

# Book Reviews – February 2013

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***The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film, Vols. 1-4***  
**Edited by Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann and Art Simon**

Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 9781405179843. pp. 2456. £450 (hbk)

**A Review by Paul Elliott, University of Worcester.**

There are books and there are publishing events. *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* is firmly in the latter of these two categories. Consisting of four volumes and 90 essays from some of the leading scholars in their field, it traces the development of American film from Edwin S. Porter to post-9/11 cinema. As the editors state in the preface to volume one, it is however more than a mere collection of essays; it attempts to form a narrative for American cinema that takes in specific textual and socio-historical events and places canonical theories such as the star system and genre alongside more recent frameworks like intermediation and identity politics. The effect is by turns impressive and, perhaps inevitably, occasionally disappointing.

The readership of these volumes is likely to be as wide as the scope of the essays themselves. Although varied in tone and focus, *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* is based very much in an Anglo-American film studies methodology that privileges the interrogation of representation and film history over film as a philosophy or ontology. It is perhaps an oversight not to include substantial considerations of how American cinema has been exported beyond its own boundaries or how American film has informed and invigorated non-American criticism. Some consideration of the impact of American film around the world would surely have consolidated the collection's global concerns and, presumably, expanded the potential readership.

The production of all four books is solid and functionally well thought out. The hardbound volumes are crisply printed and there are numerous (although surprisingly low resolution) stills to accompany some of the essays. The paratextual elements are clear and helpful as might be expected in a work that is meant as both a history and a reference book. Accordingly, the essays are presented chronologically rather than thematically. Each volume is about 600 pages and contains around 23 essays, headed by a volume-specific contents page as well as the full listings of the collection, allowing the reader to situate

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each essay within the context of the larger historical framework of American cinema. Again, this presumably reflects the editors' desire to provide a developmental narrative to the collection as a whole.

The collection situates itself somewhere between the historical and the theoretical literature. This means that many of the essays touch on a range of aspects of film theory and history that distract from the specific context of the film or period in hand. This makes for somewhat confusing reading if one is looking for a straightforward evolutionary history of the form. Statements on individual performers, for example, are flanked by considerations of social history and/or genre studies. As with other large anthologies, a thematic contents page might well have gone some way to smoothing out this situation and providing the reader with a more "three dimensional" resource. However, the absence of this does not detract hugely from the overall usefulness of the books.

As might be expected, the essays vary in scope and intention ranging from Susan Jeffords' piece on Reagan-era politics to James Naremore's consideration of Orson Welles and film style. The author list, as can be seen in these two examples, is as impressive as the product itself, including scholars such as Richard Maltby, William Rothman, Kirsten Moana Thompson and Thomas Schatz. There is no doubt, therefore, that this will be a foundational text for scholars of American film and that it will provide a valuable resource for anyone beginning their study of Hollywood, especially in training for careers within the industry. While the writing is academic it is very rarely obfuscatory and there are a number of close readings that ensure that the larger theoretical and philosophical points are rooted within the textual.

The first volume, *Origins to 1928*, contains essays on the early peep shows and nickelodeons through to the coming of sound. Special mentions should be made of Shelley Stamp's excellent entry on 'Women and the Silent Screen' that aims to address some of the paucity of work done in this area, and Paula Massood's 'African Americans and Silent Films' that does the same. As with all of the volumes, there is a mixture of writing on both narrative and non-narrative film, with Andrew Kelly's essay 'In the Trenches, On the Screen' specifically addressing the depiction and effect of World War One on American moving

pictures, therefore reflecting in microcosm the intellectual mandate of the whole collection.

Volume one lays the groundwork for the rest of the collection in terms of the film cultures that it draws from. As might be expected, the dominant voice is that of Hollywood and many of the more canonical theories deriving from its study. The sense in these early chapters is of a nascent giant gradually being constructed by both filmmakers and audiences. What is also hinted at, although never overtly stated, are the subtle ways that Hollywood asserted its dominance in the post-war period and the effect that this had on global cinema production. These early essays present an interesting and important methodological mix of sociology, economics and film studies. The aesthetic developments of filmmakers such as Porter or Griffith are always contextualised (by the collection, if not by individual essays) with the naked economics of Hollywood filmmaking. This is not a new or innovative approach but is one that always works well with considerations of early Hollywood, as the money men and the artists jostle for primacy in the formative narrative of film history.

What does not come across, however, is the cultural and textual force of Hollywood – how it swept other voices aside on a tidal wave of cinematic production, sometimes through sheer weight of numbers and quality but just as often through aggressive cultural and socio-political ideology. There are considerations of other American cinema cultures but the fraught and complex relationship between these and mainstream Hollywood is never fully explored. The much vaunted Hollywood mode of narration and production emerges in this period but the extent to which it soon became the hegemonic norm is left largely uncriticised.

Volume two takes us from 1929 to 1945 and so traverses what is usually thought of as the Golden Age of Hollywood. There are familiar names studied here – Frank Capra, Orson Welles, Howard Hawks and the screwball comedy. There are however less canonical areas covered such as avant-garde cinema, documentary and animation. These are welcome additions to what is, after all, a collection on American, rather than Hollywood, cinema. In itself, this is an important distinction and the editors perform a solid job of asserting the role of the breadth of American film without eliding the importance of its major

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industrial centre. Coverage of this period especially could easily have been dominated entirely by work on Hollywood. The volume ends with Roy Grundmann's insightful essay on the redefinition of gender roles at the end of the Second World War. Again this chapter is a testimony to the editors' mandate of not only providing a broad range of subject areas but, a good variety of theoretical approaches.

Volume three has, perhaps, the most difficult task. Huge changes took place in American film during 1945 to 1975 both in terms of aesthetics and in terms of production; therefore this was always going to be the most challenging volume to cohere into a stable and insightful history. However, the editors have provided a reasonable narrative that begins with considerations of the Actors Studio and ends with New Hollywood and Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975). Despite the dynamism of the period, one can detect a distinct socio-historical narrative being created here, as Hollywood is depicted as mirroring the massive demographic and cultural changes in post-1950s America. The last chapter of the third volume also introduces the subject of American Film Criticism with David Sterritt's essay of the same name. Film criticism culture provides only a background voice to previous volumes but here it takes centre stage as the giants of 1960s and 70s film criticism like Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael are placed in context with the changes and development in production. The reciprocity between filmmaking and film criticism (especially in the late 1960s and 70s) is neatly explored in what is an illuminating and much needed chapter.

The last volume in the series takes us from 1976 to the present day and thus incorporates the rise of the blockbuster in the 1980s, the evolution of Indycinema and the impact of 9/11. Again, the field is wide and diverse but the editors offer us a fairly well rounded view. Essays of note here include Adam Lowenstein's piece on the horror film and Keith Harris's on black crossover films. Again, the figure of Hollywood looms large in the background of these considerations of minor American cinemas, but a critical consideration of its culpability in the homogenisation of the late twentieth-century cultural landscape is largely missing.

As can be sensed from this brief overview, the scope of *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* is necessarily broad. It is arguable, though, that it is

too broad. Essays on film criticism and the relationship between the movies and television add to the overall inclusive nature of the collection – and its meandering nature can be part of its value – but they also have a tendency to dilute the major historical thrust, in which the overall structure seems so invested. There is, of course, no shortage of writers on American cinema and one of the interesting aspects of this collection is the names that are omitted. There are no entries, for example, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger or Kirstin Thompson (not to be confused with Kirsten Moana Thompson who *does* make a contribution). Nor are several British authors such as Warren Buckland (and his work on Spielberg) or Richard Dyer represented, much less important names like Laura Mulvey or Peter Wollen. Omissions like these are significant because they underline and implicitly consolidate the collection's intention to foreground the socio-historical aspects of film rather than the formal or the theoretical.

At the same time, however, it manages to neglect important industrial concerns. Indeed, one of the major criticisms of this collection (and others like it) might be that it elides much of the output of American popular cinema in favour of more critically engaged and engaging texts. American mainstream film has always relied on an endless stream of sequels and potboilers to keep studios in business and audiences eager for the next big trend. More than any other contemporary form, cinema creates its share of what Pauline Kael would have no doubt termed "trash" as opposed to art. This "low" strata of cinematic production is very rarely mentioned in the history books and when they are it is only in terms of kitsch or postmodern reinvention. In the context of the (ultimately crucial) balance sheet of the major studios, bankable products like *Home Alone 2* (Chris Columbus, 1992) or *Freddy vs Jason* (Ronny Yu, 2003) are just as important as *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) or *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), and yet very rarely does this collection address this tension. Peter Wollen famously suggested that the real problem of film studies was not Eisenstein but Hollywood; like many collections, *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* fails to fully address this problem.

Any criticisms of this collection however need to put into the context of what the editors have achieved. The four volumes do go some considerable way to describing and tracing the expansive evolution of American film and, by

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extension, how it became the major cinema culture. The essays stand up on their own and could conceivably be published separately, however together they form what is a very impressive package and one that will be difficult to surpass. It is hard to imagine a project such as this being attempted in the near future and so this is likely to function as a key introductory resource some time to come. Both in terms of its scope and in terms of the expertise that has gone to making it, *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* is an almost unique publishing event. The collection not only stands as a history of cinema but also as a time capsule for specific threads of contemporary film theory, capturing the epistemological zeitgeist as well as the cultural.

As can be gathered by the shared ISBN, it is unlikely that Wiley Blackwell will offer this as anything other than a collection of four volumes, a fact that limits it in terms of the general marketplace; it is likely that it will only find a home in libraries and university collections. But *The Wiley Blackwell History of American Film* is more than a reference book that can be dipped into; it is an attempt to map one of the most powerful forces in cultural history – the American cinematic imagination – and to trace its emergence and also its dominance. The editors should be congratulated for collating and organising this mammoth task and Wiley Blackwell should be commended for the quality with which they produced it.



## ***Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity***

**By Hamilton Carroll**

Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780822349488. 12 Illustrations, ix+219 pp. £14.99 (pbk).

## ***Angel***

**By Stacey Abbott**

Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780814333198. 14 Illustrations, x+121 pp. £13.50 (pbk).

### **A Review by Ryan Taylor, University of Portsmouth.**

The two books under review here share a common interest in the formations of white masculinity. Although different in subject, approach and range, both work to question the idea that the entertainment media create a monolithic white male identity. They do so in very different ways and, to an extent, with different levels of success. For example, Hamilton Carroll's *Affirmative Reaction* productively outlines the conservative political context in which the media product is produced, whereas Stacey Abbott's *Angel* advocates a more textual and institutional framework.

In 1997, Richard Dyer's *White* (Routledge, 1997) postulated that white is no colour because it is all colours fused together and, as such, white people are both particular and nothing in particular. Some fourteen years later, *Affirmative Reaction* provides a contemporary illumination of the ways in which white masculinity has undergone such particularisation. Carroll seeks to expose the strategies deployed by white masculinity in order to position itself as a marginalised identity and renounce its normalcy. In doing so, it aims to reclaim the racial/gender hegemony which had been previously undermined by post-civil rights identity politics. Carroll asserts that, as it can no longer "rely on its status as unremarkable or normative, white masculinity attempts to manage the stakes of its own fragmentation by co-opting the forms of representational meaning secured by women, gays, and people of color over the preceding decades" (7).

The book consists of six chapters analysing various American cultural artefacts produced within a post-9/11 environment. The introduction positions Carroll's

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hypothesis within the broader context of whiteness studies and critical race theory in general, which enables the subsequent three sections (each comprising of two chapters) to detail the ways in which white masculinity has re-appropriated the particularity of a number of identity locations: homosexuality, white trailer trash, the blue-collar labourer, Irish paternalism and domestic affectivity.

Section one explores white masculinity and the War on Terror and opens with perhaps the richest chapter, which investigates *24* (2001-2010), its central protagonist, sovereignty, citizenship and the construction of white male heroism. By looking at *24*'s narrative, aesthetic and structural devices, the chapter demonstrates the programme's adherence to and circumvention of legalities within a post-9/11 reactionary culture and argues that the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers enabled a resuscitation of traditional models of masculinity which had been previously destabilised. Carroll's description of the restoration of previous formations of a white male identity continues in chapter two, which looks at the ways in which fictional superheroes have been supplanted by the veneration of the "everyday hero" (emergency service workers and, especially, firemen). Here, following 9/11, "the everyday hero produces a relationship between gender and race that cites a white ethnic identity as the unambiguously proper citizen" (59).

Section two explores white masculinity within a post-industrial economy and commences with an exploration of *American Chopper* (2003-2010), a programme which, Carroll says, situates the working-class white male as a nostalgic and celebratory figure within an environment of depleting labour opportunities. This is followed by chapter four's discussion of Eminem's white trash identity, which, Carroll maintains, is mobilised to allow whiteness to be recast as a marginalised identity; Eminem "attains the privileges of being white by denying that he is" (104).

The final section investigates white masculinity within melodrama. The opening chapter of this section continues the exploration of white trash identity politics through an examination of *Million Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2004), which, in Carroll's analysis, exchanges the white trash particularity for that of white Irish. This enables both a celebration of whiteness by transforming its symbolic power

into a minoritised identity and a recuperation of white paternal authority. This latter theme, initially established in chapter one, is elucidated in chapter six which looks at *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000) and the re-enfranchisement of normative, heterosexual fatherhood. Here, through the deployment of emotional expression, the white patriarch turns to the domestic sphere to re-inaugurate his authority. Subsequently, Carroll maintains, *Traffic* is a precursor to a small cycle of films, including *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004), *Good Night, and Good Luck* (George Clooney, 2005) and *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), which actually capitulate to conservative ideologies that contradict the films' liberal agendas and criticisms of the neoconservative Bush administration.

*Affirmative Reaction* is comprehensive and detailed and the segregation of each section allows individual thematic concerns to be kept distinct from but informed by those already covered. However, this book fails to present anything particularly original for the scholar of masculinity or whiteness. For example, Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed about America* (Metropolitan Books, 2007) discusses very similar subject matter from a feminist perspective; especially firemen, superheroes, the construction of male heroism and the return to traditional models of masculine action following 9/11. Similarly Carroll echoes the distinction that Richard Dyer had previously highlighted between two forms of whiteness within media representation – ordinary whiteness and extreme whiteness – which allows whites to occupy two cultural positions – the unmarked and the exceptional (or the traditional hegemonic and the particularised). Indeed, Dyer's own discussion owes a debt to R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* (Polity Press, 1995) which outlined the multiplicity of masculine identities. Carroll struggles, then, to mark his work out from others who have already demonstrated the protean nature of white masculinity (or what Carroll calls its "lability") as well as the importance of focusing not just on monolithic forms (essentialism) but also competing and myriad formations of gender. With this in mind, it is interesting that Carroll argues that 9/11 enabled a resuscitation of pre-existing ideological paradigms of white masculinity but, elsewhere, he outlines the ways in which whiteness casts itself as minoritised. Both of these strategies, he argues, "recuperates hegemony by articulating it to difference" (8). But this potentially challenging hypothesis is strained by the fact

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that, rather than discussing minority and majority explicitly, Carroll frequently conflates the two. This apparent paradox could have been better explained and it would be preferable to see Carroll discuss the relationship between hegemonic and marginalised forms in greater detail.

