

Book Reviews – June 2012

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Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema: Resonance Between Realms

By James Walters

Bristol: Intellect, 2008. ISBN 978-1-84150-202-1, 232 pp. £20.50 (pbk)

The Fantasy Film

By Katherine A. Fowkes

Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. ISBN: 9781405168786 (hbk), 9781405168793 (pbk), xi + 201 pp. £55.00 (hbk), £19.99 (pbk)

A Review by Alexander Sergeant, King's College London, UK

In the last decade, perhaps as a result of the phenomenal successes of franchises such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) and *Harry Potter* (2001-2011), the fantasy film genre seems to have become too prevalent an entity in the field of film studies to ignore any longer. After a long period of critical neglect in which this type of cinema was frequently passed over for seemingly more worthy fantastic forms of filmmaking, namely horror and science fiction, a unique genre encapsulating such diverse, vibrant and historical examples as *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964) and *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton, 2010) is finally beginning to be scrutinised in an academic context. James Walters's *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema* and Katherine Fowkes's *The Fantasy Film* represent two such pioneering examples in this burgeoning field; both texts demonstrate a commitment to understand the cinematic functioning of fantasy and illuminate its many aesthetic complexities. Along with other publications such as Alec Worley's *Empires of Imagination* (2005) and David Butler's *Fantasy Cinema* (2009), studies such as these represent an encouraging movement within film studies.

Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema is, however, not a study of the fantasy film genre, at least not explicitly. This fact should be made abundantly clear by the publication of Walters's other recent work, *Fantasy Film: A Critical Introduction* (Berg Publishers, 2011). Instead, *Alternative Worlds* is a study into Hollywood's recurring representation of the alternative world: a narrative device Walters succeeds in locating throughout Hollywood's history. In his introduction, Walters sets out the key distinction between his notion of alternative worlds and

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more general ontological theories which argue for the existence of a cinematic world within every narrative system. Walters articulates this distinction as a separation between “resemblance rather than reproduction”, focusing on films that, rather than exclusively depicting a representative reality similar to our own, instead choose to actively step out of this mimetic relationship within their narratives and engage in overtly fictionalised realms (31). Mapping out this theoretical distinction, Walters proceeds to divide these alternative worlds into three distinct categories: the “Imagined” worlds of the dreams or fantasies of a central character, the “Potential” worlds of alternative universes and angelic visions and the fabricated “Other” worlds of mythic creations, such as Middle-Earth and Narnia (10-11). These three categories form the basis for the rest of the book’s structure, as the study proceeds to move through each type of alternative world, discussing each in both a generalised, semantic context and also citing a handful of case studies of specific films as representatives, utilising detailed textual analysis to fulfil a declared aim of “articulating the precise aesthetic handling of the alternative world” (11).

Walters’s case studies include discussions of texts as diverse as *The Woman in the Window* (Fritz Lang, 1944), *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004). Within each, he identifies specific audiovisual tropes used to identify their worlds as alternative, which leads to many fascinating illuminations on the precise presentation of cinematic fantasy. Therefore, although *Alternative Worlds* makes no overt claim to be part of the burgeoning study of a genre, it does serve to address many of its aesthetic issues. The book is ultimately concerned with how imagery which transcends notions of mimesis or realism – a type of imagery crucial to fantasy’s identity – is manifested on screen, and thus it is almost inevitable that key fantasy films are interrogated within this context, often with provocative results. His analysis of *The Wizard of Oz* exposes a dichotomy between the film’s desire to represent the subjective dream of its protagonist and the objectivity of the camera lens, which Walters argues results in the film “portraying a fantasy of the dream experience rather than providing an accurate account” of the dream. (45) Whilst it is tempting to view the MGM classic as dreamscape, Dorothy’s imagined land of Oz, of course, looks nothing like a dream. It is too rational, it has too much spatial logic, and so although the film’s visuals highlight a sense of

the subjective to allow the audience a “special position” into the mindset of its protagonist, “involving an intimacy that could never be engaged with in real life”, the representation of Oz does not serve to promote a sense of dream but instead offers its viewers “the ability to appraise” the two worlds and Dorothy’s position within them (56). Walters’s journey through the alternative is littered with insights such as these, providing analyses that serve to implicitly illuminate many of fantasy’s aesthetic processes and pleasures. In his analysis of *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), the author skilfully exposes the horror present within George’s alternative Bedford Falls as a “trauma of being visible”: it is the piercing visual crystallisation of the alternative world that makes it traumatic; it is Mary’s inability to see George as George but to see him nonetheless that is a source of anguish, and thus once again the film’s specific representations of the alternative world are shown to have a profound effect on its narrative and thematic concerns (129-30).

Moving through other equally diverse texts such as *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954) and *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998), Walters’s study consistently reveals many of the visual intricacies of these alternative worlds, offering a vibrant scattershot of diverging and yet converging film texts throughout Hollywood’s history. However, if the book is indeed not a study of genre but instead an attempt at a “more precise categorization of alternative worlds in Hollywood films”, then it is largely unsuccessful in achieving this goal (10). Walters’s case studies, though vivid on their own terms, take the film texts largely on an individual basis. His analyses rarely feature substantial cross-referencing with wider examples, nor is this crucial sense of context achieved sufficiently in his opening sections, which are often rather too broad in their tone and scope. *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Woman in the Window* may both be subjected to an interesting cross-comparison; both films clearly deal with similar narratives with very different styles or tones. However, this comparison is not placed within the wider context of either historical or thematic examples, of which there are numerous – *Alice in Wonderland* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1933), *The Blue Bird* (Walter Lang, 1940) and *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T* (Roy Rowland, 1953) are just a few examples from the same period that use a similar device of the dream of a central protagonist to achieve a level of analysis that would seem to have

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wider implications. Instead, Walters seems happy for his conclusions to be applied only to the specific films in question, and this lack of scope is regrettable. As a result, the book often reads more like a collection of essays based around a themed topic rather than an overarching exploration as to why Hollywood consistently turns to this narrative device, and what insights are gleaned from viewing these films as a semantic group. In his conclusion, Walters states that “my analyses of the film contained within this study implicitly propose those film’s value as works of fantasy... these films all have something to say about the shared experience of existing in the world” (213). This quotation perhaps exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of *Alternative Worlds*. It is a book that showcases fantasy, that describes fantasy, that celebrates and engages with fantasy yet, somewhat frustratingly, is not actually about fantasy.

This lies in contrast with Katherine Fowkes’s *The Fantasy Film*, which is explicitly concerned with defining, categorising and engaging with the aesthetics of a genre. In her introduction, entitled ‘What’s in a Name: Defining the Elusive Fantasy Genre’, Fowkes tackles directly the methodological difficulties in categorising a genre as widespread and as neglected as fantasy, discussing both the tradition of disregard and also attempting to forge a precise definition that can serve to adequately categorise and illustrate the workings of a unique form of cinema. Fowkes succeeds in distilling the key differences in both typical iconography and tone between various fantastic cinematic forms, separating fantasy from horror or science fiction, through a consideration of fantasy as a mode of storytelling based around the presentation of “ontological ruptures” (2). Fowkes uses this definition to carve a unique identity for fantasy, arguing it to be a cinema based around the presentation of clear, established breaks from a sense of reality, breaks presented neither fearfully nor with a sense of rationality. This consideration engages with precise theoretical issues surrounding the genre and attempts to define fantasy not according to negative terms of what it is not but instead by what it is, seeming to implicitly provide a framework to aid future postulations.

This is then complimented by the book’s two subsequent sections, which both continue this attempt to craft fantasy’s identity and legacy by providing its cinema with an adequate critical and historical context. Tracing its origins back

to “ancient myths, legends, and folk tales”, following its trajectory through romantic and gothic fictions of the late nineteenth century and discussing the role of fantasy in the work of early cinema’s pioneering individuals such as Georges Méliès, Fowkes manages to successfully showcase fantasy’s vast traditions and recurring motifs. It is a section with impressive scope and a masterly control over the various converging and diverging materials, which really serves to explicitly demonstrate fantasy’s deep-seated history, vitality and importance to film studies.

However, it is unfortunate that, after these impressive opening chapters, the study becomes more problematic in its approach. Like Walters, Fowkes makes the decision to approach her analysis through a series of detailed case studies, using a handful of fantasy films to serve almost exclusively as representations for the genre as a whole. There is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong with this practice; it can theoretically lead to a precision of analysis other more collating genre studies do not reach. However, also like Walters, Fowkes fails to provide her chosen examples with a sufficient overarching thematic, generic or chronological context to justify her earlier generic postulations. Films selected for analysis are, therefore, ultimately not considered as examples of genre but instead largely as singular film texts with singular aesthetic concerns. This does not mean that her insights are without interest. Her discussion of the largely overlooked *Always* (Steven Spielberg, 1989) positions the supernatural ghost film as a key text in the director’s oeuvre. Her examination of *Shrek* (Adam Adamson & Vicky Jenson, 2001) places the animation in the context of Disney’s legacy to discuss how the populist Ogre subverts and yet also implicitly supports many of its conservative gender roles. She positions *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001-03) specifically as literary adaptations and places *Big* (Penny Marshall, 1988) in the context of the teen-marketed comedies of the same period such as *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure* (Stephen Herek, 1989) and *Dumb & Dumber* (Peter & Bobby Farrelly, 1994). However, none of these examples succeed in describing the respective films as examples of the fantasy genre. Instead, they are discussed as something other than the genre that inhabit. At times, Fowkes seems to fall guilty to the very practice her opening sections of the book seem to be implicitly arguing against. She sets out her

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desire to craft an identity for a specific style of generic filmmaking, with specific aesthetic characteristics and desires, and yet then fails to address these concerns in the films in discussion. *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002) becomes not a fantasy film but a film addressing an established comic book fandom and legacy. *The Wizard of Oz* is provided with a detailed production history but not a detailed generic context. *Harvey* (Henry Koster, 1950) is compared briefly to *Miracle on 34th Street* (George Seaton, 1947) for their comparative depictions of insanity but this does not illustrate why or how either can or indeed should be thought of as fantasy films. By the end of the study, very little sense of the genre's history, evolution or recurring concerns are ascertained beyond those set out in the book's opening chapters.

Moreover, her selection of texts is problematic in terms of representing an entire genre. Of the ten films chosen for close analysis, five were made in the past decade and only two examples were produced before 1980. Fowkes does acknowledge this favouring of the modern in her introduction, stating that her "selection is weighted towards more recent popular films, in part because of the large number of fantasies released in the last few decades... The films are therefore not meant to represent every historical era. Rather these 'features' were selected because they have been successful or influential" (13). These considerations contain harmful implications for the future study of fantasy cinema that should be countered explicitly. The genre has certainly had its recent financial achievements, but huge numbers of fantasy films exist in almost every period of Hollywood's history, from the fanciful worlds of *Oz* or *Peter Pan* (Herbert Brenon, 1924), to the more world-bound narratives of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (Mel Stuart, 1971), to the numerous high fantasies of the 1980s, with examples such as *Krull* (Peter Yates, 1983), *The NeverEnding Story* (Wolfgang Peterson, 1984) or *Willow* (Ron Howard, 1988). Fantasy has delighted audiences since the dawn of early cinema; Fowkes's analysis acknowledges this both implicitly in its theoretical foundations and explicitly in its devotion to the exploration of the genre's expansive history. It is lamentable that her subsequent analyses do not support such vibrant beginnings.

Both *Alternative Worlds in Hollywood Cinema* and *The Fantasy Film* deserve a notable amount of credit for attempting to place a neglected genre under a

critical spotlight. To varying degrees of success, they both engage with fantasy's unique aesthetic processes and serve to provide its typical iconographies with a degree of theoretical depth of analysis. They are pioneering texts in a growing academic practise that will hopefully succeed in crafting a sense of the genre's identity; the very fact that both texts tackle overlapping film texts for overlapping critical concerns begins to provide the genre with a crucial sense of canon and history. The subsequent aesthetic questions that follow this establishment are not answered in these works, and in all probability will require many more bookshelves to be filled before such enigmas are solved adequately. However, despite the clear flaws in both texts, both studies deserve to sit high on those shelves. Fantasy has not yet been explained but these two works at least desire to and, at times, also succeed.

Global Art Cinema

Edited by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-19-538563-2. b/w illustrations, 384 pp. \$29.95 (pbk)

Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties

By Andrew L. Owen

New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-85745-162-2. b/w illustrations, 245 pp. \$85.00 (hbk)

Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema

By Janina Falkowska

New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. ISBN: 1-84545-225-9. b/w illustrations, 340 pp. \$85.00 (hbk)

A Review by Billy Budd Vermillion, Northwestern University

What is art cinema? Answering this question has proven extremely challenging for film scholars, and various answers have been put forth over the decades. Art cinema might be a genre or a “mode of narration” (see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 1985), or it might be most productively thought of as an industrial category or a marketing tool. Historically, the term has been associated at various times with European film production, with experimental cinema, with the type of serious American dramas represented by movies like *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954) or *Twelve Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet 1957), with independent cinema, and with those movies lumped together under the label, “festival fare”. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, the editors of *Global Art Cinema*, point out in their introduction that art cinema is “an elastically hybrid category” (3), a type of film that has proven hard to define over the years and which overlaps with any number of genres, subgenres, styles, and approaches to cinematic storytelling. Art cinema resists being isolated to individual national traditions or industrial circumstances even as film scholars frequently must use frameworks of nation or industry to explain the functions of specific films, their place in film history, or their connection to audiences. The essays collected in *Global Art Cinema* make a strong case for a flexible, loose

definition of art cinema, one capable of holding the rich variety of films and the long history of non-mainstream cinema within it. The other two books considered here do not directly tackle the thorny issue of categorisation, though they do help round out our understanding of art cinema in their investigation of art films from East-Central Europe. Jonathan L. Owen's valuable new book, *Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties*, examines a particular strand of a single national cinema, but also pays close attention to international influences and the global context in which these films were made. In *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, Janina Falkowska considers the work of the great Polish director decade by decade, addressing his working methods, thematic preoccupations, and biographical and aesthetic influences. A historically complex and constantly evolving class of motion pictures, art cinema as an area of scholarly inquiry would seem to require the employment of numerous perspectives, diverse approaches, and various methodologies. The three books under consideration in this review provide us with a number of ways to think about art cinema in its different incarnations.

In recent years, film scholars have begun to revisit the idea of art cinema, propelling our understanding of the form beyond the auteurist and national cinema frameworks that dominated academia for so long. *Global Art Cinema* joins such books as András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (2008) and Mark Betz's *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (2009) in this endeavour, putting forth a strong and cohesive argument about the complex, multivalent, and "mongrel identity" (Galt and Schoonover, 3) of art cinema. It goes beyond the scope of either of those books as well, looking beyond Europe and discussing art films from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The book is divided into four sections, dealing with issues of classification and categorisation, the place and power of the image in art cinema, art film histories, and the global nature of art cinema.

In the book's first essay, 'Beyond Europe: On Parametric Transcendence', Mark Betz finds a connection between the seemingly disparate films of directors such as Aleksandr Sokurov, Wong Kar-Wai and Apichatpong Weerasethakul in their reliance on what David Bordwell has called the "parametric mode of narration".

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Betz points out that very little analytical work has been done following on Bordwell's now quarter-century-old notion of parametric cinema (itself derived from ideas presented by Noel Burch in his classic *Theory of Film Practice*, 1981) and proceeds to illustrate how the works of many celebrated filmmakers fall into this category. The basic premises of parametric cinema include a prioritization of style over story and an almost mathematical structural precision. Betz's essay makes a convincing case that what was once a minority tradition in art cinema (represented by Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati and very few other directors) has become the standard of global art cinema in recent decades.

Several essays in the collection revolve around the depiction of sex and sexuality as a means of defining art cinema. Sharon Hayashi's 'The Fantastic Trajectory of Pink Cinema from Stalin to Bush' suggests a way of broadening definitions of art cinema to include such neglected but historically important (sub) genres as Japan's "pink film", a type of soft-core pornography that shares certain aesthetic features with more traditional art cinema fare and was marketed as art cinema in the 1960s. Hayashi argues that the display of sexuality and the open discussion of the devastation of World War II in these films worked to undermine the carefully constructed image of the nation seen in the run-up to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and in the more respectable and internationally distributed art films that the Japanese film industry pumped out in the 1950s and 1960s. She details how pink film and the later J-pink films became enshrined as culturally respectable in spite of the protests of cultural gatekeepers, and addresses how these films are currently shown in international film festivals and frequently deal with controversial political as well as sexual subject matter. In 'Unthinking Heterocentrism: Bisexual Representability in Art Cinema', Maria San Filippo posits a kind of philosophical link between art cinema and bisexuality, arguing that both exist in between culturally recognised categories and suggesting that we can move beyond this status quo to indicate a way of unraveling hetero- and homonormative attitudes via art films that investigate bisexuality, such as the films of François Ozon or Tsai Ming-Liang.

