

# Reviews

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- Karina von Lindeiner  
Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge

Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany*, Manchester University Press, 2005. ISBN: 0719061717

More often than not, recent internationally acclaimed German films have dealt with the GDR and its aftermath. With films such as *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006), *Goodbye, Lenin!* (2003), and *Sonnenallee* (1999), German directors have contributed to the reappraisal of their country's recent past. Hence a look at the cinematic traditions of East Germany is interesting not only historically, but also from the point of view of the observer of contemporary German cinema.

Daniela Berghahn has taken a very thorough look, and she presents her findings in a competently written, highly informative and equally entertaining study of 'Hollywood behind the Wall'. She undertakes a journey through the history of East German cinema from the first post-war film, Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* that was produced in the Soviet-occupied zone in 1946, to post-unification films that either deal with the recent past and/or are made by Eastern German directors such as Andreas Dresen and Andreas Kleinert. Investigating thematic as well as stylistic developments and the cultural-political background, she takes her readers on a journey through fifty years of East German film history that have often been neglected by Western researchers.

During this journey, each of the six chapters has a different focus, exploring different aspects of Eastern German cinema. Insightful contextual analyses and investigations of broader, mostly political, topics are supplemented by close readings of a large number of celebrated DEFA

classics, as well as of a smaller number of German post-unification films.

The book starts with an analysis of a fundamental theme in the history of cinema in any communist regime: the relationship between the film industry and the state. The author shows how East Germany's state-owned film production company, DEFA, rose from the ashes of UFA, the successful production company of the Weimar years and the 'Third Reich', and was 'assigned a leading role in the process of political enlightenment' (13) in the Soviet-occupied zone and, from 1949, in the GDR. Under close patronage as well as censorship by the Central Film Administration, DEFA went on to fulfil this role by producing approximately 900 feature films across all genres, from fairy tales to science fiction, from anti-fascist films to costume drama and beyond. The political aims of communist film production can be felt in most of them, and hence the political topic is also the underlying theme and the connecting factor in this study.

While the first chapter broadly introduces the relationship between East German cinema and the state, and briefly looks at its aesthetic consequences, the second chapter moves on to examine in detail at two of the most important political themes of DEFA films – anti-fascism and the effort to come to terms with the Nazi past – that were explored in approximately 13% of all DEFA films, and constituted the 'cornerstone of East German film culture' (64). The author traces attempts to face the past and to appoint guilt in the post-war years through cinematic discourse on the Holocaust to the manifestation of the anti-fascist myth and attempts to deconstruct it in the 1980s.

The influence of the state on East German cinema is further explored in a chapter that deals with censorship, using as examples the twelve 'forbidden films' that were banned in the wake

of the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965. The plenum and its devastating effects, the author argues, proved to be far-reaching in East German cinema and 'continued to affect artists and intellectuals until the demise of the GDR' twenty-four years later (173).

Political aims can also be seen in East German films that appropriate Germany's cultural heritage. The author shows how Eastern as well as Western film makers referred to important cultural figures such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich and Thomas Mann in a ferocious contest to legitimise their states.

A topic that is usually little-discussed is the role of 'Women on film' in the GDR. In a fascinating analysis, parallels as well as contrasts are drawn between women on screen to official or real women's liberation and feminist movements. Again, connections to political aims can hardly be overlooked when the depiction of women and their desirable position in society changes along with the socialist agenda throughout the decades.

The concluding chapter that investigates 'German cinema after unification' opens up interesting possibilities for further research on the cinematic aftermaths of the GDR in unified Germany. The author provides an overview of influences of the breakdown of the GDR and of former GDR directors on contemporary German films, as well as of early post-unification attempts of coming to terms with the GDR past and the unification process. In the light of recent developments and the international success of *Goodbye, Lenin* and particularly of the Academy Award-winning *Das Leben der Anderen* (made by Western German directors Wolfgang Becker and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck), the author's notion of a possible 'emergence of a unified German film culture' (251) more than a decade after unification seems to come true.

