

Book Reviews – October 2012

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Jacques Rivette**By Douglas Morrey and Alison Smith**

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-7190-7484-4. 10 illustrations, xii+271pp. £45.00 (hbk)

Alain Robbe-Grillet**By John Phillips**

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7190-7737-1. 20 illustrations, x+166pp. £45.00 (hbk)

A Review by Jonathan L. Owen, University of St Andrews, UK

Two recent additions to Manchester University Press's ever-reliable 'French Film Directors' series deal with a pair of surprisingly neglected cinéastes – Jacques Rivette and Alain Robbe-Grillet. I say surprisingly as both figures were attached, at varying distances, to the otherwise tired academic and critical stalwart of the French New Wave. Indeed both represent much that is most vital and exemplary of that era's explosive modernism, even if, to their probable detriment, they scored their major artistic successes just as the New Wave's focus and relevance were ebbing away. Rivette and Robbe-Grillet's films are studiously intellectual yet provocatively embodied, ludic yet grave. Chronically self-reflexive creators on the edge of the 'hard' avant-garde, both filmmakers abandon their viewers to the narrative and hermeneutic labyrinth (a key common trope). At the very least, these two overdue studies make for erudite introductions and thoroughly explanatory 'user's guides' to their slightly forbidding subjects.

Douglas Morrey and Alison Smith's book suggests various reasons for the neglect of Rivette, who invariably takes fifth place in the roll call of the *Cahiers* quintet. The inordinate length of Rivette's boldest work is in inverse proportion to his often truncated critical treatment, and the material challenge of his best films' mammoth size is surely one reason for the distribution problems, noted by Morrey and Smith, that have made them difficult to see: former 'indie' programmer John Pierson has elsewhere admitted to evading requests for 'four-hour' Rivette films. At the same time, Rivette is largely a 'discreet' pioneer, and his work less ostentatiously experimental than, say, the densely layered video art of late Godard. If Rivette's durational 'excess' offers an aggressive revision of

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cinematic time, his remodelling of the film medium is generally less conspicuous than his theatrical and literary concerns, the rapt, dogged documentation of other arts' struggles with becoming.

This book makes a strong case for explaining what is specific, innovative and exciting about Rivette's films, focusing on his exploration of form and the relationship of artist to audience. The text is structured around characteristic Rivette tropes and preoccupations, including community and conspiracy, urban and domestic space, games and play, theatre and theatricality, and love and physicality. Overlaying the separate chapters, however, are the constitutive oppositions of contingency and control, process and fixity, while the term 'play' (or the French 'jeu'), in its multiple meanings, transcends its allotted chapter to provide a virtual key to Rivette's aesthetic. His films' hesitant summoning of shadowy, inchoate conspiracies, obsessively pursued yet seldom definitively established, are games of narrative that enable the play of spectatorial response. Rivette's studies of acting and theatre similarly transform spectators into co-players, dissolving the boundaries that separate them from professional performers, art from real life; in the same movement, the finished work becomes the work in process, as completion yields to ceaseless reinvention and the theatrical play comes to resemble children's play. Particularly fascinating in the discussion of this formal self-interrogation is the specific importance assigned to theatre, shown as symbolising just such comminglings of actors and audience and implicitly as better equipped to accommodate them than the 'exclusive' form of cinema: is the older medium then the fitter adjunct of a levelling artistic radicalism?

Sympathetic as the authors are to Rivette's experiments and probing of forms, they also wisely cast doubt on their consistency or feasibility. Most importantly, they question how far Rivette's apparent commitment to contingency, openness and collective participation in his own working methods is really fulfilled. Rivette is ultimately shown to assert subtle control over the final form of his films, especially through editing, used to mould actorial extemporisations or shuffle Parisian spaces into new configurations. A compelling image thus emerges of Rivette as *éminence*

grise within his own work, as much a secret string-puller as his films' elusive conspirators.

Morrey and Smith ably suggest the terrors that lurk beneath Rivette's surface frolics, revealing the stakes or implications of his characters' game-playing as surprisingly grave (a child's death is averted amidst the antics of *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (*Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, 1974]). Rivette's own devotion to grinding minutiae – which as the authors bravely admit courts boredom – itself evokes existential fears about our “less-than-solid foundations in being” (229). Are such stakes and terrors also political? The authors acknowledge the demoralised political conjunctures that inform several films, for instance the post-Mai doldrums inscribed in *Out 1* (1971), and compare Rivette's conspiracies to Debord's ‘society of the spectacle’ (a theoretical construct suggested to betray the same paranoiac proclivities that intrigue Rivette). The micropolitics of family relations and the joyous feminist resistance of Céline and Julie are also addressed. Rivette himself, however, defined his formal practice as the very political essence of his cinema, at least at one point in his career. It is evident from the analysis how a subversive politics asserts itself in Rivette's formal concerns, what with references to the “dictatorship” of the author and the “free agency” of performers, yet the book is slightly amiss in not considering Rivette's own politicised perception of his art.

Smith and Morrey offer a vital defence of some of Rivette's more maligned films, with a purportedly staid, conventional work like *The Nun* (*La Religieuse*, 1965) shown to exhibit avant-garde formal design. The book's heart, however, is with the uncompromising modernist behemoths of the late 1960s and 1970s, which, unlike the later films, sprawl imposingly throughout the text (even 1991's magisterial *La Belle noiseuse* gets relatively short shrift). But extended treatment of *L'Amour fou* (1969) or *Out 1* is a task more urgent than most, these monumental works at once among Rivette's greatest and (their recent revival notwithstanding) his least seen. The authors communicate the peculiar immersive power of a film like *Out 1*, that astonishing twelve-hour experiment in narrative self-annihilation whose very digestion in the cinema provides an existential adventure all its own. Beyond specific analyses, the authors assign some shape to Rivette's career as a whole, for instance tracing (without

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necessarily explaining) his gradual transference of attention from urban frescoes of chance and paranoia to secluded domestic spaces emplotted with power games and family secrets. Similarly, Rivette's last two films are aligned as manifestations of what Edward Said called 'late style', marked by "difficulty", "intransigence" and lack of reconciliation (243). The designation generally suits these morose chamber works, although the authors do not consider that the ending of *The Story of Marie and Julien* (*Histoire de Marie et Julien*, 2003), Rivette's last-but-one film, may be a redemptive and romantic one. Also, are two films enough on which to found a stylistic period?

In their acknowledgements, the authors admit to alternating chief writing duties for each chapter, and stylistic discrepancies ensue, between Smith's dense and closely argued material and Morrey's more serviceable, rounded and succinct analysis. Though apt enough for a director enamoured of contrasting acting styles, the effect is a mite jarring. Perhaps also concomitant with the book's collaborative nature is the occasional repetition of narrative or scenic detail from chapter to chapter, which makes this a slightly cumbersome reading experience. In addition, the book's theoretically inflected passages, already arguably over-profuse, are at times somewhat strained, over-involved or tenuously related to the film at hand (a critical flight on the relation of ghosts and cinema is of little consequence in explaining *Marie and Julien*). Yet, these are minor complaints to set against the book's astute, painstaking analysis, evidence of wide research and generally sensitive, often original application of theory: for instance, the Deleuzian reading of *Céline and Julie* as a work of productive, plenitudinous desire is both ingenious and undeniably logical.

While Rivette was himself part of the *Cahiers du cinéma* crowd, Alain Robbe-Grillet had the misfortune, so John Phillips informs us, to be critically rejected as a filmmaker by both *Cahiers* and its rival journal *Positif*, institutions that fomented the very cinematic revolution of which Robbe-Grillet constitutes an under-valued part. Robbe-Grillet's directorial output is still far less known, esteemed or accessible than his writing, itself hardly in vogue these days. His best-known filmic endeavour remains, symptomatically, *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961), a work he only scripted and whose decisive 'authorial' role is usually credited to its director, celebrated New Waver

Alain Resnais. Phillips in fact begins his analysis of Robbe-Grillet's films by attempting to establish a sense of creative equilibrium with regard to that trailblazing work, a task he achieves with some success if too much citation of other critics' arguments and the artists' own remarks.

Like Morrey and Smith, Phillips structures his study into thematically based chapters, something that helps highlight Robbe-Grillet's consistency in themes, tropes and formal strategies – a consistency that is exemplarily 'auteurist', if also rigid and obsessive. Inadvertently perhaps, the book's organisation foregrounds a certain lack of development or maturation: a chapter examining eroticism in 'oriental' settings juxtaposes Robbe-Grillet's first directorial effort with his last and reveals little difference or advance in perspective, the 2006 *Gradiva (C'est Gradiva qui vous appelle)* displaying classically Orientalist attitudes in no less crude and unashamed (though more sexually explicit) a manner than 1963's *L'Immortelle*. As if under the influence of its subject, the book's own chapters and discussions tend occasionally to run into one another, though the fact that there is more than one chapter dealing with erotic matters is perhaps unavoidable in this case.

Phillips' study broadly revolves around the psychological, plastic and self-reflexive qualities of Robbe-Grillet's films, and doesn't fall into the trap of trying to sift out direct political commentaries (the Algerian War observed from a Marienbad terrace). If, as Robbe-Grillet asserted in his early essays, an entire contemporary epistemology and philosophy of the object are crystallised in his once-revolutionary aesthetic, his books and films also pursue a ludic cultivation of form as self-sufficient entity. Some of Phillips' most detailed and interesting analysis concerns itself with the nuts and bolts of Robbe-Grillet's intricate formalist patternings of narrative and audiovisual design, from the 'serialist' structure of *Eden and After (L'Éden et après, 1970)* (composed around twelve themes organised into ten series) to his abstract use of sound motifs. Such analysis will surely extend many readers' experience of Robbe-Grillet's films and appreciation of his craft, though even Phillips ponders whether these often subliminal texturings are mere "narcissistic" touches. Whatever the case, accounts of such fancies as the creation of "symphonic variations" on air

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conditioning noise for one film imbue Robbe-Grillet's aloof artistic persona with a perverse humour (56).

Though inevitably well-disposed to his subject, Phillips is admirably clear-eyed in exploring an artist who has proved as easy to condemn as to venerate. Robbe-Grillet's immersion in a European haute-chic sensibility inhospitable to the ugly or poor can be seductive or obnoxious, while his films' vulnerability to charges of misogyny and pornography is countered by Robbe-Grillet's eloquence in refuting them. Phillips considers the views of both feminist critics and Robbe-Grillet himself on the films' notorious erotic and sadomasochistic aspects, without fully endorsing either side: he concedes the frequently self-titillatory character of these images, which militates against the professed intent of parodying sexual norms and stereotypes, yet he also suggests how Robbe-Grillet's focus on transgression and the nude (invariably female) body affords a critique of sexual repression and an assault on social order. A fitting comparison is made between *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* (*Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, 1974) and Georges Bataille's erotic novel *Story of the Eye* (*Histoire de l'oeil*), itself a work rife with metaphoric 'slidings'. It is further mooted whether the diverse sex-and-bondage tableaux of *Successive Slidings* may prompt a more mobile viewer identification than straightforward charges of female objectification would allow, enabling spectators of either gender to shift between active and passive and even male and female positions.

As with a flourish of narrative revelation, Robbe-Grillet is ultimately unveiled as a highly controlling and premeditative artist, and less the devotee of aleatory procedures that some of the experiments hitherto discussed by Phillips might suggest. Just as, by his own admission, the viscous, 'abject' substances of Robbe-Grillet's films are always 'clean', so his dalliances with (apparent) chance are nearly always orderly. Control is indicated to be a central principle in Robbe-Grillet's work (as opposed to the determining, if diluted, role of play and contingency in Rivette), and is explored at different levels: Phillips suggests that the evoked themes of vampirism and necrophilia connect to a desire to control death, and of course he examines the control of the sexual object, finally psychoanalysed as an aggrieved response to the reminder of primary separation that these desired objects present. This Lacan-influenced reading may not be

grounded very specifically in any of the films, but the conflation of Robbe-Grillet's formal and sexual peculiarities as expressions of an acute controlling tendency is both neat and accurate.

One sometimes senses that Phillips is slightly hampered by prior theorisation of this material – large chunks of Deleuze on Robbe-Grilletian time are quoted – or even by the fact that Robbe-Grillet's aesthetic was forged, in part, with the mind of the theorist, leaving analysis at times redundant. Furthermore, for all the successes of Phillips' book, one might question whether he sufficiently fulfils his stated aim of demonstrating that the innovation and influence of Robbe-Grillet's films matches that of his novels. Despite his self-evident place among the most formally adventurous cinéastes of the 1960s and '70s, the notion lingers that Robbe-Grillet's films, while attentive to the possibilities of cinema, derive their experiments from a broad template already established in his fiction. As for their influence, Phillips cautiously suggests links with Greenaway, Lynch and Almodovar, before resorting to vague remarks about Robbe-Grillet's influence "on cinema in general" (153). It is, however, the influence of the novels that Greenaway, for one, has explicitly cited. Phillips nonetheless does reveal an interesting and ambiguous connection between Robbe-Grillet and contemporary cinematic trends: mainstream cinema's own dominant register is now one of fantasy and artifice (if of a very different kind from Robbe-Grillet's glacial, metafictional inventions), which means that Robbe-Grillet's great *bête noire* of Balzacian realism has been vanquished in the same measure as his erstwhile polemic with it has dwindled to dated irrelevance.

Neither Phillips' nor Smith and Morrey's book quite exemplifies the stated brief of the French Film Directors series to qualify the auteurist perspective and account for the "complex process of film production and reception", including socio-economic determinants, the work of collaborators and the responses of variously situated spectators (Morrey and Smith ix-x; Phillips x-xi). One might claim that the auteur framework is entirely appropriate to two independent figures who have largely originated their own projects and seldom courted popular success. Yet both *oeuvres* have benefited from the contributions of distinguished casts and crews, among them key personalities of New Wave acting and cinematography. These books could have offered fuller acknowledgement of

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such contributions, while the circumstances of, say, Robbe-Grillet's Czechoslovak co-productions might have been worth exploring. Yet as closely analytical thematic and stylistic studies, aimed at satisfying novices and admirers of these filmmakers alike, both books succeed amply.