The book includes other attempts at broadening our definitions of art cinema, including an essay by David Andrews, who tries to develop "a contextual definition of art cinema that is simultaneously neutral and inclusive" (64),

attempts to shift the discussion of art cinema away from the class-based distinctions that have served to define what an art film is, and draws on ideas from the philosophy of art, which, as he points out, abandoned the distinction between “high” and “low” art forms many years ago. Andrews seeks to move away from style-dependent definitions of art cinema like Bordwell’s and towards a definition that would account for the various “art” subgenres that exist within most significant cinematic genres, even those associated with “low” forms of culture (such as “art-horror” or “art-porn”). Adam Loewenstein’s essay compares the act of watching films such as *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali, 1929) and *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999) to playing games, drawing on the works by the Surrealist fellow-traveller Roger Caillois. These art film narratives, Loewenstein suggests, engage us in acts of affective mimicry or identification. In this view, art cinema encourages the recognition of authorial signatures and the like, but it also encourages other sorts of cognitive and imaginative play, particularly in surrealist works that operate interactively with the viewer.

Essays by Brian Price and Jihoon Kim both consider intersections between art cinema and the museum. Price identifies a type of art film he calls “limited-access cinema”, which includes films made as installation pieces and not broadly distributed in other formats. His essay raises important questions about the affordability of seeing such works, as well as the advantages (including being around people who can voice their thoughts and opinions about a work of art as they encounter it) and disadvantages of experiencing films communally. Kim’s piece focuses on Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s films and museum installations and the connections between the two. Kim isolates Weerasethakul’s interruptions of space and time, the way he divides his films and creates non-linear narratives, arguing that this is related to the use of split-screens and other devices the artist has employed in his installation pieces. The conclusion that “[t]oday’s video installation [...] inaugurates the rehabilitation of the cinema as a prominent art for engaging space and time through moving images” (138) indicates how art cinema continues to explore new terrain and remains an important aesthetic form in the twenty-first century.

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Many of the other works in the collection also take up specific films and filmmakers and situate their concerns within art cinema, and the wider world of cinema and the arts. Angela Dalle Vacche looks at the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais, linking their interest in the human face, spatio-temporal discontinuities, and the interplay of illusion and visual perception with Surrealism and the art of Man Ray, Salvador Dali, and others, suggesting both historical continuity and a shared sense of purpose. Patrick Keating's examination of the cinematography of Gabriel Figueroa in films directed by Emilio Fernandez and Luis Bunuel deals with the important question of why Fernandez has never been considered part of the art film canon while Bunuel's films are firmly entrenched therein. Keating's discussion of the three interconnected spaces of art cinema – cinematic, institutional and cultural – shows how this could have happened, as critics with a Eurocentric point-of-view evaluated these films based on their understanding of European artistic traditions in the case of Bunuel, and their activation of "frames of cultural and racial difference" (214) in that of Fernandez, effectively removing the latter's films from consideration as "art cinema" in spite of their aesthetic connections.

A number of pieces in the section titled 'Art Film Histories' and the final section, 'Geopolitical Intersections', satisfyingly address the question of the international and transnational reach of global art cinema. Essays on Indian filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, the cinemas of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin American cinema and Iranian cinema demonstrate the international spread of the idea of art cinema and critique Eurocentric notions of what art cinema is and what it has been in the past. Manishita Dass's essay on Ghatak argues that "a definition of art cinema predicated on assumptions of international legibility and address" (250), like the definition that permitted Satyajit Ray to be brought into the art film canon does not include Ghatak's films, and that the way we have understood what constitutes art cinema in the West has rested on exactly such problematic assumptions for far too long. The issue of Third Cinema comes up in pieces by Philip Rosen, Dennis Hanlon and Rachel Gabara, and their essays provide avenues for profitably exploring and expanding on critical theory from the 1960s in relation to contemporary cinemas from the developing world. Two other essays in the last half of the book, 'Disentangling the International Festival Circuit: Genre and Iranian Cinema' by Azadeh Farahmand and 'Offering Tales

They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism' by Randall Halle, present important arguments about the extra-cinematic mechanisms through which art cinema gets defined, distributed, exhibited, consumed and perhaps, ultimately, compromised. Farahmand argues that the centrality of the global film festival circuit and particularly the Tehran International Film Festival in promoting and supporting the films of directors such as Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf shaped the world's understanding of Iranian cinema and influenced the types of films that could be made. Halle's essay makes the charge that co-productions and European financing result in the types of cinematic stories that European and American audiences desire rather than a truly local or regional cinema that would present a more accurate image of Turkish, Algerian, or Moroccan communities and cultures.

While *Global Art Cinema* is a welcome and illuminating addition to the literature on world cinema, it does not include any essays focusing on the films of East-Central Europe (aside from a few nods to German productions or co-productions). The other two books under consideration in this review provide some redress here. Neither book is as comprehensive or provocative as the Galt and Schoonover anthology, but both are thoughtful works of scholarship that investigate little-known films as well as internationally acclaimed masterpieces and present readers with the opportunity to reassess the goals and the impact of films from this part of the world.

Andrew Owen's new book on Surrealism in the Czechoslovak New Wave attempts to move the discussion of East-Central European art cinema away from issues of allegory and direct political commentary. Instead, he encourages scholars to consider how adopting surrealist aesthetics might have been something of a political act in itself. Owen sees in Surrealism liberatory possibilities that would not have been at home in the official culture of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and which suggest an embrace of broader realms of human experience outside the purely political. He looks at Surrealism's appropriation of popular culture and considers how Surrealism co-existed with – in fact, was an integral part of – more mainstream narrative cinema during the years of the new wave. He considers modernist literature as source material for

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the avant-garde, and offers connections between the modern and the postmodern in the course of his analysis. The book also looks at the New Wave's interest in the depiction of subjective experience and its "greater narrative and interpretive openness" (15) as links between films like those made by Miloš Forman and the more radically experimental work of Vera Chytilová, Jan Nemeč, or Jan Švankmajer. Owen reads these films through the lens of figures like Georges Bataille, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, situating his interest in Surrealism in its investment in the uncanny and its liberation of the unconscious minds of artists and viewers alike.

The book addresses the work of a number of filmmakers influenced by Surrealism, including Pavel Juráček, Jiří Menzel, Vera Chytilová, Juraj Jakubisko, Jaromil Jireš and Jan Švankmajer. Owen's analyses of Juráček's Kafkaesque *Josef Killian* (1965) and *A Case for the Young Hangman* (1970) delve into the problems with communication and the depiction of absurd societies in these films, making the case that Juráček's debts to Surrealism and Absurdism push the films beyond political allegory into a broader conversation about the modern world that nevertheless revealed Czechoslovak communist society to itself "in the terms it most despised" (71). Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* (1966), Owen contends, has been somewhat uncritically considered as a humanist work and instead needs to be understood in the context of Georges Bataille's idea of the "heterogeneous", those aspects of human life that "resist assimilation into a socio-economic order dependent upon functionality and usefulness" (83). Owen sees the film's reversals of socialist realist plot devices and Menzel's insistence – accomplished through his lush imagery – on the sexual, sensual and material aspects of human experience as evidence of an attitude of subversiveness towards what is assumed to make us human as well as towards any political ideology. At the same time, Owen points out a few significant points of departure from Bohumil Hrabal's source novella, and indicates how the film's regressive sexual politics muddy its subversive undercurrents.

Postmodernism and its theoretical links to Surrealism enter the argument in relation to several films Owen discusses. He reads *Chytilová's Daisies* (1966) as a postmodern text that reveals its own constructedness and denaturalises the world, presenting a challenge not just to communist Czechoslovakia, but to

humanism itself. He also sees something of the postmodern in Juraj Jakubisko's folkloric cinema (and that of other Slovak filmmakers), which he argues do not celebrate some sort of pastoral innocence (135) but are actually "cynical and despairing" (121) works which attack rationality head-on and ought to be linked to the anti-utopian projects of postwar surrealists, most clearly identified by Vrástislav Effenberger. Jaromil Jireš's *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1970), Owen contends, with its Gothic trappings and fairy-tale characters, presents a baffling narrative that betrays a sense of disillusionment and disappointment appropriate to its post-1968 release but equally a part of more far-reaching countercultural attitudes. Finally, while Jan Švankmajer is not usually considered alongside the New Wave and is "the only (one) to have joined the Czech Surrealist Group" (188), his dark and disturbing films provide Owen with a link back to "concerns that had been present in the Czech avant-garde" going back to the days of Karel Teige and the artists associated with Devětsil in the 1920s, artists whose work also influenced the New Wave filmmakers (216). Throughout the book, Owen carefully argues how the films of Švankmajer and those of the New Wave offer more profoundly transgressive critiques of social and cultural norms and values, a critique that demonstrates the continued relevance of these films after the fall of communism in the region. At the same time, he does not ignore the political impact of the New Wave films at the time of their release. This balancing act is one of the great strengths of the book, and provides a useful model for scholars interested in this part of the world to follow.

Janina Falkowska's book on Andrzej Wajda is more of a traditional account of one director's body of work, and the monograph does have its flaws. Falkowska uncritically uses shorthand terms like "baroque", and the book might have been stronger had she unpacked these concepts with greater analytical precision. She has, however, performed a valuable service to the field through her extensive research into Wajda's archives. She tantalises readers with the prospect of further research projects that might examine the director's unrealised projects and provides thoughtful and thorough analyses of most of his films, including projects made for television and some of his lesser known works.

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The book proceeds from the widely held position that Wajda is something of a national (and nationalist) poet who happens to work in the medium of film; as Falkowska notes, “[o]f all Polish filmmakers, Wajda has addressed issues of national identity most explicitly, articulating matters important to national tradition, and has deliberated the essence of Polish culture and history in most of his films” (8). This statement is reminiscent of the type of argument found in much Wajda criticism, but Falkowska goes on to provide a more detailed account of the director’s biography and assessments of most of his films than is typical of English-language studies of the director’s career. She looks at Wajda’s early years, his experiences during the Second World War and in the Home Army, his stint at the state film school at Łódź, his love life, and political events of the postwar period, suggesting how each influenced his films. Falkowska’s investigation of Wajda’s films includes analyses of his student projects, which she claims are “crude” and “amateurish” even as they hint at the themes and style of his later, more mature works (34). The book then moves chronologically through Wajda’s *oeuvre*, with analyses of each film and discussions of its reception in Poland. Falkowska’s evaluation of the films is always foregrounded, and she does problematise a number of Wajda’s films, notably regarding the issue of anti-semitism, which crops up in her discussions of *Hunting Flies* (1969) and *Promised Land* (1975), both of which portray anti-semitic characters and which might be seen as presenting anti-semitic sentiments. Falkowska sees Wajda’s career as tracing several major concerns, including World War II and its repercussions, the political history of Poland since 1945, universal human concerns like “life and death” or “personal feelings” (261), and adaptations of literary classics (particularly classics of Polish literature).

While these conclusions are not particularly revelatory, the book does present a more complete picture of Wajda’s life and work than many other books about the filmmaker. Falkowska connects the treatment of World War II in Wajda’s early films with his interest in the same period in recent years, details his use of characters embroiled in historical events beyond their control in a number of films, and analyses how his developing sensitivity to the plight of the Jewish people in Poland throughout the twentieth century is expressed in films such as *Samson* (1961), *Korczak* (1990) and *Holy Week* (1995). Her observations and critical opinions are frequently insightful, and a number of her claims provide

avenues for further research into Wajda's style, themes and subject matter. In particular, Falkowska's too-brief discussion of the influence of painting on Wajda's films, and the work of the Polish School directors more generally, sheds light on a particular aesthetic feature of these films – the use of tableaux staging – that is frequently overlooked.

Reading Owen's book on the Czechoslovak New Wave and Falkowska's on Andrzej Wajda alongside *Global Art Cinema* allows one to see where arguments in all three books might be enhanced and supplemented. For example, Surrealism as an international movement that impacted the plastic arts and cinema in both the 1920s and the 1960s is addressed by Dalle Vacche, and Falkowska points out that Wajda was also influenced by Surrealism. But thinking through such arguments about French and Polish filmmaking in relation to Owen's study of the Czechoslovak context in *Avant-Garde to New Wave* might prove an especially fruitful exercise. Similarly, an understanding of international aesthetic trends and a sensitivity to issues of global distribution, exhibition and reception might provide additional shading to some of the arguments in the Owen and Falkowska volumes. Taken as a group, all three books can teach us a great deal about one of the most important – and perhaps under-studied – areas of modern film history.

Jane Campion: Authorship and Personal Cinema**By Alistair Fox**

Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780253223012. 22 illustrations xii + 263 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), \$26.95 (pbk)

The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era**By Thomas Schatz**

Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780816670109. 93 illustrations xii + 514 pp. \$24.95 (pbk)

A Review by Deborah Mellamphy, University College Cork, Ireland

Considering the highly complex and specialist nature of the film industry, no matter where in the world it is located, it still seems somewhat simplistic to attribute a film to a single creative individual. Yet, despite the poststructuralist “death of the author” thesis in the 1960s, the romantic and idealistic concept of a sole “genius” that controls authorship continues to motivate critical interest as the auteur remains at the centre of scholarship, criticism and fan attention. Contemporary scholarship and biography continue to rely on the concept of the creative genius, and it is easy to see that modern audiences, critics and scholars still attribute a work of art to an individual creative mind rather than examining the complex set of relationships that make up and operate within the film industry.

The two books discussed here examine this relationship and the significance of the genius, taking opposing approaches to the subject and coming up with two very different conclusions. *Jane Campion: Authorship and Personal Cinema* by Alistair Fox prescribes to the concept of the individual genius, arguing for what Francis Vanoye calls “personal cinema”. Fox examines the filmmaker’s oeuvre from *Tissues* (1980), her first short film, which is not available for general viewing, to *Brightstar* (2009). In his introduction, Fox justifies his choice of Campion, saying he concentrated on her “because many of the issues concerning the question of authorship have been raised by the scholars who have written on her” (9). Fox refers to Deb Verhoeven’s *Jane Campion* (2009) who espouses an extremely anti-auteurist approach to the oeuvre, expressing her belief that auteurism is “an intricate set of industrial processes” (11). Fox argues against the extratextual film-as-text approach, expressed by Verhoeven

along with Sue Gillett in "Lips and Fingers: Jane Campion's *The Piano*" (1995) and *Views from beyond the Mirror: The Films of Jane Campion* (2004) that ignores the filmmaker and their connection with their work, examining only the film itself and its significance in isolation. He criticises the poststructuralist framework because from this perspective, everything we know about an auteur "was necessarily derived from "inside" the text" (3), which is an approach that is too limiting. Instead, for the remainder of the book, Fox outlines details of Campion's upbringing and draws parallels within and between the narratives and *mise-en-scène* of her films. Significantly, Fox also expresses his belief that "Campion undoubtedly has an acute sense of her own persona as an auteur.... She clearly cultivates and encourages a view of her work that highlights its personal and artistic singularity" (12), marking her as a very self-conscious filmmaker, who is very aware of and actively constructs her own persona as auteur. He briefly acknowledges a degree of collaboration in her films, saying that "[w]hile her films demonstrate the influences of her collaborators, they nevertheless contain a wealth of detail in the *mise-en-scène* and enunciation that cannot be accounted for merely by consideration of the industrial and cultural circumstances of each film's production" (12). He continues by arguing instead for an approach that examines film in relation to an individual rather than in relation to a system or collaborative team because "without further consideration of the personal motivations and concerns of the filmmaker-director, a large part of the overall signification of a film will go unrecognized" (13). He also explains that he chose Campion because the

readiness with which Campion has revealed the presence of autobiographical elements in her work means that the process of creative transformation of the real-life elements that is entailed in authorship is easier to ascertain than is the case with many filmmakers. (15)

Fox locates his study within the context of auteur theory and argues for the continued applicability and validity of auteur theory today, taking the auteur-director as the prime source of filmic meaning. He wants to develop a theory that has at its centre the autobiographical nature of authorship and the deeply personal nature of Campion's films that make them examples of "personal cinema" or "*génétiobiographique*", which is a system "that traces the process whereby the form and substance of a film evolve from its origins in the family

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system of the artist who creates it" (18). An examination of Campion's autobiography alongside her films reveals the presence of a deep-rooted psychological investment in the films.