Daniela Berghahn claims that with 'Hollywood behind the Wall', she aims to create greater public interest in the often neglected cinematic production of the DEFA. In fact, she achieves more. Her constant looks 'eastwards and westwards' (p. 4), the parallels and comparisons that she draws with communist film art in other

countries of the Eastern block, as well as with cinematic topics, aesthetic trends and cultural politics in Western Germany, turn her study into not only a profound investigation of GDR cinema, but also of political (and aesthetic) developments in German, if not European, film from 1946 till today.

• Andrew Shail  
St. Anne's College, Oxford University

Vanessa Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians: The Story of the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection*, British Film Institute, 2006. ISBN: 1844571459

In twenty minutes he was leaving Turnhill station and entering the town. . . . The first thing he saw was an electric tram, and the second thing he saw was another electric tram. In Toby's time there were no trams at Turnhill, and the then recently-introduced steam-trams between Bursley and Longshaw, long since superseded, were regarded as the final marvel of science as applied to traction. . . . The railway renewed his youth, but this darting electricity showed him how old he was.<sup>1</sup>

The 'story' of this work is multiple. Toulmin recognises that as a body of artefacts the Mitchell and Kenyon collection constitutes evidence for a number of histories, and that it is important to tell them all. She distinguishes these stories clearly for the most part, demonstrating the application of four distinct questions. 1) What can the date, location and exhibitor appended to most of the reels and the surviving newspaper advertisements tell us about the modes of operation of the film business 1899–1913? 2) How do the films compare to contemporary modes of film production and entertainment genres in general? 3) How did exhibition protocols shape film production and what role did these 'abortive' modes of film exhibition have in shaping the formation of a later institutional cinema? 4) What is the historicity of the practices that the films record?

An increase in the average commute, better access to public parks, the expansion of the notion of what territory constituted one's

'locale' and the formalisation of certain areas of public space as 'stops' were all a consequence of the electric tram boom that reached its peak in 1900–1903, and which shaped the kinds of localities and workforces that existed at the time of filming. This is just one of the historical moments that Toulmin attends to in the chapters that answer the fourth of these questions. These cover such developments as the new accounts of childhood expressed in the debate on child labour, the avowal of 'recreation' as a valid part of working-class life, the geographical localisation of the professionalisation of sport, and the rise of militarism in the Edwardian UK. In what could be the weak spot of a work by an authority on the history of entertainments, Toulmin demonstrates that the films are not windows into a static 'other' time but products of the changes through which that time had become strange even to itself. Although any period could be described as 'a period of tremendous social and political change' (154), she does show *what* some of the changes of the late-Victorian and early Edwardian period were, asking what had happened to the population's habits, class stratification, ranges of mobility, working lives, urban environment and types of social participation in the years immediately before these films were shot.

In answering the first three questions, the early part of the book elegantly explains that the type of image recorded was overwhelmingly determined by local exhibition, Toulmin classifying 90% of the films as local. She shows, for example, that the factory gate exits were filmed substantially closer to the subjects than their predecessors in order to obtain as high a level of detail as possible in faces, and that their framing also mostly excluded architecture, maximising the number of faces obtained and their recognisability. Even 'news events', which were filmed by others for national exhibition, were 'localised' in Mitchell and Kenyon films: one example of the former is as a series of snapshots of a procession in a well-known landscape, while the latter is a narrative thread which treats the viewer to a trip around an unfamiliar city. This approach is fundamental to the further

development of early film scholarship. Seeing the documentary function of the films as incidental – as Toulmin lays bare, they *did not* archive much more than they *did* – allows the viewer to identify choices about inclusion and exclusion that made these films local or national. In addition to this high relevance of form to content in the films, Mitchell and Kenyon's sharing of 'authorship' with the showmen who commissioned their films further demonstrates that exhibition context is not 'background'. Toulmin also demonstrates the role of geography – specifically the high concentration of fairgrounds and industrial entertainments in the densely-populated area covered by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway – in determining the output of the Blackburn-based as mostly local in the first place. She is also careful to position herself against the idea that the protocols of this era of cinema were utterly undone by later cinema, describing the genres of early exhibition practices as the roots out of which newsreels and docudrama developed.

