

# No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive

By Lee Edelman

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. ISBN: 978-0822333593 (hbk). ISBN: 978-0822333692 (pbk) 208pp. £62.00 (hbk, £16.99 (pbk).

## A review by Angelo Restivo, Georgia State University, USA

Lee Edelman's new book is not principally a work of film studies. Nonetheless, there are several reasons why this brilliantly argued and overtly polemical book should be brought to the attention of the film studies community. In the first place, the final two of the book's four chapters present bravura readings of Hitchcock, with chapter three devoted to an analysis of only the final minutes of *North by Northwest* (1959), and chapter four to a reading of *The Birds* (1963). (These chapters, one might note parenthetically, represent an exciting culmination of over a decade of work Edelman has produced on Hitchcock and on other canonical texts of classical Hollywood cinema, which have appeared variously in journals and collections). Secondly, Edelman's book elaborates a new way of conceiving the relationship between critical theory (and especially, a revitalized psychoanalysis), cultural studies, and film studies. Finally, there is the "queer theory" of the book's subtitle: Edelman's book doesn't just show us what a queer reading practice should look like -- for, after all, film studies has had well over a decade of work engaged in queering the canon -- but more importantly, shows us the profound stakes in such reading practices, insisting that they are charged with a radical ethical injunction, beyond any comforting dream of "assimilation".

Key to Edelman's project is the mobilization of the notion of cultural fantasy, as that which insistently manifests itself across a field which includes films and other cultural productions, but also political pronouncements, advertising, pop music lyrics, and news coverage of such events as the murder of Matthew Shephard or Andrew Cunanan's killing spree. The identification of a pervasive cultural fantasy -- in this case, one that Edelman names "reproductive futurism," and which will be attended to here in due course -- is precisely what allows the cultural analyst to, among other things, produce important new readings of canonical films like *The Birds*. In order to make this procedure work, however, one must already have abandoned the old notion, inherited from the New Criticism, that the film or other work of art is some organic, autonomous "object". If the film is seen rather as a kind of "force field" embedded within a larger textuality, one then has in place a mechanism by which all manner of cultural scraps are able to migrate across discourses and cultural productions. In itself, this is not new: it is the classic poststructuralist view of textuality going back to Roland Barthes. Nevertheless, it can serve to explain to those readers not versed in (or sympathetic to) poststructuralist theories of textuality why someone like Edelman might not be concerned with producing a totalizing reading of a film, or the validity of his focusing on some five-odd minutes of *North by Northwest*. (Here it should be noted that Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who has written extensively on Hitchcock, really pioneered this

tracking of social fantasy across various cultural productions, without regard for the boundaries of any given text).

In fact, this older notion of the work of art as an "object" with stable boundaries, or of the work of the critic as that of producing a totalizing interpretation, is precisely what Hitchcock himself subverts in *The Birds*. Edelman begins his discussion of the film with a mini-"reception study", where we find that critics and audiences alike were dazzled by Hitchcock's technical mastery but frustrated by the film's utter lack of closure. This, Edelman argues, is just one more manifestation of the fundamental cultural fantasy of reproductive futurism: the notion that at some point in the future, we will arrive at the "fullness of meaning", that the fundamental disequilibrium between language and world will somehow be healed. In the U.S. today, this fantasy is more and more embodied in the figure of the child, and in a heteronormativity which then bears, as Edelman puts it, "the cultural burden of signifying futurity". Indeed, other queer theorists before Edelman -- particularly Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner -- have noted how a democracy founded on the concerns of adult citizens now envisions its central preoccupation to be the nurturing of the child. In the first chapter of *No Future*, Edelman illustrates this development with numerous examples taken from public discourse: from the television public service announcement starring Bill, Hilary, and Chelsea Clinton which ended with the forced choice "We're fighting for the children. Whose side are you on?", to the ongoing American hysteria over abortion. In this totalized ideological field, queerness comes to figure as that which threatens the fantasy of reproductive futurism, and so bears all the ethical weight that such a symbolic position calls into being.

Edelman's argument is grounded in psychoanalytic theory (as well as a poststructuralist view of language), and he is one of those rare writers who can not only make the intricacies of Lacanian theory or deconstruction intelligible, but is able to do so with great panache. Since to rehearse the fundamentals of Lacan's imaginary, symbolic, and real would likely be either unnecessary or oversimplifying to readers of this journal, let us instead focus on the broad strokes of Edelman's argument. Psychoanalysis posits that one's sense of identity is always a precarious formation, in which an imaginary idea of wholeness is more or less propped up, given social validation, by the symbolic structures of language (including the discourses that constitute the space we call "politics"). But human beings are also subjects of drives, whose circularity and demonic, repetitive insistence always threaten to destabilize our imaginary and symbolic identifications, opening up the abyss of a radical enjoyment, "beyond the pleasure principle". Edelman argues that we need to conceptualize queerness as another name for this force which disfigures the Symbolic; and in a highly original move, he links the death drive to Paul DeMan's conception of irony, "that queerest of rhetorical devices", irony for DeMan always undoing the imaginary coherence of narrative. The most difficult piece of Edelman's argument comes via his neologism, "*sinthomosexuality*" (from Lacan's own neologism of sorts, the "*sinthome*"). The *sinthome* designates the utterly particular way in which each subject knots together the imaginary and symbolic in relation to the annihilating force of the drives: as such, it marks a kind of fundamental limit to the procedure of psychoanalysis. The *sinthome* is a contingent and meaningless sign--yet take it away and the subject's entire being collapses. In Lacan's later teachings -- and I think it would have helped Edelman's presentation if he had brought this out explicitly -- the final stage of the psychoanalysis is the "identification with the *sinthome*," that is, coming fully to embrace the fact that one's core sense of self is held in place by this contingent and unanalyzeable (and often ridiculous) sign. *Sinthomosexuality*, then, asserts the position of permanent critique that queerness is charged with: it will always reveal the arbitrariness of any fantasmatic "identity," always reveal the social fantasy as the defense against our full acknowledgment of mortality--and this is why

*sinthomosexuality* will always be seen as a threat to the order of things, however assimilated some gays may seem to have become.

In Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, we have an example of the cinematic *sinthomosexual* par excellence in the character of Leonard. Leonard, of course, is coded as "gay", but this is not the focus of Edelman's argument. Rather, Edelman begins at the point where Leonard puts his foot down, grinding it into the hand of Roger Thornhill dangling precariously (along with Eve) on the face of Mount Rushmore. We can remember that Leonard's gesture here comes in response to Thornhill's simple plea for help; we can thus say that this is a key fulcrum point in Thornhill's "development", insofar as his speech is finally purged of its glibness, its double-entendre, its *irony*. Leonard, meanwhile, is now in possession of the pre-Columbian statuette containing the microfilm, which throughout the film has been called simply "the figure"; and so Leonard gets associated with that figurality which, essential to language, constantly sets it off course. The physical object, of course, is the film's MacGuffin (in other words, a "nothing"), and here Edelman effects a nice interpretive move: at the very moment when Thornhill, whose middle initial "stands for nothing", is ready to stand for something, the burden of standing for nothing is transferred to Leonard. In order to explain how Leonard's gesture represents the "wholly impossible ethical act" that the *sinthomosexual* is called to, Edelman invokes a section of Lacan's ethics seminar devoted to St. Martin and the beggar. Hagiography tells us that when a naked beggar on a cold winter day asked St. Martin for help, St. Martin responded by sharing his cloak. But perhaps, Lacan speculates, the beggar was asking for something else entirely: perhaps he was asking that St. Martin "either kill him or fuck him" (Lacan's words, translated). For Lacan, St. Martin's altruism in the face of the suffering of his neighbor has to be seen as implicated in narcissism, insofar as the performance of compassion always involves a certain assumption that what the other wants conforms to what we think he *should* want. In the case of our scenario on Mount Rushmore, Leonard's *sinthomosexuality* comes to figure the radical repudiation of an altruism that seeks only to continue the reassuring fantasies that keep things the way they are; thus, his act more closely resembles that of Antigone. (Lacan ends the ethics seminar mentioned above with an extended discussion of Antigone's act; this in turn has generated much discussion in critical theory of late, by Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, and others. Edelman here weighs in on this debate). Naturally, then, Leonard must be killed by the agents of the Law, and as the pre-Columbian figurine drops to the ground and shatters, so too does the disfiguring force of figuration itself become purged from the film. Finally, Edelman's reading is able to produce an interesting new interpretation of the strangeness of the ellipsis at the scene's end, when Hitchcock cuts from the dangling characters on Rushmore to Thornhill pulling Eve up into the honeymoon berth on the train. Clearly, here, we have a startling disruption of the invisibility of the Hollywood system of *découpage*: this simultaneously enacts the fantasy of reproductive futurism and, in its very reflexivity, exposes it as fantasy.

Two things should be noted by way of the larger implications of this reading. In the first place, clearly this is an allegorical reading. Lacan always noted that the ethical imperative for the psychoanalyst lay in the timing and nature of an intervention, whether it be the proffering of an interpretation or the sudden halting of the analytic session. Thus, one could say that the difference between a therapist and an analyst is that, when the patient-analysand is hanging precariously on the edge and asks for help, the therapist responds with empathy, while the psychoanalyst tries to push the analysand further toward the edge so as to allow the fantasy to be traversed. But there is something about putting Leonard in this position that doesn't sit right. It has to do, I think, with the fact that Leonard is motivated by jealousy. We know as much from the earlier scene in the parlor (if not from his manner throughout the film). As

such, he is *acting out*, and so hardly occupying the position of the analyst. The second thing has to do with an idea Edelman does develop at some length, but which I think might be productive if pushed even further. Leonard, Edelman notes, at this moment in the film might easily be seen as a surrogate for the director, given Hitchcock's delight in sadistically playing with the affective registers of the audience. One can draw the implication, then, that Hitchcock's "sadism" was in the service of shocking the spectator from the complacency of such social fantasies as reproductive futurism (and Hitchcock's next two films, *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds*, would provide evidence of this); while the ideological structures of the dream factory—all that post-1968 film theory taught us about classical cinema—are mobilized, consciously or not, to prevent the films from going too far. But there is a certain amount of work going on in film theory now centering on the notion of the machinic (and thus radically non-human) nature of cinematic "perception", and that this is where cinema's radical potential lay from the very start. Benjamin, for example, in his idea of the "dynamite of the split second", was on to this notion; and it seems that one of film theory's current projects -- whether developing out of the Frankfurt school, Deleuze, or deconstruction -- is to understand this other, more radical side of the "cinematic". Such, for example, is undertaken in Tom Cohen's very difficult volumes, *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies* (2 vol., University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

But on this note of the machinic and non-human, we can return to *The Birds*, the analysis of which comprises the last chapter of the book. By now it will be evident that the birds cannot be interpreted as representatives of homosexuality or coming out of the closet, even if the birds do "come from San Francisco"! Rather, they figure the radically disruptive force of the death drive (and of the *sinthomosexuality* that comes to stand in for it). The discussion of the film is framed by a discussion of the murder of Matthew Shephard: how, for example, the public mourning took shape around -- what else? -- the trope of "our children", as if the right to mourn more appropriately accrued to those with children than to every gay man who potentially stood in Shephard's place; or how, for example, the bicyclist who discovered the body at first thought it to be a scarecrow, and in this "mistaken" perception reveals the reality of the common fantasy of the homosexual as a "bird of prey". Edelman's reading of the opening shots of *The Birds* is more a reinlection than a re-reading of this sequence: but a reinlection with the added weight that accrues from his incorporating within the analysis the television commercial in which Hitchcock discovered Tippi Hedron, and whose "storyline" Hitchcock recreates in the film's opening. The commercial, for a diet drink called Sego, is positively tutelary in its enactment of heteronormativity: Tippi, the object of the hungry glances of several men, hears a wolf-whistle and turns to find it's her son waiting for her in the car. In *The Birds*, the boy's whistle is immediately displaced onto a more ominous sound, the cries from the dark cloud of birds gathering in the distant sky. The project of the film is thus announced: the birds will stand as a blockage to any fantasmatic investment in reproductive futurism; and of course, children will become one of their most "inexplicable" targets.

When Annie Hayworth delivers what is arguably one of the film's most hilarious lines -- "Don't they ever stop migrating?" -- we can understand here the way the birds figure the senseless circulation of the drives which, as Edelman puts it, "reduce the hope of futurity to nothing but endless repetition." Edelman puts to great use Hitchcock's advertising campaign for the film. In the phrase "*The Birds* Is Coming", Hitchcock himself seems wryly aware of how the birds destabilize the laws of syntax itself. But Edelman takes this further: the "coming" suggests not only the *jouissance* embodied in the birds, but also the way in which their "coming" undoes the very legality of narrative's promise of a "future". Edelman then

shows how this concern with the signifier and its disruption makes its way into the film itself. Melanie, for example, in attempting to convince Mitch (and herself, perhaps) that her life is not all frivolity and practical jokes, says that she's enrolled in a course in general semantics at Berkeley. (Here, it is surprising that Edelman doesn't pick up another bit of dialogue in this scene—Melanie's women's league is helping to "put a little Korean boy through school". How better to convince a potential husband you've given up your reckless and promiscuous partying than by invoking the education of the child?) Edelman notes then how the lovebirds she brings to Cathy for her birthday are actually the result of a substitution: she was originally shopping for a mynah bird, which she was going to teach the four-letter words she picked up at Berkeley in order to shock her straight-laced aunt. The substitution of the pair of love birds for the mynah, Edelman argues, represents the way in which we force nature to ratify the order of meaning constructed by language; and so it is no wonder that the lovebirds end up figured as fragile little "children", in the famous "throw-away" shot of the lovebirds swaying back and forth in Melanie's car as it careens down the curving road.

While I've tried here to give enough detail to allow the reader to grasp the subtlety of Edelman's argument, it is of course impossible to convey in such a short space the richness of interpretation Edelman brings to his readings of Hitchcock. One of the great pleasures of the book -- aside from the argument itself -- is to experience the way Edelman inhabits language, and without extensive quotes, this can only be vaguely suggested in a review. On the paperback's back cover, Leo Bersani notes that "we can perhaps reproach [Edelman] only for not spelling out the mode in which we might survive our necessary assent to his argument". Indeed, this is the great challenge Edelman's book presents to the reader. But I would suggest that what assent to his argument calls for is, while difficult, not without precedent in critical theory: it is the call to critique as a way of life.

# Queer Screen: A Screen Reader

By Jackie Stacey and Sarah Street

London: Routledge, 2007. ISBN: 0-415-38430-3 (hbk), ISBN: 0-415-38431-1 (pbk). 37 illustrations, xvi + 304 pp. £60.00 (hbk), £21.99 (pbk).

## A review by E. Corzo-Duchardt, Northwestern University, USA

An anthology containing articles published in *Screen* beginning around 1990, *Queer Screen* seeks to narrate the journal's own history within queer film studies, the discipline that emerged with B. Ruby Rich's article inaugurating "The New Queer Cinema" in 1992 (*Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, issue 5, pp. 30-4). Editors Jackie Stacey and Sarah Street describe a somewhat defensive impetus for this volume. Acknowledging "the relative delay in *Screen* being associated with the emergence of queer scholarship", the editors offer this collection in order to position the journal as a significant source for past and future queer work (9). Towards this effort, *Queer Screen* quite convincingly traces the lineage of queer film studies from a tradition of feminist scholarship. Indeed, feminist scholars, particularly those concerned with the Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist aesthetic criticism associated with the journal, have long been interested in destabilizing the binaries that trouble queer scholars.

In this context, the opening essay, Teresa de Lauretis' 'Guerrilla in the midst: women's cinema in the 80's' finds its place as a progenitor of sorts. While the word "queer" never appears in her text, de Lauretis' privileged example of "an alternative, guerrilla cinema" is lesbian-themed film *She Must be Seeing Things* (Sheila McLaughlin, 1987) (39). Lesbianism, implies de Lauretis, can function as a wrench in the system, one of many representational problems that trouble the various binaries structuring the discourse of so-called "women's cinema". In its goal to "at once question and to redefine the terms of the critical discourse on cinema," this essay demonstrates a strong affinity with the volume's larger project (22). Like the term "queer" for Stacey and Street, "women's cinema" for de Lauretis is a productively ambiguous label that "cuts across any easy division or opposition between high and popular culture, Hollywood and independent, mainstream and alternative [and] it destabilizes the criteria by which film-critical categories have been set up" (23-24).

*Queer Screen* is organized in five sections: "authoring queerness", "queering technology", "racialization, queerness and desire", "queer bodies and histories", and a group of shorter essays constituting the "*Boys Don't Cry* debate". Each article in this volume seeks to establish alternative modes of inquiry appropriate to queer theory's rejection of a politics of respectability and celebration of proliferating deviant sexualities. As a result, many of these articles show an attentiveness to form that moves beyond plot and story onto explorations of alternative temporalities and spatialities. The authors' methods and opinions diverge however, on the relationship between the queer and the mainstream. Some articles strongly advocate the importance of maintaining alternative spaces for the production and exhibition of queer films, while others are engaged in "queering" as a political practice, that is, "asserting power in deviance through a radical re-scripting of history" (6).

For example, Teresa de Lauretis comes down firmly on the side of the "alternative" even as she troubles the term's definition. She is highly critical of what she identifies as a dominant strategy in film: the "appropriation and expropriation of sociosexual differences" and the narrative processes "by which those differences are re-contained in current [1980s] films" (22). According to these criteria, de Lauretis rejects certain lesbian-themed films such as *Lianna* (John Sayles, 1983) and *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1985) because they "contain" potentially deviant sexualities within formulaic romance narratives (38).

José Muñoz's essay 'The autoethnographic performance: reading Richard Fung's queer hybridity' follows de Lauretis' lead by virtue of his object of choice: a queer Chinese-Trinidadian video performance artist. In fact, not only is Fung's work firmly situated outside of mainstream entertainment, Muñoz's analysis is rooted in postcolonial theory as much as it is queer theory, mobilizing together the writings of Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha, Eve K. Sedgwick and Ella Shohat. His essay introduces an alternative in the context of the volume's dominant, mostly Western feminist derived, discourse. For instance, Muñoz discusses Richard Fung's critique of gay pornography in his video, *Chinese Characters* (1986). This video not only works to deconstruct "the generic fictions of the native Other in ethnography and the Asian 'bottom' in fetishizing, North American, specialty porn", but also brings to the surface ethnocentrism in gay culture more generally (166).

Indicative of the use of the term "queer" as a verb, the essays in the section entitled "queering technology", take as their objects resolutely mainstream texts. For instance, Ellis Hanson celebrates a queerness that exceeds sexuality, applying the term to both the "no-man's land beyond the heterosexual norm" and "the odd, the uncanny, the undecidable" (dis)embodied in the voice of the computer HAL in *2001, A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) (55). Jackie Stacey takes on the figure of the clone in 'She is not herself: the deviant relations of *Alien Resurrection*'. And through a discussion of formal technique, Lee Wallace manages to queer the already homosexual characters in *Bound* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1996) and *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948), texts that might fall under de Lauretis' description (on page 39) of films that "contain" deviant sexualities.

It is Chris Straayer's essay, 'The She-man: postmodern bi-sexed performance in film and video,' that takes most seriously the collapse of the binaries de Lauretis rails against. Straayer celebrates a motley crew of queer figures from David Bowie and Annie Lenox to artists Carolee Schneeman and Richard Fung. Her work is not a queering of the mainstream, however, for Straayer insists that (at the time of her writing in 1988) "the She-man is the most transgressive signifier of sexuality in play, evident in popular music culture as well as underground film and experimental video" (254). No matter what the context, Straayer argues, the She-man figure "suggests the collapse of the phallus as the dominant signifier and its replacement by a new empowered female sexuality which cannot be reduced to boyishness" (254). Here, once again, the continuity between queer film studies and feminist film studies is apparent.

A central concern of this volume is the exploration of alternative temporality and spatiality as both a queer mode of analysis and a queered perspective on the world. For example, in his discussion of Robert Lepage's films, Peter Dickinson takes up issues of time and space as they relate to the queer male body. James Tweedie looks at time's suspension in moments of spectacle in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986). And Lee Wallace highlights the indebtedness of *Bound* to Hitchcock's *Rope* along the lines of cinematic technique, namely

the particularly queer way that each film "foregrounds cinema as a spatial system, a filmic organization of place and time which generates among its effects narrative causality" (114).

One of the best resources this book has to offer scholars and teachers is the final section, which brings together a series of shorter essays originally published in *Screen's* "debates" section between 2001 and 2002 focusing on the film *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 1999). These essays speak to each other deliberately, while at the same time maintaining their unique perspective on the film. At stake are fundamental issues to screen studies such as the revision of feminist gaze theory to account for a gaze that is resolutely female (Patricia White) or transgender (Judith Halberstam). With regard to the complexities of representation, another important issue is the degree to which the film falls into the trap of constituting "otherness" along one vector. Judith Halberstam and Jennifer Devere Brody critique the film's privileging of Brandon's white, male transgender subjectivity at the expense of another character, a wheelchair-bound African American man whose murder alongside Brandon Teena's was excised from the narrative. Similarly, Lisa Henderson wonders how the film's depiction of working-class life may overdetermine transgender violence, and whether we may conceive of the film as "about" class as much as it is about transgender subjectivity (285). Julianne Pidduck focuses on questions of representation in terms of gendered violence, pointing out the limits of transgender legibility in the visualization of power and vulnerability, arguing that Brandon is rendered female in order to elicit maximum shock and horror at the violence done to him, begging the question: even if the gaze is not necessarily male, is power?

As any retrospective practice is always rooted in the present, we can view *Queer Screen* not only as a looking back upon seminal, influential or representative essays, but also as an assertion of the journal's presence with regard to more contemporary hot topics of analysis. These include: the increased (and increasing) interest within both queer theory and cinema studies in questions of temporality, the emergence of transgender studies in the academy and proliferation of transgender characters on screen, and the importance of notions of hybridity and intersectionality in terms of race, gender and sexuality. Besides successfully positioning *Screen* as an important site for queer scholarship, this book's attention to these very contemporary concerns makes *Queer Screen* a useful resource.



# Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies

By Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (eds.)

New York and London: Routledge, 2008. ISBN: 978-0415-962568 (pbk). ISBN 978-0415-96255-1 (hbk). 27 b&w illustrations, x + 259 pp. £16.00 (pbk), £60.00 (hbk).

Thelma & Louise Live! : The Cultural Afterlife of an American Film by Bernie Cook (ed.)

## Thelma & Louise Live! : The Cultural Afterlife of an American Film

By Bernie Cook (ed.).

Austin: University of Texas, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-292-71466-3, 60 (pbk). ISBN: 978-0-292-71465-6 (hbk). 60 b&w illustrations, ix + 227 pp. £17.99 (pbk), £40.85 (hbk).

## A review by Betty Jay, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Written as a companion volume to their anthology *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction* (Routledge, 2005), Suzanne Ferriss's and Mallory Young's more recent collection of essays, *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, represents an instructive addition to feminist film criticism. The essays in this volume all grapple with a nominally contentious genre which despite, or indeed because of, its relative newness, has already invited many attempts to define and determine its remit. Notwithstanding the ambivalence that the term calls forth, almost all the essays in this collection contribute to a serious critical and cultural discourse which seeks not only to define but also analyse a newly emergent cultural phenomenon. To this end, many of the essays begin by acknowledging the problems of precisely defining the genre before going on to offer a full range of -- sometimes contradictory -- descriptions of the "chick flick" itself. Whilst the editors themselves "hesitate to pin it down to a single, possibly reductive definition" (1), Ferriss and Young nonetheless identify the "chick flick" as a genre which emerges out of the "conflicted territory" between feminist and post-feminist beliefs. Following this line, Deborah Barker argues that "the chick flick is responding simultaneously to feminist principles and to the backlash mentality" (92) before going on to demonstrate how these conflicting impulses are displayed in a number of films set in the American South. For Lisa M. Rüll, the most helpful definition of a chick flick is a simpler one, namely, a movie which takes as its focus "success and survival for -- and between -- soulmates, sisters and girlfriends" (79). This focus frames Rüll's subsequent discussion of the movie soundtrack and a consideration of "how films, songs and albums are influenced by external commercial considerations" (80). Especially fruitful is Suzanne Ferriss's exploration of "makeover films", which she identifies as "a dependable sub-genre of chick-flicks, where superficial external changes are signs of an internal moral transformation"

(42). Like Rüll's account of music and film, Ferriss's essay also takes in a discussion of consumer culture and of spectatorship (within the film as well as within the audience). Ferriss's own emphasis on the accoutrements of contemporary femininity also works well alongside Carol M. Dole's essay, which deals with the semiotics of pink, reading the colour as "a cultural symptom of shifting attitudes to femininity" (58) and visible, omnipresent sign of third wave feminism. Both of these essays detect in seemingly superficial signifiers of femininity and subject formation wider undercurrents which convey complex attitudes to post-war gender politics.

The question of the definition of the chick flick, which the editors see as productively opened and a spur to debate, is further complicated by the many different genres that the term can also encompass. As Ferriss and Young argue in their introduction, "Considering chick flicks as a group emphasizes the fluidity of the generic classification. Chick flicks do not clearly align themselves with any particular genre" (16). Such fluidity proves to be useful in terms of this volume itself, which includes essays devoted to *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001) and *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994) alongside chick flicks which take Southern culture as their backdrop, deal with aging women, or offer insights into the complex ways in which the chick flick might be said to address or sidestep, often in troubling ways, questions of class, race and sexuality.

The essays which form the last few chapters of the volume, clearly seek to expand and reinvigorate the discussion of the chick flick by focusing attention on what Karen Hollinger, in her 'Afterword', describes as the "porous borders" (225) of the chick flick. As she goes on to argue, these lead it "to be constantly expanding in new and previously unexplored directions" (225), a point borne out by many of the essays included here. Indeed, it is this porosity which, on the whole, makes this volume of essays so suggestive.

At the same time, although the debates generated take in the many and diverse forms that the chick flick assumes, such variety also goes to create a kind of critical dispersal. This is perhaps inevitable given the problem of precisely defining the form but its effects are most apparent in those essays which tend to offer informative surveys of particular kinds of chick flick rather than a more convincing analysis of the form itself. This is particularly the case with the last two essays in the volume, which deal with the "babe scientist" and "warrior woman" (by Holly Hassel and Kate Waites respectively). In the latter, which offers astute readings of recent manifestations of the female warrior in film, it is more difficult to discern in precise terms how the emergence of this figure precisely relates to the chick flick phenomenon and to debates about feminism and postfeminism. Other attempts to investigate the boundaries of the chick flick form prove to be equally challenging but also more satisfying. Margaret Tally, for example, in 'Something's gotta give: Hollywood, female sexuality and the "older bird" chick flick', considers a range of films which take as their focus the older woman, exploring, in particular whether these portrayals can ever allow mature female sexual desire to go unpunished. Just as substantial is Myra Mendible's 'Chica flicks: postfeminism, class and the Latina American Dream,' which seeks to address the white, middle-class focus of much criticism by foregrounding the working-class Latina body. This essay identifies some of the assumptions about race and class that the genre encompasses and argues that these deserve to be made visible to and debated by critics of popular culture. A concern with forms of romance also informs Lisa Henderson's analysis of *Go Fish*, a film which Henderson sees as offering its audience a "modest lesbian utopian" vision which is as problematic as it is seductive. The difficulty of translating Anglo-American definitions of romance is the focus of Young's essay on European films which, following "transatlantic

intermingling" (177), seem to have given rise to a new film genre, the "European chick flick", a term used to define films which "follow the Anglo-American prescriptions for chick-flick romance while contributing an unexpected element drawn from traditional European film: the element of naturalism". Like Mendible, Young argues that the chick flick itself might usefully take in new and emergent forms of cinematic production. Both writers share a concern with what Mendible calls "narratives of romance" (160). As Mendible demonstrates, the romance in these films represents "harmonious matings" (160) which "can assuage racial and class anxieties, reflecting a reassuring vision of racial, gender, and class harmony".

