

Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film

By Emanuel Levy

New York and London: New York University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8147-5124-5. 53 illustrations, xiii + 600 pp. £15.50 (pbk), £25.25 (hbk)

A review by Christine Becker, University of Notre Dame, USA

Given American independent cinema's rise to prominence over the past two decades, the time is ripe for a comprehensive account of the catalysts behind that rise, as well as an assessment of indie cinema's effect on American film culture and its relationship to the mainstream Hollywood industry. Emanuel Levy's *Cinema of Outsiders* can serve as a handy viewing guide for whoever aims to write such an account. Consisting primarily of critical reviews of independent films, *Cinema of Outsiders* engagingly assesses the extensive range of work in American independent cinema since the late 1970s. Unfortunately, this text covers a lot of critical ground without digging very deeply into it, leaving crucial questions unexplored.

The introduction, conclusion and first two chapters are the most satisfying sections of the book. The introduction opens in a logical place by addressing how difficult it is to establish a clear definition for contemporary independent cinema. Here Levy identifies the two main factors he feels are essential to such a definition: financing and artistic vision. In Levy's view, as the book title indicates, independent cinema is founded upon the films of "outsiders," iconoclastic writers and directors not willing to compromise their personal visions in exchange for mainstream studio financing.

The first chapter extends Levy's attempts at definition by exploring ten forces that have affected the development of independent cinema. This chapter is therefore a useful sketch of catalysts within both the indie scene and the world of Hollywood that have shaped independent cinema. Throughout these opening sections and in the conclusion, Levy repeatedly considers the difficulties in determining the industrial and aesthetic dividing lines between mainstream Hollywood and the independent filmworld, perhaps one of the most interesting issues in contemporary American film. He notes that some filmmakers, like Steven Soderbergh, have a much easier time moving back and forth between Hollywood and the indie world than others, like John Waters, commenting that "It's always interesting to observe what the established order - - mainstream Hollywood - - accepts, incorporates, or rejects" (54). Yet all Levy does here is indeed "observe" these issues, rarely analyzing them in any detail, and largely not returning to them until the conclusion.

This is primarily because the bulk of the book consists of critical assessments of individual films and filmmakers, and Levy provides little sense of how each filmmaker relates to the issues raised in the opening sections of the book. The chapters are organized thematically, based on categories of films or filmmakers; chapter titles include "The New York School of Indies," "Comedy and Satire: Tackling Taboos," and "The New African American Cinema."

The chapter entitled "The Resurrection of Noir," for example, opens with a general consideration of how noir styles and themes have been adopted by indie cinema and then reviews the works of Joel and Ethan Coen, John Dahl, James Foley, and others. Levy ends the chapter with the perceptive observation that many indie filmmakers working in neo-noir rely too heavily on flashy style, violence and thematic clichés without a full appreciation of the existential consequences of the genre; he argues persuasively that "Neo-noir in the 1990s is loaded with the excesses of overeager directors" (242). Not even the exalted Coen brothers are safe from his criticism, as Levy finds their works to be stylistically energetic but emotionally shallow.

Such editorial comments provide the main attraction of these chapters, as Levy fruitfully exercises the skills that have served him as a film critic for *Variety*. He provides astute opinions on filmmakers, such as his assessment of Sean Penn: "He seems to mistake pain and intensity for art and truth. His movies are not bad, but they are derivative, based more on amalgams of attitudes than on fully developed narratives" (106). And Levy's familiarity with film history is extensive and engaging, enabling him to compare John Turturro's *Mac* to works by John Cassavetes, Jean Renoir and Marcel Carne without seeming too pretentious. Given Levy's apparent knowledge, though, it is surprising that the book contains significant errors, including misspellings of names, an inaccurate description of the opening of David Lynch's seminal indie film *Blue Velvet*, and the inexcusable citation of *This is Spinal Tap*'s guitar player as Nigel "Tufnela" (262).

In sum, readers looking for a sharply written compendium of independent film reviews will be well served by *Cinema of Outsiders*. But for those looking for more, the book too frequently raises intriguing issues that it then neglects. For instance, Levy opens the "Female/Feminist Sensibility" chapter with the following questions: "Is there a distinctly female sensibility in indie narratives written and directed by women? Are new meanings established? Do women-directed indies address their audiences in different ways?" (348-349). Unfortunately, he never approaches solid answers to these questions in the chapter's subsequent film reviews. As such, while the reader gains a good sense of the artistic merits and drawbacks of many independent films through reading the book, Levy never satisfactorily makes clear what all of these films add up to.

A Companion to Film Theory

By Toby Miller & Robert Stam (eds.)

Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-631-20644-2. v + 428pp. £80.00 (hbk).

Film Theory: An Introduction By Robert Stam & Film and Theory: An Anthology Edited by Robert Stam

Film Theory: An Introduction By Robert Stam. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. ISBN 0-631-20654-X. 392pp. £14.99 (pbk), £50.00 (hbk). Film and Theory: An Anthology Edited by Robert Stam & Toby Miller. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. ISBN 0-631-20626-4. xviii + 862pp. £16.99 (pbk), £65.00 (hbk).

A review by Ernest Mathijs, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Introducing film theory seems like a flourishing business. Publishers turn out "anthologies", "edited collections", "introductions" and "reinventions" of the theoretical aspects of film studies on a regular basis. It may be seen as indicative of the inventiveness and diversity of film theory that, perhaps surprisingly enough, almost each of these publications harbours several or more very interesting essays, that offer fresh and innovative discussions of film theory.

According to the respective introductions and cover announcements, the Blackwell Film Theory trilogy attempts to both synthesize the state of affairs in historical and contemporary film theory, and revitalize the discipline by providing fresh considerations of established programmes as well as mapping out new directions for theoretical thought. The first book, *A Companion to Film Theory*, presents a collective of newly commissioned essays on the different debates and methods in current film theory; the second book, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, summarizes the historical development of film theory and debates recent trends and concerns. The last book, *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, anthologizes the field in presenting a combination of "key writings since the 60s," to provide the reader with an overview of what paradigms, research programmes, and methods are being (and have been) employed in film theory. Together, the trilogy seeks to equip readers with a sense of what contemporary film theory is all about.

The first book of the trilogy, *A Companion to Film Theory*, is undoubtedly the most ambitious. It proclaims to give an overview of what Toby Miller calls the "relatively stable concerns" of film study, namely "representation and audience" (2), as well as going beyond pure cinema theory, in trying to "sketch the field in an international way, examining the relationship of cinema studies to other forms of knowledge, such as critical studies, anthropology, and literature" (from the inner cover). All nineteen essays are supposed to assist this double goal by "examining a wide variety of approaches to cinema, summarizing them in a scholarly and readable fashion, and offering some new directions" (3).

