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# *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire*

by Tom Rice.

University of California Press.

2019. 360 pages.

\$85.00 hardcover; \$29.95 paper; also available in e-book.

Tom Rice's *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* is an impressive study of the Colonial Film Unit (hereafter CFU), a British government agency that made movies for British imperial subjects in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean from 1939 until 1954. It is exhaustively researched, drawing on archival materials, published works, interviews with CFU staff, and extensive analysis of the films produced by the unit. While many scholars have described the work of the CFU in Africa and elsewhere, Rice's book is the first to document its rise, fall, and aftermath in detail. In producing the definitive account of the unit's history, he makes significant contributions to multiple lines of historical inquiry. *Films for the Colonies* will prove essential reading for the growing community of scholars interested in the history of media in European colonies. But Rice sees the story of the CFU as having relevance beyond its imperial context. He locates the unit's history within the broader field of British film history and seeks to contribute to recent scholarship on "useful" cinemas: that is, studies that examine "nontheatrical exhibition, educational, industrial, and instructional film," the institutions that produced them, and the agents who disseminated them.<sup>1</sup> Finally, as the

1 Tom Rice, *Films for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 5.

title suggests, Rice also contends that the CFU's history can tell us a great deal about the transition from Empire to Commonwealth that transpired rapidly in the wake of the Second World War. Rice persuasively argues that the CFU played a role in refashioning the relationship between Britain and her colonies, helping to "enact new models of empire that often continue to this day."<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 1 explores the interwar origins of the unit. The key figure here is William Sellers, a civil servant who made several pioneering films for African audiences in British Nigeria during the 1920s. Sellers was a sanitation officer with no technical film training who began making movies for use in public health campaigns. He became the head of the CFU at its inception in 1939 and led the unit continuously over its fifteen-year life span. As head of the CFU, he became an influential "expert" on filmmaking for rural audiences around the world in the postwar era. Rice carefully documents Sellers's early experiences in Nigeria, which strongly influenced his subsequent work for the CFU. During the 1930s, Sellers was one of several officials pressing the Colonial Office to fund filmmaking for colonial peoples. These proposals were met with a tepid response as government officials viewed these initiatives as amateurish, and the Colonial Office could not justify financing film production during the depression. But as war emerged on the horizon, the British government began to take a greater interest in film propaganda in the colonies and placed Sellers in command of the newly created CFU in late 1939. The other figure looming over these interwar conversations was John Grierson, who was working for the Empire Marketing Board during the 1930s and was called to head film propaganda efforts for the British government in Canada during the war. Grierson's interest in storytelling influenced a generation of British documentary makers. Though Grierson and Sellers held quite different philosophies of filmmaking, Rice observes that these two figures "[b]oth represent efforts at this precise moment to institutionalize film and make it useful for an imperial project."<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 2, "Film Rules: The Governing Principles of the Colonial Film Unit," analyzes the approach to filmmaking that Sellers implemented at the CFU. He insisted CFU films had to utilize a simplified film language because he believed Africans would be confused by sophisticated cinema techniques. He had developed this approach while making films in Nigeria. "These early experiments," Sellers explained in 1941, "proved conclusively that if films were to be successful in conveying a story or teaching a lesson to these people they would have to be specially made."<sup>4</sup> Sellers popularized his views in speeches and articles with titles such as "Films for Primitive Peoples." Sellers's views on the limited film literacy of colonial audiences were disseminated in the pages of the Colonial Office's in-house journal *Colonial Cinema*. Rice shows how Sellers's simplistic approach to filmmaking guided a generation of colonial filmmakers and came to influence film theorists such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Brian

2 Rice, 4.

3 Rice, 14.

4 Rice, 66.

Larkin, Rice shows how these scholars relied on works published by agents of the CFU to conceptualize their understanding of how new audiences processed cinematic images. However, Rice demonstrates that their articulation of the Sellers approach removed it from an imperial context and instead viewed CFU stories of audience incomprehension as evidence of the early stages of the process of cinema literacy experienced by all new audiences. At the CFU, Sellers worked closely with George Pearson, a former teacher and silent film director who shared his views on the limitations of their target audience. Their partnership would shape filmmaking for colonial peoples for a generation. However, some recruits to the film unit were unhappy with this simple, didactic style. Many had been inspired by Grierson, and this tension between the two approaches would characterize the CFU throughout its life. These competing visions lived on after the unit wound down, as film units working in former colonies drew inspiration from one or the other style.

