; Chapter Five on 'Teen Pics'; and Chapter Six on 'high quality' films. Choi describes this last as similar to Hollywood's 'high-concept film' (145). But her constant referral to their high production values (i.e. not just quality of budget, but script as well) suggests they share more with those films Hollywood releases prior to the Oscar awards ceremony.

Despite these pre-conceived generic categories that Choi uses to divide up her analysis, she does effectively present patterns that emerge across them. The context of political and economic factors is always made important, though the films' formalistic and narrative devices are also presented as equally significant. Choi identifies high school settings; views on genders that differentiate from South Korean social stereotypes; and generic hybridity, amongst other characteristics within Chapters Three to Six. This is done concisely and frequently, but does not get repetitive. Choi then uses these political, economic and stylistic factors to show that certain filmmakers have used this situation to build on an increasing global critical appreciation of their works. Specifically, she uses the films of Park Chan-wook, Kim Ki-duk and Hong San-soo to illustrate this. Park and Kim reflect the 'Asian Extreme' category that is commonly used to market films at festivals and on DVD (164); and Hong is seen as part of 'Asian Minimalism' that became popular following critical film successes from Taiwan in the late 1980s (182).

Choi closes by summarising these points that she has made throughout the chapters, as any author should do. The difference here is that Choi keeps the conclusions she has made on a level playing field. She does not pick out one of the reasons she has described to determine why South Korean film has become so popular in the last two decades. Initially, there does not seem to be a problem with this, as Choi clearly defines South Korean cinema as having a desire for "cultural visibility as well as global aesthetic standards" despite a simultaneous urge to express nationalist feelings (196). Nonetheless, a view from her suggesting which was most important – either the politics of 1986-2006, the economic situation, or the talent that emerged in this period – would have been interesting to hear. However, Choi does hint that South Korea's number of critical and commercial successes, at home and abroad, may be declining. She has therefore presented information that she thinks is most relevant to explaining the 'South Korean Film Renaissance', and food for thought as to whether or not it will continue.

I mentioned at the start of this review that Choi's book shows a similar milestone that Japanese film studies reached after 2000. In 2005, such books as Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp's *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film* (Stone Bridge Press, 2005) and Jay McRoy's edited collection *Japanese Horror Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005) were published. Shin and Stringer's edited collection, *New Korean Cinema*, also came out in this year. Choi's book shows that interest is still growing in South Korea's most recent films; while Japanese film research appears to be moving back to older periods and sources as more students and scholars enter this field. Research of older sources and films may consequently appear in future publications on South Korean cinema, if interest continues to grow. Therefore, it may only be a matter of time before a guidebook to research sources for Korean film research is published, as has been done for Japan by Nornes and Gerow. Both books reviewed are excellent examples of research in these fields, and will hopefully lead to more in coming years.

Chapaev**By Julian Graffy**

London and New York: I B Tauris, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-85043-987-5 (pbk).
x+134 pp. £12.99 (pbk)

Leni Riefenstahl: A Life**By Jürgen Trimborn (translated from the German by Edna McCown)**

London and New York: I B Tauris, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-84511-644-6. xii + 353
pp. £14.99 (pbk)

A Review by Andrei Rogatchevski, University of Glasgow, UK

Both these books deal with totalitarian cinema's cult classics. Vasili Chapaev was a much admired Red commander of the Russian Civil War, who died in action in 1919 at the age of thirty-two. The Commissar Dmitry Furmanov, assigned to be Chapaev's political mentor, escaped Chapaev's fate only because he had been transferred elsewhere at his own request, partly to escape the unwanted attention Chapaev had been paying to his wife. Intrigued by Chapaev's charisma, in 1923 Furmanov published a novel about him, which promptly became part of the emerging Soviet literary canon. Furmanov's own premature death (in 1926, of meningitis, at the age of thirty-four) undoubtedly assisted the novel's high standing within the canon that thrived, among other things, on revolutionary martyrdom. In 1934, the book was turned into a biopic by Sergei and Georgi Vasilev (known as the Vasilev Brothers, although they were merely namesakes).

Chapaev the film became one of Stalin's favourites. In the first fifteen months after its release, he watched it 38 times. The rest of the nation had little choice but to follow suit. In those days, when only very few feature films could be produced in Soviet Russia annually, it was not always easy to determine if the audiences liked a film for its qualities, or because there was almost no alternative to its frequent screenings. Yet, *Chapaev's* popularity has outlived not only Stalin but Communism itself, transcending ideological divides in the process. In the spring of 1935, the poet Osip Mandelstam, in exile for his anti-Stalin verses yet unable to resist *Chapaev's* appeal, penned at least two poems which contained hints at the possibility of Chapaev's resurrection (as his dead body did not actually appear on the screen). More than seventy years after the film's premiere, in a novel about the National Bolshevik Party (radically opposed to Putin's and Medvedev's Kremlin), the protagonist reacts to a regular TV broadcast of *Chapaev* thus: "[d]espite its predictability, the film mesmerized [viewers], for no obvious reason" (Zakhar Prilepin, *Sankya*, Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2006, 283-84). Even Andrei Tarkovsky, a quintessentially apolitical

film director to the extent this was at all possible in the Soviet film industry, was a *Chapaev* fan and went on record as saying in 1967:

A man (...) who gets into conflict with his commissar, (...) who fights in his underwear – you would think that everything here is the reverse of the ideal cinematic character. And it is only thanks to the fact that we see in him an ordinary, normal man that he becomes immortal in our eyes. (...) Because the hero is a human being, and that is why he is immortal (from an interview published in Aleksandr Lipkov's *Professii ili prizvanie* [Profession vs. Vocation], Moscow: Soiuz kinematografistov SSSR, 1991, 25)

It is hard to judge how much in this attitude can be explained by an intellectual's fascination with a peasant action hero, stemming from a guilt complex that has been leading individual representatives of Russia's privileged classes towards armed rebellions against its predominantly oppressive regimes ever since at least the Decembrist coup of 1825. To Graffy's credit, he does not engage in either generalizing or moralizing (on the dangers of modern-day myth-making and hero-worshipping, or on the subject of cinema at the service of a dictator, for example). Neither does he pitch the film as a flawed or rediscovered masterpiece. Graffy's main task is to establish as many facts as possible with regard to *Chapaev*'s real-life prototypes (separating them from what has become a film-inspired legend), as well as its production and reception history (which includes *Chapaev*'s reincarnation as a character in a sizeable cycle of popular jokes that has even been imported to other cultures. In the best traditions of a philological commentary (here successfully and inconspicuously applied to the field of film studies), Graffy does an exemplary job of contextualizing and elucidating *Chapaev* for the benefit of those who could only perceive it as a Borscht Western of sorts. Experts in pre-World War II Soviet cinema will not be left disappointed either.

Jürgen Trimborn, who knew Leni Riefenstahl personally, is also preoccupied, first and foremost, with the factual side of her story – because he is on a mission to compare her own statements about her links to the Nazi movement with the surviving archival records and other people's memoirs, to find out the truth, where possible. It comes as no surprise that Riefenstahl's level of proximity to the Third Reich leaders, as well as her awareness of, and responsibility for (as the regime's propagandist), some of their policies and actions turns out to be much higher than she herself was prepared to admit and her four denazification trials of 1948-52 were able to ascertain (only the third one, conducted in her absence, under pressure from the military authorities in the French occupation zone, ruled that she was a Nazi 'follower'; the trials at which she was allowed to appear – the first two, as well as the last one – absolved her of violating the law).

Book Reviews

Riefenstahl seems to be an extraordinary example of someone who had – most patently with her documentaries of 1933-35 NSDAP rallies – put her talent directly at the service of an ideology-driven regime but managed to exercise complete control over the creative process and retain her artistic freedom. Much to the consternation of the Propaganda Minister Dr Goebbels, Riefenstahl was answerable to Hitler alone – but even Hitler, in those exceptional moments when he decided to interfere with her work, rarely got his way. And, contrary to persistent rumours, he was not even her lover: in the words of a German newspaper article from the late 1940s, "a whole group of people with whom Hitler was close would (...) be prepared to swear that he was a little afraid of her, and that he found her personally rather unlikable". (223) Yet Riefenstahl succeeded in convincing him to authorize spending eye-watering sums, at a time when Germany was bogged down in World War II and could not afford such a luxury, on her film *Tiefland* (1954) which went grossly over-budget and had nothing to do with either Nazism or Germany (except that it was based on Hitler's favourite opera, by Eugen d'Albert).

As Trimborn observes, Riefenstahl (whose career in visual arts had of course began before Hitler's rise and continued long after his fall), "never distanced herself from the films she created during the Third Reich, which then became the key documents of fascism's self-representation. In the end, it was this refusal that brought her entire work into disrepute" (261). Even Riefenstahl's photographs of the Nuba tribes, made in the 1960 and 1970s, were suspected of having a hidden Nazi agenda, as they allegedly "corresponded to concepts of the fascist aesthetics", which had "little room for human imperfection", hence "there are no old, ill or disabled Nuba to be found in her published photographs" (256). Is it not strange, in the light of such statements, that no one seems to have thought of accusing Riefenstahl's underwater pictures, made in the 1970s-2000s, of latent Nazism too?

The fact that Riefenstahl – formally never a NSDAP member – persisted in the denial of the deep intimacy of her association with Nazism, may have paradoxically helped her to keep her art, in all of its permutations, in the public eye. Had she been less controversial a figure (and had she lived less), would she be able to enter, "while still alive, (...) the realm of legend customarily reserved for those who have died" (270) – those like Chapaev, that is?

I B Tauris should be complimented on publishing these two books, whose high academic standard is rivaled only by their readability. Arranged in a chronological order (Trimborn's genre being a straightforward biography, while Graffy's, a biography of a film, as it were, from inception to reception); steeped in a wealth of data which includes, where appropriate, little known and/or rarely accessible sources; and clearly preferring a solid factual base over fashionable but unnecessary theorizing, both monographs are likely to serve as a model and an inspiration for many present-day and future film historians.

Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century

By R. Bruce Elder

Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 1554580285, ISBN-13: 978-1554580286. 516 pp. \$34.95 (pbk)

Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience

By Carl Plantinga

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. ISBN-10: 9780520256965, ISBN-13: 978-0520256965. 296 pp. \$23.28 (pbk)

A Review by Caroline Hagood, St. Francis College, USA

With their focus on the transcendent quality of film in their respective works, *Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century* and *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*, R. Bruce Elder and Carl Plantinga call to mind the third of Arthur C. Clarke's three laws of prediction from his *Profiles of the Future*: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (Holt, Rinehart & Wilson, 1973, 36). In different manners, they both explore the mystical experience of watching movies; and recognize a permeable membrane where cinema is concerned by examining how the real, outside life of the viewer interacts with the fictional, internal world of the film.