The work observes the importance of numbers, listing the frequency of films by year (suggesting the company's busiest years), the number of films in the collection for each type of exhibitor year by year, the frequency of appearances of cinematograph shows at certain venues, the percentage of the total titles in the collection by genre and sub-genre, the concentrations of the various genres in certain periods (e.g. local films were concentrated in 1901–5 and factory gate films at the beginning of this period), the other film companies based in or filming in the North of England, the time elapsed between news events and the filming of reconstructions, and the time elapsed between filming and exhibition in general. The last of these has led to her discovery that approaching wakes weeks occasioned the majority of the factory gate films. The only unclear distinction is between the films that Mitchell and Kenyon were commissioned by showmen to make and those that they made under their own initiative. Two filmographies also list all of the films in the collection by subject and location. The work derives from thorough research in local papers and, in

such cases as the history of showman A. D. Thomas, dedicated detective work, and in true scholarly fashion it also suggests the possible further uses of the collection, such as studies of the age, sex and class composition of 'the public' of the various venues – parks, piers and fairground – that crowds were filmed entering and leaving.

Although descriptions of the 'vibrancy and energy' (155) and 'energy and vibrancy' (163) of Edwardian street life smack of nostalgia, this is mostly managed. An account of modernity as an increase in freedom and mobility is balanced by an account of modernity as the increased codification of public space. There is some imbalance between chapters, with a lighter chapter on the history of various sports than on the history of seaside resorts and fairgrounds, and a briefer case study in the chapter on the Edwardian City than in the other chapters. The work also covers some of the ground already covered by specialists in her, Simon Pople and Patrick Russell's collection *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon* (2004). The frame enlargements are also mostly excellent, with only the occasional inexplicably pixellated image. There is also only one instance of inattention within the main text, a small amount of material being repeated in two separate chapters (193, 254). The work makes a nonetheless major contribution to the twin tasks of making film available to social historians as evidence and establishing an accurate account of the early film business in Britain.

## Note

- 1 Arnold Bennett, *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns*, 1907 (London, Penguin, 1946), pp. 110–11.

## • Michael Grant University of Kent

Reynold Humphries, *The Hollywood Horror Film, 1931–1941: Madness in a Social Landscape*, Scarecrow Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0-8108-5726-1

From its inception as an academic discipline during the late 1970s, film studies saw itself as a

theoretical enterprise whose primary justification lay in the critique and subversion of dominant ideology, an entity whose characteristic features were constructed in large part by the discipline of film studies itself. The work of subversion involved a sustained and critical 'interrogation' of the structures of representation that the various modes of realism associated with the dominant ideology were taken to manifest. One result of this was a grotesque misreading of Bazin. It also led to 'debates around' the work of those, such as Brecht, Godard, Vertov and the Formalists, who were thought to have opened the way to a revelation of the nature of representation as such. A convincing account of representation along these lines was deemed to require what might be called a logic of alienation, of distancing, and only a theory of the divided or split subject was thought capable of delivering what was needed. It is here that Lacan comes in, a figure who, along with Althusser, of course, provided *Screen* in its early years with much of the intellectual drive that was to establish it, however briefly, at the pinnacle of theoretical endeavour, at least in Britain. Since then things have changed, and the claims of theory have been challenged on a number of fronts, including those of cognitive science and the resurgence of interest in the work of Stanley Cavell and V. F. Perkins: psychoanalysis and Marxism are no longer the irresistible combination they once were.

It is part of Reynold Humphries' purpose to reinstate, or resurrect, this lost state of affairs. 'This study,' he says in his Introduction, 'is an attempt to turn the clock back to the days—not that long ago—before the notions of "the end of history" and "post-theory" had been concocted by those anxious to ensure that certain questions would never be asked again' (p. xiv). He goes on at once to cite Robin Wood, who 'has put his finger unerringly on the ideological stakes when he writes that the attempts to discredit Freud are "strongly influenced by the socio-political climate"' (p. xiv).<sup>1</sup> Humphries aims to bring out into the open the nature of the ideological forces at work, not only in 1930s America, his period of study, but also in our own period