This is no small task. To begin with, film thought *an sich* is probably endlessly diversive, and suggesting new directions also implies breaking established boundaries and constructing new ones, increasing the pluriformity and complexity of the discipline. The editors have tried to

cope with this in outlining the conceptual organization of the book. The first five chapters, dealing with film form and style (authorship, genre, narration, editing, semiotics), and the next three chapters, dealing with spectatorship (cognitivism, psychoanalysis, and subjectivity), represent dominant concepts in film theory. The next eleven chapters then challenge this dominance by supplying alternative approaches (queer theory, class politics, culture industries, political economy, digitalisation, cultural exchange, media ethnography, renewed textual analysis, and meta-criticism). The result of this wide variety is that the book covers so much ground that the internal structure and rationale tend to get overshadowed by the sheer amount and diversity of approaches. This is an effect that the editors are well aware of, warning as they do that, "this project is not proclaiming a happy moment of Whiggism" (6). The *Companion* also has political implications. Obviously, the selection of subjects can be suspected to hide rhetorical purposes, and certainly Miller's remark that film scholars who try to isolate film's characteristics account for "cultural elitism, whereby professors define what art is and then instruct others" (3) can be seen as indicative for the kind of political emphasis on contextuality the book displays. But more important are the political implications the contextualization itself carries. The chapters on gender, class, and anthropology confess to an approach that favours the study of film as a "marker of culture" rather than an art form, and several essays include attacks against formalism and new criticism (although there are some essays that hold other views, see the essays of Gaudreault & Jost, Fisher, and Currie). This political view informs many, if not all, of the essays in the book. While not necessarily affecting the scope of the book's project, nor diminishing the singular importance of the essays involved, it limits the overall directions the book aims to present.

Given these two observations, what essays then, are really worth reading? The chapters on film form, style, and spectatorship are introductory, mostly reconfirming already established perspectives, and offering only slight adjustments (like Currie's argument about pro-simulation theory in his essay on cognitivism, or Allen's distinctions within psychoanalytic theory). Generally, the quality of these essays lies in their ability to summarize. A notable exception is Pribram's chapter on spectatorship and subjectivity, in which the study of audiences is linked to recent theory (influenced by Foucault) of how viewers continuously (re)negotiate their readings of, and positions towards, filmic representations. Using work from Mouffe and Butler, Pribram demonstrates that identifying the spectator as a discursive subject also allows for the study of how "representation conflicts and collaborates with other cultural discourses" (157). The *Companion's* last eleven chapters specifically focus on the usefulness of external disciplines for film theory. One specific question that several of these chapters cover, is how theories of the political and economical discourses to which film belongs can contribute to film theory. Departing from classical political economy and communication studies, Wasko outlines the possibilities of developing a political economy of film, as a tool for studying the institutional aspects of film, and for "cross-media analyses" in particular (230). Of peculiar interest is James' chapter on "the repression of class in film and cultural studies", in which he pleads for the reemergence of notions of social class in considerations of spectatorship, by turning to the work of Marx, Weber, Bourdieu, and (again) Laclau & Mouffe, thus reconsidering spectatorial hierarchy and enabling correlations between class and patterns of decoding. Another significant thread that reappears throughout the *Companion* is the special status that is attributed to interpretation. Two essays discuss it specifically (Xavier, Bhaskar), but notions and aspects of interpretation also surface in chapters on authorship, cultural exchange and semiotics. In his discussion of allegory as a mode of representation, Xavier sketches the possibilities of studying *meaning* as the result of particular "controversies, conflicts and confrontations", thus relating the *meaning* making

process to "struggles for hegemony" (360). Bhaskar's essay works in a similar vein. Taking Bordwell as a point of departure, and using Bakhtin & Medvedev's critique of formalism, Bhaskar argues for a "truly" historical approach towards interpretation, that also "demands a view of narrative as culturally and historically rooted" (390).

Probably the greatest accomplishment of the *Companion* is that, in offering such new and diverse directions which film theory can and must address, it also pushes forward the notion that film study is never just the scrutiny of film in perfect isolation. As Miller aptly points out in his introduction, the "textual fetishization" of film is becoming rapidly obsolete, since film study and film itself are, once again, radically contextualized through new technologies. "The division between text and context is breaking up", Miller writes (5), and the *Companion* not only supports this but is pivotal in suggesting some ways to deal with it. We'd better make a note of that.

The second book of the trilogy, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, presents itself as an "antechamber to film theory" (9), giving a historical overview of film theory from its beginnings to the present. Its forty two chapters are predominantly organised chronologically, ranging from silent film theory and classical film theory, over structuralism and psychoanalysis, to cultural studies, audience theory, and postcolonial theory. As Robert Stam points out, however, "a strict chronology can be deceptive" (3). Therefore the *Introduction* also uses non-linear patterns to discuss its subject. For one, it embraces the relations, overlaps and intertextual referencing between the theories under consideration that so many other overviews of film theory try to avoid. Instead of trying to narrow film theory down to categories (as is, in fact, the case with the *Companion*), the *Introduction* concentrates on the practices of doing film theory, allowing for the description of similarities as well as splits between different trends and schools of thought, making it possible to establish temporal links between them (e.g. the chapters on specificity theory and the debate between formalism, realism and auteurism), and enabling relations and distinctions between topical and regional concerns (e.g. the chapters on "American" analytic theory, "British" cultural studies, "European" intertextuality, and multiculturalism), something Stam calls the "deprovincialization" of film theory (4). By using the chronology as both crowbar and glue, the *Introduction* provides a fresh perspective to the theoretical study of film as a critical and academic practice.

Second, and partly as a result of this, the *Introduction* also engages with the material it discusses, using "free, indirect discourse" to slide from descriptions of theory to debates about it (4). These debates function on two levels. First, the *Introduction* devotes attention to the debates between film theorists, presenting the respective arguments they have been caught up in, from a metacritical position. This is one of the major advantages of the book, allowing the reader to observe how polemics result in either new insights or the entrenchment of visions. Several chapters, like the ones on the classical realist text, Brecht, interpretation, and cognitivism are heavily influenced by these polemics. A second level is the position Stam himself takes in his discussions. Evidently, his own concerns (intertextuality, Eurocentrism, multiculturalism, Bakhtin) receive much attention, but they also appear as arguments in chapters that deal with other issues (e.g. the chapters on alternative aesthetics, semiotics, and the antecedents of film theory). Similarly, in outlining such developments Stam extensively refers to the (invited) positions the *Companion* offers on some theoretical issues. In the chapters on interpretation and digital theory, explicit references (including long quotes) are made to the *Companion* contributions of Bhaskar and Jenkins to criticize other perspectives. It is a logical consequence of the metacritical approach the *Introduction* takes.

On the whole, the most valuable chapters in the *Introduction* are the ones that deal with post-1970s theory. Here, Stam both summarizes the different positions that poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory have called into being, bringing these diverse points of view back to their "roots", and accentuates the interdisciplinary influences, directions and implications contemporary film theory aspires to. In fact, when Stam arrives at discussing queer theory, multiculturalism, race and representation, postmodernism, and mass culture, he is referring as much to television, literature, pop music, and visual culture as to film, indicating the multidisciplinary of film studies itself. One of the single most interesting chapters in the *Introduction* is the one on digital theory and the new media. Leaning heavily on Jenkins' essay on digital theory in the *Companion*, Stam carefully describes the numerous aspects and implications involved in understanding new media texts that are both subject to and stimulator of technological transformation, while at the same time discussing issues of representation and spectatorship in relation to these new media (326-327). These chapters on the attempts to theorize the most recent developments in film thought, are also shaped by a desire to make film theory socially relevant, in showing that it is able to not only discuss film, but may also account for providing methods and perspectives for analyzing contemporary culture. It is, then, comforting to observe that Stam actually succeeds in demonstrating this.

The third book of the trilogy, *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, looks the least stimulating. It consists of forty four previously published essays that are collected here to represent the state of affairs in film theory. As such, it is an exponent of what has been, since *Movies and Methods* in 1976, a classical way of introducing students and interested readers to film theory: reprinting essays that have become paradigmatic examples of the field, and grouping them (with respective introductions) under headings that suggest a couple of major categories to which most (if not all) of these writings belong. The *Anthology* does a good job at this, but it leaves little, if nothing, open for debate or reinterpretation.