Early on in his book, Elder establishes that many of the art movements after the emergence of cinema sought to construct themselves in its image. In answer to why they might do this, he suggests that watching a film is such a potent experience that it can appear almost paranormal, and therefore that cinema often appears to corroborate the existence of the supernatural. He uses the atom as an example of how real world phenomena that may appear magical (such as science and cinema) can make what is, in fact, fanciful (such as the business of witches and sorcerers) seem possible. He points out that the findings surrounding the atom even made reality appear more numinous, "matter presented itself more as void than as substance. When the world seems insubstantial, the *Lichtspiel* and cinema are free of physical fetters - and cinema in particular seems an almost geseour, *immaterial shadow-form*" (52). Thus, cinema, that bewitching play of light and darkness, appears as a sort of sorcery.

Even more provocative is his belief that avant-garde cinema, in particular, has the capacity for enchantment. He maintains that film "exerts a spell" that "unfeters dynamism and allows cinema's capacity to charm to achieve its full

Book Reviews

potential - to become mysterious" (127). From this perspective, when avant-garde film's vitality is unleashed, it can ascend to its highest, most enigmatic embodiment. For Elder, if a movie is somewhat mystifying, it's not a drawback, but rather a signal that it has achieved its creative peak.

Plantinga's view on film's supernatural potential is of a more psychological variety. He critiques and revises traditional psychoanalytic film theory with its inhuman spectator in favor of what he calls a "cognitive-perceptual" (15) approach, which focuses on the wonder of people watching films and the ensuing reactions and interactions. "The most common sort of theatrical experience - in the United States, at least," he argues, "encourages the audience to give rapt attention to the screen" (15). Most striking of all, however, is his exploration of film's capacity to transform emotion, in which he takes his theories beyond the practical workings of the mind to encompass cinema's more spiritual realms. In the strongest section of his book, he clarifies his view on film's most awe-inspiring feature in this way:

One central element of the film's success has been insufficiently examined: the means by which *Titanic* manages its representation of traumatic events in such a way that it attempts to turn the experience of pain into pleasure and to exchange a representation of irrevocable loss for a quasireligious, ritual affirmation of the proposed transformative power and transcendence of romantic love and self-sacrifice. One can find similar psychological manipulations at the end of many [other films]...and in many of the most popular sympathetic movies emerging from Hollywood. One might call this 'catharsis,' 'transformation,' or 'working through,' but whatever kind of psychological experience it is, it is worth exploring here because it has implications for understanding the spectator's experience of all sympathetic narratives (173)

Here, he takes a psychological stance on the life of the silver screen, foregrounding film's capacity for helping its spectators work through pain. He uses the example of James Cameron's film *Titanic* (1997) in order to illustrate the process by which movies can convert unpleasant emotions into pleasant ones. As an example, he employs an instance in the film in which pain (the ship going down and the female lead losing her love when he gives up his life for her) becomes a transcendent experience wherein what was lost is replaced by a spiritual state of celebration of domestic pairing and giving oneself up for the good of others.

By using this example, he presents not only an analysis of film, but, more powerfully, also a mode for the audience to deal with and work through deep suffering. In this model, cinema is more than mere entertainment. It crosses over into the territory of faith and healing. He outlines the process by which this is possible, stressing that it is not a case of putting an end to emotions, but rather of substituting exultant feelings for distressing ones. To all this he adds

his theory of "spillover effect", or the residual impact of the formerly anguished response that renders the positive sentiments so very powerful:

In relation to the spectator's response, the two relevant terms are not the purgation of emotion but the *relief* from strong negative emotions which are *replaced* by pleasurable emotions that depend for their strength on the arousal caused by physiological spillover remaining from the prior negative emotions. What is channeled is the physiological residue of the painful emotions, which through emotional 'spillover' increases the strength of the positive emotions at the film's end (184)

Thus, the recently departed painful sentiments imbue the newly arrived pleasurable ones with poignancy they would not otherwise have.

Elder, on the other hand, draws an intriguing connection between Rosicrucianism and film that addresses movie magic and the emotional calculus of viewing films in a slightly different manner. "Rosicrucianism, too," he writes, "teaches the importance of the sensation of sympathetic participation in the life of the universe. Such participation prepares one to experience universal empathy. Cinema itself elicits a similar sort of participation, for it engenders kinesthetic effects through purely optical means: empathetic experience allows us to experience the life to another's inward sensations through purely pneumatic means" (315). In this intellectually stimulating portion of his text, he compares the ability of Rosicrucianism and film to make the participants feel that they are living in a world of experience and feeling that does not technically belong to them. On a deeper level, rather than merely feeling that they are taking part in one particular life in the universe, the audience can take part in the life of the universe.

In keeping with this concept of movie watching as a pastime that draws on qualities both in and beyond the film itself, Elder describes his "principle of dissent" as the need for artistic or thought processes' constituent pieces to break free of the whole and push back against it in order to transfigure it when they are reclaimed (5). He acknowledges that this process predates film, but that those wily moving pictures reiterate and even seem to prove this theory.

Plantinga echoes Elder's focus on the internal and external life of cinema when he writes about a cultural shift towards reflexivity in Hollywood films: "We can confidently say that the pleasures of film viewing go beyond the intratextual; spectators also enjoy the *intertextural* and *extratextual* pleasure of film viewing, critical appreciation, and fandom" (36). This is similar to Elder's belief in the importance of the individual sections of any aesthetic or intellectual whole separating from it in order to eventually transform it when reintegrated. Where proof of a good Hollywood movie used to be that its constructed quality was invisible, Plantinga claims that it is now both common and desirable for a film to

Book Reviews

draw attention to its own state of being. He sees this as evidence of the importance of the spectator's thought processes, because in the case that they are able to recall that it's merely a film and not their direct experience, they can journey in and out of its coils, swapping references from the two worlds.

Both Plantinga and Elder spend a lot of time defining existing terms. Sometimes it seems that they are not going out on a limb in order to create something new, but rather nimbly assembling the best of others' theories. Plantinga says in the end (perhaps as an apology for not developing some of his ideas further) that the book is meant to be the beginning of a conversation and suggests possible next research steps. Elder's text suffers in places from trying to do too much. He strives to address such a vast slice of information that at times his book can read like a survey course on avant-garde art movements. Perhaps he would have done better to choose a unifying thesis to keep his reader on track rather than delivering a lot of facts with little analysis in places. Yet, thankfully, both authors follow their occasional weakness with generous servings of strong, original scholarship.

Small shortcomings aside, both books offer a wealth of ideas about cinema as a dynamic entity whose world the viewer can enjoy on multiple levels of consciousness at once. Both present this experience as something that can take place in or outside of the film for a variety of reasons. For example, a woman in the audience could be crying because the film's protagonist died; or because her own mother passed away and the cinematic moment presents itself as an opportunity to confront and work through the related emotions; or even because she is experiencing an ecstatic spiritual state as a result of the moving images before her eyes. In the end, the most arresting point that Elder and Plantinga leave their readers with is that film is an art that can make them believe in magic.

Reworking the German Past: Adaptations in Film, the Arts, and Popular Culture

Edited by Susan G. Figge and Jenifer K. Ward

Rochester: Camden House, 2010. ISBN-10: 9781571134448, ISBN-13: 978-1571134448. 281 pp. £40.00 (hbk)

The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

Edited by Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010. ISBN-10: 081433377X, ISBN-13: 978-0814333778. 36 illustrations. 431 pp. \$39.95 (pbk)

A Review by Matthias Uecker, University of Nottingham, UK

Collections of articles can be a problematic medium for the dissemination of research: on the one hand they provide an opportunity to combine the expertise of a large number of researchers and discuss a chosen topic from a variety of approaches; frequently, however, these combinations are insufficiently coordinated and run the risk of presenting no more than an accidental collection of unconnected articles that fail to provide both comparative perspectives or a comprehensive overview of the field. The two collections covered in this review demonstrate the risks of this approach to some degree.

A particular type of German Film Studies, originating in German departments rather than Film Studies, was for a long time preoccupied with cinematic adaptations of books, often focusing on the pitfalls of transferring complex literary texts onto the screen. The volume *Reworking the German Past* has grown out of related, but slightly adapted concerns. The editors, Susan G. Figge and Jenifer K. Ward, were initially interested in cinematic adaptations of German novels dealing with the Nazi period, but intended to shift the focus away from the questions of faithfulness to the original towards the "role of the medium in developing a specific response to the past" (1), treating adaptations as legitimate "re-mediations" which "undo fixed interpretations of the past" and reveal "an evolution of responses to earlier events or eras" (3).

The concept of "re-mediation" supplants well-established alternative theoretical contexts which might have been seen as relevant for many of these studies. Notions of intertextuality and intermediality – and the body of theoretical work carried out around these concepts – are being sidelined in this volume. In their place, a relatively simple concept is employed which adds few new insights and often merely rearticulates common-sense positions. The claim that re-medialisations articulate or engage with contemporary discourses is hardly

Book Reviews

original, as the same assumption can be applied to almost any work of art. It may serve the useful purpose of directing the focus of adaptation studies away from questions regarding the faithfulness of adaptations towards their engagement with changing cultural and historical contexts, but it lacks theoretical sophistication.

The focus on changing cultural contexts is perhaps closer to Cultural Studies than Film Studies, but if it had been carried through it could have produced some useful insights into changing perspectives on the Nazi period in German culture and specifically German cinema which has shown a particular fascination with this period over the past decade. Unfortunately, the collection as a whole and many of the individual contributions lack a clear focus on these issues, and while they present often interesting discussions of their specific topics, they rarely communicate with each other and there is no sense of a broader picture emerging of how German adaptations of the past have been developing. This lack of focus is partly a result of the editors' decision to invite contributions which cover not just the representation of the Nazi period, but the Weimar Republic and post-unification culture as well. Half of the volume's ten contributions pursue matters related to literature, photography, popular music and museums. The remaining articles, while contributing to Film Studies, again have very little in common.

Cary Nathenson suggests that a little known Nazi propaganda film from 1944, *Die Degenhardts* (Werner Klingler), may have been designed as a veiled remake and revision of F.W. Murnau's classic *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924), aiming "to address – and quell – the fears that the earlier film still represented for Nazi society" (15). The later film, Nathenson argues, reveals the continuing concerns in Nazi Germany about the humiliation the war generation experienced in 1920s Germany and attempts to "enact their cathartic banishment from contemporary society" (19) through a rehabilitation of the discarded authority figure in the context of the World War II.

Richard C. Figge compares four film versions of a popular 1920s children's book, Erich Kästner's *Emil und die Detektive* which was filmed in 1931 (Gerhard Lamprecht), 1954 (Robert A. Stemmle), 1964 (Peter Tewksbury, a Disney version) and 2001 (Franziska Buch), demonstrating how the novel's core values were re-articulated in a succession of changing social and cultural circumstances in post- and cold-war West Germany and finally in post-unification Berlin. He underscores how all the post-war versions avoid reconstructions of the novel's original historical context in favour of situating the same story within the specific conditions of their own times.