Music and Politics**By John Street**

Cambridge: Polity, 2012. ISBN 0-7456-3544-X. 256 pp. £15.99 (pbk)

Wagner and Cinema**Edited by Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman**

Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-253-22163-6. 504 pp. 28 b&w illustrations. 35 musical exx. \$29.95 (pbk)

A Review by Nathan Waddell, University of Nottingham

These two books will be of interest to anyone committed to the study of music's varied relationships with ideology and politics. *Music and Politics*, by John Street, is a wide-ranging overview of the different ways in which we might conceptualise the relationship between the twin terms of its title, and explores, among other emphases, the politics of taste, censorship, government policy, and sound. Although *Music and Politics* is primarily concerned with mid to late twentieth-century popular music, Street notes that his arguments "can be applied to any form of music, whatever its genre" (8). This point is substantiated by a theoretical scope that makes Street's lines of argument relevant to several musical contexts, not least the contexts investigated in *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, which looks at the plethora of senses in which Wagner's music and different kinds of Wagnerian reception histories have informed cinematic production throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Announcing from the outset that "Richard Wagner has been a continuing source of artistic inspiration and ideological controversy in literature, philosophy, and the visual arts, as well as in music" (1), Joe and Gilman present a collection of scholarly essays which engages with Wagner and silent film, Wagnerian 'resonance' in film scores, Wagner in Hollywood, Wagner in the context of German cinema, and Wagner 'beyond' the soundtrack. The volume is rounded off by a 'Postlude' on the practicalities of archival work on Wagner's links with cinema; an 'Epilogue' on opera, politics, style, and reception; an interview with the contemporary video artist Bill Viola; and a useful filmography of the varied "English-language narrative feature films that

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quote Wagner's music rather than directly allude to it" (441). *Music and Politics* and *Wagner and Cinema* are very different kinds of books, but both ought to be of interest to the readers of *Scope*. When read in tandem, these studies provide numerous insights into the complex manners in which music can have political and ideological resonances and identities.

Street's book opens by arguing that music and politics "are not to be seen as separate entities whose worlds collide only occasionally", but rather as "extensions of each other" (1):

I would like to persuade readers that music *embodies* political values and experiences, and *organizes* our response to society as political thought and action. Music does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it *is* that expression. And, furthermore, states organize us through their management of music and sound more generally. The boundaries between the two realms of music and politics [...] are largely illusionary. (1, original emphasis)

These statements are inseparable from Street's related claims that "the connection between music and politics is less simple than it may appear" (1), and that "[i]t is where music inspires forms of collective thought and action that it becomes part of politics. It is where music forms a site of public deliberation, rather than private reflection, that we talk of music as political" (8). Music, then, is to be understood not merely as an incidental conduit for political content, a neutral repository which can be freighted with different political and ideological cargoes, but as itself a form of politics in which ideological meanings can be contested. The public character of music is affirmed again and again throughout *Music and Politics*, which demonstrates convincingly that "music does not just accompany our political thoughts and actions, and that it is not simply the object of state intervention and state policy, or the instrument of social movements, but rather that it is deeply implicated in the ideas and institutions that organize politics" (175). In this regard, the book challenges readers to think about music as bound up in complex ways with the cultures to which it responds, the ideologies it supports or subverts, and the communities from which it emerges.

Street's key achievement lies in his clarifications of the different categories of connection that music and politics can be seen to possess. Put another way, *Music and Politics* is most valuable for making us think more carefully about how we explain and compartmentalise the relationships between music and politics, a set of links which, as Street shows, is protean. Nine groupings underpin his argument: the censoring of music; music policy; music in the context of political communication versus representation; music as political participation; music as mobilisation; making history through music; the politics of taste; the sound of ideas and ideology; and music as political experience. These typologies represent a structure through which future scholarship on this subject will be indebted, and in elaborating the distinctivenesses of these forms Street persuasively demarcates their boundaries and precisely accounts for how those boundaries have fluctuated over time. *Music and Politics* is itself a polemical text, but it is also a model work of scholarship in which polemics about the link between music and politics are themselves problematised and explained with reference to historical contexts. The end result is a book relevant not only to scholars working in the disciplinary pairing signified by its overt subject matter, but also to those interested in more general links between politics and the arts. Furthermore, the book will be required reading for those seeking to make problematic causal explanations of economical shifts and cultural developments, a question signalled in Street's reiteration of Michael Haralambos's insight that, contrary to popular belief, the decline of blues music in mid-twentieth-century America was, in fact, inversely proportional to the rate of African-American unemployment during that period. This claim adds credibility to Street's general position that "whatever the connection between social conditions and musical form, it is much more complex than has traditionally been allowed for" (50). A simple point this might be, but Street's defences of it throughout *Music and Politics* will stand as necessary foundations for future scholarship in this area for what I anticipate will be a long time to come.

Likewise, Joe and Gilman's edited collection *Wagner and Cinema* is a text that will no doubt be consulted for many years henceforward. Although the link between music and politics is not the keynote of the book as a whole, it does nevertheless loom large. This is particularly the case in Marc A. Weiner's chapter

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'Hollywood's German Fantasy: Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*', which explores how Wagner is used in *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) "above all as but one of a number of signifiers that refer to German cultural and political history in general, and to America's experience of Germany in particular, as a means of unfolding their ideological operations" (187). That is to say, the political 'identity' – or, more precisely, *perceived* identity – of Wagner's music is explored here as a means of unravelling how in *Gladiator* a particular, Americanised construction of German culture is encoded in a film ostensibly about imperial Rome. Music, in this instance, serves as a way of investigating the textures of ideologically freighted iconographies and politically motivated forms of *mise en scène*. More perhaps than any other essay in the volume, Weiner's argument demonstrates how music is anything but immune from politics, and, indeed, is an *instance* of politics, a point nowhere better demonstrated than in the problematic 'Nazification' of Wagner's music – what Peter Franklin calls in his essay in this volume "cultural anxiety about the affiliation of Wagnerism and Nazism" (47) – upon which the visual and aural languages of Scott's film evidently draw. In exploring the "associations that have come to attend Wagner's works in the modern Western imagination" (197), Weiner bears out just how tightly interconnected music and politics can be, and reveals how a particular appropriation of Wagnerian style has led to an enduring, and in some ways false, political legacy for a body of music typified by myriad forms, associations, and effects.

Crucially, no "master narrative" (9) about Wagner's music is provided in this collection. Wagner's roles in the history of cinema are treated by the volume's contributors as presenting a multiplicity of emphases amply validated by the diversity of topics considered here, among them Wagnerian motifs in the history of silent film accompaniment; Wagnerian presences in the scores of *Die Nibelungen* (Fritz Lang, 1924), Max Steiner, and 1950s invasion films; and Wagner's influence on gender roles in early Hollywood film. All of the essays are thought-provoking, carefully evidenced and researched, enjoyable to read, and rooted in sound scholarship. A seemingly light-hearted piece on 'Reading Wagner in *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944)' carefully explores the role of Wagner's music in World War Two propaganda film, and considers how this particular cartoon's soundtrack presents a "mastery of European concert hall and operatic

traditions and the ways they can be employed in the service of comedic irony" (211). Paul Fryer's interesting piece on *'The Life and Works of Richard Wagner (1913): Becce, Froelich, and Messter'* investigates the production and reception of one of the earliest feature-length biographical films in cinematic history, whereas Eva Rieger's chapter on *'Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film'* reflects on the contribution made by Wagner's music to a range of cinematic value categories, and explores how that music strives to "create extreme binary oppositions between the great representative world of power and the inwardly turned world of love" (143). Other essays in the volume explore *Humoresque* (Jean Negulesco, 1946), Mitchell Leisen's *Golden Earrings* (1947), the New German Cinema, *Die Macht der Gefühle* (Alexander Kluge, 1983), and *Der fliegende Holländer* (Joachim Hertz, 1964).

Perhaps the most interesting section in the book is the fifth, *'Wagner Beyond the Soundtrack'*, which begins with a stand-out essay from Elisabeth Bronfen on *'Nocturnal Wagner: The Cultural Survival of *Tristan und Isolde* in Hollywood'*, which engages with the legacy of Wagner's libretto for his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. In order to argue that "its most compelling postmodern refiguration occurs in the realm of what has come to be known as film noir" (316), Bronfen expands on Wagnerian parallels in *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) and *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947). Giorgio Biancorosso's essay on *'Ludwig's Wagner and Visconti's *Ludwig*'* turns to Luchino Visconti's filmic portrait of the last reigning King of Bavaria, *Ludwig* (1973), as a way of exploring, among other things, a nostalgic reconstruction of nineteenth-century aristocratic culture. Jeongwon Joe's *'The Tristan Project: Time in Wagner and Viola'* considers Bill Viola's *The Tristan Project* (2004), a multi-media, multi-disciplinary effort which attempted to understand Wagner's opera in relation to works by subsequent composers and against the backdrop of thematically resonant video art. Lawrence Kramer's *"The Threshold of the Visible World": Wagner, Bill Viola, and *Tristan*'*, another stand-out piece, complements Joe's chapter in suggestive and theoretically complicated ways, using Derrida to explore how "Wagner and cinema come together on the 'shadowy and shifting ground [...] of a certain perception of presence' ", of "the making present or making a present of perception" (382). The idea here, reductively put, is that a complex account of

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subject-formation, perception, and being is already underway in Wagner before it gets underway in cinema, and that each has something to tell us about the other.

It should be evident from even this brief and selective summary of *Wagner and Cinema* that it is a collection rich in material, scholarship, perceptions, and debates. The size of the volume attests its enormous coverage, but also paradoxically indicates that far more remains to be said about the interrelations between Wagner and cinematic art. Street's *Music and Politics* is a smaller book than Joe and Gilman's collection, but is, all the same, conceptually groundbreaking. Both books take familiar materials and treat them in original ways, resulting in a pair of texts that ought to be read by music, politics, and film scholars alike. Each book invites us to (re)consider the complications of music's relationships with other modes of expression, and especially to think about the value-laden nature of music as it is used and abused by multifarious political and cultural agents. They are surely texts which will become indispensable parts of their respective fields, and I heartily recommend them.

Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films**By M. Keith Booker**

California: Praeger, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-31337672-6. 214 pages. £31.95 (pbk)

Demystifying Disney: A History of Disney Feature Animation**By Chris Pallant**

London: Continuum, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-4411-7421-5. 18 illustrations. 168 pages. £60 (hbk)

A Review by Noel Brown, Newcastle University

With Hollywood 'children's films' and 'family films' currently dominating the international box office with franchises ranging from *Harry Potter* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* to *Ice Age* and *Toy Story*, works that engage critically with Hollywood children's films and family films would seem to have considerable appeal for scholars, publishers and readers alike for the foreseeable future. However, as these two books illustrate, there is still mileage in historical accounts of Disney – the studio which popularised such entertainment among global audiences, and which continues to be a world leader in tapping this enormously lucrative market. However, both works grapple – with varying degrees of success – with the problem of finding original and provocative critical insights into a company that has already been the subject of a vast range of scholarly literature.

As the title would imply, M. Keith Booker's *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Messages of Children's Films* is a historical examination of the ideological aspects of Disney and Pixar films. Although it promises much, it is a work that ultimately frustrates and disappoints in equal measure. Booker identifies his monograph as his "report back to the world of adults" (xx), and his adoption of an intrusive authorial voice which reflects his dual identity as an "egg-head" film critic, on the one hand, and a "dad", on the

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other, underpins the entire book. What he offers is a mixture of personal reflections and more familiar, if value-laden, criticism of texts ranging from *Snow White* (David Hand et al., 1937) to *Up* (Pete Docter, 2009). Booker expresses his wish that it might “help adults better understand the messages encoded in children’s film so that they can help the children in their lives engage with these messages in productive (and, possibly, resistant) ways” (xxi). This is a noble intention (if possibly somewhat ambitious, given the very limited print runs of most academic and trade press books), but his ambivalent authorial identity ultimately hinders more than it helps.

For example – to start at the beginning of the book – Booker claims to be “relatively little troubled by the question of defining just what constitutes a ‘children’s film’”, although he concedes that the question “is obviously relevant to my project” (xvi). Instead, he favours “a pragmatic definition” based on films he deems to be suitable viewing for his young son. Now, an approach founded on pragmatism is all well and good, providing it holds. In this case, unfortunately, it disintegrates on inspection. The first problem is that even if Booker’s son could be considered somehow ‘representative’ of boys of his age (i.e. seven-year-olds), he could scarcely be thought to embody the desires of older boys or girls or, indeed, adult consumers. As a result, what may seem to Booker to be a good ‘children’s film’, as determined by the aesthetic and emotional standards of his son, is hardly a reliable barometer.

The second problem is that it leads him to narrow his focus unnecessarily. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the book is the lack of consideration of Hollywood children’s films and family films made by studios *other* than Disney/Pixar. Booker makes a half-hearted attempt to explain this by alluding to the more juvenile emphasis on Disney’s output in comparison to films such as *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), and it is undeniably true that many such non-Disney family films are more adult in

tone. Yet this is to ignore others with demonstrable appeal for children, ranging from the fantasies of Willis O'Brien, George Pal and Ray Harryhausen to *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990), and the franchises *Harry Potter*, *Shrek* and *Ice Age*. One gets the impression that non-Disney productions are ignored for reasons of convenience, rather than argument. But whatever the justification, it is a wasted opportunity, considering their relative critical neglect.

Even the more overtly child-friendly Disney/Pixar animations *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008) and *Up*, meanwhile, are not viewed straightforwardly as 'children's films', partly because of their relative sophistication, but also because they deal with "serious issues" (110) such as environmentalism, and (ironically, given their distributor) the negative impact of big business. Yet this is puzzling; having identified innumerable 'hidden messages' in Disney films dating back to the late-1930s, some of which he clearly regards as pernicious, it seems strange that liberal-leftist content seemingly in accordance with his own Althusserian Marxist approach should render these films unsuitable for young children. Even using Booker's criteria, I fail to see why *Peter Pan* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1953) – now widely viewed as racist – is unproblematically a children's film, but *Wall-E* is not.