There are, however, several facets to the *Anthology* that set it apart from similar enterprises. First, it limits itself to contemporary film theory, bringing together writings from the seventies and beyond. Stam and Miller write that earlier theory has "already been widely disseminated," and that "except when they have been absolutely seminal" even contributions from the seventies have been avoided (xv-xvi). Apart from essays by Espinosa, Solanas, Enzensberger, Metz and Mulvey all other material stems from the eighties and nineties. Second, the *Anthology* includes several relatively "unfamous" texts. While the chapters on text and intertext, apparatus theory, the nature of the gaze, and permutations of difference group essays that are commonly read and used (e.g. by Neale and Altman on genre; Metz, Copjec and Penley on psychoanalysis, Mulvey, Doane, hooks, and Zizek on looking; Hall and Dyer on representation), there are many texts included that haven't been so easily available, or haven't received a paradigmatic status yet. Henry Jenkins' essay on fandom, for one, is an interesting account of how spectatorship, textual analysis and postmodern concerns can be synthesized in the (empirical) study of one subject. JoEllen Shively's essay on the perception of Western films among American Indians is another example of such a text. These two essays may well be considered as highlights of the *Anthology*. The emphasis on work that has not yet been reprinted in other anthologies also applies to the "older" essays involved. Enzensberger's essay on constituents of a theory of media may be influential but it is certainly not widely read, and Espinosa's and Solanas' writings on third world cinema are still not at the core of film study (especially in Anglo-Saxon countries). It is a good thing that they are included here.

Third, many of these 'marginal' writings also indicate another facet to the *Anthology*, namely its concern with other media. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of the *Anthology* is that, unlike similar work, it is not restricted to film studies alone. Several chapters deal explicitly with other media, most notably with television and video. This textual multidisciplinary is also characteristic of the *Companion* and the *Introduction*, where other media had been granted a fairly prominent position within the field of film theory, as a reference, an example, or as a medium that can be analyzed using (derivations of) methods coming from film theory. In the *Anthology*, Stam and Miller explain their approach as a resistance to the "ghettoization" of film theory. Examples include essays by Collins (television and postmodernity), Caldwell (the televisual apparatus,) and Coward (the television author). These essays certainly widen the *Anthology's* scope, and revitalize discussions within categories (postmodernism, image/technology, authorship). Moreover, there is also a political issue involved. When Stam and Miller write that one of their main concerns in the organization of the *Anthology* was to present it as an attempt "to register the shift towards cultural studies" (xviii) it is hard not to infer from this that the editors consider film theory to be a field/discipline that can only survive "within" the paradigm of cultural studies.

Fourth and lastly, there is always the "embarrassment of choice," the issue of what's been left out. Most notable here is the lack of any reprint from a cognitivist point of view. Even the work of authors like Staiger or Barker who are only slightly related to the cognitivist strain are not included in the collection. Given the relatively marginal importance of cognitivism in the field it should not, of course, be held against the editors that they have withheld such an essay. However, since other marginal approaches do appear, why not a cognitivist one as well? One major explanation may be Miller and Stam's own assertion that cognitivist middle-level perspectives "should not become an alibi for censuring larger philosophical or political questions about the cinema" (xvi).

At points, the *Anthology* lacks imagination. Several categories have the effect of ruminating interests in film theory rather than illuminating them. On the whole, however, the book is a well-presented and carefully introduced reader for everyone interested in wanting to know what texts shape the field of film theory.

Together, the trilogy serves as a perfect initiation to the field of film theory, not only in synthesizing past accomplishments and debates, but also, and perhaps foremost, in supplying the reader with a clear-cut, yet multi-dimensional account of the most important recent developments (and their relation to other disciplines, schools of thought, and possible implications for the past, present, and future). According to the editors, all three books can be consulted either separately, or in relation to each other. In any case, the books show a high degree of consistency within and between them. At the start of a new millenium (and the second centennial for film) this trilogy is both a solid starting point and an intriguing manifest for the future.

Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics

By Hyangjin Lee

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. ISBN 0 7190 60087. 24 illustrations, vii + 244pp. £14.99 (pbk)

A review by Frances Gateward, University of Michigan, USA

Finally! -- a new book length, single authored text on what many would describe as the most vibrant Asian cinema today. Though previously unknown to world film audiences for more than sixty years, in the last two decades films from Korea, or more specifically South Korea, have been greeted with positive critical reception. Outside the country's borders there have been numerous academic conferences, retrospectives, screenings at festivals like Berlin, Rotterdam, and Cannes, and essays published in journals such as *Asian Cinema*, *Cinemaya*, *Film Quarterly*, *Persimmon*, *Sight and Sound*. The accolades go beyond academics and cinephiles -- several recent films from South Korea have been theatrically distributed in the United States and it is not uncommon to find Korean films offered in neighbourhood video rental outlets.

Lee's book is a wonderful introduction to Korean cinema for the uninitiated while at the same time functioning as a useful text for those knowledgeable but seeking in-depth English language scholarship. What makes this book especially interesting is its comparative approach to the films of both the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). It is a fascinating examination of the intersections between Korean feature films and the changing conceptualizations of national identity -- an ambitious task given the tumultuous history of the peninsula: annexation and occupation by Japan (1910-1945), liberation and the separation of the country into two separate nation states immediately after World War II, The Korean War (1950-1953), and the advancement of socialism in the North and political upheaval in the South.

The book opens with a brief overview of Korean film history, providing context needed not only on the history of the respective industries, but the political histories as well. I find that this makes the book particularly useful in the classroom. In courses on international cinema, students often have difficulty with films because of a lack of knowledge about world history. For many, they are introduced for the first time to the central concerns of other nations and American students are often surprised by the critique of American foreign policy and the effects of American hegemony on other countries. It also works well for courses because most of the films discussed are available on video.

It is difficult to highlight a particular chapter as *the* most interesting, but had I to choose one, it would be chapter two, the section focused on the multiple versions of Ch'unhyangjon, a popular tradition folktale that dates back to the Chosun Dynasty. There have been over a dozen versions of this story adapted to film, the most recent by veteran director Im Kwon

Taek. Lee examines five of them, three from South Korea, *Sung Ch'unhyang* (1961), *The Tale of Song Ch'unhyang* (Pak T'aewon 1976), and *Sung Ch'unhyang* (1987), and two from the People's Republic, *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* (1980), and a musical version, *Love, Love, My Love* (1985). These films based on the same basic story provide a very interesting comparative study not only of "North" and "South" ideologies, but also of shifting ideologies of gender and class.

The complex issue of the division of the nation is deftly addressed in chapter three. It covers the conflicting ideological orientations, the Korean War, and the effects of the civil conflict turned international. Films analyzed include *The Sea of Blood*, *Ch'oe Hakshin's Family*, *Wolmi Island*, *A Stray Bullet*, and *The Banner Bearer without a Flag*.

Chapter four looks closely at what Lee deems one of the "foremost factors in the formation of cultural identities on contemporary Koreans living as a divided nation" an issue that "defines Korean's selfhood in both personal and social domains through such economic indicators as occupation, income, and ownership" -- class. Here the author examines major works of the South Korean New Wave, films that were among the first to openly critique government policy: *Kuro Arirang* (1989) and *Black Republic* (1990).

The book also includes a useful filmography, organized by historical period, and an extensive bibliography of both English-language and Korean sources.

Overall, Lee is successful in her attempt to provide a deeper understanding of Korean cinematic culture and its relation to culture at large. *Contemporary Korean Cinema* is an important book -- thoughtful, rigorous, and insightful. It leaves me wanting to read more about Korean film -- the documentary movements, the resurgence of particular genres such as horror, and the effects of the recent international success on the industry. I look forward to reading more from this promising young scholar.

Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism

By Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu (eds.)

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. ISBN 1-56639-775-8 (hbk), ISBN 1-56639-776-6 (pbk). 39 illustrations, xiv + 317 pp. £62.95 (hbk), £22.50 (pbk)

A review by Chi-Yun Shin, University of Exeter, UK

The essays collected in this anthology demonstrate the increasing richness of both Asian American films and various research agendas and voices regarding Asian American films. This anthology brings together a diverse range of topics, written from diverse perspectives, by a mix of more established scholars of Asian American cinema (e.g. Peter Feng, Gina Marchetti, Julian Stringer) and those who are newer to the field as well as film/video practitioners themselves (Valerie Soe, Lindsey Jang, Renee Tajima-Peña, Trinh Minh-ha). Thus the book accommodates theoretical film criticism and textual analysis within a broader cultural-historical context.

It is also notable that the contributors attend to both fiction and documentary, to the mainstream as well as experimental films. Thus some of the chapters are concerned with (relatively speaking) more successful Asian American filmmakers such as Wayne Wang and Ang Lee, while others, particularly the ones written by the practitioners focus on aesthetically innovative work. Sandra Liu, for instance, examines Wayne Wang's career in the mainstream film industry as well as his shadow films that embody resistance to systems of domination, and asserts that Wang negotiates complex and changing social and economic conditions in the US. Gina Marchetti, for her part offers insightful ways to read Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* as national, ethnic, sexual and national allegories, and finds that the film does not engage with the problems Asian Americans confront in everyday life. And Julian Stringer's delightful essay illustrates how recent Hong Kong films are "intimately related to the screen life of Asian Americans" and how these same films are significant in representing "Asian American screen identities that are in the process of formation" (298).

Chapters in "Part Four: Exploring Form" espouse a more oppositional stance. The videomaker Valerie Soe accounts for the alternative ways in which activists and cultural workers use images and methods from mainstream sources and turn them around to develop new means of dissent. Similarly, Jun Xing examines Asian American women's experimental filmmaking as a new subgenre in Asian American cinematic discourse, and suggests space-based techniques as ways to "reveal and link different forms of oppression that have been separated or suppressed in Hollywood" (198). The dialogue between Gwendolyn Foster and Trinh T. Minh-ha also tells of "blurring the distinction between staged material and improvisation / documentary and narrative film" (4).

Part Three is devoted to the films that deal with the removal and relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II. In varying degrees they all question the authenticity and reliability both of visual records and of family narrative. In "Re/membering Spectators:

"Meditations on Japanese American Cinema", Kent Ono contends that spectators participate dynamically in the history-making process, and rightly asserts the need to look at Japanese American transnational history including Japanese colonialism of other Asian people.

Questions of representation figure strongly in most of the contributions as the chosen films deal with marginalised subjects in the racially stratified US society. Although these essays revisit the familiar territory of stereotypical representations of Asian American characters in the mainstream media, they do much more than simply analyse the flatness of Asian characters. For example, the collection begins with the two chapters that reconsider the iconic status of Anna May Wong and Nancy Kwan whose screen images have been read as purely "Orientalist". Three essays in Part Two explore the ways in which Asian American filmmakers overcome the institutional boundaries imposed on them. Lindsey Jang's playful piece, for example, provides seven points of advice Asian American filmmakers could draw from their more successful "cousin" Asian filmmakers, but believes that they should remain true to a vision that goes beyond their self-interest.

As one of the editors of the collection, Darrell Hamamoto states, this eclectic set of contributions "engage a plethora of themes and substantive questions that have occupied past and present independent Asian American film-makers" (5). Indeed, the essays are in dialogue with feminism, the emergence of queer theory and various discourses of race. One reservation I have about the book as a collection, however, is the way in which different essays are grouped. The separate introduction to each section might have explained the rationale behind the grouping of essays, but the boundaries between sections are not clear and even confusing with often misleading headings. In this sense, Hamamoto's introduction is the weakest link in the collection since it does not draw out the connections between chapters in different sections. Although it does offer much insightful information about Asian American cinema, the introduction is also often patchy and fragmentary.

Taken together, however, the book offers invaluable insights into the ways in which Asian American film and film criticism developed over the past thirty years. Therefore, I have no doubt in my mind that this anthology will become a central reference to the study of Asian American cinema.

Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out (Revised Edition)

By Slavoj Zizek

New York and London: Routledge, 2001. ISBN 0-415-928125. 5 illustrations, 238 pp. £13.99 (pbk)

A review by Chris Dumas, Indiana University, USA

This "revised edition" of Slovene philosopher Slavoj Zizek's 1992 classic isn't even the latest of his books to hit stores in the last twelve months (it's one of *three* so far, and *another two* are due by Christmas). For those of us who consider Zizek to be the most important cultural theorist currently writing in English, this incessant output is clearly a mixed blessing. On the one hand, his acolytes always have a shiny new Zizek item on the shelf, waiting to have its spine broken (as it were); on the other hand, it is easy to suspect that Zizek's record-busting ten-year run as "Theoretical Flavor Of The Month" has diminished his ability and/or willingness to articulate new metaphors or break new theoretical ground (even his most ardent devotees must be getting tired of Antigone's impossible/necessary *passage à l'acte* by now). Like Stephen King, Zizek needs to ditch his word processor for an Underwood typewriter, if only to slow him down. He also needs to encounter some cultural artifacts other than high opera and low modernism (I, for one, am waiting for him to tackle "Iron Chef," the *Left Behind* series, and David Gelernter).

Of course, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* presages these difficulties rather than embodying them. The 1992 edition was one of the few important theoretical interventions into academic film studies to appear since the mid-70's; together with its companion volume -- *Looking Awry* (MIT Press, 1992) -- *Symptom* built a theoretical apparatus of astonishing flexibility, coupling the late Lacan (the Lacan of the Real, as Zizek continually reminds us) with Marx (via Laclau and Mouffe's theory of antagonism), as well as with virtually every other important contemporary theorist of subjectivity and/or power: a kind of all-purpose "theory interface," if you will. In building this Lacanian black box, Zizek turns away from two decades of theories of spectatorship (perhaps in recognition of their fundamentally impossible relation to the spectator) and focuses instead on *ideology* -- a brave gesture indeed, since "ideology" is academic film studies' current Bad Object. The importance of Zizek's achievement can best be measured by the enemies he has earned: the Bordwell school of ersatz "empiricism" expends a great deal of energy attacking Zizek's psychoanalytic-materialist procedure (at least in the abstract, if not always by name), and -- on the other side of the methodological fence -- Stephen Heath (of all people!) has accused Zizek of "forgetting cinema itself." Of course Heath condenses, in the single word "cinema," a range of sacred abstractions: cinema-as-fetish-object, film as apparatus, film as signifying practice -- basically, *cinema in its relation to the spectator*. But Zizek's genius is precisely his *elision* of the spectator, his attempt to think "cinema" not in its tonal specificity or its status as erotic object (categories that implicitly reify humanist, pre-Lacanian notions of "subject" and "power") but, rather, in its uncanny ability to *merely illustrate* Lacanian precepts -- in other words, its "inherent imbecility."

