



## Reviews

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## REVIEWS

**TRANSNATIONAL AUSTRALIAN CINEMA: ETHICS IN THE ASIAN DIASPORAS, 1ST ED., OLIVIA KHOO, BELINDA SMAILL AND AUDREY YUE (2013)**

Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 207pp.,  
ISBN: 978-0-7391-7324-4, h/bk, £37.00

*Reviewed by Aine Llang Young, Queen's University Belfast*

The result of an Australian Research Council funded project, (along with its online 'sister' database *Asian Australian Cinema*), the new book *Transnational Australian Cinema: Ethics in the Asian Diasporas* is a good example of how a scholarly survey can benefit from the contribution of authors approaching a topic from varying fields of expertise. Whereas Olivia Khoo's background largely comprises gender and sexuality studies, Belinda Smail approaches the subject matter after a significant publication on documentary (2010) and extensive research on other media, while Audrey Yue's research primarily examines queer and transgendered Asian Film.

Appropriately, before discussing the historical trajectory of representations of Asians in Australian film history, the authors engage with the concept of Australian national cinema, surveying the literature on the subject and examining its canon, especially Tom O'Regan's assessment of Australian cinema as a 'hybrid assemblage of diverse elements, statuses and films' (1996: 4) that describes it as a 'messy' national filmic tradition. The authors' response to this assessment is 'to posit Australian cinema as a transnational formation' (12), not only in its contemporary phase, but 'since the earliest days of silent cinema and especially during the so-called dormant periods of the nation's filmmaking' (12) as a result of the country's proximity to Asia and of its colonial roots.

The study's detailed chronological investigation of the evolving representations of Asian identities in Australian cinema begins with a chapter dedicated to the proliferation of Asian stereotypes (the cook, the thief and the wife) starting in the 1920s, as a result of the ongoing 'White Australia'

policy, (which favoured immigration into Australia from European countries rather than Asian ones throughout the first half of the twentieth century). The following chapter examines the Colombo Plan documentaries of the 1950s and 1960s, highlighting the widespread perception of Australian cinema from the 1930s to the 1970s as ‘an uneventful time [...] due to the dominance of North American production and distribution’. (41) This series of documentaries, produced by the Australian National Film Board (established in 1945), emphasized post-war reconstruction and, in the process – the authors argue – ‘sought to demonstrate to both Europe and Asia that Australia was engaged in Asia in an important mission that would assuage the negative impact of decades of “White Australia”’ (53).

In their significant requalification of the 1930–1970 period of Australian cinema, the authors – Khoo in this case – also hold the merit of analysing the understudied Japanese/Australian Western *Koya No Toseinin/The Drifting Avenger* (Takakura, 1968) as exemplary of how ‘Asian Australian cinema is defined through the putative borders erected between Australian national cinema and Hollywood (or American) cinema, as the global English-language cinema, and Asian cinema, Australian’s regional counterpart’ (68).

Chapter 5 examines the growing number of representations of inter-racial romantic relations between white and East Asian characters in the period of the Australian cinema revival after 1970, with particular emphasis on biopics produced in the last decade that bring the Asian diaspora to screen. This study’s central argument of re-contextualizing Australian cinema as a phenomenon that has always been transnational is probably best exemplified in the analysis of John Heyer’s documentary *The Back of Beyond* (1954) as a precursor to the depiction of Australia as a globalized entity carried out in recent road movies with an emphasis on diasporic representation.

One may be challenged by the sole focus on Asian identities in a book that is primarily entitled *Transnational Australian Cinema* and one that aspires to redefine our understanding of Australian cinema altogether, wishing for a wider scholarly scope that encompasses the analysis of all the diasporic and marginalized entities on-screen in Australian films; this imbalance, however, is partially mitigated by the reproduction of Smaill’s article on ‘Asianness and aboriginality’ (2013). The inclusion of a chapter on short films that aims to cover such a widespread timeframe is also welcome.

In conclusion, with its concise recount of the geopolitical tensions, the policies and the economic factors that informed the representation of Asianness throughout a century of Australian cinema and its reappraisal of understudied films, Khoo’s, Smaill’s and Yue’s publication positions itself as a crucial read for a renewed understanding of the historical canon of Australian film, as well as an important contribution to the growing field of transnational film studies.

