Book Reviews – February 2012

Table of Contents

Book Reviews

Hollywood Incoherent: Narration in Seventies Cinema

By Todd Berliner

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-292-72279-8. 276 pp. £37.00 (hbk)

The Godfather

By Jon Lewis

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84457-292-2. 96 pp. £9.99 (pbk)

A Review by Adam O'Brien, University of Bristol

The two books under review here both address a period in American film history that is simultaneously over-romanticised and underserved – the early 1970s. It is underserved not in terms of volume, but in terms of the imaginative range that is used to interpret the particular atmosphere which characterised Hollywood at this time. Todd Berliner's *Hollywood Incoherent* and Jon Lewis's *The Godfather* both succeed in avoiding the familiar trap of invoking Vietnam and Watergate as 'explanations' for the (undeniable) tonal shift in popular American movies in the 'New Hollywood' era. But while Lewis substitutes these with other interesting conceptual contexts, such as the gangster film's receptiveness to changes in American capitalism, Berliner is reluctant to move much beyond the conclusion that the shift was a half-hearted abandonment of classicism. And the thoroughness of his study only makes the narrowness of his argument all the more regrettable.

"What matters most about films of the seventies… is not so much their themes, politics or cultural relevance, as previous studies of the period have contended, but their unusual manner of storytelling and the gripping, unconventional experiences they offer spectators" (5) – this is

the central contention of *Hollywood Incoherent*. The impatience with existing studies of this period is in itself quite understandable; the set of explanations for a shifting tone in Hollywood at this time – the collapse of the studio system, Watergate and Vietnam, generational politics – has become somewhat stale and staid. Stephen Prince, in his endorsement on the jacket of *Hollywood Incoherent*, complains that "[m]ost books about American film in the 1970s tell stories about iconoclastic auteurs working in the shadow of the Vietnam war", and praises Berliner for trying to carve a new path. And yet, in Berliner's introduction, he describes how "in the 1970s, a group of talented filmmakers set out to dismantle" the "coherent narrative design" that Hollywood had perfected (4). It is a small point (and the inconsistency is of course not of Berliner's making), but it is symptomatic of how this book never quite manages to escape the paradigms it wants to challenge. Thus we have yet another narrative of how Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola et al. attacked and dismantled, rather than how they imagined and created.

This is not to suggest, however, that *Hollywood Incoherent* is a condemnation of movie-brat frivolities, *à la* James Bernadoni's *The New Hollywood* (1991). Instead, it is an attempt to understand, and define, the enduring appeal of these films in terms of their peculiar narrational strategies. Films of the period, Berliner argues, were invariably characterised by "narrative perversities", such as "ideological incongruities, logical and characterlogical inconsistencies, distracting and stylistic ornamentation and discordances, irresolutions, ambiguities and other impediments to straightforwardness in a film's narration" (10). As is probably clear from this short extract, Berliner's outlook is resolutely normative, and the relative strength of his argument rests – often precariously – on a definition of classical Hollywood narration which the author seems to assume is beyond question. Early on, Berliner is keen to stress that this comparison is not value driven, and that his use of terms

such as 'perverse', 'superfluous' and 'relevant' is not judgemental; indeed, he does attempt to explicate "the value of narrative incongruity" (29), and is more likely to endorse these so-called perversities rather than condemn them. However, in its attempted flight from cultural relevance and ideology towards apparently neutral questions of narrative modes, *Hollywood Incoherent* refuses to entertain the notion that narrational techniques themselves might come laden with unavoidably ideological baggage. This – along with reductive, straw-man conceptions of both classical Hollywood and 'foreign art cinema' – seriously hinders Berliner's project.

A small but telling example comes in Berliner's treatment of *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975), which he sees as a prime example of this period's penchant for "chatacterlogical inconsistency" (35). Sonny (Al Pacino) is not only inconsistent, suggests Berliner, but is inconsistent in a way which doesn't progress the narrative (in other words, it doesn't seem to 'cause' anything). And although this type of inconsistency is a feature of "art films", *Dog Day Afternoon* is not, insists Berliner, art cinema; it is ultimately contained by classical norms, its art-cinema techniques occasionally embellishing those norms with "nuance, richness and unpredictability", rather than fully replacing them (36). Sonny is indeed a complex character, and inconsistency is an important element of that complexity. But can we really understand those inconsistencies as additional features? (In a similar fashion, we are told that subjective shots in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) are "narratively superfluous" (171)). Berliner seems to want us to imagine a purer *Dog Day Afternoon* to which exoticising ingredients are subsequently added, but of course such a thing never existed, and it remains mysterious why imagining it is helpful. After all, this leap of imagination also requires us to believe that classical Hollywood cinema *lacks* nuance, richness and unpredictability, and that such features are the property of something called 'art cinema'

(a term which is apparently interchangeable with 'European art films' and 'foreign art films'). Berliner more than once describes his case studies as occupying the centre of an imaginary spectrum between classical coherence and foreign / art-cinema otherness, which – especially when he mentions Ozu, Mizoguchi, Bresson and Tati as alternatives to coherence – should certainly set alarm bells ringing.

Disagreeing fundamentally with the premise of a study should not, of course, blind us to its merits and insights. In fact, *Hollywood Incoherent* is a curious example of when the sum *lets down* the parts; ironically, the book suffers from an over-eager attempt to draw together a variety of the author's thoughts about interesting films and make them conform to a coherent system. In one chapter, 'Genre Deviation and *The French Connection*', Berliner makes an subtle distinction between "genre breakers" (films which set out to expose genre conventions) and "genre benders" (those which playfully trick us into a false sense of security), and convincingly argues that "genre benders deny us the ideological mastery that genre breakers congratulate us for having gained" (94). Although once again relying a little too heavily on static definitions of important concepts (are genres ever unbent?), *Hollywood Incoherent* here offers a very provocative insight into how, when it comes to genre, "violation does not necessarily enlighten us" (99).

In what is possibly the book's strongest section, Berliner offers a reading of *The Godfather, Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), examining the ways in which, as a sequel, it deliberately denies us the pleasures offered by the first film. "*The Godfather, Part II* disappoints its audience," he explains, "but it does so in a peculiarly extravagant way" (57). Not only does Berliner provide an interesting snapshot of contemporary reviews (which were largely characterised by a tone of disappointment), but – most importantly – he makes an overwhelmingly convincing case for how

this disenchantment is carefully manufactured by Coppola, as a subtle expression of the Corleones' own disenchantment. One is left with the impression that *The Godfather, Part II* is an intelligent, thoughtful, contemplative, sensitive and unremittingly tragic film; Berliner has made an excellent case for the perfect appropriateness of many of its – admittedly idiosyncratic – features. But soon, he remarks that "the incongruities remain largely extraneous to the causal progress of the story, wanton impediments to narrative linearity, clarity, and resolution" (79). Wanton? Have we not just learned about the remarkable aptness of the film's 'perversities'? One wonders what kind of 'clarity' we would be left with if *The Godfather, Part II* prioritised causality and linearity above all else.

As this example suggests, Berliner not only avoids ideological considerations of narrative forms, but even shies away from conclusions which recognise their important aesthetic and thematic implications. And this leaves little else but a series of judgements about whether seventies films fit a Bordwellian model of Hollywood classicism. Even Bordwell, though, is not so unwavering:

> "Hollywood output, from routine efforts to richly detailed worlds and hyperclassical movies, adheres to long-standing principles of storytelling. Is this system therefore rigid and unbending? No. Hollywood has always valued innovation, for both artistic and economic reasons. The talent pool has to be refreshed, people long to see something different, and the right kinds of novelty can sell."

Hollywood Incoherent, as mentioned earlier, makes a concerted effort to overcome some slightly lazy and sentimental writing about New Hollywood, but the ultimate impression is of the baby being thrown out with the bath water. So when Berliner moves towards a concluding thought about *why* films such as *The Godfather, Part II,* and *Nashville*

(Robert Altman, 1975) experiment with narrative in the ways that they do, he is left flailing somewhat: "The movies frustrate linear narration not necessarily to create suspense or delay resolution, but often incidentally, permanently, and for no evident reason except to keep spectators off balance" (81-82). *Hollywood Incoherent* limits its critical range so resolutely that it invariably finds no 'evident' reasons why the films proceed as they do. It is difficult to avoid the sense that this is a lack of imagination on the part of the study itself, and not the films in question.

Jon Lewis's monograph, *The Godfather*, is in many ways just as tightly structured as *Hollywood Incoherent*, but develops a framework which allows room for differing approaches to the film. The book is divided into three main parts (one almost expects the third to be a crushing disappointment!): 'I Believe in America', 'I Believe in Hollywood', and 'I Believe in the Mafia'. Cleverly, Lewis does not waste precious space reminding us about the film's iconic status or legions of dedicated fans, and instead offers as his opening chapter something of a walk through the whole film, from start to finish, always striking a tone of observation rather than explanation. He notes, for example, how power in *The Godfather* is often shown in terms of a character's ability to 'read' the scene they are in and control its *mise-en-scène*. In fact, many of Lewis's most interesting interpretations revolve around the film's careful use of space, as when he articulates the importance of Michael's trip to Las Vegas in the following terms: "It is in Michael's willingness, or more accurately, his obligation to leave home for the meeting that we appreciate the gravity of the deal he proposes" (22). The author also seems more than capable of appreciating *The Godfather*'s straightforwardness as well as its complexity. Pondering Michael's chilling efficiency towards the end of the film, Lewis notes how "[n]o cop or private detective or spurned lover or rival gangster steps in at this point to take Michael out of the film. Instead, he rather simply succeeds" (35).

In *Hollywood Incoherent*, Berliner interprets this dark tone as a tilt toward ethical incoherence, but Lewis instead finds a kind of horror in its bleak straightforwardness.

The book's opening chapter is built on such small but illuminating insights. It is also strengthened by an attempt to locate *The Godfather* in the evolution of the gangster film, and that genre's relationship with notions of American capitalism. This move from (broadly impressionistic) textual analysis towards contextualisation is then followed through in the next two chapters, which discuss the film's industrial context ('I Believe in Hollywood') and its intertwining with the real-life mafia ('I Believe in the Mafia'). Lewis's account of how *The Godfather* was born is admirably even handed, awarding plenty of credit to Coppola's creative energies, but also recognising the pressures and legitimate concerns which troubled producer Robert Evans. We are thus spared the maverick-genius-versus-philistine-corporation yarn which always threatens to mar studies of the New Hollywood. "Evans boasted publicly," writes Lewis about the producer-director power struggle, "but behind the scenes he managed the production carefully; he was for the most part smart enough to capitulate to Coppola on the set and he resisted displays of authority" (54). Restrained but insightful judgements such as these appear again and again. (Lewis even goes to great lengths to complement the creativity of the marketing team, who developed the wonderful tagline of '*The Godfather* is now a movie'). In making the case for *The Godfather* as a studio production as well as a consummate directorial achievement, this chapter also does an excellent job of describing the rather turbulent conditions at Paramount in the lead up to the film's release, as failed real-estate ventures were quickly followed by the incredible success of *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller, 1970). These sixteen pages are a model of clear and engaging scholarship, offering us a vivid impression of the complex

interplay between economics, ego, creativity and serendipity at the heart of big-budget film production.

The final chapter returns to questions of genre, but this time with a more sociological bent. Lewis discusses the important complementarity of criminal activity and assimilation in *The Godfather*, astutely recognising that one of the film's great ironies is that "Michael aspires to be at once like his father *and* these other more modern businessmen and in the end he succeeds in neither" (69). But the real subject of this third chapter is the fascinating relationship between Hollywood cinema and real-life organised crime. Lewis traces how, at least since *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (D.W Griffith, 1912), gangster films have willingly blurred the lines between fact and fiction, and suggests that *The Godfather* is an interesting example when the fiction had a tangible effect on reality, prompting real mobsters to emulate those old-world values which were so romanticised in Coppola's film (72). These links become a little more obscure (although still fascinating) as Lewis identifies specific instances of 'shady dealings' in the production on *The Godfather*, including when Robert Evans resorted to the help of a mafia lawyer in order to get Al Pacino released from his contract with MGM. One cannot fault the depth and breadth of Lewis's knowledge of *The Godfather* in a number of contexts, but when his book concludes with a detailed account of labyrinthine links between Paramount studios, the mob, and shares in a Vatican-held company, I regretted how far Lewis had moved from the opening chapter and its tone of relaxed, observant connoisseurship.

Nevertheless, the book most definitely provides readers with a wealth of detail (for the most part through lightly-worn research) and range of approaches, which is surely what the BFI Film Classics series invariably does best. There are more intellectually ambitious responses to *The Godfather* (see, for example, Carl Freedman's 'The Supplement of

Coppola' in a recent issue of *Film International*), but it is hard to imagine one that characterises the film's appeal and importance in so many different ways, whilst remaining readable and engaging from start to finish.

A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film

By Richard Barrios

Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. ISBN 978-0-19-537734-7. 73 illustrations. 504 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity, and Mayhem

By Kelly Kessler

Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978-0-230-23049-1. 10 illustrations. xiii+272 pp. £50.00 (hbk)

Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film

By David Laderman

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-292-72170-8. 20 illustrations. 200 pp. £34.00 (hbk)

A Review by Alissa Burger, State University of New York at Delhi

The twenty-first century is seeing a resurgence in onscreen musicals in a variety of media, from big-screen film musicals like *Chicago* (Rob Marshall, 2002) and *Burlesque* (Steven Antin, 2010) to small screen ventures such as the Disney Channel's made-for-cable *High School Musical* franchise of films (*High School Musical* [Kenny Ortega, 2006], *High School Musical 2* [Ortega, 2007], and *High School Musical 3: Senior Year* [Ortega, 2008]) and FOX's showstopper series *Glee* (2009-present). The contemporary resurgence of the onscreen musical makes it especially important for the critical viewer to gain a historically based understanding of this unique genre, where it has come from, its previous challenges, and its signature forms of expression. Three recent books – Richard Barrios' *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*, Kelly Kessler's *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity, and Mayhem*, and David Laderman's *Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film* – provide discerning viewers and readers with this essential context.

In *A Song in the Dark*, Barrios begins by establishing a complex and illuminating theoretical framework that sheds light on the much-mythologised birth of film sound, which Barrios characterises as a "catalytic hinge" (7) combining reception theory with a three-part focus on "*[b]ackground and production history*", "*[o]ur changing perceptions of these films*", and "*[t]he singular and precarious relationship these films had with their audiences*" (emphasis original, 8). This theoretical perspective provides a standpoint for viewing the early musical films addressed in this book simultaneously within their own historical and sociocultural context as well as from the contemporary perspective, the latter of which Barrios points out is often dismissive of these early films, seeing them as cinematic oddities with little critical value (423). In addition to this theoretical engagement, Barrios' passion and enthusiasm for these films is also clear throughout the book and his tone is accessible, conversational, and at times even engagingly humorous. *A Song in the Dark* provides a comprehensive overview of the birth of sound and the development of the film musical as a genre, covering the time period from the premiere of Vitaphone in 1926 to the burgeoning enforcement of the Production Code in 1934 and its effect on film musicals, including the solidification of genre conventions of the musical which, as a direct result, became less daring and inventive. As Barrios summarizes the 1934 shift, "[e]verything was so smoothly accessible that there was no call or need for iconoclasm or, for the most part, depth. … Musicals, then, became bigger and narrower" (420-421).

A Song in the Dark provides a comprehensive overview of this genre, its history, and its (often contentious) development, including a close look at emerging sound technology that debunks the cultural memory created by *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), in his first two chapters, 'Vitaphone Prelude' and 'The Sound Barrier'. In his third

chapter, "'You Were Meant For Me,'" Barrios develops a close reading of *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, 1929), a detailed analysis that sets up the following individual treatment of films throughout the book. Barrios also devotes individual chapters to sub-genres of the early musical, including the melodrama of "mammy stories" (139) in Chapter 6, backstage dramas in Chapter 8, adaptations of stage shows in Chapter 9, and comedies in Chapter 11. In a sub-genre unique to early musicals, Barrios has a chapter (Chapter 7, 'Hollywood, Revued') on "all-star musical revues" (157), which were undertaken by every major Hollywood studio in the late 1920s and early '30s. In addition to an examination of individual films and how studios worked to use these reviews to showcase as many of their contract actors as possible, often with little regard for whether or not those stars were suited to the musical revue format, one of the key achievements of this chapter is Barrios' concise and accessible overview of how these individual revues expressed each studio's unique identity in the early days of film. For example, as Barrios explains, Paramount "was marked… by attributes that could not be bought or invented: finesse, a sense of humor, and, uniquely, a genuine understanding of the studio and its players" (172), moving on to apply this definition of identity to Paramount's revue *Paramount on Parade* (Dorothy Arzner et al, 1930) and account for its comparative success in a market that was glutted with revues. Writing of a time period in which studio shenanigans and behind the scenes drama have reached the level of near-legendary, Barrios' demystification of Hollywood urban legend surrounding individual studios makes their position within this unique period of film history engaging and accessible, an achievement which is further underscored by Barrios' application to the individual studios' revues.