of neo-liberalism and global capitalism, and his method of doing so is the analysis of fetishism. He sees fetishism, by way of both Freud and Marx, as the insistence on an imaginary presence or totality. The purpose of such a totality is to enable the subject (the subject here being the Lacanian subject) to close off an unpleasant and threatening absence, an absence that undermines the subject's self-assured centrality to the world and mastery of it. The absence in question is that lack at the heart of being which, to put it in Freudian terms, is masked by a belief in the maternal phallus. This is an understanding which can be paralleled, for Humphries, by the Marxist recognition of the reification of objects as commodities, such that the relations holding between them mask the relations that are really at work conditioning the social structure of a given historical period. However, the relation between Marxism and psychoanalysis is not as straightforward as this treatment of fetishism would have it seem. The issue was wittily put by Gérard Miller (in a remark cited by Slavoj Žižek): 'In Marxism, a man knows what he wants and does not possess it; in psychoanalysis, a man does not know what he wants and already possesses it'.<sup>2</sup> Humphries, regrettably, does not explore the matter. For him, the task of the critic with respect to a film or set of films is fairly straightforward: it is to expose the operations whereby ideology imposes upon the work or works in question a false sense of totality or wholeness. The result will be to unveil the 'absent cause' – the 'real' of history – the truth repressed under ideology, and to reveal what would otherwise remain hidden, what Fredric Jameson has called 'the political unconscious'. The project, so conceived, is indebted less to the semiotic 'idealisation' of desire that typified the efforts of the pioneers of film theory than to the kind of engagement with the Real found in Žižek, to whom Humphries pays his respects a number of times.

What this comes to can be seen from the account Humphries gives of *King Kong* (1933). After considering readings of the film by R. C. Dale and Kenneth Bernard, readings that involve a critique of what are essentially male fantasies

concerning the size of Kong's penis as well as the role of the 'huge phallic bolt' which is meant to keep him in his place, Humphries springs his surprise: '*There is no textual evidence that Kong is male*' (p. 84, his emphasis). This leads him to the view that what the bulk of critical writing on the film shows is 'a massive and unconscious anthropomorphism at work that consists of attributing to an ape the desires of heterosexual males' (p. 84). Humphries then elaborates the implications of this for the readings of the film he has considered, subjecting the ideological presuppositions of even such socially alert critics as Dale and Bernard to political and psychoanalytic scrutiny. He is thus led to present *King Kong* as 'a proto-feminist text concerned with matriarchal, as opposed to patriarchal, culture; and with a form of "female bonding," which certainly makes a change from its male equivalent' (p. 85). It is at this point that the real interest of the analysis comes clear: it is not Ann Darrow (the Fay Wray character) who is hysterical, it is the film itself, inasmuch as the film's own discourse asks the hysterical question: is Kong male or female? In other words, what *King Kong* is 'about' is the ambiguous nature of sexuality itself. It induces its audience to participate (unconsciously) in a hysterical displacement of identity, and by so doing lays down a challenge to social identity as such. This amounts to saying that *King Kong* foregrounds the subject as essential division, a division that, once recognised, implies the possibility of subverting those social dictates that assume the subject to be unified and centred, an assumption underpinning capitalist individualism. It needs to be stressed that Humphries is not meaning to claim here that Kong is really a female ape, a fact missed by other, less perceptive, critics. He is proposing something quite different. In Kong's second major fight, to save Ann from one of the reptilian creatures of the black lagoon, Kong kills the creature, and shakes it by its elongated neck to make certain it is dead. Kong then looks at it, intrigued by what is clearly a phallic head and neck. Humphries sees in Kong's interest here essential evidence for his argument that the dead reptile is a stand-in for the phallus Kong

does not have. This is not to say that Kong is female and so has no penis. Humphries writes: 'What I am claiming is that, whether Kong be male or female, he or she cannot have the phallus, for the simple reason that it does not exist: the phallus Kong does not have is a phallus no creature can have, for the simple reason that it is the maternal phallus, the phallus the women wants (*sic*), the phallus the male wants to (continue to) believe in' (p. 86). It is thus impossible to decide whether Kong is male or female. The ape escapes classification, remaining always outside the conceptual frame that would subsume it and subject it to symbolic death. In Lacanian terms, the ape is a site of the intrusion of the Real, *objet petit a*.