Insofar as the essays in this volume contribute to an ongoing debate about the chick flick and in some cases suggest new ways in which the chick flick might be conceived and understood, *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies* represents a successful attempt to initiate and shape future discussion of the form. It is perhaps worth noting, finally, that the most persuasive essays in this volume are those which look back as well as forward. This is the case with Ferriss's account of the makeover film and, in particular, with Maureen Turim's 'Women's Films: comedy, drama, romance', an essay which uncovers the many ways in which "antecedents of many of today's chick flicks may be traced far back in film history" (26), and provides a welcome sense of context and history to set against the newness of the chick flick form.

Taking as its focus just one of the films which might be absorbed into the chick flick category is Bernie Cook's edited collection *Thelma & Louise Live! The Cultural Afterlife of an American Film*. Including an interview with screenwriter Callie Khouri and contemporary reviews, this volume is essential reading for *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) aficionados, as well as critics interested in the phenomenal cultural and box office success of the film. The range of essays included in this volume does justice to the complex and powerful meanings that have been generated by the film and, with this in mind, the essays included take in both questions of spectatorship and consumption as well as debates concerning semiotics and interpretation. Indeed, the volume offers a careful balance between essays that attend in careful detail to the formal composition of the film and those that look beyond to consider the cultural impact it has had. Given the amount of print and debate already generated, it is pleasantly surprising to discover that each of these essays has something new and illuminating to add, from J. David Slocum's reading of the outlaw movie to Cynthia Fuch's account of the film's interrogation of masculinity as spectacle. The huge advantage of a volume like this is, of course, the possibility for a full and detailed exploration of specific aspects of the film. This possibility is exploited by all of the contributors to this volume. Suzanne Knobloch's contribution, 'Interplaying Identities: Acting and the Building Blocks of Character in *Thelma & Louise*', is an extremely perceptive account of body, gesture and space in the film. As Knobloch argues, "The characters Thelma and Louise are built on an exchange circuit of alluring fluidity and protective materiality", and it is by focusing on the interplay between actors, audience and camera in such detail that Knobloch is able to explore the film's performativity to such effect. The volume's single focus also enables its contributors to attend to aspects of the film otherwise overlooked, as is the case with Victoria Sturtevant's 'Getting Hysterical: *Thelma & Louise* and Laughter'. Here "the lens of comedy theory" and of Bakhtin, in particular, ensures close scrutiny not only of the kinds of humour deployed by the film but also the theoretical and cultural contexts which enable such a wide comedic register to be understood. Sturtevant's essay functions as a useful intervention into the debates about the film and its multigeneric form. Another astute essay is Claudia Gorman's 'Hearing *Thelma & Louise*: Active Reading of the Hybrid Pop Score', which is attuned to the musical range the film utilizes, from Hans Zimmer's compositions to the music

-- both diegetic and non-diegetic -- incorporated into the soundtrack. Gorman's essay also has the advantage of offering readers unfamiliar with the intersections between music and film theory a concise guide as to how they work together. Of particular interest to students of film history is Slocum's attempt "to meditate on *Thelma & Louise* as an 'outlaw-couple-on-the-run' film for the early 1990s". Taking in classic films which include *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969) and *Badlands* (Terence Malick, 1973), Slocum offers a consideration of "being on the run, outlawry, and coupling, as well as their significance to the historically specific popular culture and mythmaking of the early 1990s" before going on to connect the film's reworking of popular cinematic forms in terms of politics, economics and gender.

Bernie Cook's own contribution to the book represents a fascinating account of the difficulties encountered during the production and promotion of the film, and the way in which these shed light on the film's sometimes unsettling appeal. Of particular interest is the way in which his essay hones in on the possible tensions between director Ridley Scott's vision of the film and Khouri's screenplay, which some critics see as "a clash of sensibilities between Khouri's feminism and Scott's masculinist polish" (13-14). For Cook, the film's achievement owes much to the collaboration between these two artists, both of whom in turn must negotiate the agenda set by MGM/UA during a period of intense discord and heated debate around issues of gender. Cook's own contribution to this debate and his reading of comments posted on the Internet Movie Database website and in response to reviews of the film suggests that *Thelma & Louise* itself unsettles these simple binaries between masculine and feminine. For this reason, it seems that debates around the film might be better framed in terms which take fuller account of the film's "mobile perspectives and possibilities for play with identity" (34). At the same time, it seems likely that the collection of essays in *Thelma & Louise Live! : The Cultural Afterlife of an American Film* itself goes a good way towards reframing the film and its meanings. The detailed readings of the film's production, composition, promotion and reception make this a valuable resource for those who seek a better understanding of *Thelma & Louise* as well as a demonstration of the many different routes traversed by modern film criticism.

# Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain

By Steve Blandford

Bristol: Intellect, 2008. ISBN: 978-1841501505 (pbk). 200pp. £19.95 (pbk). Bristol: Intellect, 2008. ISBN: 978-1841501505 (pbk). 200pp. £19.95 (pbk).

The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories by Milly Buonanno.

## The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories

By Milly Buonanno.

Bristol: Intellect, 2008. ISBN: 978-1841501819 (pbk). 141pp. £19.95 (pbk).

## A review by Brett Mills, University of East Anglia, UK

With these two books, Intellect extends their developing catalogue of intriguing and novel books on media and culture. As with all of the publisher's books, each of these is pretty succinct, and feels like a slim volume in the hand. The page size too is different from what is expected in most academic books; it's a small matter, but it points to Intellect's desire to publish material perhaps not found elsewhere, and to produce volumes which are distinct. Considering most subject areas persistently plough tried and tested furrows, this is to be applauded. Indeed, the two books under review here certainly offer insights into material I've not encountered elsewhere.

Blandford's *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* examines the relationships between the four different kinds of national identity within the nations that make up the United Kingdom through analysis of cinema and theatre. The book has nine chapters; after the introductory opening, each of these takes one of those nations and explores either theatre or cinema in relation to it. Blandford notes that his book and its title refer to Tom Nairn's *The Break-Up of Britain* (New Left Books, 1977), examining whether the predictions Nairn made thirty years ago can be seen to have come to fruition. Considering devolution, and the growth of the powers of the Governments and Assemblies in the nations that make up the UK, this is an interesting time for such analysis, especially as those legislative bodies have often seen investing in culture as a way in which they can help foster newer forms of identity. To this end, this book explores not only the texts which are relevant to its focus, but the historical and policy factors which might be seen to have made them come about. As Blandford notes, this is a suitable time to examine the "ways in which dramatic narratives have played a significant part in the re-imagination of the idea of Britain" (18).

Buonanno's book, on the other hand, attempts to examine and summarise a number of key approaches commonly taken towards the examination of television; it might, therefore, be seen as a useful indicator of what can be called "Television Studies". Drawing on a wealth of canonical material, Buonanno explores what she calls the "age of television" (11) and its impacts upon communication within society. There are, therefore, chapters on technology and

recent developments in digital technology, media events, narrative, time, globalisation and localisation, and the international flows of television. In that sense, this book would be useful as a set text for undergraduate classes, as well as a primer for those new to the subject. Considering it points towards many of the key thinkers, it also helps define the field as a whole.

It is this which highlights the main distinction between the two books; Buonanno's is primarily reliant on existing literature, while Blandford's instead uses such literature only as reference points in the book's argument as a whole. That is not to say there isn't anything new said by Buonanno. Considering she works at the University of Rome it's unsurprising that she draws on a wealth of Italian literature, television, and cultural examples to demonstrate her points, and all of these were new to me. This takes a particular inflection in the chapter on media events, where she examines the death and funeral of Mother Theresa, and the subsequent drama about her life broadcast by the Italian television channel Raiuno (43). Through analysis of the reception of this drama she shows how it was publicised as, and understood by audience to be, central to Italy's "Catholic imagination" (52). Indeed, Buonanno goes on to show that the slew of religious dramas about Popes on Italian television around the millennium drew on a "Catholic sentiment" (51). Each of these programmes garnered massive audiences, showing that "religious drama in Italy provide[s] the largest possible guarantee of a popular success" (51). This is noticeably at odds with such programming in the majority of European countries, and demonstrates that, globalisation notwithstanding, the relationship between the nation and broadcasting remains a resolutely steadfast one. Considering the vast majority of written material many of us come across remains fixated on British and American television, it's fascinating to be given such insights into the specifics of other nations. It's a shame that the mass of research produced by Italian academics -- and which Buonanno uses extensively in her book -- is not usually translated into English, and instead the subject area remains an Anglo-American one, even if books such as James Curran and Myung-Jin Park's *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (Routledge, 1999) has shown the folly of this. Intellect deserves to be applauded, then, for publishing a book in English which is chock-a-block with examples which are literally foreign for much of the intended market; the insights these Italian examples give show the short-sightedness of many publishers who reject book proposals if their appropriateness for the English-language market is not symbolised by the preponderance of British and American television texts.

Clearly, what is running through both books, then, is an interest in the relationships between culture and the national. While both acknowledge the slipperiness of such definitions, it's telling that Buonanno demonstrates the rigidity of such a structure within broadcasting, while Blandford testifies to the mutability and confusion within national identity. Indeed, Blandford notes that "the initial idea of this volume included discussion of television drama" (17), but that this was dropped partly for space reasons, but also because "the institutional complexity of television production is such that it is the institutional context itself that tends to dominate, rather than the narrative itself" (17). I have sympathy with this approach, and it is clear that television institutions are far more complex than might be the case for other cultural forms. Yet investigation of those institutional structures would, I feel, have added a worthwhile dimension to this study, especially as institutions such as BBC Wales and BBC Scotland have for much of their existence grappled with the difficulty of defining their output as "regional" or "national". That is, Blandford examines the ways in which notions of nation are explored in cinema and theatre through the creativity of the individual, and there's much to be applauded with that approach, especially as many of those creatives make clear their desire for their work to be about such a topic. Yet exploring institutions would have added another

layer to this debate. Furthermore, as Blandford acknowledges the regulatory and policy incentives which have had consequences for those working in film and theatre, it seems odd to use institutional reasons as a justification for the avoidance of television. That said, if television was included in his book then the question would arise about a whole range of other cultural forms (radio, music, the internet) resulting in an unwieldy and impossible volume.

What's more puzzling is the lack of engagement with debates about makes a cultural text "national". So, while Blandford draws on Tom Nairn, as well as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), the debates and complexities which these works raise about defining texts in terms of the nation are sidestepped. For example, in the chapter on Wales and Cinema, Blandford examines films directed by Marc Evans, focussing on the English-language *Beautiful Mistake* (2000) and *House of America* (1997) as well as the Welsh-language *Dal: Yma Nawr* (2004). The latter was a co-production with S4C, and was "marketed heavily as an educational resource" (93); it therefore wears its national credentials on its sleeve. For Blandford, the two English-language films are pertinent to debates of Wales and cinema because *Beautiful Mistake* "plays with the facile concept of 'Cool Cymru'" (92) while *House of America* has a "keen sense of the Welsh, rather than British, context" (97). Indeed, Blandford uses both of these films to usefully explore not only the institutional difficulties in making such films, but also the "hybridity and freewheeling nature of the possibilities inherent in a new Welsh identity" (92). Considering Evans can be classified as a director with such an interest, it seems odd that his other films -- *My Little Eye* (2002), *Trauma* (2004) and *Snow Cake* (2006) -- are not mentioned at all, while *Resurrection Man* (1998) is placed in the chapter on Ireland and cinema because of its content and setting. What is unclear is how these decisions are made; is a film classified as "Welsh" because of its narrative, its setting, its director, its sensibility, its funding, or its themes? Drawing on films which are not so obviously "Welsh" but which are made by a director who has, in some of his work, clearly engaged with ideas of "Welsh-ness" and identity might have helped broaden the examination of the national, precisely to show the complexities within it.

Indeed, it's unfortunate that there is no concluding chapter in the book. In its examples, this book offers a wealth of useful material for those debates about how national culture can be defined, both by the academy and by those who produce and consume it. Indeed, Intellect are to be applauded again for publishing a book whose international marked is not immediately obvious, even though the *implications* of this volume's findings are essential to ongoing policy debates about media in smaller nations, especially those for whom ideas of nation are most obviously problematic. Running throughout Blandford's book is a sense of struggle, both for the artists whose work he covers, but also for the nations (including, and perhaps most pertinently, England) which are grappling with a changing sense of themselves. This is in stark contrast to Buonanno's sense of Italy which, without eliding contradictions and complications, is clearly far more certain of its sense of self.

Perhaps, though, this just suggests something about different forms of culture. While television has been nationally defined since its inception, theatre and cinema have a much more problematic relationship to their homelands, and this has never been fully grounded in institutional terms. It's noticeable that Buonanno is able to draw on theory and literature from many decades ago, and shows how it is still relevant to the analysis of television today: Blandford, on the other hand, consistently and rightly shows the specifics of the contemporary, offering a snapshot of a period of change which will continue to mutate.

Reading them together has been an odd experience, for the one has repeatedly shown the stability of the nation, while the other has done the complete opposite. What both books show is the ongoing relationship between the nation and culture, and in that sense they offer valuable examples of the range of ways in which this most valuable of questions can be approached.



# Film Hieroglyphs: Ruptures in Classical Cinema

By Tom Conley

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. ISBN: 0-8166-4970-7 84 (pbk). 270 pp. £15.99 (pbk).

## A review by Brian Faucette, University of Kansas, USA

Conley first published *Film Hieroglyphs* in 1991. For this new edition he has included a new introduction that speaks to how he viewed his project of looking at cinema as another form of writing in the 1990s and how some of his earlier conclusions and theories have changed over the course of time. In large part, Conley examines the phenomenon of classical cinema as evidence of what he terms cinema *écriture*. Within this framework he argues cinema ruptures its pictorial elements because of the inclusion of writing in the frame. He notes that

wherever graphic traits interceded in the film (in the credits or the icons, in signboards within landscapes, in subtitles, in toponyms on maps shown in the field of the image) it was sustained that the illusion of reality seen within the frame became subject to graphic treatment that might forcibly call cinematic illusion into question. (x)

It is this rupture between the visual essence of cinema and the inclusion of the written word that Conley explores throughout this volume.

Conley draws upon the literary theories articulated by the deconstructionists (Derrida, Foucault, Chomsky), psychoanalytic tradition (Freud), and the philosophical approach to cinema as articulated by Gilles Deleuze in his two books *Cinema I: The Movement Image* (Continuum, 2005) and *Cinema II: The Time Image* (Continuum, 2005). In using this mixed method approach, Conley is able to challenge the more standard approaches to the study of film. In addition this multi-method allows Conley to attempt to theorize how cinema might be understood as a medium that is capable of being read on multiple levels, and more importantly to illustrate how limiting it is to think of cinema only in terms of the meaning created through images.

The device that structures the entire book is the idea of the *hieroglyph*. Conley recognizes that ancient humans relied heavily on hieroglyphs as their primary form of communication. However, he argues that cinema can best be thought of as an extension of those ancient forms of writing. He notes that the "hieroglyph... transforms a phenomenology of cinema into an epistemology, that is, into a problematic condition in which things heard and spoken or seen become elements of knowledge..." (xiv). It is this creation of a dual knowledge in film through images, signs, and dialogue that Conley argues differentiates it from other forms of communication. Conley divides the book into seven chapters and analyzes nine films to support his argument that film is an art form that is closely linked to all art forms, especially writing.

He begins his discussion of the hieroglyph and the effect of actual written words onscreen with a discussion of *Boudou Saved from Drowning* (Jean Renoir, 1932). While Conley's close analysis of individual shots/sequences is invaluable he veers away from his original purpose and begins to argue that what makes *Boudou* fascinating is its intertextual nature. In fact, Conley argues that the film's narrative, jokes, and action sequences are all linked to Renoir's earlier films, classical French literature and French painting. For Conley this film is the perfect example of the filmic icon, which allows the spectator to share an unconscious association with the events of the film and their own conscience exposure to verbal language (2). However, according to Conley's analysis, in order for the viewer to gain an understanding of the film, then they must have access to a knowledge of other films and in particular all of Renoir's films. By emphasizing this idea of intertextuality, Conley's revolutionary approach to film becomes embroiled in the older methods of film analysis such as auteurism, genre analysis and formalism.

This method of connecting the films under analysis to all forms of writing and the idea of the director as author undergirds the entire rest of the book. In chapter two he examines *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1946) as an example of what he calls "the letter of the law". By this, he means films wherein actual alphabetic letters come to represent the actual meaning of the film and connect it to the director's larger themes.

In chapter three he analyzes *Manpower* (Raoul Walsh, 1942) and in chapter four he looks at *Objective Burma* (Raoul Walsh, 1945). Conley believes that these two films illustrate the ways in which classical cinema was working to deconstruct the notion of the character as an important register of meaning and instead working to emphasize the self-reflexive nature of the director, the studio, and the star. These are interesting and bold assertions made by Conley, however, he lacks direct evidence to prove these theories.

Of all the chapters in the volume it is chapter seven, which analyzes the film noir films *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946), *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh, 1941) and *White Heat* (Raoul Walsh, 1949), that offers a groundbreaking system for re-thinking what films noirs mean and how they were constructed. Conley makes the argument that in films noirs, like *The Killers*, when the viewer sees the image from the perspective of car headlights that it is indicating how cinema as a medium of light/shadow can be read and interpreted (156). Furthermore, he argues that in many of these films when the shots are constructed to look through windshields it connects to the idea that the period of noir films was one marked by the anxiety of war and not being able to see what the future might hold for America.

Conley ends the book by connecting all the visual and graphic tropes he has discussed to *Vagabond* (Agnes Varda, 1984). By connecting the films, Conley is able to argue for a tradition of filmmaking and filmmakers who recognized that when language is shown through symbols in films that it creates a rupture between the spectator's expectations and the very medium of cinema. Might these ruptures simply be signs of future disruptions caused by living in a world that is constantly surrounded by images, words and text?

# The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s

By Lea Jacobs

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. ISBN: 0-520237018 (hbk). ISBN: 0-520254572 (pbk). 40 illustrations, iii + 374 pp. £38.95 (hbk), £16.95 (pbk).

## A review by Daniel Bashara, Northwestern University, USA

By any account, the 1920s were a decade of great change and development in American cinema; the growth and merging of studios, the expansion of the star system, and the advent of sound during the period are merely some of the most popular chapters in the Hollywood story. With *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*, film historian Lea Jacobs plants her own flag in this seemingly well-trodden terrain, outlining the as-yet-unexplored shift in taste away from the sentimental and toward a more restrained, "sophisticated" style of cinematic storytelling. For Jacobs, this development is an outgrowth of the debates over literary naturalism raging in intellectual circles throughout the 1910s and 1920s, a period in literary history marked by greater experimentation in both form and content. A retreat from genteel linguistic polish, a slackening of narrative pacing, and an engagement with pessimism, quotidian life, and open endings came to signify sophistication in literature, a trend with Jacobs uncovers in American film as well.

To chart this shift in popular film taste, Jacobs combines two methodologies: a discourse analysis of trade presses -- largely *Variety* and *Film Daily*, but others, such as *Moving Picture World* and *Photoplay*, appear as well -- and extensive narrative and textual analysis of key films seen to influence and respond to this industry discourse. Positing "a sort of feedback loop between reviewing and film production", she follows the effects of this loop through the developments of some of the major popular film genres of the period (18). In so doing, Jacobs sets her project apart from its closest scholarly neighbors, exhibition and reception studies; openly unconcerned with specific viewing communities or the behavior of actual, individual spectators, she instead goes for "something more abstract: the systematic assumptions and categories that ranked film preferences" (18).

Imbricated in the industrially determined currents of taste, Jacobs argues, are key issues of class and gender. As trade publications, *Variety* and *Film Daily* addressed a readership of distributors and exhibitors; consequently, their reviews were oriented toward the identification of the most responsive -- and therefore the most profitable -- audiences. The generally accepted thrust is by now easy to guess: sophisticated films are appropriate for educated, moneyed, urban, largely male audiences, while more sentimental, old-fashioned fare belongs to the working-class, suburbanites, and emotional housewives looking for a good cry after a busy day of shopping. However, one of *The Decline of Sentiment's* most valuable contributions to the field of 1920s film history is its careful and persuasive troubling of such intuitive and uncritical binaries. Taking trade reviews as productive of a discourse rather than as reflective of empirical spectatorship practices, Jacobs complicates our simplistic view of

gender and class assumptions of the era, locating instances in which women in particular sometimes -- I stress the "sometimes," as the intent here is not to overturn, but to add nuance -- escaped this network of associations to occupy the forefront of progressive taste at the movies. In uncovering this presumed female spectator, she enhances our understanding of the forces at work in the shaping of modern American gender: to the widely recognized accounts of increased sexual permissiveness and the growth of a consumer culture, we may now add Jacobs's identification of the filmgoing woman and the shifting designation of the "feminine" proposed by the Hollywood industry press.

The other field on which the shift away from sentimentality played out is, of course, in the films themselves, and here Jacobs shows off her extensive archival research and her impressive powers of textual analysis. Picking up literary naturalism's intervention in its own field, she finds a similar movement in American cinema in the 1920s; Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1924) is her prime example, but she follows the trend through other films, among them Josef von Sternberg's *The Salvation Hunters* (1925) and King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928). She observes, "It would be fair to say that by the late 1920s naturalism provided the framework for most serious, intellectually ambitious filmmaking within the classical Hollywood cinema" (77); however, as she rightly acknowledges, "serious" and "intellectually ambitious" did not necessarily translate into "crowd-pleasing", and much naturalist filmmaking remained marginal, or suffered severe studio interference in an attempt to make its pessimism and experimental nature more palatable to a mass audience. Here she is careful to hedge her bets: "I would not maintain...that Hollywood films *en bloc* became in some sense more 'naturalist.' I would argue, however, that some of the most prominent stylistic and narrative features of the naturalist films recurred in other generic contexts" (77).

The remainder of the book represents Jacobs's attempt to chart that recurrence in four major popular film genres of the 1920s: the sophisticated comedy, the male adventure story, the seduction plot, and the romantic drama. While fragments of the naturalist impulse manifested themselves differently within the constraints of each genre, a discernible throughline does emerge. What Jacobs calls "the emergence of a preference for a laconic and understated style" is for her Hollywood cinema's "crucial development" during the period (275); markers of this new style include the reduction of intertitles, the reluctance to moralize, indirect methods of representation, an increase in sexual content, the introduction of vernacular language, and a complex system of narration built upon point of view shots, structures of symmetry and repetition, and a focus on seemingly minor detail as symbolically or narratively important.

Again, the inclusion of these traits was not universal. Part of Jacobs's discovery in her analysis of *Variety* and its contemporaries is that sentimental filmmaking was still occurring; it was just being savaged by the critical press as outmoded and unsophisticated. Reviewers preferred the emerging low-key, modernist-inflected style even as they warned distributors and exhibitors that such films would likely have trouble selling outside of downtown urban areas. However, *The Decline of Sentiment's* central intervention here is the concept of the feedback loop: as *Variety* and *Film Daily* warned that the sentimental style was on its way out, film production evolved to keep up with the times as they were painted in these publications. The empirical "truth value" of these warnings -- were audiences *actually* tired of sentimentality, or was it just the reviewers who felt the naturalist itch? -- is not of concern to Jacobs here; her analysis operates on the avowedly "abstract" level of discourse, and she persuasively proves her point that the discourse itself was enough to effect change in Hollywood filmmaking practice.

In fact, the only complaint I have is that Jacobs sometimes proves her point *too* persuasively. Extensive and intricate plot summaries abound in *The Decline of Sentiment*; a significant percentage of each chapter (particularly the ones oriented around specific genres) is devoted to scene-by-scene recitations of individual film narratives. Given the decade of focus, this is likely unavoidable: many of these films are unavailable outside of archives, and some of them no longer exist at all, and had to be reconstructed from distribution materials or from the reviews themselves. This painstaking research deserves its moment in the spotlight, and Jacobs is to be applauded for making the plots of these rare or destroyed films accessible to a wide audience. (And this book is indeed appropriate for a wide audience: Jacobs's avoidance of jargon or insider lingo renders this book useful and comprehensible to interested readers of all backgrounds, and refreshing to readers of specialized ones). However, the length of her summaries occasionally approach excess, giving the book an air of the merely descriptive rather than the analytical.

Overall, though, its contributions to the field of film history far outweigh this minor setback, which may not even be a setback, but rather merely the nature of the beast when dealing with cinema of the preclassical era. *The Decline of Sentiment* has much to teach us about the development of the Hollywood film in the 1920s, and about the trade press's role in the turn away from sentimental storytelling. Lea Jacobs has given us a comprehensive history of film form and content during a contentious moment in popular filmmaking, and an account of taste and tastemaking that still resonates in today's film culture.

# Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema

By Jay McRoy

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008. ISBN: 978-90-420-2331-4 (pbk). 22 illustrations, xi+219pp. £33.00 (pbk).

## A review by Daniel Martin, University of East Anglia, UK

It seems that Japanese cinema has long been a staple of non-Western film studies, but the majority of scholarship has typically focused on the work of a few canonised directors. The Western market for Japanese cinema has undoubtedly changed in the last decade, with increased audiences for Japanese animation and horror in particular. Indeed, there is great deal of academic, critical and fan interest in the recent 'J-Horror' boom, making Jay McRoy's *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* a timely contribution to English-language scholarship.

McRoy's previous contribution to this field was as editor of the collection *Japanese Horror Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), an inadequate and uneven collection of essays which, despite a few worthwhile contributions, did little to provide students and researchers with the introductory text that is obviously needed. Thankfully, this monograph contains work of a higher consistent quality, although it isn't without its limitations. Though far from comprehensive (one book can only cover so much) *Nightmare Japan* focuses on an interesting range of films, paying close attention to the best know Japanese horror as well as the most obscure.

McRoy's approach is based entirely on textual analysis, and he explains in his straightforward introduction that "as a substantial component of Japanese popular culture, horror films allow artists an avenue through which they may apply visual and narrative metaphors in order to engage aesthetically with a rapidly transforming social and cultural landscape" (4). McRoy justifies his film selection by describing each title under analysis as 'politically-charged', a label which has never been applied to many of the films in question. While the introduction does a good job of laying out the methodology of the study, it lacks some necessary information. For example, McRoy never explains that he'll be using the Japanese naming convention (surname first) throughout the book, which is potentially confusing for readers unfamiliar with this area. More unforgivably, McRoy even slips up occasionally and reverses the name order. This review, for the record, uses the more familiar Western naming convention.

The first two chapters examine body horror films from the 1980s and mid-1990s. McRoy first considers four films from the *Guinea Pig* series: *The Devil's Experiment* (Satoru Ogura, 1985), *Flowers of Flesh and Blood* (Hideshi Hino, 1985), *Devil Woman Doctor* (Masayuki Kuzumi, 1986), and *He Never Dies* (Hajime Tabe, 1990). This chapter begins with an amusing re-telling of the alarm caused when Hollywood actor Charlie Sheen mistook *Flowers of Flesh and Blood* for a genuine snuff film and triggered an international FBI

investigation. However, McRoy remains tightly focused on visual analysis and makes little reference to the meaning of this moralistic panic. A potentially fruitful discussion of Orientalist perspectives on Japanese brutality later in the chapter also has little meaningful link with the subsequent discussion of the films.