Additionally, and regrettably, a number of chapters sporadically minimise the central thematic concern (that of the discourses to which white men have turned to reclaim privilege) in favour of other conceptualisations; notable examples are chapter three's focus on generational conflict and issues of labour, or chapter six's discussion of the conflation of actor with character and the importance of such practices in production and marketing contexts. Readers may also find the selective choice of media products (and the criteria used in that selection) problematic as this is not satisfactorily justified.

Lastly, *Affirmative Reaction* charts the responses of white masculinity but little attention is paid to the changes to which it is responding, or even the responses of other ethnicities in similar circumstances. For example, Carroll argues that disenfranchisement following redundancy in the manufacturing sector enables *American Chopper* to valorise previous models of masculine action. However, little mention is made of how such circumstances affect different ethnicities. Similarly, this book operates within the paradigmatic conventions of whiteness studies, a discipline which seeks to interrogate whiteness in order to dislodge its assumed centrality within social, cultural and political discourses. However, *Affirmative Reaction* demonstrates the ways in which whites attempt to reclaim privilege but does not question the problematic ramifications of such reclamation. This is not to say that Carroll means to imply that this reclamation concerns *rightful* or *natural* privilege and authority, but only that some wider explication of its social and cultural effects would have been beneficial. That said, given the enormous complexity of critical race theory, it may be unfair to expect alternative ethnicities to be juxtaposed with whites. However, further work would certainly benefit from comparing Eminem's substitution of race for class to the strategies deployed by his black contemporaries, for example. Or indeed how affective displays of emotion are utilised in media representations of Asian or Latino fathers in their attempts to reassert patriarchal authority.

These misgivings aside, *Affirmative Reaction* is reasonably accessible and encompasses a diversity of media (film, television, comic books). Furthermore, Carroll successfully draws together several disparate elements, which are then applied to a range of content. In doing so, this book provides an engaging analysis of media, political philosophy, whiteness, masculine agency and the importance of identity politics. If only through the very combination of masculinity, whiteness, marginalised identities and post-9/11 political rhetoric, Carroll generates some fresh cultural historical insight – albeit into well-trodden theoretical avenues. Prospective readers should be aware, though, that Carroll's work is indeed presented as theoretical from the outset and, at times, his theorisations and terminology may be a little dense to suit a casual interest. As such, this book will be of use fairly exclusively to those firmly within the fields of whiteness and masculinity studies.

While Abbott's *Angel* touches on a similar paradigmatic undercurrent of protean white male identities, interestingly, her work takes a broader approach precisely by analysing several illustrative episodes of just one TV programme. Part of Wayne State University Press's Milestone TV Series, a succession of short monographs that provides a condensed analysis of popular television shows, this informed publication analyses *Angel* (1999-2004) within the contexts of television history, production processes and genre categorisation. By conflating numerous elements of media studies, Abbott ultimately attempts to show how *Angel* functions as a piece of genre television that nevertheless experiments with televisual form, both narratively and aesthetically.

The introduction provides a condensed but informative history of the show and establishes a context for the chapters that follow. Chapter one demonstrates how, through theme, characterisation and numerous narrative devices, the spin-off show distinguished itself from its parent programme, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Moreover, through a simplified exploration of the programme's production company Mutant Enemy, this chapter also argues for the collaborative nature of American broadcast television and challenges frameworks of the singular auteurist theory, into which studies of television texts (especially those with cult status like *Buffy*) can so often fall. Chapter two builds upon this production/institutional basis and demonstrates how *Angel*

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experiments with hybridisation through the amalgamation of structural and generic conventions. For example, Abbott argues that the use of a noir aesthetic reflects the moral ambiguity which engulfs both the programme and its eponymous hero but, she continues, the show is not "singularly defined by its film noir visual style" (30). Rather, distinct and divergent generic references are utilised to illuminate narrative, character and plot. Ultimately, this chapter concludes, *Angel* exemplifies the hybridity of TV genre. But, regretfully, it does not elaborate on the connected importance of this generic duplicity to the show's construction of masculinity. Despite the odd intriguing indication of this link between formal conventions and wider political-social meaning, a more detailed exploration would have been much more satisfying.

Issues of hybridity are continued in chapter three, which considers the generic conventions of television horror and "the indeterminacy and liminality of the human body" (48). Using such a foundation, Abbott suggests that horror TV reiterates the central thematic preoccupations of cinematic horror (those of boundary transgression and the destruction of the body through the rupturing of its borders). Boundary transgression is further explored in chapter four, which opens with a fleeting history of male homosocial relationships on television before transposing the idea of boundary transgression to gender. Here Abbott details how, at the show's inception, the eponymous character is a cliché of white masculinity (isolated and emotionally inexpressive) but, through male homosocial relationships, he evolves and enables a reconsideration of heroism and masculinity. Again, regretfully, this is not developed further, hindered perhaps simply by the book's functional shortness.

It concludes with one of the more interesting chapters and expands upon previous concepts of boundary transgression. This time Abbott addresses *Angel*'s contraventions of stylistic, narrative, aesthetic and generic boundaries through a close textual analysis of three illustrative episodes. The first ('Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?', season two, episode two) demonstrates the programme's experimentation with time, space and conventions of film noir. The second episode analysed ('Spin the Bottle', 4.6) is shown to exercise the breaching of diegesis in order to draw attention to its own artificiality. Finally, 'Smile Time' (5.4) is shown to exemplify the show's subversion of generic forms while

concurrently satirising the undermining of American televisual creativity by commerciality and its effect on representations of masculine heroism.

It must be said that this publication provides little discussion that cannot be found elsewhere (for instance, in Abbott's own *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-Off with a Soul*, I.B. Tauris, 2005). However, by promoting textual/thematic exploration over theorisation, this book is able to extrapolate points about aesthetics and style in an accessible form. Also, by merging explication with critical analysis, Abbott amalgamates numerous paradigmatic frameworks, spanning textual, institutional, production and broadcast studies within her limited space. Disappointingly, though, that brevity inevitably means that some themes are under-explored; most notably, the show's negotiation of masculinity-in-crisis, which is touched upon sporadically. That said, this small publication does feel peculiarly inclusive and wide-ranging due to the economic use of narrative and character analysis to support the (limited) claims being made. Nonetheless, because this book refrains from the application of critical theory in favour of an overview (along with its celebratory undertones), it will primarily interest undergraduate students and fans of the programme with academics feeling somewhat dissatisfied.

A potentially rewarding study would arise from combining elements of both these books – applying Carroll's concept of particularisation to the ways in which white masculinity is constructed within the protean boundaries of TV horror is, indeed, a fascinating prospect. Their differences aside, both publications work to expand conceptualisations of identity, particularity and hybridisation and, importantly, such books will enable the reader to re-conceptualise frameworks of gender and ethnicity within America's post-9/11 culture of moral ambiguity and conservative political rhetoric. As such, both *Affirmative Reaction* and *Angel* provide an illustrative resource for those interested in media and race/gender theory. Most importantly, both publications attest clearly to the need to incisively and comprehensively scrutinise media constructions of white male identities, suggesting that fertile ground is yet to be unearthed.





***The Persistence of Hollywood*****By Thomas Elsaesser**

New York and London: Routledge, 2012. ISBN 9780415968140. viii + 395 pp. £24.99 (pbk).

***Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-Line*****Edited by Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham**

St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012. ISBN 9780956373076. viii + 233 pp. £19.99 (pbk).

***Travels of Bollywood Cinema: From Bombay to LA*****Edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Chua Beng Huat**

New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN 9780198075981. xxxi + 356 pp. £30.00 (hbk).

**A Review by Akshaya Kumar, University of Glasgow.**

The titles under review here, when put together, throw up a variety of questions about the tension in contemporary cinema between persistence and disruption – across industries, technologies of production, circulation and exhibition, and film as a cultural object. We struggle strenuously to make sense of the place of film in this ever-changing present context. But equally, the challenge lies in identifying the criteria by which we are to measure and track the claims of film's persistence. At a time when we have seen cinema converging with various on-line portals, we have also seen an unprecedented rise in Hollywood's box office returns. Simultaneously, Bollywood's overseas presence has made new ground and its domestic market continues to be dominant – with the various ancillary industries providing an order to a business previously considered "unprofessional". Add to this the fact that festival circuits are also growing in number and size – and across platforms – and that there is more buzz on the world cinema scene than ever before. Add also that digital technology has enabled, in the last decade, the emergence of many vernacular "cottage" industries, circulating their films either on low-cost, unsecured VCDs or through decrepit theatres, and attending to a huge chunk of the "masses". If we try to

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put all of these together, it gets increasingly difficult to define that with which we are faced in “cinema”. The problem is that we may be stuck on making claims about a consistent filmic object while it has long since split into many fragments. With these three books two major aspects of “cinema” in the current context emerge: we might identify one as the persistent of *entertainment* – wrapped up as it is with passive consumption – while another could very well be defined as *content* – data that can be exchanged across devices and technologies by a more activated audience, and of which filmic data is only one component.

Cinema has traditionally braved its sociality and resisted the economic impetus to overwhelm its integrity; it has restored itself against competing cultural forms and technologies, auteurist claims, even unpleasurable spectatorship. But it has mostly thrived on a certain kind of isolation – technological, architectural and audiovisual – thus rising above its nearest competition. With the intervention of the internet, cinema’s capacity to isolate itself has suffered an unprecedented setback. In this light, the three books under review raise important questions about the (im)possibility of cinema’s persistence: how to reconcile increasingly “individuated” forms of distribution with the capacity of cinema to address the collective; and how to resolve the growing inadequacy of economic criteria as a measuring yardstick for the popularity of cinema.

The first can also be posed as an opposition between surrender or retention of controls within what Elsaesser calls “the viewing situation” (96-104). If cinema traditionally addressed a collective, does an individual who holds the potential to tailor his very film-watching experience not threaten cinema itself? Just because the internet has brought about a regime of user-generated feedback that operates at an unprecedented speed and potentially grants access to more film-related information than has ever been possible, what assures us that it is *cinema* which has moved online? If, as Elsaesser brilliantly points out, a certain kind of nostalgic deferral (that is, “disappointment redeem[ing] memory at the expense of the present”) was integral to the older cinephilia (66-67), perhaps the digital disruption has also disallowed any possibility of deferral by flattening out temporal lag by its very speed. The essays in *Digital Disruption* elaborate upon a variety of interesting dynamics and shifting registers across this new

industrial lifecycle of digital filmic content. But they fail to establish the terms by which we are to persist with the concept of cinema even as we move beyond the “regular bandwidth of filmic awareness” (181). That is, they fail to properly identify the position – let alone authority – of *cinema* in relation to *content* in the digital age, and miss an opportunity to probe whether the demolition of older constraints prepares a platform stable enough to host the cinematic encounter.

Even more importantly, in spite of Elsaesser’s brilliant opening – comprising of a rich history of film studies as a discipline, its major dependencies and anchors, and various registers of cinephilia – the somewhat desperate defence of Hollywood in his conclusion leans too heavily on economic indicators as legitimate criteria. The trouble is, economic conditions indeed continue to shape cinema but we do not yet know when to declare that cinema has gone *out of* shape to the extent that we could no longer call it cinema. On the contrary, as with both Elsaesser and Jordanova/Cunningham, scholars continue to redefine a certain outstanding value of the cinematic enterprise in order for it to go on being championed. A pertinent problem that finds a perfect test case in the study of that enterprise named Bollywood, a complicated term indicating a transnational hybridity that at once relies on and claims distinction from the persistence of Hollywood.

*Travels of Bollywood Cinema* brings together several essays about (non-Indian) south Asian cinema industries, some about their influence within Bollywood, and some about Bollywood’s own diasporic travels. The book contains five parts: ‘Modernity, Globalization, Globality’, ‘Love Across the Border’, ‘The Other Film Industry’, ‘Village in the City’ and ‘The Travels of Bollywood Cinema’. Together these contain eighteen chapters by scholars from a range of disciplines including anthropologists and historians. Work is offered on cross-border flows on the west as well as east of India, regional film industries such as Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and Bhojpuri, and the transnational moves of the Bombay-based industry. The title is a product of a time when much attention has been offered to the global popularity of Indian cinema, whether from the 1950s ‘Golden Age’ or post-liberalisation Bollywood since the mid-1990s. Much of the book, however, only recycles existing scholarship on Indian cinemas and makes sketchy additions to it. The introduction struggles to open up any challenging

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questions, and there is no conclusion to synergize what we might take away from the collection as a whole. One of the more insightful chapters, 'Bollywood, Postcolonial Transformation, and Modernity' by Bill Ashcroft, posits an interesting duality in Bollywood between persistence and subordination. Having helpfully reminded us that, "[i]f we look at the breadth of distribution and the cultural impact of Indian film, we still have nothing like the impact of Hollywood" (3), he nevertheless asserts that, "because of its distribution, its wide audience, its cultural integrity, its vibrant, colourful, and completely Indian character Bollywood shows that the transformation of the technology of film has not led to a transformed version of Hollywood, but to a total, internally consistent entertainment form" (16). Similarly reflecting upon the different natures of the two industries, Makarand Paranjape's chapter 'Cultural Flows Travelling Shows: Bombay Talkies, Global Times', on the other hand, highlights the cultural flows *across* them: "Hollywood [...] has been outsourcing to Bollywood its back office and technical work, such as dubbing, editing, digital enhancement, and other value-addition works are possible because of the relatively inexpensive, technically and artistically skilled labour pool in India" (24). He also powerfully critiques the unequal topography of human resources in film production; while foreign technicians continue to work without work permits in India, Indian technicians were often denied guild membership abroad (27).

The finest chapter in the book is by Ishtiaq Ahmed who sketches the historical trajectory connecting Lahore's film industry with that of Bombay and illustrates the impact of partition in the flight of "artists, technicians, producers, and indeed capital" that crippled the Lahore industry but were to flourish in Bombay for many years (64). The worst hit was Punjabi language cinema, eclipsed on one side by a much bigger industry, and on the other by religious ideology (65-66). Ahmed shows how the later years in Pakistan were marked by an underground love for what was to later become Bollywood, as well as the censorious response of the Pakistani state. By highlighting the later antipathetic tendencies of the two cinemas towards each other, Ahmed hints usefully at a film history that could have been. Also notable is Haseenah Ebrahim's chapter on the journey of Bollywood in South Africa, illustrating how "the entertainment and publication industries have increasingly exploited the entire 'Bollywood phenomenon', frequently using the term 'Bollywood' to label anything Indian and glamorous,

colourful, or extravagant" (327). To a large extent, Ebrahim's chapter shows how the film itself has been marginalised, as Bollywood becomes "just one of the many cultural references" which support young South Africans' perception of themselves as "cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and media-savvy" (336).