Enjoy Your Symptom!, in its first edition, is comprised of five chapters, each of which is centered around a particular Lacanian riddle -- i.e. "Woman is a symptom of man" or "the Letter always arrives at its destination." If the chapters occasionally prolong and amplify these riddles rather than explain them (the chapter on "woman," for example, never actually answers its central riddle -- although this might be due to the fact that Zizek, in a spectacular academic hoax, had apparently never seen any of the Rossellini movies he cites), Zizek's writing, more often than not, is dazzling in its imagination and theoretical rigor. In particular, I would place the chapters on "the letter" and "the two fathers" among the most important philosophical writings since Wittgenstein: Zizek elucidates some of the most complex aspects of Lacanian thought with a clarity currently matched only in the work of Bruce Fink, and does so with a razor-sharp attention to ethical philosophy, the paradoxical deadlocks of post-Marxism, and -- most devastatingly -- the political failures of the academic Left. More often than not, the book is hair-raisingly brilliant, and never less than essential.

This new edition, however, is rather puzzling. In addition to correcting most of the typographical errors that plagued the first edition, Zizek has appended a new preface as well as a sixth chapter, "Why Is Reality Always Multiple?" While Zizek has recently seemed to be on theoretical autopilot, this new chapter inflates this quality to a preposterous degree, bouncing back and forth between Levi-Strauss (again!), the Hitchcockian sinthome (again!!), and Syberberg's *Parsifal* (again!!!) in a panicked attempt to uncover -- what? The fundamental antagonism that lurks behind the phantasmatic spectre of social consensus, of course. How many times must we discover anew that *Psycho* "confronts us with the antagonisms of modernity" or that the key to Habermas's failure lies in his belief in the Big Other? Lacan himself, although nominally present, seems to have somehow gone missing; other than the chapter's title and its bifurcated structure, there is no attempt, other than the most purely formal, to continue or expand the book's original project. And when Zizek turns his attention to the recent Keanu Reeves blockbuster *The Matrix* (for academics, surely the most over-scrutinized Hollywood film of the last decade), he simply mobilizes the same *you-must-refuse-the-vampiric-lure-of-the-cybernetic-avatar* rhetoric that closes *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* -- an argument that, to be frank, seems little more than humanist-luddite paranoia, Adorno meets Baudrillard. Indeed, the new chapter seems to be completely superfluous *until* one considers the new preface, in which Zizek disingenuously jokes that he added a sixth chapter *simply because* most of his other books also have six chapters -- in response to which I'm tempted to rephrase Zizek's beloved Freudian anecdote about the Jew on his way to Krakow: "why are you telling us that you added the sixth chapter merely for the sake of form, when you really added the sixth chapter merely for the sake of form?"

In any case, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* is still indispensable, even if it now comes with an unwieldy additional appendage (an hysterical extra phallus, one might say). Media theorists of *any* stripe should at least *encounter* the book, whether they like Zizek or not; if one already knows the first edition well, however, this new revision is hardly necessary.

Postmodern Journeys: Film and Culture 1996-1998

By Joseph Natoli

Albany: State University Press of New York, 2001. ISBN 0-7914-4772-3. xiv + 287 pp.
£12.00 (pbk)

A review by Kelly A. Ritter, Southern Connecticut State University, USA

Joseph Natoli's *Postmodern Journeys: Film and Culture 1996-1998* might best be described as a study of the pastiche of commodities in late 1990s America. Specifically, Natoli seeks to personalize the texts that characterize the popular by linking these and their underlying ideologies to his own "journeys" in life and with art, as alluded to in the book's somewhat misleading title. This approach makes for a frequently challenging writing style, replete with personal references, familiar discourse (there is a distinct "you" and "I" in this approach, quite unexpected for readers familiar with the typical scholarly monograph), and discursive referencing between and within the not-so-discreet chapters. It is an unorthodox examination of film as neither genre per se nor as legitimate, purposeful art form; the "culture" of the title is the real driving force of this work, upon which Natoli rests the majority of his individual readings and his general principles of film criticism, neither of which are anchored in any specific school.

In fact, there is little *film* criticism here at all. Instead, the aim seems to be to define the idea of postmodern America - - for Natoli a disaffected, cynical, and vaguely troubled populace consumed by a need for wealth, prestige, and a singular, marketable identity - - vis-à-vis a smattering of very recent, popular films, including *Jackie Brown*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Tin Cup*, *Ransom*, *Ulee's Gold*, *Batman and Robin*, and a score of other seemingly disparate titles. In addition, Natoli focuses on cultural phenomena unrelated to film studies, such as President Bill Clinton's trials and tribulations and O.J. Simpson's murder trial. This combination seems to attempt to define, for one, the "being-in-the-world" that directs Natoli's outlook on postmodernity as a fifty something intellectual in an anti-intellectual culture. About two-thirds of the way through the book, when speaking of *Good Will Hunting*, Natoli remarks that "class... is a suppressed and repressed cultural signifier in the American cultural imaginary" (163). This is only one of the many concerns that Natoli tangentially links to film studies.

The trajectory of Natoli's book is the first indicator of its mission. The book is divided into two sorts of chapters: those that study a particular film, or a particular ideology for which a recent Hollywood film might serve as a guiding example, and those that study Natoli himself and his relationship to the "journey" motif framing his study. These more personal chapters are typically labeled as "Side Trip(s)", although the chapters labeled "Walkabout" often serve a similar purpose. Other more traditional chapters use one or more films sometimes in a review format, sometimes as simple asides within a larger argument about the postmodern individual. The book overall is framed by a dialogue between Natoli and his parents regarding their life journeys and concept of "future". These three impulses seek to layer the

organization of the book in the same way that postmodern culture is layered: without "original" and without closure.

Readers seeking to learn more about postmodern film will not be overwhelmed, for such moments are few. The chapters on *Boogie Nights* ("Long Day's Journey to Boogie Nights") and The Coen Brothers' *Fargo* ("Where are We Going in Fargo? And How Do We Get There?") both raise intriguing principles about film's function and design in a culture that currently values non-linear, highly self-referential texts, but also shuns those narratives for their lack of familiar fluidity and closure. This includes an insightful discussion of the way in which *Boogie Nights* challenges our underlying fears about sex and family by raising the question, "what if a society doesn't really value child-rearing, initiation, or apprenticeship of the young into that society, or value the family as an other-than-for-profit organization?" (99). In this chapter, Natoli is able to successfully weave his theories about the myth of wealth and consumerism into a detailed look at *Boogie Nights* as both purveyor and critic of this myth.

But not all of the chapters take advantage of this rich intersection between film studies and cultural studies. For example, in "Permutations on the Act of Saving in A Sliding Door Action World," Natoli begins by discussing his own accidental escape from military service stemming from a medical misdiagnosis, to a brief discussion of the film *Sliding Doors* (a British production, although this fact is curiously not mentioned) and how it, too, focuses on escape, to a fuller linking of his own wartime experience with the film *Saving Private Ryan*. While this latter link is clear, the earlier missed opportunity to talk about the significant implications for feminist film criticism that *Sliding Doors* provides (as Gwyneth Paltrow's character both chooses and does not choose, both directs her fate and at film's end is still a pawn in this greater patriarchal game), is unfortunate.

Indeed, female readers may find this an overwhelmingly masculine book, with its reliance upon journey/father-mother-son markers of reference and its avoidance of critical gendered readings of any texts, including surprisingly *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, and *Jackie Brown*, in which Jackie is an artifact of the "'fine' black woman of twenty years before" (86) but not a postmodern commentary on the aging woman's place in a dialectical male genre (the heist picture). Of course this is part of Natoli's point; his discussion of "slow time" here hints at his frustration with a genre that wants to revolutionize itself but does so only halfway. These missed opportunities at connecting with gender studies as a significant counterpart to cultural studies makes the book intriguing as a therapeutic study of image-in-film, but only those images that are male or male-directed.