Susan G. Figge and Jenifer Ward's contribution which is closest to the project's original remit discusses three adaptations of influential novels dealing with the Nazi past: Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's 1965 adaptation of a Heinrich

Böll novel, *Nicht versöhnt*, a 1977 West German television adaptation of Anna Seghers' exile novel, *Transit* (West 3, 1977), and the 1974 East German adaptation of Jurek Becker's ghetto novel *Jakob der Lügner* (Frank Beyer). While the two Western adaptations are characterized by an experimental style which sometimes interrogates and even criticizes parts of the original literary text, Frank Beyer's adaptation of *Jakob der Lügner* represents a more conventional adaptation, inviting the audience to identify with the film's protagonist and simplifying the novel's narrative structure.

Maria Euchner describes in some detail Götz Friedrich's 1981 adaptation of Richard Strauss's opera, *Elektra*, in order to demonstrate how some of the original concerns of the libretto which had been pushed into the background in Strauss's opera, were brought back into the foreground in Friedrich's filmic adaptation. Euchner argues that in the process the opera takes on additional contemporary relevance as a contribution about post-war discourses concerned with problems of remembering and forgetting a traumatic past, while avoiding any explicit 'modernisation' of the story.

Finally, Mareike Herrman introduces director and writer Doris Dörrie's own adaptation of her short stories in *Bin ich schön?* (1998). She demonstrates how the film version "takes advantage of the film medium's ability to emphasize relational aspects of character and connections between them, shifting the focus away from internal motivations (...) and from the unfinished nature of the short-story genre, toward a larger view and a more complete, carefully crafted structure" (228).

It is hard to identify a common thread that might unite these articles. The selection of topics and films appears almost random, and the individual contributions fail to demonstrate the productivity of the book's overarching concept as the issue of 're-medialisation' merely provides a vague starting point for most of them and even the titular issue of 'reworking the past' is not central to all of them.

By comparison, *The Collapse of the Conventional. German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager, promises a more coherent and focused experience. The volume concentrates exclusively on German cinema of the past decade, proposing to establish common aesthetic and ideological features which distinguish this period of film production from the previous one. Taking their cue from Eric Rentschler's famous description of 1990s German film as a "cinema of consensus" ('From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus', *Cinema and Nation*, Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, eds., Routledge, 2009) which had rejected both the stylistic experimentation and the political pessimism of the New German Cinema of the 1970s and 80s, Fisher and Prager argue that over the past decade a new body of films has emerged which once again challenges

Book Reviews

both political and cinematic conventions and in the process appeals to both domestic and international audiences. Admittedly, the most high-profile German films of the past decade have been "sweeping historical melodramas" (10) like *Downfall* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004), *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (Marc Rothemund, 2005), or the Oscar-winning *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), but even these productions are deemed taboo-breaking and thus anti-consensual by the editors. In strong contrast to the prevalence of harmless relationship comedies during the 1990s, these films confront topics of historical and contemporary significance and take an openly political stance. It is this prevalence of the political which, according to the editors, connects such films to the more aesthetically innovative and less crowd-pleasing films of the so-called 'Berlin School'. Fisher and Prager reject "superficially differentiating approaches" that set "bad ideological films" against "good cultural-critical films" (11) and instead propose to treat all of them as instances of a larger formation that has arisen from a "tectonic shift" (1) away from the 'consensual' project of the preceding decade. The book thus argues "that German cinema at the turn of the century can be best approached as a politically charged polyvocal arena" (32).

The fifteen contributions of the volume cover a broad range of films and genres, including some of the decade's biggest commercial and critical successes, like *The Lives of Others*, *Downfall*, or *Rosenstraße*, alongside the output of directors like Oskar Roehler, Christian Petzold or Ursula Biemann. While some chapters focus on individual films or the work of specific directors, others discuss the development of genres or the treatment of particular topics. The breadth of these contributions, all of which are based on extensive specialist research, makes this collection a successor to David Clarke's 2006 volume *German Cinema Since Unification* (Continuum, 2006), taking up some of that collection's concerns and extending the scope of the discussion to more recent films.

The comparison of both volumes by Clarke and Fisher/Prager highlights a number of significant similarities and differences. The continuing significance of the Nazi period and the GDR combined with a new approach to historical memory is central to both volumes, but Fisher and Prager devote hardly any space to Turkish-German cinema which had been central to the overview provided in Clarke's edition. Equally, the representation of gender and sexuality has been sidelined in the more recent volume in favour of a sustained discussion of the films of the 'Berlin School'. Neither volume pays much attention to commercially successful films which continued the well-established genre of relationship comedies or genre parodies and might undermine the claim that the cinema of consensus has been swept away for good (e.g. Till Schweiger's *Keinohrhasen* (2007), or Michael Bully Herbig's box-office topping genre parody *Der Schuh des Manitu* (2001)).

Prager and Fisher's strong claims regarding the 'collapse of the consensual' are perhaps best supported by the volume's chapters on the films of Oskar Roehler, Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler, or Hans Weingartner. Johannes von Moltke, Marco Abel, Kristin Kopp and Roger F. Cook provide generally sympathetic, well-researched discussions of these directors' films which address the volume's central concerns head-on. Yet their chapters also demonstrate that the issue of the 'politics' of current German cinema is more complex than the title of the volume or even the editors' introduction might suggest.

Marco Abel argues in his essay on Christian Petzold that his films about life in contemporary Germany "raise the question of the "political" precisely by *refusing* to make explicit political films" (258). Instead of making explicit political statements or even addressing so-called "issues", Petzold's films are "based on the belief that for the films to have any political effect at all, they have to operate on the level of the *image* itself" (265). Petzold's project is concerned with the problem of "render[ing] visible finance capitalism without having (...) recourse to the level of representational resemblance" (267). In Abel's view, Petzold successfully attempts to "find new images for a space whose images have turned into clichés" (270).

In her article on Christoph Hochhäusler, Kristin Kopp appears to take almost the opposite approach. She questions the prevalence of aesthetic discussions about Hochhäusler's work, arguing that it obscures the political dimension of his films. While she highlights Hochhäusler's opposition to conventional narrative and his cinematic creation of transitional spaces, she suggests that Hochhäusler's images demand to be read symbolically in order to reveal the "allegorical quality" of his stories (294). To be sure, Hochhäusler's engagement with the images of the German-Polish borderland is hardly explicit, and his images share Petzold's suspicion of representational resemblance, but Kopp seems to suggest that the politics of his films are not located in a refusal to make explicit political films, and that an overly aesthetical approach runs the risk of missing the allegorical discourse they develop.

A somewhat more conventional view of cinematic politics is then proposed in Roger F. Cook's discussion of Weingartner's *The Edukators* (2004). Cook queries the editors' assumption that the new German cinema reflects a fundamental collapse of the conventional. Instead, he argues, it is overwhelmingly characterised by an acceptance of commercial requirements and a lack of interest in developing a specifically German style which might set it apart from the international mainstream which he interprets as a symptom of 'normalization'. Inviting "visceral identification with the protagonists" (324), *The Edukators* uses "the most effective Hollywood techniques in the service of social and political opposition" (326). The film's politics are not hidden in the construction of images which require allegorical interpretation, but rather

Book Reviews

represented explicitly in the protagonists' dialogues and actions which revolve around a variety of options for developing a sustainable resistance against the latest incarnation of global capitalism.

The prevalence of conventional cinematic strategies is also discussed in those contributions which portray German cinema's continuing engagement with the Nazi past. Both Elisabeth Krimmer's chapter on *Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993) and *Downfall*, and Wilfried Wilms' discussion of the TV-movie *Dresden* (Roland Suso Richter, 2006) highlight the conventional narrative and cinematic strategies of these films which go hand in glove with their focus on German victimhood, a general feature of recent German memory culture. Crucially, this new focus does no longer exclude the representation and acknowledgement of German perpetrators, but instead presents a finely tuned balance between both sides, inviting easy identification with victims and resisters as representatives of a 'better' national identity. It is only a small step from this form of aesthetic and ideological normalization to the modes of wistful nostalgia and collective identification which are discussed in Jennifer M. Kapczynski's and Lutz Koepnick's contributions on the football films of Soenke Wortmann. Koepnick praises the virtues of Wortmann's celebration of the German team's 2006 campaign, while Kapczynski argues that *The Miracle of Bern* (Sönke Wortmann, 2003) creates "a fantasy of German visual unity that plays to contemporary desires for cohesive national sentiment without nationalism" (49), "soliciting not critical reflection but rather emotional investment" (58) in a past that is reconstructed not as it really was, but "how contemporary audiences might like to think' it was" (42).

Kapczynski's conclusion neatly demonstrates the politics of Wortmann's film, but hardly supports the volume's overall claim that current German cinema is characterised by a 'collapse of the conventional'. Although a number of contributions rightly identify consensus-challenging aesthetic (and to a lesser extent: political) strategies in selected films, at least as many articles demonstrate that the commercially most successful films of the past decade are in fact engaged in an effort to reconstruct an ideological consensus about Germany's past and present.

Stellar Encounters: Stardom in Popular European Cinema**Edited by Tytti Soila**

New Barnet, Herts: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2009. ISBN: 9780-86196-679-0. 66 illustrations, viii + 294 pp. £20.99 (pbk)

Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice**By David J. Skal, with Jessica Rains**

Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8131-2432-2. 54 illustrations, x+ 290 pp. \$29.95 (hbk)

A Review by Rachael Johnson, Independent Scholar

In the following review, I will be discussing a scholarly collection of essays on European stardom as well as a critical biography on an English-born, Hollywood character actor and movie star. Both the scholarly essay and the biography may offer new understanding about the meaning of stardom. Star studies have dissected the discourses of stardom while the film star biography may provide useful information about the production and promotion of the star as well as insights into 'real' lives of stars, an integral part of their stardom.

As Hollywood stars customarily dominate film scholarship on stardom, a fresh collection of essays with European perspective on the topic remains a welcome prospect. *Stellar Encounters* is based on the contributions of European scholars at the 2003 fourth Popular European Cinema Conference on 'Methods and Stars' in Sweden. Examining star personae from all corners of Europe, and encompassing films of the silent era to those of the present, the collection endorses and embraces diversity. Contributors equally endeavour to situate star personalities and discursive strategies of creating, consuming and reading stars in the specific social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the various nations as well as ground their stardom in their particular national film cultures. The collection's editor, Tytti Soila, promises that a key aim of *Stellar Encounters* is to "evaluate the different practices of stardom in Europe - and the "meanings" produced by them" (1). While offering new essays on more famous European stars, *Stellar Encounters* also shines the spotlight on "forgotten or "unknown" stars (4). This is a commendable intention in an increasingly homogenised, globalised world.