One of Barrios' main strengths is his ability to deftly deal with the absent presence of (partially or entirely) lost early films, many of which he

himself writes about, including *Gold Diggers of Broadway* (Roy Del Ruth, 1929) and *The Rogue Song* (Lionel Barrymore, 1930), among others. Barrios works from studio paperwork, surviving film fragments or alternate versions and this meticulous approach culminates with Barrios' first appendix, 'Notes on Lost Films', which lists and differentiates between "[t]otal losses," "[b]lack-and-white survivors," and "[m]iscellaneous losses," which details specific lost scenes from individual films (433-425). Another strength of *A Song in the Dark* are the second edition updates, which have been applied throughout the book in its entirety, where Barrios has "streamlined this new *Song in the Dark* into a slightly leaner, if hardly meaner, new edition" (425), a refreshing change from revised editions with a tendency to keep growing, whether this growth is warranted or not. The second edition also takes note of changes in both past and present film, including discussion of previously lost films that have been rediscovered since the first edition's publication in 1995 and a contextualisation of this history with the resurgence of musicals in the early twentieth century in Barrios' afterword. Barrios' enthusiastic tone as both a fan and an engaged critic resurfaces in this afterword as well, where he looks simultaneously to the past in celebration of early film musicals and forward to the promising future descendants of the genre, where "musicals continue to offer the reminder that they can be an inviting, open canvas for an artist willing to try new possibilities" (423).

Kelly Kessler's book, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity, and Mayhem* defines the early musicals such as those Barrios focuses on as "arcadian", which she defines as "films [that] strive toward ideological stasis and communal unification" (9). This sets up the definitive difference that structures much of her book, as she contrasts these earlier, idealistic musicals with "ambivalent" musicals of the 1960s, '70s and '80s, those which reflect "the complexity and uncertainty of both the genre and the times … reflecting its contextualization amid various

forms of industrial and social unrest" (10). Kessler focuses on the time period of 1966-1983, a time period she argues "has been marginalized" (26) in theoretical discussions of film and film history. In focusing on a previously neglected time period, Kessler is also able to address several musical films within their own cultural context which have often been derided or dismissed, bringing a new perspective to films like *Paint Your Wagon* (Joshua Logan, 1969), *At Long Last Love* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1975), *The Wiz* (Sidney Lumet, 1978)*, and *Popeye* (Robert Altman, 1980). Though these films "were either critical or economic disasters (or both)" (96), Kessler positions them within their unique historical period and the wider context of the musical genre and its state of flux and negotiation, highlighting the relevance of these films and moving beyond the dismissal many have previously faced within the discourse of film criticism. While Kessler clearly states in the book's introduction that production history, musical marketing, and audience reaction are outside the scope of her study, she works to contextualise the musicals within their respective times of release and reception, highlighting the unique historical and sociocultural contexts that influenced these films. Finally, the structure and development of the book also connects the time period (1966-1983) with the earlier history of the musical genre and its contemporary resurgence.

Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical is divided into six main sections, including the introduction and conclusion, plus a useful appendix of integrated musicals from 1966-1983 and the contemporary period. Kessler's introduction, 'The Musical and Masculinity Take a Turn for the Ambivalent', establishes her theoretical framework, including the distinction between "arcadian" and "ambivalent" musicals; outlines the historical scope of her study, addresses the shifting role of masculinity within movie musicals and its significance; and provides a definition of integrated musicals, the main focus of her book, as "the subset of the

musical genre that encompasses only films that include characters spontaneously bursting into song" (6). Kessler also includes a section in the introduction on "theoretical, formal, and industrial roots" (10-22) that will provide a useful historical context for readers who lack detailed familiarity with the genre. Kessler's first two chapters address major changes in the musical genre, with the first chapter exploring narrative shifts, including the destabilization of romance and community-unifying themes, and the second addressing visual innovation and difference. As Kessler argues, the visual changes underscore the narrative changes, with increased close-ups highlighting the musical's new focus on the individual rather than the community (67) and dark mise-en-scène emphasizing the chaos, isolation, and unsolvable social problems engaged by ambivalent musicals (69).

Kessler's third and fourth chapters build on the theoretical framework established by the introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 by looking specifically at how images of masculinity were undergoing intense negotiation during this time period and how those tensions found expression onscreen through the ambivalent musical. Kessler explains that as actors became less affiliated with specific studios and more in control of their own careers and onscreen personae, there were fewer exclusive "song and dance" men. As a result, the ambivalent musical period is typified by non-traditional musical heroes from the macho – such as Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin in *Paint Your Wagon* and Burt Reynolds in *At Long Last Love* and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Colin Higgins, 1982) – to the comical, including Steve Martin in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Michael Schultz, 1978) and *Pennies From Heaven* (Herbert Ross, 1981). As Kessler argues,

> [w]ith no stable image of masculinity coming into the genre, the genre
> itself fails to gain a stable sense of self. To the contrary, these actors

project a sense of instability, chaos, and inconclusivity with regard to society and the genre.(97)

This unsettled sense of musical men translated to onscreen changes as well, with a less prominent emphasis on singing and dancing, resulting in musicals with non-singing leading men, alternate sources of music, and dance characterized by "mechanical stylization" (114) that supersedes the earlier traditions of "folk dance and the final production number" (115), which were previously used to unify the fractured community. Chapter 4, 'The New Guard's Musical Masculinity', addresses gender as performative (133-134) and explains that in this time period a new type of leading man took precedence and "a generic notion of masculinity emerges as variant and contradictory" (143), unseating the romance-centered, domesticated leading man of earlier arcadian musicals. One key change that typifies this new musical man is that instead of the narrative of the film centring around his position as part of a heterosexual romantic pair or community unifier, internal and personal struggles take centre stage, a shift that is underscored by the combination of form and content as "[t]he cinematic presentation of the male character shifts away from one centred on dance and visual coupling and toward an establishment or underscoring of male introspection" (145). This decentring of the leading man's position as romantic lead also creates space for exploration of the spiritual, in films such as *Godspell* (David Greene, 1973) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Norman Jewison, 1973), and alternative sexual options, with "[a] range of homosocial/platonic relationships, promiscuity, and non-heterosexual or non-consensual sex" (160) featured prominently in films of the time period, such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) and *Can't Stop the Music* (Nancy Walker, 1980). Finally, in her conclusion, Kessler connects the ambivalent musical period to the contemporary resurgence of the genre, dividing this into two distinct time periods: 1984-1995 and 1996 to the present (2009 at the time of writing).

Through her focus on a specific subset of musicals – integrated musicals from 1966-1983 – and shifting representations of masculinity within these films, Kessler provides readers with an engaging and accessible snapshot of the ways in which cultural conditions and anxieties find expression onscreen, often altering the very mediums with which they engage. Simultaneously, however, Kessler works to contextualize this specific period, explaining how it differs from what has come before and how it influences what has come after, as well as the significance of this engagement and the role of the ambivalent musical, deftly balancing the general and the specific to provide readers with a new understanding of masculinity in the musicals of a specific time period and an appreciation of both its uniqueness and its position within an ongoing trajectory of genre tradition.

David Laderman's *Punk Slash! Musicals: Tracking Slip-Sync on Film* is the most specialised of these three books, developing a theory of "slip-sync" in punk films from 1978-1986. As Laderman defines his key term, "in slip-sync, the singer-performer slips out of sync, alienated from yet caught up by the performance spectacle. … [which] conveys punk's anxiety regarding new electronic technologies of simulation as well as music-industry submission to intensified visualization" (3). Laderman devotes the first two chapters to setting up his theoretical framework of "slip-sync" and the punk film genre cycle, including his treatment of the concept of "in/authenticity," highlighting the complicated notion of performance as the site of contested authenticity, which poses "a clash between resistance and commodification" (13): in other words, the struggle within individual punk performances as personal expression mediated by commodification and marketing, an issue that is especially relevant in terms of the punk film cycle, its construction and commodification. As Laderman argues, however, slip-sync proves

essential in addressing the challenge of in/authenticity because it allows the performers to self-reflexively highlight and critically comment upon performance, identity, and the question of authenticity. Laderman rounds out the second chapter by contextualizing the punk film genre within the larger musical genre tradition, demonstrating the influence of the classical musical, the rock musical, independent cinema, and experimental feminist cinema on the punk film genre cycle. With this theoretical framework established, Laderman spends much of the book conducting close readings of specific films, including *Jubilee* (Derek Jarman, 1978)*, The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (Julien Temple, 1980)*, Breaking Glass* (Brian Gibson, 1980)*, Times Square* (Allan Moyle, 1980)*,* and *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* (Lou Adler, 1982), focusing on detailed analyses of representative scenes and writing candidly about the strengths and shortcomings of the films he addresses. Laderman also devotes two chapters to drawing connections between two series of related films. The first of these multi-film chapters, 'American Slip-Sync Remix' (Chapter 6) looks at a series of American punk films that emphasise the "fan narrative structure" (98) and "the ethnographic motif connected to the independent or cult narrative" (103), with Laderman drawing his discussion from *Blank Generation* (Ulli Lommel, 1979), *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (Allan Arkush, 1979)*, Out of the Blue* (Dennis Hopper, 1980)*, Smithereens* (Susan Seidelman, 1982)*,* and *Liquid Sky* (Slava Tsukerman, 1982)*.*

Laderman's book is also likely to inspire spirited conversation among readers and punk fans since, as Laderman explains, most of the films he addresses in his book have been "[s]purned by punk purists as too commercial and passed over by mainstream film histories as too trashy" (2) and the identity of many of the films featured in the book are contested as to whether or not they should be considered part of the punk film genre cycle. Laderman's final chapter, and the second multi-film

chapter in *Punk Slash! Musicals*, explores a series of arguably non-punk films that he posits signal the conclusion of the punk film genre cycle: *Starstruck* (Gillian Armstrong, 1982)*, Sid and Nancy* (Alex Cox, 1986)*,* and *True Stories* (David Byrne, 1986). Laderman acknowledges that these films, including through their comparatively more mainstream focus and format, "stretch to the limits of the terrain what 'punk' might designate" (139) and may in fact be rejected by many viewers as being part of the punk film genre cycle at all. However, Laderman argues that "*Sid and Nancy* functions as an endpoint, [but] it also signifies a new beginning for punk film. Or at least a threshold across which punk musicals traveled into a kind of remission before reemerging differently in the mid-1990s" (139). Laderman concludes *Punk Slash! Musicals* by resituating the concept of slip-sync within the contemporary popular culture context of recent lip-syncing scandals and the participatory nature of "the virtual universe" (158) of blogs, YouTube and social networking sites.

In the current popular culture context of the resurgence of the musical genre, Barrios' *A Song in the Dark*, Kessler's *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical*, and Laderman's *Punk Slash! Musicals* provide readers with the necessary context for a critical understanding of this unique genre, which as these three books show, remains under constant negotiation, facing new challenges and articulating unique perspectives. From Barrios' general historical overview to the more focused considerations of Kessler and Laderman, whose works dynamically illustrate the role of critical perspective in their analyses of overlapping time periods, these works supply essential background and diverse theoretical models in engaging with the musical film, both past and present.

Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique

By Bliss Cua Lim

Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8223-4510-7. 51 illustrations, xiv + 345 pp. £15.99 (pbk), £64.00 (hbk)

Crash: Cinema and the Politics of Speed and Stasis

By Karen Beckman

Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8223-4726-2. 98 illustrations, xi + 305 pp. £16.99 (pbk), £70.00 (hbk)

Abandoned Images: Film and Film's End

By Stephen Barber

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A Review by Benjamin Betka, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

These three books illuminate key words of humanist research – representations and constructions of national identity, the (gendered) body in motion, and a medium's specifically *material* ends and means – by screening them *with* the screen and not just within. They allude to the ambiguous relationships between the medium's potential capacities and its actual representations and usages. *Translating Time*'s scope expands spatially: Lim folds philosophy, history, and cultural theory up until she reaches the global cine-machinery of Hollywood as it adapts Asian narratives for a cinematic mainstream. Beckman's *Crash* spans the twentieth century and examines gender representations in diverse frames of reference via cinematic velocities and collisions. *Abandoned Images*, finally, grips and grasps cinema in its substantial and material position in the world and in itself.

Lim engages in a temporal critique of "first, the persistence of supernaturalism, of occult modes of thinking encoded in fantastic narratives; and second, the existence of multiple times that fail to coincide with the measured, uniform intervals quantified by clock and calendar" (2). She considers the time-giving and time-taking agencies residing in an elitist, colonialist rule and traces their workings and resistances to them in theories and practices of Asian ghost films. An "untranslatable temporal otherness in the fantastic" film genre is emphasised by the term "*immiscible times* – multiple times that never quite dissolve into the code of modern time consciousness, discrete temporalities incapable of attaining homogeneity with or full incorporation into a uniform chronological present" (12, her emphasis).

Henri Bergson and Dipesh Chakrabarty's concepts are drawn upon to disengage the temporal rule endorsed by Newton and colonialist means and measure(r)s. Lim considers the entire historical project that is modernism:

> the historical and post-colonial approaches [she] seek[s] to fold into Bergson's philosophical critique reveal the conditions of emergence of homogenous time to be shaped *not* by the limits of 'natural' human consciousness and perception *but by global historical processes*, that is, to the world-historical project of modernity that hinged on colonialism.

The "three topoi for [her] critique of homogenous time" are: first, "the upholding of plural times"; second, "the refusal of anachronisms" since this very term confirms existing power-structures; and third, "the recognition of untranslatability" and thus an "avowal of *immiscible temporalities*" (13, my emphases except last one). Bergson can help illuminate cinematic time(s) and its (their) translations. Two modes of temporal critique are brought together: the first one is informed by Bergson as he combines memory, film, time, and consciousness (68). The

second mode explicates "postcolonial critiques of modern time consciousness" by considering how global time fused with labour time and technocratic temporal systematics (69, 71).

Lim shows how the aswang, a kind of ghoul, disrupts traditional interpretations of supernatural contents. She dismisses structuralist approaches by Tzvetan Todorov and others in favour of Fredric Jameson who does not support an artificial separation of the reader/consumer and the genre story from the actual world. Consequently, Lim sets the 1990s aswang films by Peque Gallaga and Lore Reyes as a phenomenon of "media convergence" at that time (99, 113). Socio-historical implications of this trans-cultural event blur narratives and political temporalities: the "enchanted" and even "mimetic capital" of the aswang sheds light on "occult national times" while disabling a colonist's perspective (134, 137, 140, 143). "The aswang attests to the survival and coexistence of a cacophonous past, itself composed of several immiscible times" (145).

A crumbling of national unity via narrative, cinematic and temporal means becomes visible by grasping "the ghost film as [a] historical allegory" and by suggesting that it "contain[s] the seeds of… culturally resonant theories of temporal coevalness and inhabit[s] the elusive, heterogeneous space posited by Bergsonism" (149). "[F]antastic disruptions of *national time*" occur which unsettle "the fantasy of a single calendrical present shared by all citizens through an *occult splintering of the national meanwhile*" (39, her emphases). Ghosts provoke the world of the living and question established orders and boundaries – thus Lim consecutively briefly enters a discussion of gender roles and rules but also of justice and justifications. Common measures and orders are questioned and partially dissolved. In doing so, she does not explicitly mention the *gothic* tradition – a notion which carries its eurocentrism in its name. Nevertheless, any ghost story is linked to several issues of this genre which continues to

spawn numerous entertainment products on the global market. *Translating Time* hints at the truly global value of ghost narratives since they reflect on the conditions of narratives in general, alluding to categories such as *realistic*, *bland*, *naïve*, or its counterparts.

Consequently, Lim asks how Hollywood deals with the "ghostliness of genre" (190). US film companies deracinate genres and "*retool*…the Asian horror film as a cultural key to enticing Asian markets" (200, my emphasis). A "*refamiliarizing translation*" and a cultural adaptation for a global audience are fabricated (215, her emphasis). But she also underlines that any genre film nurtures its viewers and thus confirms generic traditions and repetitions – and especially trans-cultural remakes provoke the genre fans' tendency to derive "audience pleasure" in further detailing the "already-known" genre rules (220). This is another allusion to the global value of ghosts.

Lim ends her book by nullifying the cliché of a Hollywood that is just exploitative as a new coloniser of the globe. Yet another discussion of a horror film, Kim Jee-woon's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003), comes last for that: it does not only illuminate the contents of Lim's book but might also be too sophisticated to be remade by an American studio in a presumably stultifying manner (235). A key term is, again, "immiscible times": for Lim "[t]he epistemological argument about translation is undergirded by the ontological conviction that there is no such thing as a single, empty, homogenous time" (251). Some territories remain unconnected, some imagined communities cannot be charted on foreign or future maps since they inhabit and defend their own temporal niche.

In *Crash*, Karen Beckman intends to

> examine how we articulate, police and transgress aesthetic, discursive,

> disciplinary and physical boundaries, and consider how we might better understand the relationships among ourselves by examining how filmmakers and artists explore, explode, and transform the borders between different modes of representation (24).

Taking the cue from Walter Benjamin and Virginia Woolf, Beckman begins with a comparison of three car-crash films from 1900 and 1906 which can "serve as sites for […] testing, representing, and shaping the emerging space of the frame, the experience of the screen surface, the relationship between moving objects and the camera, and the axis between spectators and the moving image". She considers this decade as the time when crashes become "particularly prominent" without necessarily leading into more traditional discussions of the genre of the Road Movie. The automobile plays a crucial role in the beginnings of film (28). After dismantling Vivian Sobchack's perspective of a "feminist phenomenological-film-theory", Beckman highlights a Deleuzean notion of a rather nonsubjective spectatorship (37, 41-42). The *drive* of the medium itself is identified: "these early cinematic examples show how the figure of the out-of-control-car… registers the traces of cinema's yearning toward its own becoming" (52).