While such linkages between Bollywood and its transnational appeal demand more serious analysis beyond its consumerist self-fashioning, the re-fashioning of cinema at large through its digital distribution is what the next book offers. Divided into two segments, *Digital Disruption* firstly deals with the question of digital innovations in film distribution and consumption, and, secondly, the many entrepreneurial models proliferating in cinema online. There are five essays in each section which try to capture the digital wave, new media, the convergence of consumption and production, summarising in the process an enormous range of scholarly writing on the topics and arguing that the digital disruption is democratic because it dismantles the "tyranny of geography" (23). The new media user – a lot younger and technologically motivated – demands videos online, gives prompt feedback, writes and reads multiple reviews, and is only constrained by the limits of that very internet technology. Unfortunately important questions like the material nature of online spectatorship and the extent to which the over-abundance of filmic content itself destroys the cinematic encounter based on a tradition of scarcity value do not find sustained attention in the book. In particular, the authors within the section entitled 'Cinema Moves On-line' fail to convince on most accounts. Foremost among them is the doubt about whether, like major corporations who eventually realised they needed to make films available cheaply on the web because the web was making them available regardless, Jordanova and Cunningham are following suit by making a desperate virtue out of necessity, speaking in tandem with and through digital entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, the book ably illustrates how the advent of the digital has radically altered the way to do business with films, even if the place of cinema in it remains uncertain. The title remains a vital contribution to scholarship about the eroding "economic foundations of the existing film industry", attempts to harness a "demand-driven globalised economy", and the relocation of the site of scarcity (from producer to consumer) using a "vast, digitised back catalogue"

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(68). Michael Gubbins' excellent chapter looks towards a "hybrid, 'transmedia' art form", and mentions a significant positive side of the online shift: the "potential to increase the reach of non-Hollywood film, which has always been held back by the economic viability of producing and transporting large numbers of prints" (69). Incidentally, this is an allegation also acknowledged by Elsaesser as that of cultural imperialism, prompting his argument that the web makes local/regional industries more competitive and forces Hollywood to attend to its foreign audiences (325-327). Gubbins similarly notes how "the digital age is pushing profit away from producers and towards platforms and hardware providers" (87) and that the internet's "contribution so far has been more in creating new means to distribute and talk about content than in creating influential works" (92). He also underlines the doubts expressed above: "Film is not heading on a clear path of progress to a single destination; the digital shift described here is not simply a set of evolutionary changes that the cinematic product is undergoing but, rather, represents a new environment in which film is going to have to find its place" (96).

Another important essay, 'On-line Film Distribution: Its History and Global Complexion' by Stuart Cunningham and Jon Silver, showcases a variety of European business innovators, who have built localised film distribution networks using online means within their regional contexts (40-43). An interesting passage looks at how, in China, online screen culture "has provided an unprecedented platform for personal expression and the flowering of vernacular creativity". It is an especially useful addition to the book given its awareness that "the really innovative thinking in China seems to be occurring in television rather the film" (45). The most interesting part of the essay though is the Amazon case study, in which they suggest that Amazon can now play at "both ends of the market": at the production end through low cost independent productions, and at the distribution end by retailing Hollywood and theatrically released independent films (58).

If, on one hand, the essays in the book speak of a vast range of possibilities to exchange information and network production-distribution-exhibition rights through the web, on the other hand they also suggest that there is an ongoing battle between Hollywood and non-Hollywood models, which has led to

innovation of a regional instead of global variety. Hollywood as an industry may be threatened by the digital cottage industries at present, but the unchecked mobility of cyberspace may eventually end up playing into the hands of global capital. That is why the digital disruptions described in this book need to be understood as localisations of the digital space that represents a potential barricade against Hollywood.

*The Persistence of Hollywood* is a collection of Elsaesser's reflections – old and new – upon Hollywood as a system, as an industry, as a hotbed of international talent, and as an entertainment complex in search of a universal film grammar. It is divided in five parts: 'Flashback: Of Objects of Love and Objects of Study', 'Genius of the System', 'Studio and Genre: *Auteurs Maudits*, Mavericks and Eminent Europeans', 'Genie out of the Bottle: The Return of the System as *Auteur?*' and 'The Persistence of Hollywood'. The collection suffers from indulgent chapter design, which convinces Elsaesser to keep several essays, such as the whole of the third part on genre, which do not fit so well within the thematic. Going by the quality of his insights, a tighter and more up-to-date collection would have been a far greater contribution. Having said that, the book is a worthwhile addition to the scholarship on the history of film studies and Hollywood historiography and it should be read widely by scholars as well as students. It arms us with several ways of looking back at cinema, and, crucially, is courageous enough to also set out the means by which we could critique a wide variety of its arguments. Elsaesser is at his best when reflecting upon Hollywood as a system – its economic, historical, political and aesthetic logics. He pushes us to engage with

the formal features as well as the historical dynamics that allow Hollywood to be in constant change and yet stay the same, to be the most adaptive *and* the most conservative, the most revolutionary *and* the most reactionary force in global culture: a perplexing and paradoxical anthropological phenomenon that will never have been studied enough. (7)

Elsaesser's own love for Hollywood seems to have strong auteurist underpinnings, which he often imposes upon post-production authorship, reasserting the creative autonomy of directors to rescue their signatures over the filmic product – found to be potentially shrinking under digital manipulations.

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In this light, his most significant contribution is thinking about the shifts in the trajectory of cinema which, he says, “is no longer a window onto the world, as it has tended to be in its first century; it now behaves more like a door or portal to other, parallel, totally impossible but also thoroughly familiar worlds” (81). The distinction he offers between cinema as product and as service is an important one that should allow us to conceptually grapple with many faces of cinema across the world:

Is this a service, allowing us to access through the mind and the senses, or is it a product, in the sense of creating a material-immaterial abode for restless spirits and homeless bodies? These worlds are self-enclosed and self-sufficient, yet by virtue of the universality of their visual language and narrative grammar, they are paradoxically open to all and accessible at all times. (81)

Even though very often he uses “Hollywood” and “American cinema” interchangeably, simplifying the global-local dynamics at the heart of Hollywood, he also adds profound insight into how those dynamics relate to the national community: “Hollywood has taught America the collective virtues of sublimation and deferral, of controlling the individual’s creative and destructive impulses – always in the name of community values, the nation’s collective interest, or of global survival” (93). The product/service distinction also addresses this gap between “Hollywood” and “American cinema” by splitting open the tension between an industrial-global enterprise and a national cinema culture that make a simultaneous claim to a cinematic locality. Throughout Elsaesser continues to pursue such cracks along which we can split Hollywood, which only had this reader wondering if, in fact, we could take what he hails as its openness (290-91) to be its emptiness, amplified along the same old myth-making model. We often wonder what is essentially American about American cinema; it is sad that Elsaesser is so caught up in his auteuristic clustering of films that he does not pursue any of the thematic myths that Hollywood has come to be associated with, nor, by the same token, does he account for that myth-making impulse as a potentially substantial *strength* of Hollywood.

Elsaesser manages to celebrate the persistence of the cinematic product through concepts like the “recursive memory” of social systems, “oscillation function” and



other feedback mechanisms, which help him to transcend the boundary between Hollywood as an industry and cinema as a cultural phenomenon (340). But this boundary, even if threatened by its frequent blurring within the industry, is held onto with immense affective investment, as the other two titles here inform us. Note, for example, *Travels of Bollywood Cinema's* chapter on Africa's romance with Bollywood for being *unlike* Hollywood (302-318), or the non-Hollywood-oriented models of digital entrepreneurship described in the essay by Cunningham and Silver in *Digital Disruption*. This dimension of the Hollywood equation – the persistence of resistance against its encroachment – could be far less isomorphic, but Elsaesser doesn't engage with the national policies, market initiatives, creative responses, or piracy circuits defending or promoting local contents across the world by such *other* means. Systems as large and powerful as Hollywood, and even Bollywood, grow by mere association because they wield power across the network of production, distribution and consumption. They persist even as they are transported or eroded from within; contrary to Elsaesser's belief, they become indifferent to feedback except when it presents itself as an opportunity to grow further. It hardly needs to be asserted that the persistence of Hollywood is tied to the persistence of capital and its mysterious ability to stay the same even as it changes. Seen from this perspective, Hollywood's persistence seems much less remarkable.

While, for themselves, *The Persistence of Hollywood* and *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line* are worthy contributions to the conceptualization of the contemporary moment in cinema, a tendency that is evident across all three of these titles is to side with the march of technological or economic capital. Overall, they celebrate the shifts already taking place "out there"; instead of alerting us to what may not be directly comprehensible, often they try to make a stronger case for the relatively obvious. While each can be appreciated as useful documentations of the present, they serve us very little beyond that. It must be suggested then, that even as these titles are read for what they offer, the readers must not surrender their capacity to wonder about – and present resistance to – the elementary appeal of the cinematic and the technological enterprise, and how they may be getting subsumed under discussions of flows, networks and *new* media. Even though there are exciting opportunities which

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have opened up because of these, the claims of democratisation remain suspect unless they are substantiated by a discussion of things like shadow economies and piracy, and the response meted out to them by global capital. These books are useful, then, at least in highlighting the need for attention to be turned to such aspects of cinema in the twenty-first century.

***Memento*****By Claire Molloy**

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780748637720. 133 pp. £14.99 (pbk).

***Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change*****By Andrew Nestingen**

Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008. ISBN 9788763507936. x+326 pp. £28.50 (pbk).

***Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*****By Colette Balmain**

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008. ISBN 9780748624751. xi+214 pp. £16.99 (pbk).

**A Review by Andrea Virginás, Sapientia University, Romania.**

While the formal concept of genre is not explicitly examined with any thoroughness in any of the books under review here, all three succeed in making (a specific) genre a working category in their wider analyses of social and cultural transformations and landscapes. While a straightforward interest in genre itself might not be satisfied, therefore, taken together the three works serve to present the intriguing fact that genres have not undergone any radical change in recent decades, despite the hybridization and complication of some categories, so that they are still found to be perseverant in terms of iconographic, narrative and ideological constituents. Moreover, they are each convincing in the methodological strategy of tracing the formations of genres across decades and cultures stands as an effective means by which to speak about broader context.

Two of the books in question belong to series, and that certainly influences their position. Claire Molloy's *Memento* is the fourth title of Edinburgh University Press's American Indies series, in the company of other monographs concerning films like *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003), *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002). These are movies that

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surfaced, by and large, from the buzz of Oscar nominations, yet despite acclaim from within its establishment, each presented some kind of distinction from mainstream Hollywood. In keeping with the series, then, Molloy's book sets out to document the process that led to the appearance (and integration) of an apparently avant-garde film within the mainstream. Indeed, this process, Molloy says, retroactively became an allegory for the trajectory of its creator's career (5-6).

Andrew Nestingen's *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia* belongs to the series *New Directions in Scandinavian Studies*, with other titles touching upon topics ranging from the history of Danish cookbooks to "small states in international relations". In this context, Nestingen's aim is twofold: firstly, to document the proliferation of the crime genre (in a position overlapping with melodrama and fantasy) in Scandinavian literature and cinema; and to do so by interpreting it as a sphere of contemporary popular culture that is found imagining publics on the backdrop of the erosion and transformation of the welfare state's solidarity.

Finally, Colette Balmain's *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* takes a similar perspective of a specific popular cultural form amidst social and cultural changes in a national context. One of the chief preoccupations of the book is linking the thematic and formal changes in the Japanese horror film through the second half of the twentieth century to the dissolution of the *ie* system of social and familial loyalty. Still, it must be stated that the intended audiences of the three books will probably differ, thus their interpretive strategies and scopes have to be weighed in relation to these audiences: in Molloy's case this is a general, yet connoisseur, festival-going public; for Nestingen's book, cultural historians buried interested in specific regional-national phenomena in Northern Europe; and students in genre film studies or Japanese culture more widely for Balmain's meticulous study.

Molloy's book, then, is perhaps the most accessible of the three, appealing to both academic and non-academic readers with an interest in the interaction between art-house and mainstream cinemas. Via its study of Christopher Nolan's 2000 neo-noir psychological thriller, it sets out to generate a set of meanings for "indie", in a vein not unlike the postwar process of canonization undergone by *film noir*. This she sees as a retrospective definition, as she writes that "[d]espite

not being acknowledged as an independent film within critical or public discourses at the time, *Memento* is now recognized as an exemplification of twenty-first-century indie filmmaking” (109). The book is divided into five chapters, with the first one introducing American independent cinema’s rise since the screening at the 1989 Sundance Film Festival of Steven Soderbergh’s *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. Molloy presents clearly the industrial causes for the American indie film becoming a mass phenomenon (noting the Slamdance Film Festival, founded for projects rejected at the prestigious Sundance, receiving 1700 submissions in 1999). Among these causes is a heavy dependence on non-American markets, but also the fact that all Hollywood majors gradually created indie divisions (either for production or distribution) during the 1990s (4-5). One of the most hotly debated terms of the book is “independence” itself, whose edgy opposition to “the mainstream” Molloy critically exposes as another unhelpful binary:

[W]ithin particular discourses the production of knowledge and construction of meanings about commercial mainstream cinema is crucial to the establishment and meanings about independent cinema; one is invoked to make sense of the other. But this is not to propose that a discourse of independence is produced from an overarching oppositional mainstream-independent binary; this would require fixed authorities of delimitation and stable lines of difference. Instead, there is always a multiplicity of discourses in circulation which serve many different interests [...]. (2)

Therefore, in chapters two and five, the discursive fields in which *Memento*’s status as “independent” was created – respectively, its pre-release marketing campaigns in the UK and the US, and the post-release online commentaries on IMDB message boards – are meticulously reproduced and analysed. Specifically interesting is the discussion of *Memento*’s post-release recirculation via online discourse as it opens up the related point of the role of a film’s DVD release in gathering and transforming its interpretive community. With this film in particular this is intricately linked to matters of narrative form and, more broadly, the film’s cultural status:

*Memento* was always intended to be a ‘DVD-enabled film’ that, like other complex narratives, attended to the changing conditions of film

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spectatorship and the trend towards multiple viewings. This allowed for the appropriation of art cinema devices which fragment the unity of the film discourse, creating dissonance between what is seen and what is heard in such a way that *Memento* pushes against but does not exceed the norms of classical narrative. (85)

The remaining two chapters, three and four, present readings of the film itself, varying the focus between narratology, film history and the representation of gender. In scene-by-scene narrative analysis, with recourse to a formalist approach, the author demonstrates that the famous ambiguities and mysteries of *Memento* rely to a great degree on classical narrative conventions (59), but also that its structure cannot be neatly summarized since “absolute construction of the fabula is inhibited by the syuzhet as the syuzhet’s presentation of events make possible two (or more) fabulas” (83).