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**TRANSNATIONAL ECOCINEMA: FILM CULTURE IN AN ERA OF  
ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION, TOMMY GUSTAFSSON AND  
PIETARI KÄÄPÄ (EDS) (2013)**

Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 216 pp.,  
ISBN: 9781841507293, p/bk, £24.95/\$40

*Reviewed by Antonella Palmieri, University of Lincoln*

Tommy Gustafsson and Pietari Kääpä's edited collection focuses on a burgeoning interdisciplinary area of film studies – ecocinema studies. While until now the focus of the critical debate on ecocinema has been on either Hollywood blockbusters or specific national cinemas, this book intends to move ecocinematic analysis beyond the dominant binary of Hollywood/national cinemas, which contributors perceive as a limitation to an effective interrogation of 'the participatory potential of cinema in ecological debates' (6). The volume therefore considers a range of both well-known and less well-known films from different countries and cultural backgrounds, analysing them in the context of a new critical paradigm: transnational ecocinema. While inclined to see ecological problems from a transnational perspective, the editors emphasize the project's rejection of stereotypical understandings of transnational film culture 'as only concerning difficult or marginal films' in favour of 'comprising a range of approaches that share the theme of cross-border collaboration and concerns with imbalances and inequalities of power in global society' (19). Hence, films discussed in this collection encompass art house cinema and mainstream, documentary and fiction films. Films are investigated from a variety of perspectives that include an examination of production and distribution practices, reception and transmediality, alongside thematic content and textual analysis.

The volume is organized in four parts. Part One, 'Introduction to Transnational Ecocinema', situates the collection at the crossroad of transnationalism and ecocriticism, offering an outline of the project's purpose, rationale and methodological approaches. The importance of analysing ecocinema from various transnational angles is further expanded upon by Kääpä in 'Transnational Approaches to Ecocinema: Charting an Expansive Field'.

Part Two, 'Documentary Politics and the Ecological Imagination', focuses on the transnational dimensions of ecodocumentary films from China, Taiwan, Latin America and the United States. By taking documentaries from mainland China and Taiwan, concerning representations of water as case studies, Enoch Yee-Lok Tam suggests that the variously coloured screens these documentaries offer in their construction of water imaginaries can operate 'as a device for interrogating the ecological relationship between humanity and water (or nature)' (48). Kiu-wai Chu, meanwhile, focuses on recent Chinese documentaries that tackle issues of global environmental justice and denounce exploitative profit-driven production practices. He claims that transnationalism in Jia Zhangke's *Wuyong/Useless* (2007) and Ho Chao-ti's *Wo Ai Gaogenxie/My Fancy High Heels* (2010)

on one hand, facilitates the expression of ecocritical and environmentalist messages concerning nature and the environment, as well as the relationships between human and all other beings on the planet. On the

other, transnationalism reveals the challenges and contradictions film-makers and artists face in productions attempting to reflect ecological and environmental concerns, challenges and contradictions that are brought about by the unstoppable forces of excessive global consumerism.

(66)

Next, through a critical discussion of two political documentaries based on transnational collaborative initiatives, *When Clouds Clear* (Bernstein and Slick, 2008) and *When The Land Cries: Operation Devil* (Boyd, 2010), Roberto Fornsbroggi suggests that ecocinema in Latin America 'does not only study and produce films and media as tools for raising awareness and educating people about environmental issues. It is also a platform for the cultural conception of "Good Life"' (86), the latter a notion that emanates 'from indigenous ways of communal life between the human and non-human world' (86–87) in Latin American countries. Finally, Ilda Teresa de Castro argues that the repercussions of current environmental concerns have extended beyond geopolitical and economic confines to investigate two very different US ecodocumentaries – the ecoactivist *Earthlings* (Monson, 2005) and *Encounters at the End of the World* (Herzog, 2007) – as illustrative of the significant part cinema has to play in framing 'both local and planetary ecological realities in their comprehensive contamination' (102) and to engage and encourage 'awareness and cosmobiological ecocriticism on the part of the viewer' (101) and therefore influence solutions on a global and local scale.

Part Three, 'Popular Film and Ecology', concerns itself with popular cinema. Through an historical overview of mainstream ecofilms nominated for Academy Awards between 1979 and 2011 Tommy Gustafsson considers 'how different themes, narrations, styles and notions of gender have been employed to evoke ecocritical consciousness, at the same time as these mainstream films had to entertain their audience' (138), and argues convincingly about the gendering of these mainstream ecofilms according to specific genres. Corrado Neri, for example, investigates images of nature in contemporary commercial Chinese cinema, and in particular in Feng Xiaogang's films, to suggest that Feng's work, while not explicitly dealing with environmental issues, 'implicitly address[es] the contradictions and different anxieties linked to China's economic and environmental development' (133) in that it

tells us of the ways the ruling class in China disseminates a message of blind consumerism and wider globalization – intended here as an assimilation and acceptance of the transnational capitalist and consumerist system, even if it is 'protected' by a discourse that stresses a nationalistic chauvinism.