Soila acknowledges that it is the Hollywood star who has shaped our understanding of stardom. As she confesses, "the underlying enquiry is whether Hollywood alone has provided the world with original movie stars" (1). However, European stars must be understood as distinctive and European stardom should be appreciated differently. Soila asserts that a key idea of the collection is

Book Reviews

"vernacular stardom", a term employed by Vincenz Hediger and Alexandra Schneider in their study of Swiss actor Emil Steinberger (2).

In 'Functionaries with Hearts of Gold: T.V. Comedians as Vernacular Movies Stars in Switzerland', Schneider and Hediger explain that in a country lacking a film industry, stars must be drawn from radio and television, which "may negotiate regionally specific concerns on a higher plane of symbolic representation" (70). Vernacular stardom is equally central to discussions of Scandinavian stardom. Gunnar Iversen links Liv Ullmann's youthful star persona to Norwegian national identity and post-war modernity ('Charismatic Ordinarity: Ullmann Before Bergman'). Norwegian stars were perceived as radically dissimilar from Hollywood's so-called artificial, manufactured stars; "natural" stars like Ullmann personified "charismatic ordinarity" (80). In 'Avant-Garde Comedy and Populism: The Star Image of Comedian Rolv Wesenlund', Leif Ove Larsen underscores the "cultural populism" of Norwegian comedian Rolv Wesenlund (44). Vernacular stardom is furthermore appropriate to the Flemish cinema. In 'No Stars in 'The Flemish Flag: Flemish Actors and National Character'', Alexander Dhoest Larsen argues that Anglo-Saxon concepts of stardom are "hardly applicable" (21) to Flemish cinema and that there exists a "basic distrust" (24) of stardom among the Flemish. According to Sonja de Leeuw, there has also been a "democratisation" of stardom in Holland, the country that created *Big Brother* (196). In 'Stardom and Cultural Identity in the Netherlands: The Role of Television in "Democraticising" Stardom', De Leeuw asserts that Reality Television has allowed us to "play out new identities, and to present acts of self-realisation" (198).

The essays on British stars, John Mills and Eric Portman, are worthy of note. Gill Plains in 'The Hero as Coat Hanger: John Mills Post-War "Stardom"' contends that John Mills's stardom in the post-war era was founded upon his successful embodiment of the class-less 'Everyman'. In 'The Mark of Cain: Eric Portman and British Stardom', Andrew Spicer examines the career and acting style of 1940s character actor, Eric Portman. He argues that Portman, a closeted homosexual, conveyed a "troubled and uncertain" masculinity (109) on the screen while his acting style straddled the melodramatic and naturalistic. Underscoring the inauthentic and class-conscious elements of British film culture of the 1930s, Annette Kuhn's 'Film Stars in 1930s Britain: A Case Study of Modernity and Femininity' examines the careers of Robert Donat and Jessie Matthews, two British actors who spurned Hollywood and suffered ill health. Kuhn explains how the sham middle-class persona exhibited by the now-forgotten working-class Matthews was nevertheless emblematic of femininity and modernity.

One of the most interesting articles in the collection is Robert Shail's exploration of Terence Stamp's youthful, chic masculinity – 'The Historical Specificity of Stardom: Terence Stamp in the 1960s'. Underscoring the importance of

grounding stars in their social and historical contexts, Shail evaluates Stamp as a 1960s British star. He argues that Stamp offered a "nuanced, complex and contradictory" masculinity: while his working-class dynamism countered English reticence, the star's ambivalent gender identity and sexually ambiguous beauty challenged normative heterosexual masculinity (106). Indeed, Shail contends, that the young actor's uncertain image helps to highlight "the very constructiveness of masculinity" (106).

Susan Hayward offers a detailed reading of the gender and sexuality of her star subject in 'Simone Signoret: Costume Drama and the Star Text - a Case Study: *Casque d'Or*'. She provides a thoughtful and meticulous analysis of the body and clothes of Signoret's character Marie in *Casque d'or* (Jacques Becker, 1952) to illustrate her strong sexual subjectivity. One of the more fascinating essays in the collection is 'The Case of Theodore Tugai: the Film Star and the Factitious Body'. In a reading influenced by Judith Butler's performance theory, Harri Kalha highlights the subversive significance of the performances of the exotic, sexually ambiguous and gender-transgressive Finnish Valentino.

There are two additional essays which examine early Finnish cinema. In 'Celebrity Culture and The Preconditions for Finnish Film Stardom in the 1920s and 1930s', Kimmo Laine charts the evolution of 1920s and 1930s film stardom in a country where actors were thought to be "too down- to-earth to be associated with heavenly bodies" (245). While Ana Koivunen's essay, 'Soulfulness, Sichtbarkeit and The Sexual Politics of National Cinema', considers 1930s Finnish stars Sirkka Sari and Tauno Palo as "soulful" icons of modernity (143). A further essay exploring discourses surrounding stars in early European cinema is "'Dear Miss Gagner!" a Star and her Methods' by Jan Olsson. The most interesting essay historically speaking, however, is Paul Lesch's examination of the controversial career of Luxembourgish actor, Rene Deltgen. A star of 1930s and 1940s German cinema, the celebrated Deltgen was ultimately convicted as a Nazi collaborator. In 'Rene Deltgen: Luxembourg's Prodigal Son?', Lesch explains how the star's career was integral to Germanisation propaganda in Nazi-occupied Luxembourg.

A few articles on Italian stardom support each other. Maddalena Spazzini appraises the stardom of Sabrina Ferrilli, an Italian actress unknown outside Italy in "Italy's New Sophia Loren". Evaluating Ferrilli's "natural" Italian sex appeal (161) - as well as her cinematic and extra-cinematic working-class personae, Spazzini contends that Ferrilli's exemplary embodiment of "Italian-ness"- "all food, family and beauty"- accounts for her popularity in contemporary Italy (167). Elisabetta Girelli, in 'Stardom, Italian-ness and Britishness in Post-War Britain', explores the passion that post-war Britain had for Italian-ness and Italian stars. Italian-ness, she asserts, was identified with beauty and style, and Italian stars gave British films "an aura of international glamour" (172). Girelli

Book Reviews

notes, however, that this infatuation was marked by ambivalence: Italian stars were stereotyped as entirely sexual, flamboyant and even hysterical. In 'I am not Greta Garbo, I am not Marlene Dietrich. I am Isa Miranda', Guiliana Muscio evaluates the unhappy experiences of 1930s and 1940s Italian star, Isa Miranda in the dream factory. She maintains that the Italian actress was a consummate professional entirely at odds with type-casting and the Hollywood studio system. In 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: tracking Italian Stardom', Marcia Landy provides a sweeping survey of Italian stardom from the early 1900s to the present. The only essay on Greek cinema, 'Stars of the 1960s Greek Musical: Rena Vlahopoulou and Alikì Vougiouklaki', reclaims two female musical stars of 1960s. Lydia Papadimitriou contrasts Rena Valhopoulou, a singer-actress who embodied an "extraordinary ordinariness" (205), and the glamorous blonde icon, Alikì Vougiouklaki. She argues that both women exemplify "a cinema of stars" (214).

The concluding essay of the collection is a fairly depressing one. Olof Hedling wonders whether the star-deficient continental film industries can bring about an "eventual revival of pan-European stardom" (254) and examines why European films lack commercial success.

Stellar Encounters project is, of course an ideological one: it manifestly seeks to puncture Hollywood's monopoly of defining stardom. This is an honorable intention. The specificity and uniqueness of European stars should be celebrated. In their embrace of comedians and television stars and espousal of "vernacular stardom", *Stellar Encounters* effectively broadens definitions and ideals of stardom. We may ask, however, whether these reconceptualisations adulterate stardom or render it meaningless. We may also question the dominance of "charismatic ordinariness" as the ideal species of stardom in Europe. A consideration of the correspondence between the secularization of Europe and "charismatic ordinariness" of European stardom would surely be helpful in this regard. Is it only in the U.S. and India that stars are revered for their glamorous otherness? Are Europeans so "ordinary" and self-effacing?

Soila observes, "[o]ne characteristic for the examples of stardom presented here is that in many places the "cast" of a star seems to be more flexible and resilient than Hollywood's fixed stereotypes" (6). I would argue that the characterization of the Hollywood star as a fixed type is somewhat crude and reductive. In Classical Hollywood cinema, the radical charisma of the stars such as Katherine Hepburn often succeeded in subverting stereotyping. Regarding female stars particularly, we may question whether European popular cinema has been more successful in creating complex and truthful female roles. It may even be contended that it is popular European cinema which has been more persistent in maintaining sexual stereotypes, as is shown by the outdated objectification of caricatures such as Sabrina Ferrilli.

Richard Dyer has stated, "[s]tardom is an image of the way the stars live" (Richard Dyer, *Stars*, London: BFI, 1979: 39). By holding up a mirror to the lives of Hollywood stars, the movie star biography could be said to reproduce stardom. Dyer has also contended that Hollywood stardom is bound up with discourses of bourgeois individualism. As a representative of humanity in capitalist society, Dyer claims, the star possesses an authentic self – "a separable, coherent quality, located "inside" consciousness and variously termed "the self", "the soul", the subject" (9). By focusing on a star's personal odyssey and uniqueness, the movie star biography could equally be said to sustain bourgeois notions of selfhood. The movie star biographer may also, however, provide insightful, analytical readings of the star's image, performance style and reception. Interdisciplinary approaches have become more common in contemporary film biography. Feminist and queer theories have influenced thoughtful biographers of film actors. There are movie star biographies which manifest a gender-aware approach to their star subjects and consider the erotic appeal of stars in relation to the sexual codes and conventions of their age. Successful examples of this include Emily W. Leider's historically grounded, empathetic reading of Rudolph Valentino's sexuality in her biography *Dark Lover: The Life and Death of Rudolph Valentino* (Farrah, Straus and Giroux, 2003) and William J. Mann's imaginative, historically specific interpretation of Katherine Hepburn's ambivalent gender identity in *Kate: The Woman Who Was Hepburn* (Henry Holt and Company, 2007). Movie star biographies may express personal tastes and passions. David Thomson's eccentric and recurrently dream-like biography of Nicole Kidman (Nicole Kidman, Bloomsbury, 2006) confesses erotic desire for his star subject. The question of desire, (unfathomably) ordinarily obscured in film criticism, biographies and film scholarship on stars is, I believe, essential to our appreciation of stardom. Audiences have, after all, traditionally had an intense rapport with their favourite stars.