Chapter 3, “Mobilizing an Empire: The Colonial Film Unit in a State of War,” examines the CFU’s activities from 1939 to 1945. This chapter draws extensively on government documents to reconstruct the bureaucratic maneuvering and infighting that shaped the CFU’s activities during the war. It also provides a close examination of the unit’s limited wartime output. Rice analyzes a large number of the early films to plot the ways in which their subjects and themes changed as Britain’s wartime prospects improved. Originally Sellers had conceptualized the CFU as an educational film unit, mostly with African audiences in mind. But shortly after its creation in 1939, Britain found herself in imminent peril, and the unit was called upon to produce propaganda for consumption in rural communities across the Empire. As peace started to come into view by 1943, Rice shows that production began to shift to the original educational mission. Rice demonstrates that these films were not experienced in a cultural vacuum but formed a part of a broader media landscape. CFU productions were screened by mobile cinema units run by government agents, which meant they were invariably mediated by interpreters. They were also one of several forms of media being disseminated to colonial peoples, which also included radio, the press, posters, and magic lantern shows.

Chapter 4, “Moving Overseas: ‘Films for Africans, with Africans, by Africans,’” documents the postwar decade when the CFU began actively filming in the colonies. During the war, filming abroad had been largely impossible. Therefore, most of the films the CFU produced were intended to educate the colonies about Britain (with titles such as *Mister English at Home*) or were cobbled together from footage provided by local officials from across the Empire. But shortly after the end of the war, film crews traveled to Africa to begin producing, in the words of George Pearson, “films for Africans, with Africans, by Africans,” a motto that many CFU staff embraced with ambivalence. As the CFU ramped up production abroad, it found itself dealing with the growing influence of the United Nations in global education, the new Labour government’s shifting colonial policies, and the exigencies facing every government department in the era of postwar austerity. During this period, the CFU set up a series of film schools in London and in the colonies to train local people to take on the unit’s mission upon independence. In his

analysis of these separate film units, Rice shows that local filmmakers began putting their stamp on these government productions as unique film cultures emerged. In examining work of units from across the Empire, Rice observes, “The films often appear remarkably similar, but they also reveal the particular ideologies of the local units, the ways in which the work of the CFU was now reworked and repurposed across different territories.”<sup>5</sup>

The final chapter, “Handover: Local Units through the End of Empire,” follows the CFU’s influence beyond the official transfer of power. It demonstrates that many of the former colonies continued to employ cinema units for mass education and propaganda after independence. Some states retained the CFU’s didactic tone and simplified film language, while others sought to distance themselves from this approach. Rice examines state-sponsored film production in such diverse nations as Jamaica, Ghana, and Malaysia to illuminate the enduring influence of the CFU on the aesthetics and agendas of postcolonial film units.

This is a fascinating story, clearly told by an author with an impressive knowledge of his subject. Rice is uniquely qualified to produce a history of the CFU. He was the senior researcher for the BFI website that contains many CFU films (an indispensable companion to this volume).<sup>6</sup> He helped to organize a conference in conjunction with the launching of the website that resulted in the publication of two edited volumes of essays on colonial film. This background is in evidence throughout the text. He displays a strong understanding of the complicated bureaucratic structures that shaped the CFU’s history. He also appears to have an encyclopedic knowledge of these films, which underpins his thoughtful and insightful analysis.

Throughout its five chapters, *Films for the Colonies* maintains a close focus on the activities and influence of the CFU. It is thus likely to leave some readers curious about similar developments in other colonies. It also has little to say about the history of Hollywood and other less “useful” cinema experiences in the British colonies. Fortunately, Rice has provided an efficient bibliography to direct readers to the literature on these and other related subjects that his compact history does not have the space to address. The volume is also complemented by an extensive collection of effective photographs. In sum, this is an attractively packaged, absorbingly written history of a fascinating subject. It will prove equally valuable to scholars interested in British film history, the global history of film, or the end of the Empire.

**James Burns** is an associate dean for academic affairs and a professor of African history at Clemson University. He is the author of several books, including *Flickering Shadows: Cinema and Identity in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Ohio University Press, 2002), *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895–1940* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2013).

5 Rice, 233.

6 See *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/home>.

Reviewed by Juan Llamas-Rodriguez

# *The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor*

by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky.

Duke University Press.

2020. 336 pages.

\$104.95 hardcover; \$28.95 paper; also available in e-book.

Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky begins her absorptive and accomplished monograph by describing in detail exemplary sequences from a range of different films that illustrate the key characteristics of what she calls the process genre. From *A Visit to Peek Frean and Co.'s Biscuit Works* (Cricks and Sharp, 1906) to *El Velador (The Night Watchman)*, Natalia Almada, 2011), the variety and abundance of examples in this early section of the book reveal both the aims and ambition of Skvirsky's project: to theorize a "phenomenon with which we are all familiar but that does not have a name."<sup>1</sup> She coins the term *process genre* to describe films that organize the representation of processes (usually production processes) into sequentially ordered series of steps. For Skvirsky, it is a ciné-genre since it achieves its fullest expression in moving image media by utilizing the medium's "constitutive capacity to visually and analytically decompose movement and to curate its recomposition."<sup>2</sup> The process genre is also "a genre of modernity" insofar as its method for representing a way of doing something functions simultaneously "as an index of a mode of production" and "of the status and character of a people or civilization."<sup>3</sup> The process genre's robust cultural life in the present, the author argues, marks a renewed anxiety and uncertainty about the conditions of human life in light of today's significant changes in the organization and management of

1 Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, *The Process Genre: Cinema and the Aesthetic of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 1.

2 Skvirsky, 3.

3 Skvirsky, 52.

production.<sup>4</sup> In the process genre's methodical representations of technique, Skvirsky finds a humanistic genre that commands fascination, glorifies labor, and allegorizes alternative national formations.

The first two chapters of the book define what the process genre is, first extrinsically and then intrinsically. Chapter 1, "The Process Film in Context," situates the ciné-genre within a longer tradition of processual syntax present in forms such as live demonstrations of crafts and pictorial instructions. Processual representation's stability of form, the author contends, accounts for its persistence across multiple centuries and for a variety of functions. The chapter also differentiates the process genre from established categories of film analysis, including the industrial, educational, and ethnographic film. Skvirsky argues not only for considering the process genre as separate from these other types of films but also against subsuming the genre in a subdivision of these types. The process genre must be thought of as separate lest our theorization fails to seriously consider the genre's anti-instrumentalist ethos as part of its distinctive politics.

Chapter 2, "On Being Absorbed in Work," analyzes the formal elements of the process genre's most notable phenomenological aspect: its mesmerizing sense of absorption. Skvirsky establishes that the genre's appeal cannot be reduced to an "operational aesthetic"—that is, the pleasure in understanding how things work—nor to a basic fascination with watching movement. Rather, it is the process film's overarching narrative structures that drive its signature sense of absorption. The process film lies in the tension between the generic and the singular; though devised as a how-to, or a general protocol of a kind, the genre's reliance on film's indexicality means that each representation of a process is still unique, still a record of an unrepeatable past moment. By analyzing the famous "How People Make Crayons" segment of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (NET, 1968–1970; PBS, 1971–2001), Skvirsky argues that the generic character of processual representation indeed holds the key to its absorptiveness. She then proposes three expository discursive structures that the process film may deploy: surprise, suspense, or curiosity. Close readings of *The Unstable Object* (Daniel Eisenberg, 2011) and *A Man Escaped* (Robert Bresson, 1956) offer representative examples of these three discursive structures and how they can interact within a film. The author concludes by affirming the importance of narrative closure for the process genre. The spectator must realize that the narrative has answered all their lingering questions—that it has satisfied curiosity or resolved suspense—by recognizing that the object or action represented processually has been completed. These three characteristics—the use of a specific expository strategy, the singular representation of a generic process, the sense of closure—provide a simple yet robust framework of what the process genre is.

The next two chapters define what the process genre does. (Note the action verb gerunds in their titles.) In chapter 3, "Aestheticizing Labor," Skvirsky contends with a fraught political question: If the process genre represents a technique in a series of sequential steps, is it not merely the

4 Skvirsky, 220.

formal correlate to the Taylorist way of organizing labor? In her response, the author asserts that the process genre is fundamentally committed to the “metaphysics of labor,” a shorthand that Skvirsky uses to characterize “the view that a flourishing human life has labor—capaciously understood—at its center.”<sup>5</sup> The genre’s basic glorification of labor could mobilize vastly different political projects, such as a Protestant work ethic on the right or a utopian socialism on the left. This political ambivalence allows the author to parse out the genre’s varied ideological work. For instance, the process genre counteracts the idea that labor must be toil by instead aestheticizing the sensorial pleasures of witnessing a job well done. Likewise, processual syntax belies the conceit that concealing labor is tantamount to not showing the face of the laborer. Contrasting the main narrative of the advertising film *Birth of a Hat: The Art and Mystery of Making Fur Felt Hats* (J. B. Stetson Hat Co., 1920) with its own coda, Skvirsky illustrates how the film eschews commodity fetishism by emphasizing the labor that makes the hat.<sup>6</sup> While the genre may not be inherently reactionary, its commitment to the metaphysics of labor allows it to energize projects on the political left and right.