In short, Natoli's book is at times as unsatisfying as the culture he is critiquing. To call it a book about film would be a mistake, although it is clear that Natoli is well-versed enough in not only film studies but also relevant cultural theorists (such as Jean Baudrillard, sorely under-utilized here), that such a book could have been possible. *Postmodern Journeys* is at times baffling (why the obscure reference within a discussion of *Inventing the Abbotts* to who may or may not have had "the wherewithal" (57) to attend the University of Pennsylvania in the 1950s?). But it may intrigue those readers who wish to see what results when the self and society are conflated in one long, winding journey through America's visual universe.

Spanish Cinema. The Auterist Tradition

By Peter William Evans (ed.)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-19-818414-X. 8 illustrations, xxii + 350 pp. £17.99 (pbk)

A review by Antonio Lázaro Reboll, University of Nottingham, UK

The prologue sets the tone of this excellent edited collection of articles on the auterist tradition of Spanish cinema. Written by José Luis Borau, director, producer, and, at the time in which Peter Evans' collection was published, President of the Spanish Film Academy (Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas), it is an insightful overview of the role of key filmmakers in Spanish cinema both during the Francoist dictatorship and after the death of Franco in 1975 -- the book cover, a still from Borau's *Furtivos*, invokes such an important date in Spanish recent history. In the words of Borau:

In Spain it was precisely the auteurs who, above all after the first screening of *¡Bienvenido Mr Marshall!* in the spring of 1953, accepted responsibility for guiding and redefining the film industry to which they belonged, trying to endow it gradually - perhaps without too much collective consciousness, but through personal effort and inspiration - with themes, forms, and styles that replaced old practices and created new guidelines, defining our film industry for audiences abroad and -- with greater difficulty -- for home audiences, or at least sections that were most critical and demanding (xviii).

Spanish Cinema. The Auterist Tradition follows a chronological order, which provides cohesion and continuity. The collection covers two films from the 1950s (*¡Bienvenido Mr Marshall!* (1952) and *Calle Mayor* (1956)), two from the 1960s (*Los golfos* (1962, release date) and *Del rosa al amarillo* (1963)) and four of the 1990s (*Vacas* (1991), *Belle Époque* (1992), *Jamón jamón* (1992), and *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto* (1995)) with the 1970s (*Tristana* (1970), *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), *Furtivos* (1975), *Cambio de sexo* (1977), *Mi hija Hildegart* (1977), and *El corazón del bosque* (1979)) and the 1980s (*Gary Cooper que estás en los cielos* (1980), *La muerte de Mikel* (1983), *Epílogo* (1984), *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984), *La vida alegre* (1986), *Las cosas del querer* (1989)) figuring strongly. The contributors, recognized and established experts in the emerging field of Spanish Film Studies, focus on the main auteurs of Spanish cinema; established (Buñuel, Saura, Almodóvar, Bigas Luna), less known filmmakers for international audiences (among others, Summers, Gutierrez Aragón, Miró), and young filmmakers (Medem, Díaz Yanes) are present in the twenty articles that comprise the book. Spanish cinema is a notorious example of male domination in industrial, political, and cultural contexts. The only female director that figures in the volume is Pilar Miró; fortunately, as Evans points out in the introduction, future works on Spanish cinema will benefit from women directors of the last decade.

The collection concentrates on individual films that represent the personal vision of key directors who are "loosely to be said to belong to an auteurist as distinct from a popular tradition of film-making" (2). The flexibility and versatility accorded to the term "auteur" both by Borau and Evans is shared by all the contributors, as well as their constant preoccupation to place the films under analysis firmly into their historical and social context. The articles of Stephen Roberts, Marsha Kinder, and Núria Triana-Toribio are a case in point. Roberts grounds Bardem's *Calle Mayor* (1956) in a Spanish "past, and essentially literary, tradition," a repositioning of the film that sheds light on the director's intentions: a sort of political or committed realism which would "find Spanish ways of dealing with Spanish reality" (24). Vicente Aranda's *Cambio de sexo* (1977) provides Marsha Kinder with a good example of the use of sex as an effective trope for cultural transformation. For Kinder, Aranda's film lends itself to a twofold reading: on the one hand, a commentary on a specific moment of Spanish history (the Transition period between 1975 and the first democratic elections in June 1977); on the other, in terms of reception, it is a text that relates to international gay audiences in the 1990s for its depiction of sexuality and gender through the figure of the actress Victoria Abril, better known for her work with Almodóvar in the nineties. Nuria Triana-Toribio moves away from an Anglo-Saxon strand of criticism that imposes alien cultural and artistic codes on the work of Almodóvar and considers how he works within the parameters of Spanish culture making use of Spanish genres and subgenres, more specifically the musical or folkloric genre.

Besides Buñuel, the "auteur" and art movie director *par excellence* for audiences both at home and abroad is Carlos Saura. His film *Los golfos* (made in 1959, but not released until 1962) is the subject of Maria Delgado's contribution. Delgado shows, through an analysis of form and style, how the film heralded a new cinema for the sixties, and points to the paradoxes arising from the attempt on the part of the Spanish regime to create a more internationally Spanish cinema: "despite the fact it was used to promote Spain abroad as an example of the regime's 'new' *apertura* (liberalism)" (53), *Los golfos* suffered crippling censorship at home for its tackling of taboo subjects such as juvenile crime and social ills. Spanish audiences would agree with the opening words of Paul Julian Smith's article on Erice's *El Espíritu de la Colmena*: "There seems little doubt that Víctor Erice is the consummate Spanish art director" (93). Smith re-examines, among other things, Erice's press persona in a successful attempt to historicize the question of art cinema, "auteurism" and their relation to cinematic language. His is one of the finest pieces in the collection in its direct engagement with issues of "auteurism" and the collaborative nature of cinema.

Other engagements with directors' thematic and stylistic features are those of Rikki Morgan, Xon de Ros and Isabel Santaolalla. Rikki Morgan examines female subjectivity in Miró's *Gary Cooper que estás en los cielos* (1980). Framed in terms of Sartrean philosophy and feminist film theory, Morgan explores the recurrent obsessions of this author -- problems of communication, alienation, and existential frustrations -- to conclude that Miró "reappropriates the dominantly male practice of cinema by actively subverting the established practices of representation and looking in order to articulate a specifically female voice" (191). Xon de Ros focuses on the heterogeneity of styles underlying Gonzalo Suárez's, *Epílogo* (1984). Suárez's cinematic language is informed by the language of television at a time where there was an increasing interaction between the two media. She also identifies another aspect of the film's visual discourse -- the director's references to film noir, which explicitly align him with the auteurist tradition's interest in style. Working within and against a tradition of earlier Basque film, the work of Julio Medem, and more specifically his film *Vacas*, is examined by Isabel Santaolalla. She studies the filmmaker's "position inside and

outside discourses of Basqueness" (314) through the lens of works on Basque mythology and history. Like Hopewell's article on *El corazón del bosque* (1979, Gutierrez Aragón), Santaolalla teases out the contradictions between myth and history posed both narratively and stylistically in the film.

An interest in the reception process, in the spectator as auteur, runs through the articles of Wendy Rolph, Martin-Márquez, and Marvin D'Lugo. Rolph asks interesting questions about *¡Bienvenido Mr Marshall!*'s (1952, Luis García Berlanga) "future iterations" in new contexts of reception and interpretation. Martin-Márquez considers how strategic readings, negotiated readings, and tactics of consumption open fruitful fields from which to consider films made under the Francoist period, in this case *Del rosa al amarillo* (1963, Manuel Summers); and *La muerte de Mikel* (1983, Manuel Uribe), raises, for D'Lugo, issues about cultural and identity politics through the pattern of enunciation proposed by the director.