Another obvious weakness is the relative lack of secondary research in support of Booker's admittedly deep knowledge of the primary texts. I fully accept that his main interest is the ideological content of the films themselves, and that close textual analysis may be the most productive way of 'decoding' these films. However, there are occasions when Booker's neglect of secondary sources almost trips him up. For example, he avers that MGM's big-screen adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz* "annouce[s] that the children's film was potentially becoming big business" and that it was the onset of the Second World War that "largely

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puts children's fantasy films on hold" (7-8; 11). In fact, big-screen fantasies had long been regarded with suspicion by the Hollywood establishment. *The Wizard of Oz*, far from being a smash hit (as might be assumed by audiences today), failed to recoup its production costs until its late-1940s re-release. The subsequent box office failure of the child-orientated fantasies *The Blue Bird* (Walter Lang, 1940) and *The Thief of Bagdad* (Ludwig Berger et al., 1940) – in addition to Disney's own, more sophisticated, *Fantasia* (Ben Sharpsteen et al., 1940) – discouraged producers from making further excursions into similar territory. In other words – and Booker would have known this, if he had done the research – the onset of World War II had very little to do with the scarcity of children's films in 1940s Hollywood.

On a more positive note, the close textual analysis occasionally yields significant insights, and the sections examining the post-1970s films are more useful, as there is less existing scholarship in this area. There are interesting analyses of curios such as *The Cat from Outer Space* (Norman Tokar, 1978). Often dismissed as a campy misfire, Booker suggests that it "is in some ways ahead of its time [...] in the way it satirises the paranoid response of the American military authorities to the arrival of the cat" (39). In this way, the film prefigures the mistrust of the state, and in particular the military-industrial complex, evident in such early-1980s films as *E.T.* and *WarGames* (John Badham, 1983). Also interesting is the analysis of *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989), which announced Disney's artistic and commercial resurgence via its successful appeal to the key demographics of baby-boomers and their children. However, whilst its tone bespeaks a freshness and confidence which separates it from its immediate predecessors, Booker sees it, ideologically speaking, as "a definite throwback that seems almost entirely to ignore the gains made by the woman's movement in the decades preceding its release" (65). He also contends that post-2000, Disney/Pixar releases have moved tentatively beyond the conservatism

often associated with the company, towards a “vaguely liberal” leaning (172).

Booker is also surely correct in his belief that “the promotion of family values is about the most uncontroversial move possible in contemporary American culture” (186), and that Disney’s demagogic adherence to such an ideological position underpins its attempts to attract mass audiences. He points out that “almost every film I have discussed actively promotes individualism”, which is “the central constitutive component of the official ideology of the United States as a nation and of capitalism as a system” (175). In other words, Disney’s privileged position in the North American social and cultural spheres reflects, to a certain degree, the fact that its ethos so closely mirrors many of the foundational values of the nation itself.

On the other hand, many observations are far from original, and merely echo points previously made by the likes of Richard Schickel, Steven Watts and Eric Smoodin. Additionally, far too much space is given over to plot summaries. In a relatively short book, there is the inevitable corollary that space which should be reserved for analysis is afforded to basic recapitulation of story.

Most of these criticisms could be countered with reference to the generic get-out clause in the introduction, namely that this book is “a report back to the world of adults”. Yet, when an established academic publishes with a trade press publisher, surely they are somewhat naive – or cunningly disingenuous – not to expect a core readership of fellow scholars. And, I suspect, such readers will find little that is new here.

Chris Pallant’s book, *Demystifying Disney: A History of Disney Feature Animation*, by contrast, is an interesting and instructive examination of the formal and aesthetic development of Disney feature films ranging from the silent era to the present. It is, however, mistitled, and the back

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cover blurb does its best to misrepresent the book, presumably in an attempt to widen its appeal. 'Demystifying Disney', implies a stripping-away of dogma, propaganda and theoretical density in favour of a more pragmatic, straightforwardly accessible approach towards its subject. The first thought that occurred, upon seeing the title, was whether Disney's 'true' identities have been obfuscated to the extent that 'demystification' is necessary. Indeed, it is really only the first section – which functions, essentially, as a literature review – which challenges and debunks the 'misconceptions' alluded to in the back cover blurb. In the remaining sections, where Pallant develops his own interpretations of the aesthetic development of Disney feature animation, there is not a great deal of 'demystification' in evidence.

I have further misgivings with the blurb: *Demystifying Disney* is quite demonstrably *not* a "comprehensive...examination" of Disney feature animation. At just over 150 pages in length, the book is relatively short, and when the myth-busting first section is taken out of the equation, the 'history' of Disney feature animation is covered in little more than 100 pages. This historical narrative is also somewhat selective. A whole chapter is devoted to *Destino* (Dominique Monféry, 2003), an unfinished short film begun in 1946 as the intended fruits of an unlikely collaboration between Walt Disney and Salvador Dali that was finally completed in 2003. It is good work, which again emphasises the extent of Walt Disney's obsession with artistic credibility, but its inclusion in a book which purports to deal with Disney's feature animation is questionable. It may be that its inclusion reflects an authorial desire to break new ground and avoid rehashing the more familiar, more conventional accounts of this epoch. Unfortunately, it leaves less space to discuss more significant films, such as *Cinderella* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1950), *Peter Pan* and *Sleeping Beauty* (Clyde Geronimi et al., 1959), all of which are glossed over in the following chapter, 'Disney in Transition', which rather ambitiously attempts to summarise Disney's industrial and artistic

histories between 1950 and 1990 in a mere eighteen pages. It is really only in the final two chapters, 'Neo-Disney' and 'Digital Disney', where a detailed and satisfyingly nuanced historical account is provided. Elsewhere, he covers a lot of ground incisively and skilfully, but to suggest that this historical portrait is "comprehensive" is naked hyperbole.

Where this book is most effective is in the close analysis of Disney's techniques of animation. In this regard, Pallant's approach is more clearly influenced by the work of animation theorist Paul Wells than by the critical-biographic style of Schickel, the ideological analysis of Booker, the culturalist perspective of Nicholas Sammond, or the historical/industrial groundings of Smoodin and Michael Barrier. Pallant recounts how Disney's animated features from *Snow White* to *Bambi* (James Algar et al., 1942) strove for a technically complex but expensive hyperrealist aesthetic "in an effort to move [...] away from the cartoon principles of the Studio's earlier shorts" (51). During the mid-1940s, the company was forced to abandon this approach as a result of financial difficulties. Where Pallant differentiates himself from most previous scholars is in his analysis of the animation process itself. Where others have been content to leave analysis of animation techniques to specialists, Pallant examines the aesthetic implications of, say, the multiplane camera during the early-1940s features to establish depth-of-field, and the strenuous efforts of Disney's animators to make *Bambi's* eyes as realistic and believable as possible. He also analyses the aesthetic impact of Disney's adoption of xerography during the 1950s and 1960s, which, in conjunction with other factors, resulted in a departure from the hyperrealist conventions of the earlier films. In other instances – as Pallant shows with the assistance of some judiciously chosen illustrations – the studio recycled animation to keep costs down. In the latter part of the book, he relates how the development of computer-generated animation during the 1980s and 1990s coincided with a renewed focus on stylistic experimentation, whilst

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linking these on-screen developments with behind-the-scenes developments as Disney pursued strategies of expansion and synergy. As with Booker, Pallant seems to be liberated by the relative lack of established scholarly writing on post-2000 Disney and Pixar films, allowing him to make his case without the fear of recapitulating arguments made many times before.

Demystifying Disney is far from perfect. Although Pallant has clearly undertaken a large amount of research for this book, most of the historical documentation appears to have been culled from previous studies. Several chapters have an isolated feel, as if they were devised and written as independent essays and collected for the purposes of this book – as indeed they were. My other main reservation is the idea that this is primarily a ‘demystification’ of Disney. Some of Pallant’s myth-busting is not nearly as far-reaching or revisionist as he would have the reader believe. There is an entire chapter devoted to ‘Disney Authorship’, in which Pallant debunks the notion that Walt Disney was some kind of monolithic authorial figure, whilst endorsing Paul Wells’s notion of him as an “extra-textual auteur” (5). Admittedly, Pallant cites various studies which argue that Disney was a God-like artistic visionary who was personally responsible for every artistic decision, or that the studio was invariably at the forefront of technological innovation throughout its history. But almost all of them are hagiographic texts published by subsidiaries of Disney itself, or else biographies of its founder, which have clear vested interests in propagating these fallacies. What Pallant neglects to mention is that such totalising and dogmatic interpretations have long been discredited amongst impartial critics and historians.

I do not know whether the title is Pallant’s own, or an editorial imposition, but there is the sense that it represents an attempt to carve a niche for the book in an already-crowded marketplace. It would have been much more efficacious to emphasise the book’s true virtues, namely its fine

analysis of the evolution of Disney's animation techniques, as shaped by a combination of cultural mores, authorial voices and technological variables.

Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel**Edited by Jeffrey Ruoff**

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. ISBN 0-8223-3713-4, xiv + 298 pp. £15.99 (pbk)

Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement**By Dimitris Eleftheriotis**

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-7486-3312-8, vii + 208 pp. £63.75 (hbk)

A Review by Sofia Sampaio, Centre for Research in Anthropology, ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon

Over the past decade, there has been a surge in academic publications on travel and cinema. Reflecting the general reorientation in the social sciences and the humanities towards topics like globalisation and, more recently, transnationalism and mobility, most of this work has been developed within cultural studies, ultimately converging on the nascent interdisciplinary field of tourism studies. Whether primarily concerned with cultural theory, as with Ellen Strain's *Public Places, Private Journeys* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), methodologically closer to sociology, as with Rodanthe Tzanelli's *The Cinematic Tourist* (Routledge, 2007), or industry-orientated, like Sue Beeton's *Film-induced Tourism* (Channel View, 2005) – to name but a few examples in a growing corpus – most of this work shares a theoretical framework (which goes back at least to Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist* [University of California Press, 1976]) that enlists modernity and its regimes of visibility to interrogate tourism, John Urry's *Tourist Gaze* (Sage, 1990), probably the most influential book in the field, being emblematic of this trend.

The two books under review, Jeffrey Ruoff's *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* and Dimitris Eleftheriotis' *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement*, are not indifferent to this theoretical framework. Both volumes take for granted the modernity paradigm that has underpinned visual and tourism studies, linking early and late cinematic pleasures to nineteenth-century mobile visual techniques and exhibition practices – notably, the panorama, the diorama, the stereoscope, the museum, the public lecture, the world exhibition and the

popular fairground. Nevertheless, the two books also manage to avoid accounts (rife in cultural theory) that flatten distinctions and reproduce sweeping generalisations, by engaging with film history and the visual grammar of films.

Although many of its contributors (such as Lauren Rabinovitz and Alison Griffiths) pay considerable attention to aspects of visual grammar, Ruoff's edited collection is particularly keen to intervene in film history, which has systematically neglected the travel film – among cinema's first genres and one of the most popular in the early period (1). The most commonly accepted view is that cinema's post-1915 embrace of fiction, which subordinated the visual pleasures pursued in early cinema – what Tom Gunning has called "the cinema of attractions" – to a cause-effect narrative logic, was responsible for bringing about the "eclipse" (178), or even the decline of the travel film. Ruoff's book, on the contrary, suggests that film scholars have themselves been guilty of a narrative/fiction bias, turning a blind eye to the wealth of documentary films (educational, industrial, scientific, commercial and amateur) that were produced (and, in many ways, continue to be) alongside commercial, mostly Hollywood, feature films.

One of the many merits of *Virtual Voyages* is the way it crosses over these boundaries to offer historically grounded analyses of a vast number of travel films, ranging from ride films (Lauren Rabinovitz's essay) and travel lecture films (the two essays by Rick Altman and Jeffrey Ruoff) to archival films (Paula Amad), ethnographic films (Hamid Naficy), commercial travel films sponsored either by American railway companies (Jennifer Lynn Peterson) or the French automobile industry (Peter J. Bloom), Swiss home movies (Alexandra Schneider), popular expeditionary films (Amy J. Staples), IMAX travel movies (Alison Griffiths), and Hollywood's own 1930s incursions on the travelogue (Dana Benelli's essay, the only one which addresses fiction). This opening up of research to less common objects of study also reflects the book's desire to move beyond "our infatuation with films as texts" (6), so that films can (also) be viewed as "performative events" (61-62) or even "hyper-real simulations rather than as mere representations" (50). As a result of this shift, the different case studies included in this collection reveal a dense tissue of social practices associated with the travel film, especially regarding their exhibition contexts.

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The editor's aim – "to incorporate the travelogue in film studies" (14) – is, therefore, not only fully attained, but attained in a way that corrects some of the field's theoretical imbalances and historical misconceptions. Accompanying the rise and development of the travel film, the book is divided into three sections. Part one gives an overview of cinema's early period that does not fail to establish connections with our times: Tom Gunning's opening essay discusses the importance of pre-cinematic forms of travel simulation for the development of the travelogue; Lauren Rabinovitz explores the links between early twentieth-century "virtual voyages" like *Hale's Tours* and modern motion simulation rides like *Star Tours* (Dennis Muren, 1987); finally, Rick Altman goes back to cinema's formative years, to examine the early days of the travel lecture, which was dominated by live performance and from which the travel film eventually emerged as an independent form. Parts two and three focus, respectively, on the silent period and the sound era. All essays offer well-researched case studies that stress the genre's continuity, countering the notion (dominant in film history) that the travelogue faded away in the early decades of the twentieth-century: Benelli identifies some of the ways in which 1930s classical Hollywood movies incorporated this genre, while Ruoff demonstrates that travel lectures continue to be a lively business in contemporary America.

Finally, most of these essays bear witness to the permeability of travel films to historically grounded ideological uses – from the expansion of colonialism (as illustrated in the essays by Amad, Naficy and Bloom) to the campaign for settlement in the American West targeted at immigrant workers (broached in Peterson's essay), and the promotion of tourism (in the essays by Peterson, Amad, Bloom and Schneider). Nevertheless, the book as a whole never succumbs to a vision of despair, corroborating Gunning's claim that the travel film also contains "utopian possibilities" (39).