McRoy then turns his attention to the prolific exploitation *auteur* Hisayasu Sato and his films *Naked Blood* (1995) and *Muscle* (1989). It is here that McRoy's insistence that these films are all "politically-charged" becomes dubious, and it's clear from the quotes he provides that no other Western critics read such profound meaning into *Naked Blood*. Regardless of the conclusions reached, these essays are worthwhile even if only for the fact that they pay sustained, serious attention to films and filmmakers that had previously received no academic attention at all.

Chapter three, which examines the incredibly influential ghost stories *Ring* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2003), should be the centrepiece of the book, yet it is characterised by a narrow focus and limited relevance. In the text's introduction, McRoy boldly suggests that the director Norio Tsuruta was single-handedly responsible for pushing Japanese horror away from visually graphic body-horror and towards atmospheric restraint. It seems strange, then, that McRoy never explains or justifies this statement, and totally ignores Tsuruta in his chapter on suspenseful ghost stories.

The analysis contained in this chapter is lively and intelligent, but there are some strange omissions. McRoy discusses the cultural meaning of *Ring* as it relates to single-motherhood in modern Japan, yet neglects to mention the significance of *Ring*'s original author, Koji Suzuki. Suzuki has a very public role in Japan as a 'new man' and an authority on fatherhood. Indeed, the novel on which *Ring* is based was about a single father rather than a single mother. Even briefly acknowledging these facts would complicate the otherwise straightforward reading of *Ring*, and the culture that produced it, that McRoy provides.

This chapter would have also been strengthened if McRoy had said more about the ways in which Hideo Nakata and Takashi Shimizu are influenced by (very different) Western filmmakers, and elaborated on references he makes to the influence of American slasher movies on *Ju-on*. There's also a potentially very interesting discussion of Orientalism in the American remake of *Ju-on* which is far too short. This book is at its best when engaging with these wider issues, but McRoy typically refers to these contextual matters only in passing.

The next two chapters examine *ijime* (bullying) films and apocalyptic narratives. It's pleasing to see some unconventional (but well-justified) film choices in these essays, particularly the categorisation of Shunji Iwai's teenage drama *All About Lily Chou-Chou* (2001) as a horror film. McRoy also examines some of the most popular recent Japanese horror, including *Ichi the Killer* (Takashi Miike, 2001) and *Pulse* (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2001). While the analysis in these chapters is strong, McRoy perhaps relies too much on the history and categorisations of the genre provided by fans, repeating the definitions provided by Thomas and Yuko Mihara Weisser in their *Japanese Cinema Encyclopaedia: Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction Films* (Vital Books, 1998).

The book's final chapter is also its conclusion, and it's here that McRoy discusses the most recent trends in Japanese horror by looking at the work of some of the genre's major directors. McRoy analyses the first two films in the *J-Horror Theater* series, *Premonition* (Norio Tsuruta, 2004) and *Infection* (Masayuki Ochiai, 2004) as well as Shinya Tsukamoto's

*Vital* (2004) and Takashi Shimizu's *Marebito* (2004). McRoy admits that he hasn't chosen these films because they're typical or representative of contemporary Japanese horror; in fact, he's chosen them precisely because they provide evidence of the creativity that still exists in an otherwise stagnant and repetitive genre. As ever, McRoy's passion for the films he's chosen is evident, but it does seem remiss that the brief conclusion doesn't say more about the supposedly less-interesting J-Horror films being made today.

It is, however, possibly redundant to complain about what this book doesn't do, when its focus and purpose is so clear and precise. McRoy may not provide much information about the production contexts of these films, but his research into Japanese cultural issues is exhaustive. Indeed, since his only concern is with cultural interrogation of these films, his actual analysis is hard to fault. Despite its somewhat limited focus, then, this book will undoubtedly be of use to researchers and students. There are several books on this topic, not all of them strictly academic, and this is by no means the worst. There is still a great deal of work to be done on Japanese horror, and Jay McRoy's contribution should inspire some discussion and motivate further scholarship.



# Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics

By Jeffrey Sconce (ed.)

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8223-3964-9 (pbk). 340 pp. £13.99 (pbk).

## A review by David Simmons, Northampton University, UK

Editor Jeffrey Sconce's *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics* collects together current thinking on lowbrow or 'trash' cinema from a selection of noted academics in the field. Charting the changing relationship between 'sleazy' and legitimate cinematic forms, the volume begins with a brief but concise introduction in which Sconce suggests that there has always been a tradition of seeing cinema as a disreputable art form; referring to Pauline Kael's 1968 essay 'Trash, Art, and the Movies' he notes the existence of a strain of academic thinking that is more interested in "bad" cinema than "good".

Sconce moves on to explore what this approach has meant for the middle-class critical respectability of film and whether this conventional hierarchy of filmic taste matters for the success of lowbrow cinema. Sconce uses Pierre Bourdieu's theories concerning symbolic capital to foreground the importance of reception theory in the field of disreputable film, rightly identifying that the establishment's disavowal of such films is often what makes them attractive as so called "guilty pleasures". Additionally, such film is often appreciated, Sconce believes, not because of any outstanding cinematic worth but because, concurrent with Barthes' "text of Bliss", it offers something new, unusual and therefore exciting to a critical fraternity jaded by their ability to all too easily decipher the formulaic codes of more standard Hollywood fare. Conversely, Sconce proposes that the rising profile of disreputable cinema is due in part to both the growing centrality of "sleaze" in the cultural mainstream and a more general democratisation of film studies itself

Though it raises many interesting questions regarding the changing position of exploitative cinema, one of the partial failings of the introduction is Sconce's inability to provide a satisfying definition of what he means by "sleaze". Perhaps as a result of the wide range of means by which films can come to be considered as lowbrow or disreputable, the nearest Sconce gets to a definition is to suggest that a "sleazy" film is one that does not make clear its true authorial intentions from the outset. This bagginess in terms of categorisation is also evident at the end of the introduction. Though Sconce proposes that the articles in section one are concerned with a historical analysis of "sleazy" cinema while those in section two examine the 'afterlife' of lowbrow cinema, the truth is that the essays often seem to contradict their placement, with some of the chapters in section one containing much that would be of interest to reception studies fans and vice versa.

Amongst the diverse subjects covered in the first section of the book are; the marketing of 1960s sexploitation films; the "love-hate" relationship between advertising and disreputable

cinema; notions of "camp" and the horror film; the significance of changing technologies of film distribution to the re-appropriation and re-evaluation of lowbrow film; and the changing importance of the narrator in situating the audience of *Mondo* films in an ironic relationship to the images on screen. While the majority of the chapters in this first part of the book are undoubtedly interesting and contain much of interest to both fans and scholars of "sleaze" cinema, as a collection they can sometimes appear somewhat disparate in nature with only a common reliance on Bourdieu's theories serving to tie them together.

Section two of the volume is slightly more cohesive due to a recurrent emphasis on examining cultural and critical attitudes to trash cinema. Of particular interest are Kay Dickinson's essay 'Troubling Synthesis: The Horrific Sights and Incompatible Sounds of Video Nasties' and Matt Hills' 'Para-ParaCinema: The *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* Film Series as Other to Trash and Legitimate Film Cultures. Dickinson's chapter explores the particular use of sound in several of the Italian horror films banned under the 1984 'Video Nasties' video recordings act. Through an analysis of *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1979), *Inferno* (Dario Argento, 1980), *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1981), *The Beyond* (Lucio Fulci, 1981), and *Tenebrae* (Dario Argento, 1982), Dickinson suggests that the discordant use of electronic synthesizers on these film's soundtracks was an important factor in their banning. Indeed, Dickinson argues that the synthesiser's primary association with the clinical, cold and detached dance music of the 1980s may have led members of the classificatory board to believe that such films were refusing to pass any moral judgement on the action on screen in the manner of more mainstream conservative film. In contrast to this judgement, Dickinson believes that these films often employ sound in a discordant manner as part of a larger self-reflexiveness which was overlooked by an establishment predisposed not to recognise any artistic merit in such cinema.

Also on the subject of horror, Matt Hills's chapter explores the questions that are raised by the existence of hierarchies of taste within sub cultural filmic forms. Taking the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* film series as an example, Hills details the manner in which both the legitimate and trash film communities have worked to exclude the series, often, somewhat ironically, through a set of criteria, comparable in their reliance on subjective hierarchies of taste: while the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* films have been judged to be too lowbrow to be considered legitimate cinema, trash cinema fans have deemed the films to be too indebted to the conventions of Hollywood. Consequently, Hills comes up with the classification: "para-paracinema" and argues that the films in the series have too often been misread by critics on both sides of the trash/legitimate divide.

The penultimate chapter, 'Pure Quidditas or Geek Chic? Cultism as Discernment' examines the increasing centrality of cultish connoisseurship. Proposing that "geekdom" and cultism have now become a legitimate and even culturally favoured way to interact with popular culture, author Greg Taylor provides an enjoyable and thought provoking reassessment of the changing distinctions between the mainstream and the marginal in a manner that is both accessible and enlightening. Taylor uses a close reading of Comedy Central's television quiz show *Beat the Geeks* (Mark Cronin and James Rowley, 2001-2002) to illustrate his central premise that 'geekdom', of the sort that the author suggests film critics are also guilty of, propagates an implicit subjective evaluation reflective of a desire to empower our own personal past.

The volume ends with an interesting if lengthy essay, authored by Sconce, on the topic of filmic disillusionment. 'Movies: a Century of Failure' serves as a conclusion for themes

explored in several of the other chapters, examining some of the reasons why many film fans, academic or otherwise, appear to love to hate the cinema. After much discussion Sconce suggests that the contemporary predominance of "snark-ing": criticism devoted to expressing a caustic cynicism towards a pop cultural form, is evidence of a larger trend of moviegoers who seek to "wallow in the cinema as a faltering medium in a failing culture" (276). Noting the history of critical melancholy with the cinema, Sconce surmises that the current valorisation of "sleaze" cinema is perhaps evidence of a more reasonable acceptance of film and its limitations, one that realises the form's ongoing schizoid identity as both art and commodity and chooses to take pleasure in the adoption of a deconstructive critical theory.

# **From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896**

By Stuart Hanson

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-071906944-4 (hbk). ISBN: 978-071906945-1 (pbk). 224pp. £50.00 (hbk), £14.99 (pbk).

## **A review by Deborah Allison, Independent scholar, UK**

Stuart Hanson's chronicle of a cinema exhibition trade persistently held back by the conservatism, lack of foresight and limited adaptability of its major operators amounts to such a damning indictment of poor business practice that it seems almost a national embarrassment. Such is the inventory of errors the author describes, one starts to wonder how Britain's once-great cinema industry scraped through its post-war period of decline for as many years as it did before its reinvigoration in the mid-1980s by the superior business acumen of American operators and investors. Hanson's book is no crass polemic though; instead he offers up a diligent account that never shies away from engaging with historical complexity.

This study traces the progress of British cinemas and cinema-going from their inception through to the twenty-first century. From fairground attraction to the digital age, Hanson's wide-ranging account concerns itself as much with audience habits and preferences as with cinema architecture, technology and business strategy. His accounts of the underlying causes and implications of significant upheavals in the history of British film exhibition are nuanced and carefully reckoned. For example, in the sections of the book that deal with the impact of the widespread acquisition of domestic television sets upon cinemagoing habits his scrupulous consideration of a complex range of causes and effects is impressive. Avoiding the all too common pitfall of propounding an overly reductive correlation between the growth in television ownership and the simultaneous decline in movie-going, Hanson draws upon some aptly selected studies and statistics, weighing up the sometimes conflicting theories of earlier cinema historians in order to show that, while a causal relationship undoubtedly existed, other significant factors were at play. In particular, he argues effectively that the failure of UK cinema operators to adapt to the post-war relocation of a large part of the population from city centres to the suburbs was responsible for the industry's loss of the custom of citizens who were no longer served by local or easily accessible theatres. He argues, moreover, that the exhibition industry's apparent interpretation of declining admissions as irreversible -- and their concomitant strategy of cutting their losses by closing cinemas or adapting them to other uses such as bingo and bowling, while failing to refurbish remaining cinema buildings to a standard that would make them appealing destinations for audiences -- risked making their operators' pessimism a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In evaluating the responses of British cinema operators to changing audience habits and expectations, Hanson fruitfully draws regular contrasts with the American industry's handling

of comparable social changes and business pressures. His continual comparison of the two national industries serves in three ways. Firstly, description of their similarities provides a helpful account of US exhibition (for readers that find this an interesting aside to the main topic at hand). Secondly, in interrogating their differences he reveals some of the ways in which the American industry successfully weathered potentially catastrophic assaults upon their traditional modes of operation through their greater adaptability and willingness to implement new business strategies. Most famous amongst these is the widespread introduction of drive-in cinemas in America during the 1950s, a period in which British operators responded to dwindling business by closing cinemas rather than by adapting exhibition spaces to changing audience requirements. Thirdly, he shows how the growing sway of American hegemony led to the merging of the two cinema cultures. The British cinema industry had, for many years, thrived upon the American product that filled so many of its screens; in the mid-1980s and beyond this influence would extend to the importation of American and Canadian styles of exhibition space and management practice. The move towards multiplex and mall-based cinemas, heralded by the opening of The Point in Milton Keynes, would wreak irrevocable changes upon the landscape of British cinemas and the cinema-going habits of its population.

Hanson's book is, in the main, impeccably researched. As well as evaluating the theories and findings of previous cinema historians he draws extensively on such sources as government legislation, industry-commissioned studies and the trade press, both past and present. Written in a very clear style, the book would serve well as an undergraduate text. For the most part it is judiciously concise, covering more than a century of events and a broad spectrum of associated historical issues without becoming bogged down in extraneous detail. Only occasionally is a point belaboured, such as the hammering home of the fact that multiplexes offer a greater choice of films and a generally enhanced level of comfort than did the majority of their immediate predecessors. Favouring concision, his study never approaches the level of detail found in the books of Allen Eyles, whose histories of Britain's leading cinema chains such as ABC, Odeon, Gaumont and Granada have provided us with an as-yet unsurpassed wealth of information about British cinema history. Hanson does not, for instance, even touch upon the diversification of cinemas' offers to include such live spectacles as music and wrestling, nor the short-lived attempts to turn profits from broadcasting live television onto theatre screens. Yet while his book lacks the richness of Eyles' more detailed studies, it provides an overview that is more succinct and, arguably, more palatable to the student or casual reader who seeks an introduction to the broader history of cinema operation and cinema-going in Britain across the course of more than a century.

If fault is to be found, then, it is in the final two chapters which deal with 'The multiplex revolution: 1985-present' and 'The future for cinema exhibition in the digital age', where Hanson flounders a little in keeping up-to-date with the finer details of a rapidly changing industry. His footnotes suggest that the bulk of research for these chapters was undertaken in the summer of 2005, with a smattering of later additions. And yet, some of the "information" he provides was already out of date by that point. For instance, he claims that the largest art house chains are "City Screen, Zoo Cinema Exhibition and Mainline, which between them control over 30 cinemas" (184). In fact, Zoo no longer existed by this point, having been subsumed by City Screen in 2003. Moreover, his calculation of the number of screens controlled by the three companies appears to double-count the venues once operated by Zoo: the eighteen operated by City Screen after the merger (correctly totalled on p.163) plus the seven owned by Mainline Pictures (sold, since the book's publication, to the Everyman Media Group in March 2008) fall at least five venues short of his total.

Furthermore, through no fault of the author, any scholarly study that aims to cover contemporary phenomena will almost invariably be stymied by the length of time that normally elapses between the completion of the project and its eventual publication. At the point of writing this review (June 2008) there have already been many rapid and significant developments in the UK exhibition industry. These include the widespread introduction of new 3D technologies alongside the explosion of "alternative content" that includes such material as the projection of live satellite transmissions of events ranging from opera to rock concerts onto art house and multiplex cinema screens alike. At the same time, projections by the UK Film Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that the roll-out of digital technologies would mean that "schedules can be changed much more frequently, responding both to market conditions, different audience groups, and varying deals with distributors" (186) have come to look increasingly utopian and naïve as the major film distribution companies continue to resist new programming models that they regard as a threat to their revenues. By the time this review is published the industry will doubtless have taken further turns both expected and, in some cases, unexpected.

What will be the way forward for a cinema industry engaged in the switchover to digital distribution and exhibition, Hanson wonders, when the "end of celluloid itself" erodes "the most enduring 'standard' of all" (187)? It is a curious sentence with which to conclude a book that has hitherto vigorously resisted a history shaped by technological determinism in favour of "plac[ing] the development of cinema in a broad social, cultural and political context" (2). As his own study succeeds in showing, the history of cinema exhibition in Britain is characterised by a great deal more than the projection of celluloid strips. Both a useful educational resource and a generally satisfying read, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen* provides an engaging tour through British cinema history, illuminating the social and institutional structures in which, as cinema-goers, we all participate.

# Directors Close (2nd Edition): Interviews with Directors Nominated for Best Film by the Directors Guild of America

By Jeremy Kagan

Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0810857124 (pbk). 360 pp. £20.99 (pbk).

## A review by Elaine Lennon, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

Why is Jules White so important? Bear with this question, for within the answer lies the pattern of much contemporary Hollywood filmmaking. An updated version of the first edition published in 2000, this is a compendium of interviews featuring the majority of DGA nominees for Best Feature at an annual symposium that takes place at the Directors Guild, moderated by multi-hyphenate extraordinaire, Jeremy Kagan. Edited into sometimes exceedingly brief excerpts in order to fit into 11 sections representing (roughly) the stages of the filmmaking process, this commences as a very aggravating system because many of the initial remarks are nothing more than soundbites. Yet, as the book progresses, the interviews get longer and more detailed, and the volume more than deserves its page length: the incipient madness and frustration of filmmaking virtually wafts from between the lines, as do the extraordinary differences in attitudes, origins and habits: to shotlist or not to shotlist; to rehearse or not; to fraternise with the cast and crew or go home and prep for the next day; the chaos and fractiousness seeps out as the pressures mount.

'Script' is perhaps most fascinating of the early sections for the insights of those writers who have turned to directing in order perhaps to better control the final outcome; and yet, as Oliver Stone admits, throughout the development and pre-production (and even editing) phases, "themes change" (17). Indeed Quentin Tarantino says that bringing *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) to the Sundance workshop taught him that there is a writer's work and then there is the job of writing as a director, that is, for an audience. There is no universal precept on the desirability or structuring of subject matter; but Peter Weir would seem to be the trickiest director, admitting that he likes to change all screenplays to reflect *his* sensibility; while amongst the Americans it seems that Robert Zemeckis -- paradoxically a writer-turned-director himself -- would also seem to be gunning for Sydney Pollack's bad rep amongst screenwriters. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001; 2002; 2003) was written and repeatedly rewritten, on the set, and after editing, when pick up shots were deemed necessary to complete the story, because, as Jackson explains, "you just organically develop the thing right the way through to the very end" (36). Mike Leigh famously has no screenplay to work with, just a premise, workshopped through improvisation (which begs the question, how on earth was he nominated for a Best Screenplay Oscar?). On the other hand Roman Polanski, a frequent co-writer of his material, regards the script as a manual, "so all you have to do is shoot it" (32).

'Casting' is perhaps the most psychologically revealing of the chapters: from what Weir describes as a missing persons search, to squirming accounts of face-to-face readings, each director is remarkably candid about what their process involves, embarrassed to a tee. Anthony Minghella admits such indecisiveness over Kristin Scott Thomas that he gathered a longlist of actresses in one room to see whom Ralph Fiennes would choose; Stephen Daldry admits casting a recently bereaved boy whom he knew he could then manipulate to heights of emotion via unacknowledged grief.

The more substantial commentaries lie in the longest section, 'Production', and yield perhaps the most fascinating insights. The more aesthetically inclined reader may find the mundanity of film directing infuriating, a common complaint amongst the interviewees is the unpredictability of the weather. Rain drives Mike Newell insane; it doesn't bother Mel Gibson, who seizes the day, as his mentor George Miller taught him on *Mad Max* (1979); and it caused havoc on the set of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy when it rained so heavily they didn't even reach their first location in New Zealand because the roads were washed out. Steven Soderbergh keeps his script with him and reads it constantly in case his creative compass veers off a little from day to day; whereas Minghella never looks at it on the set. The sense of impending insanity and doom is pleasingly evident in this chapter, which truly reflects the reasons why Hitchcock was happiest with his storyboards, something that M. Night Shyamalan is never without, and Alexander Payne would never bother with, trusting instead the location's capacity to dictate the scene (when he can reach it, presumably). Michael Radford had to deal with a star who was dying on *Il Postino* (1994); while Scott Hicks' trials on *Shine* (1996) were rendered infinitely trickier by John Gielgud's four-hour daily window in the UK, which of course became just two hours when the British unions ensured that everyone's lunch and tea breaks were sorted. Eastwood admits to no longer wanting to act in the films he directs. The most important lessons, it seems, are to remember to wear comfortable shoes; and, if a scene isn't working, do it twice as fast. The alleged glamour of the movie business is swiftly dispelled as Gibson admits he lost it to such an extent on *Braveheart* (1995) that his extras pelted him with turnips after he insulted their mothers.

The chapter on editing is perhaps the most enlightening, as Payne describes how a script whose potential seems to go in one direction in the shoot develops in another, more thoughtful one during the process; the alchemy of filmmaking is given a practical dimension in the conjoining and cutting of pictures yielding a transformation in the material and, at times, in the overworked director himself because only Sofia Coppola, Jane Campion and Barbra Streisand were nominated amongst women in this 14 year period. Scorsese indeed uses the phrase "magic" to define this process. The ensuing differences that virtually all the directors claim to arise from the originating material gives one pause for thought about the neurological well-being of all concerned: did they read the screenplays? Were they present at the shoot? It seems that cutting for the camera, something that only Eastwood and Spielberg seem capable of achieving, is truly a thing of the past. Sam Mendes admits to a totally different ending following post-production; Rob Reiner claims to fully altering performances, with shots and lines from entirely different scenes combining to create fundamental shifts in story. As Taylor Hackford says, "the last rewrite is in the editing room" (242).

Music and sound are extraordinarily impactful. Eastwood claims that "sound in general ... [is] at least 40 per cent of the movie sometimes" (250). Michael Mann concurs, "the mix is probably the fourth total writing of the movie" (256). The older directors -- principally Eastwood and Spielberg -- vouchsafe the influence of their mentors, the classical Hollywood



practitioners, and strangely, are the only interviewees, along with Ang Lee, who advert to the importance of the right faces for their films and also discuss the importance of TV's influence on the contemporary audience's perception of the moving image; only Tarantino and Zemeckis amongst the (relatively) younger set look to their forebears; others amongst this generation relate to their immediate predecessors, mostly amongst the interviewees themselves.

Other than Baz Luhrmann's very precise delineation of the construction of the musical and its identity, and Rob Marshall's similar account of building up the equivalent of a theatrical company, few references are made to the concept of genre or its effect on either screenplay or shooting; and only Cameron Crowe alludes to the pressure of changing anything once a star comes on board.

Sadly discreet on the issue of studio interference (other than the impending release date Andrew Davis had to deal with prior to *The Fugitive's* (1993) screenplay being "done"), incompetent producers and interference -- from a European point of view -- by financiers, this is a book that benefits from an occasional dipping into rather than a concentrated run-through. Perhaps amongst all the additions and appendices of storyboards, script notes and photographs, the best section in the entire volume is Elia Kazan's daunting but wonderful essay in defence of the auteur theory, 'On What Makes a Director'. The director, he says, is, "the man with the answers" (322). (He wasn't Arthur Miller's favourite collaborator for nothing). Yet the overwhelming impression of this volume's interviews is the director's reliance on worthy collaborators, the same team cropping up again and again, particularly on American crews, where the cinematographers, editors and composers are the director's trusted allies who steer them when they are exhausted beyond description.

# **Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation**

By Marco Abel

Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0803211186 (hbk). xvi + 292pp. £26.00 (hbk).

Movies and the Modern Psyche by Sharon Packer

## **Movies and the Modern Psyche**

**By Sharon Packer.**

Connecticut: Praeger, 2007. ISBN: 978-0275993597 (hbk). xi + 197pp. £27.95 (hbk).

## **A review by Emma Radley, University College Dublin, Ireland**

Writing a review of a book which profoundly critiques the tendency towards evaluation or judgement which inheres within critical discourse immediately places the commentator at odds with the spirit of the thesis. For Marco Abel in *Violent Affect*, academic criticism in general is permeated with an implicit judgemental or evaluative drive which insists the maintenance of a strict distance between critic (subject) and text (object), and which reinforces the sense of the primacy of the subject over the object. Instead, in this book, Abel seeks to a type of criticism which demands the effacement of this alienating separation and which encourages instead an engagement with the text or image that is based on response and experience. An avowed polemic, Abel's argument operates not only as an intervention into the palpable turn away from abstract 'Theory' which has gathered momentum since the mid-nineties in favour of a more "socio-cultural" approach that seeks a more "scientific" or material engagement with texts and images, but also strikes at the very bedrock of criticism itself, pushing at the boundaries of a discourse which relies heavily on semiotic methods of engagement. Through this reconfiguration of the act of criticism -- indeed, the very act of seeing itself -- Abel attempts to articulate a new, ethical form of scholarly activity for the twenty-first century.

Although the examination of the imaging of violence and the response to this imaging (both in literary and cinematic texts, and in reality) is a central concern of Abel's study, violence itself serves primarily as the most practical device to elucidate his principal project, which is the articulation of an alternative mode of critical engagement with the image itself. For Abel, criticism -- the act of looking at or examining a text or image -- is itself a kind of violence, which forcefully acts on both the object and the subject of the study, creating new knowledges at every glance. This new methodology privileges engagement with the image at the level of sensation or response, rather than at the level of representation or signification,

i.e. it asks the critic to concentrate on the *affect* of the image, rather than consider its *effect*. His study is therefore principally an attempt to shift the focus away from representational criticism (in other words, a criticism which seeks to determine the *meaning* -- hidden or otherwise -- of texts and images), a tradition in academic scholarship he traces from Victorian Matthew Arnold all the way through many of the most prominent critical discourses of the twentieth century, such as structuralism, New Historicism, cultural materialism, psychoanalytic criticism and cultural studies. Although Abel acknowledges his debt to the work of post-structural thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, de Man and others, his contention is that the application of this work in literary, film and cultural theory has remained tied to the (negative) logic of representation and meaning (even if the meaning is there is no meaning), and has thus not reached its full transformative potential: post-structural criticism may be a step in the right direction, but it "is not post-structuralist enough" (xii).

Central to this study is the articulation of this new mode of criticism, an approach he describes as masocriticism, or masochistic criticism. In order to deliver this radical reconstitution of critical discourse, Abel turns to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze who infamously advocated a turn away from the semiotic core of psycho-linguistic theory, towards a more sensory, or embodied, way of understanding reality and image. Drawing on the radical reconfiguration of the psychoanalytic concept of masochism by Deleuze, and combining it with Deleuze's shift of focus away from the effects (and cure) of the syndrome towards an interrogation of symptoms and sensations of the body (symptomology), Abel positions the critic and the text, the viewer and the viewed, the reader and the read in a "masochistic contract". This mutually dependent and interactive connection allows for productive engagement with the text which, rather than being tied to the negative practice of signification or meaning-making, insists on the production of new knowledges based on *response* (as opposed to interpretation, which he sees as being inherently bound with judgement and distance). Masocriticism, according to Abel, is thus a way to engage with texts and images at the level of sensation itself, and to focus attention on the forces or "affective intensities".