In Chapter 1, 'Origins of a Problematic: The Campion Family', which is the cornerstone of the rest of the book, Fox discusses Campion's upbringing tracing in detail the backgrounds of her parents and her relationship with them and her sister Anna, who is also a filmmaker. He argues that it is not difficult to trace the origins of her creativity as well as the psychoanalytic nature of her recurring narrative preoccupations, character types and iconography to her unresolved childhood trauma that resulted from her upbringing. Both her parents came from Wellington, New Zealand, and were brought up in highly dysfunctional families. Her mother, Edith, was an orphan at the age of ten after her parents died of alcoholism, and her father Richard's parents were members of the Exclusive Brethren, an extreme branch of the Christian evangelical movement. As a result of rebelling against the Church's strictness, Richard suffered severe parental neglect and essentially became an emotional orphan at a young age. Fox outlines how in later life, both parents became highly absorbed in their theatre careers, and how Richard Campion's extramarital affairs (Anna Campion said that he was "a bit of a Ted Hughes figure" (32)) resulted in Campion's mother's profound sense of loneliness and depression, which she expressed in her many literary works, including *A Place to Pass Through* (1977), a collection of short stories, and *The Chain* (1979), a novella. The Campions' focus on their careers meant that Jane and Anna felt the need to compete for their parents' love and attention and because they were regularly left in the care of nannies when both parents toured, both girls often created complex imaginary worlds in order to protect themselves from parental neglect. It is thus clear that Campion came to rely on filmmaking as a form of companionship, cathartically drawing on these unresolved childhood tensions for "psychotherapy" (41). For the remainder of the book, Fox draws simplistically obvious parallels between Campion's biography and the plots of her films, arguing that narratological unity is created through Campion's fixation with the ongoing problems that arise from childhood trauma as a result of parental neglect. Such problems include her interest in the sibling relationship, in lost or absent mothers who affect their daughters' lives and the recurrent images of seductive or perverse fathers, or father figures,

which are often played out through fantasised incestuous relationships, such as seen in *Sweetie* (1989) and *Holy Smoke* (1999).

In Chapter Two, 'The "Tragic Underbelly" of the Family: Fantasies of Transgression in the Early Films', Fox discusses, amongst other films, *Peel: An Exercise in Discipline* (1982), a film that won the Palme D'Or for best short film in "Un certain regard" at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival, using its central imagery as a representation of Campion's oeuvre for the rest of the study. The film has at its centre a young boy peeling an orange into which he then sticks his finger, creating an illicitly sexual image that represents the repressed sexuality that is hidden beneath the surface. Fox also argues that the peeling away of the orange's outer layer symbolically represents the peeling away of layers of family history, which can be related to Campion's own discovery of her father's indiscretions and her mother's psychological problems.

The theme of repressed sexuality is most famously dealt with in *The Piano* (1993), which Fox discusses in Chapter Five, 'Traumas of Separation and the Encounter with the Phallic Other: *The Piano*'. Fox's close analysis of Campion's most famous and most critically acclaimed film makes it clear that it is an intensely personal film even though it is the director's most mythical and archetypal film in what can be called a realist oeuvre. Despite the fact that it developed as a loose adaptation of New Zealand writer Jane Mander's *The Story of a New Zealand River* (John Lane, 1920), there are copious references to Campion's work, including Ada's (Holly Hunter) muteness (also seen in *A Girl's Own Story* (1984)), her sexual frigidity (also seen in *Sweetie*), an analysis of the mother-daughter relationship (seen previously in *An Angel at my Table* (1990)) and the tyrannical father figure (as seen in *Peel: An Exercise in Discipline*). In particular, Fox discusses the use of the image of the misogynistic Bluebeard in *The Piano* as a symbolic figure for Richard Campion, and he discusses Campion's recollection of seeing a woman who had chopped off her own hand after discovering that her husband had had an affair. This traumatic event for the young Campion, which occurred whilst visiting her mother in a psychiatric hospital, resulted in the image of Ada's finger being cut off, adding weight to Fox's argument that this is filmmaking at its most personal. He argues that images in the film have "associative meaning" that concretely link the film with

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the real life of the Campion family, showing that this is a form of cathartic self-discovery.

This intensely personal approach to filmmaking is countered by Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*, which is already an established and highly respected seminal text, and arguably the most significant study of the Hollywood system during the studio era. He takes his title from an André Bazin quote: "The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e., not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system" (1957). First published in 1989 by Pantheon Books, it has been republished by Minnesota Press. In the book's Preface titled 'The Centre of Gravity', Steven Bach, writing in 1996, deems the study "necessary" as it is part of "that slender selection of film books essential to scholars and a lasting delight to fans" (ix). He also explains that an understanding of the studio era helps inform us of contemporary studio dynamics which continue to mirror the boom and bust of the Golden Age.

In his Introduction titled 'The Whole Equation of Pictures', Schatz justifies his study by proposing that our understanding of the studio system is "more mythology than history" (5). His goal is to illustrate that the "quality and artistry of all these films were the product not simply of individual human expression, but of a melding of institutional forces" (6), and he begins by criticising the popularity of and (still) ongoing reliance on the auteur theory, calling it – particularly Andrew Sarris' version – overly simplistic. The book is divided into five sections, each covering a different phase of the studio era from 'The 1920s: Beginnings', in which he recounts the early years of Universal, MGM and Warner Brothers, '1928-1932: The Powers That Be', 'The 1930s: Golden Age', '1941-1946: War Boom' and finally '1947-1960: Decline'. His study is a detailed analysis of the system's constraints as well as its reaction to historical events, including The Wall Street Crash, the Great Depression and World War II, and the technological advancements that led to the popularity and consumption of the television set in American homes in the 1950s.

At the heart of the book is the system of producers, directors and stars working in Hollywood during the era. In comparison to Fox's analysis, Schatz continually emphasises the relationships between this wide collection of individuals, and

attributes the films to the system that is beyond any single person. One particular example and highlight is Schatz's description of the relationship between Irving Thalberg and Erich von Stroheim while at Universal. Whilst attempting to develop Universal into a first-run studio by the creation of an assembly line production and marketing system, Thalberg became one of the first producers in Hollywood to limit the authority of the director in order to make production more efficient and to increase profit margins. Thalberg locked von Stroheim, a director already known for squandering studio time, money and resources, out of the cutting room to edit *Foolish Wives* (1922) himself after the director refused to reduce his three-and-a-half-hour film to standard length (25). This inevitably led directors, including von Stroheim, to leave Universal because of Thalberg's increasing level of control, signifying the battle for power within the system that still exists today. Significantly, Fox draws attention to the "Thalberg men" (44), the team of advisors that he collaborated closely with on every decision, illustrating that even when one individual is valorised, they don't act on their own accord. Another battle for creative control occurred between Alfred Hitchcock and David. O. Selznick at Selznick International Pictures. Fox discusses the struggle for authority particularly in relation to the production of *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940) and Fox outlines that Selznick, already known for his control of story selection and script development when Hitchcock became involved in the project, asserted his authority by dominating casting and rewrite decisions. However, Hitchcock's ability to "cut with the camera" (283) allowed him to control not only the film's production but also its post-production for a brief period until Selznick again stepped in to reshoot the opening and closing sequences. This account illustrates the balance of power that occurred in filmmaking, not only within the large studios but also within smaller, more independent studios. Schatz's entire study also illustrates that filmmaking is the result of the contribution of many people and never one individual as the sole creative force. In addition, the book draws attention to the growing importance of the star vehicle and the increasing authority of the star system. Fox details the distinguishing features of a "Norma Shearer", a "Lon Chaney", and a "Lillian Gish" and how these intersected with the studio system, often resulting in battles between studio heads and stars.

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Schatz' study, which arguably provides the most significant contribution to a financial understanding and production history of the studio system during Hollywood's Golden Age, is utterly convincing as he illustrates that filmmaking during the studio era was a complex collaborative effort. The study illustrates that even when a director or star was so strong-willed to establish a persona, they were still located within the highly organised system. The constant references to individuals' pay can become a bit tedious, but it is nevertheless fascinating and, as it is told in a narrative style, it is easy to read, developing each individual into a dramatic character. The book is not only useful to us today as a historical account but it is also illustrative of the ongoing collaborative nature of all filmmaking both before and since the demise of the studio era. A similar study of today's complex industry would prove to be equally useful.

An examination of these two contrasting works together illustrates the complicated nature of auteur studies today and the multiplicity of approaches that are possible. This review has highlighted that the debate on how significant the director or producer is is ongoing, and is not yet near resolution, which illustrates the need to continue discussing the origins and nature of creativity and collaboration within filmmaking, regardless of geographical location or budget. Both arguments are well researched and convincing and offer substantial evidence in a complex debate that remains unresolved, yet I find Schatz's the stronger as it discusses the production system in its entirety rather than presenting a much more simplistic account of how the system operates. These relationships may be set to transform over the next few decades due to the rise of social media and the increasing accessibility of affordable production techniques, yet, at the moment, film production remains reliant on the force of more than one individual.

Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema

By Stefan Andriopoulos

Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008. ISBN 0-226-02054-1. vii+192 pages. £18.00

A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan

By Aaron Gerow

Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2008. ISBN 978-1-929280-51-3. 22 illustrations, x+130 pages. \$50.00

A Review by Irena Hayter, University of Leeds

Fredric Jameson once remarked that for the bourgeoisie at the turn of the twentieth century, modernist works of art seemed “ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous, immoral, subversive or generally ‘antisocial’”; today, however, “not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly, they now strike us, as a whole, as rather ‘realistic’.” (Jameson, 1991) This might have something to do with the ubiquity of alienation effects in advertisements and with the general trivialisation of the language of modernism. On the other hand, the formerly shocking and subversive is now institutionalised as high art and safely contained in the space of the gallery and the art museum. Judging by the attendance figures of blockbuster exhibitions of Matisse and Picasso, our fascination with modernism endures. We still want to see in modernism that moment of aesthetic transcendence; the purified work of art standing aloof above a degraded mass culture. We still seem to need the heroic modernist narrative of rupture and discontinuity, of a forceful assault on everything old.

The two books reviewed here in a certain sense go against the myth of the self-contained visionary modernist work — implicitly, in the case of Andriopoulos, and explicitly for Gerow. One of the quotations on the back cover of *Possessed* is from Jonathan Crary, and he is indeed a palpable presence behind the intent of the book. In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1992) and *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (1999) Crary’s approach is broadly Foucauldian; if we want to be rigorous about method, the study by Andriopoulos is closer to new

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historicism, with Stephen Greenblatt's work providing important points of reference. But it was Crary's groundbreaking work that first demonstrated how visual modernism came about in an already reconfigured field of techniques; that cinema was not a cause, but an agent of perceptual displacement, "a validation of the authenticity of perceptual disorientation that increasingly constituted social and subjective experience" (Crary, 1999) in the late nineteenth century. Like Crary, Andriopoulos firmly rejects the technological determinism of media historians such as Friedrich Kittler, assuming instead "a mutual interaction between the emergence of new technology and its surrounding cultural discourses" (15). Rather than privileging the aesthetic domain, Andriopoulos traces reciprocal discursive exchanges between literary, legal and medical texts. However, unlike Crary, for whom the perceptual changes of the nineteenth century are implicated in new forms of power and the logic of exchange, Andriopoulos is not looking for "reflections" of pre-discursive reality in the texts he is studying. His reciprocity is carefully defined and positioned; it involves not simply finding in literary and cinematic texts metaphors borrowed from medico-legal discourse, but also analysis of legal and medical texts "as if they are literary, without neglecting the specific cultural function of each discursive practice" (10).

The trope uncovered by Andriopoulos is the pervasive anxiety of being governed by an opaque and invisible foreign power, through hypnotism and possession. His immense archival research shows how in the late nineteenth century, a flood of medical and legal books speak of an obsession with the possibility of hypnotic crime — of committing a criminal act under the suggestion of a hypnotist. This was indeed an obsession lacking any basis in reality: Andriopoulos's meticulous research uncovers only two such court cases. Medical writing was actually based on literary and theatrical simulations; physicians and psychiatrists cited the language of the numerous popular novels depicting hypnotic crime. Juridical discourse, on the other hand, also drew on the literature of the fantastic when conceptualising the agency of large corporations. Tropes from popular literature seeped into the legal descriptions of invisible corporate forces manipulating their members, especially in the work of theorists such as Otto von Gierke (1841-1921) and Franz von Liszt (1851-1919). Andriopoulos finds "a precarious proximity" between legal conceptualisations of corporate agency and horror

fiction (13). There is a very elegant historical gloss on that now ubiquitous neoliberal phrase for the miraculous self-regulation of the market, Adam Smith's metaphor of the invisible hand. For Andriopoulos, this is symptomatic of the "interpenetration of the gothic novel and political economy": in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Clara Reeves's *The Old English Baron* (1778), the intervention of a supernatural invisible hand restores a shaken genealogical equilibrium (56). Another famous literary embodiment of the legal theories of corporate agency, noted by Andriopoulos, is the company in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, an opaque force interfering with his narrator's autonomy.

Cinema and the writing surrounding it is only one of the practices analysed by Andriopoulos, but his readings of both films and theory in the context of the medico-literary tropes of hypnotic crime make for a compelling argument for the structural affinities between cinema and hypnotism. The posters advertising Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), too, drew on the suggestive power of both cinema and advertising with their imperative "You must become Caligari" (*Du musst Caligari werden*) (91). Andriopoulos affirms the centrality of Wiene's film not only for German expressionism, but in the histories of cinema in general. Like Guy de Maupassant's *La Horla*, another important text in this study, the famous narrative indeterminacy of *Caligari* (the conflict between the story of Francis and the frame narrative) makes it a commentary, a meta-text on the intense medical debates on hypnotic crime. Like Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* (1922), *Caligari* clearly appropriated discourses about the power of suggestion. But cinema also deeply influenced medical experiments, with physicians aiming to produce film-like hallucinations in their patients. Andriopoulos's readings shed a new light on a whole body of pre-war film writing. In a striking difference from post-war film theory and its insistence on suture and the dominating gaze, writing on film in the 1920s and 1930s, from France to Japan, did not figure spectatorship as mastery and control, but emphasised instead a radical passivity: the immobilised fascination of the spectator, going even as far as his or her loss of self. For Jean Epstein, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and others, the close-up had a hypnotic effect on the spectator. As Andriopoulos shows, in *Dr Mabuse* this effect was consciously sought: Lang's close-ups and point-of-view shots work to interpellate the spectator in the

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position of the hypnotised (107). The structural relationship between cinema and hypnosis was proposed by Raymond Bellour in 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour' (1979), but while Bellour saw it as timeless and universal, Andriopoulos makes a convincing argument that it is historically conditioned by the conjunction of an exciting new medium and vigorous medical debates about the power of hypnosis.

In its last chapters, the book explores human and corporate bodies in the novels of Franz Kafka and Hermann Broch. In Kafka, Andriopoulos discovers a strategy of literalisation: a literal merging of human and corporate bodies in *The Castle*, and a literal use of the metaphors used by legal descriptions of corporate bodies in *The Trial*. The epilogue stresses briefly another notion which crossed from medical discourse into avant-garde practices, that of depersonalisation, which was important for André Breton's ideas of psychic automatism and automatic writing.

There is the occasional departure from the rigorous historicism espoused in the book, as when Andriopoulos writes that "in centering on corporate agency and hypnotism, the films and texts analyzed in this book seem to anticipate arguments central to recent poststructuralist theory" (4). This is careful and qualified, but it stills gestures towards the kind of critical reflex to which this reviewer at least remains sceptical. The discovery of some sort of proto-poststructuralism produces an implicit teleology; it is as if poststructuralism is seen as the endpoint of history, with all prior discourses leading inexorably towards it; as if these discourses and practices will acquire value (and cultural-academic capital) only when seen as precursors of poststructuralism. But this still remains an enlightening book impressive in its scope, cutting through domains normally kept apart, crossing disciplinary boundaries. This breadth is particularly impressive when one thinks of the often narrow and circumscribed concerns of film studies. Modernist studies, on the other hand, often retain traces of the opposition between literature and film, the high and low, the authentic and the technological. Andriopoulos goes boldly against such preconceptions, bringing literature, film, medical discourse and legal theory together in order to reinsert the centrality of hypnotism and possession into the cultural histories of modernity. The anxieties about hypnotic crime and

corporate power are symptomatic of a crisis of agency, a threat to the cherished bourgeois notion of the autonomous monad. Andriopoulos is concerned strictly with the discursive, but behind these anxieties there are also some stubbornly material forces: the mutation of capitalism from liberal into corporate; the Taylorising rationalisation of time and labour against lived temporality and the organic body; the emergence of densely populated urban environments saturated with new techniques and the images they produced.