Echoing Gunning's suggestion that film represents the attempt (through movement) "to overcome the limits of the frame" (34), the main proposal of Dimitris Eleftheriotis' *Cinematic Journeys* is, precisely, to address movement of and in the frame – no doubt, the strongest contribution of the book to the ongoing debate on cinema and travel. Through close analysis of frames, shots and scenes, the author explores the relationship between film and movement

(embodied and disembodied), stressing the latter's value outside of and beyond strict narrative functions and authorial 'signature' purposes. Eleftheriotis grounds his analyses in nineteenth-century articulations of movement, vision and subjectivity, which are at the core of the modern episteme – a well-trodden theoretical path no doubt. Yet, he does not stop at the usual topos, such as the 'panopticon' or the 'flâneur'. The work of Foucault (on the technologies of vision) and Benjamin (on the Parisian arcades) remain key references, but there is also an attempt to move beyond the overarching (and by now rather banal) association of vision, knowledge and power.

The book lacks a tightly organised argument; nevertheless, its tripartite form takes us from an introductory theoretical section, in which the major philosophical premises are laid down and on which the main analytical tools are built (Part I, chapters 1-3), to a section which expands upon and tests the book's central propositions regarding the concept of cinematic journey (Part II, chapters 4-6). The last section takes a different and unexpected turn, as it moves away from the filmic text to discuss how films themselves travel across borders (Part III, chapters 7-8).

A closer look at each of these parts is crucial to grasp the book's rather intricate argumentation. The first chapter ('Movement, Vision and Subjectivity in the Nineteenth Century') reviews nineteenth-century "unprecedented obsession with both movement and vision" (29), which was felt generally, from science to painting (namely, in impressionism) and in everyday life, with the invention and popularisation of new visual regimes and practices (such as museums, world exhibitions and panoramas), as well as new modes of mechanical (the train) and pedestrian (urban 'flânerie') circulation. Though adding little to an already vast literature on these topics (the author acknowledges and draws upon Ruoff's book, as well as work published by some of its other contributors), this is nonetheless a fine and nuanced survey. Its aim is not only to trace cinema's genealogy, but also to ground in that genealogy the movement of/in the frame, a topic that – as the author rightly points out – has received little attention in film studies (the way movement has been treated or, more frequently, overlooked in film studies – from the 'classical paradigm' and suture theory to

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Lyotard and Deleuze – is the subject of chapter two ('Movement in Film Studies'), one of the book's most engrossing).

Two types of mobile vision emerge from this historical-philosophical discussion: one that is steady and linear, aiming towards an object (or destination), and one that is circular, around an object. Both are linked to pleasures of visual (and spatial) discovery, exploration and revelation which, in turn, are guided by a yearning for total vision and "the fantasy of complete knowledge" (32). A third kind of movement is also suggested (in opposition and as an alternative to the former two), but not further developed. Finally, the author identifies two major debates/ attitudes towards these technologies: one concerning the passive/active status of the subjects involved in the new mobilities, in which passivity is equated with body immobility and activity with self-propelled bodily motion; and another around the subject's (lack of) epistemological certainty. These are drawn upon to build the two axes – activity ↔ passivity, and certainty ↔ uncertainty – with which, from chapter three onwards and with various degrees of success, "movements of exploration, discovery and revelation" are analysed in films as diverse as Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1950), Visconti's *Death in Venice* (1971), or more recent ones (in chapter four, 'Quests'), such as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles, 2004), *Koktebel* (Boris Khlebnikov, 2003) and *Japón* (Carlos Reygadas, 2002).

In chapter five ('Intercepted Trajectories'), the author turns his attention to films that call into question aspects of the "journeys of exploration, discovery and revelation" (122) analysed so far, if not the book's interpretive model itself. These are now films interested in "movements of displacement, exile, diaspora and migration", often pigeonholed as "intercultural cinema", "transnational film genre" or "exilic and diasporic filmmaking" (124). Films by Tony Gatlif – *Exils* (2004), *Transylvania* (2006), *Cadjo Dilo* (1997) and *Swing* (2002) – bring side by side different types of mobility (namely, tourism, immigration, asylum seeking), stressing the importance of "relational movements" (125). Likewise, Fatih Akin's films – *In July* (2000), *Head On* (2004), *Crossing the Bridge* (2005), and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) – foreground "converging routes" (within these films, but also between them) that "intercept" and destabilise main trajectories (132). These "intercepted trajectories" interrupt or disturb "journeys of

exploration, discovery and revelation” by undermining the self-sufficiency of the individual “quest” and its romantic underpinnings and by “checking” the usual landscape-associated pleasures. Still, these journeys continue to be aligned with dominant understandings of travel, as they tend to “other” (and, therefore, fail to fully acknowledge) alternative kinds of mobility (132; 142). The analyses of Angelopoulos’ *Ulysses’ Gaze* (1995) and Makhmalbaf’s *Blackboards* (2000), in chapter six, further explore the limits of “exploration, discovery and revelation”. In the first case, the landscape and the “views on the move” are obliterated, thus ceasing to be attractions; in the second case, mobility, now synonymous with displacement, becomes “a condition of being”, a state of “perpetual movement” that is neither sought after nor a source of personal pleasure or self-improvement (144; 150; 153; 158).

The third and last part of *Cinematic Journeys* considers a different aspect of the relationship between movement and film: the way films travel outside of their national boundaries. In chapter seven (‘Films Across Borders’), Eleftheriotis analyses the unexpected popularity of Indian films in Greece during the 1950s and 1960s, bringing to the fore the practices of “corruption”, “imitation” and plagiarism they gave rise to, and suggesting a cultural historical explanation for the critics’ elitist reception. Chapter eight (‘Reading Subtitles: Travelling Films Meet Foreign Spectators’) approaches the question of subtitles, which are singled out and ultimately praised for marking and materialising a film’s foreignness.

To conclude, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* offers many important insights on film and movement. Eleftheriotis successfully articulates the re-theorisation of movement in film studies with close film analysis. Even when he is directly handling theory (as in chapter two), he continues to rely on films and their images, usually for illustrative purposes, but without underestimating a film’s ability to interrupt theory. His heterodox approach to film – which allows him to analyse Godard’s *Tout va bien* (1972) and *Slow Motion* (1972) alongside, respectively, *Far from Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002) and *Hukkle* (György Pálfi, 2002) – proves fruitful in many ways. Nevertheless, the book lacks a conclusion, failing to bring under a unified argument the concepts and analytical tools that are introduced and tested at different moments, not to mention the last part, whose relation to the other two sections is not immediately apparent.

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One could say that the author's argument itself undergoes movement. His initial point – countering the “classical paradigm”, which subordinates every filmic aspect to narrative – is that movement of/in the frame also enables the introduction of moments of visual and spatial exploration and, by extension, of the spectacular. That is, camera movement and editing (with an emphasis on reframing) cannot be reduced to a narrative function. Furthermore, countering the claims of “apparatus theory” (which had stressed cognitive and perceptual processes to the detriment of affective and emotive ones), the author adds that the pleasures derived from these “movements of exploration, discovery and revelation” are an important part of the cinematic experience. To his merit, Eleftheriotis does not stop here, as he turns to films where the question of pleasure is less certain and the movement of/in the frame poses serious challenges to the hegemonic travel narrative. The fact that, towards the end of the volume, the author addresses other kinds of movement (the circulation of films themselves and their transfer/translation into other cultures) reflects the breadth of his analysis. Nevertheless, the book's own theoretical *movement* gets lost in the wealth of details and is never sufficiently clarified.

By contrast, even though it is a multi-authored work, with essays (some reprinted, some new) that span several epochs and address different objects, Jeffery Ruoff's *Virtual Voyages* shows remarkable theoretical and methodological unity. The book dissipates any doubts concerning the place of the travel film in film history. As Ruoff points out, the essayistic, episodic and open-ended form of the travelogue provided an alternative to classical Hollywood cinema, enabling a range of possibilities that were not ignored by ethnographic and experimental films (11), or, indeed, Hollywood itself. In fact, the two books reviewed here demonstrate that it was in early travel films that many of the conventions and techniques involving movement were first tried out. Among these are landscape panning and tracking; the use of the journey itinerary as a narrative structure (which facilitated the introduction of moments of suspense and climax); the ‘viewer-as-passenger’ convention; the development of the subjective shot; and new editing patterns, such as the alternation of the travelling hero and the travelled landscape, the viewer and the viewed. The two books also demonstrate that the absence of the travel film from film studies has often resulted in flawed theories – not least, as Eleftheriotis points out, Deleuze's famous theorisation of

the movement-image and the time-image as two different and succeeding moments in film history (54-55).

Together, *Virtual Voyages* and *Cinematic Journeys* reaffirm the importance of historical approaches for film studies if we are to avoid cultural theory abstractions, as Griffiths points out in Ruoff's book (239). They also stress the need to take into account extra-textual connections, thus positing cinema as a social practice that interacts with other social practices, old and new. Nevertheless, close reading can never be brushed aside: films are still the best way to understand the relationship between movement and film, as they can guide us through the difficult meanders of theory and often – as Eleftheriotis' book illustrates – force re-theorisation.

Jerry Lewis**by Chris Fujiwara**

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-252-07679-4. 158 pp. £12.99

Atom Egoyan**by Emma Wilson**

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-252-07620-6. xii + 161 pp. £14.99

Andrei Tarkovsky**by Sean Martin**

Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2011. ISBN 978-1-84243-366-9. 224 pp. £16.99

A review by Adam Jones, Newcastle University

Of these three monographs on well-known film directors, two are from the University of Illinois Press' Contemporary Film Directors series, which "provides concise, well-written introductions to directors from around the world and from every level of the film industry" (Wilson, iii). The third is an expansion of an earlier work by Martin on Tarkovsky, originally published in 2005 as part of the Pocket Essentials series. The three authors are experienced writers with numerous previous publications, including studies of directors Jacques Tourneur and Otto Preminger (Fujiwara) and Resnais and Kieślowski (Wilson). Martin has written predominantly about occult history and alchemy, although he has a forthcoming publication on French New Wave cinema, also from Kamera.

While Andrei Tarkovsky and Atom Egoyan are renowned for the psychological and philosophical complexity of their films, Jerry Lewis is best known for a series of manic comedies which have generally not been afforded the same degree of critical respect as subtle and melancholic masterpieces like *Stalker* (Tarkovsky, 1979) or *Exotica* (Egoyan, 1993). He has been regarded less than seriously in America for years, as Fujiwara observes in his introduction. While the response of U.S. critics to films like *The Bellboy* (1960), *The Ladies' Man* (1961), and *The Patsy* (1964) was indifferent, "a number of French critics, including writers for [...] *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif*, heralded Lewis as an original and important

film maker" (6). Fujiwara notes that, rather than improving his reputation in the United States, the effect of Lewis' growing standing and popularity in France was to make him a figure of mockery, the subject of "countless lazy and patronising jokes [...] gibes whose ideological nature has become unmistakable and more obnoxious than ever in a period of U.S. history that has witnessed the rebranding of Freedom Fries" (7).

This emphatic opening attack on dismissive critical attitudes seems intended to justify writing with depth and meaning about an actor and director best known for slapstick comedy and to dismiss the impression that the films are "mawkish, easily readable and bathetic" (45). Given the likely audience for this book, it seems unnecessary to provide such a basis for an analysis, as there is sufficient support in the bibliography alone. While he acknowledges that it "represents a small selection from the vast literature on Lewis" (146), it contains entries from Frank Krutnik, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Louis Comolli amongst others. Readers are more likely to recognise these names than those of critics perceived to have an ideological prejudice, although specific examples of these prejudiced attitudes are not provided.

A biographical account of Lewis' early experiences as a comedian, including his first meeting with Dean Martin, is disregarded as it "has been told in so many books [...] that it is pointless to recite it" (1). Instead, there is brief introductory mention of Lewis' work in the 1950s and 1960s, along with a note of his hiatus in the 1970s, from which time he has worked as a director infrequently and not at all since 1990. Although the first for which he is credited as director is *The Bellboy* (1960), the observation that Lewis "took an active part in shaping his films" (3) as early as 1949 allows for the discussion of nearly forty films before 1970, so it is unsurprising that Fujiwara does not follow an orthodox structure of discussing each of the director's films in their own right and in chronological order.

With biographical concerns put to one side, Fujiwara proceeds quickly to an overview of the nature and originality of Lewis' filmmaking, indirectly justifying the perception of French critics like Robert Benayoun. Starting with a discussion of filmic structure and narrative, he argues that the films have an unusual independence from plot, citing the privileging of "the gag -- or, more generally,

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the moment, scene, episode, event or block" (10). This idea of the block as a characteristically Lewisian element of structure is developed with reference to the implied absences between them and discontinuity, vindicated by their ultimate convergence. The epitome is "a sequence in *The Bellboy* [that] merely stages, in succession, all four possible permutations of dual roles played by Milton Berle and Jerry Lewis (...). It's like the working out of a mathematical problem on a blackboard" (17). The block concept, and discussion of the effects of different configurations of these units, is carried into other contexts beyond the structural, drawing in examples of space and identity.

Identity is the subject of the largest section, revealing a complicating factor in how Fujiwara has approached Lewis' films. He demonstrates that they are often intensely personal in their protagonists' quests for a sense of belonging and purpose. In raising the question of the separation of textual meaning from biographical meaning, he underlines the importance of the concise treatment of biographical details in the introduction. He points out, though, that it is ultimately impossible to separate out Lewis, "his history, his personality, his public image and its vicissitudes" (22), from the characters he creates onscreen: "the separate blocks of identity that constitute his characters are united, if at all, by Lewis himself (...) he makes himself the justification, the subject of the film" (20). The performance of identity is complex and self-referential, to the degree of appearing "devoted to a cult of the self" (22). It is to this, as well as a tendency to moralizing and sanctimony, that Fujiwara attributes the negative reactions that the films have engendered, all concentrated on: "the figure of the man being embodied by a single actor, Lewis" (55).

Structurally, Fujiwara's analysis is complex. Elements shift between categories; while he is discussing a "Lewisian narrative" (10) organised in blocks of meaning, a parallel is drawn with blocks of space, such as the modular apartments of *The Ladies' Man*, although space is then discussed in more depth in a later section (67). Early references to space-time (17) are unpacked either side of a section which describes framing in some detail. Glimpses of Lewis' life off screen are also woven through, not kept within a discrete chapter but juxtaposed with characters and events in the films, the significance left to the reader to determine.