(123–24)

Of particular interest in Part Four, '(In)Sustainable Footprint of Cinema', is Inês Crespo and Ângela Pereira's reception study of European audiences' engagement with selected fear-inducing scenes from *The Day after Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006) and *Home* (Arthus-Bertrand, 2009). The essay argues in favour of cinema as an alternative tool for science communication as it considers the role climate change films have 'to encourage a sense of agency among their audiences' (180). Finally, Susan Ward and Rebecca Coyle discuss three Australian ecomedia initiatives (two of which are transmedia projects) that, while all being linked

to one specific rural region in Australia, have found distribution to global audiences as mainstream entertainment. Their case studies beautifully illustrate their claim that 'it is possible for some places to inspire representations of nature that address widespread ecological concerns via the global flows of ideas and values that link people and places around the globe' (189).

As a whole, this collection of engaging essays effectively adopts theoretical and methodological tools from transnational studies as viable tools for ecocinema studies. As it successfully complicates the simplistic binary of the local and the global, the volume's cultural diversity represents a significant contribution to the existing scholarship in the ecocritical humanities. Delivering what it promises, this volume may help cultivate among its readers more discerning views on the role of cinema in the political debates over environmental problems and sustainable practices, and on the potential of films in raising awareness that local and national environmental concerns do in fact have transnational and global dimensions.

**CINEMA AND INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS: TRACKING  
TRANSNATIONAL AFFECT, ADRIÁN PÉREZ MELGOSA (2012)**

New York, London: Routledge, 243 pp.,  
ISBN: 9780415532938 0415532930, h/bk, £90.00

*Reviewed by Dunja Fehimovic, University of Cambridge*

The consideration of cinema as an inherently transnational medium is far from new, but as the titles in Routledge's series *Advances in Film Studies* confirm, film studies is a field still largely advanced within national frameworks. Adrián Pérez Melgosa has written a book that makes the transnational central to his argument. This ambitious monograph aims to substantiate the author's central claim regarding the existence of a 'cluster of shared allegories' that recur in Anglo- and Latin American film over time and indicate a tacit Anglo-Latin common ground (182). Framing his argument within the theorization of affect, he sets out to shed light on the rhetorical links between inter-American policies and film using a method that moves away from an emphasis on the ideological and power implications of the gaze.

The first two chapters develop the idea that Pérez Melgosa proposes in his introduction: that of the cabaret as an allegory of the American continent and, more specifically, of early twentieth-century ideals of Pan-Americanism. By considering the film *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton and Freeland, 1933) that inaugurated a whole host of Hollywood Good Neighbour musical comedies together with Roosevelt's speech introducing the eponymous policy, the author discusses how the dynamism of stereotypes was put to use in both film and politics in order to layer an attractive, non-threatening image of Latin America as essentially performative over existing negative perceptions. The most compelling aspect of this discussion is undoubtedly the way in which it reveals the historic hegemonic deployment of the concept of performative identity, by suggesting how it allowed US policy and film-makers to revise

the Monroe Doctrine and previous pejorative stereotypes of Latin America without losing face. The second chapter deals with Latin American responses to this Good Neighbourly allegory and discusses more recent filmic uses of song and dance relating to Latin America. Abundant contextual detail including an introduction to the development of Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy as well as mention of a vast array of other films that support the author's argument are ambitiously combined into a discussion ranging from the 1930s to the present day. Drawing heavily on Ana M. López's analyses of Mexican responses to Hollywood Good Neighbour musicals, Pérez Melgosa reminds the reader that 'every effort to symbolize multinational projects contains in its narrative traces of a revived nationalism' (74), highlighting the inextricability of the transnational and national.

Chapter 3 grounds its investigation of the Anglo-Latin heterosexual couple in Doris Sommers' foundational text *Foundational Fictions* (1991) in order to argue that cinematic representations of such unions can be read as allegories of Continentalism and different interpretations of Latin Americanism. Though it contains fewer in-depth analyses, the chapter draws on filmic texts dating from 1916 to 2008 to depict the development of the cinematic hemispheric (mixed Anglo- and Latin American) couple. Particularly promising is the author's tracing of an initial resistance to Anglo-Latin unions in films from Latin America to a more recent embracing of the hemispheric couple as 'a fanciful fantasy, a myth worth entertaining as such if it serves the purpose of showcasing their respective countries as modern, well managed, and beautiful tourist destinations' (100). This most original aspect of the author's argument, which points to a link between emotional economies and the economies of nations, enlivens the somewhat familiar discussion of heterosexual romance as allegory, and could have been explored further.