Chapter four considers the film in its function as *noir*. Molloy emphasizes, following Jane Place, that the characters are archetypal in this generic universe, with Shelby’s (Guy Pearce) possibly murdered wife Catherine (Jorja Fox) playing opposite the femme fatale Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss), who Molloy reads as “the woman as redeemer” (90). She also argues that through *noir* conventions *Memento* offers a serious critique of mainstream contemporary discourses about masculinity, such as the New Man or the Retributive Man, since “[o]ne reading that *Memento* makes possible is the suggestion that memory loss is a form of symbolic impotence which functions to offer a commentary on contemporary masculinity” (94).

Both Molloy’s monograph and Nestingen’s more wide-ranging *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia* draw on Justin Wyatt’s critical study, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (University of Texas Press, 1994), as well as his subsequent studies of the relationships between mainstream and independent cinemas. Most pertinent is his description of the type of mainstream studio film against which both the American indie and the Scandinavian “medium-concept cinema” (Nestingén, 5) have been defined. Nestingen’s is the most ambitious project of the three books reviewed here, since he does not simply seek to contextualize and comment on the success or importance of a movie, as Molloy does, or more broadly trace the transformations of a widely known and

consumed genre, as in Colette Balmain's book. To cite the author: "[t]his book's goal is to develop a model for studying popular culture and cultural politics in the Scandinavian welfare state during times of neoliberalism. If we want to understand contemporary Scandinavia and its struggles over transformation, we need to study and discuss popular fictions" (9). The phrase "popular fictions" is useful to Nestingen given that it suggests his subjects to be transformative actors rather than mere artifacts to be analysed: "this book's argument attributes agency to popular fictions. [...] Popular fictions create new terms, images and assemblages, which generate novel forms of self-understanding and recognition, which in turn respond to challenges and dialogues undergoing transformation" (41). The place of state support in the formation of these popular fictions further complicates the conception of the term, since "[o]ne of the reasons for the vitality of popular culture in Scandinavia is the continuing and changing influence of the welfare states' and national cultures' support of the arts" (13). Also, the phrase is allowed to cover a large selection of very diverse texts: from Finnish rock band Lordi's performance in the Eurovision song-contest, to press coverage of doping scandals in professional skiing, to feature films and prose works published since 1989 in the Scandinavian region.

In the first chapter of the book, meant to offer a theoretical foundation, a short history of the (idea of the) Nordic welfare state is presented, with useful differentiations made between Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland concerning the "imagined communities" of individual, state and nation. Of specific interest is the mapping of advancements in media technology onto the generational difference affecting concepts of political agency: "[n]ew identity groups that could not be fit into the left-right continuum of the 1968 generation emerged. These groups used technological mediations to differentiate themselves from what was perceived as the ideological conformity of their parents" (30). Recognisable to the British reader from such films as the Swedish *The Girl with Dragon Tattoo* (Niels Arden Oplev, 2009), these new identity groups are being represented and articulated via popular fictions, therefore crime, fantasy and melodrama offer themselves as key terrains for "debates over individualism, collective claims, and the status of national homogeneity, gender, and transnational relations" (Nestingen 14).

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Among the book's case studies, two film genres are re-interpreted in the Scandinavian context meeting the needs of globalization: crime and melodrama – the previous being the location for Nestingen's most valuable contribution, the category of the "medium-concept film", while "the melodrama of demand" proves to be a useful tool in distinguishing the genre against the contemporary ("transnational, global") auteur art cinema emerging from Scandinavia over the last few decades (and probably more familiar to the Anglophone reader). Medium-concept cinema – "[t]he combination of art film and genre film aimed at mainstream national and regional audiences" (53) – is a variation on Wyatt's Hollywood-focused term "high concept", the latter identifying a production model in which filmic diegesis and extratextual elements (such as marketing) are harmoniously blended, with "cinematic excess" integral to the films' style. By contrast, Scandinavian medium-concept crime films, exemplified by Nestingen in Nicholas Winding Refn's *Pusher* trilogy (1996; 2004; 2004) and Erik Skjoldbaerg's *Insomnia* (1997), "differ from high-concept films in that they tend to use excess to direct attention toward extrafilmic, sometimes politically significant issues. Yet medium-concept's use of excess also differs from Scandinavian auteur cinema inasmuch as medium-concept films privilege narrative to a high degree" (73).

Similarly, politically and socially significant issues are posed in the "melodrama of demand", contrary to classical melodrama's conventional trajectory. Through analysis of the formal and thematic workings of Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-ever* (2002) or Aki Kaurismäki's *The Man Without a Past* (2002), involving some detailed work on the interaction between their narratological and moral mechanics, Nestingen draws out the subversive potential in the genre's specifically Scandinavian, welfare-oriented variation:

The melodrama of demand is an attempt to renew and refresh the critical potential of melodrama, asserting distinction from the liberal framework of American film discourse. Indeed, Moodysson and Kaurismäki attack the liberal subject as a consumer of American corporate globalization. (118)

The detailed historical and production overview of the Scandinavian movie and literary scenes since the early 1990s provides ample context for Nestingen's account of advancements in political and social issues, which he traces via his



case studies with an engaging versatility. However, his repudiation of the aesthetic analysis of cinema, suggesting at one point that it amounts to some kind of “sterilization” (97), limits the full force of the book’s arguments. A similar, but more justified, emphasis on the historical, industrial and political underpins Colette Balmain’s book about the transformation of the Japanese horror film genre through the 2000s. With Japanese originals and Hollywood remakes becoming equally popular among global audiences, this book seems to offer a timely and justified account of the industrial workings of this transnational phenomenon.

Admittedly some of the general claims made in her preface’s historical and cultural contextualization of the topic, while perhaps necessary in an introductory work, are nevertheless reiterations of already existing and only loosely relevant material. For example, Balmain ranges across the erosion of the feudal system by forced and incomplete modernization following the second world war and Hiroshima (Balmain x); the co-existence “of the world of the living (*kono-yo*) and the world of the dead (*ano-yo*)” in Japanese religion and mythology (x); and the specificities of Japanese visual representations originating from the woodblock print and traditional theatre forms (like *No* and *Kabuki*) – all of which have been given much more in-depth and complex treatment elsewhere. However, the opening chapter of the book proper is much more specific and illuminating concerning the development of the Japanese horror genre itself. For example Balmain rejects the application of the psychoanalytical and feminist mainstream of (Western) horror criticism, since “[t]his type of approach to horror film can be reductive, especially if it is utilised unproblematically in the study of non-Western forms of horror” (6). A main reason for this is the fact that sexuality (often in its most extreme forms) is central to the Japanese horror genre (and is apparently rendered puritanical by comparison in American remakes). The sadomasochistic brutality and countless violations performed on the female body in Japanese horror films are linked to the proliferation of Japanese pornography and its multiplying subgenres. Balmain describes convincingly how, since the 1960s, Japanese “pink film” (porn) industry has been evolving in close collaboration with the horror genre, either as a site of training for later famous horror film directors, or as a

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repository of themes, characters and formulas to reappear in successful horror movies. This is, in fact, just one aspect of an important underlying argument of the book: namely, the importance of diverse subcultural forms and pop icons (like *otaku*, *kogal*, *kawaii* and *aidoru*) in the narratives and casts of the films analyzed.

Each chapter takes one of the book's major themes and situates it at the outset through a historical-mythological framework, which is followed by a summary of relevant films and directors, setting up for a more in-depth analysis of two or three representative films. The structure allows for a clear but detailed discussion, which is enhanced by Balmain's reasoning in selecting films that act as templates for subsequent productions. Of the numerous films examined one notable example is Kenji Mizoguchi's 1953 *Tales of Ugetsu*. This is shown to foreshadow more well-known titles – among them films that went on to produce high profile remakes, like *Ring* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) and *Ju-On* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002) – as it contains key themes, characters and intertextual relations:

These include the vengeful female ghost with long black hair; the haunted house; themes of abandonment and alienation; doomed love [...]. Both films emerge from the *kabuki* and *no* traditions [...], the special effects and spectacle influencing *Godzilla*, and the stories of ghosts, demons and other supernatural beings forming the basis of *Tales of Ugetsu*. (32)

None of the works reviewed here makes for readily easy reading taken in its entirety. They would rather be useful as in-depth handbooks, which must be on the shelves of anyone interested in the texts and genres involved. They all offer usefully full filmographies, as well as a vast array of off- and online resources that should be helpful for anyone who wants to pursue the topics in their contemporary (specifically globalized and digital) contexts. Overwhelmingly, they demonstrate how questions of genre provide dynamic points of entry for understanding and describing fields as diverse and difficult as changes in film industrial structures in the United States, the global success – partly through English-language remakes – of a particular type of Japanese cinema, and, finally, the changing structure of the Scandinavian welfare state system, and “its popular reception”. The more or less contemporary developments covered in

each book all provoke some common speculations: that our digital era has engendered changes and transformations in very different zones of the globe that may be plausibly and coherently interpreted as stories of genre; and that these transformations are linked inherently to social, political and cultural change more widely.

***Terrence Malick and the Thought of Film*****By Steven Rybin**

Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012. ISBN 9780739166758. 204 pp. £39.95 (hbk).

***Orson Welles and the Unfinished RKO Projects: A Postmodern Perspective*****By Marguerite H. Rippy**

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780809329120. 226 pp. £31.50 (pbk).

**A Review by Nicholas Godfrey, Flinders University, Australia.**

If the recent passing of Andrew Sarris managed to stir some echoes of the old auteurist debates, the fire of the critical controversy of yesteryear has cooled into wistful recollection. Film criticism has long since absorbed auteurism and moved on, and although Sarris' brand of auteurism continues to inform the language of mainstream criticism, the forces of postmodernism and poststructuralism have diluted and redirected much of its influence on contemporary critical writing on cinema. Nevertheless, the names of some directors will always be more dominant than others, and it is hard to imagine two Hollywood figures who better embody Sarris' definition of the auteur than Orson Welles and Terrence Malick: each director is found to have honed a singular visual style through their careful control over production practices, and weaved a complex, inter-related web of themes across their body of films. Of equal importance is the way each director's persona has contributed to their legacy and enduring mythology. In the case of Welles, his larger-than-life personality, fiery clashes with Hollywood studios, and long periods of exile in Europe contributed to his legendary status as something of a suppressed genius, whose works were severely compromised by factors beyond his control. In Malick's case, it is the very unavailability of the director, who took his own extended sojourn to Europe, and returned to work just as mysteriously after a twenty-year absence, that has contributed to his standing as one of Hollywood's great recluses - a contradiction in terms if ever there was one. Given the stature of both of these directors, it is not surprising they have commanded a wealth of critical studies, Welles being the lynchpin of many of the first wave of auteurist

writings on Hollywood, and Malick the subject of an explosion of scholarly writings in the last decade.

The books under review here by Steven Rybin and Marguerite H. Rippy demonstrate two means by which we might approach a single director's body of work without resorting to standard auteurist tropes. Rybin considers Malick's films not as enactments of philosophy and history, but as explorations of the process by which philosophy and history are written. Meanwhile, Rippy examines Welles' unfinished RKO films from a postmodern perspective, inserting the projects back into their historical moments and investigating the ramifications of Welles' working methods. The careers of both directors point to the slippery interaction between idiosyncratic creative practice – authoring highly personalised works within an essentially collaborative, commodified medium – and commercial and critical failure. With this broad concern in common these books employ distinct sets of critical tools to fashion new vantage points from which we may consider their subjects' films.

Steven Rybin is unapologetic for approaching Malick's films from a philosophical perspective, and endeavours from the outset to distinguish his own methodology from existing philosophical readings of Malick's films. Given Malick's own background as a student of philosophy under Stanley Cavell and Gilbert Ryle, and his early translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (1929; translated by Malick as *The Essence of Reasons* in 1969), it is easy to see why many have chosen to read Malick's films as filmic explorations of Heidegger's philosophical concepts of Dasein, dwelling, and Being. Rybin cautions against such an approach, arguing that to reduce Malick's films to superficial illustrations of schools of philosophical thought is to overlook the significance of his films as complex philosophical works in their own right. Rybin rejects this illustrative reading of Malick's films, casting it in opposition to the phenomenological approach to cinema as championed by Vivian Sobchack. This is not to say that Rybin completely rejects a Heideggerian reading of Malick's films, but instead suggests that, "Malick's films teach us how to use Heidegger as another valuable tool to understand film experience as a site in which philosophy may happen" (2).

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To this end, Rybin's most significant contribution to Malick scholarship is not his commentary on Malick's body of themes or evocation of world (already well-trodden analytical pathways), but his detailed analysis of Malick's representation of his characters. Rybin argues that Malick's characters are in a constant process of becoming, constantly attempting to articulate their identities as "voicing meaning becomes [...] the effort to imagine another world, to creatively envision how the historical world in which they find themselves might be otherwise" (26). Stylistically, this sensibility is articulated through Malick's use of voiceover, which became increasingly complex and detached from causal narrative as his career progressed, from Holly's attempts to romantically re-envision her killing-spree in *Badlands* (1973), to Linda's use of voiceover to make sense of the actions of the adults *Days of Heaven* (1978), arriving at the polyphonic interrogation of the nature of war and the essence of nature in *The Thin Red Line* (1998). In this sense, Malick's films should be taken less as traditional causality-based narratives than the representation of an ongoing probing by his characters, who are attempting to fashion their own narratives from their investigations into and impressions of the world around them. Rybin links this open-ended search for identity with Malick's heavily fragmented use of montage, as

one of the striking qualities of Malick's films, in contrast to both non-narrative experimental cinema and the classical Hollywood cinema, is their frequent predilection for generating disjunctive visual pairings of obliquely related narrative spaces while nevertheless implying the possible causal, emotional, and intellectual relationships that might yet be found between them. (39-40)

Rybin highlights the paratactic quality of Malick's associational style of montage, which he links to Heidegger's concept of "earth". Where the "earth" of a painting may be observed in its visible brush-strokes, Rybin locates the "earth" of cinematic experience in "its grounding in the sensuous luminosity of the unfolding projection of the celluloid strip" (16). Rybin makes an interesting distinction here between classical cinema narrative, which in its aspiration towards invisibility of style and immersion in narrative denies experience of its "earth", and poetic cinema, of which Malick is unarguably a practitioner. For

Rybin, within "poetic" cinema, "the tight join that binds narrative to image and sound is loosened" (16), opening up a more purely phenomenological viewing experience than is possible within classical cinema.