Such commitment also allows the genre’s recruitment to various nationalistic projects, which is the subject of chapter 4, “Nation Building.” Skvirsky reveals how filmmakers mobilized the process genre, as in the industrial and ethnographic films of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) movement, to allegorize a national community parallel to the state by representing a distinct mode of production. For instance, Skvirsky reads *Aruanda* (Linduarte Noronha, 1960) as a sustained revalorization of the national-popular through the intelligent labor of local peasants and artisans. The film’s processual representation of ceramic houseware production, and its connection to the NLAC’s “artisanal mode of filmic production,” gives shape to a revolutionary, romantic anti-capitalism tied to the representation of “underdevelopment” that Cinema Novo sought.<sup>7</sup> Focusing on Chilean and Brazilian examples, Skvirsky offers a lens to revisit not only the films of the NLAC movement but also the region’s more recent instances of slow cinema and ethnographic documentary.

After analyzing what the genre is and what it does, Skvirsky ends by discussing the exceptions to and parodies of the genre. Chapter 5, “The Limits of the Genre,” explores the process genre’s inability to represent affective labor by considering the case of *Parque vía* (Enrique Rivero, 2008) in contrast to *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975). Both films depict a person carrying out regular, mundane activities within or around a house. *Parque vía*, however, is an *anti-process* film: it evokes the conventions of the process genre only to reject them and, in doing so, gives visual expression to the self-estrangement of the film’s main character, a domestic worker. By subverting the conventions of a ciné-genre devoted to the representation of material labor, Skvirsky argues, the film suggests there

5 Skvirsky, 120–121.

6 Skvirsky, 137–139.

7 Skvirsky, 183–185.

is no representational solution to restoring the servant's personhood.<sup>8</sup> The book's epilogue, "The Spoof That Proves the Rule," then turns to four films that, in parodying the conventions of the process genre, reaffirm the genre's commitments and strategies.

Fittingly for a book about films representing the step-by-step making of an object, *The Process Genre* reveals the process of building a theory of genre in its chapter structure, which moves through definition and function to limitations. Within each chapter, Skvirsky's writing is methodical and clear, guiding the reader through the process of formal analysis, theorization, and argumentation. Skvirsky's clear organization and approachable writing when engaging theoretically rich areas make the book appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses both as a case study in its entirety and through individual chapters that offer new perspectives into the cinematic treatment of topics such as labor, the nation, or affect.

Besides its solid theorization, a particular strength of *The Process Genre* is Skvirsky's employment of formal analysis. That is no small feat; if, as the author suggests, films are particularly suited to produce mesmerizing depictions of processes, then the written word would no doubt fall short of replicating this sense of absorption. Yet Skvirsky largely succeeds in enthralling the reader with her appreciation for these moving images even as she carries out a methodical theoretical argument. Her style eschews a more traditional writing structure that would include description of the film's context and plot, description of formal elements, and interpretation of these elements. Instead, Skvirsky intersperses these elements in the writing. In her analysis of "How People Make Crayons" to illustrate the discursive structure of curiosity, for instance, the rhetorical use of questions simultaneously signposts the description of the video and performs the sense of curiosity evoked while watching the short.<sup>9</sup> Other similarly compelling segments include the thread-like, almost run-on description of the representation of wicker fibers in *Mimbre* (Sergio Bravo, 1957) and the macro-level summary of shot sizes and framing in *Parque vía*.<sup>10</sup> The book's formal analysis thus reads as propulsive, compelling, and tailored to the films discussed. For a discipline in which the description of audiovisual material is both evidence and argument, Skvirsky's approach reinvigorates a central tenet of the field's scholarly production. For a book about the appeal of watching a precisely accomplished technique, *The Process Genre* illuminates the pleasure of reading a well-executed scholarly work.

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8 Skvirsky, 215.

9 Skvirsky, 99–101.

10 Skvirsky, 159–161, 210–211.

Reviewed by Pamela Robertson Wojcik

# *Where Histories Reside: India as Filmed Space*

by Priya Jaikumar.

Duke University Press.

2019. 416 pages.

\$109.95 hardcover; \$29.95 paper; also available in e-book.