On this reading, *King Kong* is a radical work, inasmuch as the unconscious of the film can be shown to undo the film's overt meaning, even in the very act of the film's shoring it up. *King Kong* exposes to view the fantasmatic structure of the ideology it is in the process of espousing. I have spent some time outlining a single analysis, rather than trying to give an overview of the book as a whole, because its life and interest lie in the specific analyses themselves. Humphries is not only writing a history of American horror films between 1931 and 1941; he is engaged in a polemic whose ultimate purpose is to have his reader re-engage with cinema as such, and to do so politically. In the course of pursuing this end, he examines a wide range of films of the genre, many of them unjustly neglected, and as a result some of the films emerge not merely as interesting case studies but as striking and important achievements of cinema in their own right. I was particularly impressed by his account of the version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* produced by Paramount in 1931, and directed by Rouben Mamoulian, with Fredric March in the leading role. The film is structured around a complex dialectic of the gaze, whereby desire reverses into drive. Hyde is an embodiment of the *unheimlich*, the death drive, a strange and immortal life, 'between two deaths', as Lacan has it, that persists beyond death in a condition that Maurice Blanchot has called the 'impossibility of dying'. His distorted, ugly and

blurred features, with their wide, flaring nostrils, extruded teeth and distended eyelids, the skin around them gathered into multiple folds, constitute him as the obscene figure, at once irrepressible, ridiculous and terrifying, of the mad 'anal father' that Žižek has dubbed 'the nauseous debauchee' or 'the Father of Enjoyment' (*le Père Jouissance*). He is that surplus in Jekyll that is in him more than he is himself. According to Lacan, it is exactly this surplus that represents that part of the subject that the subject must renounce, murder even, in order to live as a 'normal' member of society. The power of the film thus derives from the way its representation of desire flips over into a presentation of drive. It is this that is attested to by the film's looping back on itself, from the 'subjective' camera shot at the beginning of the film, a tracking shot taken from Jekyll's 'point of view', to the 'objective' shot at the end showing Jekyll's dead face, restored to its original regularity, after the shooting and death of Hyde. (Of relevance here are Blanchot's reflections on the cadaver.) Jekyll in death has become a part of what lies within his own field of vision, while in the right foreground of the shot a pot placed on a fire boils vigorously with the liquid which, one assumes, 'created' Hyde – a 'stain' of the Real, if ever there was one. Although I believe the film to be a more complex achievement than Humphries gets round to acknowledging (he does not attend to its extraordinarily subtle use of the 'subjective' camera in relation to the mirror, or to the critical role of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' in the transformation scene in the park, or indeed to the fact that in the disgustingly mean and dirty figure of Hyde the film has revealed what Lacanian theory would see as the ultimate object of horror), his account of it has, nevertheless, established once and for all its enduring significance.

The author has had access to an invaluable resource, the files of the Production Code Administration at the Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills. These resources offer, of course, a wealth of ideologically skewed material, and while he has written at some length on it I regret that he has

not seen fit to make a more substantial use of it, looking in closer detail at how specific proposals made by the censors about specific films were heeded or ignored by the studios. Leaving my quibbles to one side, however, it must be emphasised that Humphries is to be congratulated on one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of American cinema of recent years. Not only this, but the book reveals embodied in its cast of scientists and doctors, mad or not, from Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive) to Dr Crespi (Erich von Stroheim), a complex set of contradictions, paradoxes and displacements, such that one can follow in the author's footsteps, and take up for oneself the business – if that is the word – of rethinking the ideological and political role of the horror film as such.

## Notes

- 1 Humphries is citing a remark of Wood's from the 'Foreword' to *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmares*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xiv–xv.
- 2 The remark and a discussion of its implications can be found in *Interrogating the Real* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 52.

## • Reynolds Humphries University of Life III

Gary D. Rhodes (with Richard Sheffield), *Bela Lugosi: Dreams and Nightmares*, Narbeth: PA: Collectables, 2006. ISBN-10: 0977379817

Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006. ISBN-10: 0810858703

Two new books on two vastly different aspects of the horror film which have in common its crucial place within popular culture. Rhodes continues to mine the rich vein of his subject, whereas Koven offers us the first systematic overview of his chosen topic.