Having established his central thesis, Rybin moves through each of Malick's films. In *Badlands*, Rybin notes an overriding obsession with artefacts of decay and detritus, as the characters of the film are stricken with malaise and physical unease. Kit's "disharmonious relationship with the world" (58) prompts his entropic assumption of the role of killer almost by default, as he attempts to connect with his surroundings by awkwardly lashing out with violence towards them. Rybin aligns Kit's fetishistic fascination with physical objects, and his frequent, often comically abortive attempts at "self-preservation through media and other artefacts" (58) (such as the phonograph record he cuts before burning down Holly's home, or the rock monument he hastily constructs in the moments before his capture), with Andre Bazin's notion of the mummy complex. Rybin links Bazin's comments on the cinematic potential for immortality with the desire of Malick's characters to fix their identity within their surroundings: whereas Holly strives to articulate herself through her voiceover, Kit feebly interacts with physical objects, and attempts to leave his mark on the world through his uncertain acts of violence. Additionally, Rybin has some interesting observations on the depiction of violence in *Badlands*, noting that despite the many killings in the film, Malick routinely elides the moment of death, which Rybin relates once again back to Bazin and his writings on cinema and the preservation of the historical moment.

Rybin labels Malick's next film, *Days of Heaven*, a "co-text", which invites the audience to piece their own narrative from the shards of experience depicted in the film. Malick's camera observes, but never penetrates the interior lives of his characters, and his within his

impressionistic and gently fractured imagery [...] images are wrested apart from continuity and woven back together so as to give a patchwork of perspectives and positions that all occupy the same space but nevertheless do not quite occupy it in shared ways or with shared meanings. (74)

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Rybin rightly acknowledges that *Days of Heaven* represents a turn from the straightforward narrative of *Badlands* into a more impressionistic, experiential space, signalling the increasingly significant departure from narrative with each of Malick's subsequent film. Many important story events in *Days of Heaven* are truncated or excised altogether, and Rybin stresses that Linda Manz's voiceover is not a source of exposition or clarification for the audience, but an insight into the character's attempt to make sense of the events that she glimpses but does not always understand. We too build our understanding of the film from the snatches of her voiceover narration, and the disjointed moments in the characters' private lives that Malick permits us to look in on. The concept of the "co-text" continues to develop in *The Thin Red Line*, as Malick further abstracts his use of voiceover narration in a film that Rybin considers to be less a film about war than it is a film about the mythologies that war's participants forge through their interior monologues in an attempt to make philosophical sense of the experience.

Rybin reserves his most complex and rewarding interpretive work for the oft-overlooked *The New World* (2005). Rybin views the animated maps that feature in the title sequence of the film as emblematic of both the misguided project of colonialism and Malick's own creative methodology.

Like the unfinished maps seen in the film, *The New World* is a design always in a process of becoming, confessing its artificial nature to its viewers frankly and inviting them to participate in its completion [...] an ongoing work of artifice and myth rather than a finished one. (151)

Rybin identifies the mapmaking process as a motif that relates back to the prevailing concerns that have been developed throughout the course of his book:

In Malick's hands Enlightenment cartography becomes a concrete manifestation of the human desire for perspectival mastery, but it is also presented as something of a magical myth unto itself, one we might inhabit creatively and critically no less than the story of Pocahontas. (149)

Despite being Malick's most overtly historical film (surveying no less momentous an occasion than the formation of a nation and the displacement of an



indigenous people), *The New World* displays less interest in fidelity to historical fact than it does a curiosity towards the point at which history crosses into myth. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the conclusion of the film, where the character of Pocahontas,

whispers something to her son, but the soundtrack's exclusion of this whisper, and the film's visual framing of the moment in a long shot, lets us know clearly that her words are not for our ears. What we do hear is [John] Rolfe, who speaks to us in voice-over on the soundtrack as these final images of Pocahontas are shown to us; he reads the letter she has left for their son before her death and in doing so marks the first of many Anglo-Saxons who will act as her voice throughout history. (164)

Of course, Malick is another participant in the long line of (predominantly white male) storytellers who have fashioned their own version of the Pocahontas myth. By denying the character interiority in her last appearance in the film, allowing her dialogue to pass unheard on the soundtrack, as her written words are verbalised by John Rolfe on the soundtrack, Malick acknowledges the futility of attempting to master the Pocahontas narrative, as he himself "refus[es] to master the fictional worlds [he] creates" (167).

Precisely this "insistence on uncertainty and indetermination" (26), fragmented editing style, and psychological distance from his characters, all routinely perceived as characteristic shortcomings by Malick's critics, are viewed by Rybin as a statement on the impossibility of mastery. Pocahontas remains unknowable, and, indeed, "we cannot know [her] because 400 years of genocide and unethical myth-making separate us from this figure who is animated but not explained in the final frames of *The New World*" (164).

Rybin's book ends with a short post-script on *The Tree of Life* (2011), which is mostly limited to describing the content of the film, although Rybin makes some interesting links between the distended web of recollections that constitute the film, and the relationship between memory and architecture. Overall, Rybin views *Tree of Life* as consistent with Malick's trajectory away from causal narrative and into a poetic and deeply philosophical aesthetic that is entirely his own.

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Malick's voice [...] itself searches for a narrative through-line from out of a paratactic imagistic structure that is without question the most disjunctive and challenging of Malick's career so far [...] rather than functioning as the Prime Mover of *The Tree of Life*, Malick, concerned with the evolution of life and origin of the species, is himself searching in his film poetry for a causal agent, perhaps God, that might grant shape and structure to fleeting memories from a childhood and human past that the roving camera of the film seeks to recapture. (179)

I quote at length to show how Rybin's prose goes towards making this one of the most satisfying and comprehensive yet written on Malick's cinema, and goes a great distance towards articulating the gulf between form and meaning in Malick's work. If the deeply divisive reception that greeted *To the Wonder* (2012) at the recent Venice and Toronto film festivals is any indication, Malick has departed even further from the classical conventions of narrative, and, with two further films presently in production, is currently engaged in by far the most prolific phase of his career. Doubtless this will not be the last major book to consider Malick's works, regardless of whether audiences and critics are prepared to follow him further down the rabbit hole to tremble wondrously on the threshold of his cinematic worlds.

Unlike Malick, who seems more resolutely untroubled by commercial considerations with each successive film, Orson Welles' career predicated a far greater ambivalence towards the film as artwork versus the film as commodity. Marguerite Rippy innovatively characterises this tension in the form of Orson Welles as brand. The branding of Welles was central to his radio work, with his presence immediately identifiable due to his distinctive voice in his radio work. RKO wished to continue to exploit the Welles brand, highlighting his authorship as both director and star. Rippy explores Welles' unfinished projects during his time at RKO in an exploration of the intersecting nexus between production practice, the political dimensions of the filmic text (both intended and unintended), and the commodification of film and director. Given Welles' notoriously troubled relationship with his studio masters, and the fact that Welles' unfinished projects outnumber his completed titles for RKO, Rippy believes that we can learn more about Welles' production practice through his

incomplete works than his completed films. Unlike Rybin's book, which rarely considers the interplay between Malick's production practices and realised aesthetics, Rippy's book is diligently historical, working through screenplay drafts and correspondences, as well as drawing upon the cultural and historical backgrounds against which Welles' unfinished films were conceived.

Her ambition not to privilege Welles' completed films over his unfinished works is a fascinating one. In the postmodern age, in which the unified, whole text is dismantled, dispersed, and recombined, Rippy sees a new opportunity to examine Welles' unfinished films as postmodern objects. The very fact of their failure to reach completion should not prevent us from reading them as texts, and their incomplete state indicates to Rippy that Hollywood was not ready to accept Welles' distinctive production practices and political concerns. In her final chapter, she suggests that as new media technologies such as the internet allow us to experience and interact with Welles' unfinished works as never before, the director's true influence is being felt in films and television of the early twenty-first century.

Unlike Rybin, for whom Malick's authorship (or, more accurately, co-authorship) is paramount, Rippy consciously deconstructs Welles as auteur, stressing the studio imperative to sell Welles as sole creative author of his films, despite his highly collaborative creative process - a fallacy which came to a head with Welles' dispute with Herman J. Mankiewicz over the screenwriting credit of *Citizen Kane* (1941). Rippy's intent is "to reposition auteurism in order to analyse the radical potential within its fissures and to emphasise its creation as a commercial construct" (3). To this end, she frequently invokes the term "star director" instead of auteur, which recognises that the "star director, like a star actor, is a vehicle to market the work more than he or she is a representation of sole authorship" (4). This is indeed a particularly pertinent distinction in the case of Welles given that his onscreen presence is often as distinctive a component of his brand as his directorial style.

Rippy identifies four features that recur across his entire body of work, and which began to develop with his unfinished RKO films, namely,

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experimentation with narrative that focused on the exploration of a first-person narrator; desire to adapt classic texts for mass media audiences; recurrent use of expressionist images from modernist primitivism for the purposes of collective politics; and finally exploration of the line between reality and fiction, tangibly linked to the line between commercially marketable wartime propaganda and marginalised cinematic art. (5)

Rippy places at the forefront of Welles' storytelling style a device she dubs the "first person singular", after Welles' 1938 radio programme. The first person singular is defined as "representing stream of consciousness, intersubjectivity, and deconstruction of reality" (61) through an essentially subjective progression through narrative. The first person singular would perhaps have been most fully realised in Welles' scrapped *Heart of Darkness* adaptation (1938-9), which would have been shot from a subjective, point-of-view camera perspective. Welles' adventurous early work within radio approached the medium as a space for narrative experimentation, drawing upon the sensory limitations of the medium to prompt the listener to construct entire imagined worlds. Likewise, his earliest film projects attempted to facilitate a similar level of viewer immersion, using radical formal and narrative innovations to position the viewer's perspective as analogous with a series of momentous protagonists: the doubled Kurtz/Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Charles Foster Kane, and Christ, in the unfinished *Life of Christ* project.

Rippy also links Welles' relationship with adaptations of classic texts to his prestige as a star director commodity. Many of his radio works were literary adaptations, a trend which RKO were keen for him to continue for them, in an arrangement which would trade off both the literary pedigree of the adapted works, and consolidate Welles' own standing as a prestige director. His failure to complete a Charles Dickens adaptation for RKO points to his shifting of priorities, towards an interest in more formally adventurous, politically didactic works, and away from the constraints of a pre-existing literary source. Welles' antifascist concerns, and interest in the "exotic" are most vividly expressed through *Heart of Darkness*, his 1939 *Algiers* radio show, and his final unfinished film for RKO, *It's All True* (1941-2). Rippy returns to Welles' 1939 theatrical adaptation of "voodoo" *Macbeth*, and notes Welles' fascination with the exotic and the

primitive giving way to an inherent racism in his industrial practices and pay scale. Echoing the conflicted reception of his *Macbeth*, Rippy attributes the hostile reception to the *Algiers* radio programme to Welles' "thematic and structural challenges to bourgeois individual American identity" (87). Rippy's most detailed analytical work looks at *It's All True*, in which the intersections of differing agendas (Welles' creative impulse, the marketing concerns of RKO, and the representative concerns of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, which had invested in the film), the tension between fact and fiction, documentary and free-form narrative clashed in a particularly incendiary manner that would culminate in Welles' departure from RKO. Rippy's final chapter considers the contemporary resonance of Welles' influence, and she draws a particularly long bow by looking at Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Steven Spielberg's *The War of the Worlds* (2005), and Stephen Colbert's concept of "truthiness" as contemporary manifestations of Wellesian style.

Rippy's book is not for the uninitiated - a fair degree of knowledge is expected of most of Welles' unfinished projects, and the scrambled chronology makes it difficult to chart the connections between projects, and their relationship to Welles' completed films, which go largely unremarked upon here. In many ways it is a shame that Rippy restricts the scope of her work to Welles' RKO projects, given some of the equally notable works mounted in the subsequent stages of his career that never saw the light of day. Nevertheless, Rippy is to be commended for suggesting new ways that we might interact with and interpret Welles' work, and ensuring that Welles' unfinished projects do not fall away into invisibility as time catches up with them.

***Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*****By Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton**

London and New York: Routledge, 2010. ISBN 9780415409278. 10 illustrations. viii+175pp. £20.99 (pbk).

***Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*****By Catherine Wheatley**

New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009. ISBN 9781845455576. 12 illustrations, xvi+216pp. £44.00 (hbk).

**A Review by Rowena Santos Aquino, California State University.**

What comes most immediately to mind when regarding the intersection of film and ethics is documentary film subjects and their relationship with the film-makers. Significantly, bringing together film and ethics also always involves a third issue, that of violence—by extension, suffering and pain. By what ethical code of conduct do film-makers need to abide to avoid impinging on – indeed, violating – the dignity and rights of film subjects? Works by documentary film scholars like Bill Nichols (*Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Indiana University Press, 1991) and Brian Winston (*Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, British Film Institute, 2000) have constituted a gathering scholarship surrounding this conceptual triumvirate in recent years.

The two works under review, however, each reframe the points of discussion on film and ethics. Both examine how filmic representations elaborate an ethical film criticism beyond the exclusive context of documentary film and the filmmaker-film subject relationship. The first taking a wide view of films across genres and the other focused on those of Michael Haneke, at a fundamental level, together they pose key questions like how filmic representation can elaborate ethical film criticism; how films can function in ethical, critical dialogue with philosophy and film theory; and how films negotiate an ethically informed relationship between the actual world – the world in which we watch films – and the represented world(s) in films? Or, as Peter Brunette sums up in another recent book on Haneke (University of Illinois Press, 2010), “Who is looking and why?” (113).

Indeed, *encountering* is a key thread that connects the two books – between films and viewers, between film and ethics and between people. Both *Film and Ethics* and *Ethic of the Image* engage explicitly with ethics as the basis of their respective film analyses, and not the other way around. For Downing and Saxton, at stake is “the encounter and the act of interrogating the self about its relationship to the other” (1). But the encounter between film and ethics is not about how films fulfil a moral norm or define what it is. By stressing the encounter in ethics, Downing and Saxton frame ethics as a process and they explore instead the kind of spaces and actions in which ethics may reside. It is a process in which the encounter with the other is about acknowledging one’s alterity instead of appropriating the other’s difference to the point of eclipsing the other. The authors stage encounters between films and certain philosophers, not so much to argue for a definition of “ethical” (or “unethical”) films, but for ethics to be understood as the “*context* in which all filmmaking takes place” (11), so as to explore “cinema’s potential to constitute a genuinely ethical space of experience” (14). For Downing and Saxton, then, film and ethics are less separate realms than co-constitutive of each other, as ways of being and representation.

Downing and Saxton’s departure from a focus on documentary film as the exclusive site of ethical film criticism is fundamental to their critical intervention. Though they do not aim to undercut the work done in documentary film studies with regards to ethics, with a few exceptions they devote their attention to fiction films. Downing and Saxton divide the ten chapters evenly between them, according to each scholar’s research interests. French continental thought underpins all of their analyses, but for Downing, questions of the body and performance and representations of gender and sexuality dominate, while for Saxton, questions of memory and testimony and representations of the Holocaust characterise her essays. Nevertheless, in each of their chapters, with varying degrees of persuasion and originality, they elaborate the “ethical dynamics” (63) between film, spectatorship, and theory. One issue is that Saxton’s portion of the book generally continues and overlaps with where her first solo book, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (2008), left off, making for a slight lack of overall purpose here.