The successful marketing of American cars in the 1920s gives the context for the rise of cinematic slapstick. The traffic cop and "the reckless driver [were] beginning to emerge in Hollywood's narrative films as a character type perfectly suited to an increasingly self-censoring movie industry's need to justify sensational thrills with a didactic function". Beckman concludes that "slapstick or 'anarchistic' comedy" is a rebellion against regulated (automobile) cinematics (60). A scholarly evaluation of this highly gendered genre is more promising once one moves away from "character-centered and biographical approaches" and Beckman intends to "introduce *speed* and *stasis* as an alternative frame within which to consider the genre" (68, my emphasis). Beckman would not reinforce

traditional psychoanalytic traditions: slapstick has subversive potential and depicts social order (including gender differentiations) and the common idea of progress as fabricated and "inhibited" (84, 85).

Focusing on the crash test dummy and public speed(s) and safety(-ies), Beckman evaluates Virilio' concepts of velocity and notes "fundamental limitations": "he ultimately negates the very space that makes responsibility and citizenship both necessary and possible in the first place" (108, 109). Beckman rather follows Butler in order to highlight that "responsibility for the other is… a condition into which we are unwillingly, passively, enigmatically, and indeed violently born" (110). Beckman accuses Virilio of "sexual moralism and teleological technophobia" which, for her, is not very fruitful in terms of thinking risk and responsibility (112). Safety films and "the safety test has arisen as an increasingly visible figure not only in contemporary art and films" but also in pop culture (131). The relationship of psyche, vehicle, and their filmic representation has changed in the twentieth century's second half. With Ulrich Beck the author maintains that a "world risk society… put[s] pressure on the frame of realism" and test dummies might actually provoke "the questions: Are *we* really dummies? Are *we* dead yet?" (133, 136, my emphasis).

The Zapruder film is connected to Warhol next. In a time when cars are an issue/trope in both the situationists' critique of urban spaces and in consumerist-driven television, Warhol's posthumously published *Since* (1966) shows "the crisis of personal and political subjectivity ushered in by the experience of witnessing mediated death" (153). Ballard's *Crash* (both novel and film) builds on this and proves that "film falls apart" – also because of its complex depiction of sexuality (161). Especially the "ubiquity of semen… remains interesting precisely because it resists resolving itself into solid form and withstands a logic of fertilization,

choosing instead to trace the possibility of *moving* in… bodies" (164, my emphasis). Beckman hails *Crash* as it "probes the limits of literary form and language in relation to the adjacent media of photography and film." The crash becomes an emblem of "the embrace of… threatened immolation… even at the risk of death, [it] becomes the precondition for the possibility of *both motion and emotion*" (178, my emphasis).

In 2000's *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000), "the crash… becomes intertwined with questions about reproducible media, about the relation of these media to politics, about public and private viewing spaces, and about individual and mass subjectivity" (179). It even alludes to "global media, global citizenship, and migration or immigration" (180). For Beckman "it becomes clear if *Amores Perros* does create an image of Mexico's present, it is an endlessly traumatic present in which forward narrative movement can only be achieved paradoxically by moving backward to an already lived instant" (183-184). The film "highlights the confrontation of motion and stasis that defines film, and uses it to explore the difficulty of cinematically representing Mexico's urban present" (184).

Film's ultimate endings and "crashes" are finally considered with a postponed treatment of Godard's *Weekend* (1967) since it does not only focus on diverse apocalypses but also on "aftermath" (205). Beckman sees this film as a culmination of earlier Godardian car crashes that also delivers the viewer to "a scrapheap of cinematic and literary references that appear within a nonlinear, nonteleological framework" (206, 209). This instant is highlighted by Weekend Campus as a digital work of "faux-tographie" by Nancy Davenport from 2004 (220). In the end, "[t]he cinematic crash represents ideological and aesthetic impurity, hybridity, and uncertainty." It is an intermediating and "self-reflexive figure for the medium of film", alluding to non-subjective and "radical creativity" but also to "the capitalist commodity culture of cars… and territorial

expansion" (262-263).

Stephen Barber examines a big picture. While Lim and Beckman discuss what cinema alters/maintains, he elaborates on the changing role of the medium through the decades without hesitating to highlight its plain material components. He begins with and returns to defunct (Californian) movie theaters and their "sensitized zones" in order to describe film as an "abandoned entity, formed by abandoned images" (29, 7). Four steps inform his journey. "The first... is concerned with film theorists and cultural historians who have... formulated 'ends' of film, and also with filmmakers whose work involves an anatomizing of decay and ruination" (8). With a look at desolate (former) sites of film, he notes the medium's "integral capacity for aberrance, for the arbitrary and for the shattering of time" which ultimately prevents a linear historiography of film (13). Forms and contents of movie theaters are deeply enmeshed into urban grids. Films like Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002) but also David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) serve as examples for "ghost-spaces" within/among the moving images and their scenes/sites (18, 39). While the first one explores disintegration in an ever-evolving, somatic and/or hylic way, the latter delves into the various echoes and (hidden) depths of Hollywood as place and system. For Barber, such filmmakers "are pioneers of film's end, of an apparent spatial closing down directed towards film's terminal point, since abandonment implies a boundaried constriction within which deterioration sets in" (56).

In a second step, Barber elaborates on his assumption that "[t]he memory of film remains so embedded within the nature of memory itself that the 'lapsing', shattering or disappearance of film constitutes a significant trauma of memory, within a contemporary era that predominantly formulates media of oblivion" (8-9). He continues his analysis residing in a blend of grit and spirit:

> The cultural experience of filmic images and of cinemagoing, during an extended historical period, directed and inflected many or all of the ways of living and ways of perceiving of populations worldwide... film always generated the processes of a mass dreaming rather than simulating them. (72-73)

Barber suspects that "[a]t film's end, memory may enter a sclerotic state in which the media images that engulf it entirely lack the activating capacity of film" (77). Film already went underground literally and figuratively, rather locked into dungeons under the "face of the city" than attracting viewers in plain daylight (81). With the rise of digital technology, film's "linguistic elements [and signifiers, BB]... become radically disassembled by the process of cinematic abandonment; film's language appears irretrievably lost" (86). But it lingers, nevertheless, and film has an *echo*: its language is, "at its end, […] one that often inhabits and anatomizes a precarious, ambivalent temporal boundary between the filmic and the digital, or between memory and oblivion" (87). Wong Kar-Wai's *2046* (2004), Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and other works illuminate this play with/against identity, memory, and the velocity of sense-making among digital and analog regimes (90, 96). This does not exclude film's projectionists: a cinematic obsession rules and ruins them at film's end(s) (103).

A look at "the relationship between film and the human eye" underlines the notion of "acts of blinding, and the loss or ending of vision" (9). It is in the eye where "film's end, [and] the disintegration of its medium and spaces are experienced" (111). This comes as a "shock" and an "assault", shadowed out by filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov and Luis Buñuel (112). Complex camera movements and excessive editing can achieve this but also cinematic narrations that include blindness and blindings, probably

alluding to "an experimental proposition of vision and language, like that generated in the mind of a sightless spectator" (121). Eyes are much more than symbols but help to examine the shapes (and ends) of cinema as a whole.

Abandoned Images concludes with a look at the future, estimating that "[e]specially in an era of digital malfunctions and crashes, the residue of film – its material once held together for projection by splices – may be crucial for the reparatory suturing of memory and vision" (10). These splices connect images and contexts, ensuring an "inhabitation of that cinematic space... "[F]ilm's living end... appears tenaciously suspended, and ineradicable: an endless end, for the entity of film" (149). The analog spectrum is layered and sedimentary, not locked into the either/or of digital storage. Film even "transforms itself" when screens are filmed as the show images, opening multiple loops and layers content-wise (155). "Film can scan and interrogate the forms of digital image-screens" (157). It is especially integrated "into other media forms" in East Asia, both on an urban and on a cinematic level, the latter resonating the "manias of the human eye" as topic and entity discussed in chapter three (159, 160). But in general, "[t]he ruined cinemas of Broadway form extraordinary apertures into the past history of film... as well as into the future of visual media" (164). Film remains the major tool/vehicle to explore space which includes ((non-)human) architectures and space-folding agents or "tricksters" (165, 169, 177).

While Lim focuses on one genre for reasons of trans-cultural connectivity and –isms, Beckman considers a vast array of filmic productions, even including the sad fate of crash test dummies. One could accuse her of a random choice of material but this would not be justified regarding the complexities of crashes as (cine-)philosophical events. Both Lim and Beckman follow the postmodern conatus from rather general concepts

towards more complex foldings of screens and images. Both mention but do not focus on film's composition and distribution beyond specific content while Barber does. Hence a comparison of all three books is difficult since the stunningly brief *Abandoned Images* looks at such a crucial and central issue: film as a whole in this world as a whole. The marketing of films is an essential issue in his analysis which feeds film scholars and devotees alike without betraying one group for the other. His frame of reference is huge (it spans the century and every age of Hollywood) but also small with its focus on film as a tape, a finite ribbon that connects pictures for human eyes to see. Barber manages to extrapolate crucial attributes of film as it now seems to merge into digital methods of (re-)production. Exploring actual ghost towns of cinematic space is by no means nostalgic but rather reminds the reader of the multiple anchorages of film (and thus film studies) in specific territories, populations, and other collective image zones.

The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism

By Steven Price

Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978-0-230-22362-2. No illustrations, xvi + 209. £16.99 (pbk)

Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths

By C. Paul Sellors

London and New York: Wallflower, 2010. ISBN 978-1-906660-24-6. Forty-seven illustrations (including cover), 165. £12.99 (pbk)

Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Studio Era

By Guerric DeBona

Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-252-07737-1. One illustration (front cover), x + 195. $25.00 (pbk)

A Review by Douglas Macleod, SUNY Cobleskill, USA

Is a screenplay a form of literature? Does the screenplay have an official, singular auteur (or an author)? Can an adapted screenplay be a sufficient representation of a canonical piece of literature? Over the last ten to fifteen years, film screenplay study and film adaptation study have seemed to blossom, bringing about a litany of essays, book chapters and textbooks on both subject matters. With scholars like Linda Hutcheon, James Naremore, Robert Stam, John Ellis and Thomas Leitch, film adaptation (screenplay) studies has moved away from George Bluestone's seminal (but flawed) *Novels into Film* to become more fleshed out, to become less about the surface or aesthetics of screenplay writing (whether an adaptation or not) and more about language, communication, semiotics, politics, authorship and agenda. Steven Price's *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory, and Criticism*, C. Paul Sellors's *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths*, and Guerric DeBona's *Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Studio Era* all provide a great deal of insight on how screenplays and how literary adaptation into screenplays should

be studied. Sometimes successful, other times confusing, all three books offer the reader new ways of looking at both of these significant fields of investigation within film studies.

The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism begins with a fascinating and very readable preface about Price's study of David Mamet's plays and films. After reading several published and unpublished screenplays by Mamet, and after learning about Mamet's problems with the Hollywood studio system, Price claims that two significant observations came about: 1) the reading of screenplays in "industrial form" was indeed not "difficult or unrewarding" (ix) and 2) the "very notion of authorship itself is questionable" (ix) – that any work (not just a screenplay) is not subject to the Romantic notion of the work stemming from an individual, but a collaboration that bonds screenplay creation to literary creation. These observations are fleshed out in his first chapter entitled 'Authorship' where Price gives the reader a history of the author and the auteur theory (beginning with the Cashiers du Cinema critics, Richard Corliss, Andrew Sarris, etc.), and of the writer (theories included). Price looks at primarily Michel Foucault's concept of writer and author, which states that the writer/author is just an "ideological figure" (20), the writer/author is not an individual, but is associated with legal issues, attribution, construction (psychological, historical, cultural, coherence, etc.), and multiplicity of the self. In essence, writing is always about collaboration (even when that collaboration is not documented), and who the "true" author is can be ambiguous and complex. With the ambiguity of the writer now firmly established, Price naturally progresses into the concepts of work and text or what is being written by the writer. Using Roland Barthes' seven propositions on the work as being the material for public consumption, as opposed to the Text being about plurality and attempting to move away from consumption, Price claims that he now understands why the screenplay is not looked at as literature,

as text, thus placing the screenplay into "a peculiar ontological state of non-being" (38-42); the screenplay is "made to disappear" (xi). This disappearing happens with both original screenplays and adaptations, and Price uses the film *Adaptation* (Spike Jonez, 2002) as a physical, visual representation of how the disappearing takes place.

This is where Price is most effective; this is where his text is most effective. With a work of this magnitude, the writer must incorporate comprehensive textual analysis to illustrate what he or she means. Price, on several key occasions, does so. After going into the formal stages of screenplay writing (from the pitch to the published script), he speaks in-depth about Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece *The Birds* (1963). Based on meticulous research, Price delves deep into the making of the film, exposing how the writer (Evan Hunter) was virtually taken off the project after completing three drafts, "the last of which was then in effect taken over by Hitchcock and reworked into a shooting script from which then diverged significantly both in the filming and in the editing" (76). At one point, Hitchcock actually "commissioned the opinion of Hume Cronyn" (86) amongst other Hollywood writers. At first, Hunter's relationship with Hitchcock was fine; but, after many distinct changes which included the character of Melanie and the ending that lacks explanation, all of which Hunter was against, the relationship went sour. Hitchcock, although having a great deal of respect for the writer, had his own vision; and his vision was seemingly more important than that of Hunter's. In other words, Hunter "attempted to resolve some of them within the script, while Hitchcock later developed more visual methods of addressing the same concerns" (xii), thus creating the rift. Price's study on *The Birds* and his brief work on other texts in his chapter titled 'Editing and Publication' — *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and gene Kelly, 1952), *Wild Strawberries* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957), etc. — is then used as a springboard to his theory that

film, because of its collaborative efforts, should be looked at as literature and studied as literature. This section, although key to the success of his argument, is a bit confusing, not so much in context, but in wording. The textual analysis works; but his logic is not presented clearly enough. Thus, his last chapters, 'The Scene Text' and 'The Dialogue Text', seem out of place. His "final two chapters continue this dual approach by attempting to establish the ways in which both literary and film theory may illuminate the critical reading of screenplays, while also seeking to establish the distinctive textual properties of the screenplay form" (xii). Price breaks up each of these chapters into sections: the scene text having format, modes, time, narration, character and structure; the dialogue text using deixis and offstage space, speech acts, polyfunctionality, duologues, one-liners, monologues and internal storytelling, voice-overs, and action as speech. All of these elements are generally associated in some way with the study of literature, which is not-so-overtly established by Price, but is somewhat aptly implied. But, due to the chapter on editing and publication, the reader gets somewhat lost and the message that the screenplay can be literature does not get clearly conveyed. His 'Epilogue' on *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) is meant to tie everything together, but because of the confusing nature of the three chapters prior to the last, it works better as a textual study on its own. He indeed proves that the "text is one of the finest examples of screenwriting," but misses slightly when attempting to prove that it is "a testament to the irreducible differences between a verbal medium and a visual and auditory one" (xiv).

Sunset Boulevard is the epilogue of Price's tome, but it is the starting point of C. Paul Sellors's *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths* which delves into the concept of authorship, which firstly (according to Sellors) looks "straightforward" (6), because of how theorists and critics alike place their emphasis on the director. In *Sunset Boulevard*, for example,

Billy Wilder has been established as the author of the text, the auteur of the text because of his status in Hollywood. However, as Sellors states,

> *Sunset Blvd*. was produced by Charles Brackett, directed by Billy Wilder, and written by Brackett, Wilder and D.M. Marshman Jr. The story reworks themes and plot lines from *Salomé* and *Queen Kelly*, and draws on the biographical details of its main actors: Gloria Swanson, Cecil B. DeMille and Erich Von Stoheim, not to mention biographies of some of its minor characters and the very history of Hollywood cinema. Who is the author of *Sunset Blvd*.?" (2)

Sellors's book argues that although "the concept of a film author is indispensible," it does not "provide robust methodologies for analysing the practical importance of authorship for film production, criticism and history" (2).

In his first chapter entitled 'Film Directors and Auteurs', Sellors uses D.W. Griffith as an example of how authorship was perceived back in the early days of cinema. Technology, being that it was only about ten to fifteen years old back in the early 1900s, was how producers would market the product (the production company's film) to start off with. It was soon after, however, that branding became more of an issue, and the first person recognized as a brand name director was D.W. Griffith. One interesting photograph has Griffith's name up top, with this saying below it: "Producer of all great Biograph successes, revolutionizing Motion Picture drama and founding the modern technique of the art" (9). Thus, the author of film is born; the concept of the author/auteurism stemming from Romanticism. It is here where Sellors delves into the history of auteurism, which is well-known and was also written about by Price. Where Sellors differs a bit, however, is in how he presents the theory's "methodological shortcomings": Auteurism does not take into consideration collaboration, only directors (as opposed to films) and the

"critic's proclivities rather than the director's abilities" (19). Also, auteurism does not take into consideration context, which is equally important as the director (19). According to Sellors, though, this perception changes over time, most especially with the poststructuralists who claimed that the author cannot be "separated from society, but [is] with the reader deeply embedded with the dynamics of language, representation and ideology" (32). His second chapter is on reception and attempts to prove that the dynamics above are indeed true, and that theorists and viewers alike need to "validate a film as meaningful" (57). Using Foucault, Barthes, and Booth (amongst others) tends to be a bit dizzying, and most especially in Sellors's work; although imperative that these writers are incorporated, a clearer reason as to how it all fits would have been appreciated. This is where Sellors's work breaks down a bit.