David Skal's biography of the star Claude Rains, *Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice*, seeks to shine the spotlight on one of the sharpest and most elegant stars of classical Hollywood cinema. Blessed with a devilishly distinctive voice, Rains gave performances of depth, subtlety and intelligence. Although small in stature, his ironic presence frequently eclipsed his more high-profile colleagues and mesmerised audiences. He was especially beguiling to women. He was a favourite of the war generation but is now chiefly remembered for his incarnation of the charismatic yet duplicitous Captain Renault in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1943).

Skal reminds us that *An Actor's Voice* is the first critical biography of the star. He has benefited from fresh primary material given to him by Rains's daughter Jessica, as well as first-hand accounts from the actress. Indeed, he was fortunate enough to draw on more than thirty hours of interviews which Rains had recorded for a planned biography of his own. *An Actor's Voice* is, indeed, an

Book Reviews

informative read. We learn that the man with the sublime, suave voice suffered from a speech impediment as a youth and that his polished persona masked a childhood of poverty and abuse. Rains grew up on the London stage of the early 1900s and it is fascinating to read of his apprenticeship. Skal's descriptions of the young man's relationship with such titans as Herbert Beerbohm Tree are vivid and entertaining. Rains not only enjoyed a noted acting career in the London theatre but taught the likes of John Gielgud and Charles Laughton at RADA before venturing forth to Broadway and Hollywood. In a comprehensive review of Rains's Hollywood career, Skal notes both the actor's consummate professionalism and the insecurities demonstrated by his alcoholism. Attractive and witty to women, the Englishman married six times. Although he was neither tall (he stood five foot six) nor classically handsome, he won legions of female fans.

An Actor's Voice is a thorough and meticulous review of Rains's acting career. Skal provides painstakingly detailed information on both Rains's film and theatre work. His exhaustive filmography will be of vital importance to film historians and students of classical cinema. The writer's inclusion of contemporary reviews of Rains' performances – such as those of the legendary Hollywood columnist Louella Parsons – is of equal historical importance and colour. They provide a valuable record of the actor's critical reception. Skal does not, however, provide an original, insightful assessment of Rains's performances and career. Although he plainly describes Rains's professional commitment and perfectionism, he does not examine the actor's engagement with his roles with any depth. Nor does he consider the cultural meanings informing Rains's roles and interpretations.

Essentially, Skal does not explore the star in the social, cultural and political contexts of his times. Indeed, he does not, in essence, examine Rains in the context of his own film culture. How did Rains embody the values of the day? How was he celebrated as a cultural hero? What was his impact? What did Rains's Englishness signify and how was it interpreted by American and international audiences? Skal does not, moreover, examine Rains in relation to gender construction and sexuality. How did Rains's sophisticated, urbane masculinity fit with the conventional and hegemonic masculinities of the time? Although Skal acknowledges Rains's seductiveness, he does not investigate the Englishman's erotic appeal. The mature Englishmen played fathers and lovers as well as villains and freaks. Was it his patrician persona which made Rains sexy to his fervent female fans? Was his erotic appeal constituted entirely through his voice? Although thoroughly researched and detailed, *An Actor's Voice* presents a fundamentally conventional, theory-free narrative of a star's career.

Skal's collaboration with Rains's daughter and access to the actor's own recordings allow for claims of authenticity. To hear a subject speaking openly and at length about his life is, of course, invaluable for a biographer. We may ask, however, if Skal has been partner to controlling the star's image? Is this a

heritage-building effort? Is Skal ideologically complicit in sustaining the discursive practices of stardom? It is also bizarrely apparent that *An Actor's Voice* does not mine the real Rains in spite of his access to that extraordinary instrument. The writer does not, in truth, make considered connections between the man and his roles. As a result, the actor's stardom remains fundamentally unanalysed.

Both *An Actor's Voice* and *Stellar Encounters* seek to reclaim and foreground stars shrouded in the shadows of time. Skal's biography aims to restore and preserve Rains's professional legacy. That is both its purpose and contribution. Skal has presented and organised a treasure trove of material with methodical acuity. His lucid and informative biography would be of interest to film scholars and fans of classical Hollywood cinema. As a critical biography, however, *An Actor's Life* is ultimately shallow and flawed. As I have maintained, Rains's stardom is not explored in social, cultural and historical contexts while his gender and sexual personae remain uninvestigated. Careful research and a forensic attention to detail are equally manifest in the scholarly essays in *Stellar Encounters*. The contributors offer well-delineated, well-researched portraits of European star personae. Contributors engage with a rich plurality of cultural, gender and star studies theorists from Babington to Butler. They will be, of course, of varying interest to the reader. Our interest in stars is, after all, a matter of taste. The restoration of forgotten or marginalised stars is of immense importance to European film scholarship and of deep cultural, historical and political significance. It is both enlightening and gratifying to read of provocative stars of old such as Theodore Tugai. *Stellar Encounters* is, for the most part, a valuable contribution to European star studies.

Alternative Film Culture in Inter-War Britain

By Jamie Sexton

Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-85989-8102. 11 b/w illustrations. 240 pp. £45.00 (hbk)

The Lost World of Cliff Twemlow: The King of Manchester Exploitation Movies

By C. P. Lee and Andy Willis

Manchester: Hotun Press, 2009. ISBN: 9-760955-625718. 35 b/w illustrations. 250 pp. £9.99 (pbk)

The British 'B' Film

By Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84457-319-6, ISBN10: 1-84457-319-2. 15 b/w illustrations. 356 pp. \$30.00 (pbk), \$85.00 (hbk)

A Review by Laurence Raw, Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey

All three of these books explore non-mainstream areas of British film history, demonstrating the intimate connection between social and political issues and the ways in which films were conceived and executed.

This is one of the main themes of Jamie Sexton's *Alternative Film Culture in Post-War Britain*, which concentrates on avant-garde and experimental filmmaking between the two world wars. Documentary filmmakers such as John Grierson produced works such as *Drifters* (1929), which concentrated on the Scottish herring industry, trying to create a warts-and-all portrait of working class lives. However Grierson was also influenced by modernist filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Robert Flaherty, whose film of an Inuit hunter *Nanook of the North* (1922) constructed "aestheticized images out of natural material". (81) Grierson's combination of abstraction, naturalism and objectivity stresses the organic links between past and present in the fishermen's lives; in Sexton's view this is a typical modernist position that "highlights the evolutionary theme, itself a key component of 'progress'" (82).

Other filmmakers took a more abstract approach to the cinematic representation of inter-war politics. The New Zealand-born Len Lye combined 'abstract' and 'concrete' modes through live-action and non-naturalistic means. His experiments were not always welcomed by critics, but Grierson supported him in the belief that Lye, like other alternative filmmakers, upheld "the abstractions of

Cubism" that captured "the dynamism and abstract energies of an increasingly industrialized world" (146).

Yet despite their interest in working-class culture, most alternative filmmakers originated from privileged backgrounds. They disliked what they perceived as the conformity of mainstream British cinema (Adrian Brunel's burlesques, made in 1924 and 1925, were particularly savage in their satire), but they themselves often manifested patronizing views of race and class issues. *Borderline* (1930), directed by Kenneth Macpherson, starred the husband-and-wife team of Paul and Eslanda Robeson. The film deprives the central female protagonist Adah (Eslanda) of her identity: "Because she is neither white or black, she exists in a kind of flicker world, vacillating between both categories but never entering either" (157). Paul Robeson himself is fetishized as "an object of male desire (...) a figure of noble stability within the flux of 'white' modernity" (160). Established racial categories still prevailed, despite the filmmakers' attempts to impose a 'radical' structure on the material.

Despite their undoubted sincerity, most alternative films of this period failed to make much impact at the time of their first release. Many supporters of the movement were established filmmakers themselves (Hitchcock, Anthony Asquith, Victor Saville), but they could not create the kind of immediate validity accorded to many French avant-garde films (166). Nonetheless, the experimental film movement helped to establish a film culture in Britain. *Alternative Film Culture* focuses on aspects of British film history which hitherto have received scant critical attention. Sometimes Sexton's style can be quite prolix, revealing the book's origins in his doctoral thesis, but he tells an entertaining tale of interest to specialists and non-specialists alike.

C. P. Lee's and Andy Willis in *The Lost World of Cliff Twemlow* reveal an obvious enjoyment with their material, which makes their book a fascinating read, even for those with little or no knowledge of the subject. Twemlow (1937-93) was a nightclub bouncer who wrote and starred in his own adventure films, while at the same time writing books – both fiction and nonfiction – and composing nearly two thousand musical pieces for radio and television. He worked under numerous pseudonyms, including John Agar (although much more talented than the granite-faced Hollywood star of the same name). Sometimes Twemlow's diverse talents worked against him; his friend Charles Wyatt commented that "Cliff didn't have the temperament to focus on one thing at a time. He had (...) a grasshopper mind" (217). Occasionally Twemlow's lack of financial resources forced him to take on jobs that should have been delegated to others. However Wyatt suggests that Twemlow "trusted no-one enough to do their jobs properly, that is, to his standards, and so ended up doing them all himself" (268).

Twemlow was not just an enthusiastic amateur; he managed to raise money for all of his films, and frequently employed well-known directors and actors.

Book Reviews

Tuxedo Warrior (1982), filmed in Zimbabwe, was directed by Andrew Sinclair, whose previous credits included *Under Milk Wood* (1972), as well as numerous episodes of *Armchair Theatre* for ITV. *The Ibiza Connection* (1984) co-starred Fiona Fullerton, once of the BBC hospital soap *Angels*. *Firestar: First Impact* (1991) boasted the twin talents of Oliver Tobias and Charles Gray, best known for Blofeld in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971). Most actors enjoyed working for Twemlow, even if they didn't take the experience very seriously: Twemlow was evidently under the impression that he had engaged Oliver Reed, rather than Oliver Tobias, for *Firestar: First Impact* (165). Tobias walked through the film, which was plagued by financial troubles: once shooting had wrapped, the tapes were held by the online editing facilities in lieu of non-payment of production fees (170).

The overriding impression emerging from *The World of Cliff Twemlow* is of someone who refused to let any difficulty – whether financial or otherwise – stand in his way. Most of his films were destined for the exploitation market, containing copious amounts of sex and violence; the plots were usually derivative with distinct echoes of popular hits of the time such as *Rambo*. Nonetheless Twemlow managed to produce memorable works such as *GBH* (1983) and *GBH2* (1991) – bearing no relation to the Alan Bleasdale television series of the same name. Set in and around Manchester clubland, the first film focused on the exploits of the legendary tough guy Steve Donovan (played by Twemlow himself). The sequel also took place in Manchester, with extra location sequences in Malta thrown in for good measure. The original film was aimed at the straight-to-video market; the sequel was destined for television, but could not find a distributor. The director David Kent-Watson re-cut the film to incorporate sequences from the first *GBH*, and re-released it as a 'Director's Cut' in 2006. However it has still not received a television airing, due in no small part to copyright issues, the bane of the exploitation filmmaker (191).