The fourth chapter offers an account of the transition of magical realism from literature to film, reading its adoption by Hollywood as a perpetuation of the colonial, exoticizing gaze by which Anglo-Americans attempt to assuage anxieties relating to the legitimacy of their cultural presence on the continent. The parallel analysis of the Latin American response to magical realism is more ambiguous, as Pérez Melgosa sees an anti- or post-magical trend in a variety of Latin American films. Centring his argument around the concept of catachresis, the author contends that recent films from Latin America differ from Hollywood in their implied belief that the distance between signifier and signified cannot and perhaps should not be sutured. The fifth and final chapter focuses on a figure of difference par excellence: the Latino. 'Capturing a moving identity' sees the author engage with Brian Massumi's theorizations of affect in a more sustained manner in order to suggest that the Latino has become the 'affective focalizer' of choice in contemporary cinema throughout the hemisphere. Pérez Melgosa shows that although cinematic narratives rely on this figure to shore up national identities, the Latino's transnational subjectivity also represents a threat to such hegemonic discourses.

Overall, Pérez Melgosa succeeds in convincing the reader of the existence of certain shared Anglo-Latin allegories, although the conclusion's indication of a possibility of breaking with the colonial legacy of a divided Anglo-Latin America could have been further developed. The book suffers from a few limitations, imposed of necessity by its broad scope and aim. At times, the impact of each chapter's argument could have benefitted from a more sustained analysis of specific films. The range of theorists and concepts to which the author refers is impressive, though these allusions (examples include mimicry and Butler's

ideas about performative identity) are not always pursued as thoroughly as they might deserve. The emerging emphasis on performance as a definitive aspect of Latin American identity is particularly notable, and it would have been interesting to see it carried forward into later chapters. Despite such drawbacks, this book should be welcomed for its thorough, detailed and sustained engagement with the way in which films, nations and policies influence each other.

**A SOCIAL HISTORY OF IRANIAN CINEMA, VOLUME 4: THE GLOBALIZING ERA, 1984–2010, HAMID NAFICY (2012)**

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 632 pp.,

ISBN: 978-0-8223-4866-5, ISBN: 978-0-8223-4878-8, p/bk, £20.99

*Reviewed by Anna Misiak, Falmouth University*

*The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010*, the fourth and final volume of Hamid Naficy's monumental scholarly *oeuvre*, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* crowns more than thirty years of his extensive research. The Iranian American film theorist conducted in-depth research into the culture and politics surrounding countless films by his compatriots, those living in Iran and elsewhere around the globe. His concluding volume starts after the Islamic Revolution, in the midst of the Iran–Iraq War and ends in 2011, past the closing date indicated by the title. The material gathered in this project benefits from detailed archival research and secondary source queries, interviews and e-mail correspondence with film industry professionals, as well as textual and contextual film analyses. Naficy's broad methodology results in a multi-dimensional appraisal, promoting understanding of both Iranian and related diaspora cinemas that are set against the landscapes of the globalized world, where 'Iranians at home and abroad [are] able to achieve equality ... while maintaining difference without it degenerating into superiority or inferiority *vis-a-vis* the West' (2012: 512).

*Volume 4* offers substantial evidence of national and international socio-political transformations that, since the 1980s, have had a varied but conspicuous impact on any cinematic product coming from the global Iranian community. Naficy has been on a successful mission to build a body of knowledge about his country of origin and its nationals; both informing and impressing western cinema viewers. Not only does his up-to-date *Volume 4* offer a remarkable contribution to anglophone film studies, but it also delineates thematic lines of analyses for future researchers. With film at its heart, the book also reads like a complex critical media history of Iranian society and its diaspora. It is, however, easy to navigate and useful as a reference as well, with all source materials in English and Persian solidly documented on 120 pages of appendices, notes, bibliographies and indexes.

Naficy has divided the last volume of his Iranian opus into five substantial chapters; with each of them covering one of the significant developments that changed Iranian cinema over the past three decades. Chapter 1 demonstrates how the state-run post-revolutionary cinema of the 1980s aimed at propagating a new national identity, when individualist approaches to the



national cause were substituted with a focus on Islam. After his original and comprehensive discussion of lesser-known military documentaries, Naficy extends his argument to include other state-funded televisual and cinematic forms that served the same purpose of promoting the sacred post-revolutionary identity of the country, which marginalized some of the opposition and led to some Iranians leaving for foreign lands.

Chapter 2 discusses the relatively recent emergence of women in Iranian cinema, both on camera and behind it. Naficy argues that in this respect the Islamic rules of modesty (*hijab*) have had double-folded and seemingly paradoxical effects. Whereas on the one hand they historically led to the suppression of women in the Iranian film industry, on the other they protected on-screen and off-screen females from the objectifying male gaze, safeguarding the desexualized women from commodification in public discourses and thus serving as an empowerment. Naficy, however, concludes that several other political and social developments facilitated the progression of women in Iranian cinema in a more direct manner, with the instrumental reform era under Khatami and international industry contacts at the forefront of change.