His aim in this study is two-fold: first, to encourage the scholar to think beyond the prism of the representational, or the symbolic, and to look to the affective quality of the act of seeing or reading, and second, to position this new methodology as an ethical mode of criticism in contemporary reality. Abel elegantly outlines his methodology, managing to intelligently and insightfully set out an approach which side-steps the problem of the representative value of the violent image without reducing or diminishing the obvious strength of this level of meaning. His argument rarely veers towards the utopic, as is sometimes the case in Deleuzian-inflected criticism. The argument for paying attention to affect and sensation is highly persuasive, particularly in a contemporary culture which is constantly under assault by the visual. Abel makes a strong case for the relevance of Deleuze, and his claim for a critical approach informed by the synthesis of Deleuze and Adorno as a dynamic opposition to the more standard juxtaposition of Lacan and Hegel, or Derrida and Nietzsche, is extremely convincing, if a little underdeveloped in this particular study.

The book is very strong in its textual analysis: his treatment of Patricia Highsmith's fiction is particularly perceptive, and his reconfiguration of the standard existentialist reading of the Nietzschean "eternal return of the same" to demonstrate that, rather than being banal and conservative, repetition and serialisation can operate as an intensification of affectivity and difference is refreshing and compelling. Also note-worthy is the analysis of the star persona of Robert DeNiro, which effectively employs the Deleuzian concept of becoming, as well as

some less well-known concepts such as "faciality" (Deleuze points to the face as belonging to a different -- less representative -- system of signifiers than language, either spoken or written), to position DeNiro's performances -- indeed, acting in general -- as a profoundly asignifying imaging of violence. Through his interrogation of DeNiro's persona, he makes an interesting claim for the potentiality of masocriticism as an ethical intervention in the pedagogical aspect of commentary on violence (i.e. he offers masocriticism as an alternative to the conventional "moral" response to violent images based on their representative qualities, specifically the contentious relationship between screen violence and real violence).

The stand-out chapter however is the sixth and final one, where Abel finally gets to grips with the two spectres which shadow the book from the opening sentence - the events of 9/11, and less directly, one of the most prolific scholarly commentators on the events, Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. His treatment of 9/11 is perfectly balanced between personal and theoretical, and, examined through his experiences in the classroom in the days and weeks following the events, displays the pedagogical (and ethical) potential of shifting the focus from representation to affect. Here, of course, he inevitably comes face to face with the wealth of scholarship from theoreticians in the wake of the attacks, and this perhaps provides Abel with the toughest challenge to his affective paradigm. Throughout the book generally, Abel struggles with what is possibly the most prominent proponent of the politics of representation in literary, and particularly film, criticism, and what is frequently the target of Deleuze's own conceptualisations: psychoanalytic theory, particularly the Lacanian variety practiced by Žižek, Kaja Silverman and Joan Copjec, among others. Prior to this, Abel has focussed his attack on representational criticism on perhaps easier targets such as sociological and empirical discourse. In this chapter however, he deals with concepts such as the lack and the Lacanian Real (probably the closest theoretical idea to his own concept of masochistic engagement) in an informed and able manner, making for a much more dynamic discussion that really gets to grips with the possibility of an asemiotic method of textual engagement.

Marco Abel's intriguing study of violence and the politics of representation in the twenty-first century seeks to interrogate not only the production and reception of violence and violent images, but also the very nature of critique itself. If a critique can be made, perhaps it is that, unless the reader is relatively well versed in Deleuzian theory, the discussion can at times be difficult to follow. Deleuze's discourse is notoriously opaque, and perhaps not enough effort is made to explain the use of such terms as "the body without organs", "plane of immanence" and "the actualisation of the virtual", leaving the uninformed reader slightly at a loss at times to fully grasp the full significance of this exciting new methodology. For scholarly readers well versed in theoretical and critical discourses however, Abel's book is a refreshing and much-needed intervention into the realm of visual culture.

Dealing with a related subject, though in a profoundly different way to Abel, Sharon Packer's *Movies and the Modern Psyche* attempts to make explicit the reciprocal development of film form and technology and (particularly Freudian) psychoanalysis. This is representational criticism at its strongest, positioning cinema literally as a screen which reflects and comments on socio-cultural and political anxieties. The book offers a formidable survey of psychoanalysis in cinema, moving from the concurrent development of Freud's fundamental psychoanalytic concepts (such as dream symbolism, repressed infant memories and the uncanny) and the birth of cinema in the late nineteenth century, right through to the current fascination with digital special effects in contemporary science fiction film. Throughout, Packer makes insightful connections between trends and movements in the field of

psychology and medicine and narrative and formal characteristics of Hollywood cinema, offering a compelling appraisal of the fertile subject of cinema and psychology.

Packer begins by acknowledging her own interest in the subject as a practicing psychiatrist with a long-standing fascination with representations of psychoanalysis, and particularly Freudian-derived symbolism, in film. The introductory chapter, as well as laying out the chronological convergences of psychology and cinematography, documents an intriguing strand of contemporary psychiatry which considers the employment of film within a therapeutic environment. She notes how "film therapy" (2) or film as therapy, is often used within group analysis as a means of encouraging patients to contribute to discussion, and thus open up to the analytic experience, as well as being employed as an edifying device (showing the effects of substance abuse, for example, or as a means of assuaging anxiety about reality). This she connects, in one of the most compelling sections of the chapter, with the sensory nature of film spectatorship, both specific to the film itself (sound, light, and colour) but also in terms of the whole event of cinema (taking in the experience of being in the theatre, the olfactory, taste and tactile perceptual encounters of acquiring snacks, taking a seat in the darkened auditorium and submitting to the force of the screen). Here, Packer highlights a generally unexplored, but potentially dynamic intervention into the debate on cinema and psychoanalysis, and although in this study she is ultimately more concerned with an all-embracing assessment of this relationship, she draws attention to a perspective which is ripe for further investigation.

Packer's study is a comprehensive one: as well as looking at the more obvious -- and well-explored -- connections between psychoanalysis and cinema, such as horror cinema and motifs of madness, she also delves into less investigated areas of convergence, and puts forward interesting and thorough analyses of genres and themes, such as westerns or film noir, which are not usually associated with psychology. Particularly strong in this regard are the chapters on cold war paranoia and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and drug and addiction culture, mainly due to their emphasis on the therapeutic aspect of cinema and spectatorship. While initially her discussion of 1950's war and science-fiction cinema seems restricted to the standard model of McCarthyism, paranoia and 'reds-under-the-bed' mentality, a consideration of the motifs of memory and amnesia in war cinema develops into a stimulating reflection on the psychoanalytic concepts of repressed memory and trauma, particularly in terms of Vietnam War films such as *The Deerhunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) and *Jacobs Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1990). Once again, however, this potentially forceful direction is sacrificed in order to maintain the broad focus of the book. An attention to more contemporary war and science fiction cinema in the light of current heightened interest in terror, trauma and conflict might have been extremely rewarding. As it is, the events and consequences of 9/11 appear only as a five-line aside, in a brief discussion of the uncanniness of real-life/reel-life parallels in *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) and *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001). This is a disappointing omission, considering the huge amount of scholarship carried out in the wake of the attacks by psychoanalytic critics such as Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler.

It is the impulse towards survey in this study that perhaps brings about its main limitations. In its drive to comprehensively delineate the long and productive history of psychology and cinema, the book rarely moves beyond merely identifying psychological symbolism in a variety of genres and periods, hurtling through scores of cinematic examples without really settling on a specific thesis or argument. The somewhat unusual insertion of a chapter on Woody Allen is emblematic of this tendency: running for only six pages, the discussion does

not precede past the well established topics of the frequent appearance of analysis in his films, the recognisable similarity between Allen's screen and real persona, and the inference that Allen's filmmaking is a somewhat therapeutic endeavour. While Packer often offers insightful readings of individual films, these are inevitably too brief, and do not allow her the space to engage with the nuances of the texts: in the case of *Donnie Darko* for example (154-5), such is the speed of the analysis she misses out on some vital plot points that would surely challenge her reading of the film.

These limitations aside, however, Packer's book is a welcome addition to the wealth of scholarship on this subject. Refreshingly free from jargon, the study is a comprehensive and comprehensible introduction to the historical correspondence between the two, and will prove a valuable addition to the reading list of any undergraduate course on psychology and cinema.

# **Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age**

By Paul Grainge

Oxford: Routledge, 2008. ISBN: 978-0415354059 (pbk). 18 illustrations, xii + 212 pp. £18.99 (pbk).

The Television will be Revolutionized by Amanda D. Lotz

## **The Television will be Revolutionized**

By Amanda D. Lotz.

New York: New York University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0814752203 (pbk). xii + 319pp. £14.50 (pbk).

## **A review by Gareth James, Exeter University, UK**

From viewing episodes of *Lost* (J.J. Abrams, 2004–present) on the iPod to the global campaigns that attend the latest Hollywood blockbusters, the modern experience of film and television has taken on a character that encompasses ongoing media convergence, the ubiquity of branding and easy access to visual content. Paul Grainge's *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* and Amanda D. Lotz's *The Television Will be Revolutionized* offer detailed reflections on these changes in the contemporary U.S. film and television industries that ably demonstrate their effects and possible futures.

Moving away from recurring ideological criticism of the shifts towards corporate branding and the collapse of boundaries of ownership and control, both Grainge and Lotz position their work as offering a more conciliatory approach. Grainge emphasizes the "*contingencies* of branding as a discursive and material practice" (8) within Hollywood as the organizing principle of studio economics, while Lotz positions U.S. television as entering a new "post-network era" (7) of wide-ranging change across all areas of financing, production, exhibition and reception. Taken together, the two publications offer a necessary consideration of how rapidly our experiences as viewers and consumers of entertainment and culture have diversified in recent years.

Grainge primarily positions *Brand Hollywood* as continuing a wave of research into media branding that builds on Rosemary Coombe's *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties* (Duke University Press, 1998), Robert McChesney's *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (New Press, 1999), and Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* (New York University Press, 2006). More specifically, he further develops the studies of Hollywood as virtual operation conducted by Charles Acland's *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Duke University Press, 2003) and Aida Hozic's *Hollyworld: Space, Power, and Fantasy in the American Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2001), demonstrating the extent to which a

discussion of Hollywood has become inseparable from an understanding of globalization and the need for competitive distinction within a crowded marketplace.

In this context, Grainge approaches branding as it has come to act as the "organizing principle -- what some would call an orthodoxy -- within the (new) media economy of Hollywood" (15). Focusing particularly on Hollywood since the 1980s, he details how the conglomeration between major studios and media corporations, most notably Time Inc.'s merger with Warner Bros. in 1989, has led to an era of "total entertainment" (66) whereby Hollywood has evolved from a site of physical production to a collection of brands used to stabilize and structure a flow of global content across platforms. While Grainge emphasizes that branding has existed in some form throughout Hollywood history, he is clear to note that the contemporary industry has embraced branding in more sophisticated ways than ever before.

The idea of the brand consequently develops in *Brand Hollywood* as helping to negotiate changes in modern Hollywood for audiences as a way of attaching an added symbolic and emotional, rather than transactional, value to individual and serialized films. Having provided a pan-historical reflection on the overlap between contemporary film and brand practice in chapters one and two, Grainge then uses the remainder of the book to provide detailed examples of how this works in practice on both a micro and macro level. Of the former, Grainge devotes chapters three and four to a rarely discussed aspect of the filmic experience, the studio and technological logo, demonstrating how they contribute to "total entertainment".

Here Grainge directly engages with the "poetics of branding" (71), whereby the studio logo has acted as a fluid signature for different films over time. Comparing the static trademark of the classical Hollywood era logos of Warner Bros. and Paramount to their current ability to digitally morph into the diegetic experience of films such as *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and *Spiderman* (Sam Raimi, 2002), Grainge illustrates how the logo performs the dual function of referencing Hollywood's mythical past alongside "experiential pleasures in the present" (86). The extent to which logos have become part of the wider cinematic experience is then taken a step further with the Dolby logo, identified in the 1980s as a source of "added value" for consumers in the expansion of the multiplex, but now expressed through "promotional initiatives that territorialize the affectivity of sound" (105) as a sensory experience tied to Hollywood spectacle.

From chapter five onwards Grainge chooses to expand his scope to consider how Warner Bros. mobilizes its brand identity in multiple ways. Taking the franchise success of *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) as a crucial moment in corporate studio branding, he goes on to trace the global "theming" of Warner Brothers in the 1990s through studio stores, theme parks, and the cross-franchise potential of the Looney Tunes characters, playing particular attention to the intensified cross-branding with Michael Jordan in *Space Jam* (Joe Pytka, 1996). More recently, in chapter six he emphasizes the enormous success of franchises such as *Harry Potter* (2001-) and the *Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) series as "indicative corporate ventures, combining staggering financial outlays on the creation of imposing fantasies with substantial revenue potential" (130), and using marketing techniques that have maximized the community potential of the internet and other new technologies for reaching diverse audiences through immersive worlds.



However, perhaps the most illustrative example of the way Hollywood branding functions as a way of structuring our understanding of media comes in Grainge's final chapter. Here he examines in detail how the Warner brand contributes to local entertainment developments in Britain through Warner Village cinemas, particularly Gunswarf Quay in Portsmouth and Nottingham's Cornerhouse. Grainge examines how Warner adapts to these local spaces in a process of "assimilation, adaptation and discursive reworking by particular communities of interest" (169). In this context, the Warner brand continues to signify global Hollywood as the quality brand of megaplex exhibition and as a carrier of the previously discussed emotive meanings, but is grounded in a specific location that allows for a fluid participation in an economy where its "effects will always ultimately be defined by the way that brand objects and commodities -- be these organization of content or space -- are *made to mean* in the lived practices of everyday life" (171).

Grainge's survey of Hollywood branding thereby creates a rich sense of how the "corporate authorship" (10) of Hollywood cinema functions across varied contexts as a way of creating symbolic networks for audiences that mediate the potential distance created by global economic practices. By taking a balanced approach described by the author as influenced by Gramscian notions of historical negotiation aligned with Acland and Coombes, Grainge succeeds in demonstrating that branding should be understood as a consequence of Hollywood's contemporary need to address audiences in extra-textual ways that bridge the distinctive parts of the industry into a convergent form:

the gestalt of 'total entertainment' has not, in this sense, altered the function of contemporary Hollywood studios in selling the commodity 'film' and the service 'cinema.' Rather, its significance lies in the way that film and cinema have increasingly come to be understood as something environmental, a spectacular experience to enter and inhabit' (66).

By comparison, Lotz's *The Television Will be Revolutionized* shares Grainge's focus on the issues created by new media but with a focus on the arguably more divergent industrial practices that have emerged within the U.S. television industry since the 1980s. Lotz focuses on the "new rituals of use" (2) of television as it has developed from historical associations with major network monopolies and limited consumer control to a current situation where individual viewers actively engage with television content through mobile technology, TiVos and the internet, causing ripple effects throughout the industry.

In this context, Lotz begins by emphasizing how network-era criticisms of television as a mass institution have been gradually replaced by niche-orientated perspectives, a trend she links to the work of Michael Curtin, Henry Jenkins, and Joseph Turow. Her work also marks a historical progression from Jan Olsson and Lynn Spigel's anthology *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Duke University Press, 2004) reflecting the pace of industry change in just a few years. Lotz distinguishes her own research as initiating criticism of a "post-network" era whereby the ongoing fragmentation and consumer control of the television audience has now re-positioned the medium as an "electronic newsstand" (5) that more closely resembles the publishing industry. Each subsequent chapter thereby focuses on how this increase in choice can be aligned with particular changes at different stages of the industry.

Beginning with an overview of how ongoing changes in televisual technology have broadly enhanced aesthetic quality and access in her introduction and opening chapter, Lotz goes on

to map the fluid capabilities of contemporary televisual content onto an ongoing diversification of production, distribution, advertising and audience measurement strategies that has seen a range of competing practices emerge over dominant industrial standards. At each stage Lotz details a progression through a network and multi-channel era into the current post-network environment, with a recurring focus on how developments such as network conglomeration, the maturation of cable, and a more sophisticated understanding of advertising demographics have created new conditions for a complex range of original programming without a guiding industrial standard or centralized control.

Throughout these chapters, Lotz asserts that while television as an industrial medium and cultural form has been "revolutionized" in certain areas, most notably in the cable sector through networks such as HBO and FX, this process has been staggered by inconsistent rates of change between old and new economic models. She partly attributes this to the broadcast networks and advertisers' reluctance to abandon the enormous profits of historical audience measurement and production techniques, and how the financial potential of direct episode downloads via the internet have only recently become a lucrative option for the industry.

Lotz then illustrates how this range of practices can co-exist through a final chapter that compares the unique political economies that separate series such as premium cable production *Sex and the City* (Darren Star, 1998-2004), basic cable's *The Shield* (Sawn Ryan, 2002-2008) and broadcast network CBS's unscripted success *Survivor* (Charlie Parsons, 2000-present), demonstrating how "program success and failure may be difficult to anticipate, but a confluence of industrial factors contributes significantly to explaining why audiences now choose among a broader array of televised storytelling than at any previous moment in the medium's history" (239). An understanding of televisual experience therefore becomes relative to individualization for Lotz, whereby "each viewer allocates value differently based on taste, ability to pay, and the technology at hand" (244), contributing to an overall hierarchy of use and production within the industry as a whole. Lotz also addresses the negative side of this process, arguing that it "has fuelled a retreat of the audience into enclaves of self-interest" (240) as well as creating boundaries of access based on wealth and class. Additionally, she offers anecdotal evidence in support of this theory through the effect that watching television primarily through a TiVo has increased her options for personalization and detachment from commercial interruptions, while also commenting on her students' use of Bit Torrent technology to download episodes.

Considering the depth and diversity of the subject in question, Lotz's approach is consistently rewarding, representing a meticulous breakdown of the television industry that marshals an impressive amount of audience research and economic findings while also laying the foundations for a clear and persuasive argument over how we can now define television. While acknowledging how the everyday experience of television has considerably been shaped by niche tastes, she demonstrates that key continuities have been preserved from its mass audience past, most significantly the potential for "*convenience, customization, and community*" (245) within programming identified in Horace Newcomb's groundbreaking study *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Anchor Press, 1974). These values then allow for the argument that "the U.S. television industry may be being redefined, the experience of television viewing may be being redefined, but our intuitive sense of this thing we call television remains intact – at least for now" (21).

However, like Grainge, Lotz also acknowledges how any reading of the modern industry must take into consideration continual changes and the instability of both corporate practice

and the nature of content, and duly touches upon the growing success of YouTube as a possible sign of further breakdowns in linear perspectives, as well as sounding a warning against attributing too much power to consumers over producers and distributors. She is also careful to position her own use of "post-network" as a way of reflecting the loss of a central or consensus media as complementing "developments in the network society" (254) created by the internet. In doing so, she strikes upon the duality that marks both publications in their negotiation of a convergent global and national media economy that promotes heightened individualism and niche taste.

*Brand Hollywood* and *The Television Will be Revolutionized* are undoubtedly timely books, covering a broad range of industrial changes without lapsing into generalizations. Both also benefit from concise writing styles and appropriate case studies that avoid excessive technical jargon and make comprehensive thematic links throughout their texts that establish continuity with previous modes of practice. As a result, they work well together as complementary examples of parallel industries that have significantly overlapped in the past twenty years, while also possessing individual strengths. Grainge is perhaps the more expansive on a trans-national scale, particularly in his study of the Warner brand in use within Britain's entertainment parks, although Lotz does argue that the changes in U.S. television are components of broader global experiences in converting to digital technology and the expansion of viewing choice. Conversely, Lotz offers a more detailed cross-section of both the high and low-end of her chosen industry, while Grainge predominantly focuses on Warner Bros. as the most representative example of Hollywood branding. However, these criticisms are minor in respect of the significant ground and issues covered by both authors within their industrial approach.

Looking to the future, *Brand Hollywood* makes the case for a renewed understanding of how imaginative branding strategies can be used to track how Hollywood studios construct a marketable self-image for world audiences, and re-asserts the continued importance of conceptualizing Hollywood as one part of a wider infrastructure of corporate entertainment. By comparison, Lotz notes a current gap in research on the "differences among media that consumers pay for directly versus those that are advertiser-supported -- particularly within a single medium" (190), while calling for a more inclusive approach to niche media, commenting that "sub-cultural concerns are also important, but need theory distinct from that which treats television as a cultural institution" (262). Until then, Lotz and Grainge provide valuable signposts in the ongoing race between the academy and the two industries as they continue to re-invent themselves at an accelerated rate.

# The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All that Heaven Allows

By James Morrison (ed.)

London: Wallflower Press, 2007. 13 illustrations, 196 pp. ISBN: 978-1904764779 (hbk).  
£16.99 (hbk).

## A review by Gerald R. Butters, Jr., Aurora University, USA

Todd Haynes is presently one of the most innovative and talented American film directors. His latest film, *I'm Not There* (2007), is a complex meditation on the seminal singer/songwriter Bob Dylan. Haynes ingeniously uses six actors, including a young African American actor, Marcus Carl Frankin, and Cate Blanchett to "play" the role of Dylan. *I'm Not There* cemented Haynes's reputation as one of the most creative forces at work in contemporary American film. He has managed to curiously traverse the fine line between being a mainstream film director and an independent. Almost from the release of Haynes's notorious 16 millimeter short *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), Haynes has also been a darling among academics and film critics. His films (and now his oeuvre) have more written about them than just about any other working director. While cinematic lions like Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese have been enshrined in the canon, younger filmmakers (such as Quentin Tarantino) have slowly faded out of cinema journals after their initial notoriety.

James Morrison has collected an impressive number of essays in the new release *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All That Heaven Allows*. A recent addition to the Director's Cut series from Wallflower Press, Haynes rightly gets his due in this seminal series on important twentieth and twenty-first century global film directors.

Haynes is unique in the sense that he is an unabashed student of film. Like Martin Scorsese, Haynes has a remarkable grasp of the totality of film history and grammar. But Haynes transcends even Scorsese in his ability to critique cinematic language and theory and incorporate it in his films. This is a common theme in a number of the essays in this volume. A graduate from Brown University with a degree in semiotics, Haynes uses his educational background to inform much of his work. While auteur theory has fallen on hard times in the twenty-first century, Alexandra Juhasz illustrates how the political and cultural climate of 1980s New York City greatly informs his work. Anat Pick explains how Haynes' background as an abstract painter "keep[s] with melodrama's foregrounding of rich color palettes on textual surfaces" (145) (melodrama being the genre Haynes is most associated with). But the editor James Morrison perhaps puts it best when explains, "Haynes . . . pursues ideas and frames questions in his films

in ways fundamentally influenced by the concerns, assumptions and premises of poststructuralism. It is not just that his work is informed by theory, but that each of his projects is conceptually determined by crucial theoretical pretexts

which condition, in each case, secondary realizations of plot, character and overall treatment (132).

Simply put, Haynes is a product of the cultural studies movement which came to fruition in the 1980s. As a student and emerging director, he was profoundly influenced by the theoretical and academic debates swirling around regarding deconstruction, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Unlike Tarantino, who has taken pastiche and made it into his modus operandi, Haynes has consistently worked as a director who deeply critiques film form and language. His vision of the cinematic form incorporates a deep sense of meaning replete with a density of textual analysis, not apparent in the work of most living directors.

Haynes was also one of the first openly gay film directors working within contemporary film. His queerness is a seminal subject within this volume but only in relationship to his critiques of gender, authority and suburbia. Joan Hawkins claims he has "a special queer relation to voice" (29). Sam Ishii-Gonzales relates Haynes to Jean Genet in the film *Poison* (1991). Lucas Hilderbrand argues that "Todd Haynes offers richly imagined histories of 6-year-old boys" (42). While homosexuality can be an overt theme in his work as in *Poison*, more often the case, Haynes' queerness allows him to view contemporary and past western civilization in a way that is fresh and creative. As with *I'm Not There*, Haynes illustrates the polymorphous ever-changing notion of self and identity, a characteristic that queer men and women around the globe are all too familiar with. Jan Davies claims, "There are few directors who treat the subject of queer childhood with as much insight and imagination as Todd Haynes" (57).

One of the most accomplished features of this collection is the well-rounded treatment of all of Haynes's cinematic work including his shorts *Assassins: A Film Concerning Rimbaud* (1985), *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* and *Dottie Gets Spanked* (1993). Perhaps because it can be assumed that shorts don't have much commercial possibility, Haynes illustrates his courageous and outrageous ability to provoke and experiment in these three shorts. Joan Hawkins, in a finely written essay, considers Haynes' tribute to outlaw poet Arthur Rimbaud, *Assassins*, made while the future director was still an undergraduate student. Hawkins places the film within the New Queer Cinema movement which was to emerge in the early 1990's, and demonstrates how the short reveals future tendencies of Haynes such as the treatment of modern gay literary icons, the mixture of historical epochs and genres, and the pastiche treatment of differing artistic styles. John David Rhodes compares *Superstar* to the feature *Safe* (1995), arguing that the short "might also be read allegorically as being about gay experience and the experience of AIDS" (75). James Morrison makes a similar observation in his examination of Haynes's treatment of illness in films like *Superstar* and *Safe*. *Dottie Gets Spanked* receives significant coverage in this volume due to the film's consideration of gay childhood. In a fine essay, Hilderbrand's analysis of popular cultural consumption and spectatorship in identity formation for queer children is very important for those working in film studies and queer studies.

Haynes' feature films including *Poison*, *Safe*, *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) and *Far From Heaven* (2002) get ample attention in this volume. *Far From Heaven* is arguably the most written about film by academics and cultural critics of this century and new essays in this volume consider the landmark film's relationship to repression, film style, Rainer Werner Fassbinder the use of color.

Special attention must be made to Alexandra Juhasz's essay in the volume, the final essay of the collection, entitled 'From the Scenes of Queens: Genre, AIDS and Queer Love'. This

brave, ingenious essay is as experimental as any of Haynes' cinematic works. Coming of age at relatively the same time as Haynes and often running in the same circles, Juhasz writes about her own life and her relationship to individual Haynes films, illustrating how the culture of the 1980s, 1990s and the new century has impacted a formidable number of gay Americans and their supporters, families and friends. Comparable to essays in James Baldwin's *The Devil Finds Work* (The Dial Press, 1976), Juhasz illustrates how we all of have personal relationship with cinema, and for many of us, we have an intimate relationship with the cinema of Todd Haynes.

# Dietrich Icon

By Gerd Gemünden and Mary R. Desjardins (eds.)

Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0822338192 (pbk). 54 b&w illustrations, vii+420 pp. £18.99 (pbk).

David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker? by Mark Browning

## David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker?

By Mark Browning.

Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007. ISBN 978-1-84150-173-4. 206 pp. £17.50.

## A review by Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, Northwestern University, USA

Marlene Dietrich's sculpted, luminous face gleams moon-like under a cocked top hat, her fingers straightening a bow tie at her neck. Her heavy-lidded eyes are barely open; a cigarette juts from her lips; French cuffs (could there be any other kind?) sidle angularly from under her tuxedo jacket's arms. First, there are always these visual fixations, her palely made-up lids, her pout, her blond curls juxtaposed with dark masculine attire, and the constant possibility of an unveiling of her famous legs, which help to make her interminably elusive, confusing, and impossible to fully grasp—and all the more fascinating and adored because of it. Writing about Dietrich can send even the most rigorously disassociated into paroxysms of bliss and breath loss at such a definition of glamour materialized. And this can happen just by looking at *Dietrich Icon's* cover.