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Saxton begins the book's first section, 'Representation and Spectatorship', with a discussion on two specific strands of twentieth-century articulations of the ethics in film, which attempt to rethink the Western tradition of aesthetic-ethical interactions: French cinephilic criticism and American documentary film theory. Saxton selects these two strands of theory and practice as an entry point to a discussion of film and ethics and as the book's specific genealogy. This chapter nicely establishes the two authors' commitment to French continental thought and film theory and practice as the principal lens with which to contend with the "constitutive role played by film form in the production of ethical meaning" (34).

While Downing contributes two interesting essays in this section — a re-reading of *Thelma and Louise* (1991, Ridley Scott) and the ethics of censorship in pornography, respectively — Saxton's contributions read more persuasively. In 'The South Looks Back: Ethics, Race, Postcolonialism', Saxton examines the thorny debate of "positive" and "negative" images of race and ethnicity in film, in this case, of Africa and Africans. She focuses on the contemporary (Hollywood) sub-genre "white conscious film", and an example of this genre, *The Constant Gardener* (2001, Fernando Meirelles). In contrast to this film's curtailed critique of the white perspective of Africans in this sub-genre, she also examines *Bamako* (2006, Abderrahmane Sissako). Though at first glance the examination of these films would seem to merely affirm the reductive binary of positive/negative that Saxton critiques, by approaching these two films as thinking entities with respective ethical subjectivities and staging an encounter between them, Saxton draws out the ethics of post/colonial power relations. That is, she demonstrates how these two films together perform a dialogue on the politics *and* ethics of representations of the other.

In 'Ethics, Spectatorship and the Spectacle of Suffering' Saxton continues this thread of viewing and representing the other, but with the focus on the other's suffering and pain. She asks, what kind of power relations form between the spectator and those suffering in films? With this question, Saxton brings to the discussion the politics and ethics of witnessing. Integral to this chapter are the significant theories of spectatorship posited by Michelle Aaron and Susan Sontag, both of whom move beyond the reductive equation of a passive, non-responsible consumer-witness on one side and manipulative media images of violence,



suffering, and pain on the other. Aaron and Sontag have emphasised how spectatorship is always already ethical through media conflation of atrocity images and fictions of violence, suffering, and pain, resulting in one indistinguishable flow. Saxton takes further the encounter of film and ethics from where Aaron and Sontag leave off and examines how films negotiate our ethical spectatorship on the one hand, and interrogate their own ethical positioning and responsibility on the other. In short, she analyses how films interpellate, and not simply implicate, our viewing of suffering. Her readings of films by Ingmar Bergman (*Persona*, 1966), Michelangelo Antonioni (*The Passenger*, 1975), and, most insightfully, Michael Haneke (*Caché*, 2005) pick out how certain films exercise ethical criticism and responsibility, not just concerning film and other audiovisual media but also the act of film-going itself. The distinction between stating what ethical spectatorship is and looking at films that reflect back and interrogate the ethics of our spectatorship is crucial to Saxton's argument. This is because it applies not only to the entire book's intervention in the encounter of film and ethics, but also to Catherine Wheatley's book on Haneke's cinema. The distinction redefines discussions of film and ethics according to a kind of Bakhtinian dialogic responsibility, where ethics is made an unavoidable part of spectatorship, which in turn must be treated as a form of awareness and dialogue and not simply manipulation, as suggested by images of passive consumption.

The second section of *Film and Ethics*, 'Theory, Ethics, Film', is an altogether more impactful one. Downing's contributions stand out this time as a stimulating complement to Saxton's own contributions. Saxton continues her principal preoccupations of representations of suffering: in the two chapters that open the section, she revisits philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' theories of ethics and stages an incredibly charged encounter between his *Bilderverbot* ("ban on images") and filmmaker Claude Lanzmann's own work on the "unrepresentable" in *Shoah* (1985). The result is a rethinking of Levinas' fundamental distrust of the image as well as the ethical argument of *Shoah* itself. The following chapter by Saxton which places Jacques Derrida's decentering of traditional Western concepts, such as the subject and ethical agency, alongside Danish filmmaker Carl Theodor Dreyer's austere cinema of faith, is less memorable.

Downing concludes the book by authoring the last three very compelling chapters. In 'Foucault in Focus' she rethinks Michel Foucault's theories of surveillance, power, and the body vis-à-vis several French contemporary films. As with Saxton on Levinas, Downing provides a persuasive critical re-reading of Foucault's theoretical work in relation to cinema, examples of which have been surprisingly few in film studies. She brings together Foucauldian approaches to the body and surveillance on the one hand, and gaze theory and individual films on the other, in a dynamic, relevant way. Her reading of Foucault's ideas on surveillance as a way to understand spectatorship and film is particularly insightful. If critical film studies' basic objective is to relate complex ideas with film texts and incite engagement with both theory and films in a way relevant to contemporary social subjecthood, then this chapter and the book's very last one, entitled 'What If We Are Post-ethical? Postmodernism's Ethics and Aesthetics', fulfil this objective confidently.

One of Downing and Saxton's major critical interventions with this book is to challenge the dominant tendency for documentary film to be held up as the exclusive site for the encounter between film and ethics. Another is to disprove the absence of the ethical in postmodernism:

We might propose instead that postmodernism, with its commitment to a questioning of authority, hierarchy and the official 'meta narratives' or 'grand narratives' of history [...] is in fact the site of tantalizing and plural ethical alternatives to the universalizing [...] discourses of modernism. (148)

Downing provides an interesting postmodernist ethical reading of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films (2003 and 2004). But her discussion of post-humanism – a thread of postmodernism that challenges the privilege and immutability of the human – in conjunction with the *Alien* quadrilogy presents the book's most radical and seductive approach to film and ethics. Downing's reading of the four films extends to representations of the other and interrogation of "the self about its relationship to the other" (1) in several ways. One, the "other" here is now non-human. Two, the decentering of *human* identity is no longer constituted just

in relation to other humans but above all to non-human forms. Three, accommodating the perspective of the non-human, prevalent in many science-fiction and horror films, provides a different perspective for genre studies. Four, bringing in eco-criticism, and its challenge to consider other life-forms, positions the environment as other. Yet this radicalised form of ethical film criticism does not abstract or uproot it from our everyday lives. On the contrary, the questions that Downing's reading of the *Alien* quadrilogy raise provide "profoundly ethical insights into our contemporary global, humanistic and ecological dilemmas" (158). Through such insights, Downing's concluding chapter deftly brings the reader back full circle to the book's crucial approach to ethics as encounter.

In the central chapter, 'Ethics, Spectatorship and the Spectacle of Suffering', mentioned above, Saxton briefly discusses one of Michael Haneke's films to explore the relationship between ethics and the filmic positioning of suffering. Her concern "with the ways in which films negotiate the surfeit of images of suffering that circulate in competing visual media and interrogate our responses to them" (69) also partially describes Catherine Wheatley's own project of staging an encounter between Haneke's cinema and philosophical ethics. What Wheatley calls Haneke's "critical aesthetic" (5) diverges from the two main strands of thinking about politico-ethical reflexivity in film theory – namely, American moralist critics, who examine the moral content of films, and apparatus theorists, who critique the ethical coercion of film form. Wheatley argues that Haneke's cinema, while nodding towards these two theoretical strands, moves the hinge of discussion from ideology to ethics. She also argues that Kantian ethics in particular serve a significant reference point to examine the ethics of Haneke's film images. In this regard, Wheatley differs from Downing and Saxton, since the latter mention Kant only in the beginning of their book and engage principally thereafter with post-war French continental thought that developed largely from a post-Kantian standpoint.

However, there are several overlaps between the theoretical literature to which both books is indebted. The foundation of Wheatley's examination of Haneke's cinema and the Kantian "ethics of the viewing situation" (12) is the question of visual *unpleasure*. It thus seemingly inverts the notion of visual pleasure in spectatorship theory, a subject most famously discussed by poststructuralist

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Laura Mulvey. Wheatley begins from the basic question, why are Haneke's films unpleasurable viewing experiences? If Kantian ethics hold one morally responsible to how one responds to one's desires and un/pleasures, the "spectator's choice to suspend their faculty for critical awareness must be seen as an ethically problematic act" (42). But key to the force of Wheatley's argument about unpleasure is that she does not oppose it to pleasure. Haneke's films begin as a "pleasurable experience before then asking the spectator the ethics of this experience" (43), marked by a *transition* from pleasure to unpleasure and not an opposition between the two. This transition creates a tension between reason and emotion, which places the spectator in a Kantian position of critical moral awareness of the ethics of his/her viewing. In this regard, Haneke's films confront us not to show "how we are victims of cinematic interpellation, but how we *collude* in it" (37; emphasis mine).

Gaze theory and visual pleasure have marked out the viewing positions of, respectively, a completely manipulated spectator and a critically aware yet still passive spectator. One of Wheatley's important insights is that Haneke's films create "a third position for the spectator, revealing them as *willingly* passive, and asking them instead to be active – or at least in a mental sense – and to take responsibility for their part in the workings of the cinematic constitution" (36). Unlike Downing and Saxton's approach to film and ethics, where they propose an ethical subjectivity for the spectator to discover, as formulated by Wheatley Haneke's films make the spectator become aware of his or her own ethical subjectivity instead, thereby confronting and questioning the process by which the spectator cedes their critical awareness in the act of viewing.

Wheatley's most radical intervention is in her argument that the ethical triangulation of film, spectator, and filmmaker in Haneke's cinema "position[s] the spectator as the film's real protagonist" (113). Wheatley makes this statement with regards to *Funny Games* (1997), but it is applicable to a majority of Haneke's films, for the simple fact that Haneke's narratives and film form have as one of their fundamental components the interrogation of vision and the act of seeing, especially through cinema. As Wheatley writes, "In Lacanian terms, [the 'fourth look'] is a look imagined by me in the field of the other which surprises me in the act of looking and causes a feeling of shame" (133),

responsibility, or at the very least, unpleasure. But Wheatley is also quick to point out that Haneke's ethical positioning of the spectator should not be confused with a rigid moral law that Haneke wants to instil in the viewer. Haneke is less interested in inciting social action in response to moral reflexivity prompted by his films than provoking this moral reflexivity itself in the spectator, and leaving the spectator to respond to his/her reflexivity. Haneke's films, as Wheatley makes us see convincingly, enact an empowering critical and ethical vision, resulting in an altogether different conception of the spectator.

At times Wheatley's points get bogged down by the terms she presents to denote post-war European art cinema and its concern with experimental film form at an aesthetic level ("benign modernism," or "first-generation modernism") and late 1960s and 1970s counter-cinema and its concern with ideology, politics, and film form ("aggressive modernism," or "second-generation modernism"). Wheatley rightly considers these two developments as Haneke's cinematic roots. But the terms themselves seem forced and redundant, as if formulated for the simple sake of neologism.

Indeed, the density of theoretical terms in both these books will make them appealing only to a certain section of academia. On the whole, however, they both present persuasive arguments for the development of the theory of film and ethics in cinema and media studies. They stage diverse dialogues between filmmakers and philosophers, such that the work of the former is less distant from the latter.

## ***The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film***

**Edited by Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic**

Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780814211243.  
xi+239 pp. £45.15 (hbk).

## ***Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image***

**By Roger Hallas**

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. ISBN 9780822346012. xiii + 319 pp. £16.99 (pbk).

### **A Review by Flavia Monceri, Università del Molise, Italy.**

Comprehensive works devoted to the issue of disability and cinema are still very limited, although a scattering of remarkable books can be found in this area, among them Martin Norden's *Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (Rutgers University Press, 1994) and Anthony Enns and Christopher R. Smit's volume *Screening Disability: Essays on Cinema and Disability* (University Press of America, 2001). This paucity is perhaps surprising, given that, as Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic state in their introduction to *The Problem Body*, "rather than absent, as other stigmatized social identities can be (for example, films can entirely avoid lead female or racialized roles), disability is highly and continuously present on-screen", and that "filmic narrative fictions rarely ignore disability" (1). This is the first reason why the essays collected in *The Problem Body* should be greeted as an important contribution to an apparently still neglected topic in the field of film studies. But it goes further than simply addressing a preconceived gap: underpinning its aim is the idea that "the *representation* of disability does not exist separate from disability itself" because "how experience [of disability] is represented textually and how that representation is projected onto and via audiences are both central aspects of the experience itself" (4).

Projection is a core notion underpinning and connecting the essays, understood in the twofold sense of "the act of the film projector displaying disability" and of "what film viewers project – in the sense of prediction – disability to be" (2). This understanding of projection could also be the basis for a twofold definition

of “representation”. On the one hand, in the act of displaying disability by means of a projector an attempt to make it an “objective fact” might also be concealed, allowing for the stereotypical solidification of the fluid lived experiences of real disability, to presentation of which could be perceived as reassuringly far from the lives of the (assumedly able-bodied) viewers, and so stripped of its problematic nature. In a second sense, the subjective projection of the displayed disabled characters could be understood as a “mental representation” of what disability is, and particularly what experiencing a disabling condition looks like. However, also in this case the effect is not assured that the (assumedly able-bodied) viewer would transform such representation into a self-representation as (a possibly) disabled person. In other words, although the common impetus of disability scholarship is correct – that ‘disability’ as a unified and othered term should be resisted, because it should be thought of as a multiplicity of conditions to which all of us are eventually bound as “temporarily able-bodied” – the difficulty remains to make spectators shift from the experience of viewing the disabled “other” to the experience of the “self” as the (possible) other.

This seems to be directly linked to the second core notion of the book, that is to say the “problem body”, firstly used by Markotic and rooted in Louis Althusser’s understanding of the term “problematic”. According to the editors, “the ‘problem’ body stands for those bodily realities that – within shifting ideologies – represent the anomalies that contradict a normative understanding of physical being”; and with their volume they mean to “examine the problems and possibilities of filmic representation that classifies and thereby problematizes bodies” (9). The “problem body” is that concrete body that puts in question or *problematizes* the “normal” body, and hence the very dichotomy able-bodied/disabled, by *projecting* the “abnormal” body. In this sense, the fact itself that abnormal/disabled bodies are to be abundantly found in films – their *visibility* – opens up the possibility for viewers to change their mind, so to say, not only about disability itself and its implications for the bodies of others, but also about the artificial and constructed character of the stereotypical “normal body” as it is until now conceived in most cultures (i.e., white, male, heterosexual, and first of all “able”). This is the reason why it is worth addressing the issue of disability and film, even when the investigation demonstrates a predominance of disabled

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characters who reproduce, instead of undermining, the dominant stereotypes about “problem bodies”.

The collected essays address a wide range of topics related to the treatment and prevailing images of “disabled bodies” by considering films coming from different periods, genres and production contexts, and provide as a whole an interesting, although surely preliminary, map of the different cinematic approaches to disability and its lived experience, including the problems they leave open. The most important of such problems concerns the ability of films to effectively “represent” lived experience and to change *through that representation* the prevailing attitude toward disability as something to be connected to the experience of “others” and carefully removed from the self, even as a mere *potentiality*. More generally, the book has the merit of explicitly “distinguish[ing] disability as a category of identity as well as investigat[ing] the usefulness of expanding disability’s definition and challenging identity as a critical paradigm and a political strategy” (12).