In Chapter 2 Naficy also observes that the increase in female participation in the domestic cinematic market would not have happened without the presence of role models and encouraging media representations that often came from abroad. Among many other examples here he cites the Nobel Peace Prize Committee's recognition for Shirin Ebadi's activist work in 2003 and perhaps surprisingly the popularity of *Oshin* (1983), a Japanese TV series that encouraged female perseverance among women in Iran. Whereas other English language authors (i.e. Tapper 2006; Mottahedeh 2008; Dabashi 2007) previously explored the representation of Iranian women in films with the work of the most popular female directors, including Samira Makhmalbaf, Marziyeh Meshkini or Manijeh Hekma, Naficy's transnational background analysis of the catalysing factors that prompted the emergence of publicly visible and vocal women in the formerly strictly gender segregated film culture turns the fourth volume of *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* into a truly pioneering work.

The author continues to examine Iranian cinema with his sharp, discerning approach in the following chapter on art house productions, which have received significant recognition with western critics and audiences. Naficy articulates his praise and critique for world-class new wave, and later post-revolutionary directors, such as Abbas Kiarostami, the Makhmalbaf family, Bahman Ghobadi, Majid Majidi, amongst others. In a unique way he underpins his discussion with intricate accounts of production, domestic and global reception, and the unregulated internal circulation of popular Iranian films, including the recent Oscar winner, *A Separation* (Farhadi, 2011), whose production story concludes the third part of the book.

The transnational aspect of Iranian film illuminates the majority of the first half of the book, with the contents of the two final chapters relating even more directly to the volume's header, *The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010*. In Chapter 4, the author's commentary on the Internet and underground cinema is anchored in political and media antagonisms between the West and Iran. Naficy's abundant examples reveal that for contemporary Iranians amateur films often function to articulate the discontents felt about social and political inequalities in the country. In the author's opinion the opposition's videos form 'a ticking time bomb' (367) in the Iranian regime, whose potency remains to be seen.

Whereas Chapter 4 deals with new material, Naficy returns to his earlier expert focus on migrant cinema in the last section of the book, claiming that films produced by Iranians living in the diaspora articulate new transnationally shaped cosmopolitan subjectivities. When the author discussed the exile's feeling of displacement in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001) a decade ago, he most memorably remarked that anxieties related to being away from one's home may be often 'suppressed in order to get on with life' (2001: 28). Although Naficy is not a film-maker, his approaches are aligned with the experiences of the many displaced feature and documentary film directors mentioned in the final chapter, whose feelings of displacement no longer remain suppressed and are now instrumental in shaping the global Iranian cinema's identity.

With *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Naficy capitalizes on his own displacement by going back to his cultural origins. With a typical émigré's desire for self-representation Naficy's knowledgeable and well-informed approach to analytical and cultural theories informs the complex critical arguments in this publication. The intelligently narrated *Volume 4* is highly recommended and seals Naficy's reputation as one of the main experts on Iranian and transnational cinema studies.

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**CONTEMPORARY QUEER CINEMA: SOME NOTES ON RECENT SCHOLARSHIP**

***NEW QUEER CINEMA: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT*, B. RUBY RICH (2013)**

Durham: Duke University Press, 360pp.,  
ISBN: 978-0-8223-5428-4, p/bk, £17.99

***LOVE AND MONEY: QUEERS, CLASS AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION*, LISA HENDERSON (2013)**

New York: New York University Press, 224pp.,  
ISBN: 978-0-8147-9058-8, p/bk, £15.99

***QUEER LOVE IN FILM AND TELEVISION: CRITICAL ESSAYS*, PAMELA DEMORY AND CHRISTOPHER PULLEN (EDS) (2013)**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 292pp.,  
ISBN: 978-1-1372-7296-6, h/bk, £57.50

*Reviewed by Rohit K. Dasgupta, University of the Arts London*

The history of queer cinema stretches far back and is almost as old as the invention of cinema itself. Whilst cinema has numerous examples of the camp figure of the sissy, the dragged-up hero, these have mostly been to provide comic relief or at the most offer a narrative of comparative criticism. As Pamela Demory and Chris Pullen (2013) have argued, the foundational premise of classical Hollywood is based on the tired formula of the chivalric romance, bourgeois novel and the American melodrama. There has been little engagement with queer consciousness other than the occasional slippages (White 1999 for instance) or sub-textual hints.

In this article I shall explore how recent texts on film and visual criticism have taken the figure of the queer further, offering critical approaches to address the production and reception of queer characters. These texts not only interrogate the narrowness of our understanding of non heteronormativity but offer progressive pathways to extend the reading of queer characters in film and television. I will be looking primarily at the following publications: B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (2013), Lisa Henderson's *Love and Money: Queers, Class and Cultural Production* (2013) and finally Demory and Pullen's edited collection *Queer Love in Film and Television* (2013).