His next chapter entitled 'Narrator and Author' speaks about the voices of a film, the characters' voices that come within the diegetic framework of the movie. So, not only is the film a collaboration (meaning there is no single author), it also has an author already inherent in the film. Using such classics as *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), and *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) as examples aptly proves that authorship is a communication between the director, the collaborators, the viewers and the critics/theorists. Film production involves communication and negotiation between members of the production team and will, by virtue of the knowledge each brings to the process, engage a wide range of ideas, perspectives and filmmaking practices.

In essence, authorship is relational not singular; and the authorship of a text gets separated from the narration of it. Sellors states that it is not about the significance of a film, but about its meaning; it is about how it is interpreted, which allows for more engagement. Film is a form of

expression, which is where Sellors goes in his next chapter. Much of 'Cinematic Expression' speaks about the similarities between commercial cinema and avant-garde films, mainly focusing on "film production through gender, institutions, race and autobiography" (83). Sellors is especially enlightening here; in this chapter, he delves into the work of Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, Carolee Schneemann, Maya Deren, and other avant-garde filmmakers to prove that, like many commercial filmmakers, they create "public objects that communicate meaning" (103), their films have a context, and their films are collaborations.

Sellors's final chapter is called 'Intention' and attempts to define authorship, using Paisley Livingston's definition as a starting point. Livingston states that the author is "the agent (or agents) who intentionally make(s) an "utterance" refers to any action, an intended function which is expression or communication" (quoted. in Sellors, 108); Sellors calls Livingston's definition "useful" (108), but in need of "further explanation and tinkering" (109). This tinkering results in a new definition of authorship, and a new definition of filmic authorship:

> [T]he agent (or agents) who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance to communicate a meaning. 'To token' refers to any relevant action, an intended function of which is to compose a filmic utterance; a filmic utterance is the material film constituting an expression of conveying a meaning; and communicate implies the possibility of an audience capable of understanding such an expression (110).

It is a bit ironic that Sellors is talking about intention and authorship, while at the same time 'tinkering' with (or completely changing) Livingston's perceptions on authorship; but, it also makes for compelling writing. Being an articulate and well-conceived high theory, 'Intention' works nicely as a pre-coda to what truly is a fascinating work on the whole concept of film authorship; *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other*

Myths does prove that film is a communicative "collaborative production" (127), and that film authorship studies should recognize this hypothesis.

Film authorship naturally lends itself to our posed final question also somewhat being answered: Can an adapted screenplay be a sufficient representation of a canonical piece of literature? *Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Studio Era* by Guerric DeBona does not entirely attempt to prove that adapted screenplays can be a sufficient representation of the original work, but are works that are studied from a revisionist's standpoint, "with industrial choices, audience reception, and the sociocultural environment contributing to the construction of the cinematic text" (2); he will look at the cultural politics of these adapted films, specifically speaking of American and British canonical texts. Using the adapted films *David Copperfield* (George Cukor, 1935), *Heart of Darkness* (Orson Welles, 1939), *The Long Voyage Home* (John Ford, 1940), and *The Red Badge of Courage* (John Huston, 1951) as his examples, DeBona's purpose is to investigate the cultural politics of these films and suggest "a kind of matrix for this field of study, broadly consisting of intertextuality, cultural value, and authorship" (7). Intertextuality, according to DeBona, is the "collateral relationship among a variety of systems surrounding the adaptation process" (11); cultural value involves the distinctions (if in fact there are distinctions) between high art and low art; and authorship, which "allows us to consider ways in which the standardized literary canon and its authors, once so crucial to the cultural practice after the implementation of the Production Code at one point in the history of American film culture, would be by and large displaced by an evolution of film stylistics, an emphasis on performance brought on by the New Wave" (34). It is this last piece of information (la politique des auteurs) that is most confusing; DeBona's point of view gets lost in a sea of theories from other critics and film scholars like Foucault, Wollen, Barthes, Bazin, Stam, Bluestone, Sobchack and Schatz; this

section of DeBona's first chapter is more like a who's who in film theory as opposed to the theory itself. Historical context is certainly necessary but not to detriment of the argument at hand.

DeBona's chapters that follow are how he intends to prove his thesis, a thesis that is sound and viable. 'The Victorian New Deal: Dickens, the Great Depression, and MGM's *David Copperfield* (1935)' speaks a great deal about Dickens's popularity in the United States, and how that popularity resonated with America during the Depression. DeBona writes that David Selznick used Dickens because of both his popularity and because his "fiction garnered middle-class moral knowledge and respectability" (8). The second half of DeBona's chapter goes into a textual analysis of the film; he speaks specifically about how first person narration, cinematography, character development, editing, etc. exposes Charles Dickens as the storyteller of the film, not Selznick, Cukor, or MGM, and allows the audience to feel comfortable with the text and modern, "sleek" changes that takes place (54). DeBona's analysis is quite extensive, but his use of cultural theory can be a bit daunting.

I will suggest here that Welles's *Heart of Darkness* treats Conrad's theme of primitivism self-consciously, revealing its underlying racism and misogyny. Welles's *Heart of Darkness* works, then, to problematize the "invisible" classical Hollywood narrative, blurring the traditional, bifurcating paradigm of what Robert B. Ray has perceptively identified as the variations worked by American ideology around an "opposition of natural man versus civilized man" (65). This section of 'Into Africa: Orson Welles and *Heart of Darkness*' is indicative of DeBona's work throughout *Film Adaptation in the Hollywood Studio Era*. Even in his chapters on John Ford's *The Long Voyage Home* ("Filmed Theater") and John Huston's *The Red Badge of Courage* ("Canon Fire"), DeBona uses sources extensively (135 citations and 115 citations, respectively; 574 citations in total),

which weighs down his own deft perceptions about each filmic text. Inadvertently, our author brings about interesting questions not so much about film authorship, but literary and theoretical authorship: Is there a true author when said writer uses other authors to sustain the argument? Citations are meant to support an argument; to help prove the argument a writer is making. DeBona (although aptly using sources and incorporating citations) relies too heavily on his support, most especially in his chapters of textual analysis. Thus, his own voice gets lost which once again makes for complicated reading. Equally bothersome is DeBona's lack of a conclusion; with a text that delves deeply into the world of film adaptation, a few words after his textual analysis would have been appropriate and desired.

At the same time, DeBona's lack of a conclusion helps us understand that the questions first asked, (Is a screenplay a form of literature? Does the screenplay have an official, singular auteur (or an author? Can an adapted screenplay be a sufficient representation of a canonical piece of literature?), cannot be answered just in one text; DeBona, in essence, leaves it open to his readers' interpretation. Here is my hypothesis; now it is up to you to agree or disagree. Steven Price and C. Paul Sellors also do this in their respective texts, but in a more subtle way; they present us with conclusions, with their final thoughts on what is truly a very difficult subject to get a handle on, and then allows us to either follow their lead or move aimlessly towards the opposite direction.

Skyscraper Cinema: Architecture and Gender in American Film

By Merrill Schleier

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. ISBN 9780816642816. 368 pp. £21.50 (pbk)

The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945-1975

By Pamela Robertson Wojcik

Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780822347736. 352 pp. £16.99 (pbk)

A Review by Gillian Jein, University of Limerick

Considering two books simultaneously affords the reader a reflective luxury not normally applicable to the space of a single book review. It is apt to introduce these books, therefore, by recalling Michel Foucault's prediction that the twentieth century would 'be above all the epoch of space'. As a category for understanding the production of culture, the analysis of space traverses disciplinary boundaries, and at its best brings into dialogue the concrete and the cultural to reveal the ideologies that shape and are shaped by the performance of identities *in situ*. Both Schleier's *Skyscraper Cinema* and Wojcik's *The Apartment Plot* take space as their starting point, situating their analysis in the cinematic locations of the skyscraper and the apartment, respectively. While the literature documenting the relationship between cinema and urban space is not insignificant (works such as David Clark's *The Cinematic City* (1997) and Stephen Barber's *Projected Cities* (2002) deserving particular mention], the efforts of scholars thus far have tended towards the panoramic: laying the theoretical groundwork for analysing the interconnections between screenscape and cityscape. As Schleier's and Wojcik's titles suggest, these books delimit the scope to two architectural types, a site-based focus that does not reduce the extent of the critical landscape analysed

but rather enables both writers to defy traditional critical boundaries that might typically organise a monograph along the lines of auteur or genre, and thereby to refract the analyses towards wider cultural terrains. Through this lens, Schleier and Wojcik illuminate the ideologies at stake in more specific locations, adopting the skyscraper and apartment as prismatic sites where discourses of gender, class, capital and ethnicity are played out in dialogue with the shifting connotative landscape of these particular urban architectures.

Schleier's *Skyscraper Cinema* is an interpretative history of tall-building architecture and its relationship to discourses of gender across the history of American cinema – from 1923 to the 1950s. The historical framework is complemented by a thematic organisation which groups films from particular decades in accordance with broader socio-cultural developments in the United States. In-depth and rigorous, Schleier's historical framework is more than simply a convenient temporal grid. Furnishing the reader with diegetic as well as external reference points, Schleier makes a strong case for these films as producers of culture at the same time as they can be seen to emerge from within a certain cultural context. Her research extends well beyond the screen as she discusses the original texts from which many of the films were adapted, as well as situating the films within networks of architectural discourse, US domestic policy, self-help books, magazines, popular novels and the vagaries of the film industry itself. The result is that each chapter weaves a broad tapestry of the *zeitgeist* of the decade under consideration, imbricating these films in the ongoing performance of meanings for architecture and gender across the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Schleier's close readings of the films' cinematographic and scriptural rhetoric illuminate these external sources to support her analysis of how class- and gender-inflected ideologies are inscribed in architecture and in its celluloid manifestation onscreen.

Schleier's approach is informed by theoretical strands across the fields of urban and gender studies. Most notably, in the first instance, she mobilises Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Henri Lefebvre's pioneering work which shows how various categories of space – from representations of space (buildings, infrastructures) to representational spaces (films, paintings, sculpture) – interrelate and animate the networks of power in any given society. Judith Butler's work on gender and representational space informs Schleier's demonstration of how gender identities are continually negotiated and renegotiated with respect to a bank of cultural representations.

Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!* (1923) forms the main subject of Schleier's first chapter, wherein she reveals the phenomenon of the human fly as emerging from associations of virility and the self-made man with the scaling of intrepid heights and a disregard for danger. Placing Lloyd's films and his star persona in dialogue with contemporary popular references such as self-help psychiatrist Dr. Emile Coué, Schleier develops her argument that such a cinema can be seen as part of a wider cultural discourse seeking to find a mould for individual masculinity in the midst of the increasingly overwhelming monuments and masses of the urban environment. While the films of the 1920s offer hope for the preservation of man's triumphant singularity, Schleier's analysis of depression-era films such as *Skyscraper Souls* (Edgar Selwyn, 1932), *Baby Face* (Alfred E. Greene, 1933) and *Wife vs. Secretary* (Clarence Brown, 1936) demonstrates how cinematic skyscrapers of this period are often mediators for debate surrounding deviant sexualities and class-tensions. Most often, she argues, these films reinforce dominant models of acceptable gender roles for men and women, and also serve as cautionary tales for those (women in particular) with Icarean tendencies.

Particularly noteworthy is Schleier's groundbreaking analysis of King Vidor and Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1949) and John Farrow's adaptation of Kenneth Fearing's novel *The Big Clock* (1948). Schleier reveals these films as complicated tapestries that disclose the entrenched political leanings of the authors and their eras. Her archival delving into Rand's life and work offers a fascinating background to the development of the author's capitalist sympathies and her vision of masculinity, embodied in *The Fountainhead*'s main protagonist Roark, as one of austere functionalism and creativity. Schleier's research on Rand illuminates the intersecting strands of class ideology that blend in the figure of Roark, who is, somewhat ironically, a figure possessed with working-class virility but who is ultimately mobilised not to service the masses – portrayed as lacking self-determination – but to reinvigorate and modernise the existing bastions of pre-modern capital. The final chapter, 'Mid-century Corporate Renewal and Gender Realignment in *Executive Suite* and *Desk Set*' approaches the fifties as a period of transition in corporate America, a time when both gender roles were being reconfigured with the emergence of the female executive, and when a balance between work and domestic spaces was increasingly sought. As with the rest of the book, here the cinematic taxonomies of set design, sound effects and cinematography are analysed to great effect. Schleier's perceptive observations on *Executive Suite* (Robert Wise, 1954) unpack the tensions between conformism and individuality, the organisation man versus the domestically attuned executive, that are insinuated by the choices of a ground-facing close-up or an elevated shot. Her reading of *Desk Set* (Walter Lang, 1957) is informed by contemporary debate surrounding the advent of the computer age, and popular anxieties about the increasing rationalisation of the workspace and the replacement of humans by the machine. *Desk Set* is analysed as an early example of blatant product placement, with IBM being instrumental in the film's production and its

attempts to neutralise apprehension about computers through the medium of a romantic comedy film.

Where Schleier's book is accomplished in the depth and breadth of its cultural-historical analysis, Wojcik employs the force of spatial theory to more directly break down the traditional critical boundaries of film studies. The subject of the book is films and popular culture from the 1950s to 1975 that take the apartment as their *locus operandi*. Rather than viewing such spaces as a simple cage for the action, however, Wojcik convincingly argues that the continuities in cultural discourses surrounding the apartment in American cinema of the period merit the more systemic categorisation of 'plot'. Building on her establishment of the 'apartment plot', she goes on to challenge traditional methods of distinguishing between films on the basis of auteur or genre, and instead sets up a rich and illuminating dialogue between films that span such categories. Beginning with the fifties, where Schleier's analysis ends, this book's understanding of the apartment as an ironically mainstream yet liminal space, a convergence of private and public spaces, casts new light on more established critical edifices that tend to frame this period more definitively in terms of the opposition between the urban and the suburban, with more sustained focus landing on the latter. Wojcik's revelation of the apartment as a public-private space, a porous arena that performs alternative and sometimes contradictory functions in relation to gender, marital status, sexuality and race, allows her to explore the flows between the external public and internal domestic spaces. With admirable clarity, she simultaneously problematises the notion of distinct or separate spheres à la Habermas, while providing cogently illustrated and culturally profound analyses of this in-between space. Her chapters are organised in terms of agency, a system that allows Wojcik to establish the coherence of her subject, the apartment plot, at the same time as the specific differences between agencies open room for reflection on the

limitations of the porosity of the apartment in relation to class and, most particularly, ethnicity. More than historical, this book's emphasis is ambitious in its rehabilitation of urban theory and its relevance for understanding cultural production. Most formative to the arguments offered here are Jane Jacob's seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Lefebvre's *Right to the City* (1968), which together provide the interweaving strands connecting cinematic analyses to a philosophy of urbanism.

Such a dynamic approach enables Wojcik to reinvigorate perceptions of such classics as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), which is extensively dealt with in the book's first chapter. Taking the film as an archetype, the author illuminates the central tenets of her identification of the apartment plot; namely the porosity of such a space, its facilitation of action, and more than this its centrality in the construction, maintenance and breakdown of urban identities. Most impressive is this book's mastery of the critical landscape surrounding the more commented-upon films. While laying out for the reader the terrain of auteur-based and film noir genre-focused studies of, for example, the Hitchcockian thriller, Wojcik reads against this grain to unfold the wider issues revealed when one considers *Rear Window* in its relationship to other 'apartment plots' of the period. Thus comes into view Jacobs' idea of the street as a performative, balletic arena as well as Lefebvre's notion of spontaneity and interaction as being vital to the well-being of the urban, which together inform *The Apartment Plot*'s analysis of the antagonist, Lars Thorwald, as someone so intensely isolated as to merit suspicion. Interpreted from a spatial perspective, *Rear Window* is revealed to participate in wider debates surrounding the city's singularity in its bringing together of strangers.