Twenty directors, twenty films, twenty contributors. It is impossible to do justice in this short space to the complexity and richness of the other contributors. The exigencies of review writing demand that I group them under general headings: psychoanalytical readings of *Tristana*, *Furtivos* and *Mi hija Hildegart*; explorations of gender and sexuality issues in *Las cosas del querer*, *Jamón jamón* and *Belle Époque*; and insightful close readings of *La vida alegre* and *Nadie hablará de nosotras cuando hayamos muerto*.

The variety of approaches in *Spanish Cinema. The Auterist Tradition* offers new perspectives on twenty different films and enriches our understanding of as many filmmakers. It offers a wide picture of Spanish cinema and aims towards an understanding of the films' social and historical significance. Borau is right to say that the collection is for "anyone interested in studying the surprising changes of direction in 'Spanish film' history brought about by its auteurs" (xxii). Thus an essential addition not only to the growing field of Spanish Film studies, but also to Spanish Cultural Studies in general.

Tenebre/Tenebrae

By Xavier Mendik

Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 2000. ISBN 1 86236 022 7. 57pp. £9.95.

A review by Leon Hunt, Brunel University, UK

Flicks Books' *Cinetek* series is visibly modelled on the BFI's *Film/Modern Film Classics*, but is enlivened by a quirkier definition of what constitutes "important films in the history of world cinema." With their dutiful trudge through the canon and cautious nods to populism, it's hard to imagine the BFI including Dario Argento's stylised, violent horror thriller, *Tenebre/Tenebrae* (Italy 1982), the subject of Xavier Mendik's impressive monograph. Argento is a key figure in cult film circles, but also poses interesting questions for film theory precisely because of the same elements that give him 'cult' appeal -- semi-hysterical visual style, "transgressive" violence and narratives focused on psycho-sexual trauma. Most of his films fall into the distinctly Italian sub-genre of the *giallo*, a mixture of detective fiction, slasher movie and sexploitation. With its unreliable narration, elliptical flashbacks, split killer and reflexivity about detection, *Tenebrae* is ripe for the kind of detailed textual analysis it enjoys here.

Mendik's central methodology is psychoanalysis, but he frames the book around two charges levelled against the film by English language critics -- that it is incoherent as a detective story and that it manifests the kind of misogynist violence typical of the slasher film. *Tenebrae's* central character is a thriller writer implicated in a series of murders based on his novels -- while the early killings belong to a psychotic fan, the author "takes over" and is literally implicated by the end of the film. This "splitting" of both killer and detective takes centre stage in Mendik's response to both critiques -- the protagonist, Peter Neal, is marked by "his inability to take up a secure Symbolic position" (34), so that the film undercuts both the authority of the investigative narrative and the male subject. The film is full of references to detective fiction -- particularly Conan Doyle -- but the *giallo* also draws on *film noir*, with an "unstable environment which the hero cannot fully comprehend, as well as utilising flashback structures as a mechanism for narrating sexual and violent urges that cannot be contained" (37). Mendik reminds us (via Zizek) that psychoanalysis and the detective story have long been on speaking terms -- Freud was a Sherlock Holmes fan, Lacan analysed Poe's "The Purloined Letter". Oedipus, the "Wolf Man" and the *giallo* protagonist each "piece together the truth from a series of fragments or clues" to find solutions rooted in primal trauma (8-9) -- in *Tenebrae*, a recurring, evolving, flashback depicts a woman in a red dress humiliating a teenage boy and subsequently being stabbed by an unseen assailant. Mendik doesn't so much refute the charges of misogyny -- even male instability is projected onto violated female bodies -- as shift attention to the fragmented hero/killer. But he does demonstrate the instability of gender identity in the film -- the woman in red is played by a transsexual and Mendik argues that the film's "gaze" is (to borrow Carol J. Clover's phrase) "reactive" rather than "assaultive", inviting identification with the female victims. Just as Neale cannot achieve a position of "masculine" mastery, the film's spectacle creates a "position of insecurity" for the spectator (33).

Tenebrae (the book) is not an easy read, but that isn't really an issue because *Tenebrae* is a complex film and this monograph does full justice to its formal and narrative intricacies. Moreover, it would be patronising to assume that Mendik's arguments fly several miles over the heads of Argento cultists. This kind of approach has filtered through to more fan-oriented books like Chris Gallant's lavish *Art of Darkness: The Films of Dario Argento* (FAB Press 2001), and Mendik has already written about Argento and the giallo in crossover publications like *Necronomicon*. That said, I do have a couple of reservations about the pitching of the book. The first concerns the baggage surrounding Lacanian psychoanalysis rather than Mendik's skillful deployment of it. I have no particular axe to grind here, and psychoanalysis *is* one of the most profitable ways of approaching Italian horror, albeit certainly not the only one. But in playing detective to the "true" meaning of a text, psychoanalysis isn't the most reflective of methodologies and sometimes loses sight of the status of its readings *as* readings. This tendency is occasionally manifested here in the embedded assumption that you simply can't understand the film without Lacan and Žižek, that those viewers who (naively) perceive misogynist violence just don't know enough about the Symbolic. Given that, its textual reflexivity notwithstanding, *Tenebrae* is also a genre film (and a commercial hit in Italy), I occasionally find myself wanting to ask some annoyingly literal questions, like: does the "dead gaze" of the film's female victims *really* disturb the viewer's erotic contemplation through an eruption of the "Lacanian Real"? The second issue has more to do with the format of the *Cinetek* series. Mendik has just over fifty pages to both analyse the psycho-sexual labyrinth of Argento's film and give the reader a crash course in advanced psychoanalytic theory. If all of the *Cinetek* series is as ambitious as this, then the format would benefit from the kind of theoretical glossary included by Wallflower Press in their *Short Cuts* series. These quibbles aside, *Tenebrae* is an exemplary piece of analysis and an important contribution to the study of Argento's films.

Thrillers

By Martin Rubin

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-521-58839-1. 70 illustrations, xiii + 319 pp. £14.95 (pbk)

A review by **Ronald W. Wilson, University of Kansas, USA**

The word "thriller" was first used as a noun in 1889, according to Webster's Dictionary. The date is a pivotal one as it denotes the cultural shift from a primarily agrarian society to an industrial one. The modern city was developing during this period in all its wonder and terror. Indeed the concept of the modern is linked to the thriller "genre" itself, and that is the primary argument of Martin Rubin in his contribution to the Cambridge Press series, "Genres in American Cinema," titled simply, *Thrillers*. Rubin claims that the "roots of the thriller can be more generally related to the rise of urban-industrial society in the nineteenth century, which created a new and expanded mass audience, along with new popular entertainment forms to serve that audience" (43). Among those entertainments was the motion picture, at first a mere novelty entertainment which was displayed along with other popular entertainment, after the turn of the century it soon became the dominant one. The thriller, Rubin argues, developed as a response to modern life.