The interview with Lewis that concludes the book is fascinating and justification, even in isolation, to consider the book required reading. Questioning him on the craft of being a director, from his technical knowledge of cinematography (103) to his participation in directing years before he was ever credited, Fujiwara draws out the assertion from Lewis that he co-directed *Living It Up* (Norman Taurog, 1954), in which he co-starred with Dean Martin, the only time this claim has been made in print. Further on in the interview, Lewis speaks freely about performance, about his relationship with the audience and the correlation between his public and private selves. Tellingly, towards the end of the interview, Lewis says: "I'm sitting today with a young man [Fujiwara] [...] who knows my work as well as I do [...] you have no idea what that means to someone who yearns to know that what he did was good." (127).

The second book from the Contemporary Film Directors series examines the career of Canadian director Atom Egoyan, from *Next of Kin* (1984) to *Where the Truth Lies* (2005). Taking a structural approach that differs from *Jerry Lewis*, Emma Wilson dedicates a separate section to each film and discusses themes of gender, sexuality, ritual and alienation within them, providing a comprehensive overview. Each film is analysed in similar detail, with Egoyan's best known film *Exotica* (1993) given similar consideration to an early film like *Family Viewing* (1987). The practice of interspersing the analysis with comments from Egoyan and excerpts from interviews with other authors is continued throughout, providing a reminder of Egoyan's status as one of "the most exacting contemporary auteurs" (12) and ensuring that the analysis stays close to the figure of the director.

Egoyan's films are "frequently about Armenia, memory and ethnic identity [...] interwoven with his other concerns, particularly fantasy, displacement and loss" (4). His background is described in the preface; a Canadian of Armenian origin, he was born in Cairo and moved to the diasporic city of Toronto in 1963, only learning English after the death of his grandmother. Transnationality, Wilson suggests, is often central to his films. Egoyan describes a belief that "we need to make sense of the foreign in our own terms" (2) and his fascination with "this experience of being outside and attempting to move in" (3). This concept widens

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an interest in the permeability of national borders to encompass corporeal, psychological and sexual ones, alluding to the scenarios of exile, alienation and nostalgia played out within the films.

Each chapter discussing a film opens with a descriptive synopsis emphasising narrative and visual elements before proceeding to the analysis. Wilson identifies similar themes of family disunity and alienation in *Next of Kin* and *Family Viewing*, along with a sense of detachment communicated through the use of high angle fixed shots and surveillance footage, revealing “the dominance of voyeuristic modes of recording a representation in the consumer society Egoyan represents.” (27). *Speaking Parts* (1989), she argues, is less concerned with questions of ethnicity and memory, yet still retains a sense of nostalgia and alienation from home through being set in a Toronto hotel, a space of transience. Prefiguring *Exotica*, here sex is intimate yet alienating, marked by absence and “mediated by fantasies that screen us from the alterity and actuality of the other” (42).

Wilson considers *Exotica*, Egoyan's best-known film, the epitome of the uncomfortable association of family and sex which becomes his primary context for the exploration of desire and loss. Instead of the depiction of the family home as a sexualised space, or the destabilising of the separation between familial and sexual intimacy, in *Exotica* a strip club serves as an “erotic microclimate” (73) in which the interaction of these ordinarily discrete categories can be explored. Christina, the former babysitter turned pole dancer who performs dressed as a schoolgirl, is exhibited and fetishised, but Wilson makes the argument that when Egoyan's films flirt with the objectification of women, ultimately “what draws most desire is a woman's inaccessibility, her resistance, reflection and departure” (85).

The Sweet Hereafter (1997) and *Felicia's Journey* (1999) are both based on novels (by Russell Banks and William Trevor respectively) and centre on “fantasised and displaced” father-daughter relationships which are profoundly dysfunctional and abusive. Wilson's analysis will be particularly informative for anyone interested in the process of adaptation, as Egoyan made substantial changes to both texts (89), strengthening the significance of themes typical of his own work to the extent that, she argues, they could be considered part of a

trilogy with *Exotica*. The final film discussed is *Where the Truth Lies*. Also an adaptation, it marks a strengthening of the historical and narrative concerns of *Ararat* (2002) rather than more intimate and domestic themes, although Wilson shows that many of the same preoccupations in earlier films such as sexuality, interpersonal contact, recording devices and surveillance are present. As with *Jerry Lewis*, Atom Egoyan concludes with an interview with the director; Egoyan is erudite and willing to discuss his films without evasion or studied vagueness. It is clear, however, that Wilson had little time, speaking to him "over breakfast [...] the day after the screening of *Where the Truth Lies* at the London Film Festival" (136). Wilson subsequently reinterviewed Egoyan in 2010. Despite *Where the Truth Lies* losing more than \$24m, Egoyan had by then made two more features, *Adoration* (2008) and *Chloe* (2009). An unavoidable issue with the Contemporary Film Directors series is that, with prolific subjects like Egoyan, the books will age quickly.

Unintentional resonances exist between *Atom Egoyan* and the third book, Sean Martin's analysis of the work of Andrei Tarkovsky. In the preface, Wilson quotes Svetlana Boym in describing the poignancy of the longing and loss thematic in Egoyan's films: "at first glance, nostalgia is a longing for place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time - the time of our childhood" (Wilson, 9). In fact, this confusion of the geographical and historical loss suggests a connection between Tarkovsky and Egoyan. Indeed, with *Nostalgia* (the English title of Tarkovsky's 1983 film) both the theme of migration from east to west and the problems of adaptation itself link with Egoyan's work, although Wilson does not cite Tarkovsky as an influence on Egoyan.

Martin's stated intent is modest: to provide "a short overview [...] a stimulus to go back and rewatch the films [...] to discuss all aspects of Tarkovsky's work" (11). The book is wide in scope, with a focus on film but embracing also writing, painting and photography. He opens with a short biographical chapter, describing Tarkovsky's life from childhood to his death in 1986 and closing with a few paragraphs on his experience of working within the Soviet film industry. The second chapter is incongruously titled 'Theory and Practice' yet is better described as a précis of the remainder of the book; Martin describes the significance of dreams, nature and animals (40) alongside motifs like spilled

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liquids and glass objects in establishing a basis for closer analysis, summarising ideas later given more detail in the discussion of specific films. Water, for example, which captivated Tarkovsky (38), is mentioned briefly here before a more extensive discussion of its ubiquitous significance in *Stalker*.

Similarly to Wilson, Martin discusses the films in chronological order and in dedicated chapters rather than extending the thematic approach of his second chapter. The film chapters follow a set structure which will be familiar to readers of the Essentials series, opening with subheadings for production details, storyline and production history and concluding with close analysis. An appreciation of and respect for Tarkovsky's films comes through repeatedly. Martin describes all seven features as masterpieces and asserts more than once that any of them would, in their own right, have heralded Tarkovsky as an unparalleled talent. Of *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), Tarkovsky's first feature, he writes: "it is a major achievement and, had it been Tarkovksy's only film, it would have earned him a place, however modest, in the history of Russian cinema" (67).

The films are examined concisely and methodically, with each chapter roughly of the same length. *Andrei Rublev* (1966) defines "Tarkovsky's mature style [...] a lengthy, episodic narrative and a camera style largely comprising tracking shots" (80) and alludes to Tarkovsky's perception of the purpose of the artist in society, "his own role, in other words" (90). *Solaris* (1972) was billed on release, to the distaste of both Tarkovsky and Martin, as "the Soviet reply to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*" (99) and also represents a conflict of adaptation in which Tarkovsky's revisionist tendencies gained him the disapproval of the novel's author Stanislaw Lem (101). *Mirror* (1974) marked the fulfilment of a "desire to make a film based entirely on a character's memory and inner world" (119). *Stalker* is an "allegory of faith" (141) set in "a spiritual wasteland [which] is also an actual wasteland caused by pollution" (146); *Nostalgia* a film replete with cinematic doubling (159) and "not just a film about [...] the past, but also of the search for home and a place of belonging on a wider scale" (157).

As with *Jerry Lewis*, it becomes unavoidable to discuss the films without reference to the director's life. *Ivan's Childhood* is "autobiographical at one or so removes" (90), while we learn that despite being associated with the genre, he

claimed to dislike science fiction while reading “quite a lot of it [...] his favourite being Ray Bradbury” (99). The chapter on *Mirror* contains a compelling explanation of which scenes in the film were influenced by Tarkovsky's own experiences and to what degree. The production of *Stalker*, filmed at an Estonian power plant, led to the deaths from cancer of Tarkovsky, his wife and assistant director, Larissa, and both actors Anatoly Solonitsyn and Nikolai Grinko. During the filming of *The Sacrifice* (1986), his last film and “a thinly veiled portrait of his own family and personal circumstances at the time” (178), he was given the terminal diagnosis.

Clear, engaging and well-structured, while much of Andrei Tarkovsky discusses subject matter that has been covered elsewhere, its value lies more in Martin's ability to synthesise existing perspectives and describe the films in a way that enlivens his analysis. In its evocation of the films, the book easily fulfils Martin's aim of acting as a stimulus, although is perhaps the least penetrating of the three. Ultimately, this is unremarkable given that Lewis and Egoyan are less popular as subjects – and were both available for interview.

The Comedy of Chaplin: Artistry in Motion**By Dan Kamin**

Lanham, MD; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8108-7780-1, 227 pp. £16.95

Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini and the New Magic of the Twentieth Century**By Matthew Solomon**

Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-252-03510-4, 196pp. £16.99

A review by Bruce Bennett, Lancaster University, UK

The star persona of Charles Chaplin remains a highly visible presence within film cultures almost a century after his first arresting appearance on film in 1914 in the Keystone Studios short, *Kid Auto Races in Venice* (Henry Lehrman). He appears, for example, as a nauseatingly self-important and orgiastic supporting character in James Lever's Hollywood faux-memoir *Me, Cheeta* (Fourth Estate, 2008), and also as the protagonist of *Sunnyside* (Sceptre, 2009), Glen David Gold's novel about early Hollywood, which takes its title from another of Chaplin's shorts. Most recently, he was invoked by the makers of the low budget, high-concept, Finnish science fiction film, *Iron Sky* (Vuorensola, 2012). The inventive, comically preposterous premise of *Iron Sky* is that American astronauts, landing on the moon a few years from now, stumble across a colony of Nazis who have been stranded there since 1945. This encounter prompts the moon-Nazis, believing the astronauts are the vanguard of an invasion force, to mount a counter-attack against the earth. In one early scene, set in a school-room on the moon-base, a school-teacher screens a bowdlerized version of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), which, she explains to the children, is "one of the world's great short films, which illustrates in just ten minutes his wish that one day the entire world will be held in the great Führer's wise and gentle hand". Later on, now arrived on Earth and disoriented by the alien culture of twenty-first century New York, the school-teacher retreats gratefully into a cinema screening *The Great Dictator*, only to emerge 125 minutes later, muttering in shock and dismay, "He was mocking the Führer", and, rather more damningly, "It was so long". One of the better gags in *Iron Sky*, this scene highlights the

bluntness of Chaplin's attempts at more pointed political satire. It also attests to Chaplin's enduring significance as an historical marker – in this case a shorthand reference to popular culture of the 1940s – a political and cultural critic, and a film-maker whose work continues to be a point of reference for contemporary directors.

Dan Kamin's *The Comedy of Chaplin: Artistry in Motion* is expanded from an earlier volume on the film-maker, *Charlie Chaplin's One-Man Show* (Scarecrow Press, 1995), and, as the title suggests, is an authorial study of Chaplin's work that displays a particular sensitivity towards the intricacies of silent screen performance. The book offers a more or less chronological appreciation of Chaplin's life and career, discussing most of his films in some detail. Pitched as a broadly accessible text, rather than a specialized academic study, the book draws on interviews (some by the author), biographical and autobiographical writing, documentaries and cinema history, but largely eschews film theory and more complex work on early, transitional and late silent cinema, and its relation to early twentieth-century culture and society. Kamin begins with a useful survey of Chaplin's career as a music-hall performer and member of Fred Karno's theatre company, which serves as a crucial reference point for Chaplin throughout his career. As Kamin writes, "Karno's technical perfectionism and endless rehearsals became Chaplin's credo as a film-maker" (7). Kamin goes on to track the development of his performance style, directing and storytelling techniques through the first films Chaplin made for Keystone Studios (1914), and then Essanay (1915) and Mutual Studios (1916-17), before moving to work as an independent director from *A Dog's Life* (1918) through to his final, ill-regarded film, *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967), a romantic comedy starring Marlon Brando and Sophia Loren. Kamin's book makes a straightforward claim for Chaplin's status as an *auteur* who variously occupied the roles of producer, director, actor, screenwriter, editor and composer of scores and who produced a coherent body of work that reaches its zenith with *City Lights* (1931). Chaplin's last dialogue-free film, and a major commercial success, this is for the author, "a unique achievement, transcending considerations of sound versus silent film" (135).

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Much of the book is given over to analyses of Chaplin's films and it is copiously illustrated with scores of frames (albeit small, low-resolution images cropped to varying proportions) so that a knowledge of the films is not essential to follow Kamin's account. What makes this book distinctive against the wealth of commentary published on Chaplin, is the close attention paid in the book to bodies and physical movement. Rather than an academic, Kamin is a stage performer who was employed by Robert Downey Jr. as a consultant to help him prepare for his role as Chaplin in Richard Attenborough's 1992 film, and as a result the author is particularly interested in the technical subtleties of Chaplin's own screen performance as well as those of his co-stars and supporting cast. For Kamin, "Chaplin's art begins and ends with movement" (xii). What makes Chaplin's performances stand out, Kamin argues, "is the extraordinary articulation of his body. His movement is so hypnotic to watch both because it flows so well and because it is so selective [...] directing the eye of the viewer in the same way a magician directs our eye to what he wants us to see" (22). For example, Kamin identifies the way that Chaplin's tendency to tilt his pelvis back and stick out his chest when playing the tramp character with whom he is most closely associated, "summoned up the studied elegance and posture of a ballet dancer, made ridiculous by Charlie's outsized trousers and shoes, and it made him look like a small child playing at being grown up" (19). At the same time, the "adoption of this bustle-like posture further stresses his feminine aspect, countering his 'forcefully masculine' character and behaviour", but "also draws our attention to his posterior, a prime comic object in his films" (ibid.).