As the disciplines of film and media studies have expanded and diversified, with academic publishing following suit, there has been a much-needed decentering of the field but at the same time a tendency toward siloing. While many of us may have interests that align with more than one subfield, few of us read broadly across the plurality of subjects that constitute the larger fields of film and media studies; instead, we tend to focus more closely on one or a few specific areas or approaches, and our cloistered views sometimes prevent us from noticing books that may be vital to our interests. Even more interdisciplinary fields, such as area studies or spatial analyses, can become insulated specialties. A cursory glance at Priya Jaikumar's book *Where Histories Reside: India as Filmed Space* might point one to consider it predominantly a book about Indian cinema, mainly of interest to those who specifically focus on the expansive Indian film industry. The Indian case study may lead someone who works on film and space but tends to focus on Europe or the United States to think it beyond her ken.

However, *Where Histories Reside* not only illuminates how India has been filmed, negotiated, misrepresented, shaped, maligned, and celebrated in various cinematic forms but also offers a theorization of filmed space in general. Jaikumar is interested in both filmic space, the space within the film frame, and filmed space, the "captured artifact of an encounter between a camera and its environment."<sup>1</sup> In focusing on India, *Where*

1 Priya Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside: India as Filmed Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

*Histories Reside* seeks to displace film theory and criticism from its normative attention to “one (Western) modality of capitalism and modernity” and consider India not as Other but as operating in tandem with Western cultures in “mutually implicated histories of global modernity.”<sup>2</sup> Through an analysis of filmed space in India, Jaikumar works to unseat assumptions within film theory, and especially within approaches to space, that take for granted European and American reference points. Offering a critical spatial film historiography, *Where Histories Reside* breaks down the notion that cinema’s indexicality gives it a privileged connection to reality and dislodges “the centrality, though not the significance, of cinema’s representational space” to focus on the ways in which Indian space and cinematic space are both constructed via “multiple underlying determinants of a moment, not only in time but also in space.”<sup>3</sup>

More than simply broaching the spatial turn in film studies, Jaikumar brings to bear on her spatial analysis of India other approaches to cinema, including the perspectives of history, the law, government, education, media industries, archival research, labor practices, authorship, and colonialism. Her analysis further draws on prior studies of feature filmmaking, useful cinema, documentary, travelogues, and Indian and European filmmaking. *Where Histories Reside* shows the deep interconnectedness of the many approaches needed to understand cinema and filmed space as well as the complex interplay between and among “states, institutions, economies, societies and ideologies” that constitute filmed space.<sup>4</sup> The book aims to show how space is both a product of and an agent shaping human life and social relations; it further posits the persistence of spatial logics that exceed a normative Western spatial understanding. Overall, it convincingly argues for understanding the situatedness of film in space and synchronically through complex interwoven histories.

*Where Histories Reside* attends to the way in which the colonial imagination shapes perceptions of Indian space. In a chapter dealing with what she calls disciplinary space, Jaikumar shows how educational British geographic films inculcate an “imperial understanding” in school children and highlight intersections between the visual practices of geopolitics and geography.<sup>5</sup> Indian Town Series films, intended to teach British children about Indian geography, flatten differences between places in India or places with connections to India that have “distinct roles in imperial administration”—including Afghanistan, Darjeeling, Bikaner, and Udaipur—to focus on “vocation or ethnic types of inhabitants . . . an incongruous range of transportation (camels, motor cars, bicycles, and horse carts . . .) and quaint modes of entertainment . . . portraying the place’s awkward relationship to modernity and temporal progression.”<sup>6</sup> Aimed to encourage “accurate imagination” about far-flung places, the geographic films “prescribed an imperial outlook on the world” but also show rifts in that understanding,

2 Jaikumar, 29, 30.

3 Jaikumar, 288, 297.

4 Jaikumar, 4.

5 Jaikumar, 85.

6 Jaikumar, 43.

including how to map India, whose cartography did not fit international mapping protocols.<sup>7</sup>

A chapter on what Jaikumar characterizes as residual affective space considers the temporality of space and the tension between the disappearance of a place and its immortalization in film and photography. The British destruction of the North Indian city of Lucknow following the Indian Revolt of 1857 made Lucknow “an idea and a memory.”<sup>8</sup> Examining multiple imaginings of the 1857 Lucknow uprising as a kind of “colonial disaster tourism,” Jaikumar argues that the ruins function as a marker of modernity, “a demarcation of difference for the present” that allows capitalist modernity to “assert itself via the self-justifying claim to novelty made by ceaselessly measuring its progress against an imagined and slower past.”<sup>9</sup>