Spanning several countries and more than half a decade, Dietrich's career took her from multiple small roles in German silent films of the 1920s, to her star-making turn in *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930), through her final role in *Just a Gigolo* (David Hemmings, 1979) thirteen years before her death. Films such as *Morocco* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930), *Blond Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), and *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932) cemented her career-defining collaboration with Joseph Von Sternberg as well as her highly eroticized/exoticized star image, an image that carried through later films with Billy Wilder and Orson Welles, among others. Her elegance, humor, cool beauty, and witty play with gender roles helped make her into an unparalleled, much copied icon. Dietrich's death in 1992 after over a decade of reclusiveness barely made a dent in the gripping and pervasive status of her image in the collective filmic memory. Although her pride would likely have caused her to deny 1901 as her birth year, events, books, speeches, performances, and gatherings throughout the world celebrated one hundred years of Dietrich in 2001. Among these was a conference organized by Professors Gerd Gemünden and Mary R. Desjardins, and held at Dartmouth, promoting the "critical reviewing of Dietrich from an interdisciplinary vantage point and across numerous fields of inquiry" (18); many of the essays published in

*Dietrich Icon* were given in prior form as papers at this conference. The resulting spirit and reverie of *Dietrich Icon* may make those of us not lucky enough to have attended quite jealous indeed; the potential combination of high-level and provocative scholarship, unabashed Dietrich celebration, and James Beaman's highly regarded drag show *Black Market Marlene* (which he no longer performs) is intoxicating.

As Gemünden and Desjardins note in *Dietrich Icon's* introduction, up until this point much of the tremendous amount of scholarship regarding Dietrich focused on her construction as regards her sexuality; feminist film scholars and queer theorists particularly have taken her under their wing, at times arguing for her as the sexualized object of the male gaze (either Josef von Sternberg's, the viewer's, or both), and at times positioning her as a resistant idol. Indeed, Dietrich's performance of sexuality, power, and archly sarcastic coquettishness is ripe for interpretation under a feminist lens while her infamous gender play in costuming and flirtation readily allows for a wealth of queer analysis. Examination under the lens of psychoanalysis has also traditionally been productive for Dietrich scholars; particularly notable are Laura Mulvey's citation of Dietrich in her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', and Gaylyn Studlar's book *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Columbia University Press, 1993). Seeking both to free Dietrich's image from its occasionally restrictive restraints and provoke new encounters with it, Gemünden and Desjardins encouraged conference attendees and, eventually, book contributors to move past the standard Dietrich coding, more fully examine Dietrich as part of her larger historical surroundings, and establish her star image as one which reflects a surprising number of the vast array of discourses encapsulated in film studies.

As Dietrich was often revealed, visually, thematically, and star textually, through layered unveilings, so *Dietrich Icon* moves through four methods of uncovering the diva: 'The Icon', 'Establishing the Star Persona', 'Marlene Has Sex But No Gender', and '(Auto-)Biography and the Archive'. Scattered liberally throughout these sections are lush, both familiar and unfamiliar images of Dietrich throughout her life, from a very young and roundfaced Marlene modeling a record, to Maria Riva and her mother strikingly mirroring one another in a 1952 issue of *Life* magazine. These images provide some of the book's great joys; in compiling writings about such a visually arresting personage, Gemünden and Desjardins's choice to use extensive archival photography, much of it from the Filmmuseum Berlin-Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin, was undoubtedly the right one.

Much of the book gestures toward establishing a kind of microcosm of film studies through Dietrich's visage. This signals *Dietrich Icon's* most provocative move: to historicize *through* the star, making Marlene both canvas and canvasser who is mapped onto and travels through myriad discourses. As evidenced by the essays gathered here, performing readings through Dietrich's almost-blank face, upon which can be projected any number of emotions and questions, opens a startling array of possibilities beyond the standard methodologies of star image and coding. Nora Alter's 'The Legs of Marlene Dietrich' reframes the fascination associated with the star's notoriously silken limbs as an obsession with the dismemberment of amputees from World War I and World War II. Photographs of Dietrich hoisting and playing the "singende Säge" (singing saw) between her legs illustrate the curious, grotesque association of the fleshly and the violently sharp that help describe bodily anxieties in wartime. In 'The Blue Angel in Multiple-Language Versions: The Inner Thighs of Miss Dietrich', Patrice Petro argues for the impossibility of determining the one, authentic copy of *The Blue Angel*. Her elegant, forlorn essay speaks to an inability at completely fixing an object of study, particularly one as elusive as Dietrich, who "exists, like the film itself, in



multiple-language versions, not in the form of an original to be preserved or possessed" (159). Here, the act of obsessively gathering copies becomes as seductive as Marlene's multiplied languages and personas. Amelie Hastie's essay 'The Order of Knowledge and Experience: Marlene Dietrich's *ABC*' provocatively considers a little-known Dietrich-authored publication from 1961 alongside the work of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes. Not only a historical contemporary of the theorists, Dietrich here becomes a scholar along with them through her use of the at times restrictive, at times illuminating, informational organization of the alphabet. As generations of students have reconstructed Benjamin and Barthes through their published knowledge, so, Hastie suggests, we might approach Dietrich and shed light upon the concomitant nature of all figures in the public imagination: "Through this cross-referencing and subsequent comparison, we can display Dietrich as a producer of cultural knowledge and Barthes as a compiler of practical advice. Dietrich becomes also a critic; Barthes becomes also a star" (306).

Alongside these more unusual approaches are fruitful reconsiderations of Dietrich from methodological standpoints more commonly associated with her study. Alice A. Kuzniar's "'It's Not Often That I Want a Man": Reading for a Queer Marlene' suggests that Dietrich's performances onscreen of heterosexuality belie "queer tensions at the core of Dietrich's persona" (256). In 'Marlene Dietrich and the Erotics of Code-Bound Hollywood,' Gaylyn Studlar historicizes Dietrich's sexuality, bringing the Hays Code to the forefront in examining the production of Dietrich's famously slippery erotic persona. Mapped onto her sexualized body are the tensions and anxieties of Hollywood under fire. Elisabeth Bronfen's 'Seductive Departures of Marlene Dietrich: Exile and Stardom in *The Blue Angel*' depicts *The Blue Angel* as anticipating both Lacanian voyeurism and excess and Dietrich's eventual star text as a German in exile in Hollywood, reifying both psychoanalytical film theory and questions of national identity as inextricable aspects of Dietrich the diva.

Perhaps the loveliest segment of *Dietrich Icon* is its final one: Werner Sudendorf's "'Is That Me?": The Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin'. A somewhat humble and straightforward description of the Dietrich archive in Germany, the essay fittingly concludes (and concludes the book) with an appendix of the collection's holdings, among which are 3,000 textile items, 50 handbags, 150 pairs of gloves, 15,000 photographs, 300,000 written documents, 80 pieces of luggage... the sum of these, it would seem, exceeds the list.

So is the case as well with *Dietrich Icon*. What emerges crystalline and lucid from its well-designed and elegant pages is that, as Patrice Petro suggests, Dietrich the object of study is as elusive and mysterious as her light-infused image onscreen. Movement from one of the anthology's essays to the next is like the undoing of one of Marlene's veils to reveal the layered knots of another, silhouettes and outlines providing, in the end, only semblances of definition. In capturing such a wide spectrum of contemporary Dietrich scholarship, *Dietrich Icon* illustrates the similar, ultimately satisfying impossibility of ever fully containing and defining Dietrich herself.

David Cronenberg's elusiveness is hardly akin to Marlene Dietrich's, yet attempts to pin down what defines him as a filmmaker have been an ongoing frustration for many film scholars. While Barbara Creed's work on Cronenberg and the monstrous feminine, for example, has been regarded as a seminal approach to the director, Mark Browning's publication of *David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker?* marks only the second attempt at a single-author English-language scholarly book-length analysis of the director's oeuvre, the first being William Beard's *The Artist as Monster* (University of Toronto Press, 2001). Browning's book

is also somewhat of a departure for Cronenberg scholarship: explicitly expressing problems with psychoanalytical film theory, which is often used in examining Cronenberg's movies, Browning moves toward the sober discourse of the literary to elucidate the often-troubling cult director.

In examining Cronenberg, Browning argues for the utility of comparison and analysis of his films with literature, citing authors whom Cronenberg has adapted for the screen (William Burroughs, J.G. Ballard, and Patrick McGrath) and those whom Browning sees as major influences in thematic and structural ways (Vladimir Nabokov, Ian McEwan, Margaret Atwood, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, among many others). Through extended textual analyses centering on an adaptation theory framework, Browning finds that Cronenberg's films evoke a response "that can best be described as literary, not based around a shock to the senses" (35), and that intertextuality plays an integral role in the films' structure. According to Browning, Cronenberg not only should be read with an eye toward literature, but fully intends to be understood as an author composing Barthesian writerly texts; courting Nabokovian spiral (or, in Browning's alternate terminology, centrifugal, a la Bakhtin) narratives in films such as *Crash* (1996) and *eXistenZ* (1999) as well as referring to himself as a failed writer in interviews, Cronenberg forcefully attempts to insert himself within a novelistic canon. The multiple webbings and interlacings Browning discovers as linking Cronenberg's work with a broad range of literary and cultural material suggests the importance of a consideration of intertextuality in any media scholarship.

*David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker?* compiles an at times dizzying wealth of film theory approaches and influences in asserting its premise. Still, Browning posits the need for an auteur-esque study of Cronenberg because Cronenberg himself insists upon authorship; Cronenberg's ultimate disappointment lies in a refusal "to believe in the death of the author" (205). In fact, in many ways Browning's argument hinges upon Cronenberg's self-awareness. Yet by the conclusion of *David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker?*, one is left to wonder if such a tour-de-force examination of the interplay of multitudinous cultural factors on filmic texts is unique to Cronenberg or a latent potentiality in any textual scholarship. If it is a characteristic attributable only to his films (or, at least, more so than to others), then Cronenberg becomes an almost omniscient author, conducting a staggeringly vast orchestra of competing voices. What can one possibly make of the aggressive auteur in an age of doubling, simulation, and heteroglossia? Of a continual foregrounding of the author in films obsessed with illusion? Here, the spiraling structure of more recent Cronenberg films such as *Spider* (2002) betray the tensions implied by these questions, the desire to locate a picturing subject in an increasingly falsified imagistic field, and the despair when fixity inevitably fails.

Browning's study does engage, to a lesser extent, *A History of Violence* (2005), yet was completed prior to the release of *Eastern Promises* (2007). This latest of Cronenberg's films might steer Browning's argument in interesting and new directions; in many ways, *Eastern Promises* is told more succinctly and straightforwardly than the films Browning discusses, and also shows a looser, less controlling directorial approach. Perhaps Cronenberg has grown to believe in the death of the author after all, or at least the exciting discoveries possible in the use of a gentler, more dexterous hand.

# The Films of Luc Besson: Master of Spectacle

By Susan Hayward and Phil Powrie (eds.)

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. ISBN: 0-719070287 (hbk). ix+197 pp. £45.00 (hbk).

## A review by John Berra, Independent scholar, UK

The films of Luc Besson have courted adoration and derision in equal measure, often on the same grounds -- that of style over content -- and the appropriation of French culture to the cinematic lexicon of Hollywood and the international language of commercial advertising. This makes the subtitle of this text, 'Master of Spectacle', entirely appropriate, as editors Hayward and Powrie and their contributing writers almost unanimously concede that Besson is first and foremost an aesthetic stylist, a director who has little regard for expository dialogue or background when he can express theme and characterization through his mastery of detail and décor. The volume opens with the first English-language translation of Raphael Bassan's 1988 article 'Three Neo-Baroque Directors: Beineix, Besson, Carax, from *Diva* to *Le Grand Bleu*', which insisted that Besson and his contemporaries of the *cinema du look* movement of the 1980s should be taken seriously by the critical establishment, and the papers that follow provide ample support for this argument.

As the papers that comprise this volume were compiled in 2006, there is no mention of Besson's *Angel A* (2006), his uncharacteristically sentimental love letter to his native Paris, or *Arthur et le Minimoys* (2007), an excursion into family fantasy which was heavily re-edited for the American market and largely ignored by audiences. This is perhaps a blessing, as it enables the volume to focus on three distinct periods of filmmaking activity. These periods comprise Besson's early work alongside his contemporaries Beiniex and Carax, his international acclaim with French-language features *Le Grande Blue* (1988) and *Nikita* (1990), and his ability to crossover into English-language cinema with *Leon* (1994) and *The Fifth Element* (1997), still retaining his national identity as a French filmmaker whilst working with Hollywood stars and expensive special effects. This third period of Besson's career, and the study under review, culminates with *The Messenger – The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999), Besson's expensive epic which united French historical subject matter with a cast of international actors, and the distribution of a major American studio, Columbia. The "high epic style and politicising camp" (161) of *The Messenger* are analysed in relation to the film's troubled production history by Hayward, whose earlier text *Luc Besson* (Manchester University Press, 1998), was the first significant study of Besson, and is frequently referred to by the contributors to *Master of Spectacle*.

Although each chapter tackles a distinct aspect of Besson's oeuvre with reference to his social-political and aesthetic sensibilities, the volume is carefully structured in order not only to present a summary of the filmmaker's career to date, but to juxtapose the consistency of his cinematic vision and production methodology with dramatic changes in the financing and production of European cinema since the early 1980s. Several of the papers herein comment

on the attitudes of economic and critical powers, both in France and the United States, to a director who has at once rejuvenated French cinema through a string of international box office successes and yet struggled to be taken seriously as anything more than an upstart within the industry. Besson's response has been to create two production companies, Leeloo, for his personal projects, and Europacorp, for a mixture of arthouse and action films, and his application of the American production model to European cinema is the subject of Rosanna Maule's 'Du Cote d'Europa: The 'Post-Hollywood' Besson'. This would suggest that the book tackles the often-discussed theme of the balance between art and commerce, the creative sacrifices that the artist makes to maintain control of his work and the attention of his audience. However, this is not the case, as *Master of Spectacle* firmly establishes Besson as a populist auteur, a director who has stimulated the imagination of the mainstream, not the margins, whilst refining a unique visual sensibility that is often as subtle as it is spectacular.

Even when discussing the underlying themes of Besson's films, the analysis here is largely aesthetic in nature. Gerard Dastugue, in 'Musical Narration in the films of Luc Besson', thoughtfully considers the director's creative relationship with his regular composer, Eric Serra, suggesting that Serra is "as much an auteur of Besson's films as Besson himself" (43). This assertion is supported by his systematic analysis of the cues and score that Serra crafted for *Leon*, in which reworking of a theme served to communicate the inner life of the titular character, a protagonist whose harsh upbringing and profession as a hired killer have left him socially awkward and aloof. His analysis of the "love" theme that is used to underscore the scenes between Leon and Mathilda, his underage protégé, emphasising the "father-daughter" aspect of a screen relationship which even those who otherwise admired the film on its initial release found occasionally uncomfortable and morally questionable. In 'Imprisoned Freedoms: Space and Identity in *Subway* and *Nikita*', Mark Orme insists that Besson "exploits the film's settings in revealing the emotional state" (121), and refers to two films that exist in largely subterranean universes, those of the Paris metro and a training facility for government-sanctioned assassins. He argues that both films represent "imprisoned freedoms" (121), as the characters are able to establish "alternative lifestyles" (121) within contained environments, although this assertion is perhaps less convincing in the case of *Nikita*, as the narrative pivots itself on a female protagonist who rarely makes choices for herself and comes to accept that her world has been created by forces of the state that are rarely seen yet always present.

Criticism of Besson's evolution from arthouse radical to multiplex maestro is provided by Hayward's 'From Rags to Riches: *Le Dernier Combat* and *Le Cinequieme Element*', in which she argues that both films are defined as much by their production histories at opposing ends of the budget scale as they are by their environmental themes. She also suggests that Besson has become less politicised in the fifteen years between his stark black-and-white feature debut and his abundantly colourful Bruce Willis blockbuster, with the earlier film being praised for its "ecological and anti-capitalist positioning" (105) while the later film receives criticism for its perceived misogyny and "problematic representation of blackness" (105).. However, despite her misgivings regarding Besson's biggest international success, Hayward does acknowledge that "Besson's purpose has always been to please his audience, to offer it a spectacular respite from the everyday social unease, not to cure it" (105). Whilst discussing the grand scale of his later work in an interview which concludes the book, Besson himself states, "I think I am making films that are increasingly human, more and more intimate in the end...The gigantic scale doesn't alter that. What guides you through a film are characters and they way they develop, the way I will convey such a feeling, a fear, a doubt. That's the heart of the film" (177-178). This is perhaps an assessment that is not shared by the contributors to

*Master of Spectacle*, whose notes on characters are mostly suggested by aesthetic details, such as their clothing, or the social positioning that is implied by their career or lifestyle choices, such as government officials, hired killers, drug addicts, musicians, or thieves.

*Luc Besson: Master of Spectacle* is an informed and intelligent collection of essays about a filmmaker who has, until recently, been more revered by his fellow directors than by critics or academics. It is of interest not only as an analysis of the films of Besson, but as a commentary on the inherent tensions that still exist in French cinema, where the desire of the cultural elite to preserve a "heritage" industry that seems to represent French life is fiercely at odds with the attention of the mainstream audience that is endlessly distracted by the glamour of Hollywood. With its unusual but entirely appropriate emphasis on film score, sets, and costumes, it is also a critical celebration of the aesthetics of cinema, and their importance in the evaluation of the director as auteur. This volume successfully argues that Besson is a filmmaker whose work belies qualities both national and individual, and that these qualities transcend the trappings of the various genres in which they find themselves, such as action, science-fiction, and the historical epic, to reveal a cinematic personality that has evolved aesthetically whilst retaining a consistent social ideology.

# Films of Fact: A History of Science in Documentary Films and Television

By Timothy Boon

London: Wallflower, 2008. ISBN: 978-1905674374 (pbk). ISBN: 978-1905674381 (hbk). 36 illustrations, x+312pp. £16.99 (pbk), £45.00 (hbk).

## A review by Katherine Newbold, Northwestern University, USA

The five books that currently comprise Wallflower Press's new *Nonfictions* series cover topics devoted to the development of documentary studies. Begun in 2007, this series endeavors to broaden theoretical discussion on documentary cinema, opening new areas of research and unearthing previously peripheral, unexplored histories in nonfiction film. *Nonfictions* authors -- in essay or total book format -- have thus far discussed such subjects as transcultural and migration documentaries, Direct Cinema, and the films of Jean Rouch. With Timothy Boon's *Films of Fact: A History of Science in Documentary Films and Television*, the series captures a new look at twentieth-century documentary history in Britain. Partly a genealogy of pre- and post-war science nonfiction genres, and partly the story of documentarian Paul Rotha's concerns with the visual representation of science, *Films of Fact*, in its scope and details, covers unmarked territory with great detail and appropriate analysis. Curator and historian Boon presents just the sort of marginalized history that can help *Nonfictions* achieve its goal of enriching current conversation on documentary and nonfiction media.

*Films of Fact* progresses chronologically through what Boon has marked as the different phases of science nonfiction production and representation. Loosely bookmarked by Rotha's involvement in navigating the relationship between 'pure' science and its media presentation, Boon briefly discusses science as spectacle onscreen before jumping to the early 1930s and the introduction of Grierson's documentary mode of filmmaking. From here Boon probes the aesthetic manifestations of modernity in scientific cinema, particularly the appearance of Soviet dialectical montage and the emphasis on benevolent technology. Issues of citizenship and the social role of science in this modern era also bubble to the surface; Boon, always linking content to style and form, contextualizes how public understanding of science becomes one concern with a thousand interpretations for execution. Used for town planning, nutrition, and general health, among others, documentary practice blossoms at this time. Rotha and his contemporaries enter World War II fully prepared to aid the British wartime effort. However, a drought in stylistic experimentation pushes much production dormant until television claims a hold on the display of science. Boon ends his history on a discussion of the early scientific programs broadcast at the BBC up to 1965, and how we can link their development to previous genres of science documentary on film.

Boon carefully describes his approach as an iconographic one: his history aims to privilege "the ways that documentary filmmakers represented the world to audiences" (39). This, he says, prevents historians and audiences from succumbing to the seduction of this book as *the*

history on that particular subject. This approach proves incredibly effective here for two reasons. First, Boon's method inherently recognizes the flexibility that such a history can provide for scholars across many fields, while easing the pressure on his end to incorporate every remotely relevant detail. It also indicates the amount of work that this particular subject and time still demands. Boon, to his credit, has done his work thoroughly, yet his approach neither limits nor discourages further study on the topic of scientific documentary in Britain. If anything, his care in marking out his approach to the material makes it all the easier for others to see where work still needs to be done. Chapter two in particular provides a great run-down of Boon's methodology, explaining his careful use of the word "documentary" as well as his decision to utilize an iconographic approach to the material.

Yet Boon's conscientiousness doesn't always play off in the way that he suggests it will. The prime example of this comes from his claim to use Rotha as the "Virgil to my Dante" (4) in *Films of Fact*. Though Boon asserts that Rotha's career provides the tent markers for his story's trajectory, he fails to fully flesh out the impact Rotha has had on the development of science program genres in television. Much of the last two chapters abandons the documentarian's influence in favor of tedious recounts regarding the struggles to bring science to the tube. Boon recovers Rotha only in the coda to remind us, and possibly himself as well, that the filmmaker did indeed dramatically affect television production until the mid-1960s. The reader must sift through the muddled last section on his own in order to discover a clear link between Rotha and television.

Compounding this difficulty is the presence of other key figures that often overshadow Rotha's contribution to science documentary. Boon could have easily written this history with Julian Huxley's public science career providing the boundary points; Huxley pops out of the pages with as much color and participation as Rotha, and at times his story seems more critical to the narrative at hand. The problem isn't that Boon promotes Huxley too much. Rather, it's that Rotha fades too far from the big picture. Rotha's story, as the backbone of the narrative, ultimately doesn't parallel the main account as closely and thoroughly as it should.

Nonetheless, Rotha and his films prove useful more often than not for *Films of Fact*. Boon is at his most compelling when he performs a formal analysis of a film -- often one of Rotha's documentary gems -- and when he integrates each seamlessly back into its relevant genre and context. The heart of his story thus becomes the relationships among these films, their creators, and the circumstances that lead to their invention. Boon's development of genres, socially, historically, economically, and culturally based as they are, supplies yet another level of depth to his informative account. His discussions of nonfiction genres give those interested in further study of science and documentary a well-grounded starting point.

In the end, *Films of Fact* becomes more than a history for the erudite historian or a film text for the cinema studies scholar. The debates surrounding science's popularization in the early twentieth century become fodder for scholars from a broad range of fields: cultural studies, sociology, economics, scientific history, architecture, urban studies, communication studies, etc. Boon's ability to engage so many fields in a concise, critical history makes this book versatile for many academics and many projects. Despite a few glitches, Timothy Boon's *Films of Fact* overall imparts a very solid report of how and why science arrived to media as it did, from big screen to small, in Britain's early twentieth century.

# Film Musings: A Selected Anthology from Fanfare Magazine

By Royal S. Brown

Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0810858565 (pbk). viii+414 pp. \$45.00 (pbk).

## A review by Kendra Preston Leonard, Independent scholar, USA

From 1983 through the summer of 2001, film music scholar Royal S. Brown wrote a column called "Film Musings" for *Fanfare* magazine, a publication founded in 1977 for serious collectors of (mostly) art music. The author of the film music tome *Overtones and Undertones* (University of California Press, 1994), and a frequent contributor to *Cineaste*, Brown was particularly well-suited to the job. After retiring from the column in 2001 in order to focus on other areas of interest, Brown compiled the majority of his columns into this anthology. Despite -- or perhaps in some cases because of -- Brown's own idiosyncrasies in critiquing films and film music, the book is a good first source for collectors or laypersons interested in film music.

Divided into eighteen chapters, one for each year Brown's column appeared, *Film Musings* offers brief overviews of current films as they are released, as well as reviews of new releases of historical recordings, a few interviews with film composers, and essays on composers of interest, including Jerry Goldsmith, Miklós Rózsa, Howard Shore, and others. Brown is all-encompassing in regard to genre and intended audience in the films he reviews, neither eschewing action movies nor slighting tiny art-house films. The mix is one of great variety, and allows Brown to speak to a diverse group of collectors and aficionados. The light and conversational tone, somewhat superficial analyses, and limited space devoted to each film and column necessarily place this book as one of interest to general readers rather than Brown's music-scholar peers.

Brown's own preferences and interests are visible throughout, with multiple positive reviews and references to the scores by Bernard Hermann for Alfred Hitchcock, and almost always positive reviews for scores by the ubiquitous John Williams. At the same time, readers will have no doubt of Brown's dislike of Prince, whose "excremental songs" and "slimy voice, effete/macho posturing, sophomorically suggestive lyrics and electronically polluted back-ups represent one of the worst things to happen to popular music in recent decades" (66). Indeed, while there are excellent analyses of selected scenes in films Brown likes, at other times his invective is his own worst enemy.

Brown is at his best in instances such as his discussion of the Hermann score for *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), in which he discusses the sound quality of the recording, the organicism of the recorded but unused music, short cues and long musical interludes, and the relationship between cues used in this film and those in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), two other Hermann scores (177-178). His analysis of



Rószka's score for *El Cid* (Anthony Mann, 1967) is another strong entry, offering casual listeners the tools to make more sophisticated connections between what they are hearing and what they are shown. The "acidly bitonal" chords of a cue inform the audience that a particular love story cannot be; a solo organ cue represents the death of a major character (202).

It is clear as well that Brown has a considerable amount of repertoire at his fingertips, writing that he hears the waltz from *Carousel* (Henry King, 1956) in cues from *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996), and noting that another motif from the same film "flirts dangerously with a moment in the second movement of Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony" (233-234). Although Brown goes against musicological convention in his appreciation of the mixture of anachronistic music used in *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998), he does have the information readily available to argue a case -- applicable mostly to casual viewers of the film, rather than those educated in music -- for including Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and selections from Mozart's *Requiem*. He notes the use of Shostakovich in James Horner's score for *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001), but goes too far in accusing Horner of "ripping off John Williams for six years" without acknowledging Williams's own flaws in terms of borrowing (376).

While the lack of significant depth on any particular film, composer, or topic is justified by the genre of the magazine column and the intended general audience, Brown's writing, which often veers from the jocular into sarcasm or downright nastiness, is a serious detraction. Dismissing artists, films, and songs with childish and pejorative terms such as "namby-pamby" (70), "hyperbolic goo" (110), or "colossally blah" (327) is neither useful nor professional. Brown's own ego is, even he admits, frequently to blame: He writes that, "you'll pardon my ego, but...I had a perfect screenplay in mind" for *Misery* (Rob Reiner, 1990), and finds the real screenplay lacking in comparison (93). But it is not so much Brown's ego as his lack of interest in the new. With a few exceptions, such as his adulation for Patrick Doyle's score for *Dead Again* (Kenneth Branagh, 1991), Brown is happy with just a few composers, whom he lauds again and again, repeating even the same phrases in his praise of them: Hermann, Rószka, Korngold, Williams. The fact that the best-known of this bunch -- Williams -- is recognized primarily for his constant reuse and recycling of his own materials to the detriment of true creativity casts a doubt on Brown's reviews of other composers and their techniques. Of the score for *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderburgh, 2000), Brown writes, "OK. Just for starters let me give you a list of the instruments that make up the ensemble that performs Thomas Newman's score for *Erin Brockovich*", listing guitars, tongue drum, tonga drum, a phonograph, bloogle, and piano. He goes on, "Do I know what half these instruments are? No way. A bloogle? You've got to be kidding. And only in the age of rap can a phonograph become a percussion instrument." (368) Later, writing of *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont, 1999) by the same composer, his comments are equally unreceptive: "a bowed traveling guitar (say what?)...a tonut (eh?)" (336). It is a shame that in an era of ever-expanding soundscapes and musical environments in film, Brown has decided not to venture beyond his personal comfort zone, even for the sake of educating his audience.