*Bela Lugosi* provides much information about every aspect of the actor's long and varied

career: the stage in Hungary, then films in that country from 1917 and the years in German cinema (1919–22), prior to settling in America with a film career spanning the years 1923 to 1956. If Rhodes concentrates on the last years of Lugosi's life, from the early 1950s to his death in 1956, he does so by mentioning – and, when necessary, analysing thoroughly – the events that in some way influenced or triggered off those final tragic years beset by drugs, debts and a chronic lack of work. Here Rhodes provides details about Lugosi's career on the stage in the late 1940s, notably in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, which kept him working and in the public eye at a time when film roles had dried up. His old films, however, were constantly on show in double bills throughout the country.

Rhodes' concern is with Lugosi the man and the actor and he has received considerable help from co-author Richard Sheffield who befriended Lugosi when an adolescent in the early 1950s. It is this friendship between a film fan and an elderly actor and Rhodes' realisation 'that so much of what had been written about Lugosi's last years was flawed' (xi) that underpin this handsomely produced volume (although the unusual typing errors show the sign of the Curse of the Computer and a lack of proof-reading).

Rhodes' enthusiasm for his subject never prevents him from discussing Lugosi's failings nor the tragic ironies of those last years. Consider this remark on *The Black Sleep*, the last film released in his lifetime (the notorious *Plan 9 from Outer Space* was not released until 1959): 'And so as Rathbone played Lugosi's mad scientist part, something of a Henry Frankenstein, Lugosi was left to play the kind of mute monster that he had turned down 25 years earlier' (246). This reference to Lugosi refusing the role of Frankenstein's monster in 1931 must not lead us to assume that this decision was the sole cause of the ultimate failure of Lugosi's career (he was essentially a star of the 1930s). The success of *Frankenstein* as compared to the Lugosi vehicle *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (made almost simultaneously but released in 1932) was also a factor and in 1931 Universal had already

decided to promote Karloff as the successor to Lon Chaney (138–43).

Perhaps the most fascinating and important chapter in the book is that devoted to Lugosi's political views and activities and their attendant problems. Briefly active in Bela Kun's Bolshevik government in 1919 as a Communist party member, Lugosi found that his politics and pro-union activities did not endear him to New York's Hungarian community (35–7). And by 1952 'the US government was looking into whether or not he should be deported' (33). Even during his confinement in a medical institution for drug abuse (at his own request) in 1955 he was visited by immigration agents and questioned about his 'possible Communist affiliations' (194). Never a member of the CPUSA and ever ready to deny his Bolshevik past, Lugosi had nevertheless made no attempt to hide his sympathies as an 'extreme liberal democrat' (his own words) and admirer of Roosevelt (41). As if this was not enough for an immigrant with a Bolshevik past in Europe, Lugosi signed in 1945 a petition to prevent the deportation of Australian-born union leader Harry Bridges (51). Bridges was not a Communist either, but his success as a unionist and strike leader (in San Francisco in 1935) was tantamount to the same thing for J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI who had already (in 1944) requested that Lugosi be investigated (47). Lugosi even wrote to HUAC in 1951 but was never subpoenaed to appear and so escaped having to choose between naming names and the blacklist.

Here, as everywhere in his book, Rhodes has combed the archives painstakingly, in Los Angeles, Hungary, and elsewhere (although the information he gives on the actor's friend, the Hungarian screen-writer Nicolas Bela, is incomplete (52): Bela was named in 1951 and blacklisted, but became a friendly witness in 1954). *Bela Lugosi* richly deserves the overused formula 'a mine of information'. As Tony Williams writes on the back cover, it 'reveals a high standard of archaeological research'. With 65 pages of notes (in two columns) following a text of some 270 large-format

pages, the book is a precious guide for fans and academics alike.