The book tells the story of the entire Twemlow oeuvre – the origins of each film, the filming process and subsequent distribution problems – as well as giving comprehensive plot-summaries. Lavishly illustrated with black-and-white stills as well as family photos, this book is a labour of love.

Chibnall and McFarlane's *The British 'B' Film* returns us to more familiar territory – a genre which enjoyed its heyday in the 1940s and mid-1950s, but which became extinct a decade later with the rapid expansion in television ownership and viewing. Most of the stories providing staple 'B' Movie fare – crime dramas in particular – were now retold in drama series. The 'B' Movie as a film was generally despised by critics, whose reactions were reminiscent of those displayed by Adrian Brunel in his 1920s burlesques of the British film industry. What Chibnall and McFarlane manage to accomplish, with some considerable success, is to made readers understand how the 'B' Movie embodied changing social and cultural attitudes during the 1950s. They had a lot to say about

working conditions, and what employment opportunities were available (or not available, especially for young working-class men). However they were not quite as forthcoming about changing sexual attitudes: the authors quote Paul Ferris' observation that "Marriage was the thing [in 1950s films], as always. Engaged couples have sex before it, but 'living together' was rare. It meant loose morals, an affront to decency" (259). 'B' Movies were more explicit on racial issues; a film such as *The Wind of Change* (Vernon Sewell, 1960) had a white racist telling an African-Caribbean man to "get [his] filthy black face out of here" (264).

'B' Movies were a training-ground for tyro performers: Michael Caine began his illustrious career playing bit-parts in films like *Solo for Sparrow* (Gordon Flemyng, 1962), an episode in the Edgar Wallace mystery series. Yet Chibnall and McFarlane are more interested in celebrating the work of those who spent the majority of their lives in the genre. We learn a lot about directors such as Montgomery Tully (1904-88), Ernest Morris (1913-87), and Francis Seale (1909-2002); writers such as Mark Grantham (1931) and Norman Hudis (1922) – who also wrote the early *Carry On* films (1958-62); and actors like John Bentley (1916-), Dermot Walsh (1924-2002), Rona Anderson (1926-) and Jane Hylton (1927-79). For the most part their work has been forgotten, save for occasional credits.

'B' Movies were not just about creative personnel: studios such as Merton Park, Walton, Beaconsfield and Brighton depended for their existence on producing a steady stream of films on tight budgets in two or three weeks at most. *The British 'B' Movie* celebrates those producers who kept this type of production afloat, including Jack Greenwood (of Merton Park), E. J. Fancey (who produced 'nudie' films as well as regulation thrillers) and the legendary Danziger Brothers, who transformed cost-cutting into a fine art.

For someone who spent much time watching 'B' Movies on late-night television while supposedly completing his doctoral thesis, *The British 'B' Movie* is an absolute delight, making me understand that I didn't waste my time after all. More importantly, Chibnall and McFarlane have achieved the difficult task of producing a book appealing to general readers, while at the same time contributing to the rapidly expanding corpus of critical material on the 'B' Movie genre. I have little doubt that the book will soon attain classic status.

Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider**By Brian Neve**

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84511-560-9, 256 pp.
\$42.00 (hbk)

Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Film, Pleasure and Digital Culture, Volume 1**Edited by Scott Balcerzak and Jason Sperb**

London: Wallflower Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-905674-84-8, 288 pp. \$27.50
(hbk)

A Review by Mildred Lewis, Chapman University, USA

This post-postmodern moment challenges and in some ways undermines contemporary media studies. As Alan Kirby argued provocatively albeit pessimistically in 'The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond' (*Philosophy Now*, no. 58, 2006), "[t]he sense of superannuation, of the impotence and the irrelevance of so much Theory among academics, also bears testimony to the passing of postmodernism. The people who produce the cultural material which academics and non-academics read, watch and listen to, have simply given up on postmodernism". After years of deconstruction framed by the culture wars, media studies appears to be in more temperate phase. The uncertainties of the moment have prompted a desire to demystify, reassess and recover.

This desire powerfully informs Brian Neve's new work on Elia Kazan. Neve argues that Kazan's work is seminal, well known but, in many ways, poorly understood. Kazan's accomplishments have been long overshadowed by his decision to identify Community Party members in the entertainment industry to the House Un-American Activities Committee. For a long time Kazan essentially defined his own legacy in works like *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films* (Wallflower Press, 1999). His contribution has come to be synonymous with the Method. His efforts parallel those of other scholars. In *Kazan on Directing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Robert Cornfield compiles Kazan's notes, diaries and correspondence to explicate the director's technique, for example.

Neve's stated goal is to analyze "the film work of Elia Kazan (from 1945 to 1976) in industrial, cultural and political contexts" (1). This furthers the approach that he began in *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (Routledge, 1992). His analysis has important implications for reconsidering Kazan's oeuvre and understanding how many directors transitioned from Classical Hollywood to the New American Cinema. Beyond his stated goals, Neve also seeks to restore Kazan's reputation. He is an ideal choice for this project. The two men were in

direct contact in the 1980s. Their exchanges clearly made an impact on the author. Neve respects and admires Kazan as an artist and as a man.

Attempting to restore a reputation as polarized as that of Kazan's invokes an ongoing debate that became more complex during the postmodern period. What is the role of identity in making and evaluating art? Contemporary media scholars are accustomed to considering race, gender, sexual identity and class. Understanding politics and loyalties has proven more difficult. Neve tries to walk a very fine line. His basic point is well taken. We should come to terms with Kazan's past so that we can learn from and build upon his legacy. He advocates a humanistic approach. Unfortunately, this reasoning sometimes brings Neve dangerously close to sounding like an apologist.

The biography does not and perhaps cannot resolve the central dilemma that Kazan's life presents. How do we respond to great work by flawed artists? Neve excuses Kazan in several ways. He focuses on the director's ambivalence about the process and apparently sudden decision to testify. Neve contends that Kazan's personal and professional identity was defined by his "double" immigrant status, reflecting his outsider perception in terms of "politics and ethnicity" (4). Therefore, he argues, Kazan was uniquely vulnerable to government pressure. What would be welcome is a more precise, exacting analysis of that identity and how it evolved over time. While some immigrants were ill at ease with dissent, others during this period, including Kazan at one point, embraced radical politics. Least persuasively, Neve cites the influence of Kazan's 'Yankee' wife Molly. *Cherchez la femme*. The text too often settles for describing Kazan's motivations with generalizations like "burning desire" (18) that cannot explain Kazan's complex mixture of compassion, ruthlessness, intelligence and talent.

These rationalizations are contradicted by some of Neve's own evidence. He states that "[b]efore his second testimony Kazan also consulted with two intellectual figures in the contemporary debate on Communism and anti-Communism Sidney Hook and Bertram D. Wolfe" (66). More powerfully Neve agrees with scholar Thomas Pauly who argues in *An American Odyssey: Elia Kazan and American Culture* (Temple University Press, 1985) that Kazan was a man "who, after intense soul-searching, came to believe that a decisive stand was necessary and that reluctance to speak out on Communism increased its current threat" (160). Neve doesn't help his case by glossing over Kazan's human frailties like his ruthlessness and infidelities. Curiously he neglects to mention that Kazan never apologized for or recanted his decision. Ironically, Neve has identified perhaps the most powerful argument for reassessing Kazan's moral stature: his consistent focus on social justice and humanistic values in his work.

Book Reviews

This book is exhaustively researched. It validates Robert Stam's insistence on the value of archival materials (Robert Stam and Randal Johnson *Brazilian Cinema*, Columbia University Press, 399). When Neve "[e]xamines the director's role as part of the changing *process* of filmmaking", (399) he doesn't rely on argument. His conclusions are supported by extensive primary source materials. This effort yields many insights and opens directions for future research. It may prove exceptionally useful for understanding how directing is impacted by new business models of development, production, promotion and distribution. A terrific example of this is the book's investigation of Kazan's efforts to sustain his creative output while maintaining control over his work. It is startling to realize that Kazan's independence has not been fully recognized. The book's final chapter on *The Last Tycoon* (1976) states: "[w]ith the exception of his 'home movie', *The Visitors*, Elia Kazan had not directed a film for a producer for 20 years, since making *On the Waterfront* (1954) with Sam Spiegel" (182).

The film analyses that support Neve's argument are unusually comprehensive. They include production histories and reference often neglected elements like sound and editing. They always consider the role of Kazan's artistic and business collaborations. Consider the book's analysis of a scene from *On the Waterfront*:

This is something of a love scene, as both men reveal their emotions, Charley by drawing the gun and then collapsing back when it is brushed aside, and Terry by his sighing reaction, his bathetic expression of the word 'Wow'. The directorial and editing choices between master shot, two shots favouring each actor, and singles (which Steiger played to 'dialogue coach' and Kazan crew regular Guy Thomajan after Brando left to attend a session with his analyst) may be relatively conventional, but Kazan wanted the close-ups to capture the thought processes and feelings, and few other directors would have encouraged and expected such emotional expressivity in such a scene (87)

Most scholars and critics regard Kazan as an actor's director. Neve waits until the final chapter to provide an in-depth analysis of performance, where he quotes actors who describe Kazan's specific techniques. This alone makes the volume useful to practitioners and scholars. The author then creates a framework to analyze performance through *mise-en-scène* and themes. Typically performance analysis has focused more on the role of lighting, framing, and montage in shaping performance. The chapter makes several other claims that command further exploration. Consider the author's intriguing observation that:

Kazan's women characters are smart and strong, and often more dynamic presences within the narrative, but as Dunnock suggest, their smartness and assertiveness generally serve their men, and sometimes redeem them (194)

Hopefully scholars will explore Kazan's collaborations with female actors like Dorothy McGuire, Vivien Leigh and Julie Harris. A rigorous examination of this

could influence a contemporary Hollywood that seems to have a dearth of strong female performances.

This book is a significant contribution to the study of Kazan and the largely independent New York School of filmmaking. Understanding Kazan's methods is especially important in an era when even the best actors can be overwhelmed by CGI and green screen. Scholars can benefit from studying the continuities and discontinuities of Kazan's entire oeuvre and his impact on the New York school of filmmaking. Hopefully, Neve will inspire others to continue this exploration.

The Benjamin-esque title marks the first volume of *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Film, Pleasure and Digital Culture*, which is an especially ambitious collection of essays. This ambition is nicely balanced by the collection's underlying philosophy of validating the "presence of pleasure" (7). *Cinephilia* poses a simple question: "In short, how is cinephilia still present, and what does it present to us?" (ix).