Kamin's careful description of bodily movement and of the interaction of performers with props, vehicles and spaces in Chaplin's films is informed by a knowledge of the medium's technological development and an understanding of the more or less subtle ways in which the camera is used to emphasize movement through undercranking, trick photography and the use of varying framings and angles. This accessible and comprehensive book also provides helpful background information about the production, reception, and the release history of the films, and offers a very good overview of Chaplin's work.

Far less recognizable or ubiquitous than Chaplin, Georges Méliès nevertheless also remains a stubbornly visible presence in contemporary cinema a century after the release of his last film in 1913. For instance, Méliès occupies a central role in the historical fantasy *Hugo* (2011), Martin Scorsese's 3-D adaptation of a graphic novel about a young orphan boy's relationship with the ageing director, who was reduced to running a toy shop on a station platform before being rediscovered towards the end of his life, partly as a result of the surrealists' enthusiasm for his films which exemplified the principle of 'le merveilleux'. More recently still, a restored version of *Le voyage dans la lune* (Méliès, 1902) was released in 2012 with a score by French pop group, Air. Alongside the American magician Harry Houdini, Méliès is also one of the key protagonists in Matthew Solomon's historical account of early cinema and its relationship to theatrical spectacle and magic, *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and the New Magic of the Twentieth Century*. Employing a "comparative media approach", Solomon's book explores the ways in which "magic and cinema were in fact overlapping sets of practices that renewed, incorporated, and responded to each other historically" (6). The magical new medium of film initially posed a serious threat to magicians, since, "While stage magic always involves concealing the work that goes into a trick (and concealing how the work has been concealed), mechanical tricks ran the risk of effacing the magician altogether, leaving only the illusion" (29). Nevertheless, as Solomon recounts, cinema was quickly incorporated into magic shows as a novel component of the performers' technical armoury, while at the same time, as the commercial potential of cinema became evident, "Magicians took key roles in the emerging industry" (32). As a professional magician and owner of the most famous magic theatre in Paris, as well as a pioneer of trick films, ("an auteur in the true sense" as Elizabeth Ezra puts it in her book *Georges Méliès* (Manchester University Press, 2000: 17)) and, latterly, the owner of a studio and international distribution company, Star Films, Méliès is an important figure in Solomon's history of the technical, aesthetic and infrastructural development of cinema in the late 19th and early 20th century and its imbrication with the conventions and performance circuits of stage magic. Thus, for example, Solomon observes that "In *The Human Fly* [1902] and countless other films, Méliès combined modified modes of presentational performance with cinematographic effects; many of the forms

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these cinematic creations took can be traced to his long-time direction of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin" (39).

The understanding that early films were an integral element of a culture of popular entertainment comprising what Tom Gunning terms, the "cinema of attractions", and competed with fairground rides, freak shows, variety theatres and fortune tellers for public attention and business is a familiar notion. Placing Méliès's films within this cultural historical framework has helped to rescue them from dismissal as eccentric, infantile, technically inept and culturally insignificant sketches, as typified by this assessment of his work in Louis Gianetti and Eyman Scott's *Flashback: A Brief History of Film* (Prentice Hall, 1996): "Fuelled by an imagination of remarkable innocence, Méliès made films out of cardboard and paint that seem like the dreams of a creative child: primal, pure, startling imagery completely free of literary and social sophistication" (13).

What is fascinating about Solomon's book is the detail with which it explores the context of popular theatre and the sophisticated 'modern magic' tradition of the 19th century popularized by Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, which eschewed the exotic *mise-en-scène* of traditional stage magic for minimal sets and evening dress. Solomon takes seriously and explores the implications of Méliès's insistence that, "My cinematic career is so closely linked to the Théâtre Robert-Houdin that one can hardly separate them" (40). The book also discusses the less well-known trick films of other directors as well as films that focus on conjuring and magic tricks, mapping out a far less familiar field of early film that culminates with the deviation of cinema from stage magic partly due to cinema's commercial commitment to the visibility of the mechanics of spectacle. As Solomon writes, while "[m]ost theatrical magicians insisted quite vociferously that their techniques and technologies must be concealed from the public, [...] with the rise of story films around 1908, motion picture producers did not hesitate to expose their tricks to audiences with articles in the popular press" (78).

While the first half of the book revisits Méliès's career, the second half of the book is given over to a reassessment of the career of one of Méliès's younger contemporaries and inheritors, the Hungarian-born American magician Harry Houdini. As Solomon argues, Houdini's dual significance in histories of the inter-

relationship of cinema and magic is that as well as acting in fiction films from 1910, Houdini also incorporated documentary films of his stunts and magic acts into his stage shows while reworking the tempo and style of his stage performance accordingly: "by using films in his performances and by performing tricks that approached new thresholds of speed and visibility during the early twentieth century, Houdini's magic became doubly 'cinematic'" (81). Houdini also exploited the documentary capacity of film to capture the evanescent, genuinely dangerous and unrepeatable performances for which he became famous. How, Solomon asks, "can a magician leave behind positive proof of his genius? For Houdini, the answer was cinema, which was a method of showcasing spectacular escape stunts during his lifetime as well as a means of leaving these feats for prosperity" (82). It is, of course, appropriate that Houdini's cinematic after-life is cemented with his portrayal by Hollywood star Tony Curtis (himself the son of Hungarian immigrants to the US) in the 1953 bio-pic *Houdini* (George Marshall).

Solomon discusses the now little-known series of films (and film serials) in which Houdini featured during a brief career as a star whose films were distributed internationally. This opens out onto his preoccupation with exposing the charlatanism of spiritualism, with which he was associated against his wish, celebrity advocates of spiritualism such as Arthur Conan Doyle holding him to be a powerful spirit medium. The book ends fittingly with a brief discussion of Orson Welles, "the other twentieth-century magician-filmmaker who pursued the ideal of 'total film-making' to the extent of Méliès and Houdini" (125). It is a measure of the thoughtful way with which this fascinating book tracks an alternative history of cinema that it can establish such convincing connections between this triad of figures. However, the value of this book lies not simply in its reframing of historical accounts of early and later silent cinema, but also in its reflections upon stage and screen magic as a way of thinking about the circuits of production, reception and distribution of media representations and spectacles more generally. Commenting on the furious online discussions about the authenticity of the televised stunts of contemporary magicians such as Criss Angel and David Blaine, Solomon observes, "the 'realist' screen magic of contemporary television magicians – like Houdini's films before them – gives us

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occasion to question the place of illusion not solely in fiction but in what is ostensibly nonfiction" (128).

Together these two books make an excellent contribution to the literature and scholarship on early cinema and are highly recommended and enjoyable reading for film scholars and students.

Von Sternberg**By John Baxter**

Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8131-2601-2. viii. + 310 pp. £35.95

Willing Seduction: The Blue Angel, Marlene Dietrich and Mass Culture**By Barbara Kosta**

New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84545-572-9. xi + 195pp. £35.00

A Review by Elaine Lennon, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

Director Josef Von Sternberg's account of himself, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (MacMillan, 1965), is a Hollywood classic: by turns aggravating, enervating, obscure, rambling, evasive, arrogant, misleading, outrageous, self-deprecatory and hilarious. Never do we actually learn anything of true worth about the man other than his preoccupation with visual abstraction and formalism in the arts, and it is from this basis that biographer John Baxter must proceed, along with the evidence provided by the impressive and underrated (and sometimes unavailable) exotica in the film archive.

Re-working his earlier study of the films and armed with new sources, Baxter calls upon his inner courage to describe and enlarge the life of the director he met in 1966. The author has proved his mettle and ongoing interest in the underrated Austrian director in this account of a man seemingly obsessed by form and his own elaborately coutured image. On the one hand, Baxter is a somewhat troublesome biographer (see his hatchet job on J.G. Ballard); on the other, he has chosen a very troublesome subject. Luckily for us, he does an admirable job in filling the considerable gaps and casting light and new information on the relationship with Marlene Dietrich, which came to dominate perception of the oeuvre.

Sternberg (the 'Von' was a suitably ludicrous early addition by his studio colleague Roy William Neill in order to exoticise an unprepossessing credits list)

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was, in his own volume, quite consumed by his own thoughts on the art of cinema, but nonetheless quite illuminating on the Hollywood machine, its critics and hangers-on. Calling up critiques of himself and his work as though summoning the wrath of the gods (or cinematic demons), he relentlessly refers to his outrageous persona, which even his architect Richard Neutra sought to enhance by admittedly excessive and eccentric false description. Baxter's approach, however, is typically accessible and his writing style, as usual, easy and uninhibited. The problem with the subject is not the lack of information, rather the material he produced, which the author examined forty years ago and much of which is unavailable today. But his account is efficient and pointed, layering in those elements which would grant the director a consistency of interpretation for which he himself was unknown in his autobiography. This is particularly true of the description given of Von Sternberg's hitherto fictionalised early life, a peripatetic existence that saw his family repeatedly moving back and forth from Austria to the United States, his stint in World War I producing training films for the American armed forces, and his early days in cinema as an editing assistant.

With some problematic backing from the non-committal Chaplin, Von Sternberg made the leap to features in the mid-1920s. Baxter correctly adduces that Von Sternberg identified his themes and characters as early as *The Salvation Hunters* (1925), where he was already assigning a male protagonist as a stand-in for himself; but he truly integrated his style with *Underworld* (1927), a groundbreaking gangster film and a production with typically convoluted writing origins which nonetheless kicked off his legendary Paramount years. Baxter corrects some previous thoughts on the circumstances of the production of *The Blue Angel* (1930), his meeting with Dietrich being something of a coup de foudre which was eventually masked by a public show of lifelong mutual contempt. A complete understanding of this complete film cycle with director and star (seven in all), which bailed out the studio from certain bankruptcy and whose appeal rested on extraordinarily inventive symbolism and complex visual design with origins in Expressionist style, deserves pictorial shot-by-shot deconstruction which Baxter does his best to convey with an obviously curtailed word count.

While Von Sternberg doesn't mention Dietrich by name in his own volume, Baxter adds to the legend of this symbiotic relationship commencing with the extraordinary German film (which was a greater success in its German-language version, even in the United States) by tracing their metaphorical partnership and the director's own high adventures in the representational narrative strokes in the screenplays that followed. The director was regularly hired to re-work fellow directors' work – he even replaced Eisenstein on the controversial *An American Tragedy* (1931), a production which led to a lawsuit by novelist Theodore Dreiser. The difficult years – after the final, controversial and extraordinary Dietrich production, *The Devil Is A Woman* (1935) – such as when Alexander Korda effectively used Von Sternberg as an insurance policy against bankruptcy in the failed production of *I, Claudius* (1937) with the impossible Charles Laughton – are effectively plotted against the growing pressures of unemployability, political turmoil and the subsequent post-World War 2 phase when he was hired to do piecemeal work again stepping in regularly to rescue or do additional shooting on other directors' work.

Von Sternberg's relationship with Howard Hughes, and the ludicrous amount of time spent patching together cuts of films created as epics for the billionaire producer (like *Jet Pilot* (1950)), becomes as tedious for the reader as it must have done for Von Sternberg himself, who decamped back East again in the 1950s. Hoping to direct on Broadway, after a string of non-events he wound up investing with typical success on Wall Street. His Asian adventure, *The Saga of Anatahan* (1952), as Baxter has it, was an exercise in plasticity with his non-English speaking cast permitting him to create the ultimate in artifice. It has probably only been seen at film festivals, which regularly celebrated Von Sternberg's achievements in the 1960s, with great fanfare and a little curmudgeonly assistance by the man himself. When nobody would employ Von Sternberg he turned to his ongoing interest in art, the stock market and academia. Perhaps one of the lesser known facts about him is that he instructed both Jim Morrison and Ray Manzarek at UCLA and, as Baxter reminds us, Manzarek claims that the director was probably the greatest influence on the output of The Doors.

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Ultimately reducing the man's output to camp aestheticism, which most critics tend to do, does not really help the cause of Von Sternberg and the book struggles to some extent at the level of the career itself. In some ways his work with Dietrich merits even lengthier study and as the centre of the book's focus this leads one to wanting more. If Baxter fails to grasp completely the nettle of the totality of the man's achievement as an artist of dream-worlds shattered by reality ("languid sensuality" is one of the terms he calls upon), he grapples successfully with his thankfully over-the-top personality. Also, and somewhat mysteriously in light of the information recovered by Diana McLellan's *The Girls* (St Martin's Griffin, 2000), he doesn't wholly explore Von Sternberg's other work with Dietrich – their prolonged, difficult and stealthy project in rescuing refugees from Nazi Germany, which also involved Fritz Lang (another of Dietrich's lovers) and Dietrich's hidden first husband, Otto Katz (a.k.a. Rudolph Breda), the model for Victor Laszlo in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). The seeming hostility, widely reported, between Von Sternberg and his former muse, was actually a mask for political adventures worthy of Mata Hari and which are protected under secrecy laws in the United States to this very day.

As Baxter points out, the ghost in the machine of many years standing was Sam Winston, the director's long-time editor and collaborator, about whom little is known. He naturally does not merit a mention in the autobiography and is then named just once, in the credits list, in Barbara Kosta's intriguing interdisciplinary study of *The Blue Angel*.

Von Sternberg's own *Blonde Venus* and *Devil Woman*, that adventurous Berlin housewife formerly known as Maria Magdalene Sieber, is the subject of *Willing Seduction*, a fine case study of the star and her role in the film as cultural signifier. Taking a woman described elsewhere as "more aggressively ambiguous" than Garbo, her contemporary Euro femme fatale, it is true that Dietrich is probably more culturally complex, meaningful and ultimately mysterious than Garbo ever was, possibly because she used her image to change perceptions and to creatively enhance her career, instead of pleading anonymity whilst socialising and holidaying with the most famous people of the day in the hottest hotspots around the world (albeit that Dietrich did some of that too, with far more intriguing results for the film world).