A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan is a very different book, and yet there are motifs of mental illness, paranoia and delusion which connect it to *Possessed*; *Caligari* also makes an appearance. Aaron Gerow is consciously writing against the modernist myth: *A Page of Madness* (Teinosuke Kinugasa, 1926) as the lone avant-garde masterpiece of pre-war Japanese cinema and another Japanese text going beyond the limits of the West's practices of representation (according to the aesthetic orientalism of theorists such as Roland Barthes and Noel Burch); an independent production of struggling artists and a radical attack on the mainstream film. (There is also the story of Teinosuke "miraculously" rediscovering the print in 1975; Gerow shows that at least some of the scenes edited out of the 1975 version are closer to *shimpa* melodrama than an avant-garde experiment). The book dislodges *A Page of Madness* from this modernist narrative and reinserts it back into the contexts of its production and reception in 1920s Japan in order to make a powerful case for the multivalent and hybrid character of the film. His is not the first historicised reading of *A Page of Madness* — the pioneering one, which still remains a milestone in the critical discourse on the film, is that of Jonathan Abel in "Different from Difference: Revisiting *Kurutta Ichipeeji*" (2001) — but it is certainly the most thorough and the most scrupulously researched one.

The book is structured chronologically: it begins with the Taisho era (1912-1926) and its cinema, with the literary modernism of the *shinkankaku* (new perceptionist) group, moving on to Teinosuke and his film, from its financing and the contested authorship of the screenplay, to its exhibition and reception, and finishing with analyses of the film and the various texts surrounding it. Gerow's overview of new perceptionism and its leading figures, Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari, stresses their attempts to decentre both subject and stable

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voice through an emphasis on immediate sensory perceptions which complicate subjective unity (14). Similarly to Andriopoulos, this perspective finds in new perceptionism a proto-poststructuralist desire to decentre the subject. This reviewer would argue that what actually emerges from the essays and theoretical writings of Yokomitsu and Kawabata is the motif of the unity of subject and object, of the blurring of the divisions between them; a position which, far from being avant-garde, is very much the dominant discursive current of Taisho vitalism. It is this position, rather than the poststructuralist decentring of the subject, that would beautifully serve Gerow's central conception of *A Page of Madness* as being "...at its most basic level, a film about opposing elements and the often problematic boundaries between them" (86).

The following chapters reveal the film not to be an independent avant-garde production: Gerow describes the successful media campaign, the press conference at the beginning of the project and the participation of Inoue Masao, a *shimpa* actor at the peak of his fame, in the central role of the janitor. The new perceptionist writers were not marginal, but very much present on the cultural pages of mainstream media as the rising stars of the literary world. This association with new perceptionism — and the culturally legitimising role of literature — attracted the attention of the major film studios, with Shochiku offering the use of its Kyoto studio for free and providing financial assistance in the form of a loan (24). It is telling that it was the media, and the newspaper *Hōchi shimbun* in particular, that even named this collaboration between Kinugasa and the new perceptionist writers The New Perceptionist Film Alliance (*Shinkankakuha eiga renmei*) (23). The makers of *A Page of Madness* were part of the cultural establishment, rather than taking an avant-garde stance against it. The chapters on the screenplay and the actual filming are supported by truly groundbreaking archival research: Gerow uses the shooting script for the film (found among Kinugasa's personal papers) and the memoirs of a Shochiku scriptwriter, among other materials, to convincingly challenge the established idea about Kawabata Yasunari's authorship of the screenplay and the extent of his involvement. The screenplay was again a collaborative project; the existing text (published in a film journal in 1926 and in Kawabata's collected works) is just one of the many texts and versions surrounding the film (33). Likewise, *A Page of Madness* was not a small-scale alternative production: it used a

pecially-built set and studio and became quite expensive; its making a hybrid of industrial and artisanal methods (35). On the level of exhibition and marketing, *A Page of Madness* was again poised between established and independent modes. It was supported by powerful cultural institutions like the Musashino-kan, the premier cinema specialising in imported films. On the other hand, the posters and the advertisements for the film, some of them reproduced in the book, emphasised through their striking expressionist-constructivist graphics the avant-garde narrative of its creators as artists sacrificing everything for their art. Another myth refuted by Gerow is that *A Page of Madness* was shown without *benshi* narration — together with the absence of intertitles, this would make it a “pure” film and confirm its avant-garde status. Gerow, however, demonstrates that when the film opened in Musashino-kan, it featured the narration of the famous Tokugawa Musei. The book carefully reconstructs the contradictory meanings historical audiences read into the film, through paratexts such as plot summaries, advertising materials and reviews. Some reviewers heralded the purely cinematic elements (i.e. the departure from the long takes and the reliance on *benshi* narration typical for pre-1920s Japanese film); others criticised what they saw as the elitism of the film. Gerow’s analysis of a selection of reviews shows that *A Page of Madness* was seen as *both* realistic and experimental. Some of these reviews are translated in full in the appendix of the book, complemented by Gerow’s very informative commentaries. For people interested in 1920s Japanese film and cultural history, these make for a fascinating reading: there are reviews by the likes of Iwasaki Akira and Tanaka Jun’ichirō, who would go on to become important film critics and historians. The translations will be immensely useful to film scholars in general, as a number of critics who have written on the film clearly did not read Japanese and did not have access to Japanese-language materials.

The mixed reception of the film — both hailed by contemporary critics as the first Japanese pure film, equal to French impressionism, and bemoaned as too traditional in the *shimpa* sentimentalism of its plot — forms the backbone of Gerow's revisionist reading. His scrupulous archival research is complemented by the theoretical brilliance of his textual analysis. Critics have often drawn an easy parallel between *A Page of Madness* and *Dr Caligari*, pointing to the setting

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of both films (mental hospitals) and the narrative indeterminacy of their plots; Gerow, however, stresses the differences in the means the two use to achieve their effects: while *Dr Caligari* relies on the mise-en-scene of its expressionist sets to convey mental states, *A Page of Madness* uses filmic technique to represent psychology. Gerow's study establishes a much more convincing connection with French impressionism in this emphasis on camera and editing in the depiction of subjective states. The book engages polemically with previous writing on the film, especially readings that see it as a will to the pure, non-linear visual signifier which rejects the codes of Western cinema (Noël Burch) or as a political allegory of the aporias of non-Western colonial modernity (Eric Cazdyn). For Gerow, *A Page of Madness* is a fundamentally hybrid and multivalent text offering

a variety of modes of signification and perception, asking us less to choose one over another than to manage these overlapping, but different, melding but contradictory modes.... [I]t is this management of multiple texts, readings and perceptions, and not the singular version of experimental modernism that came to dominate interpretations of the text, if not perhaps Kinugasa's later reshaping of it, that constitutes the film's experience of modernity in 1920s Japan. (81)

Japanese modernity of the 1920s, although figuring prominently in the title, is present in the book as an abstract macro-concept, rather than as a very concrete network of discursive and material developments. It is a filmic modernity (the struggle over the articulation and the making of a modern cinema in Japan), or Foucault's modernity of technologies of separation and control whose *locus classicus* is the mental hospital, or in a very general sense, the mixed, hybrid character of Japanese modernity in the 1920s. This is very different from the masterful historicised reading of film and modernity in 1920s and 1930s Japan which Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano does in *Nippon Modern* (2008). Wada-Marciano positions the so-called *shōshimin eiga*, or middle-class film from the interwar years within the density of contemporary material and discursive events. We all know that the overdetermined figure of the modern girl is symptomatic of anxieties over modernisation; Wada-Marciano, however, insists

on a specificity: for her, the modern girl “engendered a modern subject explicitly linked with commodity fetishism in the transformation of capitalism”. Behind the ostensible ideological transparency of middle-class film and its domestic narratives, she discovers signifiers of nostalgia and nation: these films worked to produce a modernised and nationalised subject while making their own politics invisible (122).

Gerow’s definition of historical context remains largely confined to the cinematic, but his is still a very important book. Even before it was published it was mooted to be, in the narrow world of Japanese film studies, the last word on the film; the interpretation to end all interpretations. It certainly succeeds spectacularly in its challenge to the myth of *A Page of Madness* as an isolated avant-garde masterpiece in order to restore it to the multiplicity of historical and textual meaning. However, one certainly hopes that this is not the study to end all studies, but a contribution to an ongoing debate. There is still much to be said about the layered cultural histories of modernity and these two books have broken new ground.

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Ostrannenie

Edited by Annie van den Oever

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-90-8964-079-6. 280 pp. £25.00 (pbk)

Optical Media

By Friedrich Kittler

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-7456-4091-4. 250 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

A Review by Katerina Loukopoulou, University College London

The two books share an original and long-due research premise: to make media *and* media studies “strange” and European. This process of “estrangement” and Europeanisation comes with a whiff of fresh air for a field which has suffered from a double-edged malaise: over-familiarisation with its subject matter and key concepts; and predominance of an Anglo-Saxon agenda and geographical focus. In the case of the latter, issues of translation and international circulation of non-Anglophone texts *and* media are, of course, at the heart of the matter. But without a more varied and localised conceptual toolkit, even the most ambitious plan of intensive translation and distribution would not necessarily yield new understandings of media history, theory and practice.

Aptly thus, the collection of essays under the full title *Ostrannenie: On “Strangeness” and the Moving Image: The History, Reception and Relevance of a Concept* is the first volume of an ambitious new series by Amsterdam University Press (AUP), entitled “The Key Debates, Mutations and Appropriations in European Film Studies”. Expertly edited by Annie van den Oever, this volume brings together an impressive range of approaches to the concept of *ostrannenie* (making strange), which originated in the writings of the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. The collection, and especially the editor’s essay in Part One, offers many explanations to the variety of ways the Russian word *ostrannenie* has been translated, such as: defamiliarisation, estrangement, and (under Brecht’s influence) alienation and distanciation. These terms have entered the lexicon of many artists, film directors and scholars, becoming familiar words to the extent that their own history of mutation is little known. And it is exactly due to the pervasive influence of these terms in film and media studies that the book

Ostrannenie was long due. And as an act of defamiliarisation, the term appears on the book's cover with a double "nn", because as the editor explains (12), in the early 1980s Shklovsky admitted that he had misspelt *ostranenie* with one "n" instead of two, and thus this typo was erroneously carried over in the many publications (Russian and translations) that adopted it.

Interestingly, though, this typographical mistake serves as a useful metaphor for the ways that concepts are appropriated and mutate within specific historical and geographical contexts. And this is the case of *ostranenie*. It gradually took by storm art/media theory and practice on a European and international level during the inter-war period; and as the historiographical essays in Part Two show, the 1960s and 1970s was a period of new appropriations by theorists and filmmakers. As an idea and practice, *ostranenie* was appropriated (consciously or not) by theorists and artists working in many different forms: film, theatre, visual arts. But, as Tsivian's essay implies, during the revolutionary times of Russia in the 1910s, it was film more than any other art that presented the unique ability to turn visual thinking "upside down" (25-26) within new temporal and spatial arrangements. By taking his cue from the trick of the rotated image and the ways it was transposed into films (such as in Dziga Vertov's), Tsivian builds a convincing case about how film's new perceptual apparatus is in dialogue with Shklovsky's almost Aristotelian reflection on the techniques and poetics of the artistic production.

The volume's richness in historiographical and theoretical approaches can be attributed to the impressive international gathering of scholars, offering a new agenda of European media history and theory. And AUP has successfully tapped into this need for a European profile of media studies with a growing back catalogue of film and media studies (mainly written in English), a large part of which is now available online to download for free through OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks: www.oapen.org). I draw the attention to matters of language and international circulation of ideas because they are relevant to a volume which aims to ground Shklovsky's work to its original political and cultural setting in Russia (with Yuri Tsivian's essay), and then to trace its geographical and epistemological mutations and appropriations. For example, the second part of the book offers insightful essays on the following

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range of themes: *ostranenie* and media history (Frank Kessler); Brecht and Russian Formalism in Britain in the 1970s (Ian Christie); *ostranenie* in French film studies in relation to problems of translation and conflicting interests (Dominique Chateau); and finally a discussion about the relationship between Christian Metz and Russian Formalists (Emile Poppe). The volume concludes with an original feature: two “Conversations” with leading European film scholars: Laurent Jullier discusses matters of cognitivism, defamiliarisation and narration with András Bálint Kovács; and Annie van den Oever talks with Laura Mulvey about possible connections between Freud’s writings on the “uncanny” and Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique”.

This collection thus offers a range of alternative pathways to the many contexts and permutations of Shklovsky’s concept. Cognitivism seems a strong candidate of this process of mutation, as the four essays in Part Three manifest, grouped under the impressive heading: ‘Cognitive and Evolutionary-Cognitive Approaches to Ostranenie: Perception, Cognitive Gaps and Cognitive Schemes’. However, the volume offers few signposts to whether apart from legacies there is a potential successor to Shklovsky and his circle of Russian Formalists, Futurists and Symbolists in terms of radically recasting the terms of the debate around art, film, media and technology.

A possible candidate in terms of a new paradigm shift could be the author of *Optical Media*: Friedrich Kittler. And the question is worth asking: Is Kittler the Shklovsky of art and media theory? A comparison might seem futile and the answer would be a negative one; but by posing the question, my aim is to reflect on the reasons why issues of medium specificity and art technique have been, by large, sidestepped within media and film theory agendas as being either too utopian or too totalitarian — especially after Marshall McLuhan’s messianic 1960s theories, encapsulated in such mottos as “medium is the message” and proclamations to understand media as “the extensions of man”. Usefully thus, John Durham Peters’s introduction to *Optical Media* and to “Kittler’s Light Shows” sets the German theorist’s work within the Canadian tradition of media studies, marked by the technology theories of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. Indeed, this is an obvious connection since Kittler himself engages with these two. Although Shklovsky and Russian Formalism are patently absent in Kittler’s

book (and most probably deliberately so), one might learn more about his polemical (almost manifesto-like) book by setting his work against the tradition of Shklovsky's "strangeness" and its mutation of Bertolt Brecht's "distanciation". If radical and revolutionary politics were the immediate contexts of *ostranenie*, Kittler's is the opposite. As Peters puts it in his introduction, "Kittler is fully 'out' as a German conservative... compared to the hegemonic left-wing populism of Commonwealth media studies over the past decades, Kittler's vision is certainly a stark contrast" (4-5). And one of the main reasons that Kittler's long histories of media are conventionally grouped under the "conservative" banner is his fascination with war as a force of media production and technological shift. To quote an indicative example: "The end of silent film as a consequence of World War I was thus followed by the development of color film as preparation for World War II" (203). Such pyrotechnic statements are typical in Kittler's book, which would verge to the level of absurd determinism and teleology, had it not been for his consistent efforts to use this shock tactic as a means of "defamiliarising" his readers from the conventional histories of optical media. My aim is not to offer an apologia for Kittler's often crude sweeping views — actually Peters's introduction does that in an original and unusual way, merging critique with appraisal. Moreover, Kittler's condensed prose could be viewed as justifiable since this book is a collection of his 1999 Berlin Lectures. *Optical Media* offers, in a way, a reduced version of his long-standing deconstruction of the idea and history of medium specificity and media antagonisms (see his previous work *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*; and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*).

In terms of methodological premise, Kittler's long historical straddles and consistent emphasis on the effects of war and conflict could be viewed as a tactic to defamiliarise his readers from conventional research agendas and media histories. To link Renaissance linear perspective and the technologies of the fine arts with film, television and computer graphics is a commendable task. Kittler's politics of the image might lack what Tsvian calls apropos of Shlovsky "the gesture of revolution" (*Ostranenie*, 21-32), but still there is a lot to learn from Kittler's interpretation of the complexities of media succession.