Among the essays, ‘Body Genres: An Anatomy of Disability in Film’ by Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell is particularly interesting in trying to apply Linda Williams’ notion of “body genres” to the case of disability: “Because body genres rely so intrinsically on extreme sensation, we argue that disability is certainly as crucial as gender in the primal structuring fantasies that comprise these formulas” (185). Linked to this is the insightful point that “disabled bodies have been constructed cinematically and socially to function as delivery vehicles in the transfer of extreme sensation to audiences” (186). In doing so, disabled bodies reveal themselves to be “excessive” bodies, bodies out of control, which cannot be entirely subjugated to the rules governing the “non-excessive”, “normal” bodies. Indeed, in keeping with the book’s underlying problematic of the projection of disability onto normal bodies, an important side-effect of their being excessive is that disabled bodies help to bring to the fore the fact that “human bodies”, whether normal or abnormal, can never be entirely under control, and in doing so they provide a signal as to the fictionality of the socially prevailing and validated model of the (fully) human being. The implicit effect of this essay, then, is the realisation that disabled bodies, even when represented



and projected as tragic, ridiculous, pitiable or otherwise stigmatized, should be considered as proper sites of individual political transgression.

Another important aspect of the essay, if touched in passing, is that relating to the characterization of the viewer as “witness” to the “body-based spectacles” offered by disabled bodies: “In fact, social conventions of normalcy as products of historical viewing practices are highlighted in mainstream film representations of disability by the cultivation of a belief that one is witnessing a previously secret or hidden phenomenon” (181). As Heath Diehl states in his intriguingly titled essay ‘And Death – *capital D* – shall be no more – *semicolon!*: Explicating the Terminally Ill Body in Margaret Edson’s *W;t*’, representation also potentially “seeks to give voice to lived experience, to translate those experiences into action that circulates among authors/characters, and spectators/readers who are themselves engaged in the process of making meaning” (109), and this establishes the centrality of the notion of “bearing witness”. In this second notable essay, the representation of the lived experience of a disabled body, which can overlap with no other, *also* as an act of witnessing is shown to be one of the central concerns in Margaret Edson’s work on the “terminally ill body” in her play *Wit* (styled as *W;t*) directed for film by Mike Nichols in 2001. According to Diehl, it revolves around “the antithetical relationship between physical pain and its representation”, in that “on the one hand, pain [...] has no voice because it is located within the invisible (and unknowable) terrain of the material body; on the other hand, representation foregrounds the voice as one central device through which meaning is produced” (122).

Of course, the centrality of “witnessing” is evident on a basic level in any film aiming to represent a lived experience, and especially crucial for the extreme or “excessive” experiences of the various kind of disabled bodies. Roger Hallas refers to this same notion in his *Reframing Bodies*, dealing with a particular case of disabled bodies: the ones of people living with HIV/AIDS. The book considers a number of queer films and videos from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, taking as a starting point the assumption that they are able to “bear witness to the simultaneously individual and collective trauma of AIDS” (3). Hallas adds to the previous book’s account of filmic witnessing, though, observing its double mechanism: whereas the verb “to witness” implies the physical presence of the

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one who witnesses a given event, “to bear witness” (which Hallas equates with “to testify”) “also requires the physical presence of the selfsame witness at the moment of enunciation” (11). To give theoretical clarity to his definition Hallas relies on Giorgio Agamben’s distinction between the two Latin words for “witness”, that is to say “testis” and “superstes”. The person identified as “*testis*” derives enunciative authority from his or her exterior relation to the event witnessed, whereas the witness as *superstes* relies on his or her interior relation to the event, witnessing it from the inside and surviving it” (12).

It is on these terms that the films and video considered in the book are selected on the basis of their ability to bear witness. Of especial interest to Hallas are those “that explicitly structure themselves as mediated acts of bearing witness through the development of a testimonial address to the viewer [achieved] by reframing the intersubjective space between the speaking subject and the listening viewer” (9). The reference to the intersubjective space allows Hellas to define the act of bearing witness as a “relation” connecting the speaker and the viewer, who are to be both *there* for that act to succeed. At the same time, such an act is understood as a “speech act”, because “for a human witness to testify, to bear witness to what he or she has externally witnessed, an act of perception must be transformed into a speech act; mediated by human memory, visual perception thus becomes verbal enunciation” (14). Hallas tries in this way to solve the difficulty highlighted by Diehl, that is to say the fact that an embodied experience cannot be communicated *as such*, but only via some media – in the first instance “language” – by means of which to encode (and so lose the immediacy of) that experience.

The discussion of the act of bearing witness via such structuralist terminology might suggest an equivalence between the act of bearing witness and the act of confession, considered at length in Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*. According to Hallas the difference between the two acts lies in the direction of the power dynamic: *centripetal* in the case of confession, *centrifugal* in the case of bearing witness. As a result, “the truth produced by testimony is not the privatized and internalized truth of the subject generated in confession, but rather a truth that locates the subject and his or her experience relationally and historically” (12). In this sense, images too can bear witness, because the

*testis*, the external witness, tells a story s/he has collected by means of acts of visual perception. Thus, the act of witnessing implies here to “register a visual perception, producing a cognitive trace, a memory of the event, which may be accessed at a later date in an evidentiary context” (13). And of course one of the “tools” most usually perceived as a possible witness of reality is the camera.

Coming to his primary topic, Hallas claims that queer AIDS media were able to resist the impulse and imperative to “confess” by means of relying on a number of formal techniques and elements resulting in a *reframing* of the discursive space connecting the speaking witness (a queer body) to the viewer. “To reframe” refers here both to the “cinematographic practice of moving the camera within the shot to change the perspective or orientation of the image”, and to the effect that this practice achieves as to the “dynamic transformation” experienced by viewers “not only in the image but also in the space between their world and the one framed by the shot” (19). Each of the book’s six chapters is devoted to one of the formal techniques and elements Hallas identifies as achieving such reframing: self-reflexive performance; hand-held cinematography; doubled autobiographical subjects; musical spectacle; found footage; and sound design. The overall aim of these is to show, by means of analyzing selected films and video, how they favour the individuation and performance of these various “discursive strategies” that may be effective in supporting the act of bearing witness.

In this context, the “queer moving image” to which the book’s title refers “signals the process through which the normative uses of moving-image media themselves become queered”. This requires a specific deployment of the very term *queer* by Hallas, who states that it “offers the opportunity to conceptualize community, politics, and cultural production across different identities”, working as “alterity, that is to say, as an openness to relationality, rather than an index of difference that permits a specific form of identification” (25-26). The *queering* of the moving image seems to reach its most radical point in Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993), considered in the sixth and last chapter of the book, in that it seems to refuse the very idea of the “moving image” by displacing the body of the witness from vision and replacing it with voices, music, and sound effects staged on a monochrome blue screen for the entire duration of the film. This

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technical choice offers perhaps the most extreme example of the positive, subversive, and at least potentially “revolutionary” effect of the problem body by rendering it both present and invisible. Both the books under review here conceive of the problem body as a vehicle to transform prevailing models of “normalcy”. Hallas could be speaking for all the films addressed across these two challenging books when he says of *Blue*, and its radical representation of AIDS, that it “opens up the potential for a radical reconfiguration of the relation between witness and spectator by constructing a different kind of intersubjective space that implicates the spectator’s own body in the process of bearing witness” (33). Both these books are valuable additions to conceptualisations of disability, queerness and alterity in suggesting that language, for all of its power, does not suffice to “represent” a lived experience, in that it needs a concrete body able to “feel”, and that this is all the more true in trying to represent “problem bodies”.

***British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*****Edited by Sue Harper and Justin Smith**

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780748640782. 336 pp. £65.00 (hbk).

***The People's Pictures: National Lottery Funding and British Cinema*****By James Caterer**

Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. ISBN 9781443833073. 250 pp. £39.99 (hbk).

**A Review by Katie Bowkett, University of Essex.**

British cinema of the 1970s was once seen as the lost continent of film studies. Thought of as a period of bad films, bad hair and bad business choices it sat, like an embarrassing blot on the landscape, between the swinging 1960s and the politicised 1980s. Recently, however, this has begun to change as scholars have started to examine the cultural significance of a decade that was infamous for political instability and cultural excesses. Paul Newland's edited volume *Don't Look Now* (Intellect) began this trend in 2004 and Robert Shail's *Seventies British Cinema* (BFI, 2008) and Sian Barber's study of the BBFC *Censoring the 1970s* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) continued it. All of these volumes were attempts not only to unearth forgotten classics and revise kitsch staples but to understand and explain the meaning of the 1970s for British film production and how it was inevitably shaped by the decade that preceded it and how it fed into the years that followed.

Sue Harper and Justin Smith's *British Film Culture in the 1970s* is the newest edition to this growing literature and details a variety of areas from the influence of rock music on film production to the wide spread changes in censorship and classification. This edited collection of essays concretises and expands upon historical and theoretical areas only briefly dealt with in other volumes. Of particular note are Sian Barber's two essays on Government Aid and BBFC censorship. In many ways, the 1970s can be characterised by the interplay between these two aspects of film production, as the larger studios like Rank

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and Hammer struggled with diminishing audiences and more aggressive marketing from the large Hollywood players. The result is often viewed as quality giving way to mass appeal in an attempt to woo cinema goers back to the British productions; hence the string of sit-com movies that we see from 1974 onwards.

This last point is directly addressed by Laurel Foster in the essay '1970s Television: A Self-Conscious Decade' which traces the intermediation that began to emerge between the big and small screens. Foster's essay highlights the irony that, whilst the 1970s was a period of difficulty for the film industry, it also brought a cultural boom for television that would provide the proving ground for many of the more canonical film directors and writers of the 1980s and 90s. Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, Tony Garnett and others would all come to prominence on television and only afterwards branch out into film. The relationship between television and film, Foster implies, has never been as symbiotic as it was during the 1970s, a fact that is often seen as being detrimental to the latter. However, as Harper and Smith detail, this situation had as many benefits as drawbacks, as many of the more important texts of the late 70s and early 80s, like *Scum* (Alan Clarke, 1979) and *The Long Good Friday* (John Mackenzie, 1981), could be tested on TV before the larger budgets and greater commitment needed for the cinema. The second part of *British Film Culture in the 1970s* is given over to an extended essay by Harper and Smith and an appendix that details statistics relating to TV audiences and box office returns. This lends the collection a methodological stability that might be missing in other accounts and encourages a more active engagement with the text itself.

Ironically, the aforementioned drought in work on British film culture in the 1970s has turned into a glut, as Sian Barber's *The British Film Industry in the 1970s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Sean Cubitt and Stephen Partridge's *Rewind: British Artists' Video in the 1970s and 80s* (John Libbey Publishing, 2012), along with Harper and Smith's wide-ranging volume, means that there are possibly now more books dedicated to this 'lost period' than to either the 1960s or the 1980s. Being the outcome of a three-year AHRC funded project, however, *British Film Culture in the 1970s* is an especially important contribution to the field. It not only covers what might be thought of as canonical areas like

movie budgeting and industry practices but also highlights the varied and vibrant contributions made by avant-garde artists and Afro-Caribbean filmmakers to the nation's culture. Directors such as Horace Ove and Franco Rossi for example began, in the late '70s, to lay the groundwork for what would become a small but noticeable Black cinema in Britain – a cinema that would not only articulate the many demographic changes in British society but which would also provide a voice for a generation of Afro-Caribbean youth. The 1970s would also provide the first flowerings of work within the gay community with films like Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane* (1976) and Ron Peck's *Nighthawks* (1978).

It is clear, even from this brief summary, that British film of the 1970s, as envisioned by Harper and Smith, was much more than sit-com cross-overs, lurid Hammer Horrors and saucy sex comedies. It was a period of change and transition and ultimately a period that signalled the final death knell of the monolithic structures of Britain's pre-war film industry. *British Film Culture in the 1970s* is successful in tracing this end but also in highlighting the extent that the 70s foreshadowed what was to come: the highly politicised but industrially fractured cinema of the Thatcher era. In the rubble of studios like Hammer and Rank lay the foundations of contemporary British film production, a point that comes out more clearly in Harper and Smith's account than has been the case in previous works.

These seeds sown in the 1970s grew to fruition in the 1990s. The widespread changes in British cinema funding that occurred during the 1980s, and that reflected Thatcherite *laissez faire* economic policies, were a direct influence on shaping the current industry. The various levies and tax exemptions that were designed to protect the British film industry from Hollywood were abolished in an attempt to open up the film industry to the free market. The financial shortfall in cinema production was taken up in the 1990s by various bodies and institutions such as Film Four and the BBC. One of the major funding bodies to come out of the 1990s was the National Lottery, a subject that forms the basis of James Caterer's book *The People's Pictures*.

Caterer's book is an important contribution to the field of British cinema studies. It traces the evolution of the National Lottery film fund from its inception under John Major's government, through the instigation of bodies such as the Film

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Council and concludes with a consideration of its overall cultural impact. One of the major threads to arise out of this well researched book is the possibility of a “people’s cinema”; in a marketplace that is being ever-saturated by a globalised Hollywood product, how can a national cinema maintain its cultural specificity whilst, at the same time, mirroring the desires of its major financial contributor – the British tax payer? Caterer is at pains to stress the dichotomy between the need to fund less mainstream pictures and the imperative to see a return on the national investment. *The People’s Pictures* also articulates throughout the inherent difficulties of carrying out what it terms “filmmaking by committee” as the art-house battles for funding with the multiplex.

Caterer’s book is organised into five thematic chapters and a conclusion. This saves the work from being a straightforward history of Lottery funding and allows it, instead, to be also a consideration of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of British film production since the 1990s. Chapters about art house cinema and the popular reception of films sit comfortably beside outlines of the funding processes and evolving socio-cultural debates. What comes out of the picture drawn by Caterer is of an industry that was at once chaotic and endlessly energetic. As he states at the end of the book of the films it has covered:

They help to illustrate my argument that the period when the Arts Councils created pictures for the people using National Lottery funding was a time for experimentation; a chaotic yet wonderfully unfixed moment in the history of UK film policy, gaps, fissures and all.

As is evidenced here Caterer’s writing is crisp and enthusiastic. Even more impressively, he maintains this while drawing on primary material – a significant amount of tables and statistics – that might not otherwise make for such an engaging read. The author thus consistently combines detailed and important research with an enthusiasm that is hard to resist.