Subsequent chapters examine how the apartment plot functions in tandem with popular culture to construct ideal urban identities for its

subjects. In 'We Like Our Apartment' (Chapter 2), Wojcik draws on the magazine *Playboy*'s construction of the single man's 'pad' to show how such constructions, in dialogue with such films as *The Tender Trap* (Charles Walters, 1955) and *Pillow Talk* (Michael Gordon, 1959), move beyond traditional images of masculinity and are creative of alternatives such as the playboy bachelor. The author's analysis rigorously demonstrates the centrality of the apartment to such creations, and an astute section on the significance of the closet in certain of these apartment plots opens the door on tensions underlying the construction of urbane heterosexual ideals, revealing the coded homosexuality often enacted through the space of the apartment. The companion chapter on the bachelorette pad discusses the female single's apartment as inserted within dominant narratives relating to marriage and domesticity; ideally this space should only be operational for an interim period and should serve as a preparatory phase, albeit a crucial one, before marriage and the inevitable repositioning of both female identity and occupancy along the lines of the housewife in suburbia. As well as an inventive reading of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961) in terms of the Freudian uncanny, Wojcik's close readings of films such as *The Best of Everything* (Jean Negulesco, 1959) demonstrate how certain films present alternative interpretive possibilities, how while they seem to warn women against careerism, they simultaneously promulgate the apartment phase as a necessary step to female maturity, and counter stereotypes of 'good-girl' virginity by revealing the self-knowledge to be gained from pre-marital affairs. In her chapter on the urban housewife, the author reflects on the relevance of porosity to depictions of urban marriage and the stress placed on the ideal of the public privacy offered by the apartment in these cases. Confronting the question of the possibility for a female urban domesticity, Wojcik's comparative analysis of films as diverse as *Under the Yum Yum Tree* (David Swift, 1963), *Barefoot in the Park* (Gene Saks, 1967) and *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski 1968) shows these films to

import ideals of suburban housewifery to the city, and makes the argument that the ideologies surrounding marriage necessarily orient female agency towards the more fully-private realm of the suburb. Using Lefebvre's etymological equation of the 'private' with 'privation', the author demonstrates the dual tension present in these texts' depiction of female vulnerability and alienation in the city that merits their interpretation as critiques of the hegemonies of suburban marriage while at the same time being implicit in reinforcing this hegemony. In her final chapter, Wojcik flexes her definition of the 'apartment plot' and, through her dexterous analysis of the African American apartment, confronts the boundaries and exclusivity implicit in the ideal of porosity associated with the white bachelor/ette apartment. In her analysis of television series *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-79) and films such as *No Way Out* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *For Love of Ivy* (Daniel Mann, 1968) and *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971), the author explores the lines of racial and class divisions as entrenched by environmental segregation. She underlines the alternate motivations of the apartment plot depending on ethnicity, and shows the central concerns of mobility and containment to be inherent in the African American version. Wojcik ultimately convinces the reader as to how the African American apartment plot reflexively exposes the class- and race-based configurations of its white equivalent.

Both books are original, researched achievements and will be of considerable interest to scholars across the fields of urban, cultural and film studies. More than this, both offer substantial evidence as to the potential for spatially based approaches of cinema to enrich and to broaden the critical horizons of the film studies' field through their interdisciplinary revelation of how cinema's representational edifices continually construct and deconstruct the complexities of cultural identity.

Asian Horror

By Andy Richards

Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84243-320-1. 20 illustrations, 159 pp. £ 12.99

Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema

Edited by Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-962-209-972-2; 978-962-209-973-9 (pbk). 34 illustrations, ix + 273 pp. No price.

A Review by Jamil Khader, Stetson University

Since the release of Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998) and Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999) to western audiences, Asian, or more specifically Japanese, South Korean, Hong Kong, and Thai, horror cinema has taken the world by storm. In their stylistic inventions, metaphysical conundrums, sublime terrors, disturbing imagery and fantastic narratives, especially the *kaidan eiga* genre (ghost story film), with its *yurie* icon (unquiet spirit, mostly female) and more specifically, the unsettling *onryou* (the vengeful *yurei*) trope, these films catapulted the Asian horror cinematic traditions, in general, and Japanese horror (J-horror) cinema, in particular, back into the spotlight of world cinema after the Japanese 'New Wave' disappeared from the cinescape in the 1960s. By the time Hollywood and other film production and distribution companies started taking notice of this emergent cinematic phenomenon, Asian horror cinema became the ultimate source of inspiration for many horror film makers both in the region and around the world, achieving cult status among fans worldwide. Indeed, Asian horror cinema constitutes a paradigmatic site for interrogating the contradictions of cultural production within the conditions of structural inequity that characterize the international division of labour under global capitalism.

Despite the pan-Asian and global reach of Asian horror films, most of the available guides, introductions, and critical studies of Asian horror cinema still approach their subject matter through the conceptual matrix of national cinema. As media, film, and cultural studies critics continue to explore this multifaceted phenomenon, new conceptual tools and theoretical paradigms need to be developed to make sense of the contradictions that arise from the application of a nation-centred methodology to a more pan-Asian and transnational content. This is by no means an easy task and a satisfactory resolution of this contradiction will vary depending on the extent to which the premises, operative semantics, and theories underwriting the critics' interventions are completely reconfigured and restructured. The two books under review, *Asian Horror* by Andy Richards, and the collection, *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*, edited by Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, embody this contradiction between the national and the emergent transnational in the critical examination of Asian horror cinema in film, media, and cultural studies, and testify to the differential capacity of the critics to resolve this contradiction successfully.

Grounded in a critical understanding of the pan-Asian and transnational reach of Asian horror cinema, these books clear a space for rethinking important theoretical problems in Asian horror cinema. These problems include the referent of the signifier 'Asia' in Asian cinema and Asia 'extreme'; the complex dynamic between Asian horror cinema and Hollywood; and the future of Asian horror cinema. Reading these books together, therefore, does not only help open up the field for productive dialogues about Asian horror cinema itself, but also demonstrates the robust health and vibrancy of both Asian horror cinema and the critical literature on it. Nonetheless, the premises and structures of these books subvert their attempt at establishing a pan-Asian and transnational framework that can disavow and reconfigure the parameters of the

national cinema matrix they seem eager to move away from. These texts, therefore, constitute an uneven example for rethinking the language of possibility for resolving the contradictions between the national content of these cinemas and the transnational and pan-Asian methodology proposed in them.

Richards' book offers those viewers who are not too familiar with Asian horror cinema a broad and accessible overview of the national horror cinemas of Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Thailand from the 1950s to the present within their production and cultural contexts. The book also provides a survey of the masters of Asian horror cinema and a film review guide of the essential, 'must see' horror films that highlights the film's story and background as well as the author's own 'verdict' on the film's aesthetics (mainly its setting, mise-en-scene, and intertexts). Although it provides an uneven introductory survey of these national horror cinemas — Richards devotes five chapters to Japanese cinema, three to Korean cinema, and two chapters to Hong Kong and Thai cinemas each — one of the main virtues of this book is that it encompasses a wide range of terrors and monstrosities that are not exclusively limited to the *yurie* or *onryou* tropes. While some of the films reviewed in this book do not strictly fall under the traditional horror category, his selections are in some cases justified because in Richards' defence these films still "terrify or disturb the audiences", and because they are multi-genre films in which horror narratives intertwine with other types of narrative anyway (12). The book ends with a chapter entitled 'Interactive Terrors' that deals with the impact of J-horror on the flourishing interactive games market, particularly the "survival-horror genre" (151); this chapter, however, reads more like an excerpt from an ongoing or future project.

Designed for a special book series, *TransAsia: Screen Cultures*, that comes out from Hong Kong University Press, Choi and Wada-Marciano's

critical collection, *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*, is written for specialists and graduate students, and aims at an analytical and theoretical examination of the production, distribution, and consumption of Asian horror cinema in the East Asian region — Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand — and in the world within the economic structures of global capitalism and the international division of labour. Theoretically informed and conceptually sophisticated, the book seems to suggest that Asian filmmakers, production personnel and financiers reflexively construct a pan-Asian film industry that can ward off the predatory power of Hollywood and prevent its exploitation and commodification of Asian horror films in an endless series of remakes that are, ironically enough, more lucrative in Asia than the original films themselves. Along the way, the collection addresses a new set of emergent thematics in Asian horror cinema, especially the poetics of excess, collective national trauma, identity crisis, the horror of the mundane and radical politics, even though some chapters in the volume still indulge in traditional themes such as technology, gender politics, violence and the metaphysical struggle between good and evil that have thus far been the main staple of Asian horror film criticism.

Choi and Wada-Marciano's collection is divided into three sections, each of which is clearly designed to mix and blend different chapters on these national cinemas together within a pan-Asian and transnational matrix. However, neither all the sections nor all the chapters in this collection manage to accomplish this ambitious goal. For example, only the first section gets very close to achieving this volume's main objective, by including a chapter on each one of these national cinemas, beginning with J-horror and ending with Thai horror, in addition to a chapter on the international film company Tartan, thus covering national, pan-Asian, and transnational linkages within which the production, marketing and consumption of Asian horror cinema should be more critically situated and

examined. The other two sections fail to duplicate this structure: While the second section subtracts the Thai and the transnational connections, the third section concentrates only on J-horror and K-horror in albeit a reversed order. Consequently, the last two sections lack a clearly articulated rationale for grouping the contributions together as coherent single units. Unlike Richards' comprehensive overview of various genres in Asian horror cinema, this collection is marred by its narrow scope and repetitive focus on one or two major horror film hit makers and blockbusters from these national cinemas. Almost exclusively, unfortunately, the contributions to this volume concentrate on the *kaidan eiga* narratives with its *yurei* and *onryou* tropes, to the exclusion of the wide range of terrors and monstrosities that typify Asian horror cinema.

Despite their shortcomings, both books present an interesting look, sometimes compatible and other times contentious, at some of the main controversial issues that have emerged in the critical examination of Asian horror cinema, thus helping to revamp the dialogue about Asian horror films and move it a step forward. A productive point of departure is the problem of nomenclature and definition, especially the referent of the signifier 'Asia' in Asian cinema and Asia 'extreme'. Although Choi and Wada-Marciano begin their introduction with a problematisation of Asia as a "fixed territory" (2), emphasizing its status as an imagined construction and a projection *à la* Edward Said's Orientalism thesis, their deployment of the term remains exclusive to East Asia namely, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Thailand. Oddly enough, the editors end up essentialising these national horror cinemas, which they associate with specific topoi that are deemed to be exclusive to these traditions. Ironically, the editors criticise Tartan's orientalist exploitation of Asian horror films under the marketing label 'Asia Extreme', because Tartan effaces national specificities, fosters aesthetic relativism, and turns Asia into an "empty signifier for being cool" (6).

Although they acknowledge that these topoi could be overlapping in different national contexts, consequent upon shared histories, Choi and Wada-Marciano associate J-horror with technology, K-horror with (female) adolescent sensibility, and Hong Kong horror with Chinese national identity (4). This neat classification system crumbles down, however, when it comes to Thai horror, which seems to be lacking, at least for now, in an absolutely identifying signifier, trope or motif. More importantly, the reductionism at play in such a classification does not do justice to the more complex elucidation of the diverse themes and concerns that some contributors attribute to the national cinemas under discussion. Moreover, these critics tend to celebrate the shared histories and common cultural traditions of these 'Asian societies' in a way that flattens out not only the internal differences among these societies and their own histories of colonisation and brutality against each other, but also the actually existing structures of systemic racial and ethnic discrimination against and exclusion of "the brown people" from Southeast Asia, as Adam Knee notes in an endnote to his article on the Pang Brothers' Thai horror flick, *The Eye* (2002). Knee, in particular, takes exception to this homogenising strategy by critically examining the duplicative colonial relationship between Hong Kong, serving as a synecdoche for East Asia, and Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore within the structural inequity between them that turns the latter into cheap sources of labour and "invisible partners" (76-77).

This homogenisation of Asia and the flattening out of its internal differences is also evident in Richards' book. Although he does not problematise the concept 'Asia', Richards nonetheless points out that his book focuses on the horror cinemas of these East Asian countries to the exclusion of other cinemas in South East Asia, because these East Asian countries have been the source for "the most significant horror boom in

recent years" (12). Nonetheless, the exclusive synecdochical displacement at work here privileges J-horror and K-horror as the ultimate sites of Asian Horror cinema, especially the former, making it seem like Asia is nothing more than Japan. In his first chapter on Asian supernatural beliefs, for example, Richards spends two paragraphs overviewing diverse Asian religious traditions (15-16), only to focus on Japanese "supernatural story telling" in the rest of the chapter (16-19).

Reading these books together can also help unpack some of the nuances of the dynamic between Asian horror cinema and Hollywood. They effectively demonstrate the complex bi-, or even multi-directional, flows and exchanges between Asian horror cinema and Hollywood as well as among other national cinematic traditions in the region. These books make it clear that cannibalising other horror cinemas is common to all film industries around the world — Asian horror cinema, for example, has also appropriated themes from Hollywood's para-cinema, especially films like M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999). While Richards highlights the bi-directionality in the relationship between western and eastern horror cinemas, Choi and Wada-Marciano's volume emphasizes the multi-directionality and the heteroglossic nature of these exchanges that are indelibly encoded in both pan-Asian and transnational cinematic registers, iconographies and signs.

Although Richards pays less attention to the pan-Asian dimension of these cultural productions, one of his main goals in writing this book is to address the "complexities of the mutually sustaining relationship" between Hollywood and Asian horror cinema (10). He argues that since most filmmakers are "international in their outlook and interests", it becomes almost impossible to trace "the ebb and flow of influence and counter-influence" between western and eastern horror films (11). As an intriguing example of such cosmopolitan film production Richards cites is

Jason Cuadrado's ghost anthology film *Tales from the Dead* (2007), which was "devised as a Japanese-language, J-horror film which —bizarrely— was shot entirely in Los Angeles using local Japanese talent" (11). Furthermore, Richards dedicates a whole chapter towards the end of his book to Hollywood's appropriation and Asiaploitation, what he calls "desecration" and "cultural pillaging" (149), of the original Asian horror films that are motivated by a "condescending" imperial attitude, amounting to the Americanisation of Asian horror films (143). His reference to the symbolic funeral of Hideo Nakata's *The Ring*'s (1998) Sadako during *O-Bon*, the Festival of the Dead, in 2002, is a clear indication of the people's true sentiments regarding Hollywood's takeover and the Americanisation of Asian horror cinema. Richards is thus right about his ambivalent feelings regarding the Hollywood remakes. While Hollywood can guarantee that Asian horror films can become popular global commodities, Hollywood at the same time also dilutes the impact of these films by acquiring their remake rights and withholding their release to maximize the box-office potential of their remakes.

With no less vigilance about the transnational networks of cultural exchanges, Choi and Wada-Marciano's collection also examines the regional concentric network, foregrounding both the pan-Asian and the transnational registers within which Asian horror films are produced, distributed and consumed. This emphasis on the pan-Asian dimension in the production and distribution of Asian horror cinema, while being actively situated in Hollywood's global production strategies, is one of the major contributions of this collection. This pan-Asian trajectory is reflected not only in the ways in which Asian horror films are now "self-consciously" crafted, as Kevin Heffernan argues, to capitalise on regionally-driven film production, but also in the extent to which the content, style, and narrative structure of these films inscribe, as Knee states, both cross-cultural themes and traveling routes in the region and

around the world. For example, the Hong Kong film *Inner Senses*, which was directed by Chi-Leung Law in 2002, grafts J-horror iconography onto a Hollywood narrative structure, while the Thai horror film *The Eye* underscores the pan-Asian linkage in the change of the setting from Hong Kong to Thailand. Whether such a poetics amounts to the production of a "non-originary space," as Chica Kinoshita claims in her discussion of J-horror (118), remains to be seen, since other contributions to the volume also insist on the significance of cultural specificity in these films and the inevitable textual gaps or disjunctures that result, in Robert Cagle's words, from the inadequacy of Western narrative forms to "express culturally specific desires and anxieties" (129).

The two books are also incompatible in their interrogation of these forms of pan-Asian and transnational exchanges within the structural inequity of the international division of labour under global capitalism. Richards, for example, not only fails to examine these cultural flows within the current capitalist restructuring of the global economy, but he also displaces the economic structures that define and shape the relationship between western and eastern horror cinemas onto the cultural sphere. In contrast, Choi and Wada-Marciano's volume remains grounded through and through in the critical understanding of these pan-Asian and transnational cultural exchanges within the exigencies of the global political economy that proves beyond the shadow of doubt the unevenness of such exchanges within the international division of labour. As such, Choi and Wada-Marciano's collection helps clear the mist of the celebratory cosmopolitan and hybridity discourses that have occluded the oppressive social relations underpinning transnational cultural exchanges.

One issue that emerges out of the relationship between Hollywood and Asian horror cinema is the question of the future of this cinema. With the remake after remake of popular Asian horror blockbusters, has the

international film industry's Asiaploitation for their commercial potential co-opted them and emptied them out of their originality, spectral aura and subversive politics? Despite the declining revenues from the *onryou* narratives, in particular, and the reduction of Asian horror films to "empty clichés and stock tricks" (9) that have turned into the ultimate object of parody, Richards believes that Asian horror cinema is in robust health. In his review of films such as *Rampo Noir*, which was directed by Suguru Takeuchi, Akio Jissoji, Hisayasu Sato, and Atsushi Kaneko in 2005, and Kaneko Shusuke's *Death Note* (85), he notes that the diverse monstrosities populating these films and the shift from the paranormal and the supernatural to psychological terrors in recent Asian horror films testify to the refreshing artistic ingenuity of Asian horror cinema, proving that it will remain on the global cinescape for a long time to come. Choi and Wada-Marciano's collection contains contradictory assessments of the future of Asian horror films: On the one hand, Heffernan maintains that the increasing interaction between East Asian horror cinema and the Pacific Rim within the changing film distribution patterns can be translated into another boom in the pan-Asian horror industry. On the other, Robert Hyland, in the concluding chapter to the volume, argues that most of what has been labeled Asia extreme has been sapped from the radical political agenda that typifies the work of filmmakers like Miike Takashi. For Asian horror films to thrive and continue to make an impact on world cinema, he seems to suggest, Asian horror filmmakers and production companies have to go beyond the glorification of gore for its own sake. It remains to be seen, however, how the unfortunate recent natural catastrophe that hit Japan and the nuclear-reactors disaster that resulted from it will be played out in shaping the future of J-horror, in particular, and Asian horror cinema, in general.