There are several missed opportunities and a few errors in the book. Again perhaps because of the limitations of writing a column, Brown often passes over opportunities to explore the uses and meaning of scoring in depth. His discussion of John Corigliano's score for *The Red Violin* (François Girard, 1998) is just one example of a review that touches upon subjects worthy of deeper study, including the motif of sacrificial female death and the trope of the uncontrolled artist, but they are passed over. There is little discussion of the way scores are

used to imbue characters with depth, advance a plot, or let the audience in on knowledge not readily apparent through the visuals of the medium. Brown also notes instances of "ghosting," particularly that of Anthony Hopkins's Hannibal Lector being ghosted in Hopkins's later roles as Titus Andronicus and Richard Nixon, but the effect of such ghosting is neither explained nor explored. Brown also declines to include any discussion of women's contributions to film and film scores. Almost all of the films under consideration are directed and scored by men, and Brown makes a point of disdaining so-called "soap opera" movies, i.e. films that appeal to women. Although Aimee Mann's songs for *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999), one of which earned an Oscar nomination, are the focal point, musically speaking, of the film, Brown instead spotlights the background score written by Jon Brion, emphasizing Brion's involvement in the arrangement of some of Mann's songs and the "excellence" of Brion's score (349-351). There are a few factual errors and typos: Brown gives *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986) credit for making Barber's *Adagio for Strings* so popular (99); it has been an American icon since it was used at Franklin Delano Roosevelt's funeral in 1945 and again at John F. Kennedy's in 1963. Elsewhere, actor Derek Jacobi's name is misspelled (105).

For the record collector or the non-musician interested in film music, *Film Musings* is a worthwhile introduction to some of the basic ideas and concepts that shape film music criticism and their application in general-readership venues. For those dabbling in film music study, it is a potentially interesting resource for gauging the reception of particular films and composers, albeit by one highly distinctive voice. Those already familiar with and established in the field may have little use for Brown's acerbity and lack of significant insight, but might still enjoy dipping into the book for the occasional reference. Ultimately, it is a compendium more of Brown's praise for the classic scores of the past and those continuing in that style than a chronological view of the scores and the innovations that have shaped film music over the last twenty years.

# Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema

By Lisa Odham Stokes

Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0810855205 (hbk). 16 illustrations. 590 pp. £65.00 (hbk).

From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China Edited by Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang.

## From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China

Edited by Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang.

Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 37 illustrations. ISBN: 978-0742554382 (pbk). 268 pp. £19.99 (pbk).

## A review by Konrad Ng, University of Hawai'i, USA

In part, the selection of Zhang Yimou to direct the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics reveals the important role that cinema has played in crafting the narrative of China and representing contemporary Chinese cultural life for almost thirty years. Indeed, the significance of Chinese cinemas, globalization and its convergence in Beijing is punctuated by the inclusion of Steven Spielberg and Ang Lee as Zhang's artistic assistants for the Olympic ceremonies. As such, it is opportune to take up two recent publications that give an informative and critical history of two trajectories of Chinese cinemas: Hong Kong and People's Republic of China.

*Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* is the latest volume to join Scarecrow Press's extensive series, *Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts*. In the foreword, series editor Jon Woronoff praises principal author, Lisa Odham Stokes, for being her ability to convey essential facts with "a feeling for the local scene and a taste for the passion for cinema that reigns in Hong Kong and among its numerous fans" (x). True, Odham Stokes is a fan of the art form and she is no stranger to Hong Kong cinema, having co-authored the well received *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (Verso, 1999). Essentially, *Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts* is a massive and more comprehensive update of *City on Fire*.

The volume includes a chronology of Hong Kong and Hong Kong cinema from 1841-2005 and is accompanied by a brief introduction to the history of Hong Kong cinema. The bulk of the publication is devoted to its dictionary section, which contains hundreds of entries on concepts, companies, figures, selected films, genres and terminology relating to Hong Kong cinema, and ends with an extensive bibliography of written material on the topic. The entries

are equal in detail and tend to group notable directors together with their films as one entry. The writing is conversational, fan-based (but thoughtful) and peppered with references to other entries and meaningful details. Odham Stokes includes information on genres less well-known outside of Hong Kong, such as the vampire films of the 1980s, in addition to well-known phenomena in need of more scholarship, such as Johnnie To and his Milkyway Image Productions. The work is informative and useful, especially when readers need to access essential points quickly.

Given its breadth and accessibility, it's easy to see that *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* will find a natural audience in film festival programmers, critics and cinephiles. However, the concern is how quickly the material becomes dated. This is not to say that the information is thin. Rather, in the age of online databases and wikipedia, a printed encyclopedic work is at a disadvantage: the medium simply isn't dynamic enough to convey knowledge about ongoing events. Most of the entries in *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* contain information confirmed as of 2005 and, as such, the publication misses all developments that have unfolded in recent years. For example: there are minute errors such as listing the final US Distributor of Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) as Miramax when it was Sony Pictures Classics. The entry on Wong Kar-wai does not discuss his subsequent move to directing English-language films such as *My Blueberry Nights* (2007). Similarly, the discussion of Andrew Lau's *Infernal Affairs* (2002) excludes information about its remake as Martin Scorsese's Academy Award winning film, *The Departed* (2006), and more generally, the concept of "Asian remakes" and the role of industry players such as Roy Lee and his Vertigo Entertainment. While there is rigor in *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema*, the existence of websites such as Love HK Film (<http://www.lovehkfilm.com>), Hong Kong Movie Database (<http://www.hkmdb.com>), or Hong Kong Cinema (<http://www.hkcinema.co.uk>) provide more timely references (and Odham Stokes list some of these sites in the bibliography). In spite of the online competition for knowledge, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* remains a useful index for an incredible form of cinema.

*From Underground to Independent* is not a typical book on Chinese cinemas. First, co-editors Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang have assembled an interdisciplinary group of contributors who have some degree of fluency in Mandarin. Second, *From Underground to Independent* focuses on documentary filmmaking in the development of China's alternative film culture, a form of film that has been "previously obscured by an almost exclusive attention to the 'six-generation' directors of *fictional* films" (viii). Third, Pickowicz and Zhang encourage exchange between the contributors and chapters to "promote various approaches, and through internal dialogue in this book, to give the reader a sense of the excitement and challenges associated with exploring a dynamic new cultural phenomenon in contemporary China" (x). The contributors acknowledge each other's work and while different for a textbook, the engagement is not sustained. Rather, the references are more like a hyperlink where the reader is directed to another chapter to explore the issue from a different perspective. Finally, *From Underground to Independent* includes a filmography, bibliography, list of internet resources and a short piece on collecting underground Chinese films by Jim Cheng, Head of the International Relations and Pacific Studies Library and East Asia Collection at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Given how difficult it is to screen and conduct research on China's "independent" films without having direct contact with filmmakers or access to international film festivals, these additions are unique. A skeletal review of the book's content would look something like the following.

In 'Social and Political Dynamics of Underground Filmmaking in China,' Pickowicz explores the question of what it means for the state to allow the existence of an "underground" film culture and similarly, what does such a culture mean for Chinese "underground" filmmakers? From the perspective of the state, Pickowicz contends that liberal factions in the China's political machine see advantages in allowing the existence of an "underground" film culture, including good public relations and a way to develop film talent, as aspirants may start underground and move aboveground in relation to the growth of their profile. For Chinese filmmakers, the underground film world provides an opportunity to indulge in individualist self-expression and garner important international exposure, sometimes even pandering to Western tastes for an opportunity to achieve exposure. Pickowicz concludes that it may be helpful to recognize that young underground filmmakers in China see themselves as "independent" filmmakers. The term describes their choice to work with "*alternative* modes of production and circulation...[and] if not entirely independent of state institutions ...at least *independent of official ideology*. Their 'independent' status accordingly, is defined not in relation to private sources of their funding but with reference to their lack of approval by the government" (26).

In 'My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity, and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video,' Yingjin Zhang explores one of the mantras used to characterize Chinese independent film and video: "My camera doesn't lie." Zhang's chapter carefully unpacks the meaning of the phrase, particularly its ambivalences and contradictions. Rather than describe how Chinese independent film and video present an objective reality for Chinese audiences, Zhang concludes that the claim of "my camera doesn't lie" outlines a strategic position in which independent directors establish legitimacy in the cultural production of China. The statement "authorizes them to proceed in a self-confident manner: my vision, my camera and my truth" and this intervention alters "the balance of power – however symbolically – in Chinese cultural production and has remained an unrelenting challenge to the hegemony of official filmmaking and media representation in China" (40 – 41).

In "'A Scene beyond Our Line of Sign': Wu Wenguang and New Documentary China's Politics of Independence,' Matthew Johnson explores the career of acclaimed Chinese documentarian, Wu Wenguang, to trace the emergence of China's new documentary cinema and its shifting relationship to China's unofficial and official mediascapes. In brief, Johnson observes that documentary film culture is composed of individuals with a background in official film or television production and who made internationally acclaimed documentaries outside of the state studio system. These films exceeded institutional and aesthetic norms for documentary and emerged "at points where demand for new representations of contemporary China met with the possibility of their inclusion - critical junctures defined by both international and domestic patronage. While the politics surrounding this emergence [of independent documentary] created considerable tension [with the state], they also brought new images of mainland society to the fore" (60). After this achievement, these documentarians returned, "with varying degrees of willingness on the part of some directors," to "domestic institutional spaces that signaled, if not influenced, a shift toward quotidian imagery and acceptance of unofficial credentials within the mainland media as a whole" (71). For Johnson, Wu is symbolic of this arc and he concludes that in China, "a kind of new documentary 'spirit' does persist, even as its images and icons become co-opted, canonized, replaced, or forgotten" (72).

Valerie Jaffee explores the concept of "amateurism" and its role in China's new documentary film movement. She begins her analysis with an explication of the Jia Zhangke's manifesto on

amateurism and filmmaking, 'The Age of Amateur Cinema Will Return' (1999), and notes that Jia's use of the term amateurism is relevant to a subgenre of new documentary films that focus on "the lives of socially marginalized people who, in some way or another, participate or try to participate in artistic endeavors, without the training or recognition that distinguishes professional artists" (84). The connection between Jia's amateurism and these documentaries about amateurs making art is "a deconstructive impulse directed at institutions through which Chinese society circumscribes the zone of legitimate cultural production" (84). That is, like Jia's stand against cinematic excess, documentarians like Wu Wenguang, Zhu Chuanming and Zheng Dasheng destabilize the scope of "true art" and more generally, the regulation of cultural discourse, by treating amateur art as an aesthetic in itself. By doing so, new documentary culture is able to define itself. Jaffee contends that the focus with a new Other: "impoverished people speaking in exotic dialects and living at the mercy of socioeconomic forces – has led to what I see as the heart of this discourse of amateurism: an attempt to lodge the aura of art in the Other, and to redefine the self in so doing" (102).

In 'Independently Chinese: Duan Jinchuan, Jiang Yue, and Chinese Documentary,' Chris Berry explores theoretical antecedents that may have contributed to popular interpretations of Chinese independent films. Given the similarities between the Soviet model of bureaucratic regulation of cultural production and China's state system, it is often assumed that the Soviet model of independence as ideological dissent is what "independence" means in the Chinese context. Similarly, the American notion of independence as corporate freedom is also applied to independent documentary filmmaking in China. Berry suggests that both approaches are useful, but ultimately, inadequate. He contends "Chinese documentarians define themselves in relation to a three-legged system, composed of the party-state apparatus, the marketized economy, and the foreign media and art organizations that have built up a presence in China today" (109). That is, independence is a strategic and productive position in which fostering close relations with "state institutions, large corporations, and foreign organizations...help to sustain independence rather than compromise it" (109 – 110). Berry unpacks the dynamic of independence as strategic cultural production through the careers of documentarians Duan Jinchuan and Jiang Yue and, to a lesser degree, Li Hong and Wu Wenguang.

In 'Trapped Freedom and Localized Globalism,' Tonglin Lu interprets Jia's film, *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) as a parable of global capitalism and the deformation of Chinese values. *Unknown Pleasures*, she suggests, presents an imaginary which equates "wealth with happiness...[and as] this slippery value has become the measurement of happiness [in the Chinese context], it is difficult, to 'know' pleasure, because the standard of measurement is itself unknowable. In this sense, everyone is imprisoned, rich and poor alike" (138). Lu also argues that the parable of *Unknown Pleasures* reflects the transformation of Jia and other filmmakers into marketable, mainstream filmmakers. She claims that the rewards of a global capitalist structure have enabled the Chinese government to tether subversive film spirits. Lu cites Jia's decision to become an "aboveground" filmmaker to "cope with the reality of the consumer society and the market economy...[illustrates how] financial incentives have succeeded where political coercion may have failed" (129). The claim is that the capitalist values have helped "the Chinese government to reach its [ideological] goals through apparently less coercive means in a territory always difficult to control: the field of cultural production" (129).

Chen Mo and Zhiwei Xiao address this concern that Western film critics and scholars often misunderstand or celebrate films of questionable cultural, political and aesthetic value. In 'Chinese Underground Films: Critical Views from China,' they survey the perspectives of

leading Chinese film scholars and state that the reaction is mixed: Are the films critical? Do underground films constitute an important aesthetically development? Is the Western attention to underground films just hype? Is the movement a practical strategy to break into a competitive media market? Mo and Xiao draw a soft conclusion. They claim that Chinese underground filmmaking has "historical significance" (156) in how it has registered in, and to a certain extent, changed the scope of, Chinese public discourse.

In 'Film clubs in Beijing: The Cultural Consumption of Chinese Independent Films' Seio Nakajima presents an ethnographic study of film consumption in China by examining four film clubs in Beijing. Nakajima discovers that the orientation, location and scope of activities for each club reveal a different trajectory within the overall cultural economy of contemporary Chinese film. In brief, there is a "politically oriented" film club; a "commercially oriented" film club; an "art for art's sake" film club; a "combination of art and commerce" film club. Nakajima maps the clubs geographically and draws a correlation between the character of the club and its surrounding neighborhood. Overall, Nakajima's study emphasizes the role of consumption in structuring the cultural field of Chinese urban film culture.

*From Underground to Independent* is directed to a university audience. I envision individual chapters supplementing advance undergraduate courses on Chinese cinemas or a graduate level seminar including the book as part of its curriculum. My claim about audience is not based on the notion that the writing is too dense. Rather, the book acts as a rebuke of other constituencies who consume alternative Chinese film, namely English-speaking Western film critics, film festival programmers and cinephiles. Throughout *From Underground To Independent*, individual authors call for sobriety in the hype surrounding Chinese "underground," "independent" or "sixth-generation" films. Pickowicz and Zhang state that the much of the coverage of Chinese alternative film culture "has occurred mostly outside China and has been frequently filtered through Eurocentric lenses", with English-language scholarship not doing "justice to the immensely rich materials produced by Chinese underground films" (vii). Yingjing Zhang reminds readers to "not blindly follow contemporary Western media reports, which tend to emphasize politics and ideology and accept independent directors' truth claims at face value" (23). Matthew Johnson contends that film festival promoters engage in a form of mythmaking in order to "package independent Chinese filmmakers as courageous activists, no matter how limited or professionally oriented the scope of their activities in practice" (69). While she does not fault them, Valerie Jaffee states that Western scholarship "on Chinese underground, independent, and sixth generation film have been lack in both quantity and quality...[and] bear a strong resemblance to the descriptions of those works found in festival catalogues, popular publications, and marketing literature, much to the scholarship's discredit" (77). Chen Mo and Zhiwei Xiao state, "few people in the West have any idea of how underground film has been received in China and viewed by Chinese film critics" (143). Other writers are more oblique in their criticism.

As an at-large film festival programmer and I admit, cinephile, of alternative Chinese cinemas, there have been times when I have been guilty of holding a less sophisticated grasp of Chinese independent film culture or more aptly described, I hope, by what Yingjing Zhang describes being one of the promoters of alternative media practice "whose moral responsibility might make them rather reluctant to criticize even obvious weaknesses in independent productions" (23). I raise this point not to diminish the scholarship of the collection. Rather, the unquestioned academic imperative embedded in *From Underground to Independent* shields the work from questioning its assumptions about Chinese identity

(questioned briefly by Pickowicz as Occidentalism and self-Orientalism) and alienates a group of people whom I see to be part of the book's core audience. Put differently, the disjuncture can be caricatured: ivory tower-insider privilege versus proletarian-Tarantino-tourist hype. What is lost is that latter group aids and abets the type of cinematic exposure required feed the former and overall, this dynamic is a legitimate part of the discourse. Or perhaps, it's like this: my (Chinese diasporic) ego can't endure the charge of (Westernized-)centricity in my grasp of Chinese cinema. After reviewing *From Underground to Independent*, my understanding can't help but be expanded, but I wonder if it will be true for non-academics and other film festival attendees.



# Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium

By Kirsten Moana Thompson

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0791470435 (hbk). ISBN: 978-0791470442 (pbk). 14 illustrations, xii + 195 pp. £47.49 (hbk), £17.24 (pbk).

## A review by Mark Bernard, Bowling Green State University, USA

Throughout the last decade, many citizens in the United States and the world experienced anxiety about the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Hollywood capitalized on this fear and produced a spate of apocalyptic disaster films that played upon these anxieties about the possible end of the world. Given the massive number of disaster films produced by Hollywood, Kirsten Moana Thompson, in *Apocalyptic Dread*, does an admirable job of sifting through these films, locating lines of continuity, and crafting a framework for examining and analyzing these apocalyptic films.

According to Thompson, Hollywood, from 1995 to 2005, produced a cycle of apocalyptic films that conceptualized and represented the end of the world as a threat to the traditional family. Thompson argues that in these films, this threat to the family usually comes from a figure from the past that embodies a trauma for which the family (read: dominant ideology) is responsible, but has repressed and refuses to acknowledge. The dread of this figure from the past is so potent that it threatens to foreclose any possibility of the future and, thus, charges these films with apocalyptic dread. Thompson's study focuses on six films, *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991), *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992), *Dolores Claiborne* (Taylor Hackford, 1995), *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995), *Signs* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2002), and *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005), as case studies of this specific strand of apocalyptic cinema.

The introduction of *Apocalyptic Dread* provides a historical overview that contextualizes the films Thompson will be analyzing. Thompson notes that since the 1970s, the rise of conservatism in the United States has stirred an overwhelming fear and apprehension of the apocalypse. Subsequently, media conglomerates began to produce films that focused on theological issues to appeal to these religious and conservative audiences. Considering this convergence of religiously conservative thinking and dread of the apocalypse, it is appropriate that she next turns to nineteenth century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote extensively on religion and dread. As Thompson explains, Kierkegaard feels that dread about the future is often caused by the subject's unconscious fear of absolute, radical freedom. However, this anxiety about the future, Thompson notes, "can also produce a compensatory response of predetermination, a feeling that the future is not frighteningly open after all, but reassuringly preordained by God" (21).

Thompson argues that Kierkegaard's ideas are present in the apocalyptic cinema of turn-of-the-century United States, in which a fear of the future is mediated -- sometimes reassuringly,

sometimes not -- by the past. Also important in her formulation of apocalyptic cinema are notions of the uncanny and the traumatic. More specifically, the figures from the past that threaten the possibility of the future in these films are frightening, but also familiar to the films' protagonists, Thompson claims, because they represent traumas that have been repressed by the protagonists. However, she notes that since the traumatic is something that resists integration into narrative history, the danger posed by these figures and the dread that the protagonists feel toward them threaten an apocalyptic collapse of the past, the present, and the future. Ultimately, the dread of the villains in these films is the fear of the end of the world, and Thompson traces the different manifestations of apocalyptic dread throughout the representative films.

Thompson argues that Max Cady (Robert De Niro), in Scorsese's *Cape Fear*, is an apocalyptic figure who acts as "a marker of the fear of acknowledging the traumas, betrayals, and hypocrisies of the past, but also of what we know and desire, yet fear to look at and acknowledge in the present" (41). According to Thompson, Cady embodies both traumas that the Bowen family has yet to acknowledge -- for instance, the traumas that the family has endured due to Sam Bowen's (Nick Nolte) infidelities and moral hypocrisy -- and the desires that the family can never act on, like Sam's repressed desire for his daughter, Danny (Juliette Lewis). The apocalypse with which Cady threatens the Bowen family in *Cape Fear* then becomes a microcosmic version of the threat that he poses to the macrocosm of dominant ideology, for Cady also represents the apocalyptic vengeance of those who have been oppressed in the United States along race, class, and gender lines.

This notion of the apocalyptic stemming from traumatic injustices of the past continues in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*. The eponymous monster of this film (Tony Todd) terrorizes characters through a violent confrontation with the trauma of slavery and the history of racial violence, such as lynching, that continued in its wake. Thompson argues that in *Candyman*, these traumas affect the places in which they happened, creating uncanny spaces that allow the characters access to these traumas. One such uncanny space is the Cabrini-Green housing complex that was built where Daniel Robitaille, who later becomes Candyman, was lynched for impregnating a white woman. Within the uncanny space of Cabrini-Green, Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen), a graduate student who becomes obsessed with the Candyman mythos, destroys the possibility of her future by returning to the traumas of the past and merging herself with Candyman, a dissolution of identity that is, for Thompson, apocalyptic.

Thompson's analysis of Taylor Hackford's *Dolores Claiborne* turns away from the macrocosmic historical traumas of *Cape Fear* and *Candyman* and returns to intimate familial traumas that threaten to dissolve the subject's notion of identity and agency. According to Thompson, Hackford's film evinces what she calls memorial dread, the fear of remembering things that one already knows. Selena (Jennifer Jason Leigh) is the character most marked by memorial dread in the film, for she must confront the trauma of sexual abuse that she suffered from her father, Joe (David Strathairn), and has repressed as an adult. The confrontation will lead to her remembering how her mother, Dolores (Kathy Bates), murdered her father during a solar eclipse years before. Thompson claims that the ways in which the film aligns Dolores with the dramatic natural occurrence of the eclipse makes her an apocalyptic figure. In this film, the apocalyptic is positive, for Selena's and Dolores's confrontation with the past draws them together and strengthens familial bonds.

*Se7en* inverts this positive familial apocalypse, as Thompson describes how the family, as represented by Detective Mills (Brad Pitt) and his wife, Tracy (Gwyneth Paltrow), is

destroyed by the apocalyptic force of serial killer Jonathan Doe (Kevin Spacey) and all possibility of the future is annihilated. According to Thompson, the nameless city that the characters in *Se7en* inhabit is an allegorical place out of time that is stuck "in a perpetual present of continuing trauma" (109). This perpetual present is filled with different modalities of dread: urban dread, scopic dread (the paradoxical desire to see while being afraid of what one will see), corporeal dread (a fear of the body and dismemberment), and anonymous dread (a fear of what cannot be known or represented). Further, the film evinces doppelgänger dread through the ways in which Doe is the double of Detective Somerset (Morgan Freeman), a police officer whose fears that the world is corrupt and beyond salvation are corroborated by Doe's heinous crimes. Of all the films Thompson analyzes, *Se7en* emerges as the most nihilistic in how it dismembers the family, portrays the contemporary moment as one predicated on dread, and forecloses any possibility of a future.

Thompson next turns to M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs*, a film that reconfigures apocalyptic dread in a post-9/11 world and, unlike *Se7en*, shows how the family overcomes the apocalyptic by decoding the past. Having renounced his faith in God after the death of his wife, Graham Hess (Mel Gibson) is a Kierkegaardian figure who is faced with the choice of seeing the events of the world as random with no discernable order or as all a part of the plan of a higher power. When his family is besieged by invading aliens, Graham deals with the threat by interpreting the events of the past, including the death of his wife, as a complex series of signs that reveal how to survive the invasion. Thompson argues that *Signs* endorses a conservative agenda that insists that the future be understood in terms of religious faith and predestination.

Thompson concludes with a brief consideration of Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, which also figures the apocalyptic in terms of familial collapse, but, unlike *Signs*, offers the film's central family only survival rather than endorsement. According to Thompson, Spielberg subtly critiques the family and American military belligerence, but unfortunately, the chapter is too brief for these provocative ideas to be developed further. Indeed, there are quite a few weighty ideas in *Apocalyptic Dread* that could be pursued further: for instance, an exploration of the recent intersection between Christian and secular media could be a book unto itself, and the discussion of the transformation of dread after 9/11 could be fleshed out more. Nonetheless, Thompson crafts an insightful lens through which to read apocalyptic films, and cinema scholars would do well to refer to her frameworks outlined in this book.

# British Queer Cinema

By Robin Griffiths (ed.)

London: Routledge, 2006. ISBN: 978-0415307796 (pbk). 248pp. £18.99 (pbk).

## A review by Max Fincher, Independent scholar, UK

This collection of fifteen essays focuses upon a range of films that invites the question as to how each contributor understands the rubric of both "queer" and "British". As Kenneth MacKinnon observes queer readings often try to move away from a gay/straight binary of identity, and to show the fissures and instabilities of gender and sexuality against social and politically constructions of gender. Queer bodies and behaviour are often foregrounded in texts where there seems to be no apparent thematic of erotic desire between men or between women. However, the extent to which the films selected here can be described as cultural texts that are queer -- because they work against both gay and normative cultural values -- is, at times, problematic.

Queer theory developed within US academic institutions, alongside artistic and political practitioners who reclaimed the use of "queer" in the early 1990s. Given that context, it is important to ask what differentiates *British Queer Cinema* from, say, the New Queer Cinema moment of the early 1990s, for example the radical work of directors such as Greg Araki. Including essays on films and filmmakers from the 1920s through to the 1990s, this collection aims to re-evaluate classic British cinema and to survey post-war queer cinema. One needs to ask how far the films chosen are *self-consciously* and actively queer working on a definition that queer suggests complicating identity politics and gender, a practice that defines the New Queer Cinema and queer artists more generally? As MacKinnon asks: "One question therefore of British Queer Cinema, as it must be of New Queer Cinema, is whether one of its organising principles is a dismantling of the categories of 'gay' and 'straight'?" (122). Many of the films selected here are for a mainstream audience. With the exception of the essays on Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Beautiful Thing* (1996) it would have been refreshing to have had a contributing essay or two that balanced the revisionist approach and considered contemporary British queer independent offerings. Robin Griffiths notes how *Nine Dead Gay Guys* (2002) effectively provoked debate and shock surrounding sexual and/or racial stereotypes for both gay and straight audiences. But there have been other British films that have premiered at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival over the last 10 years or so that deserve further attention, films such as *Gypo* (Jan Dunn, 2005) and *Rag Tag* (Adaora Nwandu, 2005), for example, which present complex inter-racial queer relationships.