*La Dolce Morte* (at once a reference to *La Dolce Vita* and an expression of the link between death and eroticism) is a carefully constructed presentation and discussion of one of the most important phenomena in modern cinema: the *giallo*, mainly famous through the work of Bava and Argento. Both have been canonised as auteurs and deservedly so, but of all the other directors of *giallo* only Lucio Fulci has also had a book devoted to him. If certain other directors mentioned are famous – Lamberto Bava, Riccardo Freda – I will probably not be alone in reading about films and film makers of which I had never heard and finding this book an essential guide. Some sixty *giallo* films are mentioned and discussed in a wide variety of contexts: the role of space and place, the narrative function of the detective and murderer and, particularly, the art of murder and the concomitant use (and abuse) of the camera to, as it were, 'deliver the goods' and give the public what (the filmmakers think) it wants.

It is here, on the role of the public, that Koven is at once the most informative and precise and the least convincing. His long discussion of 'vernacular cinema' brings to light certain facts, particularly the nature of the audiences aimed at by the makers of *giallo* (which means simply 'yellow': the colour of popular novels belonging to the category of the murder mystery). These audiences could be described as unsophisticated, basically working-class males seeking through film-going both respite from a day's labour and the reassuring sentiment of the collective: Koven insists on the interaction between spectators and films, but also between spectators as the film continues to unfold on the screen. He points out that the 'set pieces' – ingenious and gruesome murders – make the spectators sit up and take notice. However, if *giallo* is 'without subtlety or abstraction' (39), this does not apply to all the films and is not the whole story. Take the use of the zoom, for instance, a form of address to the spectator on the part of the director to inform them that the character whose fear is heightened by the device is on the verge of being murdered.

Rather than see this as merely a crude narrative ploy, we are surely entitled, at least in certain cases, to interpret it as a sign of a certain intellectual self-consciousness on the director's part, an interest in the relation between film-making, film-going and violence/sadism, a desire to stress the formal aspects of the act of filming and thus foreground simultaneously how spectators identify with the characters, both killers and victims.

It is over this question of self-consciousness that I would take issue with Koven, as he is too ready to reduce this to game-playing by directors. Worse, he has no truck with attempts to see 'hidden' meanings in *giallo*, despite remarks about the films' interaction with social concerns within Italy in the 1970s, the period during which the greatest number of films were made. Koven falls into a trap of his own making: he is rightly anxious to explain what kind of audiences went to see such films, then reacts as if it is academic hubris to look beyond the sensationalism for other levels of meaning. He dismisses as 'ridiculous' at attempt to draw a comparison between T. S. Eliot and Fulci's *The Beyond* (22), simply on the grounds that this is to misapply theory, as if a director notoriously interested in violence could possibly be interested in metaphysics and have anything in common with high modernism. Bava, for instance, may well have been convinced that his audience would not be interested in political and Freudian analyses of patriarchy, but his films are riddled with elements crying out for such a

theoretical approach. Which does not prevent the critic from also analysing them as typical products of the *giallo*.

Koven asks that we examine 'the films on their own level' (22–3) and I feel this remark needs to be seen in the context of an academic and intellectual writing on a decidedly non-intellectual genre for a heterogeneous readership. Does this remark not betray, then, an unconscious snobbery on his part, the sneering contempt of a Pauline Kael (whom he rightly excoriates) in an inverted form? We must, he seems to be saying, expect nothing profound from these films because of the kind of spectators they sought to reach primarily. At one point Koven mentions Freud and writes: 'I remain unconvinced audiences could actually care about such motivations' (109). Surely the point is that the director and/or writer *did care*. Koven would appear to believe that to defend a cinema aimed at one kind of audience automatically prohibits the critic from adopting a position different from that of said audience. Defending difference does not have to be synonymous with an arrogant superiority complex. All this smacks suspiciously of the academic 'guilt trip': a certain anti-intellectual approach to film (no theory, please: we're British).

This said, and although such an attitude is problematic, it fortunately does not compromise a book into which an enormous amount of work, care and thought has been put and which is obviously destined to become a work of reference in the field.

## Books received

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- Aitken, Ian, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema: The nineteenth-century Lukácsian and intuitionist realist traditions*, Manchester University Press, 2006, 246 pp
- Berghahn, Daniela, *Hollywood behind the Wall: The cinema of East Germany*, Manchester University Press, 2005, 294 pp
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