The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema

By Nancy Condee

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-190536696-9. 360 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

Cinepaternity: Fathers and Sons in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film

Edited by Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-253-22187-2. 344 pp. £16.99 (pbk)

A Review by John A. Riley, Birkbeck College, University of London

These two books confirm the suspicion that Russian cinema and its attendant scholarship are both thriving, as both widen their focus by considering Soviet cinema alongside contemporary post-Soviet films. Nancy Condee claims at the outset of her study that if she has provided "six individual portraits of Russia's leading directors, [the book] will have fulfilled half its task." (4) But the second half of Condee's aim is much more ambitious: to use postcolonial theory to examine the ways in which the idea of Russia as an empire has been configured in late Soviet and post-Soviet cinema. This entails an introduction that deals, in heavily theoretical terms, with ideas of nationhood, Russia's sense of an expanding frontier – exemplified by the quote "England had an empire, but Russia was an empire" (3). The book then rather abruptly switches to a more empirical, film historical chapter which outlines the changes in cinema that began with perestroika, and takes the reader through the shrinking of the industry during Yeltsin's government to its current renaissance in production. Throughout, Condee provides fascinating anecdotal evidence, information that sheds invaluable light on an especially murky period. Her formidable critical voice is never lost in this welter of factual information.

Condee's choice of directors for her individual portraits is judicious. To Western connoisseurs of Russian cinema, names like Nikita Mikhailkov, Kira Muratova and Alexei Balabanov conjure figures by turns epic, irascible and idiosyncratic, and controversial and bloodthirsty. And yet precious little Anglophone critical attention has been paid to these figures. Another influence on Condee's choice of directors is their straddling of both periods – they emerged in the late Soviet era and managed to survive the production drought of the early nineties and have continued to carve out careers either critically or commercially successful. Condee characterises Mikhailkov as an 'enlightened conservative' pragmatically melding the allure of the nineteenth century gentry with Soviet methods (he held the prestigious post of administrator of the filmmakers' union) in both his filmmaking practice and the films themselves.

Muratova's dense and formally ostentatious films have found only a small but dedicated following in the West, where Russian and Eastern European films often sit uneasily outside both mainstream and arthouse categories. Condee shows how Muratova, with her characters portrayed not as fully formed, psychologically coherent personalities, but as "fragments... disconnected utterances" (128), disrupts the civic conscience and consistently mocks the aspirations of Russo-Soviet high culture. No wonder, then, that her films were repeatedly shelved by the Soviets.

Vadim Abrashitov and Aleksandr Mindadze are a director and scriptwriter team, little known in the West, whose work forms the subject of the fifth chapter. Their populist legal dramas link to the Russian moral tradition but remain somewhat ambivalent on the subject of community. The films comment on the pre-rehearsed one-dimensionality of public life, and focus on "anaemic collectivity" (155) rather than a direct critique of the state.

Sokurov has received duly philosophical treatments of his individual works (*Russian Ark/Russki Kovcheg*, 2003, especially) but Condee provides a succinct description of his entire career, including early documentaries and his Strugatsky brothers adaptation Days of The Eclipse/ *Dni zatmeniya, 1988)* She fills in many of the details of Sokurov's working life which are the subject of mere murky speculation to interested parties with no knowledge of the Russian language. Then, following Edwin Carels, she distinguishes between the ascetic and baroque trends in Sokurov's films (exemplified by *Mother and Son/Mat i Syn*, 1997) and *Russian Ark* respectively) Condee discusses the theme of death in Sokurov's work. Sokurov believes that mortality "expresses the essence and value of Russian art." Condee takes a judicious approach to Sokurov's ponderous pronouncement, but a discussion of the way death in Sokurov is frequently followed by a return (talking to a ghost *in Days of Eclipse*, the historical apparitions of *Russian Ark*) might have further extended our understanding of Sokurov's complex films.

Condee portrays Aleksei German as a deeply personal director, adapting stories of his father's tribulations during the Stalinist era. German "narrates stories by those who *became* the Soviet intelligentsia to an audience who, however unintentionally, *ceased to be* the Soviet intelligentsia" (186). Condee argues that German's films challenged the narrow range of responses to the Great Patriotic War (split between one-dimensional propaganda and the Thaw era's "humanizing" war stories). Perhaps, more immediately useful for the perplexed Western cinephile is Condee's placing of German's dense technique in context, calling it a "cinema of the background" (202). She considers his talismanic use of props and scenery, and following the great Russian theorist Mikhail Iampolski, notes that "camera discourse does not serve narration" (211),

the camera becoming a third element of the films that are neither a part of the spectator's world nor the world of the characters.

Alexei Balabanov baffled many British cinephiles because his enigmatic, disturbing and beautifully shot film *Of Freaks and Men/Pro urodov i lyudey* (1998), was closely followed by *Brother/Brat* (1997), a violent gangster film with overtly racist and misogynistic elements that then continued to surface in Balabanov's subsequent work. Condee scrupulously distinguishes between the dubious sentiments expressed by Balabanov's fictional protagonists (which shouldn't be taken at face value) and the same sentiments when expressed by the director himself (which should). Condee considers the way Balabanov creates a "cunning and cruel animal" (236) capable of traversing a dangerous post-Soviet landscape, a world Balabanov sees as ill-served by liberal Western values. Condee's book melds research into areas little-known to Western film scholars, with a strong theoretical line of argument, and ultimately succeeds in both its aims.

Cinepaternity announces itself as spearheading a new academic trend, a psychoanalytic or psychological focus on the father, rather than the traditional oedipal focus on the mother. This is particularly interesting in the light of now well-known concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, who felt that the limitations of the one-on-one analyst/analysand relationship was mimicked by the limiting of desire to the (bourgeoisie) relationship between mother and child. In Goscilo and Hashamova's edited collection, the approach ostensibly returns to one-on-one relations. However, as Stalin styled himself as the nation's father, the paternity studies posited in this book deal with the relation between the authority figure and the masses.

The importance of father son relations in contemporary Russian cinema became apparent to British cinemagoers in 2005, when *Koktebel* (Boris

Khlebnikov and Aleksei Popogrebsky) followed on from the previous year's release of *The Return/Vozvrashchenie* (Andrei Zvyagintsev) to find success on the arthouse circuit. Both these films deal with a strained father/son relationship, and both were sometimes read as allegories for Russia's relationship with its Soviet past – it was tyrannical, yet somehow still needed. This idea persists in several of the articles collected here.

The opening chapter shows the ways in which Thaw-era cinema returned to the Leninist rhetoric of the "great family": Stalinism resulted in a fatherless generation, and the young adults of the Thaw must continue the work of the older generation. Elena Prokhorova's chapter considers the return of the Imperial father during the 1970s, the era of conservatism and stagnation under Brezhnev, and the way in which the film *Officers/Ofitsery* (Vladimir Rogovoi, 1971), suggests continuity between pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia. Seth Graham's chapter follows on from this, investigating the ways in which perestroika era film allowed models of male kinship to explore the socio-political moment, with reference to Tengiz Abuladze's classic *Repentance/Monanieba* (1984) and Abrashitov-Mindadze's films, amongst others.

The book's second section deals specifically with World War Two. Tatiana Smorodinskaya considers the war's representation during the post-Soviet era. She concludes, reflecting Condee's work, that "Contemporary Russia, busy with the complex task of combining into a new national doctrine the legitimacies of both the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia, is struggling to part with its glorious myths" (107). Mark Lipovetsky's chapter analyses *My Stepbrother, Frankenstein/Moi Svodnyi Brat Frankenshtein* (Valerii Todorovskii, 2004) considering it as a film that breaks with the convention of the war myth as being in a symbiotic relationship with the symbol of a strong, patriarchal authority figure. Helena Goscilo's chapter, 'A Surplus

of Surrogates: Mashkov's Fathers', concerns the popular actor Vladimir Mashkov, who has won box-office success playing father roles.

The third section sets out to analyse the way filial bonds have been reconfigured in post-Soviet cinema. Yana Hashamova's chapter considers both *The Return* and *Koktebel*, proving that their similarities were more than just a caprice of UK distribution. Vlad Strukov considers the phenomena of the *Night Watch/Nochnoi Dozor* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2004) franchise. Rather than just as examples of the new wave of Soviet blockbusters, as they are often considered, Strukov takes a detour through Freud and Sophocles to show how the films dramatise a reverse Oedipus complex and argues that the franchise suggests a reconciliatory attitude towards the Soviet past and Russia's more recent history. Brian James Baer's chapter also turns to Freud, here to discuss the epic television series *The Brigade/Brigada* (Aleksei Sidorov, 2002-2004) and the way in which it aligns itself with the Putin era.

The final section comprises a chapter on Tarkovsky and Sokurov, the two Russian auteurs who continue to cast long shadows over the landscape of Western cinephilia. One feels that an entire book could be devoted to Tarkovsky's theme of fatherhood, and similarly Sokurov's diptych of *Mother and Son* and *Father and Son/Otets i Syn* (2003) could provoke reams of contemplative criticism by the philosophically inclined. After the reverent, rhapsodic criticism that is so often devoted to Tarkovsky, it is something of a relief to see him described as "arrogant and categorical" (248). Goscilo argues that this self-orchestrated mystique has obscured the true catalyst of Tarkovsky's films: That his father left the family for another woman ("bewitched by a siren" in Tarkovsky's own words) when Tarkovsky was merely four years old. This is an interpretation determined by the author's prior research interests but it is one that allows for a reconfigured and refreshingly unsentimental approach to the filmmaker.

For example, Goscilo fully considers the paternal themes in Tarkovsky's *The Steamroller and the Violin/Katok i skrpka* (1960) rather than dismissing it as mere apprentice work because that was Tarkovsky's own assessment of the film. The chapter is a valuable addition to the now considerable amount of scholarship on Tarkovsky, in part because it shifts the interpretative focus away from the director's own words.

Sokurov's films, by turns ascetic and dense, present a challenge to film scholars and Jose Alaniz acquits himself admirably with this closing chapter, which deals with *Father and Son*, a film widely perceived by Western critics as having homoerotic overtones. Sokurov reportedly responded to this interpretation by comparing "homosexuality to racism and nationalism" (283). As with Condee's treatment of Balabanov, Alaniz treats Sokurov's views even-handedly, seeing them in context yet without being overly judgemental. Alaniz considers the theme of blindness in the film through an analysis of Sokurov's mobilisation of Rembrandt (a pre-occupation he shares with Tarkovsky, who used the same artist to point up the father-son relationship in *Solaris* (1972) and concludes that Sokurov's attempted resurrection of paternity comes at the expense of the feminine.

If *Cinepaternity* focuses on a specific two-way relationship within the nuclear family, then *The Imperial Trace* widens its focus to look at the whole of civil society in Russia. But the conclusions of *Cinepaternity* aren't purely psychological, they have ramifications for society too (why this artificial dichotomy between the psychological and the sociological?). Indeed, throughout *Cinepaternity* there are hints that connect the paternal to the imperial, most notably in the discussions of films that deal with war.

While both volumes differ in their approaches to Russian cinema, but both take a non-exhaustive approach that focuses on case studies of individual films and directors. Condee concludes that the directors she has written about "suggest an unpredictable variety of such imaginative play and serve as a caution against any claim that a limit, a unity, or a template is achieved here" (243). This is also true of *Cinepaternity*, whose choice of films ranges from formally abstruse art cinema to vampire blockbusters.

In both books then there is a breadth of reference, but also a keen critical intelligence. For example, Western cinephiles are easily awed by the formidable aesthetics of Sokurov's films. Both volumes here are able to bypass this reverence, considering Sokurov's aesthetics and values as partly culturally determined. Reading the two books together then, one is left with a feeling of cohesion. Both books suggest a kind of crossroads for individual directors, a choice between making state-serving films that assert community values as unproblematic, perhaps positing the need for a strong leader, or making multifaceted films that are capable of addressing the problems of contemporary Russia.

American Science Fiction Film and Television

By Lincoln Geraghty

Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84520-796-0 (pbk). 156 pp. £14.99

British Science Fiction Film and Television: Critical Essays

Edited by Tobias Hochscherf and James Leggott

Jefferson, Carolina and London: McFarland, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7864-4621-6 (pbk). 227 pp. £29.95

The Philosophy of Science Fiction

Edited by Steven M. Sanders

Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8131-9260-4 (pbk). 232 pp £18.95

A Review by Marcus Smith, The Open University

Science fiction is a film and television genre that has always been popular with American and British film and TV audiences but has not always been taken seriously by film theorists and film historians. This is largely rooted in the perception that science fiction cinema works at the level of visual stimulation but does not engage its viewers in a wider narrative or intellectual sense. Indeed it has been a long path to critical acceptance as an important film genre. The books which are reviewed here confirm that status and show clear benefits in taking a multidisciplinary approach to understanding science fiction cinema. This includes drawing on genre studies, cultural and social history approaches as well as the quite radical methods of philosophic enquiry as applied to the study of science fiction cinema.

Tom Gunning coined the phrase "The Cinema of Attractions" (*Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, 2000) and whilst his article concentrated on the cinema before 1906, later writers have used it to

describe many of the modern Hollywood blockbusters, particularly science fiction and fantasy films since the 1970s. According to Gunning, it is a cinema that "displaces its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator". Contrast this with a narrative cinema that engages with all the senses and intellect of the viewer. This divide goes back to the earliest days of the cinema and suggests a different nature to the relationship between filmmaker and audience that may have re-emerged to some extent since the success of blockbuster movies in the 1970s like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), and even more recently with the attempts to popularise the use of 3-D cinema technology in the presentation of science fiction films.

Steve Neale in his major work on film genres, *Genres and Hollywood* (2000), only dedicates some four pages (100-104) in a relatively simplistic discussion of science fiction. Neale relies to a great degree on a limited restatement of Vivian Sobchack's *Screening Space* (1998). What we get amounts to little more than a rough guide to the main tropes and themes of science fiction cinema particularly since its mainstream revival in the 1950s. Whilst for some like Neale, science fiction is a genre of alien invasions, spaceships and ray guns, it is for others a cinema of "thick texts" (Roz Kaveney, *From Alien to the Matrix,* 2005), a cinema of speculation designed to make the audience think.

By far the greater number of big-budget, grand-scale and other science fiction films and TV series has emerged from the US, especially since the 1950s. American science fiction is popular on a global scale and particularly popular with British audiences. Lincoln Geraghty, in *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, provides us with a critical social and cultural history of the development of the American science fiction cinema genre from the 1950s to the present decade. Geraghty specifically

recognises Gunning's expression of the tension between a cinema of narrative ideas and a cinema of attractions (7). But it is the clear mission of the book to demonstrate how American science fiction cinema works at a much deeper and culturally significant level. Like a number of earlier authors, Geraghty has taken the cultural approach to understanding the genre; a good example being the essays in *Alien Zone* edited by Annette Kuhn (1990). Kuhn stressed the "cultural instrumentality" of the science fiction film genre and placed much less emphasis on the details of authorship within this genre.

The author explores how science fiction reflects crucial aspects of American culture. Geraghty suggests that American films and TV have in different ways "responded to and reflect important historical and political events in American Life, and in the ways they have been consumed by audiences and fans" (5). Science Fiction cinema is a signature to the social and cultural changes that have happened in US society since the 1950s – starting with the twin themes of the Cold War and the Space Race, and then more or less a decade at a time running through the aspirations and anxieties of successive generations up to the post-9/11 generation. Geraghty attempts to show us that science fiction is, perhaps, the most important of American film and television genres and can be read as a barometer of change in that society.

The US in the 1950s is characterised by growing consumerism and political paranoia. This is reflected in alien invasion narratives of films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956) which is the subject of one of Geraghty's short critical case studies (21) and TV series like the visionary *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64) (29). The 1960s are harder to characterise. In the US, there were large-scale technological advances crowned by the moon landings in 1969, but at the same time the US was embroiled in a difficult war in Vietnam. On TV, *Star Trek* (1966-69), whilst

espousing high production values, often dealt with the ethical issues of war which reflected on what was going on in US foreign policy (44). At the same time, the 1960s gave us *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) which showed us an uncertain future where space travel was commonplace but our lives and emotions were minimised (36). The 1970s produced a series of films that presented an unsettling, dystopic view of the future, including the totalitarian vision of *THX-1138* (Lucas, 1971), the critique of modern capitalism *Solyent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), the environmentally sound *Silent Running* (Douglas Trumball, 1972) and the wonderfully prescient violent sports drama *Rollerball (*Norman Jewison, 1975). At the same time, Geraghty sees the TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-78) as a metaphor for the attempt to rebuild the US body politic after the scandals associated with President Nixon and Watergate (63). The late '70s though produced another Lucas blockbuster, *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), the galactic soap opera which in many ways reinvigorates the "cinema of attractions" debate.