While never losing sight of institutional and governmental practices, Jaikumar also considers the interplay between the state and individual auteurs. A chapter on travelogue, expedition, and mountaineering shorts and what Jaikumar terms “regulatory space” focuses on Narain Singh Thapa, a newsreel photographer who became top cameraman for the Film Division then a producer and regional officer of the Censor Board. Jaikumar situates Thapa’s aesthetic within the state’s strict regulation of film stock, subsidized mandatory screenings of documentary films in theatrical settings, and competing and capricious bureaucracies. Mapping out the complexity of licensing systems—and all the bureaucracy, paperwork, corruption, and difficulty attendant upon those systems—Jaikumar convincingly shows how state-controlled licenses for exhibition and import determined filmmakers’ access to theatrical space and film stock and thus shaped the entire industry. Describing Thapa as “an affective microcosm within whom state power over the spatial imagination of a nation became individualized and idiosyncratic,” Jaikumar uses him as a case study of sorts for assessing the multiple layers of institutional and sociopolitical history governing the short films while also showing how Thapa’s decades-long career presents a sense of India in visual panoramas that serve “to make the state appear territorially and symbolically coextensive with the land.”<sup>10</sup>

A chapter on sublime space examines Jean Renoir’s film *The River* (1951) to explore how the “differences between a film’s location and its assumed viewership,” in this case India versus an American and European art house market, “are frequently used as triggers to explore the singularities of a place and, contrarily, the universals of the human condition.”<sup>11</sup> This chapter considers Renoir as director, including his flirtation with what he perceived to be Eastern philosophies, alongside various competing reviews and discourses around the film and its production, exhibition, and reception. Discussing the conjoining of the orientalist and the cinematic sublime in *The River*, Jaikumar underscores that “the portrayal of a place as a simultaneously ethnographic and sublime, or immanent and transcendent location, is not so much

7 Jaikumar, 46.

8 Jaikumar, 185.

9 Jaikumar, 197, 186.

10 Jaikumar, 113, 86.

11 Jaikumar, 127.

an aspect of the place as the production of a perspective and projection of a desire on it.”<sup>12</sup> Here, Jaikumar not only complicates our understanding of filmed space but also provides a vital model for the analysis of “the cinematic use of politically and economically vulnerable populations and territories as ambience in location-based films,” or indeed any “classic of cinema and literature that is a product of its period’s blind spots and social hierarchies.”<sup>13</sup>

*Where Histories Reside* also evinces a particular interest in below-the-line personnel. The first chapter situates educational geographic films in the context of nature films, orientalist short films, and commercial features not only due to their shared images but also because they share overlapping personnel and can thus “disclose shared visualities and desire across different forms and genres.”<sup>14</sup> Looking at contemporary film, the fifth chapter, on global space, considers below-the-line personnel and the culture of location shooting to suggest a form of erasure as “brand India” expunges everyday life and the “lived messiness” of Indian life in favor of a frictionless global signifier of Indianness.<sup>15</sup> With more emphasis on location-based realism in Bollywood productions, Jaikumar notes, location shooting navigates the tension between onscreen and social spaces. Hindi cinema’s *mise-en-scène* reflects and furthers “the current commodification of land and leisure” as below-the-line workers mediate between transnational multimedia corporations and local operatives to help produce a version of India that does not represent or reflect people like them.<sup>16</sup> In a fascinating discussion of casting for extras, Jaikumar convincingly demonstrates how blockbuster Indian films use white and multiracial extras, labeled “models,” drawn from college students, tourists, and conventional models to connote “global cosmopolitanism,” whereas international productions favor “junior artists” drawn from the Indian working class to show India as a land of poverty.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas many books on cinema and space focus on one space, such as the city, the suburb, or the home, *Where Histories Reside* considers the way in which various spaces, such as Indian towns, the Himalayan mountains, and ruins, construct the larger imagined space of India. An absorbing discussion of the *haveli*, a topic worthy of a book on its own perhaps, suggests how one aspect of the built environment works as a cultural signifier that revises history. An outmoded architectural form of mansion with an interior courtyard dating back to the precolonial era, the *haveli* today functions mainly as ruin or tourist attraction. But in post-independence cinema, the *haveli* has a curious dominance. Where historically *havelis* “created segregated spaces for women of North Indian Hindu and Muslim families ranging across a wide spectrum of wealth,” post-independence films have transformed these “nondenominational precolonial structures” into “predominantly Islamic feudal structures inhabited by wealthy, fading nobility.”<sup>18</sup> In collapsing the