The enthusiasm and nostalgia of cinephilia is in marked contrast to the tone of most scholarship in critical studies. In 'Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia? And Other Videosyncratic Pleasures' from *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, Amsterdam University Press, 2005), de Valck and Hagener describe the current state of the discourse:

Cinephiles worldwide continue to be captured and enraptured by the magic of moving images. They cherish personal moments of discovery and joy, develop affectionate rituals, and celebrate their loves in specialized communities. On the other hand, the term covers practices and discourses in which the term cinephilia is appropriated for dogmatic agendas (...) *les politiques des auteurs* (11)

Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction continues the post-postmodern examination of cinephilia. It questions the impact of digital technologies on cinephilia as a theoretical and viewing practice. Its contributors include bloggers, filmmakers, critics and scholars. Several of the contributors met in Oklahoma State University's Screen Studies program which is committed to experimental and cultural theory. Those influences are very clear throughout this volume. The preface was written by Christian Keathley whose *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Indiana University Press, 2005) sought to re-establish cinephilia as a rigorous discourse within film studies. More experienced scholars including Robert Burgoyne and Adrian Martin contribute essays as well.

After a brief introductory section labelled 'Contexts', the essays are divided into three sections: 'Affects', 'Ontologies', and 'Bodies'. 'Contexts' contains an excellent literature review of scholarship about digital imagery, DVDs, and blogging. It also provides a much-needed contemporary review of cinephilia.

Book Reviews

Instead of focusing on the contributions of the *Cahiers du cinéma* and Christian Metz, Sperb and Balcerzak highlight the work of contemporary American critics and scholars beginning with Andrew Sarris.

The highlight of 'Contexts' is Adrian Martin's essay, 'Beyond the Fragments of Cinephilia: Towards a Synthetic Analysis'. He revisits his twenty-year-old call for a "higher level of discussion and theorization" (30) regarding cinephilia. He then argues that cinephilia should be part of cinema aesthetics. This allows him to address two broader issues. He wants to reconcile the major traditions of film analysis: the classical and the postmodern. He also believes that cinephilia, properly deployed, has a role to play in the culture wars. He emphatically challenges the current neo-cinephilia:

However, cinephilia severed from rigorous aesthetic investigation – scarcely distinguishable from the fandom celebrated by a certain strain of cultural studies – seems to me a bloodless pursuit, easily co-opted by mainstream capitalist interests (48)

The 'Affects' section has two essays: Jenna Ng's 'A Point of Light: Epiphanic Cinephilia in Mamoru Oshii's *Avalon* (2001)' and Jason Sperb's 'Sensing an Intellectual Nemesis'. It also contains an intriguing blog post, *Zach Campbell's 'Floating Hats: A Mere Diversion?'*. Ng argues narrowly. Regrettably her argument is sometimes obscured and undermined by nuance. Nevertheless, her work provides a strong foundation for "amplify[ing] cinephilia to contain CGI" (84). Sperb takes a broader look at visual effects. He argues "[t]hat there is generous room within, and in excess of a visual effects cinema, for addressing the lingering question of cinephilia". (92) His drive towards "this utopia, a cinema of possibilities" (111) is admirable. Ultimately, however, his insights about CGI are less compelling than his broader discussion of cinephilia.

In 'Ontologies', Tobe Crockett's 'The 'Camera as Camera': How CGI Changes the World as We Know It' takes a philosophical approach to the camera and its meaning in the digital era. His essay is one of the most reflective of the collection. His suggestion that "we are developing a new set of philosophical and aesthetic motivations which value the contributions, agency and authorship of every point in space" (135) integrates the tantalizing possibilities of CGI, artificial intelligence (A.I.) with existing theories of total cinema.

'Bodies' is the final section of the collection. In 'Cinephilia as Topophilia in *The Matrix* (1999)', Kevin Fisher effectively argues that *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski, Lana Wachowski) is the exemplar for "cinephilic analysis in the age of digital special effects" (173). His work suggests several ways to explore the relationship between the cinesthetic subject and cinephiliac moment. Unlike several other contributors, Fisher is equally comfortable with film technology and scholarship. He builds his argument on semiotics, apparatus, literary and psychoanalytic

theory. The real revelations in this section are Scott Balcerzak's outstanding article 'Andy Serkis as Actor, Body and Gorilla: Motion Capture and the Presence of Performance' and Lisa Purse's observations in 'Gestures and Postures of Mastery: CGI and Contemporary Action Cinema's Expressive Tendencies'. These two essays are exceptional. They are elegantly written and persuasively argued. Balcerzak forces us to deal with the materiality of motion capture. He successfully makes the case that "the performing body can be divorced from its physical presence, yet leave behind its aura' (211). His work suggests a new scholarly approach to acting as well as to motion capture. Purse identifies the possibilities and risks of the action body. Because she deals with expression in terms of *mise-en-scène* and narrative, she is able to further Sobchak's important arguments from *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1991). Her work has repercussions for the study of filmic spectacle as well as digital cinephilia.

Given the often exceptional work in this text, the projected second volume should be intriguing. Hopefully, it will make more measured distinctions between various digital technologies. The term digital, itself, must be acknowledged as complex and unstable. Equating digital platforms with CGI is inherently problematic. Digital platforms involve distribution and the viewing experience. Imagery goes to the heart of *mise-en-scène*. Distinguished critics Jonathan Rosenbaum and Susan Sontag and scholars Thomas Elsaesser, Christian Keathley, Christian Metz, Vivian Sobchack, Paul Willemen, and Peter Wollen are referenced throughout the text. It would be interesting to see what scholars outside of the semiotics tradition would add.

This collection is an important addition to cinephilia scholarship and, beyond that, to the study of digital technologies. Like all essay collections, its contributions are uneven. Nonetheless, its diversity of approach and thought is welcome and reflects the confusion, sophistication and exhilaration of this moment. The volume's noble attempt to recover and situate individual pleasure against the onslaught of digital technologies ably updates the Bazinian tradition.

Together these books reflect the state of film studies in the post-postmodern moment, despite the fact that the authors are separated by a generation. Neither text seeks to be definitive. Rather, their impulses are, as expected, towards the heuristic. The books' arguments are purposefully crafted to be accessible to scholars, practitioners and audiences. Their relative simplicity and clarity make them a pleasure to read. More importantly, both volumes embrace the power of phenomenological, constructivist arguments that materialize their subjects. This is in marked contrast to much of film studies which is still greatly influenced by semiotics, poststructuralism and deconstruction. *Elia Kazan* uses a multidisciplinary approach that includes traditional film history, performance studies and sociology. Neve largely achieves his goal of establishing Kazan as an

Book Reviews

auteur defined by his social concerns. The very nature of cinephilia and the challenge that digital media presents to cinema force the authors in *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction* to take an ecumenical approach toward theory.

In conclusion, *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction* is a crucial addition to the newly revitalized discourse of cinephilia. It also provides important insights for digital and new media scholars. Its attention to blogging as a serious object of academic discourse is particular welcome. *Elia Kazan: The Cinema of an American Outsider* is an essential volume for students of Elia Kazan and his films. As the first serious and sustained analysis of his techniques and defining characteristics as an auteur, it compliments the emerging reappraisal of Kazan's work and legacy.

First Person Jewish**By Alisa S. Lebow**

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8166-4355-4.
xxxiii + 205 pp. \$22.50 (pbk)

Neo-Noir**Edited by Mark Gould, Kathrina Glitre and Greg Tuck**

London: Wallflower Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-906660-17-8. x+270 pp. £16.99
(pbk)

A Review by Marat Grinberg, Reed College, Portland, Oregon, USA

Both books under review here offer stimulating samples of film analysis. Both also are less effective in their methodologies, concepts and rhetoric. Alisa Lebow's study and the essays in the *Neo-Noir* collection have an uneasy relationship with their subject matter – Jewishness as a cultural, historical, artistic and hermeneutic construct in Lebow's case and the phenomenon of film noir, its genre specifications and history, in the case of the collection. Rather than providing a vivid and exact definition of what constitutes neo-noir and offering a critical lens through which Jewishness on screen can be productively evaluated, the two books exhibit a certain sense of scholarly timidity, which adds a flair of inconclusiveness and unpersuasiveness to their assumptions and conclusions. Despite this shortcoming, Lebow's study is clearly a very provocative contribution to the field of Jewish cultural and cinematic studies, while *Neo-Noir* should interest anybody seriously invested in the discussions of film noir and its afterlife.

Alisa Lebow is a filmmaker and a scholar. Her book is indebted to these two endeavors, which she takes a step further, dedicating a portion of her study to an analysis of her own film. *First Person Jewish* is an ambitious, if slim, volume, whose preoccupation is "the construction of contemporary Jewish subjectivity in recent first person documentary film" (87). Two main theoretical assumptions underlie Lebow's interest and approach. Firstly, she investigates how any autobiographical "I", be it in film, literature, or life for that matter, comes into being through a network of communications with others; hence the importance of identity politics in her work. Secondly, she is preoccupied with the genre of documentary film autobiography as most suited to exploring in problematic and challenging ways such identity configurations (xi-xx). Consequently, Lebow labels the films of her book "autoethnography", explaining that "[t]hese films are examples of the autoethnographic impulse, wherein cultural concerns are explored or displayed through the representation of the self" (xv). Because of

Book Reviews

the proliferation of Jewish film autobiographies in the past thirty decades or so, Lebow employs them as markers of certain larger, non-specifically Jewish paradigms. While this is a plausible way of thinking, her rhetoric reveals its limitations. Starting with the introduction and throughout the book, she displays uneasiness with her subject, almost apologizing in a number of places for concentrating so heavily on Jewishness; Jewishness thus must be a means to an end. Despite the fact that this uneasiness is self-conscious and deliberate, it considerably weakens her argument. Why cannot an analysis of Jewish culture in whatever form it takes be valuable in itself? It certainly can and should. It should also lead to whatever general conclusions the reader wants to draw. Lebow's persistent self-doubt hinders the process.

This apprehension permeates her analysis along with a theoretical and conceptual understanding of Jewishness. On the one hand, she perceptively comments toward the book's conclusion:

[T]radition [is not] monolithic; it would be more appropriate to speak of traditions. At this point in Jewish history, there are many traditions from which to draw on, religious orthodoxy being only one. The films of this study show that Jewish tradition can be conceptualized historically, politically, aesthetically, denominationally, and even ambivalently (158).

It's hard not to agree with this statement. The problem, and a very significant one, is that Lebow's both choice of films and her discussions of them often (and even in the majority of cases) do not support it. Only some forty pages earlier, she admits, "I find myself struggling to identify what (if anything) makes many of these films queer or Jewish" (117). Leaving aside for now the relationship between queerness and Jewishness in the book, I would see this sentence as symptomatic of Lebow's entire project. Ambivalence undoubtedly always constitutes a key feature of any serious and complex artistic representation of identity, but it does so in the context of generating aesthetic, political, and historical discourses, to paraphrase Lebow herself. In the book, ambivalence stands as a solitary "trope" (141). When Lebow attempts to explain, or locate the films' Jewish manifestations (especially aesthetic and historical), she emerges as an imaginative, but unpersuasive reader.