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Kittler's theories might not have as yet reached the canonical status of Shklovsky's, but with *Optical Media* (translated for the first time in English almost ten years after it was published in German in 2002), there seems to be a clear step towards consolidating Kittler's work within Anglophone media theory. Consciously written in accessible prose, Kittler obviously wishes to pack his multi-layered theories and long histories of "optical media" into one volume. This is a significant contribution due to his clearly Eurocentric outlook, articulated by his Dante epigraph-hymn to the sun (conceptualised as a force of technology) and his insistence on drawing together European luminaries from Aristotle to Eisenstein.

What, in a strange way, links *Ostrannenie* and *Optical Media* is a shared meta-historiographical reflexivity and even revisionism towards the "mutations and appropriations" of concepts, theoretical premises, and historical periods of medium specificity, that is readjustment of media ecologies. That both books centre their geographical span on mainly European case studies is another linking feature, which is welcome as long as it is not isolationist and insular. Kovács in *Ostrannenie* (176-77) argues against essentialist divides between European and American schools of thought; for him, the cross-fertilisation of theories and the internationalism of film defy the adoption of border lines. Kittler, in his Preface of *Optical Media* (28), offers a different reasoning for his project to equip students with the necessary knowledge and tools to master the complex and long history that has resulted in the technology of digital image-processing:

"A Microsoft subsidiary by the name of Corbis travels around all possible museums, archives, and picture collections, generously abstaining from buying any of the stored originals, but receiving for a trifling sum the digital rights for those copies that Corbis itself has scanned... And because you can imagine that cities like Florence or even Berlin have more beautiful pictures than Tallahassee or Petaluma, the lion's share of Corbis' loot comes from Europe, which had not yet learned enough about optical media to protect its own digital rights from Microsoft."

Ten years have almost passed since Kittler's anxious cry was first written. In the meantime, many projects of digitisation of the European visual and filmic

heritage have been successfully undertaken — such as Europa Film Treasures (www.europafilmtreasures.eu) and the European Film Gateway (www.europeanfilmgateway.eu) — while the most recent Orphans Film Symposium in New York in 2010 “Moving Pictures Around the World” celebrated internationalism and especially less known and recently discovered American-European exchanges (www.nyu.edu/orphanfilm/orphans7). Therefore, to rediscover and revise European media theory and history does not necessarily have to abide by an antagonistic logic of Europe versus the US. Both books offer much new ground to cover in future discussions of appropriations of theory and media (new and old), which cannot afford to exclude the trans-antlantic mutations of European thought and technologies.

The Language of Film**By Robert Edgar-Hunt, John Marland Steven Rawie**

Lausanne: AVA Publishing SA, 2010. ISBN: 978-2-940411-27-6 (pbk). 69 Illustrations, 192 pp. £19.95

Valuing Films: Shifting Perceptions of Worth**Edited by Laura Hubner**

Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-230-22968-6 (hbk). Xi+228. Price not mentioned

Fifty Key American Films**Edited by John White and Sabine Haenni**

Cornwall: Routledge, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-415-77297-6 (pbk). 262. Price not mentioned

A Review by Meraj Ahmed Mubarki, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India

The Language of Film, the authors argue, "is the starting point of knowledge rather than the end of it and the work continues" (176). One cannot but agree that language, even that of film, is an ever evolving process and can never be static. The book aims to decrypt the way cinematic language is constructed. Tastefully done, and well illustrated to highlight the points it makes, The Language of Film posits that if film has a language, then it can be constructed and deconstructed through the study of semiotics, narrative strategies, references to intertextuality, the functioning of ideology, the way the camera frames and captures images, and finally the way meaning is engendered through continuity and discontinuity editing. Accordingly, each is taken up in an exclusively devoted chapter and dealt with at length. The chapters are not numbered as, the authors reason, the book can also be read non-sequentially. They point out in the introduction that the aim of the book is to "aid you in your journey as a practitioner, as a theorist or hopefully as both" (6).

The chapter on 'Narrative' introduces the reader to the ways in which narratives are structured in cinema, and acquaints readers with the concept of Formalism as espoused by Vladimir Propp, and his 'Seven spheres of Action', Tzvetan

Todorov's formal structures of equilibrium, disequilibrium, and Syd Field's articulation of the 'Three Act Structure'. The section on 'Semiotics' indicates that cinema's grammar, like any language, is composed of signs, and offers a 'deconstruction' of a scene from *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978) to illustrate the point. It also introduces the reader to the five signifying systems theorised by Roland Barthes. The part on 'Intertextuality' quite rightly accedes that films are never made in vacuum and are often hedged in by audience expectations, genre conventions, often borrowing from other 'texts'. However intertextuality is not to be confused with plagiarism, as the authors argue, "artistry is in making something that strikes an audience as new and distinct" (70). The section on 'Frames and Images' examines the operative ways of the camera and presents the reader with the various camera angles (straight on, low and high angles, etc.), shot types (extreme long shot, long shot, and the mid long shot, etc.), *mise-en-scène* and camera movements (pan, tilt and zoom). The book reasons in the chapter on ideology that all films and all aspects of film including its text and context, time and place, form and genre are ideologically driven and not bereft of connotational meaning. The book also includes case studies and in-house short films, which have been made available online for the readers. The editing section familiarises readers and practitioners alike with continuity and discontinuity editing reasoning that what is unseen on the screen is as important as what is seen and explains various editing techniques that makes narration meaningful such as the eyeline matches, the 30° rule, the 'bread and butter' shot-reverse-shot of continuity editing. The recommended reading list is divided into 'Introductory Reading' and 'Advanced Reading', and compared to what is available on the topic from other resources, the book supports itself fine by its considerably well 'illustrated' arguments (quite literally), and could be healthy guide to students looking for an introduction to the art of film. However, the authors' contention that there are seven universal primary plots — 'Achilles' or stories of overcoming; 'Cindrella' or stories of transformation; 'Jason' or stories of pursuit; 'Faust' or stories of temptation; 'Orpheus' or stories of irrevocable loss; 'Romeo and Juliet' or stories of love triumphant; and 'Tristan and Isolde' or stories of love defeated — is far too simplistic. Even Vladimir Propp's contention doesn't have universal value, and dealt only with Russian folk tales. Again, labeling *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) as the greatest science fiction film

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ever made is bound to raise the question: what about *2001: A Space Odyssey*, (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Star Wars* (George Lukas, 1977) or *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986)?

While *The Language of Film* is about the ways through which meaning is embedded on the screen — how we apprise, value and appreciate films — the critical aim of *Valuing Films*, edited by Laura Hubner, is to de-fetishise the film critic and re-evaluate the tendency to see his/her reaction as more significant than those of the insignificant other, who could be a female spectator, the Mexican immigrant, the *Transformer* fan, the Nollywood film enthusiast, etc. The aim of the book is to “democratize” film appreciation, and rescue it from being tied down to experts’ views. *Valuing Films*, through a variety of essays, each seeking to critically examine the values on which films are judged, is, to a large extent, able to accomplish what it endeavours to. The book meant for film scholars is divided into three parts. While the first deals with the politics of criticism, the second seeks to analyse audiences and the way their taste defines and re-defines the canonisation of films. The third part deals with the institutions that influence taste, quality and values in films. In her introductory chapter, Laura Hubner mentions that values that make a film great are hard to pin down. *Valuing Films* seeks to study the process of evaluation of films, and chart out the diverse ways in which films are valued, appraised and critiqued at various levels: personal, political, institutional, industrial and commercial. Exploring a range of methodologies from cultural to institutional to consumption practices, each chapter seeks to explore an aspect of film appreciation. The book cogently mentions that there are disparate ways in which a film is and can be merited, ranging from a more bottom-line approach of box office collection, to critical acclaim, and academic interest. The book argues, quite rightly, that taste including an appreciation of films is a socially constructed practice and will carry overt and covert political implications.

Leighton Grist, in the opening chapter, claims that criticism and critical evaluation of films are as much ideologically implicated as the films themselves. Grist compares two disparate films, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) and *Waiting to Exhale* (Forest Whitaker, 1995) released 54 years apart, and postulates the view that evaluation of films are invariable political. While the

former is hailed as one of the greatest, the latter has been directed by an Oscar winning actor who is not yet considered an auteur. *Citizen Kane's* less than average business at the box-office and just one Oscar should have easily allowed the film to quietly go down in history. Yet, Grist points out that the "true appreciation" of *Citizen Kane* stemmed from the triumph of the auteuristic evaluation of films in the 1950s and 1960s that challenged the existing ways of film appreciation and rescued the film from slipping down into the deep dead sea of oblivion. The auteur movement itself was a political movement as it sought to question the dominant discourse of film appreciation of that period. The auteuristic approach to film appreciation sought "to install in cinema what had dominated in other arts: the romantic artist, the rebellious individual" (15). On the other hand, *Waiting to Exhale*, which locates the white community within the "source of problems paradigm" stereotypically reserved for the coloured (27), has received scant critical and academic attention, contrary to what it deserves (as Grist argues), given the parameters of film valuation that continue to dominate Hollywood. James Walter strives to judge the value of "coherence, credibility, and unity as they seek to rupture the defining order of their fictional worlds expressly for the dramatic impact of their storytelling volte-face" (32) as in the "twist" films such as *The Usual Suspects* (Bryan Singer, 1995) and *The Others* (Alejandro Amenabar, 2001). He argues that the former fails to make the defining moment in the film's *finale* coherent and credible because Roger 'Verbal' Kint's (Kevin Spacey) narration of events is unreliable, and there is no discernible fictional world against which the narrator's legitimacy and account of events can be tested. On the contrary, *The Others* provides enough visual clues strewn all across the narrative, with which the viewer puts to test "the twist" that is validated later on, as the film progresses towards an anapropous climax.

Tom Brown explores film spectacle in *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), which is one of the most successful films of all times and yet continues to languish academically in a marginal position. Although Brown points out that "the bigness of the film is part of its badness", he argues that the film's "emotional and affective force of spectacle" allowed the film to make an emotional connect with the female audience in ways male spectatorship could not (62). Lincoln Geraghty postulates that films can also be evaluated on the

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basis of the values placed on them by the associated fan audience, especially if the film seeks to adapt and refashion a previously existing work. He points to the way fans of the *Transformers* series lampooned Michael Bay's *Transformers* on YouTube, and dissects in their reactions a reflection of their subcultural identity and their way of re-asserting their loyalty to the original cartoon series. Adan Avalos argues for an academic re-examination of the *naco* or Mexican border films made in the 1970s and the 1980s, which because of their low production values, melodramatic plots, and shoddy camera work were usually dismissed as low culture by the academic community, but were immensely popular with the immigrant community as they represented the rage of the *Latino* immigrant, and addressed the complex issues that affected millions of Mexicans and Latinos. Cinema from 'home' is an important way for diasporic communities to keep in touch with their native land. Oluyinka Esan looks at Nollywood or the Nigerian film industry and reasons that the value of films is also shaped by its modes of consumption. Owen Evans explores the role of the popular cinema journal *Sight and Sound* in shaping film appreciation, and its role as a commentator on contemporary world cinema especially its role in reviving forgotten British films.

While Laura Hubner's *Valuing Films* critiques the way values are assigned to films, John White and Sabine Haenni's *Fifty Key American Films* is about films that have gained classic status either through critical appraisal or through popular acclaim or both. The book is unabashedly about films that have attained canonical status and are worthy of being labeled as "key filmic moment" in 100 years of American cinematic experience. However, any attempt to qualify a film as 'great' or 'best' is bound to be controversial, and will invariably raise questions with regard to the standards on which the judgement has been made. This book is no exception. The authors assert straightaway that the book is not about the "best" or the "greatest" but a selection of "key" films that "operates to provide an initial appreciation of US cinema over the past 100 years" (xv), although the book chooses films released between 1915 – *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) and 2005 – *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) covering a period of 90 years. The selection criteria hinges on several points of references including, but not limited to, film form, film aesthetics, narrative structure, genre, authorship, etc. The book argues that canonisation of film text is to be

looked within the “larger survey of social experience of making and viewing a film” (xvi). The fifty films selected comprises the usual suspects such as *Birth of a Nation*, *Citizen Kane*, *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin, 1936), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1939), *Singing in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, 1952), *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1954), *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) but one is pleasantly surprised to find less travelled films such as *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1979), *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993), *The Incredibles* (Brad Bird, 2004) and *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) on the list.

It is difficult to disagree with Sabine Haenni’s assertion that in *Birth of a Nation*, aesthetic strategies are used to make political points (7). Elliot Shapiro reads in *Modern Times* a critique of the dehumanising powers of technology, where humans are reduced to mere performers of a soul deadening ritual of running machines, operating ‘things’ that make ‘things’. Shapiro also hints that incest in Roman Polanski’s *China Town* stands as a metaphor for a dangerously intimate relationship between corporate interest, government, and criminal activity. Robert Shail approaches *Citizen Kane* through the *auteur* theory and sees the film not just as a cinematic expression of the director’s ideas and styles of visualization. He argues that the greatness of the film lies not in its visual style but in the ambiguities and contradiction that leaves the film open to varying on screen and off screen interpretations, “being all things to all people” (73). In *Aliens*, Freddie Gaffney premonitorily interprets the nature of corporate America and its potential for destruction, and ciphers a reflection of America’s tragic engagement with Vietnam in the preceding decades.

Each of the films has been read aesthetically, thematically and ideologically, within the cultural context of its production and consumption, displaying a range of judgements and this is where the book scores, though a major weakness is the lack of synopses which may hinder the reading experience of those not familiar with all the films. The book is a must read for all those seeking an introduction to some of the best of American cinema.

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The three books though disparate but nonetheless constituting a triad complement each other as they seek to engage with cinema at all levels: from production to adulation to deification.

Humphrey Jennings**By Keith Beattie**

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780719078552. 171 pp. £50.00 (hbk)

Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain**Edited by Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 978844573219. 429 pp. £19.99 (pbk)

From Pinewood to Hollywood: British Filmmakers in American Cinema 1910-1969**By Ian Scott**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN 9780230229235. 202 pp. £50 (hbk)

A review by Paul Elliott, University of Worcester, UK

Humphrey Jennings was a director steeped in paradox. Part of the Empire Marketing Board and GPO film units, he was always a little too aesthetically minded, too avant-garde for their founder and mentor John Grierson. He was politically left wing but was also accused, at various times, of patronising the working classes; he was a passionate observer of quotidian life but was at the same time a believer in the eternal qualities of poetry, music and the arts. He was also hugely influential but only produced a handful of very well-known films in a life that was cut short tragically at the age of 43. Jennings will be remembered for a number of films that documented Britain at war; his works *London Can Take It!* (1940), *Listen to Britain* (1942), *Fires Were Started* (1943) and *A Diary for Timothy* (1946) are both poignant and important, as they not only documented but buoyed up the spirits of Britons during the long days of the Blitz.

Keith Beattie's book on Jennings published by Manchester University Press in their 'British Film Makers' series is a good introduction to a director who is notoriously hard to pin down. Manchester University should be applauded for the series that attempts to offer small critical monographs on British directors who have been somewhat ignored by mainstream film theory. Texts on Roy Ward

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Baker, Sydney Box, Karel Reisz and Richard Lester make the series an important one for British film studies and cinema scholarship in general. Beattie's book, like others in the series, is focused around in-depth readings of a small number of films; films are chosen for the extent that they represent a specific quality of the director's oeuvre or provide an insight into their development as an auteur. Beattie, for example, dedicates a chapter to Jennings' twin interests in Surrealism and the Mass Observation movement, both of which went on to shape his cinematic vision in the Second World War.

Beattie's readings of films like *Fires Were Started* and *Listen to Britain* are extensive and impressive and his prose is forthright and academic. What comes out of the book is Jennings' desire to make good films *and* to serve his country, and Beattie reminds us that this was not an unusual pairing in the 1940s when even official government bodies assumed the general public to have enough intelligence to realise propaganda when they saw it. The book is arranged chronologically and takes the reader through many of Jennings' major works from the early shorts to the later, more substantial features.

Beattie's book makes constant reference to its subject's ambiguity and, in the first chapter especially, uses this as a central image with which to look at his career. Jennings' films were, as Lindsey Anderson wrote, as close as British cinema has got to visual poetry and this is highlighted in Beattie's book as scenes are deconstructed and discussed at length. This book is no biography or general survey, it is a work of film studies that is based firmly in an understanding of the text, both visual and aural. Beattie places Jennings not only in context with documentary filmmakers of his own time, and a time to come, but within a heritage of British (or, at the very least, English) Romantic patriotism that expands beyond the bounds of cinema. Much is made, for example, of Jennings' use of Milton and Shakespeare and how such use provided a foundation for his overall politico-aesthetic vision.