12 Jaikumar, 169.

13 Jaikumar, 128, 137.

14 Jaikumar, 57.

15 Jaikumar, 286.

16 Jaikumar, 239.

17 Jaikumar, 249, 261.

18 Jaikumar, 213.

reality of different religious backgrounds and statuses, representations of the *haveli* “scramble history and erase India’s colonial period” even as British colonialism is key to the *haveli*’s decline.<sup>19</sup> The “popular imagination of an architectural form” thus ruptures a sense of continuous history and absents British colonialism while also creating an “antihistory to nationalist narratives of India.”<sup>20</sup>

*Where Histories Reside* shows that space is not a thing to be filmed, nor simply a place to film in, but a constellation of material, social, institutional, and imagined spaces that briefly cohere to be captured on film but also exist in different constellations, alongside different representations, in different reception contexts, and at different historical moments. Thus, the space we call India can be simultaneously a sublime space, a regulatory space, a global space, a local space, a space of production, and a produced space. Jaikumar’s book invites us to regard both national and cinematic space as overdetermined and also to consider that seeing filmed space requires multiple overlapping lenses.

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19 Jaikumar, 213.

20 Jaikumar, 214, 224.

Reviewed by Chris Yogerst

*Pink-Slipped:  
What Happened to Women in  
the Silent Film Industries?*

by **Jane M. Gaines.**

University of Illinois Press.

2018. 328 pages.

\$99.00 hardcover; \$29.95 paper; also available in e-book.

*Bad Film Histories:  
Ethnography and the  
Early Archive*

by **Katherine Groo.**

University of Minnesota Press.

2019. 376 pages.

\$112.00 hardcover; \$28.00 paper; also available in e-book.

*The Routledge Companion to  
New Cinema History*

edited by **Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers.**

Routledge.

2019. 434 pages.

\$250.00 hardcover; \$52.95 paper; also available in e-book.

Any cinema scholars researching in the last twenty years have realized that film history and film theory have often been at odds. As a film historian, I have always found film theory fascinating and engaging but located my strengths in researching and writing history. Film history itself has been theorized by scholars like Philip Rosen, who argues that a film historian must work to fill the “gap between sources and synthesis” and find a way to place themselves “out of time” while also taking into consideration the philosophy of market-driven mass culture such as that posited by Adorno’s culture industry.<sup>1</sup> Rosen’s influential musings on historiography bridge history and theory, giving film scholars much to consider.

Current film history scholarship demonstrates the increased accessibility to primary sources since Rosen’s book came out in 2001. As noted by the editors of *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, the “growing amount of fine-grained data will enable a profound renewal of the field as it reconstructs older, less securely evidence-based narratives.”<sup>2</sup> Rosen therefore reminds us to continue considering both *why* and *how* we write cinema history.

In the digital era, access has changed significantly for many archival collections. One can scour databases for period-specific coverage in a trade journal, quickly communicate with archivists around the globe about physical collections, and search through digitally indexed databases. Because of the increasing accessibility afforded by digital archives, film studies is seeing what we can, perhaps, call another historical turn. Previously accepted history can be revisited, questioned, expanded, and, when necessary, corrected thanks to regular and convenient connection to digital archives.

One perspective on this new approach to film historiography can be found in Jane M. Gaines’s *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* Much of her text details how shifting ideologies impacted views of women’s place in film history. Gaines’s challenge to past narratives of feminist film theory is essential reading for historians and theorists working on women and film. In answering the question posed by her title, Gaines, in her own words, “examines the apparent incompatibilities these [theoretical and empirical] approaches yield: the theoretical position that there were ‘no women’ as opposed to the evidence of empirical ‘women’ or women theoretically ‘absent’ and then empirically ‘present’ in abundance.”<sup>3</sup> Understanding that the digital era has made previously accepted narratives less reliable, Gaines acknowledges the digital archive and its positive impact on verifiable evidence that can more effectively inform film theory.

Gaines finds a through line between history and theory, which both appreciates historical research but cautions historians about the pressures

1 Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 127–139. See also Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991).

2 Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers, introduction to *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* (London: Routledge, 2019), 4. See also Judith Thissen, “Cinema History as Social History: Retrospect and Prospect,” in Biltereyst, Maltby, and Meers, *New Cinema History*, 127.

3 Jane M. Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 4.

of bending a narrative to fit popular theory of the day, a concern she shares with Rosen. Certainly, discussion of the abundance of women in early cinema would have been both a historical corrective and timely for second-wave feminist film theorists. However, as Gaines points out, such discussions were passed over even after the organization Women and Film, founded in 1973, explored the abundance of women writers, directors, and producers in early cinema. Such missed opportunities exemplify why continued empirical research is important. In this case, the outdated “no women” narrative that fit the politics of 1970s feminist film theory has been replaced with a story of abundance of women acting, directing, writing, and producing during the silent era. Such historical correctives both address *how* we conduct research by relying on the evidence at hand and affirm *why* empirical research is important, because we cannot adequately theorize and contextualize film history until there is reliable footing.