One strand of a queer reading practice is to pinpoint those knots of interpretation and (in)visibility around a subject's gender and sexuality. Arguably, queer film plays with conventional film narrative devices, challenging the spectator's desire to know or understand the essence or truth of a character's identity. MacKinnon shows how *Prick Up Your Ears* (Stephen Frears, 1987) the story of the troubled relationship between the playwright Joe Orton and his lover Kenneth Halliwell, is queer because it refuses to grant to the spectator any opacity about its subjects' identities. We are shown how: "those who seem to be our

identification points if we are to reach the point of confident interpretation are not allowed to be authoritative voices" (124). Peggy Ramsay, Orton's literary agent, played by Vanessa Redgrave, is both a character and an interpretive narrator. However, her authority is undermined at various points in the film's story. Both Orton and Halliwell are like collages, built from a composite of details and viewpoints. The structure of the film is "unusually complex" with rapid changes in the chronology of Orton's life. The film's refusal to "grant any easy access to objectivity or truth" (131) makes both its subject and narrative technique queer.

Inevitably, the problem arises as to whether some of the films chosen resist the idea of being described as queer, not least because of their conservatism and/or because they are allied with a visible politics of profiling gay representation. This emerges in the biopic of Oscar Wilde, *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997) and in the adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel, *Maurice* (1987). Glyn Davis feels *Wilde* to be disappointing, to fall short of capturing the transgressive individualism of Wilde's life and spirit. Despite the success of the adaptation of Sarah Waters novels for television, queerness, especially queer sex, is difficult to accommodate with the mainstream genre of the heritage film. However, a recent adaptation of Ernest Hemmingway's posthumously published novel, *The Garden of Eden* (John Irvin, 2008), breaks this rule by containing cross-dressing, lesbianism and hints of a ménage à trois.

Other essays consider the lives and biographies of actors. Yet it is unclear if these essays succeed in claiming these biographies for a historical revisioning of queer sexuality pre-1967, the year when homosexuality was eventually decriminalized. Whether their lives and/or films are transgressive enough to merit a description as queer is difficult to decide, if we take queer to suggest transgression. Stephen Bourne examines the sensitivity of the director Anthony Asquith to situations of male bonding in his war films, a genre that has been investigated by Steve Neale's work on masculinity in war films. Unlike the closeted Asquith, Bourne notes that Brian Desmond Hurst was openly gay. Kenneth Howes considers how gay actors Michael Redgrave, Dirk Bogarde, Alec Guinness, Ian McKellen, Dennis Price and Rupert Everett have shaped the queerness of British film. However, as with the readings of Asquith and Bogarde, this sense of queerness is predicated on an assumption that the actor/director projects some *innate* essence of himself into the film. Additionally, the actor deliberately chooses stories and characters that can be given a queer performance using ambiguity and expressive intonation, to signal to those "in-the-know" that there is a subversive meaning intended. But did this sense of *identifying* as queer, as consciously neither "homosexual", "straight", or "bisexual" exist for these men. Were things more complicated back then? More queer in fact?

Other films seem more concerned with a political consciousness-raising of gay/lesbian lives and representation. *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968) despite its campness and "comedic celebration of disorderliness" (91) achieved by Beryl Reid's performance is, as Lizzie Thynne argues, one of the first films to show explicitly a sexual relationship between two women, underscored by including real footage from the lesbian nightclub, The Gateways in London. *Beautiful Thing* also wants to open the viewer's eyes by showing us what life is like from the perspective of two young working-class boys in a deprived area of London. *Beautiful Thing* is queerer because it challenges prevailing stereotypes of gay identity and does not get embroiled in voyeurism (unlike *Sister George*). Ros Jennings argues that the film subverts the classic romance narrative by showing how Jamie and Ste's love develops for one another. It also turns the politically endorsed notion of "family values" (the moral rhetoric of the Conservative government of John Major) and redefines this idea on its own

terms. At the close of the film, gay, straight, black, white, old, young male, female all dance together in a utopian family of harmony and mutual understanding with no-one "family" privileged over another.

The political dimensions of queer film emerge in Gregory Woods' appreciation of developments in the 1990s, specifically films that deal with AIDS, as well as in the essays on *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) and *Edward II* (Derek Jarman, 1991). Woods gives an overview of political climate of the demonization of gay men as the receptacles and conduits of AIDS during the 1980s and early 1990s. He notes how the "out" gay man became, ironically, safer than his closeted or bisexual counterpart who moved between two worlds. In *Closing Numbers* (Stephen Whittaker, 1993) the reckless Keith is contrasted with the openly gay and responsible Steve, who supports Anna, Keith's wife when she realizes that she might be HIV positive. In effect, the film reverses media portrayals of gay men as hedonistic and irresponsible. In this sense it is queer by reversing "gay" and "straight" patterns of behaviour, and suggesting that there are parities between them. Woods effectively contextualizes his readings with how gay men were among the first to educate and empower the majority in safer-sex practices. Nevertheless, Woods argues that the film is problematic because Steve is only nominally gay; we don't see him have sex. In the early 1990s at least, both filmmakers and audiences were only comfortable with gay characters as long as they didn't get their underwear off. The character of Stuart, the sexually avaricious rebel in the television series *Queer As Folk* (Sarah Harding and Charles MacDougall, 1999) changed all that. But whether Stuart is as free and liberated as Woods claims, or is locked into the (by now) familiar stereotype of the gay man who imitates one model of straight masculinity, is still debatable.

This is a timely collection that effectively charts some classic examples of queer filmmaking by British director and actors, while also looking again at British classic cinema to suggest that we might want to query those celluloid representations whose irony, excess and campness now seem so queer.

# Donnie Darko

By Geoff King

London: Wallflower Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-1905674510 (pbk). 24 Illustrations, 118 pp. £10.00 (pbk).

## A review by Nan McVittie, North Carolina State University, USA

According to the back of each book's cover, Wallflower's 'Cultographies' series aims to provide "a comprehensive introduction to those films which have attained the coveted status of a cult classic, focusing on their particular appeal, the ways in which they have been conceived, constructed and received, and their place in the broader popular cultural landscape". Geoff King's book, the third in this series, admirably manages to do just this in its examination of the teen-horror-science-fiction hybrid *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001). In little more than 100 pocket-sized pages, King gives an overview of the film's production history, distribution, reception and place currently in popular culture, along with thoughtful and interesting analysis of the film itself as a text. Throughout, King never loses sight of the series's focus on "cult" status and the question as to what makes *Donnie Darko* a cult film remains central in each aspect that King explores.

The book is divided into four major sections. Following a brief personal introduction, the first section, titled from an anonymous Hollywood executive's description of the film as "an impressive failure", details *Donnie Darko*'s production and distribution. In swift prose, King covers the history of the film, from its beginnings as the hottest script in Hollywood that no one wanted to take a chance on producing to its much-anticipated appearance at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival, where it became the hottest picture no one wanted to take a chance on distributing. *Darko* did eventually find a distribution deal and King ends this section with a play-by-play of the film's disastrous initial theatrical run in the autumn of 2001. In doing so, King outlines how the same series of missteps that may have doomed the film to mainstream failure simultaneously began to prime it for cult success.

The second section of the book, 'Afterlife,' details this cult success, beginning with its midnight moviehouse embrace toward the tail end of its North American release and its far more positive reception, following this, in the United Kingdom. King traces the more skillful marketing of the film during this period and, most importantly, the crucial role that material produced outside of the film's text (such as the 'Philosophy of Time Travel' pieces Kelly produced and included on the *Donnie Darko* website) played in the development of the film's cult appeal. On the latter, King writes: "The creation of this background information proved to be a canny move on Kelly's part, creating a focal point for interpretive speculation about the film and providing a significant and marketable 'extra' for the DVD release and subsequent director's cut" (24). King clarifies this connection further: "Web-based discussion and the geographically very limited availability of *Donnie Darko* in cinemas (midnight screenings or otherwise) can be assumed to have played a considerable role in the creation of demand for the video/DVD release, which proved highly successful" (25).

The remainder of this section details that success and, in doing so, King performs the task of differentiating the three versions of the film's narrative that viewers soon had access to: the original theatrical version, the DVD release (with substantial ambiguity-erasing commentary by director Kelly) and the later 'Director's Cut'. The establishment of the different interpretive possibilities each of these versions of the film offers is crucial for the section of King's book which follows, which deals with textual analysis of the film.

This third section, 'Reading *Donnie Darko*,' is the longest and most difficult to pull off in the book. It is also where King is at his most impressive. Working on a topic-by-topic basis, he analyzes the film from a number of approaches. The first of these, for instance, approaches *Donnie Darko* with a focus on genre issues and the idea of "modality", and later approaches focus on narrative, intertextuality or politics, among other ideas. In each, King produces insightful and substantial analysis, informed by the work of previous cult scholars (Matt Hills and J.P. Telotte are most frequently cited). King is almost scientific in this manner, dissecting the film and fitting each piece into an equation that always results in "cult appeal".

One example of this can be seen following King's analysis of the role religion plays in the text. He writes:

*Donnie Darko* itself appears to be agnostic, tending to edge toward, and then back away from, the potential religious implications underlying the plot. The result is that the viewer can choose whether or not to understand the film in an explicitly religious context. This is a useful strategy given the potential for an overtly religious dimension to be off-putting to many of those likely to be attracted to the film on the basis of qualities such as its generic and/or more broadly independent or cult status, especially in light of the negative qualities associated with its representations of Christian fundamentalism. (91)

What is most impressive beyond this economic yet comprehensive and focused approach is that King manages to consider in each case all three versions of the film that may be viewed and to do so with clarity. In the following passage, he traces the significance of a single intertextual detail across the various versions:

Many hints of the bigger picture are given in the original version, including the use of some of the intertextual references mentioned above, but these are often far from easy to pick up, especially on a first or single viewing. When what will prove to be Frank's car is seen speeding towards the climactic scene outside Roberta Sparrow's house, for example, Donnie is asked by his assailant, Seth (Alex Greenwald), if he called the cops. 'It's a *dea ex machina*,' replies Donnie. In the director's cut, this echoes the term used by Pomeroy in relation to *Watership Down* and is a major clue. It is not easy to hear, however, even if the viewer is sufficiently alert to have made the connection, Donnie's voice being constrained as he is pinned to the ground with a knife to his throat. Not even Seth, in close proximity, catches what he says, and it considerably less likely to be picked up in the original version in which no prior reference to the term has been made. 'Our savior,' adds Donnie. This makes perfect sense to the viewer equipped with all the background, but otherwise is likely to seem oddly disjunctive... (70)



The final section of the book, 'Placing *Donnie Darko*', draws on each of the prior sections but shifts the focus to the film's place in popular culture as a cult film. King revisits briefly how the film satisfies (or problematizes) textual and extra-textual qualifications for the "cult" label. Using Bruce Kawin's terms of the "inadvertent" cult film and the "programmatic" cult film, King works shows that *Donnie Darko*, while holding elements that might partially fit it under each of these terms, does not fit wholly into either. Rather, it exists somewhere in the middle as an intentionally cult-friendly film that also builds intentionally on generic and other elements associated with mainstream Hollywood filmmaking, fulfilling a contemporary definition of a "instant cult classic".

King's book is a concise but insightful primer on *Donnie Darko* that would be a useful place to start for anyone looking to teach the film or simply to understand more about it and its phenomenon. It provides a valuable untangling of a complicated and ambiguous film while also sorting out many of the extra-filmic materials and factors that are crucial to its reputation and reading. For those interested to learning about cult film, particularly that of the modern variety, as well constructive ways to approach cult film from a scholarly perspective, Geoff King's book would act as an excellent case study.

# Adaptation and its Discontents

By Thomas Leitch

Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0801885655 (hbk). 354 pp. £36.50 (hbk).

## A review by Sarah Artt, Queen Margaret University, UK

As the area of adaptation studies enjoys a vogue (2007 saw the launch of two dedicated academic journals: Intellect's *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* and Oxford University Press's *Adaptation*) it is fitting that one of its great champions as an area worthy of study for both English and Film Studies, Thomas Leitch, has published a substantial work outlining new directions for the field in terms of both teaching and research. The introductory chapter is a powerful and convincing call for literacy as agency and argues that adaptation studies fulfills a crucial role in teaching, that screen adaptations function "as illustrations of the incessant process of rewriting as critical reading" (16). He is keen to point out that "this approach to adaptation study treats both adaptations and their originals as heteroglot texts rather than as canonical works, emphasizing the fact that every text offers itself as an invitation to be rewritten" (16). Leitch sees this approach as fundamental in terms of teaching students how to read critically when tackling novels, an approach that is equally applicable in teaching students how to watch films critically. Leitch's suggestion of a new discipline of textual studies is very appealing, encompassing a wide range of approaches in the humanities -- "the study of how texts are produced, consumed, canonized, transformed, resisted and denied" (17) -- as is his assertion that adaptation studies is the logical bridge between literacy (in the sense of the ability to read and think critically) and literature, that is, the skills we attempt to teach our students and the texts we ask them to engage with.

Chapter two looks at adaptation in early cinema, particularly the one-reelers of D.W. Griffith, as well as early adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Leitch argues that these films, though short by today's standards, can still efficiently evoke an adapted narrative or even events on a grand scale through the use of cinematic technique. This neatly dispenses with the argument often levelled particularly at film adaptations of classic novels, that even a feature length film of two hours or more does not contain enough time or space to adapt the complexities of the classic novel. Griffith, the great master of the early epic, uses "the cachet of history rather than literature to imply epic scale within twelve minutes" (38), a technique he was to deploy later in his feature-length work. Chapter three is devoted, rather intriguingly, to the Biblical epic, with a particular focus on Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). In his discussion of notions of fidelity and the biblical epic, Leitch argues, "the worst that can happen to an unfaithful adapter of Scripture is accusations of heresy or blasphemy (though these are still a healthy step up from being tortured by the Inquisition)" (52). He then continues with a fascinating discussion around *The Passion of the Christ* and notions of 'fidelity' to the New Testament. In this chapter Leitch reimagines the whole notion of fidelity to the source text by aligning it with the idea he introduces in the first chapter, that all texts invite rewriting, or in the case of the Gospels, "the exemplary text must be shattered before it can be used" (66), meaning that selections must be made, and restructuring must occur in order to make a coherent film on this subject.

Chapter four deals with Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* as one of the most regularly adapted works in English literature. Leitch's survey of adaptations is impressively exhaustive, encompassing everything from early silents to *The Muppets Christmas Carol* (Brian Henson, 1992), which he praises for its playful self-reflexivity. An acknowledged classic text of literature that most of us regard as happily subsumed in perennial adaptations for the festive season, Leitch is keen to discuss the cultural uses of *A Christmas Carol* in terms of the form of apology normally reserved for less than inspiring adaptations, that at least the film may introduce new or young readers to a classic literary text (68). He also dwells on the perceived universal values conveyed by Dickens's text, the ideas of compassion and conversion.

Chapter five delves more deeply into adaptation theory and the much-discussed categories of adaptation put forth by Geoffrey Wagner and Dudley Andrew, and more recently by Kamilla Elliott. Leitch in turn revisits Genette's discussions of the varieties of textuality in light of previous categorisation for adaptation, which Leitch sees as predominantly evaluative (95). Leitch then goes on to explain and introduce ten strategies for adaptation. One such example is *adjustment*, the most frequently deployed approach in Leitch's view, which he breaks down even further into subcategories of: compression (the Victorian portmanteau novel in two hours); expansion (films based on shorter works, stories or even songs); correction (the rectification of flaws or inconsistencies in the source); updating (the ever popular resetting of Shakespeare's plays in a contemporary high school); and latterly a comment on the important influence of a 'house style', whether that of the Gainsborough studio or a production team like Merchant Ivory, and how style can shape an adaptation to particular criteria, such as budget and genre. Leitch's category of *metacommentary or deconstruction* is perhaps what might be called a more recent entry to the field, most aptly illustrated by films like Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002), or even the more recent *A Cock and Bull Story* (Michael Winterbottom, 2005), which imagines the intricacies and difficulties of adapting *Tristram Shandy*, alongside a behind-the-scenes mockumentary of the making of the film. The final category of adaptation that Leitch identifies is *allusion*, and he is quick to point out that all films contain allusion, particularly when one considers cinematic techniques and shots that are replicated from earlier films. However, Leitch engages in a detailed breakdown of the ways in which Baz Luhrman's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) engages with all the categories he has just so carefully identified, as an illustration of how categorisation and terminology in adaptation continue to be, as he so aptly puts it, "embarrassingly fluid" (123).

Chapter six deals with the debate that continues to plague adaptation studies, the issue of fidelity to the source text. Leitch's take on this is to discuss instances of what he terms "exceptional fidelity" in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) adaptations, whose extended DVD releases, Leitch argues, have displaced the primacy of the theatrical cut. Leitch indicates that Tolkien's trilogy is much less easy to pin down in terms of its source text, as Tolkien's other works like *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit* act as intertexts and enhancements to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It is this multitude of texts, argues Leitch, which problematise the notion of what one is supposed to be faithful to when making an adaptation.

Chapter seven allows us to revisit the well-trodden "tradition of quality" adaptation, the reputation for a particular kind of filmmaking built up over the years by the BBC in the UK, and by channels like PBS in the US, that indicate a particular set of guidelines and expectations for the classic novel adaptation, particularly on television. To this, Leitch also adds "Hollywood adaptations from the first two decades of synchronized sound...and the films produced by Ismail Merchant and directed by James Ivory" (153). The Hollywood

adaptations Leitch focuses on are seen as distinctly middle class in their values and problems (Hitchcock's adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1940) is cited extensively). The discussion of Merchant Ivory is more illuminating, as Leitch states, quite rightly, that much of Merchant Ivory's oeuvre has been dismissed or ignored, due to their ability to find "earlier works that address contemporary problems with a decorum of manners, visuals and music that will make them seem palatable, even seductive -- so seductive that many commentators have dismissed them to concentrate on the décor" (171). Leitch argues that particularly in the case of contemporary television adaptations, the notion of quality can be easily evoked, provided a programme has the right sort of location (exotic) and style (sumptuous/realistic).

Chapter eight deals with the often overlooked status of illustrated novels and picture books and how certain illustrations have assumed a canonical status, such as Tenniel's illustrations for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where some drawings are replicated in the mise-en-scene of numerous screen adaptations. Leitch goes on to discuss the difficulty of adapting picture books, or even the work of cartoonists whose work is not strictly narrative, and though he does claim "there are of course no film adaptations of such collections" (187), there are the St. Trinians films, based on the rather elliptical cartoons of Ronald Searle, as well as the silhouette animation films of Lotte Reiniger, whose visuals are intimately related to the words of the narrative. His implication that adapting a picture book to the screen will never be the same as "a child's private, interactive experience of having a picture book read aloud by a specific reader" fails to account for films which attempt to incorporate this experience, such as *The Princess Bride* (Rob Reiner, 1987) and Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (1984). Leitch's discussion rings truest in his analysis of comic book adaptations, particularly the series of Batman films since 1989, whose dark cityscape, so praised by critics, was not nearly as carefully adapted from any of the comic book versions as some might have imagined. He also discusses *Sin City's* (Robert Rodriguez, 2005) fetish for fidelity, which replicated individual comic book panels, though as Leitch points out, Miller's drawing style was already highly cinematic, influenced by the look of film noir.

Chapter nine, much like the chapter on Dickens, deals with one of the most frequently adapted figures, Sherlock Holmes. Again, Leitch unearths some surprising examples of adaptation in this vein, in particular the antic *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish* (Christy Cabanne and John Emerson, 1916) partly authored by Anita Loos, and the entertainingly bizarre *Young Sherlock Holmes* (Barry Levinson, 1985), with its memorable if implausible cult of Anubis worshippers. Leitch reserves the bulk of his analysis for the two most iconic screen performances of Holmes: Basil Rathbone and Jeremy Brett. Leitch argues that Holmes, like the mythic heroes described by Joseph Campbell, is endlessly resurrected to instill order, and that "adaptations of Holmes aim to present a Holmes more definitive than Conan Doyle's" (231).

In his discussion of adapter as auteur, Leitch ranges across the work of several British and American filmmakers: Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, and perhaps surprisingly, Walt Disney. Where Hitchcock carefully exhibited his public image as auteur through cameos and through his introductions to the television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962), Kubrick became increasingly and notoriously reclusive, building his own mysterious aura. Walt Disney, by masterminding a global, corporate empire that commodifies the classic narratives of childhood, is auteur to the sanitised accounts of fairy tales rendered by the Disney studio.

One of the most interesting categories established in this book is Leitch's discussion of what he terms 'postliterary adaptations', films which derive their inspiration from something other than a "text", which allows Leitch to discuss films based on videogames and this will hopefully serve as a way of exploring this field in greater detail. Leitch concludes his book with a discussion of films "based on a true story". This covers a broad range of cinematic territory, ranging from the historical, revisionist Western to films which chronicle relatively recent events, such as Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006). Leitch's claim that "not only does 'a true story' have no authors or agents to be recompensed, but its authority can never be discredited" (289) does not wholly account for debates that have surrounded texts like *In Cold Blood* (Richard Brooks, 1967), or even films as varied as *Erin Brockovitch* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000), and *Stone of Destiny* (Charles Martin Smith, 2008). Leitch's final analysis is reserved for the work of certain prominent American directors -- Oliver Stone, Sidney Lumet, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg -- who are all concerned with depicting different aspects of what they see as the truth of the American experience.

Overall, the book covers an extremely broad range of topics in adaptation, though many of the chapters are entirely discreet. The opening call for literacy is picked up at the end of the final chapter, and certainly the breadth of Leitch's analysis, as well as his determination to set before us adaptations which have been previously ignored or denigrated, is a powerful argument for the continuing relevance of adaptation as a field of study within both film and literature.

# Youth Culture in Global Cinema

By Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel (eds.)

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. ISBN: 0-292714149 (pbk). xii + 347 pp. £14.99 (pbk).

## A review by Rosalind Sibielski, Bowling Green State University, US

The essays gathered together in the anthology *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* investigate the ways in which film texts from a variety of national cinemas construct the concepts of adolescence and adolescent experience. Employing a wide range of disciplinary approaches and theoretical frameworks, this collection aims to "bring together scholars from all over the globe to gather in a discussion of cinema dealing with youth in terms of their attitudes, styles, sexuality, race, families, cultures, class, psychology and ideas" (xi). Although the book is ostensibly an examination of "global cinema", it is grounded as much in cultural studies as it is in cinema studies, with the emphasis of its analysis on deconstructing cinematic discourses surrounding adolescence. By broadening the scope of its inquiry to include films from countries around the globe, the book also attempts to bring films about youth from various cultures into conversation with one another in order to explore "global youth culture at large" (5).

In his introduction, co-editor Timothy Shary asserts that while there has been a great deal of scholarship surrounding the impact of film texts on youth, critical interrogations of how youth are represented in films have been less ubiquitous, in spite of the fact that "adolescence and puberty are common subjects in many movies" produced and/or distributed within "the global marketplace" (2). He therefore positions the book as a corrective to this perceived gap in cinema scholarship, both through its analysis of "films that have primarily achieved significance through what they say about young people and the culture around them," and its exploration of "the many conditions under which youth live around the world" (3). The essays collected in this volume address the former issue far more thoroughly than they do the latter. Most of them are concerned with examining the "conditions under which youth live" only within the context of their representation in cinematic texts. While connections are drawn in some essays between fictional depictions of the lives of teenagers in specific films and the actual social conditions under which teenagers reside in the countries in which those films were produced, considerations of how these films impact the identities or the practices of their characters' real-life counterparts are beyond the scope of the work collected here. Instead, the analyses offered by the contributors to this volume tend to read those texts they identify as "youth films" as reflections of hegemonic culture's attitudes towards youth in various national contexts. In this sense, although *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* provides an excellent analysis of how both youth and young people are represented on screen, its object of enquiry is not really the role of film in youth culture per se as much as it is the question of what films about adolescents reveal about how they are understood and represented by the larger (adult) cultures in which they live.

The anthology is divided into five sections. The first, 'Rebellion and Resistance', examines differing representations of adolescent rebellion or delinquency. The second section, 'Politics and Style', and the third section, 'Youth and Inner-National Conflict', both examine films in which adolescent characters confront issues of national politics, are positioned as metaphors for social or cultural conditions, or serve as vehicles through which aspects of national culture can be explored. Of particular note among the contributions to these sections are Alexandra Seibel's 'The Imported Rebellion: Criminal Guys and Consumerist Girls in Postwar Germany and Austria' and Savas Arslan's 'Projecting a Bridge for Youth: Islamic 'Enlightenment' versus Westernization in Turkish Cinema'.

Siebel's essay examines the influence of US "troubled teen" films of the 1950s and 1960s on German and Austrian films about youth produced during the same period. She suggests that while the rebel and the bad girl archetypes found in the US films shape the screen images of youth in the German and Austrian films, juvenile delinquency is represented very differently in the films from the latter two countries depending on gender, with the question of whether female characters will turn out to be "good" girls or "bad" girls ultimately "played out in relation to their consumer habits" (30). Arslan's essay examines Turkish youth cinema within the context of cultural tensions "between East and West, between Turkey's centrally projected modern identity...and traditional and religious practices persisting in the periphery" of Turkish culture (157-158). Focusing on films produced from the 1970s through the 1990s in which characters either seek or discover religious enlightenment, he argues that these films can be read as addressing "Turkish youth who find themselves at a moment of choice between Western and Eastern cultural and religious values" (158).

The final two sections in the anthology, 'Narrating Gender and Difference' and 'Coming-of-Age Queer', examine films in which issues of gender and/or sexuality are at the center of the narrative. The strongest contributions to these sections are Sarah Projansky's 'Gender, Race, Feminism, and the International Girl Hero: The Unremarkable U.S. Popular Press Reception of *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Whale Rider*', which examines the discourses of ethnicity, gender and empowerment invoked in reviews for these two films in the United States, and Satiago Fouz-Hernandez's 'Boys Will Be Men: Teen Masculinities in Recent Spanish Cinema', which looks at the treatment of masculinity, male sexuality and father-son relationships in three Spanish coming-of-age films. Susan Driver's 'Girls Looking at Girls Looking for Girls: The Visual Pleasures and Social Empowerment of Queer Teen Romance Flicks', is also interesting, not only for its textual analysis of the films she discusses, but also for Driver's examination of how her own viewing position factors into her reading of the films and the pleasures they offer viewers.

By far the most useful section of this anthology for film scholars is the filmography at the end of the volume, which lists over 700 international titles (excluding US films) which explore issues related to adolescence. The films are listed in two separate appendices, one organized by title and one organized by theme, which should prove a valuable resource to anyone interested in doing additional research in this area. The sheer number of films listed in the filmography also troubles the extent to which *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* is truly representative of a global perspective on adolescent cinematic representation, however. Given the predominance of US films in what Shary terms in his introduction "the global marketplace", this anthology makes an admirable effort to highlight cinematic representations of youth from an international perspective. Unfortunately, films produced in the US and Western Europe are somewhat overrepresented in the contributions to this collection, ultimately providing a skewed discussion of "global" cinema. Shary acknowledges this

limitation in the introduction, noting that the specializations of contributors to the volume dictated which national cinemas would be represented. While this is certainly one of the understandable realities of editing an anthology such as this, the result is still a narrowing of the "global" to a handful of countries or regions.

At the same time, particular films are also discussed across multiple essays in this collection. In the section 'Narrating Gender and Difference,' for example, two of the four essays analyze the New Zealand film *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002), while the Swedish film *Show Me Love* (Lukas Moodysson, 1998) is the central object of analysis in two of the three essays in the 'Coming of Age Queer' section. This further narrows the scope of cinematic representations of youth discussed in the anthology from a handful of geographical regions to a handful of films produced within those regions.