Beattie is not uncritical of Jennings and, in particular, spends some time outlining his use of scripted drama in the wartime propaganda piece *Fires Were Started*, arguably the director's most important film. The blurring of what is real and what is fictional, what is scripted and what is improvised, becomes an important topic when discussing this film that, like its director, is constantly

ambiguous and difficult to categorise. Beattie only just manages to negotiate the complexities of such a text by largely avoiding the tricky question of Jennings' own culpability in manipulating reality to suit the political needs of a country at war. Beattie makes the prescient point that many of the images of *Fires Were Started* have entered the public consciousness as being documentary renderings of World War Two London. However, how do we approach such images when we know them to be staged? How can we accept the validity of such films as truthful if they are scripted and rehearsed? Beattie is less convincing as an interrogator than a documentarist, as he discusses Jennings' artistic decisions without ever placing them into a wider moral and aesthetic context. We learn why Jennings made such choices but these are very rarely questioned or challenged.

The book ends with a consideration of the importance of Jennings to subsequent British filmmakers. Beattie cites his legacy as extending to directors as varied as John Boorman, Karel Reisz and Patrick Keiller, whose recent cycle of films about London is surely the closest to Jennings' own aesthetic sensibility the post-war period has produced. Ultimately, Jennings will be known for this poetical visual and aural style and for his ability to turn the sometimes grubby world of wartime propaganda into something beautiful. Jennings' films search for something eternal in the British spirit, some indubitable element that can be drawn on in times of national crisis. The nobility of this project is something that comes across in Beattie's book but some of the passion of Jennings' own work is missing. Beattie correctly highlights Jennings' aestheticism but very rarely examines how this was linked to his belief in the British character. Any viewing of *Listen to Britain* or *A Diary For Timothy* will reveal a director who was passionately patriotic about a country and a people that he fervently believed in. The sometimes overly clinical dissections of the films and their formal properties in this book often misses their more emotional power; a little like studying the metre and blank verse structure of Henry V's "Into the breach" speech without relating it to Shakespeare's unending belief in a mythical England that was both real and always unattainable. Beattie's book is an important one and, like others in Manchester University Press' series, is a fitting attempt to reclaim a part of British cinema's neglected past. Work on Humphrey Jennings is rare but thankfully exists and this text is a welcome addition to it.

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If critical work on Jennings is scarce then work on the documentary directors collected in the BFI's recent DVD anthology *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-war Britain 1951-1977* is non-existent. It was always assumed that British documentary diminished after the war, as Griersonian philosophies and methods became more and more untenable and less and less relevant to a post-war audience. Aside from the Free Cinema movement of the 1950s and 60s that spawned such cinematic luminaries as Lindsey Anderson and Tony Richardson, British documentary — so critical opinion has it — fell into a morass of commercialised, industry-sponsored production that offered very little in the way of either entertainment or displays of directorial skill. The extensive introductory chapters in Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor's edited volume of essays on this period, also entitled *Shadows of Progress*, however is primarily intended to put a contrary case to this often accepted picture. The fall of the British documentary, they assert, did happen but only after an extensive period of filmic output that would produce works of sometimes surprising quality and creativity.

As Russell and Piers Taylor outline, before the widespread ownership of televisions, there were two main ways you could view documentaries. Firstly, in the cinema as a short or a newsreel (hence the much vaunted *Look at Life* series produced by the Rank Organisation or the Pathe Pictorials of the 1960s and 70s) and, secondly, in terms of non-theatrical exhibition where films would be shown to schools, religious groups, film societies, as PR vehicles for businesses or as part of a religious or civic-minded gathering. Many of these latter films were directly sponsored by industries such as Shell, BP, Roche and Unilever and would be rented out to groups for short periods, often for no charge. The essays in *Shadows of Progress* look specifically at this group of films and, in particular, the journeymen directors who made them. Aside from a few more well-known names, most of the directors discussed in the book have gone unnoticed by mainstream film criticism, a fact that is unsurprising given the unsung nature of their work.

The book itself is split into two unequal halves: the first gives a thorough outline of the production methods, exhibition mechanisms and sponsorship programmes of the films themselves in what is an impressive piece of archival research by the editors that includes a generous selection of images from trade magazines and

journals. The second section offers sixteen small essays by a variety of authors on a number of directors, discussing their work and placing them into socio-historic and socio-economic context. The essays are historical and biographical rather than critical and so serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, documenting filmmakers like Derrick Knight and Sarah Erulkar who might otherwise be forgotten and, on the other, offering a distinct picture of the breadth and vibrancy of post-war documentary filmmaking in Britain. Names such as Geoffrey Jones and John Krish will be familiar to many with some knowledge of British documentary film, however those of Eric Marquis and Peter Pickering who made films for Roche and The National Coal Board, respectively, perhaps not so. Ultimately this uncovering of hitherto unstudied talent is the book's greatest strength and, perhaps even also its greatest weakness.

The BFI has produced a number of books recently that seek to document and discuss what we might think of as marginal filmmakers and films. Steve Chibnall's work on the British B Movie, for example, is not only a work of film history but an attempt to catalogue a layer of British film culture that might otherwise be forgotten. B movies, like trade documentaries and public information films, are meant to be functional and, to a certain extent, disposable, and so very often are. What Russell and Piers Taylor's book shows, however, is that these texts are often vital storehouses for the nation's consciousness and that, sometimes, individual films are able to transcend their humble artistic and economic origins and surprise us with their artistry and flair. Take for example, Eric Marquis' 1968 film *Time Out of Mind*. The BFI's Rebecca Vick details Marquis' work in an engaging essay that relies extensively on information provided by the director himself. Her admiration for his work is both palpable and deserving and she calls the 33-minute informative film "one of his most compelling, dynamic and (albeit again only within the industrial film's field) acclaimed cinematic works" (2010). *Time Out of Mind* was funded by the healthcare industry giant Roche and, as such, was designed primarily as a marketing agent. However, as reviewer Ken Gay said of it,

[it is] not in any sense a sales film for its sponsor but a fairly successful attempt, despite some of the loose ends and some measure

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of failure to create absolute credibility with the actors, to win sympathy for people in extreme psychological states.

Time Out of Mind is an interesting and challenging short film about depression and anxiety that, were it not for books and DVD anthologies like *Shadows of Progress*, would be lost forever under more commercially viable products.

Shadows of Progress is an archive rather than a history. Despite claiming that it is intended for both a general and a critical audience, its pages of information regarding industrial sponsorship and non-theatrical exhibition sometimes make for heavy reading and I am dubious as to its popularity outside of this specialist area. Many of the directors discussed are journeymen filmmakers who produced marketing and informational films for large corporations rather than overt artistic statements; given this the often auteurist tone of many of the pieces seems a little overstated. Nevertheless, *Shadows of Progress* is a necessary book and one that is elegantly produced by the BFI who have an important place in the preservation of British filmic culture. The directors and films discussed may not have the propagandist grandeur of Humphrey Jennings nor the political and artistic fervour of the Free Cinema movement, but they do have an honesty about them and provide a window into the fears, desires and concerns of post-war Britain. Marquis' film *Time for Terror*, for example, a Metropolitan police short made in 1975 about the dangers of IRA terrorism, has obvious resonances with the tone and content of today's media. However, the quality of research and writing in *Shadows of Progress* mean that that the essays contained within it offer more than nostalgia value: they are a real contribution to preserving the national archive of film.

One of the ways British directors, writers and producers have attempted to avoid the kinds of obscurity we have been looking at here was to try their luck in the 'film colony' of Hollywood. Ian Scott's *From Pinewood to Hollywood* is an engaging and in-depth study of the hundreds of filmmakers and actors that have, sometimes successfully sometimes not so successfully, made their way across the Atlantic, lured by money, artistic freedom, lifestyle or all three. What makes Scott's study interesting is his central thesis that Hollywood has always relied on British émigrés especially, and that cross-fertilisation between the two nations has shaped movie output since its very earliest days, as he states:

This work attempts to chronicle both the 'invasion' and some of the social and ideological fervour that went with emigration to California. The British had a screen presence undoubtedly, and an enduring one at that. But they also had a cultural and social presence, not least in the way the studios were constructed and went about their business. (11)

After an excellent introduction wherein Scott lays out his central thesis, the rest of the book discusses the history of British emigration to Hollywood in fundamentally chronological order — starting from early silent directors such as Reginald Baker, whose co-directed film *Civilisation* (1916) was "intended as a rival to Griffith's eye-wateringly ambitious *Intolerance*" (37), through the 1930s with such British luminaries as Michael Balcon and Alexander Korda, to the Second World war and its aftermath and, in chapter five, to the swathes of British directors like John Boorman and John Schlesinger who would travel to the US taking a specific brand of British social realism with them.

As Scott states in the introduction, his book elides the more well-known test cases of British-Hollywood cross-fertilisation so that, whilst mentioning names like Hitchcock, Chaplin and Stan Laurel it is the overlooked and under-discussed figures the book is more interested in. In one particularly illuminating discussion, Scott highlights the presence of women scriptwriters in Hollywood and, in particular, Elinor Glyn, who travelled to Los Angeles at the age of 56 to join the screenwriting pool at Famous Players-Laskey. As Scott notes, "Glyn scandalised pre-Code Hollywood with romantic stories where sexual tension was never far from the surface" (76).

Scott's portrait of Elinor Glyn exemplifies his central point: that the British were ideally placed to contribute to the culture and output of Hollywood because they were unencumbered by a dogmatic film history of their own. As directors from Germany, France, Russia and Italy sometimes found to their cost, Hollywood has always made a place for fresh talent from abroad but only on its own terms. Even today, the British directors who achieve most success in Hollywood (Ridley Scott, Christopher Nolan, etc.) tend to be those who are most adept at fusing a British sensibility with a distinctly American product. What arises out of Scott's book is a picture of true cross-fertilisation and constant national negotiation

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between émigrés and their adopted country. Scott's mandate to discuss filmmakers who are outside the usual canon of British film criticism should be applauded. In the last of his chapters, for example, he spends some time discussing Peter Yates, director of *Robbery* (1967), *Bullitt* (1968) and *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), who is surely one of the most undervalued English directors of recent times. It is vital that British film criticism expand its canon to include directors like Yates to avoid simply repeating work already carried out. There is no shortage of books dedicated to looking at the figure of the émigré director in Hollywood. However, that the British had a major role to play in shaping both the aesthetic and the economic structure of the major studios right the outset is a more radical and an altogether more interesting proposition. What comes out of Scott's book is the vision of Hollywood, not as some overarching American cultural monster, but a supra-and inter-national mixture of the hopes, desires, fantasies, anxieties, paranoia, passions and skills of a world of migrants hoping to find a place to settle and work.

All three books under review here attest not only to the long history of British filmmaking but to the continuing desire on the part of academics and critics to catalogue and preserve the more marginal elements of the national narrative. Whether it is the unsung directors of documentaries or the virtually unknown female writers of early Hollywood, more and more, film writers and historians are looking to unearth the hitherto hidden talent that has shaped both the British and the Hollywood filmmaking industries. All too often, British film history has been seen as being based on peaks and troughs, on boom and bust; however, texts like Scott's and Russell and Piers Taylor's contradict this, suggesting that there might be more continuity between periods than might hitherto been accepted.

Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema**By Derek Nystrom**

Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-19-533677-1. 11 illustrations, 251 pp. £ 15.99

He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western**By Roderick McGillis**

Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-55458-059-0. 9 illustrations, 208 pp. £ 19.99

A Review by Gavin Harper, Park University, USA

After teaching a recent class that focused upon masculinity in Hollywood films, I have been fascinated with various responses to the ways popular culture creates and defines masculinity for its audiences. Two recent works of scholarship, *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western* and *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema*, offer sharp and detailed analyses of the specific symbols that cinema utilises in its gendered spaces. The former text broadly defines the symbolic usage of common images in western films — guns, hats, costumes, horses, and the landscape — using an academic narrative that relies upon personal experience and semiotic study. The latter text ties its discussion of masculinity to political, historical, class, and economic details in the 1970s that shaped the filmmaking industry behind critical films of the decade. Each offers a striking and valuable discussion of different aspects of masculinity studies in the twentieth century — both focusing on cowboy culture, but using very different methods of support. Beyond their differing arguments, the cowboy in context for these authors offers an array of speculative definitions. For McGillis, the cowboy is a central figure in the definition of masculinity throughout twentieth-century film — the central and recognisable image of a gunman with six-shooter and a faithful horse. Nystrom, on the other hand, plays with the alternative or fringe definitions of cowboy culture in cinematic material — where the cowboy becomes the redneck, the Southerner, the blue-collar worker, the policeman.

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McGillis opens his text by discussing the ways in which cowboys play an integral role in many children's belief systems at a critical stage of development. Thus, for McGillis and many children, the cowboy becomes a central figure in the definition of manhood and masculine behaviour. As a symbol, he is someone that is both inside and outside the law, a symbol of hegemonic masculinity and a symbol of differing Other. In all of his forms, he is a fighter. McGillis makes it clear, though, that this symbol is a dubious one in American culture as, "the United States constructed its sense of destiny as a dynamic and progressive civilization on a myth that depends largely on aggression" (6). He continues his definition by reiterating that, "both social and psychological versions of manhood involve the necessity for active control of an Other that requires stewardship and taming. That Other is either a barbarous bunch (native or foreign) in need of a civilizing force, or it consists of the libidinous drives in the psyche in need of chastening by Mr. Strong Superego" (6). At stake here is the argument of a hegemonic struggle between the white male and oppositional forces that are rising up to thwart the cowboy's control. In the early chapters, McGillis utilises these Freudian psychological divisions to construct his ideas — cowboy as symbol of racial and masculine dominance.

The narratives that McGillis weaves into his research support these early definitions of the cowboy image and symbol — a definition of masculinity inherently violent and moral. To support his claims, McGillis develops a critical chapter devoted to the definition of nostalgia and the ways it influences and alters memory. In essence, he argues that the films he (and many other children watched) constructed the definitions of gendered behavior. Each viewer learns "from the heroes what it means to be a 'true man'" (38). In subsequent chapters, the gun, the costume, the horse, and the landscape offer a rich semiotic study of the signs at play in the westerns from roughly the 1930s to the 1950s. The discussion and analysis that McGillis employs offers both a positive and negative aspect to the sometimes *queer* existence of the cowboy in these films — as a cowboy serves as both a symbol of a safe pastime for children to consume and a transgressive element of sexuality and danger. This opposition is nowhere more apparent than in the cowboy's gun. McGillis makes one of his sharpest points by defining the crisis of the gun in these films. On the positive side, "the gun was something every real man should have in order to accomplish

his work as provider and protector. We felt we needed guns to prove something of our character as males" (72). On the other hand, the gun served as a fetish, "both desirable and dangerous, both mysterious and familiar, both a part of one's own body and a part of someone else's. No wonder the cowboy is so powerful a figure. He represents a masculinity of control, an erotic mastery, and the gun testifies to this mastery" (74). While the earlier chapters construct the cowboy as a racial and masculine figure, these later chapters detail the sexual and gendered elements of "cowboyhood" at play in the films under analysis. Ultimately, McGillis rejects the cowboy as a symbol of sexuality in the films, offering a depiction of the cowboy as asexual masculinity.

For example, the horse may serve as an interesting image of how the cowboy dispenses with women altogether. Unfortunately, this discussion is less developed. In the chapter, 'Tall in the Saddle: Romance on the Range,' McGillis argues that the horse serves as a visible and sexual symbol for the cowboy's body. If a cowboy must remain visually chaste and "if the hero's muscles remain hidden under a fancy shirt and long trousers and chaps, then his horse can reveal the body in all its sensuous beauty. In a way, the horse reflects manhood itself" (112). The horse also serves, in McGillis's work as a symbol for the absent woman in the cowboy mystique. "We used to make jokes about the cowboy and his horse, jokes that turned on the cowboy's choice to stay with his horse and leave the woman behind. Such jokes contain an important point: the cowboy does have an intimate relationship with his horse" (109). This relationship is made more clear in his point that if "we recall how often characters refer to women as horses (usually fillies), and the various uses of the word mount itself, the sexual connotations of the horse are difficult to ignore" (114).