Etymologically the word is derived from the Old English *thyrlian*, meaning "to pierce." Thus, unlike many genre titles, there is a physical response evoked when the word is applied. For instance, an "action-adventure film" gains a different set of connotative meanings when it becomes an "action-adventure thriller." Expectations are aroused and heightened. Rubin notes the similarity between the words *thrill* and *thrall* (slave, captive) which come together in the word *enthrall* (To captivate, to hold as if in a spell). "Similarly, in a thriller, it is as if we give ourselves up to be captured, carried away, in order to be thrilled, to receive a set of sharp sensations" (8). Yet, Rubin himself is casting a very wide net with the use of the word as a film genre. And it is to his credit that he admits early in the book's introduction that, "there is possibly no such things as a pure, freestanding 'thriller' thriller." The thriller can be conceptualized as "'metagenre' that gathers several other genres under its umbrella, and as a band in the spectrum that colors each of those particular genres" (4). Rubin's intent is to examine "several genres to which the concept of thriller can be applied" and to look for the, "overarching 'thriller-esque' common denominators that link them" (4).

Thrillers is organized in three sections. In the first, "Critical Overviews," Rubin surveys numerous critical and theoretical writings concerning the thriller as a general category. Leaning heavily on critical writings concerned with popular culture Rubin discusses the theories of such literary scholars as G.K. Chesterton, John G. Cawelti, Northrop Frye, and Lars Ole Sauerberg. Film scholars Pascal Bonitzer and Noel Carroll are also examined in this helpful survey of theoretical literature on thrillers and suspense. Rubin discusses such concepts as the labyrinth and the maze as being central to the narrative form of the thriller. G.K. Chesterton's idea of the "transformed city" and its relation to the detective story emphasises the thriller as transforming the urban environment with a "sense of the marvelous,

the wild, and the adventurous" (14). Likewise, John G. Cawelti's concept of the *exotic* "serves to signal the mysterious, alluring, and exciting world of the thriller, and to differentiate it from the more solid, domestic world that the thriller transforms" (22).

"Historical Overview", Part Two of *Thrillers*, constitutes the major portion of the book. In it Rubin surveys select film cycles that pertain to the 'metagenre' of the thriller. Although Rubin's survey is a selective one, he argues that it was necessary because of the "vast scope of the subject and the limited length" of the book. He also reinvokes the idea of the maze in that the section represents only one of numerous paths that could be taken in examining the movie thriller. By concentrating on film cycles, Rubin is able to examine the relationships between numerous thriller cycles and avoids a canonization of specific films. Rubin's chronological overview encompasses such cycles as the motion picture serial, Alfred Hitchcock's spy films of the thirties, the detective films of the 1940s, fifties science-fiction, James Bond, and the stalker films of the 1980s. The author's interest is not so much in delineating the elements that constitute a genre, but in identifying the "thrilleresque" qualities that these cycles have in common. Thus the broad swath Rubin takes in his survey includes gangsters, ghosts, spies, and madmen.

In the final section Rubin provides film analyses for four thriller-related genres: the detective thriller, the psychological crime thriller, the spy thriller, and the police thriller. In each, Rubin analyses pertinent films and draws on the theoretical moorings from his "Critical Overview." The author also considers each film in light of its historical contexts. Especially enlightening is his differentiation between the classical detective story or the "whodunit," (*The Kennel Murder Case*, 1933) and the detective thriller (*The Big Sleep*, 1946). Martin Rubin's *Thrillers* is an invaluable addition to the growing re-interest and re-evaluation of film genre study and the problems inherent in seeking to sufficiently taxonomize film genres themselves.

The Travelling Cinematograph Show

By Kevin Scrivens and Stephen Smith

Tweeddale: New Era Publications, 1999. ISBN 0-9535067-0-2. 180 pp. £20.00 (pbk)

A review by **Ronald W. Wilson, University of Kansas, USA**

Kevin Scrivens and Stephen Smith's *The Travelling Cinematograph Show* is an encyclopedic compendium of British itinerant showmen who played an important, though often neglected, role in the early history of British cinema. The authors coordinated task was "to record the names and appearances of all the fairground showmen who were engaged in film exhibition during this period." It was an effort that culminated in four year's research and the present volume is published by New Era Publications, a publisher devoted to histories of travelling fairgrounds. Though the authors profess that their intended audience is not an academic one, their work most definitely fills a void in film studies scholarship pertaining to motion picture exhibition.

The Travelling Cinematograph Show covers the period 1897-1910, when the novelty of "animated pictures" was incorporated into numerous travelling fairground entertainments. Much of the public fascination was not with the films themselves but with the mechanical apparatus and the wonder of technology. An advertisement for Randall Williams, "The King of Showmen," for example, emphasized the "Sensation of the 19th Century," the "ELECTROSCOPE and MAMMOTH PHANTOSCOPICAL EXHIBITION," rather than specific films. The physical venues for these itinerant showmen were of two types: the ground booths, so named because they had no stage or steps, the pay box sat on the ground with painted canvas banners forming the front of the exhibitor's site; and the much more elaborate "walk-up" shows, which were comprised of a stage front, steps for walking up to the platform, and an organ. According to Scrivens and Smith, the walk-ups "incorporated two living wagons with an arched entrance between them to make up the show front . . . Above these either painted canvas banners or more hinged scenery exaggerated the height of the show. In front was the parade, a stage extended the full length of the show, on which the company gave free shows to attract the audience" (12). The authors provide a profuse amount of photographs showing increasingly elaborate walk-ups throughout the book. Lighting for these early cinema ventures was provided at first by naphtha flare lamps and then by electricity. And in many of the illustrations the light engine can be seen as part of the walk-up itself, emphasizing even more the wonders of technology. The authors also include a section devoted to the elaborate music organs which were an integral part of the show fronts.

The major portion of *The Travelling Cinematograph Show* is an alphabetical "who's who" of itinerant showmen during the heyday of British fairground exhibition. Using archival sources, as well as information from newspapers and trade journals, Scrivens and Smith provide as detailed a portrait as possible for each individual exhibitor. One of many interesting examples is the Biddall Brothers, who originally operated a travelling menagerie of wild animals and in 1899 added "living pictures" to their show. According to the research of Scrivens and Smith, "Each performance began with the brothers' North American Indian impalement acts,

featuring Captain Hunter the lion tamer, and finally films were shown" (66). The authors also record that numerous gimmicks were used to attract patronage (The origins of "ballyhoo"). In one of these a local was ushered to the stage and then taken into the lion's cage where "he opened a bottle of wine and proposed a toast among the calm beasts" (66). What these and other entries document is the embryonic relationship of early cinema to popular theatre.

According to Scrivens and Smith the itinerant showmen were a victim of their own success. The growing popularity of moving pictures caused the development of permanent exhibition sites for films. The authors state that, "the zenith of the fairground cinematograph was over about 1910, and competition from permanent picture halls did seriously dampen enthusiasm for the travelling shows" (31). Also, prescriptive legislation in the form of the Cinematograph Act of 1909 insisted on safety measures which many smaller shows could ill afford. This in turn made the building of permanent picture halls far more practical. The legacy of the travelling cinematograph shows was that they were responsible for introducing the new medium of motion pictures to a mass audience. According to one observer, "the greatest service the old showmen did was to create an appetite for story films, the showmen 'nursed' the infant cinema, saw it through all its early trials and troubles. Mothered it or fathered it through its many illnesses, until it became a strong, sturdy, robust youth. Then, like the good-natured, unbusinesslike creature he always was, he gently handed it over" (34). Although the metaphor of the infant child may be a sentimental one, the importance of these itinerant showmen to the development and expansion of the fledgling film industry cannot be undervalued. Likewise, the importance of such a book, devoted to a cataloging of such fairground exhibitions, is a significant contribution to the early history of cinema. The service of such a work, it would be hoped, will nurture further contributions to this fascinating and valid field of study.