The early 1980s is a decade of AIDS in society and of the monstrous Aliens (*Alien (*Ridley Scott, 1979*), The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1981)) on the screen. The 1980s also saw the beginnings of the digital revolution which was both a threat and a source of optimism. The threat is reflected in the killer robot film *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) and the promise is in **Batteries Not Included* (Matthew Robbins, 1987). Geraghty sees the latter being a neglected important work which combines the benevolent alien trope and the benefits of technology (72). The 1990s is a decade of optimism, of the dot com boom and then bust. If *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996) reflects optimism about resisting and triumphing over AIDS, then *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski, 1999) begins to challenge the shallow superficial nature of the capitalist world. *The Matrix* is one of the thickest of thick science fiction film texts that demonstrates a maturity in the genre and an intertextual complexity which had been

building over the previous decades (93). On TV, *The X-Files* (1993–2002) was the science fiction show that combined scepticism of institutional truth with a hint of the bizarre not seen on TV since the heyday of the first *Twilight Zone* episodes (98).

For Geraghty, the science fiction cinema of post-9/11 has proved to be a little disappointing. Surprisingly, there is a growth in the superhero variety of science fiction/fantasy. This may hark back to an earlier time when things were less problematic. It is for TV to re-emerge with its veiled critique of the Bush administration and the new *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-09) adventures to show that science fiction can provide a critique of the present through a glimpse of a possible future quite unlike any other genre (118).

In a relatively short volume, Geraghty manages to cover an incredible amount of work. He also manages to provide a reasonable case for the value of science fiction cinema and the American nature of science fiction films and TV series. Hochscherf and Leggott are the editors of a less comprehensive but particularly innovative compilation of essays on British science fiction film and TV production. One crucial linking theme is the clear influence of Americanisation on the production and reception of British science fiction.

Although it is only one of a larger series of works on British science fiction, the critical essays edited by Hochscherf and Leggott reflect a culture which has been much less comfortable with a serious understanding of science fiction cinema in the past. However, this volume is part of a larger series of volumes that is in the process of lessening this neglect. The history of British science fiction is concerned with the slow take-on of British science fiction by the academy and the major broadcasting institutions (4, 40, 51). Many of the commentaries in this

volume show how British science fiction cinema has struggled against the low esteem ratings of academics and the low budgets available to British science fiction filmmakers. It is, of course, the weight of audience reception and the continuing popularity of science fiction cinema with British audiences that has brought about this renewed academic interest (167). The strength of the Hoshscerg and Leggot volume is that it shows how contributions from different academic disciplines can make more sense of such a cultural phenomenon. And in what Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards (*Best of British*, 2009) would describe as 'contextual cinematic history', much of these works lay emphasis on the context in which the films or TV series were produced.

The Hochscherf and Leggott book concentrates on three key issues. Firstly, there are a number of articles on what is specifically British about British science fiction cinema. This section has a strong film history approach but is a fascinating excursion into the relationship between high and popular cultures and how this manifested itself. James Chapman's article on HG Wells and the film adaptations of his work is particularly illustrative in this regard (11).

British science fiction has a particular interest in post-apocalyptic narratives; from HG Wells' early 'scientific romance' novel *The Time Machine* (1895) through to the zombie horror homage *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002). Also crucial to the national nature of British science fiction is the relationship with American science fiction. Two articles in this volume concentrate on this issue. One is a partial reassessment by Christine Spengler and Peter Wright of Dennis Potter's last and only work of science fiction, the television drama *Cold Lazarus* (1996). The authors show how Potter used science fiction to critique the post-war Americanisation of British culture (124). Two other contributors, Hoffstadt

and Schreym question the "Britishness" of *28 Days Later*, *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón,2006) and *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006) (28).

Secondly, there is a number of fascinating articles which emphasise the importance of authorship within British science fiction. Authorship is a widely drawn concept here which includes writers, directors, producers or studios. In a contribution by Michael Du Pleiss, particular attention is paid to Robert Fuest and his excellent, artistic but neglected series *The Final Programme* (1973). No volume on British science fiction could ignore the innovative work of Gerry Anderson. Peter Hutchings provides contextual background and discussion of the stylistic elements of Anderson's first 'adult' TV series *UFO* (1970-74) (85).

The third key issue identified by Hochscherf and Leggott is that British science fiction draws upon a range of literary and cultural traditions. This is certainly a characteristic of British film and TV (Algate and Richards) in a general sense. James Chapman's contribution on the literary work of H.G. Wells and how it has been adapted by the cinema again provides an excellent example. Chapman's article is partly an overview of the tension between high and popular culture – the notion that science fiction literature, which is a literature of ideas, is not reflected in science fiction cinema which privileges spectacle over narrative (24).

In a fascinating overlap, Lincoln Geraghty is also a contributor to Hochscherf and Leggott's volume. Geraghty's essay is on the 1980s TV series *The Tripods* (1984-85). Whilst not a daring contribution, it does illustrate clearly the interlinking between the British and American approaches to science fiction. *The Tripods* is set in 2089, in a post-apocalyptic Britain which has been enslaved by the alien Tripods. Geraghty explains the failure of the series (it was cancelled after two series) saying that the British audiences, used to American TV science

fiction series such as *Star Trek, Buck Rogers, Battlestar Galactica* and blockbusters movies such as *Star Wars*, expected faster paced, action-led science fiction and *The Tripod*s did not provide that. The creeping Americanisation of the sensibilities of the British science fiction audience writ large, perhaps? However, in keeping with his historical analysis, Geraghty also suggests the demise of the show was that it offered a bleak future to the society of Margaret Thatcher's contemporary Britain which was facing economic recession and public rioting (105).

The third book here, on the philosophy of science fiction, in many of its contributions provides an excellent counterpoint to the other two titles. The contrast is largely about methodology. Whereas the first two books have benefited from cultural and social historical analysis, this volume focuses on the application of philosophical methods. This has become a common approach to the popularisation of philosophy by applying some of the methods of philosophical enquiry to areas of popular culture. This book deals exclusively with classic science fiction films, a slightly problematic notion as one or two of the films included would not make every film scholar's list of classics. The author of the volume, Steven M. Sanders, also makes the assumption that each of these classic films needed to be amenable to philosophical enquiry.

Three types of philosophical thinking are applied throughout the book. Firstly, there are contributions that examine the historical and cultural contexts in which the films were made. There are two excellent contributions in this regard: Jerold J. Abram's essay on *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1928), which attempts to outline how Fritz Lang's masterpiece, through the narrative arc and visual style of the piece, expresses the key philosophical ideas contained in the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Much the same can be said for Jennifer L. McMahon's

exploration of the existential themes of *Frankenstein* (James Whale 1931) and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Kenneth Branagh, 1994).

The second approach is the analysis of the themes, settings and structure of a particular film and then an examination of the philosophical implications and assumptions of such a textual reading. From this approach, some views of the films in question produce readings that counter the conventional reading. A good illustration of this is the reading of Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Geraghty uses this film to reflect the political paranoia in American culture associated with the Cold War and that the film has been interpreted to reflect the crisis in the consumer society which encourages people to conform to common ideas about capitalism (Geraghty, 21). Sanders' reading is that the film is really about personal paranoia – that much of the narrative is simply in the mind of the leading character, Miles Bennell; that we are blinding ourselves from how things really are; that our human nature is draining away into paranoia. This is a bold step, Sanders key argument being the unsatisfactory ending where the key scientific sceptics suddenly change their views when a truckload of pods is found on the city boundaries. This interpretation is not necessarily sustainable but it clearly shows the value, as suggested in Hochscherf and Leggott, of combining academic approaches to get a richer understanding of science fiction cinema.

The third approach is, perhaps, the most philosophical and draws on the least cinematic understanding in its use of the science fiction film as an artefact for study. This may be best understood in terms of examples. William J. Devlin uses *The Terminator* and *12 Monkey*s (Terry Gilliam, 1995) to illustrate two conceptions of time travel and its possible consequences. Shai Biderman explores the nature of personal identity through the twin channels of the necessity of physical presence and the persistence of memory. These studies have a slightly geeky feel about

them – that the philosophical ideas had found an interesting set of case studies in the cinema. However, Jason Holt's exploration of the "paradox of fiction" within *The Terminator* does provide a fascinating crossover with film studies and the concept of suspension of reality that is a fundamental conceit in the audience reception and the value of film texts in general (137). This proves quite a disconcerting idea and that essay deserves a sequel in this writer's opinion.

All three texts attempt to demonstrate that science fiction cinema at its best is a cinema of speculation that will let the filmmakers comment on the social and cultural issues of today by extrapolating them onto a world of the future. The approaches and subject matter vary a little between America and Britain and there has been an abiding perception that science fiction cinema can be too concerned with visual stimulation but many science fiction films and TV series provide a cultural and political depth not always achieved in other film genres.

Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television

By Douglas E. Cowan

Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-160258238-5 (pbk). xi + 314pp £14.99 / $25

2001: A Space Odyssey

By Peter Krämer

London: BFI/Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84457-286-1 (pbk). £9.99 / $15

Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit and Steel

Edited by Roz Kaveney & Jennifer Stoy

London: I.B. Taurus, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84885-373-7 (pbk) vii + 278pp £20.99 / $24.95

A Review by Matthew Cheney, Plymouth State University, USA

In his useful monograph on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick), Peter Krämer suggests that science fiction film as we know it began in 1968, when *2001* and *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner) proved to Hollywood studios that tales of the future could be tremendously profitable, something they had seldom been before. Many of the science fiction films of the next few years were dour dystopias that were not especially successful financially, but then 1977, *Star Wars* (George Lucas) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg) hit theatres and provided their studios with breathtaking profits. Since 1977, many of the highest-grossing films have been science fiction stories. On television, *Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 2005-present) gained popularity in the mid-1960s, *Star Trek* (1966-1969) found success in syndication in the 1970s, and in 1987 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) began the first of its seven seasons, inspiring a spate of space opera shows in the 1990s.

Douglas E. Cowan's *Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television* gestures toward some explanation of the immense popularity of science fiction media. Cowan is a professor of Religious Studies at Renison University College, University of Wateroo, Ontario, and *Sacred Space* is at its best when showing the prevalence of religious imagery and allusion in a genre that is often thought to privilege reason over faith.

Sacred Space is organized into two sections: 'Science Fiction and the Quest for Transcendence' and 'Science Fiction and the Modes of Transcendence'. The first section begins by laying out ways that human beings seek to transcend their limitations (personal, social, technological), and plugs in science fiction texts as examples, finishing the section with chapters devoted to *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997) and *War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953). The chapter on *War of the Worlds* demonstrates that the first film adapted from H.G. Wells's novel reverses the author's anti-religious message to fill the story with 'the Protestant religiosity with which many 1950s sci-fi films were charged' (106).

This is a valuable insight, and the chapter is one of the strongest in the book, but it is also marred by some of the problems that pop up through the other chapters. Despite his broad conception of religion and transcendence, Cowan is blinded by any interpretation different from his own. He notes that on a recent DVD commentary for *War of the Worlds*, Joe Dante points out a convenient moment where the character of Pastor Collins approaches the Martians, recites parts of Psalm 23, and then is incinerated by the Martians' death ray. Dante, Cowan reports, quips that "[i]t's very polite of the Martians to let him finish the prayer' and that Pastor Collins was perhaps naive in 'thinking he can create interplanetary understanding by holding up a Bible" (119). Cowan calls this a typical "dismissal" that "refuses to take the presence of religion onscreen
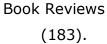
seriously – either as a function of the narrative itself or as a reflection of the society that produced the film" (120), but Cowan himself does the same thing to the evangelical Christian film *Deceived* (André van Heerden, 2002), calling it "a rather obvious and at times heavy-handed morality play designed to contrast 'real' Christian faith with all manner of false beliefs, demonic temptations, and immoral practices" (90). Cowan is merciless toward the plot conveniences of *Deceived* because he opposes the very idea of 'false beliefs' and 'real' faith. If Pastor Collins had been an evangelical Christian rather than a run-of-the-mill Protestant, would Cowan be as sympathetic to the trite moments in *War of the Worlds*?

The second section of *Sacred Space*, 'Science Fiction and the Modes of Transcendence', abandons film and devotes a chapter each to four television series: *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999), *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007)*, Babylon 5* (1993-1998)*,* and *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009). These chapters offer more insight than any of the chapters in the first section, since the fuller development of characters and plots offered by multiple-season TV shows provides more material to choose from than do feature films.

Unfortunately, Cowan's book lacks analytical rigor. Writing about the ways *Stargate SG-1* uses such things as Erich von Däniken's idea that religion was inspired on Earth by UFOs, Cowan states that,

> the question is not how these various theories and hypotheses can be debunked, but why these myths of origin endure and, for our purposes, what that endurance in a long-running science fiction series like *Stargate SG-1* can tell us. Put simply, *SG-1* reinforces the transcendent value of cosmogonic myths. It highlights our collective need for myths of origin and questions the ability of technology, of science, and of modernity and postmodernity to corrode the power of those myths. Indeed, in science fiction, these myths are often reimagined, reinvigorated, and replayed

    (183).

All of this is a reasonable observation, but it misses its own point: what *SG-1* and the frequent presence of myth, mysticism and religious speculation in science fiction suggest about such media's creators and audiences. It's facile to say that it highlights 'our' (whose?) collective anything, because the reasons plot elements or narrative turns exist may not have anything to do with the needs Cowan identifies, and the purposes for which audiences use such items may differ between or among discourse groups regionally and/or historically. Even if such things were, in fact, highlighting 'our' hive mind, Cowan does nothing with this idea – he posits everything that interests him as being transcendent, and seldom delves into the specifics of history or production that would give meaning to his observations. *Why* "these myths are often reimagined, reinvigorated, and replayed" is not explored beyond the assertion that, well, golly, we must need them.

Thus, *Sacred Space* expends most of its text in two basic strategies: 1) enumerating instances of religious discussion, allusion, or iconography in selected films and shows, or 2) using the religious elements of science fiction media to support theories about actual religion or religious history. The former is useful for proving the point that religion is a common topic to science fiction media; the latter makes the book often feel like a nondenominational Sunday School class led by an instructor who includes pop cultural references so the kids won't just stare out the window the whole time.

In a 20-page essay in *Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit and Steel*, Geoff Ryman provides more insight into the uses and meaning of religion in science fiction than Cowan does in his entire book. "*Battlestar Galactica* is not science fiction", Ryman writes. "It is an historical, religious fantasy. It uses two familiar science fiction elements [faster-

than-light travel and 'rebellious human-created intelligence' in the Cylons] to make its storytelling easy to create, and easy to understand" (37).

Ryman is able to build a convincing case for why the show's creators would make the choices they did, and what those choices suggest. By turning the inhabitants of Caprica into Americans in 2003, for instance, the show is able to keep production costs down, even though it is illogical that a society with interstellar travel and the ability to create Cylons would otherwise have all the same technology and attitudes as were visible in the US when the show was conceived. This is not, though, necessarily a fault: "In storytelling terms, the Xeroxing of America onto Caprica is brilliant" (41). By presenting Caprica as the US in 2003, *Battlestar Galactica* is able to keep costs low, make the characters easy for the target audience to identify with, allow a general audience to understand the technology that is essential to the story, and provide many obvious parallels to contemporary political and social situations.

While Cowan spends a chapter pointing out the religious allusions in *Battlestar Galactica* and deriving general lessons from them, he never answers the question of what those allusions achieve for the narrative of the series.

"Religion is a plot function in *BSG*", Ryman says (53), and this is a powerful insight for understanding at least part of the reason that religion is so prevalent in science fiction, especially science fiction media: religion is more convenient than physics. Religion offers lots of possibilities for plot points, especially the deus-ex-machina moments so valuable for any serial. Ryman also points out that religion provides an easy way to extend the story with quests, such as for objects with mystical importance, and allows messy moral moments to be quickly resolved through a god that tells the characters and audience what is right and good and just.

Prophecies are useful, too. "In storytelling terms, prophecies save work because they accustom your audience to the totally unlikely. You keep telling people it will happen until it seems inevitable. This means you are saved having to work out how things might actually happen through cause and effect" (54).

Cowan maintains that *Battlestar Galactica* uses religious discourse because transcendence is a common human yearning – to go beyond ourselves, to wonder about what is human – and that seems true, but it is not a particularly perceptive explanation for why religious faith is important to the narrative developments in the supposedly rational genre of science fiction. Ryman's insights are more productive. Religion is a useful tool for storytelling because it provides an easier way out of plot jams than science or logic do. This is not, he notes, necessarily a bad thing – *Battlestar Galactica* offers, especially in its early seasons, interesting characters, compelling situations, and a disturbing reflection of American politics and society at the beginning of the new millennium. Would it have been better if it were more rigorous in its world building? Yes, because it might have then provided a fuller vision of a future society, it might have avoided some racism and heterosexism, and it might not have had so many inconsistencies of plot and character. But that would probably have required more time and money than the show had, and it would certainly have made it a much more complex and difficult narrative, limiting its audience to people who really wanted to think through such things.

Part of the appeal of religion in stories is that people do, indeed, like to speculate about an 'unseen order' and yearn for eternal and immutable validation for their ideas of ethics and morality. But Pastor Collins didn't get to live for an extra minute because Martians like psalms or because it was logical for the Martians to wait till he stopped speaking; he lived

because the creators of the film thought it would be more poignant for their narrative to have him do so.