While a few sexual points are made clear in this chapter, McGillis ends his work by situating the cowboy as asexual within the films. As they can be neither heterosexual (they reject the world of domestication and women), nor homosexual (this option only visible for villains and campy sidekicks), the only option for a cowboy is to resist pressure to conform to either of these spheres. "Whereas Jane Tompkins sees the land as a replacement for the female in the western and Horrocks sees it as a sign of the genre's homoeroticism, we might just as well see the relationship between the hero and the land as autoerotic.

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These films are about the man's desire to be the Ideal — to be that which he desires — implacable and sure and permanent" (161). Hence, the cowboy serves as his own sexual model, alone.

McGillis offers a complex and often contradictory image of this central image of the cowboy — both covered in sexualised and gendered imagery (guns, horses, etc.), but one that is asexual and completely devoid of any actual sexual behavior. The cowboy in McGillis's text serves as a blank image of masculinity that allows viewers to apply and code the figure in any type of masculinity that they prefer — sexualised or not. Alternatively, when Nystrom discusses the ways in which cowboys have been transformed and consumed by other film genres — the images he presents are hardly blank. They offer detailed portraits of very specific icons of masculinity in the 1970s.

While it is probably always good advice not to judge a book by its cover, the central image of Nystrom's book *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men* offers three very recognisable symbols of masculinity that sharpen our understanding of his work. The three men pictured are wearing a hard hat, a cowboy shirt, and a policeman's uniform. The unique symbols within the image divide his work into the three rough categories of analysis inside his work — the construction of masculine forms in 1970s film. As a method of focusing his work, Nystrom defines masculinity in terms of the class conflict that also erupted during the same decade.

Each part of his book offers an interesting study of the political, social, and economic shifts at work during the time period that affect and generate the films at the center of his study. He identifies one of the larger gaps in American studies and film theory by suggesting that, often film criticism divorces its study from class struggles that may be generating a particular film. "By tracing the class relations that inform the various moments of industrial production, textual form, and audience reception in 1970s American cinema, I aim to make class visible to film and cultural studies" (19). To do so, Nystrom focuses his work upon three large historical reference points in the 1970s, constructs a series of "close-readings" of major films, and analyses audience and critical reception of the films — as film critics of the time were often part of the professional middle-class that Nystrom is studying. This observation is particularly valuable, as the

book uses this study of audience reception to showcase the very tangible connection between these films and their historical analogues. In other words, the film critics are here critiqued as part of the larger crisis of masculinity during the period. In sharp contrast to McGillis's work, the cowboy is not a central figure, but a type of masculinity that has been consumed and metamorphosed into different iconic figures — the most striking of which is the contrast between blue-collar workers and the white-collar managers above them.

The three main sections of Nystrom's work begin with his analysis of the crisis present between working-class men and the professional-managerial class during the decade. To do so, his writing develops a strong correlation between the Hard Hat Uprising on May 8, 1970 and the films *Joe* (John G. Avildsen, 1970) and *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970). The Hard Hat Uprising was a conflict between left-wing students and professors at a peace rally in New York and a group of two-hundred-strong blue-collar construction workers that objected to the anti-war rally being held in Manhattan near Wall Street. At the heart of both films, Nystrom argues,

the disaffiliating youth are now counterposed to a working class resentful of the privileges being disavowed by this social group. As the class locations and interests of men [such as characters in the films under study]... are assimilated into the populist figure of the hard hat, the challenge posed by radical dissent... is now transfigured into a battle between students and workers. (35)

In other words, the films depict two diverse masculine identities in conflict with one another during the decade — an elite, well-educated student (the up-and-coming professional class) and the blue-collar workers. In one of the more valuable and interesting parts of this section, Nystrom details the very same conflict going on within the filmmaking industry — between unionised film workers and the New Hollywood filmmakers who had no patience for the way traditional films were made during the studio years in the previous decade. The conflict between an aging set of union workers and the young directors making films outside of the studios echoed the conflict that *Joe* and *Five Easy Pieces* were presenting on screen. While many texts offer a contextual analysis of the

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film within a historical period, the striking counterpoint between film topic, filmmaking, history, and politics is quite powerful in Nystrom's work.

The middle section of the book details the conflicted development of the "good ol' boy" stereotype in Southern films — a direct descendant of the early Western film genre. *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) and *Convoy* (Sam Peckinpah, 1978) offer the richest material in these chapters. For *Deliverance*, Nystrom argues that the conflict at the heart of the film is not simply a battle for dominance (as many other critics have suggested), but an economic crisis. Nystrom argues that the film portrays the main characters, who enter the backwoods of Tennessee on a canoeing trip, as representatives of the professional-managerial class that are stealing and wiping out the world inhabited by the native residents. Therefore to classify the films, as many critics do, as "man against the elements, technology vs. nature, primitive vs. civilized man" is to make the conflict ahistorical (68). While most critics tend to focus upon the powerful rape sequence near the end of the film, Nystrom offers a fascinating film analysis of the opening sequence that pairs a voiceover of the admen talking about the natural world their entering — and the visuals of bulldozers tearing apart the landscape. In the final sequence then, the rape becomes a reassertion of dominance over the managerial class that is taking away the land from native residents — a reversal of the power structure in one of the only ways available to the rural denizens. After the power film analyses, Nystrom ties his film critiques to the historical elements that may have sparked the films in the first place. The effect of *Deliverance's* success was to move the filmmaking enterprise into the Sunbelt itself to shoot on-location films — away from union laborers, which helped with the rise of the independent film industry. It is, perhaps, these detailed historical connections that make this text so valuable in studying the class crises of the time period.

In his final section, the transgressive elements and permeable boundaries in sexual behaviour are fore-grounded in his studies of *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977) and *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980). The film analyses of each locate the nightclub and disco as a liminal boundary for sexual behaviour. Part of this argument is simply that the films

locate a heterosexual storyline or character in a place that is defined by opposing sexualities. These accounts of disco and its surrounding culture treated gay men as members of the social and sexual cutting edge, forging new identities and cultural forms, not just adapting to the future but also actively shaping it. In other words, they are located on the opposite end of the cultural and temporal spectrum from the blue-collar ethnics that populate *Saturday Night Fever*. (119)

As such, the storylines tend to blur the boundaries between heterosexual behaviour, while developing the storyline in gay locales, while also generating images of the male body that spark discomfort in masculine audiences.

Ultimately, each text offers a difference of support for the definitions of masculinity that they cultivate. Perhaps, the central conflict between the books is the construction of the cowboy as a central figure in the construction of masculinity or its development and consumption by other genres — centrality image or image of Other. Thus, it is probably unfair to compare them — as they deal with a large playground of definitions in what may seem to most readers a single image — a cowboy astride a horse on the American plain. However, in McGillis's work, the definitions of cowboy masculinity are generalised by reliance upon personal narrative and experience rather than more in-depth studies of the films within his title. Although, the work offers a steady stream of research to support his claims, numerous films are mentioned and dealt with summarily within the space of a paragraph. The sheer breadth of the topic defeats his ability to study any of them in close detail. On the other hand, for Nystrom, the film critiques are a powerful foundation for his studies in class, masculinity, and filmmaking history. His chapters often analyse and critique only a single film — offering him more space to develop his definitions of alternative cowboys more effectively.

The Cinema of India**Edited by Lalitha Gopalan**

London: Wallflower Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-905674-92-3, xiv + 280. £ 20.50 (pbk)

Film in the Middle East and North Africa**Edited by Josef Gugler**

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-292-72327-6, xii + 369. \$ 60 (hbk)

Bengali Cinema 'An Other Nation'**By Sharmistha Gooptu**

Oxon: Routledge, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-415-57006-0 (hbk), 978-0-203-84334-5 (ebk), xiv + 231. £ 85.00 (hbk)

A Review by Rohit K Dasgupta, University of the Arts London

Lalitha Gopalan's *The Cinema of India* is located within a growing body of scholarship and critical enquiry into Indian cinema studies by scholars such as Moinak Biswas, Rosie Thomas and Ranjani Mazumdar et al. The book looks at twenty four films from the Indian film trajectory in chronological order – from the colonial era up to its present day. Gopalan situates her work within “an opportune moment in Indian cinema studies” (1) when scholars in this field no longer have to justify its study.

The focus in the book has been to introduce the reader to not a single ‘Indian cinema’ but to multiple ‘Indian cinemas’. In India, cinema continues to be one of the most dominant forms of entertainment inflecting the viewers’ understanding, consciousness and general outlook towards life, as Moti K. Gokulsing and W. Dissanayake have shown us in *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* (2004). Unlike Britain or even China, Indian films are produced in more than twenty languages. Hence, the concept of regional films figures very prominently in this volume. With the proliferation and huge market overseas for Indian popular cinema (commonly known as Bollywood), regional cinema is often neglected both in accessing it and in a sustained study. This volume includes several essays and in-depth analysis of regional films. This anthology, a part of Wallflower Press’s 24 frames series, features twenty-four films that

emphasise particular elements of Indian cinema – key genres, production notes, aesthetic contribution and representative work.

The first essay by Rosie Thomas looks at Fearless Nadia's film *Miss Frontier Mail* (Homi Wadia, 1936). Nadia was one of the few European women who became a household name in the Indian film industry. The film was "overtly about Westernised modernity: full of images of railways, airplanes, radio communication..." (21). Her essay looks at the stunt and action-adventure genre as a key part of Indian cinema in the colonial period and emergence of modernity and understanding of new technological advances which would impinge on the identity of future India. The East-West dichotomy is further analysed in Ravi Vasudevan's essay on *Andaz* (Mehboob Khan, 1949). Vasudevan argues that the film can be seen as a reflection of Indian modernity and is "part of a complicated national agenda to secure the interest of the middle class attuned to Westernised film and leisure practices" (60). It won't be wrong to say that during this period, films were playing on securing national interests and reflecting social norms and change. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister and architect of modern India, was opposed to films and wanted to use the medium not as a middle class form of entertainment but as a driver of education and social change in the rural communities. Many of the films discussed in this volume seem to do exactly that. Moinak Biswas, Ira Bhaskar and Parama Roy in their essays discuss films which have touched on issues of social change and contemporary realities. Both Bhaskar and Biswas discuss the effects of Partition and its effects on the individual and the city. The motif of exile is a common trope used by filmmakers and writers. Cities were teeming with refugees and Biswas discusses *Chinnamul* (Nimai Ghosh, 1951), which "place[s] the fictional characters right in the middle of the present" (72). This theme is further explored by Megan Carrigy in her essay on *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (Ritwik Ghatak, 1960), which focused on the socio-economic implications of India's partition in 1947. Roy's essay on *Sujata* (Bimal Roy, 1959), on the other hand, tackles the issue of caste and untouchability. The film has been described as "a new era of post World War Two romantic-realist melodrama" (116).

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There is a widespread belief that Indian cinema and Bollywood cinema are tantamount to the same thing. This is untrue. Although the two intersect in significant ways, we need to make an analytical separation between the two forms. Whilst Bollywood cinema is restricted to commercial films of Bombay, Indian cinema, geographically and otherwise, encompasses something much larger. Gopalan introduces us to the blurred lines that often characterise Indian cinema, which makes it difficult for us to place Indian films either within the rhetoric of popular (read Bollywood) cinema or Indian cinema. Two such films which find a place in this collection are Aparna Sen's *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1981) and Ram Gopal Verma's *Satya* (1998). Both mark distinctive moments of Indian cinema as they construct parallel realities of the Indian identity. Kalpana Narayan says *36 Chowringhee Lane* "suggested a new shape and agency for the non mainstream female director in India" (181). Telling the story of an Anglo-Indian woman living in Calcutta, the film creates a heterogenous Indian nationalism which exists on the fringes of mainstream society narrated in English, Bengali and Hindi and acknowledges "India's existing, wide spectrum of narrative" (189). Ranjani Mazumdar, on the other hand, situates *Satya* against a landscape of urban detritus. It narrates the story of random events and sporadic killings within the underworld in Bombay. The cityscape of Bombay is created through the gaze of the working-class gangsters in the film, and instead of introducing the viewers to the glamour of the city, we are instead swamped with images of "claustrophobic spaces, *chawls* (working-class tenements), crowded streets and traffic" (238). The fluidity of the space challenges the viewer and we are introduced to yet another facet of the Indian identity that is erased out by mainstream rhetoric.

Josef Gugler's book *Film in the Middle East and North Africa*, like the last book, is a long overdue scholarship covering cinemas from Iran to Morocco which have received little attention in recent years. The book does not claim to be all-inclusive, but rather provides a thematic overview of the films being made in this region. The heterogeneity of this region like India's makes it difficult to terrain a comprehensive review, but Gugler manages to get some of the most respected scholars in the field to contribute to this collection.

The first Iranian film I ever saw was Bahman Ghobadi's *Turtles Can Fly*, set in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The film not only opened my eyes to the rich aesthetics of filmmaking in the Middle East but also introduced me to new abstractions and permutations of relationships. *Turtles Can Fly* belonged to a school of films which supported the American invasion of Iraq and how new lives were created through this utter chaos. Gugler agrees that whilst Kurdish films denounce the position of Kurds under Saddam Hussein, they seem to be "silent on the treatment of Kurds in Iran" (30). Eric Egan picks up on this sentiment and writes about censorship in Iran. The Iranian culture and film industry has seen perhaps one of the most severe upheavals in contemporary times. Egan says that government interventions and undertakings during the Pahlavai regime "use[d] cinema as means of promoting a progressive image of the country and to effect a cultural change" (40). The cinematic history of Iran runs parallel to the political changes the country was facing. From the White Revolution to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, cinema was suddenly codified within Islamic strictures to maintain Islamic norms and "promote the interests of the country" (48). This period witnessed the exile of several prominent filmmakers and actors. The strict enforcement of the codes saw the banning of 513 foreign films and 23 domestic films within the first three years following the revolution. The period 1997-2005 has been called the Era of Reform by Egan and he says during this time, "films became more openly concerned with critical subject matter and social and political problems such as poverty, corruption and abuse of power" (54). This period also saw the rise of several female voices. Fakhreddin Azimi in his essay on *The Hidden Half* (2001) discusses Tahmineh Milani, one of the most famous woman directors of Iran, who was arrested in 2001 following her interview calling for dialogue between individuals and the need to address the bitter legacy of the traumatic revolutionary years. Her film looks at the irony of the revolution. Hoping for a social change from the autocratic rule of the Shah, the revolution instead of leading to the promised changes pushed back Iran to an era of Islamic rule filled with desolation, extensive incarceration and conformism. Her film looks at the loss of female empowerment which had been reached during the Pahlavi era and reduction of the women to a state of dependency on male guardians, vigilantes and loyalists of the Islamist regime.

Rini Cobbey, in her essay on *Under the Skin of the City* (2001), writes of another female director – Rakhsan Bani Etemad. The film records a family's everyday existence in the backdrop of a politically unstable country. The deep-seated anguish of the people at not just the government but the media, which is seen as the mouthpiece of the regime is shown in this film. Tuba, the protagonist, confronts a documentary filmmaker gushing her anger and sadness, "Who the hell do you show these films to, anyway?" (89)

Syrian films, on the other hand, have a greater deal of freedom with its content. Lisa Weeden says "Syrian films tend to appeal to the bohemian intellectual community; it may be that the limited audience for feature films is what permits them to be produced at all, despite the censorship" (104). The essays in this collection speak of Syrian films offering a critique of political powers and critical depictions of Syrian political experience. Despite the lines which seem to segregate Arab cinemas, a few films do transgress these created borders. Nadia Yaqub in her essay on *The Dupes* (1972) places the film outside national cinemas. *The Dupes* was written by a Palestinian writer and directed by an Egyptian director – Tawfik Saleh. The film narrates the story of three Palestinian men who attempt to cross the borders of Iraq to find work in Kuwait in a tank. The film, again like most Arab films, is based on real-life incidents where forty men trying to cross the Kuwait border suffocated in a tank. The urgency posed by the film is that of time – viewers are being warned that time is running out and "decisive action must be taken now" (123).

The relationship between cinema and politics in Israel is a long and tumultuous one. As Nurith Gertz and Yael Munk say, "It began with propaganda films in the 1930s, developed into heroic tales of Jewish settlers... while intentionally avoiding national issues" (154). This is in stark contrast to Palestinian cinema, which developed only in 1948 and dealt primarily with the crisis experienced by Palestinians in 1948 as the result of the creation of Israel. Michel Khleifi's film *Tale of the Three Jewels* (1994) is set in Gaza, described as a "non place, where people live for the moment, remembering and yearning for... other places" (209). Gertz studies these films and the motif of exile and longing for the 'other space' as the idyllic Palestine of the past, which only resurfaces now as

traumatic memories for the survivors. A parallel can be drawn with the Indian films made by Ritwik Ghatak such as the Calcutta trilogy, which looked at the trauma of partition and the nostalgia for a unified Bengal.