B. Ruby Rich needs no introduction to scholars of queer cinema. In her 1992 essay 'The new queer cinema' she coined the term 'new queer cinema' to identify a group of films that use techniques of avant-garde social constructionism, of creating socially constructed reality to rework histories, and celebrate difference and sexual leeway and resist reduction to any normative coding, thereby questioning the paradigm of normativity itself. In this book, which spans almost two decades, is a testament to the ever-changing contours of queer cinema. Rich states at the very outset that these films were strongly influenced by art, activism and 'recoded aesthetics' linking the independent movement to the avant-garde.

A question that naturally arises is what gave rise to this new queer cinema (NQC hereafter). How did it start at all? Rich identifies four elements that

gave rise to NQC: 'the arrival of AIDS, Reagan, camcorder and cheap rent' (xvi). Of these four the rise of the camcorder has surely been one of the most interesting and important facets. Recent films screened at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival chronicling the rise of AIDS activism in the United States, *How to Survive a Plague* (David France, 2012) and *United in Anger: A History of Act Up* (Jim Hubbard, 2012) have also documented the power of the image especially for queer activism made possible through the invention of this little device which enabled 'the easy production of electronic media at the personal level' (xvii) by recording these tumultuous times for posterity.

Rich draws from a wide array of films, frankly some of which I had not even heard of. It is not surprising then that John Waters has remarked 'I thought I knew a lot about gay movie history until I read *New Queer Cinema* and realised what a dunce I was' (backcover). Rich's fascination and deep regard for classic film-makers such as Derek Jarman and John Waters is palpable from this book. Of Jarman she writes 'imagine a cross between Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, but somebody alive and kicking, warm and generous, irreverent and uncompromising' (49). In the short chapter on Jarman, Rich points out the postmodern importance of his work and the space he commanded within British media (which was not always favourable). Details about his funding woes attributed to the homophobia of Thatcherite Britain is discussed, especially how the film establishment actively worked against him. Waters on the other hand, who only commands a few pages, is more of an omniscient figure in this volume. About him she writes:

Waters predates the New Queer Cinema history by decades, he's a creature of the hippie past, the countercultural revolution, a pre Stonewall era of shock and awe. He's an indelible part of NQC prehistory, a patron saint presiding over its doings, chuckling at its follies, applauding its successes.

(6)

Rich's book is divided into five parts. The first part (Origins, Festivals and Audiences) gathers the foundational essays which set the tone for NQC. It argues that NQC was a cultural response to the troubled times of the noughties and emerged as an aesthetic reaction to it. Rich's writing in this section looks beyond the texts of the films themselves by also interrogating the relationship between the Gay and Lesbian film festivals and their audiences. In an illuminating chapter titled 'Collision, catastrophe, celebration', Rich argues that the festivals were a space where many of these films were either embraced or rejected by their desired public. However as a critic, Rich is troubled by the boundaries imposed by the demands of the communities and the limits of tolerance displayed when confronted with uncomfortable ideas and representations. She notes 'Queer audiences see themselves as complicit in these representations, as if they are compromised or validated by them' (38).

The second and third parts take a more journalistic voice and are devoted to specific films and film-makers. Films such as *Forbidden Love* (Fernie and Weissman, 1991), *Go Fish* (Troche, 1994) and *Watermelon Woman* (Dunye, 1996) are discussed in these chapters. NQC itself was evolving during this period and as Rich points out this was driven by a commercial motive. What is interesting is Rich's awareness of her contribution to the movement. She saw her writing during this phase as a contribution in getting enough people to the theatres and ensuring the survival of the movement and keeping the

conversation going. In the essay 'Lethal lesbians', Rich examines the sudden popularity in a group of films that were being made by heterosexual men in which 'lesbians teamed up to commit murder as a way of sealing their bond' (xxv). Rich's essay looks at the intention of the film-makers as well as the reception of the films themselves. She is not entirely dismissive of these films but rather notes that in these films 'the haunting figure of the pathological lesbian killer has been rescued from historical neglect and social isolation, given a partner and even celebration' (117). It is not entirely clear what gave rise to this genre and why these films were made during that period. Rich however agrees that this genre elicited both progressive and regressive responses from the public sphere, at the same time she is also cautionary in pointing out that these films, in most cases, reverse/subvert the power dynamics by which 'lesbians are more likely to be murdered than be murderous' (118). The area of homophobic violence and transnational responses has been explored more recently by Pullen (2012) and G. Herek and K. Berrill (1992).