Ryman's essay is one of the best in Kaveny and Stoy's anthology, but there are no weak entries, and all of the contributors show productive ways to think about *Battlestar Galactica*. In general, the essays display disillusionment with the series; many of the writers seem to have been drawn in with great hopes for its progression during the first two seasons, only to be continually annoyed, frustrated, and disappointed with the second two seasons and, especially, the final episodes. In an essay on the show's ending, Roz Kaveney locates her disappointment with the show's ending in its use of religion, and offers a purist's definition of the genre:

> Like many viewers, I assumed that the show was going to deconstruct the religious faiths of its humans and humanoid Cylons, that we were going to learn some ultimate truths, and that they would be the sort of ultimate truths appropriate to the decorum of science fiction, which is a literature of reason and not faith. (230)

If Cowan's *Sacred Space* proves anything, it is that media science fiction has at least as often relied on faith as reason. (Written science fiction is a more complex case, simply because its corpus is so much larger and therefore difficult to generalize from.)

Kaveney and some of the other writers suggest, though, that the failures of *Battlestar Galactica* stem from carelessness and hastiness, and that the reliance on supernatural explanations is both a product of this carelessness and hastiness and an enabler of it. Sloppiness allows all sorts of ideologies to sneak into stories, and many of the essays in the book explore some of these ideologies, particularly of gender and politics.

The most amusing item in the book is a set of questions Kaveney and

Stoy sent to *BSG* writer Jane Espenson. After the incisive criticism of the show offered by the various essays, Espenson's answers seem shallow – but revealing in their shallowness. When told that some people 'would call the series woman-hating and 'sketchy' about gay representation', Espenson responds:

'I felt that the *BSG* universe had amazing women characters and presented a much more gender- and orientation-balanced world than most shows. It's always possible to do better and I hope to continue to be given chances to do better. I'm stunned that anyone would call the show "woman-hating"'. (221)

Espenson's answers demonstrate the difficulty of considering representations when in the midst of creating them by committee for tight deadlines, while the essays in Kaveney and Stoy's anthology reveal just how important it is to consider the implications of what is created.

Few science fiction movies have been as full of implications and as free of obvious meanings as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey.* Strangely, Cowan has nothing to say about *2001* except to posit some superficial ideas about the relationship of humans and computers, and so he ignores a film that is almost entirely concerned with the subject of his book: transcendence. Peter Krämer's BFI monograph on *2001* fills that gap and many others, as Krämer provides a specific reading of the film's structure and its visual and aural design, as well as a history of its creation and legacy. Krämer makes good use of information about the film's gestation and of its reception, providing evidence that, for instance, contrary to many previous statements, film was not a financial failure until it was discovered in re-release by stoned college students. It had a profound effect on many first-run viewers, and was listed by *Variety* as the eleventh top-grossing film of 1968, despite limited release because of the lack of cinemas capable of projecting 70mm. When it entered general

release as 35mm in 1969, it was, Krämer says, "a major hit" (91). Nor was it a flop with the critics; the reviews in general were positive, "except for a small number of leading New York reviewers whose work is often cited in support of arguments about the film's initial critical rejection" (92).

Krämer shows that the studio understood *2001* as a film about transcendence even before a script was finalized. When Kubrick's project was known as *Journey Beyond the Stars,* the studio sent out press materials that highlighted its transcendental and even specifically religious-epic qualities:

> MGM's announcement promised that *Journey Beyond the Stars* would depict encounters with 'extra-terrestrial', that is heavenly, beings, 'explore the infinite possibilities' and 'wonder' of 'space', that is the heavens, and contemplate the vastness and mystery of the universe. The inclusion of a quotation from 'the great biologist' J.B.S. Haldane – 'The Universe is not only stranger than we imagine; it is stranger than we *can* imagine' – suggests the limits of scientific knowledge and thus perhaps the need for a more spiritual approach (36).

Clarke's novel offers some explanations for the monoliths and the strange events at the end of the story, explanations that rely on extraterrestrials whose technological and evolutionary advancement makes them little different from God. Kubrick excised almost all explanations from the film, keeping the meanings of the images unresolvable, and thus heightening the film's power for viewers, who must draw their own conclusions. Krämer quotes from letters Kubrick received from audience members, many of whom perceived "that their own journey across the strange cinematic world of *2001* had strong parallels to that of the astronaut" (87), and who saw in the rebirth of the Star Child a hope for their own, or their world's, rebirth.

Kubrick's own rationalism was so rigorous, and his creative process so careful, that, paradoxically, he created a film that is not just insistently visual, but rationally irrational. This is a sharp contrast from most of even the best science fiction media, whether *Battlestar Galactica* or the works Douglas Cowan considers, in which it is simply easier to tell an irrational story than a rational one. *2001* stands as proof that the transcendental can be exquisite art, but that such art does not result from quick decisions or plot convenience.

While *Sacred Space* may be useful for researchers looking to identify religious imagery in science fiction media, Kaveney and Stoy's anthology of essays on *Battlestar Galactica* demonstrates how much can be gained from not stopping there, but instead moving toward careful analysis of religious imagery as both a result of production circumstances and a fuel for various, often problematic, meanings. The strategies of Krämer's monograph on *2001* fall in between those of the two other books. The limitations of its format and purpose prevent sustained analysis of the film text itself, but his analyses of the film's effects and influences are persuasive because they are founded on the realities of *2001*'s conception, production, distribution, and reception.

Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition

By Malcolm Turvey

A Grammar of Murder: Violent Scenes and Film Form

By Karla Oeler

A Review by Tijana Mamula, John Cabot University

Malcolm Turvey's first single-authored volume, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition*, makes an interesting, even necessary, addition to the growing body of work on the troubled place of vision in modernity and modernism. Yet, unlike that of his predecessors in this field (e.g. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (MIT, 1990); Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (MIT, 1993); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*: *The Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1994)), Turvey's approach focuses primarily on uncovering some of the philosophical fallacies and linguistic imprecisions that tarnish the history and legacy of what he terms the 'revelationist' tradition in film theory; a tradition which sees in cinema the potential to reveal truths about reality invisible to the naked human eye.

Written with wonderful clarity, *Doubting Vision* relies largely on the analytic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle to pick apart the dangerous inaccuracies of wording that plague the theoretical projects of Jean Epstein, Dziga Vertov, Bela Balász and Siegfried Kracauer, as well as of some modern heirs to revelationism, such as Stanley Cavell, Gilles

Deleuze, and the semiotic/psychoanalytic school of the 1970s and 1980s. The crux of Turvey's argument rests on the contention that, firstly, what the revelationist theorists described as 'imperceptible' to unaided vision cannot be logically defined as such, and secondly, that analogies between the camera and scientific instruments such as microscopes and telescopes are not only profoundly misleading but also undermine the aesthetic devices that bear the cinema's true 'revelatory' potential. As the author states, in conclusion, "taking film as an art seriously involves clarifying what sort of knowledge *it* gives us, what sort of 'truths about reality' *it* can reveal, rather than assimilating these truths to those of science or philosophy" (130). In both of his basic points, Turvey's project is valid and undoubtedly valuable, and his approach could – indeed should – be applied to other areas of film theory that are marked by a similarly careless and untenable use of borrowed concepts (an example that comes immediately to mind is the dream analogy favoured by psychoanalytic film theory).

However, the author's argumentation itself is not, perhaps, as consistently persuasive as one might hope. Whereas the critique of Epstein's Bergsonian thoughts on cinematic time, for example, is both convincing and pertinent, certain comments on semiotic/psychoanalytic film theory risk appearing comparatively narrow in scope. Turvey himself is well aware of his work's vulnerability to this sort of critique, and pre-emptively defends the book against it ("Of course theorists don't believe that these things are literally true of the cinema, someone might protest..." 98). Potential accusations of triviality aside, however, a flaw emerges in Turvey's analysis of the semiotic/psychoanalytic concept of cinematic 'illusion' that cannot be easily overlooked. Citing Wittgenstein, Turvey contends that the term illusion itself is misapplied, insofar as "an illusion is not something that we *choose* to experience. Rather, an illusion is something that happens to the senses, which is why we speak of

illusions as deceiving us" (86). By insisting that cinema projects illusions of reality, the semiotic/psychoanalytic film theorists were therefore "denying human vision the capacity to see something (that film is a representation, not reality) that it can see perfectly well unaided" (87). Their conclusion – that cinema deceives us – is thus untenable. What results problematic in this otherwise sound analysis is Turvey's decision to skim over certain fundamental aspects of the psychoanalytic acceptation of illusion. Specifically, much of Turvey's critique rests on the claim that it is impossible to be aware of perceiving an illusion insofar as the very term illusion, by definition, implies that what is being perceived is experienced as real (and not as illusion). This argument, while correct in and of itself, brushes aside the foundational link between the semiotic/psychoanalytic use of 'illusion' and the concept of disavowal – a link that emerges clearly, for example, in the writings of Christian Metz. It is perfectly possible, in this sense, to experience an illusion of which one is aware: to wit, an illusion of the '*je sais bien, mais quand même*' variety, which is, arguably, the very precise psychoanalytic truth of many an identificatory experience born of the act of watching classical narrative films ("I know real life couples don't live happily ever after, and yet I still believe this fairytale romance exists as a possibility in the real world," etc.) Ultimately, however, the problem with Turvey's analysis here is not that he is wrong – for it is true that the word 'illusion' also bears a certain precise perceptual meaning not reflected in its film theoretical usage – but that it remains unclear what this amendment adds to our understanding of semiotic/psychoanalytic film theory.

In fact, the inconclusiveness of this particular discussion is underlined by the absence of any further engagement with this branch of film theory in the book's final chapter. Foregoing psychoanalysis and semiotics, Turvey's formalist conclusion substitutes the scientific and philosophical analogies

of his classical antecedents with a convincing, and very lucid, examination of the unique revelatory power of what he terms "variable framing" (117): the fact that a film can, by controlling our attention in a way that is beyond the reach of any other art form, conceal and reveal narrative events and character traits that need not, for this, be described as 'invisible' to unaided human perception. In doing so, Turvey lends currency to the lure of revelationism, but reformulates its tendencies in a way that is free from philosophical incoherence, and that valorizes both the specificity of film art and the medium's right to exist in reference to itself (and not, as classical film theory would sometimes have it, as a prosthetic sense organ).

Particularly welcome in *Doubting Vision* is Turvey's capacity to break down and comment on frequently difficult texts with a linguistic clarity and precision that one often wishes were equally characteristic of the original works. Also important is his call for grounding film theory in a higher awareness of the pitfalls of philosophic and linguistic imprecision, and his attempt to set a precedent for this kind of clarity in *Doubting Vision*. On the other hand, what the volume sometimes lacks – at least for those who, like myself, are interested more in the paradoxes of film's relationship to perception than in the internal contradictions riddling the analyses of such paradoxes – is a sense of deeper engagement with the gems of insight contained in the writings of classical film theorists, however debatable or superseded these might be. It is precisely this sort of engagement that Karla Oeler offers in *A Grammar of Murder: Violent Scenes and Film Form*.

Oeler's complex, but superbly paced and highly readable, first volume unearths a number of crucial questions hidden in cinema's, and film theory's, engagement with (or even dependence on) the scene of murder.

Oeler's original argument contends that murder is foundational in the history of cinema precisely because, in obliterating the very life that it revolves around, it dramatizes the way that filmic representation inherently oscillates between conveying reality and registering its loss.

The first half of the book develops this argument through close exploration of the links between murder and montage. Reading the films and writings of a number of important figures, including Hugo Münsterberg, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Lev Kuleshov, as well as the montage theory of André Bazin and the 1930s films of Jean Renoir, Oeler convincingly demonstrates that the history of the murder scene is coextensive with, and veritably mirrors, the history of montage itself. A particularly suggestive section of this first part of the book is Oeler's discussion ('The Body in Pieces,' Chapter 2), of the place of the close-up in early montage theory (which also provides an incidental, and interesting, parallel with *Doubting Vision*). Starting from Balász's comments on the close-up's potentially traumatic effects on the uninitiated spectator, the author shows that theoretical preoccupation with the cinema's fragmentation of the body is symptomatic of the tendency, in 1920s writings on montage, to conflate animate and inanimate objects, and thus reify human presence. That this tendency does not end with the silent era is made evident in Bazin's celebration of cinema's ability to realise a "non-anthropocentric seeing" (54).

Yet it is the second half of the book that – extending Oeler's inquiry into the "tension between individual and series" (17) entailed in Soviet montage to similar problematics in classical Hollywood – truly exemplifies the liveliness of the author's erudition. Here, we embark on something of an intellectual amusement ride through vastly different and often

conflicting illustrations of the place of the murder scene across a range of genres, including war films, Westerns, melodramas, crime films, and, finally, postmodern pastiches. In setting up the key arguments, the book takes an interesting turn away from the theory of Eisenstein, Bazin, et al., and focuses instead on the popular criticism of Manny Farber, James Agee, and Robert Warshow. Among other things, Oeler's intricate readings in Chapter 4, titled 'Individual and Series', suggest the potential productiveness of close theoretical engagement with the sort of film writing that is all too often relegated to the sidelines of academic film scholarship. In particular, the discussion of war film that Oeler derives from a close look at the reviews of Agee and Warshow bears fascinating insights into the ethics of this genre and its relation to the depiction of murder. Concentrating on Agee's obsession with the possibility of 'honesty' in cinematic representations of war (which, as his review of Disney's animated *Victory Through Air Power* (1943] indicates, has nothing to do with photographic indexicality), Oeler defines the critic's war film ethics as an "aesthetic of taciturnity" (157). For Agee, the honest representation of death relies on the exclusion of explanation, for it is only by confronting us with "the ease with which we might miss this detail [the deaths of countless anonymous G.I.s]" that a film such as *The Story of G.I. Joe* (William Wellman, 1945) "realizes, on a formal level, the sheer impossibility of not missing the countless faces that disappear in war" (158). By bracketing the explanation – or even the direct representation – of a mass killing that de-individualises human life, and thus pointing to the institutionalisation of expendability in modernity, Agee's "honest" war films foreground the scene of murder as an index of the increasing difficulty of representing the singularity of persons. This insight into murder's relation to singularity is further expanded in the book's following section on *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945). Here, Oeler interprets the murder scene – in this case admittedly tacked on as a coagulant for the film's other events – as emblematic of classical

Hollywood decoupage: structuring the film as a search for "proof," the murder scene reduces characters, events and referents to pieces of information; the murder, and its investigation, "'corpses' scenes of life" (149), ultimately evacuating interiority, or reducing it to "discrete desires" for consumer objects (181). Despite working from an opposing ideology, Oeler argues, the de-emphasis of the individual in classical Hollywood narrative approaches, and even supersedes, the work of the Soviet montage school.

A surprising, but ultimately convincing, analysis emerges in Oeler's comparison, in Chaper 5 titled 'Style and the Man,' of the archetypal attitude of the Western hero and the feigned indifference to marriage of many of Jane Austen's heroines – a reading that takes its cue from D.A. Miller's monograph *Jane Austen; or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton University Press, 2003). Amongst the most productive passages are those that address the analogy between the two genres in terms of shame and its relation to style, where the characteristic 'indifference' to violence of the Western hero is read as a necessary dissimulation of the shame of a desiring self.

Working toward the conclusion, Oeler examines the scene of the duel in the American Western in light of Hegel's dialectic between lordship and bondage, and explores the self-reflexive mirroring of the murder scene in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995) and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980)*.* Reading the latter through the self-reflexivity of the 'redrum' scene, she contends that "the film itself, as a genre pastiche, is precisely about the necessity and impossibility of witnessing to a violent past, and an other's death, that traditional Hollywood genres missed, distorted and erased" (215). Her convincing observations open new avenues for

considering *The Shining* in terms of the colonialist violence that remains the absent, unrepresentable, center of its never-ending story of murder, as well as for theorising the limits of the filmic representability of large-scale historical violence.

Like Turvey, Oeler ends her volume with a few pages on Alfred Hitchcock – specifically, on the significance of his 'aerial views', which she reads (comparing them to Godard's notion of the 'real reverse shot') as a deformation that plunges the spectator into an awareness of the limits of cinematic referentiality. By drawing our attention to the negation of perspective – and to the fact that the human reference often emerges only to be obliterated – the murder scene, Oeler contends, generates paradoxical fantasies of being seen by the screen itself, or adopting the victim's own fading gaze.

The only drawback to Oeler's rich volume is its occasional obscurity: despite the numerous illustrative examples and the attention to close textual analysis of both films and scholarship, the work seems streaked with a kind of linguistic abstractness, or tendency to replace lucid summaries with complex generalisations, that occasionally envelops key points in an unnecessary haze. Yet this is, all things considered, a minor objection, and one very likely reducible to personal taste, or even to the book's direct confrontation with the rather singular clarity of Turvey's prose. As different as it is, however, *A Grammar of Murder* also provides a multifaceted response to Turvey's inquiry into the legacy of the revelationist tradition. Not unlike the author of *Doubting Vision*, Oeler eschews imprecise analogies in order to carefully single out the aesthetic devices and genre patterns that reveal, in the guise of the murder scene, cinema's difficult negotiation of human referentiality and the visibility of violence.