The value in Kosta's book is its provision of a discursive framework for the film, placing a uniquely international film star at its centre and synthesising a wide array of work in many disciplines. As Kosta points out, the film's very presentness as artifact in the realm of film studies has ironically rendered it almost entirely unexamined. The book consists of five chapters, each of them a substantial stand-alone essay analysing an aspect of the film's significance in great detail. Thus, in the first chapter, we have its importance as a product of mass culture versus serious or *Bildungsbürger* culture, cleverly juxtaposing Emil Jannings' Professor character as a product of the latter which Von Sternberg conveys musically. A chapter on sound unfolds the bifurcate approach of Von Sternberg, allowing us to understand Professor (Un)Rath as a product of the earlier time, with Friedrich Hollaender's songs as a code striking life into the modern desire to be desired. This figures in the seductive Lola Lola and her distinctive, low, throaty delivery style culled from one of Dietrich's many female lovers, the singer Claire Waldoff. Visually, Kosta examines the physicality of the sexual spectacle, with Lola Lola, a singer now, not Mann's dancer (due to the talkies), luring the Professor on both a vocal and a carnivalesque level, dictating his masochistic behaviour in the space contained by the cabaret. Elsewhere, Kosta opens up the discussion to modernity with the fascination for American culture that came to Weimar Berlin but alludes to Von Sternberg's clever avoidance of any precise contemporary references. In fact the director used his return to Europe to summon up the images he culled from his childhood memory, street lamps using oil, a calendar dating 1929, linking forever retrospectively this period with a crisis in male subjectivity and an edgy culture produced by political turmoil. Kosta's claim that Lola Lola embodies the converging of complex and different, even contradictory, formulations of Weimar culture is borne out by her analysis of performance and its aggressive parody of the bourgeois.

One of the issues that has troubled film studies in the past lies in its ignoring of the people who actually make films and their impact on the wider culture – something that a loose group of academics creating a 'New Film History' is attempting to redeem, looking at issues beyond theory, in order to construct a more obvious, less theory-dependent version of the skein of reasons as to why

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films get made, who looks at them, and their social and cultural effects. Part of that movement is (self-evidently) looking at documentary evidence in terms of production histories, biography and memoir (however misleading, obfuscatory or delusional), reception, and press material; and perhaps asking why some films linger in the culture, others are forgotten as seasonal fodder. For this reason, Von Sternberg's own bizarre memoir is an interesting companion to be read alongside these volumes, which in their differing ways attempt to open out a peculiarly complementary relationship. He himself discusses that streak of masochism running through all his films, a detail that is of course the essence of the Professor's self-inflicted fascination with the exotic and is extended in all of Von Sternberg's films with Dietrich, all an obvious variation on *The Blue Angel*, and all containing an admitted hint of autobiography, with Von Sternberg imitated by various lookalike actors succumbing to the charms of the bewitching Dietrich, the woman to whom he apparently lost his own dishonour on a leopardskin, according to his then wife.

At the centre of Kosta's densely written thesis on the film is the idea that Dietrich's essential German-ness inflected not just her being but the perception of her as an artist: a woman who rejected Nazism but embraced her Berlin past; who lived a full life on both sides of the Atlantic pre- and post-World War II -- as a performer, wife, mother, adventurous bisexual mistress in an open marriage (her husband took up with his own mistress early on); who was a multi-faceted creature who owed her success to Von Sternberg, who at least realised he was just the latest director to have discovered her but remodelled her according to his own vision to which she willingly submitted herself. Kosta places the significance of nationality in the wider context of Germany's own psychology both before and after the Nazi era. She conjures a country in conflict with itself, but also in a somewhat Oedipal relationship with the United States, under whose flag Dietrich of course returned only after the conclusion of hostilities, having serially declined Hitler's invitations to return home, a move that would prove psychologically problematic for her and cost her audience numbers on her concert tours to the rather un-rehabilitated Germany of the 1950s and 60s. For Kosta, Dietrich is indeed the skeleton key unlocking Germany's perplexing twentieth century identity and her approach skilfully weaves a narrative linking the issues of the Weimar Republic with the country in the present day. Indeed,

Dietrich is now viewed as Berlin's symbol and has been restored as an icon in her home city.

As Kosta points out therefore, Von Sternberg's pictorialism isn't the only facet that interests us in this great early film performance by Dietrich, the modern German woman: it is the essence of Dietrich herself, that which later became bound up in the representation of German womanhood at a particular time and place, when the decadence of the Weimar Republic and the seediness of Berlin couldn't summon up the strength to deal with the jackbooted thugs of National Socialism that were already massing at a level that people have forgotten (there had already been a Nuremberg Rally of sorts, and membership of the Party exceeded 200,000 at the time the film was in production, whilst their targets continued to be the screening of American films – an easy scenario for public disarray and hysteria). It is said that Von Sternberg happened to leave Berlin the day the Reichstag burned down, although Baxter claims it was later. (Whatever the case, he was in good company: Billy Wilder departed the following morning.) Fifteen years later, as Kosta tells us, the American citizen Dietrich's role in Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1948) was cast because of her multi-layered significance to the pre-Nazi era and, of course, in *The Blue Angel*. The former could not have been exhibited without Dietrich, as she well knew. It is Wilder's comment on the failure of the Weimar Republic's great decadence and a sideways swipe at Leni von Riefenstahl, to whose *Triumph of the Will* (1935) the film's opening shots of the formerly great city's rubble pay sly homage (with 'The Ruins of Berlin' played uptempo on the soundtrack) warning the viewer about the dangers of playing both ends against the middle. Dietrich was, and remains, Von Sternberg's Lola Lola. Her songs, written and accompanied by Hollander, who was like Dietrich, based in Hollywood, accrete the legend of *The Blue Angel* and comment on her former incarnation in the earlier version of Berlin, before the fall.

If, finally, Dietrich's cultural meaning derives from the patina gained from her work with Von Sternberg, then it is all to the good for the reputations of both of them that these books go some way towards explaining their relationship and the effect upon one another in terms of not just the historiography of cinema but the wider social and cultural tropes that made them who they were. The

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singularity of their first joint production still weaves a spell that troubles our understanding of Germany to this day. However their true mystery both as individuals and as the halves that ultimately made each other a cinematic whole remains unsolved, if fascinating to the last. These tantalising volumes add ballast to preceding works on the subjects and lead one back to the films themselves, where the enigma is revealed to the audience. It's all in the silver.

Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War I

By Yvonne Tasker

Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8223-4847-4. 51 illustrations, 328 pp. £16.99

A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films

By Martin Barker

London: Pluto Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3129-4. 16 illustrations, 216 pp. £18.99

A Review by Jay Reid, The University of Adelaide

The image of the soldier is one that has filled our small and large screens since the events of World War I brought conflict into the global public consciousness. As with all media images, the discursive elements of these characters have not existed in a void and have rather been the product of external drivers that have shaped their evolution and mediation. These two recently released books by Yvonne Tasker and Martin Barker examine the figures of onscreen military characters, providing a close examination of the female soldier and the post-9/11 hero respectively, building between them a framework that can be used to examine the identity of the soldier character within visual media texts.

In *Soldier's Stories* Tasker presents a comprehensive study of the imagery surrounding military women in popular media since the 1940s. While focusing on film and television programming from the United States and the United Kingdom, Tasker also looks to media such as comic books and recruitment posters, and considers representations from other countries such as Australia. The primary thesis of her work is that the media image of the female soldier is always portrayed in contradictory terms. Soldiering is seen to be the work of men; as such, female soldiers are required to either become masculine by abandoning their femininity, or maintain their femininity and fail to fulfil their assigned roles. Barker asserts that a gender discursive split is maintained whereby men are associated with combat roles and women with non-combat roles. While common elements such as this exist throughout the history of her studied films, Barker's work highlights three waves of representation that have

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occurred since World War II: the female soldier as an auxiliary figure; the female soldier as a source of comedy; and modern mediations which see females soldiers moving into professional roles, often with investigative duties.

Early onscreen female soldiers were limited to clerical and supportive roles, their presence only tolerated as it allowed men to be freed from desk jobs and able to serve on the frontline. Tasker discusses how this distinction was simultaneously established through the discourse of recruitment material. Positioned in this auxiliary space we find the image of the military nurse, to which Tasker devotes a chapter. As existing discourses of the nursing profession had already become established, military nursing was seen as being an acceptable position for serving women, although overarching discourses asserted that they were still not true soldiers. Despite these limitations, a common trope emerged of the (female) military life enabling transformation through the ability to travel and acquire new skills, leading to such portrayals representing these women as 'new age'. Montages showing the military woman in boot camp or being outfitted are common during this period, but while her role allows her to become more liberated, at the end of the day she must still stay behind and wait while the men go off to fight.

In post-World War II films Tasker notes a move into two new genres: that of the musical, and that of the comedy, two new media forms that are often interconnected. Musicals featuring female soldiers appear in the 1940s and 1950s and function by taking existing discourses of military women and adding in romantic subplots. Through this time period the 'battle of the sexes' tale becomes prevalent with the theme of women in authority having to deal with male soldiers who are lacking in skills, themes that mimicked shifting gender norms and power relations during this time. So-called 'service comedies' begin to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s, best exemplified by *M*A*S*H** (1972–1977, developed by Larry Gelbart), which took place during a time when women were becoming fully integrated into the armed forces. Despite this, onscreen female soldiers still found it hard to attain respect and continued to struggle to resolve both their identity as a soldier and as a woman.

In the third section of her monogram Tasker examines modern representations of female soldiers. She demonstrates that in recent times the notion of military

women is no longer a laughing matter, and as such these characters have been transported from comedies and musicals to genres such as thrillers and legal procedurals. This, Tasker argues, reflects the changing public discourse surrounding military women which sees them moving from being a temporary measure needed during times of conflict to a professional member of the armed forces. However, implied notions of female soldiering still remain from previous cycles of representation. The number of military women characters appearing onscreen has dropped despite their increased participation in conflicts such as the Gulf War and the War on Terror, with defined male- and female-orientated military roles still being reinforced onscreen. Women are still not seen as combat capable and do not fight unless they have been captured or enter into a warzone unintentionally. They are commonly seen as victims of injustice or military investigators, two roles that work to position them beyond the realm of the traditional soldier, wherein they challenge notions of masculinity through their quests for revenge or justice. These texts continue the onscreen trope of women being tested, either during boot camp or out in the field, with these characters constantly seeking to prove their worth as soldiers. This modern era also commonly engages with the female soldier through the lens of scandal and controversy, which are seen to come part and parcel with the placing of women within military units.

Barker's monogram *A 'Toxic Genre'* addresses the sub-genre of Iraq war films that has materialised following the events of September 11, 2001 with the intention of doing work similar to that of Tasker's: examining discourses regarding to the screen portrayals of soldiers, this time with a focus on the post-9/11 hero. His work represents the first survey of this new wave of films, and closely examines 23 films released between 2005 and 2008 which address post-9/11 Islamic terrorism and militancy as well as current conflicts in the Middle East. The position that these films play within society is contentious; never before has a conflict been mediated onscreen so contemporaneously with its real-world occurrence, with most World War 2 and Vietnam films emerging a decade after these conflicts ended. The basic aim of his work is to isolate and tease out recurring themes and tropes which are shared among these films, noting that, while these elements "do not all necessarily appear in one film, [...]"

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they cohere quite well" (28). The value of the book, though, lies in Barker's connection of these textual elements to his demonstration of the overarching morphology that dictates the ways in which such media texts are produced and consumed.

His reading of the considered films highlights three broad themes that he sees as being inherent to movies of the 'Iraq war film' sub-genre; the specific tropes common to depictions of the 'Iraq war experience', a shared narrative structure, and a repeated model for creating the 'moral hero' of this conflict. The 'Iraq war experience' relies upon three elements: first, a representation of the soldiers as ordinary human beings trying to deal with conflict, often shown through their barracks behaviour; second, the notion that they are lost in the Middle Eastern realm and unable to comprehend the world around them; and third, the long-lasting effects that the experience has on them, which often make it impossible for them to adjust once they return home. Through a close reading of the selected films, he addresses these repeated themes – particularly the third – devoting a chapter to a discussion of four onscreen mediations of post-traumatic stress disorder and what such mediations say about the state of the American psyche and that of its armed forces post-9/11.

In addition to this common idea of the 'Iraq war experience', Barker highlights repeated narrative structures that feature throughout the studied films. Across these films he demonstrates a common thread of superior officers and leaders being shown in negative and duplicitous fashions, a questioning by the soldiers on the ground as to why they are there, and an intertwining of real world events and politics into the film narratives. It is these real world parallels to which he draws a number of conclusions regarding the roles that these films play in military recruiting and the creation of a positive marketing image, with films that achieve these goals more likely to receive financial and material support from Washington and the Pentagon. It is here that Barker's work serves its purpose best: he considers not only the films themselves but elements such as the films' creation, marketing, releases and response. By taking elements such as these into account he is able to successfully position the films within their wider discourse and engage with their subject material in a more meaningful manner.

The final group of tropes he examines is those related to the post-9/11 moral hero, being a common theme in soldiers' bonding, the various struggles with values resulting from the reality of battle, and the image of soldiers – particularly those from ethnic minorities – as hero-victims. Particular attention is drawn to the rise of the 'Latino grunt' in post-9/11 cinema who are framed in a style unlike that applied to Anglo-Saxon characters, reflecting the large number of Latino personnel currently serving overseas. As part of his investigation of the American war hero Barker conducts a study of its ever-evolving discourse, tracing its origins from scattered images following World War I to the first consolidated notions which appear post-World War II, best demonstrated through the characters played by John Wayne, who uphold good moral values and serve as an inspiration to servicemen. Such an image is shown to evaporate following the Vietnam conflict, with the character of John Rambo being stereotypical and voicing public concerns about the handling of conflict and the rise of a more 'dirty' style of conflict.

Through this analysis of common discursive structures and elements from the Iraq war films sub-genre Barker looks to challenge the notion that such movies constitute a 'toxic genre'. Critics have commented that these films frequently perform poorly at the box office, and are more often than not seen by audiences as 'statement films' that preach a personal agenda. While Barker does not doubt these two assertions, he raises the question of how does one judge a film's 'success' in the modern era, and argues that the very grouping of these films by critics serves to disadvantage them by imbuing them with the notion of failure before they even open in cinemas. He closes with an analysis of *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), detailing ways in which the film is moving away from those that came before it, and possibly opening up new discursive territory.