In the fourth section, Rich demonstrates that NQC is not just confined to films from the English speaking world. She looks at a range of Latin American films and examines the intersections between the films and the larger LGBT movements in those countries. Rich is particularly fascinated by Cuba. She illuminates the contradictions which exist, positing Cuba as an extremely homophobic country with a rich LGBT subculture. In her analysis of *Fresa y Chocolate*, she argues that the film was fundamentally for Cuba and Cubans and not for an international queer public, which in itself was evidence of the changing attitudes in the country. She further notes that the film was suffused with sympathetic characters that invite both empathy and identification. What makes this section extremely interesting is Rich's own position as a film critic and film scholar. Her analysis and description is infused with her own personal tastes and choices, thus managing to successfully bridge the gap between the intellectual detachments of an academic with the personal engagement of a critic.

Finally in the fifth section, titled 'Expansions and Reversals', Rich turns to the LGBT megahit. She looks at films such as *Milk* (Van Sant, 2008) and *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) and comments on how they have contributed not only to a new form of gay male representation but have also drawn new LGBT audiences in small towns and rural areas, thus opening up new spaces for discussion and dialogue on the struggles of queer people. She ends her book by looking at the role of new media technologies and how they continue to capture and archive queer identities in digital memory. From this perspective, NQC is in perpetual motion. From its critique of mainstream queer narratives to responding to issues such as hegemony, power and class struggles, it continues to play an important role in public consciousness. These issues of queer class struggles and representation have been examined in depth by Lisa Henderson in *Love and Money*.

In *Love and Money* Henderson attempts to look at contemporary queer cultures through the lens of social class. Henderson is critical of the distorted ways in which American media represents queer cultures and identity and seeks to study the difference that social class makes on queer subjectivity and representation. Queer cultural production is quite uneven, operating within a mainstream mantle of production as well as taking place outside the 'norm'. According to Henderson, queer cultural products are sometimes highly conventional and institutional or at other times more ephemeral or community based (4).

Consider for example shows such as *Queer As Folk* (Cowen and Lipman, 2000–2005), *Will and Grace* (Burrows, 1998–2006) and *The L Word* (Chaiken, 2004–2009). Contrary to popular television depiction, not all queer people in America (and by extension in the rest of the world) are rich, white or professionals. Henderson argues that whilst working class people are the majority of the US population, they are also the most demeaned, they are ‘physically just too much: too messy, too ill, too angry, too needy, too out of control too unrestrained and, critically too sexual’ (35). This representation of the working class as the unrestrained can be traced back to the colonial imagination of assigning hyper-degenerate sexuality to labouring non intellectual classes and hyper effeminacy to the intellectual non labouring class (Sinha 1995: 19). As true with many such cultural impositions, the anxiety of television networks and movie distributors of depicting queer sex has also certainly been careful to represent it in such a way that guards ‘the presumed modesties and class aspirations of their straight audiences’ (36).

I would like to argue that the radical potential of social criticism often gets lost within this essentialist neo-liberal privilege which dominates the representation of identity and politics of the queer populace. Henderson starts her argument with the (now) classic film *Boy’s Don’t Cry* (Pierce, 1999). The film is based on the real life events that lead to the transphobic murder of Brandon Teena. Whilst earlier analyses of the film have ranged from an archival reading of gender ambiguity, spectatorship to desires of young people (Halberstam 2005; Pidduck 2001), Henderson addressed it as a class text. She reads it as a narrative of rural white working class youths in America. She examines how this working-class abjection structures transgender representation especially within a space where class and gender variance is rooted in exclusion and within a hierarchy. She argues: ‘In *Boy’s Don’t Cry*, class marks gender trauma and gender variance is both the hope and denial of class transcendence’ (14). She further points out that by ‘reading queerness for class and class for queerness, exposes the availability and malleability of shaming and excess in pathologising queer and class others’ (30).

Henderson next identifies Miranda July’s feature film *Me and You and Everyone we Know* (2005) as a representation of a ‘world of people socially and culturally at risk’ (60). Whilst July’s work is not obviously queer in the usual sense it does not work within the parameters of same sex eroticism or gender variance. It’s disruption of normative categories of recognition therefore make it a text worth considering. Henderson analyses the film to bring up the frayed and insecure conditions of working class life. Her response is not to romanticize this deprivation but to rather use it as a ‘new way of thinking about relations among cultures, feeling and social possibility, about cultural forms as affective resources in the project of queer class solidarity’ (17).

In the final section of the book, Henderson turns to two recent films within the queer canon – *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) and *By Hook or Crook* (Dodge and Howard, 2001) Both these films can be read as queer class texts, ‘extracting a feeling of solidarity from queer class trauma and hierarchy’ (129). Whilst the first film marks the entry of queer into the mainstream western genre in Hollywood, the second is a non budget, urban trans film set in San Francisco. Henderson uses the two films to extract ‘a feeling of solidarity from queer class trauma and hierarchy’ (129). She argues in favour of the politics and energies that these films portray. Both films argue more strongly in favour of optimism of friendship over that of romantic love. The various forms of love on the other hand are what Pamela Demory and Christopher Pullen explore in their collection *Queer Love*.