The book consists of four chapters: the first one discusses Chantal Akerman's *D'Est* (1993); the second offers a survey-like analysis of the topic of family in Jewish autobiographical films, concentrating on the evolution of the character of the father, the mother and the *bobe* (the grandmother); the third section provides a self-critique of Lebow's film *Treyf* (1998), while the last one turns to the problem of "queer Jewish subjectivity" in documentary film at large (1-148). The conclusion, arguably the most interesting part of the whole study, analyzes Barbara Myerhoff's *In Her Own Time* (1985). The link between the chapters is both loose and well established. The book's strongest parts, the discussion of

Akerman and Myerhoff, are not fully integrated into its overall conceptual framework. The study would certainly have benefited from making these two films the centerpiece of *First Person Jewish*. This review pays most attention to Lebow's exploration of Akerman and Myerhoff.

To watch *D'Est* is a fascinating, if trying experience. It captures (if that is the right term) the director's trip to Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, resulting in "a chronotope caught indefinitely between past and present" (35). Lebow sees a complete lack of any Jewish referentiality in the film as an overt indication of its preoccupation with Jewishness, namely the eradication of Jewish life in the Holocaust. She rightly points out that "for Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern European descent (...) "the old country" becomes a sign without referent, an imaginary construct with no actual, geographical correlate" (1). Indeed, this is what the Russian and the Polish phantasmagoric urban and rural spaces (though shot in those actual places) look like through Akerman's camera: signs without referent. Lebow insightfully links Akerman's journey to the East with Walter Benjamin's trip to Moscow in 1926. She calls *D'Est* a "Benjamin-style autobiography" because it "is concerned with "space, moments, and discontinuities," not "what Benjamin describes as traditional autobiographical concerns... [with] time... sequence, and what makes up the continuous flow of life" (3). Akerman, Lebow continues, "seeks the resonance of the past indirectly". Thus, she inadvertently, but provocatively, writes Akerman into the story of East European Jewish modernist autobiography.

Lebow situates Akerman's film in the context of the director's installation, first presented at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The installation, consisting of snapshots and images also included in the film, begins with Akerman's reading of the Second Commandment from Exodus – the prohibition against making graven images. Akerman consciously polemicizes with this biblical prescription, positioning herself as an artistic rebel/pariah. Lebow centers her entire reading of the film on this biblical allusion. She argues that Akerman, unaware of the history of interpreting the commandment, incorrectly views it as the prohibition against art as such and yet aesthetically endorses through her film the very biblical thinking. Akerman speaks of her "primal scene", namely the trauma embedded in her memory: her parents' Holocaust experience. She never directly approaches it, holding it as a sacred object, in other words, as Jews hold the deity. Furthermore, Akerman's selective approach to history resembles the Jews' cycles of remembrance, which commemorate only those moments in time that witnessed God's intervention, such as the exodus from Egypt. These two components are responsible for making Akerman's film profoundly Jewish, according to Lebow. This is a powerful argument indeed, but in my estimation, largely unpersuasive. It seems that the question of intentionality, often and rightfully so shunned by critics, must be addressed here. There's not a single, even slight, mention of anything Jewish in *D'Est*. When discussing it herself,

Book Reviews

Akerman in fact speaks about the Gulag, rather than the Holocaust. Substituting God with the Holocaust trauma must be intentional. It is one thing to propose, as Lebow conventionally does, that Akerman's "work is infused with a particular type of Jewishness, one that retains a strong cultural affinity though it negotiates Jewish terms at a remove" (4) – Akerman foreshadows this idea when she speaks of herself, again very conventionally, as an eternal Jewish nomad – but it is completely different to ascribe to Akerman an innovative exegetical thinking. Again, Lebow's reading is fascinating, but it seems to falter under a critical scrutiny.

The rest of the book does not live up to the first chapter's analytical brevity. The discussion of the father, mother and grandmother figures in 'Jewish' documentaries is useful, but inconclusive. Strikingly the weakest part of the book seems to be the critique of Lebow's own *Treyf*. Though it does touch on important aspects of American Jewish identity, culture and religion, the chapter's unfortunate, yet deliberate, self-indulgent tone sharply contrasts with the rest of the study's critical mode. It is also quite dated, considering Lebow's dissatisfaction with the lack of political impact the film produced on American Jews' view of Israel. The strong anti-Zionist sentiments *Treyf* puts forth have become a commonplace of American Jewish appraisals of Israeli policies.

In chapter four, Lebow proposes a very conventional relationship between Jewishness and queerness, predicated on the historical pariah status of both groups. In her own view, there is nothing even remotely Jewish in most of the films surveyed in this section. When found, the Jewish components echo self-hating practices of the fin-de-siècle period (117), such as Jew as the "conscious pariah" trope (143). Again Lebow's delineation of such practices, while more persuasive, is not remotely as provocative as her questionable but inspiring discovery of the Judaic mind in Akerman.

Lebow is again at her best in the conclusion. Her description of Myerhoff's *teshuvah* – the director's attempt to return to traditional Judaism during her battle with cancer recorded in *Her Own Time* – is vivid and attentive to the film's details. Lebow's estimation of it, however, is harsh. She writes, "[Myerhoff's] return is painful, not only for her but for those of us in the audience who have chosen not to make such a return" (156-7). Indeed, the film provides "a stark demonstration of the rupture between traditional and modern secular Judaism that (...) seems indeed too great to repair" (157). Thus, Lebow insists on the value of making secular art, which "as untraditional as it may be (...) exists (...) implicitly *in relation* to tradition, even if at times from a considerable remove" (157-8). The entire Jewish secular project in modernity can be seen as operating under this principle of painstaking negotiations of tradition. Yet Lebow's final theory departs from her practice throughout – she mainly turns her critical eye to films not at "a considerable remove" (158) from tradition, but simply unaware of it.

A collection of essays, *Neo-Noir*, is not concerned with manifestations of Jewishness on screen and yet it is worth thinking of the relationship between Jewish culture in the US and pre-war Europe and film noir. As was recently persuasively argued by Vincent Brook (*Driven to Darkness: Jewish Émigré Directors and the Rise of Film Noir* Rutgers University Press, 2009), there does exist a profound relationship between the two, which demands a serious scrutiny. The Jewish aspect of film noir history seems to be particularly important to the period of its revival, considering the prominence of Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973) with its rewriting of the character of Phillip Marlowe, originally legendary portrayed by Bogart, as a Jewish loner due to Altman's casting of Elliot Gould in the role. According to J. Hoberman, in the 1970s, "Gould was part of the ethno-vanguard – Hollywood's Jew Wave" (J. Hoberman, 'The Goulden Age', accessed at <http://www.villagevoice.com/2007-04-10/film/the-goulden-age/1/>). Thus, the existential recluse of noir became a 'schlemiel', the paradigmatic Jewish character that, in scholar Ruth Wisse's classic definition, "is vulnerable and inept. The schlemiel is neither saintly nor pure, but only weak. The sleight of hand of his comedy is intended to persuade us that this weakness is strength" (Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*, The University of Chicago Press, 1971, x). It is no wonder that Altman's Marlowe not only survives his ordeals, but also kills the ex-friend who's wronged him. It is unfortunate that none of this context is reflected upon in the *Neo-Noir* collection. Keeping in mind Lebow's study, practically none of the *Neo-Noir* essays exhibit the same intellectual brevity and rigor, but do inadvertently echo some of her weaknesses.

The major problem lies not in the essays per se, but the organizing framework for the volume, reflected in the editors' introduction. If Lebow was overtly apologetic about her choice of Jewishness as a subject, these authors are doubtful about the validity of the very terms noir and neo-noir. Again, as in Lebow's case, the complexities of defining a genre, or an identity, especially such contentious and multifarious ones as Jewishness and noir, should preclude neither critical clarity, nor confidence. Ultimately, the editors move closer to attaining them: the introduction does contain a valuable overview of noir history (3-5), but still a very vague understanding of what constitutes neo-noir. The editors rightly propose that "self-reflexivity" and "self-knowledge" (7, 8) mark it: neo-noir "knows how to be noir" (8), but this seems to be a rather loose framework for what is presented as a separate and even unique category, which ties it, as the introduction acknowledges, to very broad modernist and post-modernist poetics. A more rigid historical and cultural overview needs to be provided, which would go a long way toward explaining why specifically in the 1970s did the revisiting of noir occur. Some of the essays touch on it, but somewhat fragmentarily (28-60).

Book Reviews

The entries fall into two categories: formalist, though still culturally oriented (color and music in neo-noir, for instance), and theoretical, primarily concerned with feminist perspectives. All essays are intelligent and touch on important questions, but none break new ground. Some are bogged down in plot retellings and some in theoretical jargon. The most successful are Helen Hanson's attentive investigation of music in neo-noir in 'Paranoia and Nostalgia: Sonic Motifs and Songs in Neo-Noir' (44-60) and Carl Freedman's 'The End of Work: From *Double Indemnity* to *Body Heat*' – an analysis of the turn from *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), where the individual is merely a cog in the economy machine, to *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), where nothing exists outside the individual. The least successful are those that discuss the non-American neo-noir. While the editors are to be commended for their desire to make the volume international in its scope, these essays add very little to the volume's depth and breadth. Greg Tuck's 'Laughter in the Dark: Irony, Black Comedy and Noir in the Films of David Lynch, the Coen Brothers and Quentin Tarantino' is illuminating in its analysis of where the grotesque ends and the moral begins in these directors, but, as true of the rest of the volume, stops short of truly answering the question. Indeed, I would argue that all three (or rather four) are essentially moralists; think of the ending of *Fargo* (Joel Coen, Ethan Coen, 1996) and Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999), which explains much more about Lynch's artistry overall than is usually assumed, and Tarantino's biblical allusions, which are in fact meaningful, rather than, as one can surmise from Tuck, merely performative. But to consider these issues afresh, one needs to either move beyond the confines of neo-noir, or redefine them, which is precisely where the collection falls short.

As Deborah Thomas argues in the volume's concluding essay on Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), time and memory comprise its main concerns (244). The same is true of the films of Lebow's study. What both Lebow and Thomas emphasize is that cinema insists "on its own self-conscious rhetorical strategies" (244), marking a separation between its modes and tropes and the world out there. It was precisely film noir, which, while bogged down in the ills of society, economy, and history as a whole, created its own autonomous vision of the city and human psyche, where the screen's shadows could no longer be mistaken for the mere reflections of the actual darkness. After reading *Neo-Noir*, I wanted to rewatch those original pictures and their reimaginations by Melville, Altman and the Coens.