One of the more interesting elements of Caterer’s book is its ability to fuse the historical with the textual. Often film history is guilty of eliding the textual presence of the films themselves, referring to them in the abstract or painting them as historical artefacts – as if films can be studied like the cold grey finds of an archaeological dig. British film history is, perhaps, especially guilty of this due



to the archival nature of much of its writing and has been beset in recent years by a number of studies that can be characterised as little more than lists of films. Caterer avoids this trap by offering close readings of certain texts like *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000), *Shooting Fish* (Stefan Schwartz, 1997) and *Gallivant* (Andrew Cotting, 1997) alongside his more historical threads. The outcome of this is a close view of how high-level economic measures inevitably influence the aesthetic practices of filmmakers. In what might be seen as a loosely Marxist methodology, Caterer implicitly asserts that the material forces behind film production inevitably affect the textual and stylistic rendering of the films themselves.

Another commendable contribution *The People's Pictures* makes is its reincorporation of many obscure films into the narrative of late-twentieth-century British cinema. In a book like this we might well expect to read about films like *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), *Billy Elliot* and even *Love is the Devil* (John Maybury, 1998). However it is more difficult to recall the cultural impact of *Very Annie Mary* (Sara Sugarman, 2001), *Get Real* (Simon Shore, 1998), *Fanny and Elvis* (Kay Mellor, 1999) or *The Claim* (Michael Winterbottom, 2000). But besides simply restoring these little known films to their rightful place in the history of British cinema, Caterer's book contextualises them in relation to the evolving and complex story of the cultural imagination. The obscurity of many of these texts belies the political and cultural debates out of which they emerged, and goes some way to explaining the lack of faith in Lottery funding in more recent years.

Ultimately, Caterer is largely successful in the aims of the book. It is both informative and enjoyably written, and Cambridge Scholars Publishing has achieved an attractive product. The text is clearly printed and there are a number of useful tables and graphs to display the raw data. The nearest rival to Caterer's book so far would be Bill Bailleau and John Goodchild's *The British Film Business* (Wiley, 2002), itself an impressive volume. However *The People's Pictures* is much more than an outline of an industry: it is a consideration of a nation coming to terms with widespread changes, social, economic and cultural. The years between the ends of the Thatcher and Blair governments witnessed massive alterations in how Britain saw itself and how it wanted to be seen

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abroad. This book looks at how this can be traced through the nation's cinema and how this, in turn, can provide a window into the collective consciousness. In terms of 1990s cinema it is likely to be unsurpassed in its research and will provide a valuable resource for anyone wishing to write on this area. The same can be said for Harper and Smith's collection, although the wide range of subjects and scholarly perspectives make for an altogether less satisfying read. Both, however, undeniably add depth and rigour to the understanding of how institutional and economic factors impacted on the films produced in two different but linked periods.

***Chantal Akerman*****Marion Schmid**

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. ISBN 9780719077166. 11 illustrations, 192 pp. £45.00 (hbk).

***Women on the Edge: Twelve Political Film Practices*****Sharon Lin Tay**

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. ISBN 9780230217768. 11 illustrations, 211 pp. £55.00 (hbk).

**A Review by Tess McClernon, Independent Scholar.**

In Marion Schmid's *Chantal Akerman*, a new addition to the French Film Directors series of books, the author announces her aim quite early on: acknowledging her debt to Ivone Margolies' *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Duke University Press, 1996), Schmid seeks to take up the more advanced theoretical concepts found in that book and integrate them with the autobiographical, historical, and sociological aspects she considers crucial to Akerman's oeuvre. Schmid presents these concepts in a way that is accessible to the undergraduate or lay reader, and her ability to synergise theoretical and historical perspectives makes a compelling case for her subject. One hopes that her readers will find themselves anxious to explore Schmid's rich bibliographical sources, and to seek out as many of Akerman's films as they can.

Schmid begins by briefly outlining Akerman's biography, and we come to understand the pertinence of seemingly superfluous background information given the personal and autobiographical impulses found in both Akerman's fiction features and documentaries. She discusses Akerman's relationship to her parents, her fascination with history, the legacy of the Holocaust, fluid gender identity and her nomadic tendencies; in each case, the author shows how these elements shape and populate Akerman's work. While these films are notorious for their formal experimentation and their eclectic subject matter, it is Schmid's contention that they are nevertheless unified through the persistent influence of Akerman's biography. In making this argument, Schmid does tend to rely too exclusively on quotes and statements made by Akerman; nevertheless, she persuasively justifies the importance of biography in assessing Akerman's work.

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As Schmid makes clear, Akerman defies easy categorization and often transcends genre limitations, challenging viewers to reassess how we consume and thus evaluate filmic works. Without losing sight of the variety of Akerman's output Schmid organizes her chapters by grouping the films chronologically. This actually allows her to identify thematic and formal continuities and changes through Akerman's career. For example, 'The Archaeology of Suffering' groups Akerman's later documentaries – *D'Est* (1993), *Sud* (1999), *De l'autre côté* (2002), and *Là-bas* (2006) – primarily because of their thematic interest in the politics of place. Schmid finds that "place itself becomes the main protagonist of these films, and landscape [...] takes on an important role as a locus of manifold inscriptions and a repository of memory" (99). Although Akerman's attention to place appeared as early as the seventies, her late documentaries demonstrate a shift "away from the urban and interior settings" to more expansive and outdoor spaces (99). These late documentaries also mark an outward move thematically: where earlier films had focused on the filmmaker's personal relationship to particular places (her experience as a newly arrived immigrant in New York City in *News From Home*, 1976, for example), here Akerman gestures towards more global, social, or overtly political issues. Taking the earlier features together with the later tetralogy (which, Schmid notes, was not premeditated as such), these works offer rich phenomenological investigations into the notions of space and place.

One of the virtues of Schmid's book is her conscientious effort to introduce the reader to many of Akerman's lesser-known films. Sadly, only a fraction of Akerman's oeuvre is readily available on DVD. In North America, for instance, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and the "Chantal Akerman in the Seventies" box set have both been released through the Criterion Collection, but virtually nothing else in Akerman's filmography is commercially available (the British distributor Artificial Eye has, meanwhile, published several more recent films). Based on Schmid's discussions of them, however, readers will be encouraged to seek out the comparatively more obscure films. For example, in writing about *L'Homme à la Valise* (1981), a film commissioned by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Schmid highlights this film's engagement with themes seen previously in *Saute Ma Ville* (1968), *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* (1976), *News From Home* (1977) and *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978)

(75-77). By detailing the ways in which *L'Homme* resumes and extends earlier forays into the "theme of exile", Schmid implicitly champions the effort necessary in locating films by Akerman not yet accepted into a canon, whereas, she says, Akerman's earlier works have been adopted by those interested in gender and cinema, as well as by those invested in the legacy and influence of the avant-garde (77). By keeping in step with an auteur-based approach, Schmid's work (as with others in the French Film Directors series) highlights the importance and necessity of extended studies on female film directors and their often decades-long careers.

Like Tay, whose book I will come to below, and a number of other contemporary feminist authors, Schmid periodically expresses a desire to distance herself from 1970s film theory. She characterizes "first-generation" feminist thought as sociologically inclined, "concerned largely with representations of women in film and their reflection of real life," and the "second-generation" as "more concerned with the way woman is constituted in processes of cinematic signification" (46). While she occasionally applies the term "post-feminist" to some of Akerman's later films, Schmid never explicitly explains what she means by it; however, we get some idea of what Schmid wants from a third-generational perspective from her account of the current value of *Jeanne Dielman*. Lamenting the problems that plague earlier analyses of that film, Schmid writes:

For spectators today, rather than the sociological models which freeze the film in a specific historical time frame and social milieu (that is, the postwar petite bourgeoisie with its repressive patriarchal codes and values) and thus reduce the film to the status of historical document, what arguably remains of greater interest is the new representation of women that Akerman proposes in her film and its convergence with more theoretical questionings surrounding the possibility of a new feminine language for the cinema. (47)

This framing of *Jeanne Dielman* is insightful and persuasively argued; it also echoes what Teresa de Lauretis argued for the same film back in the late seventies (an analysis that was influenced by and helped contribute to our understanding of feminist film theory from that period). One is inclined to agree with Schmid's assessment of *Jeanne Dielman* – that the film's "complex

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layering, distanced stance and playful subversion of narrative codes and modes of interpretation signal its critical indeterminacy which eschews any easy interpretation" (77). But, as the comparison to De Lauretis suggests, it is not clear that this reading either requires or effects a radical break with earlier feminist film theory. While Schmid is apparently keen to distance herself from Laura Mulvey and the polemic stance epitomized by "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", her engagement with earlier generations of feminist criticism nevertheless seems incomplete.

In *Women on the Edge* Tay similarly puts herself in dialogue with earlier feminist traditions. Her approach is also explicitly auteurist; but whereas Schmid's book offers an extended examination of a single filmmaker, Tay brings together an eclectic mix of female filmmakers to advance her goal of redefining feminist film scholarship. Each filmmaker Tay selects for chapter-length examination is shown utilizing the medium to interrogate feminist concerns; these selections likewise illuminate a number of issues still applicable to women working within the film industry. Besides the question of professional and critical achievement, women filmmakers are often called upon to defend their content and account for formal experimentation.

As Sally Potter has enjoyed an uncommon level of critical praise and institutional support (in contrast to many of the women featured in Tay's book), the chapter on Potter offers an apt example of how the author approaches her subjects. Despite Potter's relative good fortune where finances and recognition are concerned, even she has been exposed to criticism regarding her use of autobiography (a line of criticism that seems to be directed at female auteurs with curious frequency). As Tay notes, Potter's return to autobiographically inspired material often generates dismissive or derogatory comments from reviewers who take exception to her inclusion of personal experience. Typically, these reviewers charge Potter with narcissism, self-absorption, vanity, and so on. Autobiography is presented as a creative woman's only form of entertainment. In fact, this line of thinking reinforces the very stereotypes autobiography is often called upon to subvert and combat. Tay singles out one reviewer (James Berardinelli) in regard to Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997); noting Potter's decision to cast herself as the lead in that film, Berardinelli

complained that she was “ineffective” and “lacks screen presence,” and finally speculated that the role “appealed to her vanity” (94). In turn, Tay shows how the words of this reviewer reflect a deeply problematic perspective that continues to shape the reception of films made by women. Rather than dismiss the film as a trifling exercise in self-absorption, Tay engages more thoughtfully with *The Tango Lesson* and how Potter has worked her own experiences into that film. As a result, Tay begins to push back on some of these assumptions about the use of autobiography among female filmmakers more generally.

In addition to some of the better known and celebrated female filmmakers featured in her book – notably Potter, Sofia Coppola, and Deepa Mehta – Tay also devotes some much-needed attention to comparatively marginal artists and is a persuasive advocate of their work. By incorporating the work of documentarists like Kim Longinotto and Jill Craigie, Tay likewise de-privileges the generic divisions between fiction and non-fiction (a binary that female filmmakers have played a significant role in subverting). Without addressing this traditional division explicitly, Tay challenges it by placing fiction and nonfiction films together in a fluid discussion of the politics of feminist filmmaking – filmmaking that can come in many different fictional and nonfictional packages. Furthermore, many of the women examined do not enjoy a relationship with any canon, female or not. Tay’s decision to group filmmakers in this way may help to reorient our understanding of feminist film criticism and filmmaking – that is, by unravelling a division that ultimately conceals other unities.

While Tay contributes to an important trend in recent scholarship towards acquainting readers with lesser-known artists, her book also comes with an explicit theoretical agenda. In particular, she hopes, through her book, to destroy or reroute what Patricia Mellencamp has called “the garden path of theory” (a phrase Tay appeals to frequently) (8). Whether or not one shares Tay’s theoretical priorities, it is unfortunate that they often seem to prevent her from offering a close formal engagement with the films she discusses. Perhaps she is reluctant to engage in the type of analysis that undergirded much of post-1970s criticism – analyses which were often guided by psychoanalytic and semiotic models. Or perhaps Tay is simply uninterested in the political implications which can emerge from a filmmaker’s formal choices. Nevertheless,

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such an engagement does often seem called for in Tay's book. For instance, her chapter on Longinotto is suggestively titled 'On the Edges of Ethnography: Kim Longinotto's Institution of Feminist Discourses'. Given the title, one may well desire some discussion what it is that puts these films "on the edges" of ethnography – in other words, a discussion that takes into account the films' formal peculiarities, how they stand in relation to more familiar or institutional examples of ethnography, or why it is important to locate Longinotto within this documentary tradition. Instead of such a discussion Tay mentions very briefly in the introduction that Longinotto's films are "observational". But within the Longinotto chapter, she criticizes the filmmaker's flawed subjects rather than account for Longinotto's specific treatment of them. In the end, while we may be moved by Tay's descriptions to seek these films out for ourselves, this disappointing lack of critical engagement may nevertheless leave us uncertain as to what, besides subject matter, makes Longinotto's films political acts in themselves.

As stated above, Tay is guided in this book by an explicit desire to distance herself from earlier schools of feminist film scholarship, and to forge a path for a Deleuzian perspective. However, it is questionable how much use this book will have for a reader not already well versed in Deleuze's philosophy and terminology. Tay makes frequent use of Deleuzian terms and concepts throughout plot synopses; rarely, if ever, does she take the time to introduce these terms or explain what she means by them. For example, in her discussion of Deepa Mehta's work, Tay suggests thinking of Mehta's films in terms of "either Deleuze's conception of the rhizome or the metaphor of interconnection more often associated with new media and network culture" (114). She proceeds by explicating Eugene Thacker's notion of interconnectedness, but does not mention the rhizome again, nor elaborate on its usefulness. While discussing Sofia Coppola's films she suggests that "Coppola extents [*sic*] each film's *durée* in the Deleuzian sense, so that the question of the film's subject is then turned into one about the film's sensibility" (133). Here, as above, it is not clear what Deleuze thinks about *durée*, or how, precisely, attending to this concept will enrich our understanding of Coppola's films.



In a telling moment in her introduction, Tay champions Deleuze's call to abandon "ready-made" ideas "and those who abide by them" (9). The target of these words is the legacy of psychoanalytic film theory: its jargon, its narratives, its devotion to the authority of Lacan, and the doctrinaire interpretation of film that it has too often seemed to engender. But what is disappointing in Tay's book is its own failure to live up to this challenge: she uses Deleuze in such a way that his concepts seem as "ready-made" as anything from psychoanalytic theory, without critical distance or the benefit of explication. If Tay's ultimate goal is to shift our perspective and alter our approach to film criticism, then supplanting one problematic theoretical model (psychoanalysis) for another defeats the purpose of dismantling grand theories. This tact merely alters the discussion; it does not change the approach essentially.

Readers interested in recent developments in feminist film scholarship will find useful elements in either one of these books. The authors take quite different methodological approaches, but their mutual discontent with earlier scholarship challenges our reliance on canons both of filmmaking and of critical theoretical work. While Schmid's book performs a useful function as an accessible introduction to a difficult and overlooked filmmaker, the readership for Tay's theory-steeped prose will be more limited. But despite their various shortcomings, at the very least these books signal a fresh attempt at shaking up both the means and the findings of scholarship on films made by, for and about women.