Egyptian films, on the other hand, were shaped by colonialism focusing on characters, practices and situations of the shifting boundaries of the region. Walter Armbrust in his essay, 'Political Film in Egypt', says that Egyptian films "address social themes relevant to politics, if not necessarily politics per se" (228). An interesting anomaly that comes up within Egyptian cinema, as Armbrust points out, is the portrayal of Islamism. He says, "Whilst Egyptian filmmakers can criticise Islamism as a political movement, they cannot make an overtly pro-Islamist film" (238). Two strong themes that come up in Egyptian films is Islamism – both the suppression of it by the state media and its portrayal in the private terrestrial mediums – and the criticism of Israel and the US. This criticism is "linked to long standing concerns about national identity" (245).

This volume also touches briefly on Algerian and Moroccan cinema. Both these film industries bear a strong influence of French culture. The films can be seen as a tool used to unite the diverse societies in both these countries. Sandra Gayle Carter, in her book *What Moroccan Cinema: A Historical and Critical Study* (2009), says the aims of these films were, "to make distant regions to know each other, and to create a common fund of knowledge and information – and to make money". Both Algerian and Moroccan cinema have raised their international profiles in the arena of world cinema. Kevin Dwyer says, "While very few Moroccan films have gained commercial screenings abroad, many have appeared and won prizes in International festivals" (332). Algerian films, which formed a vital part of their liberation struggle – as Roy Armes states in his essay – have, however, declined over the years. With no proper production and distribution structure and most of the filmmakers in exile, the obstacles in Algerian film production are formidable.

Sharmistha Gooptu's *Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation*, carries on with the sentiment of the previous two books and introduces the reader to the rich heterogeneity of Indian cinema which is often obscured by Bollywood. At the very outset, the author distinguishes Bengali cinema from mainstream Indian

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cinema being produced in Bombay. She places it outside the rubric of national cinema and instead places it in an exclusive category of the 'other nation' (2). This body of critique looks distinctly at the history and emergence of Bengali cinema in India. Assumptions of Indian cinema being confined to Bombay cinema have been challenged and the hegemony of Hindi cinema dismantled. The book looks at the rise of Bengali cinema in the 1920s. The narrative of the Bengali cinematic history runs parallel with the political changes that India was undergoing during the same time, which as Gooptu later shows impinged the economy of this regional cinema.

India is unique in its diversity of culture and languages, and regional differences contrast and harmonise this. Bengal has been the cultural capital of India ever since Calcutta was the capital of colonial India. Bengal has played a significant role in making cinema an art form, as Gooptu argues in this book. Two of the giant film studios of this era, Madan Theatres and New Theatres, which was also producing Hindi and Urdu versions of its Bengali films, were both located in Bengal at this time. However, it was only in the 1980s with the growing incursion of Hindi cinema as the emergent form of Indian cinema that the Bengal film Industry took a backseat.

Gooptu also introduces the reader to "all-India cinema", a concept which has ceased to exist with the consumption and proliferation of Hindi cinema on a global scale, making Bollywood the global marker of Indian cinema. However, "all-India cinema" refers to a group of films produced in both Bombay and Calcutta that were made not just for the local audience but for audiences all over the country. Thus, films like *Jawab Nahin* (Pramathes Barua, 1942) and *Vidyapati* (Debaki Bose, 1937), despite their predominantly Bengali cast and technicians, still had a wide-reaching audience. Gooptu also discusses the various factors for Bengal cinema's shift towards regionalism, beginning with the partition in 1947 which had closed down the East Bengal market for Bengali cinema. In addition, Bombay's star factor and big budgets were something the Bengal industry could no longer cope with and, very soon, instead of making failed attempts at a national audience, Bengali cinema moved towards catering towards its local populace. However, this erasure of Bengal cinema on the national level did not in any way undermine the aesthetic or cultural production

value of films being made in Bengal. As a case in point, Gooptu points out to the films made by Satyajit Ray, many of which imagined and captured the distinct Bengaliness in Bengal. Gooptu references Nehru's quote, "Bengali is truly international when it is national", (169) to collectively sum up the feeling of the Bengal cultural production during this time.

The book also introduces us to the common man's comedy in Bengal popularised by Bhanu Banerjee which Gooptu calls "The Bhanu Factor" (128). This chapter looks at politics and humour that was created with the Partition of India in 1947 that split Bengal into West Bengal, which was a part of India, and East Bengal, which would later become Bangladesh. The political implications of this comedy and the common man persona were critical in maintaining an idealist position in between all the chaos and violence that partition brought with it.

The cultural practices and texts explored by Gooptu in the various chapters examine the main genres and moments constructing a unique cinematic discourse in India and establish the premise of the Bengal film industry as a major social and cultural institution. Her critique of the emergence of a Hindi-speaking national cinema as the popular face of 'Indian cinema' makes a case in point that Bollywood's growing international presence has denied other language cinemas such as Bengali cinema a widespread viewership. Gooptu is optimistic when she says "Bengali Cinema could reinforce something, it is the idea of a more critical approach to what passes in the name of being national and popular" (186).

Trying to locate a single national/regional identity which strings together several diverse cultural practices is problematic, as reviewing these three books have shown me. The shared history, structure and response are often taken for granted. Each of these books shows us different ways of looking at cinemas – to not imagine a singular form of cinema because it comes from a particular region but to acknowledge the presence of 'several cinemas'. Sharmistha Gooptu's monograph sheds light on Bengali cinema – the 'other' Indian cinema. Lalitha Gopalan's collection brings together the diverse cinemas of India as does Josef Gugler who looks at not just a single Arab or Middle Eastern cinema but the several cinemas of the region.

Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000

Edited by Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz and Steve Seid

Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-520-24911-0. 352 pp. \$29.95 (pbk)

Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids: Thirty Years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas

By Alison Macor

Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-292-72243-9. Viii + 392 pp., 33 b&w photos in section. \$24.95 (pbk)

A Review by Yusef Sayed, University of York, UK

These two books raise a familiar question relating to the practice of filmmaking: what does it mean to be 'independent'? A corollary question would be: can an artist maintain independence while working within the Industry, or are the two mutually exclusive?

In *Radical Light*, San Francisco Bay Area filmmaker Bruce Connor, whose first short film, *A Movie*, stands as one of the most noted avant-garde films, writes, "It would have been absurd to believe that the term *independent* could be co-opted and distorted to describe the type of monolithic multimillion-dollar productions we see today" (92). In *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids*, Alison Macor's splendid account of the rise of filmmaking and its supporting community in Austin, Texas, the uneasy alliances forged between imaginative, resourceful, local filmmakers and the distributors, producers and studios are constantly evaluated — illustrated by numerous accounts of behind-the-scenes antics, and boardroom meetings — to consider their impact upon the spirited, grassroots efforts of the artists.

Spanning thirty years of filmmaking, beginning with Tobe Hooper's iconic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Macor's insightful tale treats the word 'independent' as if it can ultimately withstand co-mingling with major studios and their backing. This is the commonly received wisdom regarding independent filmmaking, that which understands 'independent' to mean free from studio interference (but still financed directly or indirectly by them) — its shibboleth

being an entry into the Sundance Film Festival. In fact, what Macor has documented in depth is the slide of several brilliant filmmakers into the murky waters of the mainstream. The upshot of the hard-won deals and tenacious ingenuity of directors such as Tobe Hooper, Richard Linklater, Robert Rodriguez and Mike Judge, as illustrated in Macor's book, is that the commercial cinema is injected with life and colour. The willingness of these filmmakers to work alongside, but not be beaten down by, the studios sets a high standard for the involvement of singular filmmakers with Hollywood.

This type of interaction seems almost unimaginable for the artists documented in *Radical Light*, a book brimming with essays, personal reminiscences, artists' pages and ephemera — which goes a long way towards conveying the adventurousness of the filmmakers through its design and layout. For the Bay Area radicals, who gained a great deal of their momentum as fringe cinema magicians from 1945 (when the Art in Cinema series of experimental film screenings began), the aspiration seems to lean more heavily toward the integration of art and daily life; a community-based artistic practice that had no pretensions towards mass exposure.

Both books benefit immensely from extensive interviews with the figures central to each story. Moreover, Macor and the editors of *Radical Light* are geographically close to the material and are themselves part of the extended communities described in each book. The result is that both books convey a sense of willingness and cooperation on the part of the subjects to open up about previously undocumented memories and events. As contributions to film history, both books are stunning; abundant with stories from the front line, personal biography and insights into the filmmakers' intentions and inspirations. The trivia is also fascinating in parts: Eagle Pennell shot second-unit camera on *Robocop 2* in the late 1980s "to make ends meet" (307); Mel Gibson was considered for the role of Milton in *Office Space* (Mike Judge, 1999) — one of several casting suggestions described by cinematographer Tim Suhrstedt as "ludicrously off the mark" (261); and Stan Brakhage is alleged to have made public information films (76). Also worthy of note is the treatment that each of the authors gives to those on the outer edges of the respective film communities, as well as clarifying the importance of the bridges built between

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the artists and local cinemas, media, academic institutions and the wider community. Rather than adopting a tunnel vision view, favouring one or two individuals, both books give a fantastic sense of the collective effort and support needed to sustain any local film scene. Macor goes somewhat further in balancing the relationship of the Austin filmmakers to the national film industry, without widening the frame for too long and threatening the valuable restriction of focus.

While the filmmakers concerned in *Radical Light* and *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids* are to be found in very different aesthetic interstices on the grid of film history, it is remarkable how similarly the two scenes emerged. Each of these 'minor' histories involve energetic film societies aiming to entertain and educate the local population — Art in Cinema, Art Cinema, Camera Obscura Film Society and Canyon Cinema, to name some of those in San Francisco, and the Austin Film Society (set up by Richard Linklater) in Texas — which were central aspects of the early careers of significant filmmakers. The do-it-yourself work ethic is astounding in each film community, with individuals rigging up screening facilities and editing suites in their homes and amateurs negotiating distribution deals for local film showings. The San Francisco Bay Area and Austin, alike, gained from strong intra-community relationships, which meant that film crews and actors would help one another out with individual projects. The significance of early film programmes at nearby universities is also outlined in both books — it is interesting to note that the strong DIY approach of most of the filmmakers covered in the texts is not incompatible with the support and help of local academic institutions. Each scene has its own unfortunate casualties — Christopher MacClaine in San Francisco and Eagle Pennell in Austin — and each ultimately can trace their origin right back to the early days of cinema, with Eadweard Muybridge undertaking his movement studies in California and two Austinites, W. Hope and Paul Tilley, latching onto the possibilities of the new medium as early as 1911 when they “tried to break into the burgeoning freelance market as producers of 35mm newsreel footage” (4). As with the San Francisco artists covered by Reid et al, there is a real devotion to the city which nurtured their personal work and an unwillingness to have their achievements and interests co-opted by outsiders. Yet, both communities are described as welcoming and sympathetic to newcomers. Astute readers should catch the

passing reference to Craig Baldwin, of *Other Cinema in San Francisco*, who is mentioned in Macor's text, thereby establishing a substantial cultural exchange link between San Francisco and Austin's Film Society. Macor writes, "The two groups often exchanged programs, promoting each other's regional cinema and splitting the rental fees" (93).

Macor's book focuses on the career path of several directors: Hooper, Pennell, Bill Witliff, Linklater, Rodriguez, Tim McCanlies and Judge. The space devoted to Linklater is most welcome, since he is among the finest filmmakers working in America today. Macor paints the picture of an auto-didactic director, perhaps the most resilient and steadfast of the bunch (along with Rodriguez) who has played a major role in shaping a healthy grassroots film culture, away from Los Angeles and New York. Readers already well-versed in the background of Hooper's debut film are likely to find new insights here as a result of Macor's research. The focus, however, is undoubtedly on the production history, marketing strategies and contractual finagling rather than the ideas behind the work. This is not to say that Macor neglects to consider the films themselves (and indeed the book should not be approached as one of film criticism). But read in tandem with *Radical Light*, it is clear that the aesthetic considerations of the films are downplayed and when they do come in, they are usually in the form of reflections from the cast and crew, rather than the author herself. How Macor could treat Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* (1993) without an adulatory consideration of the film, spanning several pages, is baffling. As a result, the one problem I found with Macor's writing is that it seems unaffected by the films under consideration, which are surely the driving force behind the desire to write the book. Despite this, Macor's prose is crisp and a delight to read. *Radical Light* deftly mixes historical background with critical insight — often in the form of single-page odes to specific works by fellow artists — and manages to retain its unique thrust, despite the plethora of contributors (in fact, this reflects further on the instinctual, mutually supporting personalities that the collection focuses on).

Where the San Francisco book really begins to diverge from the Texas book is in the political and media-critical approaches charted in the 'Thinking Outside the Box' section, in particular — the 'box' here being a pun on television.

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Interestingly, one chapter charts the attempts of San Francisco's National Center for Experiments in Television to foster experimental research in the medium, a project "tenuously aligned with San Francisco's public television station, KQED" (130) and which fell by the wayside because of its lack of broadcast intentions. But in the early 1970s, the video experimentalists and alternative news groups were formed in the Bay Area, akin to the Newsreel Collective in New York, including Ant Farm, Optic Nerve and TVTV. With these groups, the aim was not simply entertainment, or filmmaking free from the constraints of the mainstream: this was artistic praxis as a way of engaging and criticising social and media phenomenon. While Macor's book details the links between the Austin Chronicle and the Texas filmmakers, there is little evidence, within the film community, of any desire to 'jam' the conservative media. This is where the artists covered in *Radical Light* are shown to be truly dissimilar to the budgeted, distributed, media-friendly filmmakers of Austin. This is no criticism, but it does illustrate the fact that the term 'independent' is used in contemporary culture very flexibly.

And whether by happenstance or not, Macor's book is obviously focused on male filmmakers. Despite the obvious fundamental role that Elizabeth Avellán plays as the producer of Robert Rodriguez's films, there is not one chapter in the book devoted to a female filmmaker; aside from Rodriguez's background and use of Mexican characters in his films, the racial line is pretty much white too — an indictment of the industry rather than Macor's focus, but surprising, given the portrait that Macor paints of Austin as a diverse, well-educated population. It is when weighed up against a multi-faceted, vibrant tome such as *Radical Light* — which also touches on feminist filmmaking, queer cinema and contemporary cutting-edge digital interrogations — that we realise how limited the voices in the mainstream are, regardless of Linklater et al's efforts to inject a bit of liveliness and difference into independent filmmaking. Reading *Radical Light*, one realises how many voices are still unheard, still lingering on the fringes of the culture. But there is a healthy trend of publishing, revolving around these radical sectors of the film culture and *Radical Light* deserves a place on any bookshelf that contains the monstrous *Buffalo Heads* (2008) collection about SUNY Buffalo and David E. James' *The Most Typical Avant-Garde* (2005). These three minor histories are a continuing source of enriched history in American filmmaking and

better exemplify independence than a whole shelf of books about Tarantino, Kevin Smith and Rodriguez — all of whom were unfortunately lured into bed with the Weinsteins, the death-knell for any urgent filmmaking.

Chainsaws, Slackers and Spy Kids reveals the industry machinations that each filmmaker profiled has had to confront, even managing to elicit self-criticism from numerous industry insiders, but the reasons for their continued involvement with the Hollywood does not seem clear. Even if it seems unreasonable for the Austin filmmakers to have to return to the status of unheard voices, shooting films on shoestring budgets with friends, one wonders why more do not explore alternative avenues. Ultimately, Macor's book reminds us that the industry will allow little leeway and the huge commercial success of *Spy Kids*, though a boon for filmmaking and employment in Texas — as well as a heartening rags-to-riches tale — is hardly a sign of the conquering of the cinema landscape by independent personalities, but another assimilation. However, to argue that the Texas filmmakers have 'sold out' would only serve to perpetuate carelessly bandied terms, like 'independence', and much credit can be given for their abilities to retain their bases of operations in Texas, create jobs and build production facilities. Macor's account is an exemplary model for research and it is evidently as a result of her enthusiasm and talent that most of the individuals who populate Austin's film tale have come forward to share their memories, triumphs and worries.