*Queer Love* is a collection of 22 essays written by established and new scholars to explore and examine how recent films and television programmes play with, critique, subvert and, in the process, queer the romantic within Western culture. In an insightful introduction Demory and Pullen state that love is the foundational premise on which Hollywood narratives depend. Romance is central not only to the romantic genre but rather also characterizes the subplots of various other genre films and television programs. The editors of this volume also identify the success of *Brokeback Mountain* as a film marking the evolution of public attitudes towards queer love/same-sex romance (3). In effect this film signalled the mainstream acceptance of queer films that was already underway in the art house films and New Queer Cinema that Rich examines in her book.

The book is structured around four sections: romance, marriage, margins and adapting queerly, although none of the sections are watertight. The first section deals exclusively with the representation of love in contemporary queer cinema and television. Kenneth Chan's chapter on *I Love you Philip Morris* (Ficarra and Requa, 2009) for example identifies the 'negative' representations within the film as offering a critical step towards a negotiated and more accommodating politics of consuming Hollywood's gay romances (24). By infusing romantic love with negativity, the author contends that the film forces the viewers to rethink stereotypical gay clichés and ideological flawlessness of Hollywood's heteronormative romantic narratives with their happy endings.

In sharp contrast Demory's own chapter on the television show *Queer As Folk* reads it as a melodramatic text and argues how this melodrama uses contradiction and the de-stability associated with the genre (melodrama) instead of realism to 'queer' the show. Instead of moving towards a final resolution, the show instead, with its seemingly unsatisfactory ending, addresses the myth of 'happy queer love' in contemporary America.

The second section of the book 'Marriage and Family' continues to investigate the representation and narrative of queer love stories against the heteronormative romantic conventions. Julia Erhart's essay, for instance, examines the narrative of the donor conception in lesbian and non lesbian films. She looks at how issues such as queerness are managed and what kind of perspectives are actually represented within them. She identifies the film *The Kids are Alright* (Cholodenko, 2010) as showing the perspective of the donors and the children which earlier films such as *The Switch* (Gordon and Speck, 2010) excluded. The film's interest in the world of donor conceiving and the lesbian-headed family make it quite unique (91) thus significantly disrupting the world of normative parenting mainstream media glorifies. Thus because of its 'engagement with the queer practice of family construction' (92), the film makes a contribution to the theme of queer love without any significant precedent.

The third section suggests that subversive and transgressive illustrations of queer love can be found within marginalized groups such as transgressors, porn stars and drag queens and through 'marginal' forms such as punk films and pornography. The authors in this section interrogate the intersection between heteronormative forms of love and the erotically marginal (7). Curran Nault's investigation into Bruce LaBruce's punk film *No Skin off my Ass* (1993) sees the film as a conflation of romance, unstimulated sex scenes and through that it effectively challenges both romance and punk conventions. As Nault notes 'At first glance, *No Skin* may be just

another fine gay romance, but on further inspection the film is quintessentially queercore in its opposition to status quo articulations of sexuality, punk and love' (176).

The final section explores 'what happens when stories of queer love are adapted from one medium to another' (7), thus suggesting that there may indeed be something queer in the very act of adapting. Pullen's chapter on Tom Ford's *A Single Man* (2009) adapted from Christopher Isherwood's novel considers how such recordings and representations explore the aesthetics of the discursive body, thus offering the potential for queer love being actually enhanced. He looks at the film as a dual text where the knowledge of the viewer about Isherwood and the original source form a dialectic, thus extending the body of Isherwood as a catalyst for new imaginings (242). The final essay by Mathew Bolton (very much like Henderson's) deals with *Brokeback Mountain* and argues how the film adaptation effectively queers its audiences:

Brokeback Mountain's audience is one that recognises not only universal human experiences of love and desire but also the profound differences produced by culture that too often values one kind of love over another. (266)

The three books through their relationship to queer aesthetics and representation reside in and illuminate the tension between the mainstream neoliberalism and the queer margins. Henderson, Demory and Pullen's books set this out very explicitly. What is probably missing from these three books is an engagement with queer cinema beyond the West (though Rich does make a foray into Latin American Cinema). There have, however, been some explorations in this area with short essays by S. Habib (2007) on queer films in the Middle East, S. Ghosh (2010) on queer cinema in India and of course Andrew Grossman's (now slightly dated) collection *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade* (2000), but it still leaves a lot to be desired. The three books discussed here, through their transnational focus, follow the trajectory of queer representation across a period of time right up to its contemporary manifestation, and in the process manage to bring up issues of marginality, class differences and the tensions between politics and representation that mainstream queer narratives often tend to obfuscate.

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