Within this context, it is also worth pointing out that there is a problematic aspect to the label "global cinema" that is never addressed in the introduction to the anthology. There is a homogenizing potential in grouping disparate national cinemas together under the banner of "global" cinema, which is illustrated -- however unintentionally -- by the anthology's collapsing of "global cinema" into films about youth from certain countries, but not others. The result is a curious disconnect between the contributions to the volume, which almost uniformly insist on the national and cultural specificity of the films they discuss, and Shary's invocation of a "global youth culture at large" in the introduction, which suggests a uniform understanding and experience of youth across the globe. Ultimately, *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* provides a fascinating look at how youth is represented in a variety of national cinematic contexts, but its limited view of the "global" and its editorial tendency to position the concept and experience of youth as interchangeable across cultures renders the anthology a useful starting place for readers interested in how youth is depicted in films from around the globe rather than a comprehensive study of the subject.



# **Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915-1966**

By Gerald R. Butters, Jr.

Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0826217493 (hbk). 14 illustrations. £29.50 (hbk).

## **A review by Sarah Boslaugh, Washington University, St. Louis, USA**

Film is one of the most important cultural forces in modern American life, and it played an even larger role before the widespread availability of television. It is not surprising, therefore, that attempts to censor the movies date back almost as far as the creation of the medium itself. The first recorded instance of movie censorship in the United States took place in 1897, when a judge in Atlantic City ordered peep show parlors to cease showing the short *Dolorita in the Passion Dance* lest it cause "moral harm" (15) to viewers. The first censorship legislation was passed in 1907, when Chicago prohibited exhibition of obscene and immoral movies, and required movie exhibitors to obtain a permit from the chief of police.

Many books have dealt with film censorship on a national level, but most ignore local or state boards of approval. *Banned in Kansas* steps into this gap, presenting a detailed history of film censorship in Kansas which is placed in its historical and social context. Kansas is an excellent choice for a history concentrating on censorship within a single state: it was the second (after Pennsylvania) to establish a board (called the Board of Censorship) with the right to review and prohibit films from being exhibited in the state, and among the last to dissolve its Board.

There is a logical contradiction involved in censorship within a free society: in a community of equals, why should one person have more authority than another to prohibit exhibition of some creative works while permitting others? Unless all the people affected by the censorship decisions recognize the authority of the censor (for instance, parents choosing what is appropriate for their minor children, or religious leaders determining what is acceptable for people who have freely embraced their faith), conflicts between freedom of expression on the one hand, and the censor's decisions about what is right and good on the other, are inevitable. When the people affected by the censor's decision are a heterogeneous population of adults, the potential for conflict increases exponentially.

Butters deals with these contradictions in detail, noting that certain pressure groups (for instance, women's clubs) exerted influence well beyond their numbers. A strong influence in the establishment and perpetuation of film censorship in Kansas was the Progressive Movement, which contrary to what the name might imply today was concerned with dictating what was best for other people, particularly children. In fact, protection of the impressionable minds of children and young women was a common reason cited for having a censorship board in the first place.

The Progressives were not grasping as straws: early movies did not shrink from racy materials, and the plot summaries provided by Butters summarized show that sexploitation is not a modern invention. A list (70) of the leading reasons cited by the board for failing to pass movies in the period October 1915 to January 1916 is a good indication of what they considered inappropriate: the most common reason cited was sexual suggestiveness, followed by drinking, smoking by women, violence, and inappropriate locations (e.g. cabaret or bedroom).

The Board which wielded such power was in no way representative of the population of Kansas: as Butters points out, most members were female and lived in the northeastern quadrant of the state. Because there was no court of appeal to check the board's authority, their decisions were often arbitrary, or appear as such to us today. For instance, the Board approved *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931) and *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932) but demanded such extensive cuts to *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) that Joseph Breen, administrator of the Hays Code, got involved in the negotiations. The Board was as inconsistent regarding sex as they were with horror: they passed *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930) and *I'm No Angel* (Wesley Riggles, 1933) (starring Marlene Dietrich and Mae West, respectively) with few objections while requiring that entire sections of dialogue be cut from the George Lemaire comedy *Love, Honor, and Oh, Baby!* (1933).

Sometimes the Board censored films for political reasons. For instance, several films dealing with labor unrest were rejected, including *The Marching Amazons of the Kansas Coal Fields* (1922) which was based on a protest march by the wives and mothers of striking Kansas miners. A Pathe newsreel about the Leo Frank case, in which a Jewish man accused of murdering a child was lynched by a mob, was banned. Many "race movies" (made by and primarily for African-American audiences, and starring African-American actors) were prohibited. Even a March of the Years newsreel which included footage of President Franklin Roosevelt discussing the federal repeal of Prohibition was banned; this decision may have been influenced by the fact that prohibition remained a state law in Kansas until 1948.

In the years after World War II, a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions diminished the power of state boards of censorship. The political and social climate in the U.S. also changed, as Americans saw more European art films and became less tolerant of local censorship. Legal bills incurred by the state of Kansas as distributors became more assertive in challenging the Board's decisions in court also played a role in the Board's diminishing popularity. In the years 1953-61 there were nine legislative attempts to dissolve the Kansas Board, and it was actually abolished once, only to be reinstated on a technicality.

The 1965 *Freedman v Maryland* Supreme Court decision proved the final knockout blow for state boards of censorship. Although the Freedman decision upheld the right of local boards to review films for appropriateness, it specified that sufficient procedural safeguards be present so that decisions would not unduly suppress free expression. On July 27, 1966, the Kansas Supreme Court decided that the state laws governing censorship were inconsistent with the U.S. Supreme Court decision, and stripped the Board of its powers; on July 31 the governor of Kansas abolished the Board.

*Banned in Kansas* provides a lively and well-written history of movie censorship in Kansas, set within the context both of the political and social currents of the day, and of the importance of movies in American life. It is extensively footnoted and includes a 10-page bibliography as well as numerous still photographs from films discussed in the text.

# What Have They Built You to Do: The Manchurian Candidate and Cold War America

By Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0816641246 (hbk). ISBN: 978-0816641253 (pbk). xv+234 pp. £37.50 (hbk), £14.99 (pbk).

**A review by Shannon Granville, Independent scholar, UK**

Any history or film studies course on the culture of the Cold War usually has a number of solid stand-bys that tend to make the professor's final cut. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), with its multiple readings as a depiction of the insidiousness of the communist threat or a critique of the enforced conformity and homogeneity of post-war American society, has the added schlock factor of the campy science-fiction horror film to provide both entertainment and discussion value. *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964), combines seemingly non-stop sexual innuendo with darkly satirical commentary on the arms race, brinksmanship, and Soviet-American relations in a manner that has made it an all-but-required film in any classroom analysis of the cultural milieu of the early Cold War. Also included in this list would be a handful of lesser-known but equally appropriate works of the period, such as the staunchly anticommunist morality play *My Son John* (Leo McCarey 1952) and the science-fiction invasion thriller *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954). Yet of all these films, few manage to combine topical political, social, racial, and gender themes in a manner that rivals *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962) -- an adaptation of Richard Condon's 1959 book, starring Laurence Harvey, Frank Sinatra, and Angela Lansbury. In their book *What Have They Built You to Do? The Manchurian Candidate and Cold War America*, Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González have put together a comprehensive and nearly exhaustive study of this classic political thriller. By exploring the social and political background against which the film was made and examining the film through multiple lenses of interpretation, the authors are able to pick apart the overt and hidden values of Cold War culture that *The Manchurian Candidate* simultaneously supports and satirizes.

As the story of an American soldier captured by communist forces during the Korean War and brainwashed to become the perfect assassin -- 'programmed' to kill and then to forget that he was ever ordered to kill -- *The Manchurian Candidate* offers several direct perspectives through which to critically and analytically study the American experience during the early decades of the Cold War. The plot of the film turns heavily on interpretations of the Korean War and McCarthyism, both of which were still prominent in public memory at the time of the film's release. The film's highly charged depiction of the sinister Soviet and Chinese communists and their nefarious Korean allies is prime material for scholars with an interest in cultural approaches to racism, specifically Orientalism. Eleanor Iselin (Angela Lansbury) presents a particularly intriguing character for gender studies enthusiasts in her dual role as the domineering, emasculating, and sexually subversive 'mom' of the brainwashed soldier and as the hidden mastermind of the assassination plot. Jacobson and González analyse these and

other key themes of the story, breaking down the 'culture of contradiction' that provides much of the underlying tension and suspense that drive both the book and its film adaptation.

The main chapters of the book examine specific themes and concepts highlighted by *The Manchurian Candidate*. Jacobson and González first look into the film as a product of late 1950s and early 1960s Hollywood, in which the repercussions of the blacklist and the still unsettled political milieu affected the initial negotiations over how best to adapt Richard Condon's novel to the screen. Part of this investigation involves an examination of the influence of several other films of the early Cold War, such as the abovementioned *My Son John* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as less overtly Cold War-themed films such as Elia Kazan's medico-legal thriller *Panic in the Streets* (1950). The four central chapters explore the overarching socio-political themes present in the film: McCarthyism, Orientalism, and two different perspectives on the depiction of gender roles and sexual messages within the film (specifically the incestuous overtones of Eleanor Iselin's control over her son and the thinly veiled suggestions of emasculation and homosexuality that serve to cripple the main male characters of the film). Jacobson and González's careful research and methodical analysis show that they have given a good deal of thought to the myriad interpretations of a deceptively complex and nuanced film, treating it not just as a big-screen adaptation of an espionage suspense thriller but also as a key primary source for film and cultural historians.

Jacobson and González also pick up on a few noteworthy real-life social and political connections not often examined by those who study *The Manchurian Candidate*. One of these connections involves Frank Sinatra and the changing messages that his political affiliation gave to his involvement in the film. Jacobson and González point out that around the time of the film's initial release in the early 1960s, Sinatra was a high-profile friend of the Kennedy set; he remained a Democratic Party supporter well into the later 1960s. By 1970, though, he had started to drift to the right - he campaigned for incumbent President Richard Nixon during the 1972 election, was involved in the Democrats for Reagan movement, and was seen as a close friend of the Reagans during the 1980s. By the time of *The Manchurian Candidate*'s re-release in 1987, Sinatra's position as 'the current president's most visible Hollywood supporter' (184) put a new spin on his role in the film, possibly even altering public perceptions and images of the film's story and overarching political message.

In a short postscript, Jacobson and González turn critical eyes on the 2004 remake of *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by Jonathan Demme and starring Denzel Washington, Liev Schreiber, and Meryl Streep. From the outset, they label the 2004 film as a "reimagining" of the story rather than a straightforward remake, taking into account the changes made to update the story for a post-Cold War audience (187). In the 2004 film, the Sino-Soviet alliance of Cold War villains have been replaced by a multinational corporation known as Manchurian Global - a sly nod, Jacobson and González suggest, to far-reaching government contractors like Halliburton (189). Several of the characters' roles have also been swapped around to 'update' the remake: Bennett Marco (Washington) is now the programmed assassin, captured and brainwashed during the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s and set up to murder the presidential candidate, thereby allowing vice-presidential nominee Congressman Raymond Shaw (Schreiber) to assume the role that Raymond's ambitious mother, Senator Eleanor Shaw (Streep), had intended for her son. The remake was released during the height of the 2004 American presidential campaign, obviously and understandably acting as a commentary on the current state of American politics, and Jacobson and González do not labour the point. Towards the end of the chapter, though, they fall victim to the temptation to editorialise on the faults of Bush-Cheney administration and its connection to the "spreading

tentacles of Halliburton or McDonald's or Wal-Mart (or Manchurian Global)" (193). It is a small digression, but a jarring one, and unfortunately its overall effect is to end the chapter and to some extent the book on a slightly sour note.

A few small weaknesses aside, *What Have They Built You to Do?* is a highly valuable resource for students and scholars of Cold War culture. Jackson and González have compiled a collection of thought-provoking commentaries on the values and prejudices of American society during the Cold War, alternately using the film to interpret the culture and the culture to interpret the film. They claim that the film is 'the repressed history of modern America' (193), and though this is an ambitious claim to make, let alone support, the book does a thorough job of delving into that repressed history and attempting to identify and express both the obvious and the less obvious aspects of Cold War culture so skillfully depicted in *The Manchurian Candidate*.

# Alfred Hitchcock

By Nicholas Haeffner

Essex: Pearson, 2005. ISBN: 0-582437385 (pbk). ix + 125 pp. £16.99 (pbk).

## A review by Thorsten Carstensen, New York University, USA

When asked about his approach to film style, director Alfred Hitchcock replied, "It's just like designing composition in a painting. Or a balance of colours. There is nothing accidental, there should never be anything accidental about these things". Hitchcock's movies are indeed flawlessly designed, and his oeuvre is replete with perfectly orchestrated scenes. On his movie sets, spontaneity was subjected to the director's master plan; to the ideas of "one guiding mind", as he once put it. However, even though Hitchcock was eager to tap the full visual potential of the medium, it would be unjustifiable to conclude that in his cinema the fascination with stylish surfaces triumphs over content. As Nicholas Haeffner points out in his illuminating book *Alfred Hitchcock*, the director's oeuvre is in fact "quite rich in meaning" (47). More precisely, his movies demand and reward close attention to detail, and they most certainly reward a critic like Haeffner who engages in a cautious analysis of plot and character rather than dissolving the movies in a whirlpool of eclectic film theory. Instead of focussing on individual films, the strategy introductions to Hitchcock usually pursue, Haeffner approaches the director's legacy from a wide range of topics. He considers various cultural influences that shaped Hitchcock's cinema as well as issues such as authorship, image and sound (including the strikingly effective use of silence), mimesis and audience representation. Finally, Haeffner turns to "the uses and abuses" of feminist and psychoanalytic film theory, rounding off a profound and accessible introduction to a filmmaker who has long become "a cultural phenomenon of the first order" (113).

In what is the most illuminating chapter of the book, Haeffner addresses the question of realism in Hitchcock's cinema. As the author puts it, "Hitchcock's formalism and his interest in realism are not only compatible but also constantly in a creative tension" (56). This is especially evident in *The Wrong Man* (1957), a movie that engages in a profound play of light and shadow and makes use of high and low angle shots; aesthetic strategies, in other words, which are reminiscent of the Expressionist cinema of Fritz Lang and other Weimar filmmakers (62). At the same time, Haeffner argues, *The Wrong Man*, based on a true story, is a fine example of Hitchcock's interest in documenting everyday activity. The director insisted on creating set designs which had characters situated in an authentic milieu. By accumulating details that might be insignificant for the actual plot, he aimed at creating the effect of verisimilitude, which was to be underscored by a "stark, colourless documentary treatment," as he told his photographer Robert Burks. With *The Wrong Man*, Hitchcock thus abandoned the sleek, polished cinematography that had rendered *To Catch a Thief* (1954) so elegant.

Comparing *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963), two of Hitchcock's major achievements that redefined the horror genre, Haeffner exemplifies how the director departed from relatively unambiguous filmmaking to a more poetic and metaphoric brand of cinema. As Haeffner

points out, "with its exploration of horror and madness in the midst of everyday life and its love of sordid, realistic detail," *Psycho* displays qualities that are usually associated with nineteenth century naturalism. Most importantly, it was one of the first Hollywood movies to depict horror as a phenomenon that occurs in a domestic, all-American environment: the roadside motel. Maybe the most significant contribution to the film's creation of suspense is Bernard Herrmann's score, which "sets up an air of dread and near panic, even before the story has started" (108). However, Hitchcock ultimately sought to produce a sense of relief in the viewer by having a psychoanalyst emerge on the scene, who explains Norman Bates' motives and thus appeases an audience that just witnessed what Andrew Sarris has called "the incursion of evil in our well laundered existence" (110). *The Birds*, by contrast, far from offering the audience any kind of relief, refused to provide an ultimate explanation for the animals' fatal attacks. When Hitchcock denied his movie the closure that was regarded as a major virtue of classical Hollywood cinema, he demonstrated his affection for the vague, indeterminate cinema of directors such as Bergman, Antonioni and Godard. While the film's ambiguous and gloomy ending may have alienated some of Hitchcock's regular audience, as Haeffner points out, it was also "perfectly in tune with the ideals of the newly fashionable European art film" (99).

According to Hitchcock himself, the fundamental principle in filmmaking should be "to make the audience imagine things that they don't actually see by feeding their imagination with just the right amount of information" (112). Anyone who has had the pleasure of watching *Psycho* on a big screen will be aware of the director's power over the audience's initial emotional response. Haeffner notes that the use of cross-cutting, intended to keep the audience suspended in narrative time, as well as the tension between subjective and objective shots and an evocative mise-en-scène are key elements in Hitchcock's suspense technique. "I was directing the viewers. You might say I was playing them, like an organ," Hitchcock claimed of *Psycho*, comparing the act of watching his movie to a visit to an amusement park: "The processes through which we take the audience, you see, it's rather like taking them through the haunted house at the fairground."

Ironically, while the director was indeed successful in manipulating theatregoers, his critics have proven more than willing to appropriate his films in a number of ways that are often "inconsistent with Hitchcock's intentions or expectations," as Haeffner points out (103).

Psychoanalytic criticism could be seen as one such attempt. Scholars like Robin Wood have been eager to put a Freudian label on the movies, some of which were actually composed by screenwriters with a profound interest in the theories of Sigmund Freud. But does psychoanalytic theory, apart from shedding light on occasional Freudian moments in Hitchcock's cinema, actually provide a helpful frame of interpretation, or has it merely saddled his films "with extraneous or irrelevant theoretical baggage" (81)? Haeffner concludes that reading the films alongside psychoanalytic theory is in fact illuminating, since their general worldviews tend to converge (85). For instance, Oedipal structures are ubiquitous throughout Hitchcock's work, as is Freud's idea that sexual pleasure and violence are closely linked. As Truffaut famously remarked, the director filmed love scenes like murders and murder scenes like love scenes, an assertion that is illustrated by the satisfied smiles that supplement the strangling of women in *Strangers on a Train* (1950) and *Frenzy* (1972). At the same time, Hitchcock seems to draw on Freud's insight that behind the façade of civilization and reason looms the dangerous and yet attractive underworld of desire. As Uncle Charlie says in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), "the world is a foul sty. Do you know that if you ripped the fronts off houses you'd find swine?" Here, Haeffner agrees with Robin Wood,

who sees as the "essence of Hitchcock" the characters' attempts to maintain a rigorous order in life by suppressing the more vivid underworld. Undoubtedly, *Psycho* and *The Birds* showcase moments when the two spheres clash -- when the irrational invades the mundane world and begins to threaten bourgeois values.

Feminist criticism has been the most common means of appropriating Hitchcock, who has often been found guilty of conscious misogyny. In her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in 1975, Laura Mulvey, for instance, referred to *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1957) in order to argue that in mainstream cinema "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly". However, in response to critics who accuse Hitchcock of his "tight-lipped fear and loathing of women", Haeffner maintains that the representation of women in his films is, rather, "complex and shot through with contradictions" (67). While mothers are frequently characterized as "monstrous or neurotic" (think of Mrs. Bates in *Psycho*, or Mme Sebastian in the 1946 classic *Notorious*), other female characters are idealized. As Molly Haskell pointed out in her study *From Reverence to Rape* (Chicago University Press, 1973), the "cool blonde" women in Hitchcock's cinema experience "long trips through terror" because they withhold love, sex and trust; the brunette type, on the other hand, is usually shown as "down to earth, unaffected, adoring, willing to swallow her pride". Haeffner extends Haskell's argument by drawing attention to the fact that Hitchcock's cinema offers the audience "two axes for identification, one identifying with the male aggressor, the other with the female victim" (79). As a consequence, his movies repeatedly oscillate "between identification with and objectification of women" (80).

One particularly instructive approach to Hitchcock is to consider his films as what Leo Braudy calls "closed films". According to this theory, all objects and characters existing within the architecturally complex spaces that these movies create serve designated functions. In keeping with Braudy's concept, Haeffner observes that even though Hitchcock's films may be "detached, ironic, blackly humorous" (113), the director in fact considered himself a teacher whose task it was to educate his audience. His films often engage in social critique, and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *Rear Window* and *The Birds* each portray their main figure's development from a "complacent carefree existence to one which is socially aware and responsible" (96). The characters in these films undergo journeys in the course of which they arrive at "some notion of social citizenship" (99). Haeffner argues that Hitchcock explores issues of perception by presenting characters who are "complacently blind to the truth of the world around them" and only see what they wish to see (86). As Dr. Brulov puts it in *Spellbound* (1945), "The human being doesn't want to know the truth about itself". Ironically, the psychologist himself is the one who wrongly insists on the protagonist's guilt. Time and again, Hitchcock juxtaposes an objective reality with a subjectively distorted world. As Haeffner argues very convincingly, the director here offers a moral critique: by misleading or confusing others, Hitchcock's characters "cause, perpetuate or become accomplices in harm done to others and to themselves" (87). Hitchcock felt the screen to be the ideal medium for shaking up a public that was becoming increasingly smug and self-satisfied. Underneath this director's passion for style, then, lies a didactic intent routinely overlooked by moviegoers and scholars alike.

Even though Nicholas Haeffner's account of Hitchcock's cinema carries the risk of cursoriness, his careful analysis of exemplary scenes, as well as his consideration of social contexts, render his thin volume an intriguing addition to the critical canon. Haeffner's major strength certainly resides in negotiating different scholarly viewpoints without losing readers



in the ever-growing jungle of academic literature on Hitchcock, the most influential examples of which are incorporated in the comprehensive bibliography in the appendix. While re-examining the work of Alfred Hitchcock from multiple perspectives, this exceptionally readable and concise book succeeds in providing a well-balanced overview of the criticism that is as diverse as the filmmakers' oeuvre itself.

# From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture

By Myra Mendible

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-292-71493-9 (hbk). x+323pp. £17.99 (pbk), £51.00 (hbk).

## A review by Hannah Durkin, University of Nottingham, UK

We need only think of the bespectacled, bushy-browed and braces-wearing Betty Suarez in ABC's *Ugly Betty* (Fernando Gaitán, 2006-), or the highly digitalised, scantily clad torsos of Jessica Alba and Rosario Dawson in *Sin City* (Robert Rodriguez, 2005) and its upcoming sequel to uncover the symptoms of a widespread fascination with the "Latina body" in contemporary American film and media. As its arresting title implies, Myra Mendible's impressively eclectic collection, *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, grapples with this fascination, utilising a wide range of approaches to unpack what it terms a "conspicuous consumption" (1) of "Latina bodies" in United States popular culture.

Central to the book's considerations are the roles sexuality and the body have played in defining and fixing cultural depictions of "Latina" identities since the birth of cinema. In her introduction, Mendible maps this concern with representation onto wider issues of identity politics and discrimination, and a key theme running through the essays is their engagement with "Latinidad" as "a fluid set of cultural boundaries that are consistently reinforced, challenged, or negotiated by and through Latina bodies" (4). Particularly pertinent to Mendible's argument, in fact, are the ways in which the "Latina body" metaphor has provided "exotic" invitation to the United States to plunder and exploit Central and South American resources and borders (think of Carmen Miranda singing provocatively under a fruit-laden hat in Busby Berkeley's 1943 musical *The Gang's All Here*), as well as its continuing function in today's society "as a kind of negotiable currency...packaged and marketed as an alter/native "type" available for consumption and sale, its design specs, desirability, and visibility held sway to reigning market forces" (12-13).

With such an extensive area to research, and such an ambitious argument, the text sets itself the formidable challenge of granting attention to a vast assortment of cultural consumables, from film and star texts to broadcast media representations and popular commodities. This highly interdisciplinary approach provides space to fourteen experts from a range of scholarly fields, including feminist and media studies, communication, comparative literature, and sociology, to consider an eclectic selection of actors, singers and other cultural signifiers spanning early Hollywood to the present day. Each author presents a case study on their particular area of expertise and therefore effectively "dips" into the ever-changing status of "Latinas" in a wide range of cultural media. Underlying each chapter is the assumption that "Latina" cultural products engage with a bodily configuration that is continually "othered," even while it is apparently assimilated into United States culture, yet the authors also attempt

to highlight the complex realities underlying homogenising cultural treatments of the "Latina body," and each reading positions the body as a site where essentialised identities are not only inscribed but challenged.

Mendible structures her essays into three main sections: silent and classical film; contemporary film and music; and recent media, televisual and merchandise representations. Two early chapters examine the cultural place and reputation of the original "Mexican Spitfire," the famously sexually liberated Lupe Vélez; later approaches consider Jennifer "the butt" Lopez, as well as Columbian musician Shakira, whose lyrics "lucky that my breasts are small and humble" helped to propel her to international stardom in 2001. The book's wide-ranging approach also takes into account the formulaic constructions and parodic counter-representations of Hispanic Barbie, as well as the United States media's disparaging treatments of contemporary court case "celebrities" Lorena Bobbitt and Marisleyxis González.

The result is a collection of highly entertaining, wide-ranging and eclectic arguments, and each chapter represents a compelling addition to Latin American and cultural studies. Especially commendable are the investigative approaches of Tara Lockhart's chapter, 'Jennifer Lopez: The New Wave of Border Crossing,' which utilises internet message boards to explore audience perceptions of "J.Lo," and Viviana Rojas's chapter entitled '*Chusmas, Christmes, y Escándalos: Latinas Talk Back to El Show de Cristina and Laura en América*,' which attempts to overcome an historic sidelining of "Latina" audience reception by recording the reactions of a group of Hispanic women from Austin, Texas to two Spanish-language American chat shows.

The widely interdisciplinary approach of this text does have a few drawbacks, however. The writers' differing methodologies throw up surprisingly contradictory readings in places, which -- in minor ways at least -- undermine the book's arguments. For example, Rosa Linda Fregoso's genealogical approach recuperates Lupe Vélez as a feminist heroine. This argument sits oddly with William A. Nerrico's creative exposition on the gossip and iconography surrounding the star, which suggests that Vélez "helped concretize an image of Latina 'exoticness,' sensuality, and silliness that dogs those who have inherited her mantle in film and, most important, those Latinas and Latinos not in film" (74). Further, Angharad Valdivia's exploration of media representational strategies that position Jennifer Lopez as Penelope Cruz's cultural inferior undermine Lockhart's perception-based study of the former as a slippery cultural signifier simultaneously claimed by competing ethnic and cultural discourses, and consequently "always in flux" (164).

Given the particular fascination with and influence of Carmen Miranda as "ethnic commodity" (12) in the middle decades of the twentieth century, I would also have liked to have seen more attention devoted to this star's impact, and it is perhaps surprising that space is not given over to her beyond Mendible's excellent introduction. The critical and ratings successes of such shows as *Ugly Betty* and *Desperate Housewives* (Marc Cherry, 2004-present) -- the latter of which features sexually voracious "Latina" housewife Gabrielle Solis (played by Eva Longoria Parker) as one of its main characters -- also highlights the fact that a chapter on popular television dramas and soaps now seems like a necessary addition to this book (not that Mendible could have predicted *Ugly Betty*'s cultural impact at the time of writing).

Nevertheless, Mendible's collection does an admirable job of weaving film, music and media representations, and her articles provide a useful starting point to understanding the ways in which "Latina" women's ethnic identities have been culturally constructed. Ultimately, this is an engaging and accessible collection with individual essays that provide compelling introductions to cultural figures and forces and open the door for future scholarly research on "Latina" women in film and culture.