Both these books map out diverging yet complimentary discursive spaces regarding the screen mediations of soldiers. Through her work, Tasker usefully investigates media images of the female soldier since its onscreen inception, drawing from wider public and political discourses in order to explain and debate the driving forces behind these evolving discourses. In a similar fashion, Barker examines the phenomena of the post-9/11 soldier, considering it as an evolution of early images of male heroes dating back to World War II. Read together, both

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monographs provide a detailed history of the American soldier figure in film and television since the 1940s with regards to the differing discourse of male and female characters. Furthermore, both texts consider not only the onscreen mediations of such characters, but also the wider political and societal drivers that over time have impacted on and influenced these screen images.

Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier**By Homay King**

Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8223-4759-0. x + 205 pp. £15.99

Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy**By Paul Bowman**

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. ISBN 978-90-420-2777-0. 255 pp. £49.40

A Review by Lin Feng, Independent Scholar

Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier interrogates western cinemas' depiction of Asian stereotypes. The book traces the emergence of these orientalist images in association with complicated psychical processes within the historical context. Pointing out that current studies of filmic representation of race often focus on character and actor, Homay King argues that such an approach not only often leads to a notion of abstractions offered in place of individuals, but also tends to regard representations as exhibiting a more simplistic, literal correspondence to factual reality than is the case (9). According to King, the idea of indigenous representation of an ethnic group risks taking fictive locations for real ones, rather than questioning any generalized notions of the Orient.

Aiming to address the issue, King has applied Jean Laplanche's notion of the enigmatic signifier to the study of racial representation. As King claims, Laplanche's enigmatic signifier provides a psychoanalytic account of subject formation, taking as its starting point the suggestion that "our interior lives are set in motion by an encounter with the unknown and unintelligible" (3). According to King's analysis of Laplanche's theory, the original of each enigmatic signifier has become untraceable because the message is a copy in an endless series of copies. Throughout the process of communication, there are certain messages of which both senders and receivers are not completely aware or comprehend. These unintelligible messages, moreover, are not resolved through mature understanding. Instead, King argues, they remain at the heart of human

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interaction. In King's opinion, Laplanche's enigmatic signifier helps to conceptualize racial stereotypes as a representation of an internal alterity, rather than as a representation of an external other. Under this logic, King argues that racial stereotypes are not simply the product of efforts made in bad faith to represent otherness but also of an anxiety about an inextricable composition of the self (10).

Lost in Translation explores a wide range of films, ranging from the silent to contemporary independent cinema, and from Hollywood noir to European documentaries, through which King argues that the Chinatowns, Tokyos, and Shanghais in these films are often dumping grounds for dead letters, overdetermined icons, and mutterings that belong to no dialect in particular. To King, these signifiers, having neither clear senders nor obvious recipient, seem to lie outside of rational systems of knowledge and communication. Diverting readers' attention from characters and human actors to a film's mise-en-scène and décor (such as Asian figurines, an origami unicorn, or a Chinese box), *Lost in Translation* is a book about visual objects and riddles and those enigmatic signifiers' roles of generating an overall sense of unknowns.

Chapter one reviews Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other texts on the stereotypical representations of Asian races on screen, although King claims that she ultimately moves away from the concepts developed from these texts. She is specifically challenging in laying theoretical groundwork through her reading of Laplanche's psychoanalytic theory. In the second chapter, King applies Laplanche to her analysis of the Eastern object, through a discussion of how the Orient appears as enigma in the mise-en-scène of classical Hollywood films. Through her reading of *Broken Blossoms* (D. W. Griffith, 1919), *Shanghai Gesture* (Josef von Sternberg, 1942), *The Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles, 1947), *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) and *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946), King develops her framework for reading racial representation via objects in film noir from this period. As King points out, these films and similar others often feature small oriental objects, such as silk curtains, Chinese coins, bowls of incense, which at first glance seem insignificant or irrelevant to the story development, apart from evoking a sense of dark exoticism. However, these oriental objects, according to King, symbolize what is "irresolvabl[y]

enigmatic and unintelligible” to the characters and spectators (13). In other words, those orientalist tropes – what King calls the “Shanghai gesture” – bear the burden of explanation for unresolved aspects of the plot, and are used by films noirs as a visual stand-in for the inexplicable. As King argues, these “Shanghaied” cinematic elements activate what Lapalanche sees as the structures of desire, soliciting but never fully satisfying the curiosity to know. The “Shanghai gesture”, providing the key to an enigma within the protagonist’s own subjectivity, functions as a representation of a specific form of repressed desire that has been rendered unconscious and inexpressible due to an oppressive socio-political culture (50).

In chapters three and four King turns her attention to the films of the 1970s and 1980s. Through her reading of two films set in Chinatown in Los Angeles, *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), King develops her other key term: “The Chinatown Syndrome”. She argues that *Chinatown* satirizes the Shanghai gestures of its classical noir predecessors, as the film’s heavy use of ethnic jokes are finally less about the western detective’s personal trauma than they are about the film’s own relation to specters of internal ethnic difference and its relationship to the history of Hollywood’s representation of alterity. Similarly, King argues that *Blade Runner* associates the otherness of replicants with simulation and virtuality and reveals the western public’s anxieties about technological reproduction associated with the East. According to King, both these films express orientalism, signification and indeterminacy through the generic framework provided by the conventions of the neo-noir.

Chapter four studies four films from outside of Hollywood: documentary *Chung Kuo: China* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972), the experimental *Adynata* (Leslie Thornton, 1983), essay film *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (Wim Wenders, 1989), and *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1989), all of which are seen by King as models of cross-cultural exchange that pose alternative to the paranoid logic of the Shanghai gesture in the Hollywood cinema. As King argues, each of these four films explicitly depicts the hybridity of East Asia and actively works to deconstruct the binary opposition between East and West. Crucially, King does not presume that these non-Hollywood films uncover an authentic

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essence. Instead, she argues that these films help to define racial identity as a performative act and reimagine the relationship between East and West as “a layered series of enfolded exchanges” (16).

The final chapter of the book analyses two contemporary films, *Exquisite Pain* (Sophie Calle, 2003) and *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003). Since both of these two films tell a story of young western women abroad in Tokyo for the first time and portray the coping strategies that a western girl adopts in the face of a traumatic encounter with otherness, King names the chapter ‘The Lost Girls’. It considers the question of whether the notion of cosmopolitanism can provide a solution to the problem of orientalism. Adopting the idea of reciprocity in translation, King concludes that neither cosmopolitanism nor the notion of authentic Asian subjectivity provides a sustainable alternative. Rather, she claims that the work of challenging orientalism must happen through continued and endless processes of translation and de-translation of the psychical enigmas of alterity, given that there is no original that can ever successfully be recovered. In accordance, King argues that both *Lost in Translation* and *Exquisite Pain* end up containing the Orient by representing it as “a carnivalesque space where a Westerner may get lost, but without being significantly changed or unmoored by that experience” (167). Seeing as the Asian image has been presented as internal alterity, this final chapter, then, is ultimately an attempt to understanding the western mass media’s depiction of self.

King’s *Lost in Translation* has filled a number of research gaps in current studies of racial representation of East Asia. Firstly, it successfully applies the psychoanalytic approach to the study of racial representation. Through her eloquent argument, King demonstrates that psychoanalytic theory has not only been a popular methodology in gender and sexuality studies, but also provides a useful tool for questioning the cinematic representation of racial difference and how it relates to the constitution of the self. Secondly, the book reminds us that the orientalist image is not just delivered through human actors or characters. Rather, *mise-en-scène*, costume, décor and style have been equally significant in the depiction of race for their capacity as enigmatic signifiers. Thirdly, *Lost in Translation* notes that the study of orientalist representation should avoid the

monolithic opposition of East and West. Indeed, the book very explicitly declines the idea that the racial depiction of Asia or Asian images in East Asian cinema is more accurate than, or as a corrective to, their counterparts delivered by the Western cinema. The most powerful insight of King's analysis is that the imaginary East is not simply excluded as other by the Western psyche, but is instead inscribed within it. Although the films discussed in the book range widely from silent era Hollywood to the European and beyond, which as King herself admits may mean that contextual specificity is lost, the book would be a useful textbook for its theoretical and conceptual account of the representation of race.

Paul Bowman's *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy* studies Bruce Lee's popularity and impact in cinema as well as popular culture more broadly. Placing Lee's stardom within a range of philosophical debates, the book's general concern is to explore the articulation between the Lee's cinematic image and its contexts. As Bowman puts it, his focus is the "relations between representation and participation, between fantastic figures and substantive political and cultural consequences" (10). Indeed, *Theorizing Bruce Lee* extends current studies of Lee's stardom beyond the cinematic realm by questioning Lee's various identities as a martial artist, teacher and even philosopher.

The four chapters of the book are designed as discrete entities, with each chapter building on or moving away from the argument developed from the previous chapter. The book starts with Bowman's attempt to "de-stereotype" Lee. As Bowman claims, Lee is not only "trivial", but also exemplifies variously undesirable characteristics, such as "silly boy's razes, faddishness, escapism, nerdiness, fantasies of physical violence, representations reliant on ultimately racist stereotypes, the commodification of oriental alterity" (7). Arguing that there is a need to acknowledge the significance of stereotypes for their reflection of an inevitable aspect of culture, Bowman accordingly points out that the aforementioned stereotypical representations signified by Lee actually are something more serious and worthy of attention than they appear to be. He argues that Lee stands as a rich source of discursivity because he represents the site where discourses of race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, postcoloniality, economic and cultural globalization, philosophy and pedagogy are all interplayed (24).

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The rest of the book then tries to explore the reason why “trivial” Lee has become a popular icon. As Bowman notes, one of the popular discourses about Lee’s legacy is that the star’s screen action (that is, as a fighter), was deemed by many as “real” or at least “realistic” (67). In other words, the realistic choreography in Lee’s films is often seen as a reflection of the real ability of the man himself. Challenging this view, Bowman argues that Lee only offers audiences a fantasy of bodily spectacle through the media of film. According to Bowman’s argument, authenticity sits uneasily with representation, as all representations “*add* something, *emphasize* something, *omit* something, *alter* something” (70). Thus, Bowman proposes that Lee’s “avoidance of special effects and fondness for long shot/long take shooting” is only an *investment in* the desire for authenticity or realism.

For Bowman, Lee’s body, his screen fights and even his very place in martial arts culture are fundamentally fantastical. Furthermore, he argues, the limits and essence of martial arts are not well established, as myths, fictions, fantasies, and fabrications constantly blur the edges of the subject. Accordingly, the “presentation of Lee and his martial arts in his films is an urge for viewers to believe that the art of fighting, i.e. martial arts, ‘really’ is something more and deeper than just fighting” (43). Given the interdisciplinary, hybrid and multicultural nature of martial arts, Bowman argues that the significance of Lee’s place in the cultural discourses underpinning West-East encounters does simply identify with the ‘authenticity’ of Asian martial arts, but through all manner of fantasies of body, power, aesthetics, desire and others.

Regarding Lee as a cultural “event”, the book argues that the understanding of his popularity has to be placed within its historical context and simultaneously engages with the discussion of film, philosophy, fighting, popular culture, and issues in postcolonialism, Chinese diasporic consciousness and so on. The word “event” has at least two uses for Bowman here. Firstly, Lee is deemed by Bowman as one event or moment in a larger history of the Western interest in oriental martial arts. In other words, Bowman argues that Lee should not be taken to be simply the epitome of the Western interest in oriental martial arts. A historical specification, he says, should be taken into account when we are discussing Lee’s place in the history of martial arts in the West. Secondly,

Bowman points out that the cultural event of the star's emergence is defined by various, composite discourses structured by the figure of Lee, and urges us to see Lee's image as multiple and dynamic.

Another important argument developed throughout the book is for the performative nature of Lee's image as a martial artist. According to Bowman, it is through this performativeness that Lee has become the vehicle for fantasy in Western popular culture. As Bowman argues, whilst martial arts have been often associated with the ancient, mystical and mysterious in the West, Lee's hybrid system *Jeet Kune Do* (JKD) promotes the fantasy of a "rational, efficient, interdisciplinary martial 'science'", with his films serving as "demystification" (90). However, what Lee's films and JKD offers to the Western public, according to Bowman, is itself fantasies of kung fu, even though it appears to be more real than other schools of martial arts. Moreover, Bowman notes that Lee rarely displays his actual abilities fully in any recognized context, leading to the sense that Lee is only *shown* to be a fighter (130). What is important in Bowman's observation is that Lee's reluctance to *reveal* himself allows the star to transform fighting into the *theory* of fighting, through which martial arts is articulated philosophically as well as bodily.

The book engages closely with a wide range of philosophical debates. However, some of the book's arguments are incoherent, inconsistent or contradict each other, which sometimes makes it difficult to follow the overarching ideas. For instance, the book regularly tries to make the point that Lee was trivial, lacking originality, and only ever participated in capitalist commodification, Western orientalism and patriarchy. Yet, at other points, the book notes that Lee's influences and significance in cinema and popular culture is evidence of the star's intention and effort to free himself and his martial arts from established institutions and from the Westernised multiculturalism inserted in Lee's star image.

Two reasons could be identified to explain the incoherence. Firstly, the book lacks a consistent theoretical framework. As Bowman himself notes, the book articulates a range of debate from film, cultural, identity, postcolonial and political studies. Indeed, the intertextual analysis could potentially have played a key role in the book's development of arguments. Yet Bowman fails to develop

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the interconnections beyond mentioned the interdisciplinary nature of his approach. As a result, the structure of the book is slightly disjointed. Secondly, the book suffers from unclear methodology by mixing the study object and research approach. At certain points, Bowman seems to be using Lee's star image to study the popularity of martial arts in the West, while in other sections, Lee's stardom is analyzed by looking at the philosophy of his martial arts. While in the former case the construction of Lee's star image serves as an analytic focus in a case study of martial arts, in the latter it is itself the sole object of study. It is not entirely clear, then, what is the key concern of the book: Lee as a film star or martial arts as a cultural-philosophical phenomenon. Although Lee's image and the philosophy of martial arts are closely interrelated, a clarification of this relationship would have helped the book to avoid incoherence. Nonetheless, the book may be used as a provocative supplementary text for anyone who is interested in Lee and Asian martial arts.