What is more, Gaines asks historians to consider what kinds of answers they are looking for in their research. Are they following a popular theoretical trend, filling gaps in historical timelines, or trying to answer questions left unanswered? Gaines cautions historians to be wary of both giving credence to and minimizing the significance of historical narratives. For example, Gaines muses that while feminist film scholars once minimized the impact of women in film, today’s scholars run the risk of overemphasizing gender as it now has “less potency than it did when it first disturbed established disciplines nearly forty years ago.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, the author cautions feminist film historians to not “get ahead of the evidence” that supports their desire to insert women into film history narratives.<sup>5</sup> This is an important point all film historians should consider, as we cannot make claims that reach beyond the available evidence.

Katherine Groo’s *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive* offers a more critical stance toward film historiography because Groo aims, in part, to address what she sees as undertheorized history as well as underrepresented artifacts of historical study. Groo’s work will be useful reading for scholars looking for new inspiration for theorizing history. As Groo explains, “The promise that the field might allow for theories of history, an ongoing critique of methods, and robust debates about the historicity of film artifacts or the spectatorial experience of the film historian has gone, with few exceptions, largely unfulfilled.”<sup>6</sup> Groo criticizes film historians Douglas Gomery and Charles Musser for what she sees as old-fashioned interest in empirical evidence and jabs David Bordwell for his, to her mind, outdated adherence to Aristotelian poetics. Bordwell’s work, according to Groo, “cannot accommodate the nonnormative or the irregular, the unprincipled or dynamically unstable objects of history. It cannot engage the early ethnographic films or any of the other ‘minor’ or marginal works that proliferate in the silent era.”<sup>7</sup> While I would defend the above scholars on many

4 Gaines, 36.

5 Gaines, 50.

6 Katherine Groo, *Bad Film Histories: Ethnography and the Early Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 14.

7 Groo, 17.

grounds, Groo's point about nonnormative cinema culture gives historians something to consider. Even if the object of a scholar's research focuses on normative Hollywood history (i.e. major studio output), how can they help expand the canon? This is certainly important for film historians who are mentoring graduate students, who should be encouraged to pursue nonnormative historical research.

Groo notes historian Robert Sklar's interest in seeing film history develop into a dialogic field of study. Certainly, after decades of tension between film history and theory, it is refreshing to consider a future of fruitful conversations about disparate approaches to historicizing cinema. One of Groo's key points is to build on scholars such as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Thomas Elsaesser, and Tom Gunning who seek to study film as a product of a specific time and place that is viewed and studied today in a distinct time and space. Drawing from Rosen, Groo further argues that history is interwoven with the contemporary moment and that fact should not be left out of historical film analysis.

To this end, Groo posits that “[o]ne would expect an empiricist film historian to either neglect or struggle to explain the aspects of film history that are not readily observable (e.g., the occurrences of certain absences in the archival record).”<sup>8</sup> Of course, this is where the digital humanities with the help of deep, searchable indexes has started to fill in historical gaps previously impossible to fill. It should also be noted that while I am engaging primarily with Groo's theory of history, she delivers original research related to her book's subtitle throughout her study. The author showcases the strengths of nontraditional archival work, as exemplified by this history of ethnographic film, as a means to re-theorize film history by expanding the accepted optics. Nonnormative cinema engages differently with empirical sources in that they do not fit neatly into established narratives. Groo sets up a useful criticism of empiricism while retaining “its openness to theorizing our sensory or spectatorial encounter with the world” as part of her theoretical approach to film history that focuses on the margins of cinema.<sup>9</sup>

For me, as a film historian, the strongest aspect of *Bad Film Histories* is that Groo channels Charles Sanders Peirce by outlining film's relationship to the iconic and indexical. Following Peirce, film historians should also think about what makes a single work or series of film symbolic. In a class that I co-teach with a philosophy colleague, we analyze popular culture as iconic and indexical and work to find ways that a given film, song, show, or comic becomes symbolic. This approach follows the tradition set forth by film historians interested in the social context of movies and film culture both inside and outside of the studio system. A few recent books have successfully followed this methodology, including J. E. Smyth's *Nobody's Girl Friday: The Women Who Ran Hollywood*, Emily Carman's *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System*, Steven J. Ross's *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America* and Laura B. Rosenzweig's

8 Groo, 21.

9 Groo, 22.

*Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (which both tackle the same subject from slightly different angles), and Thomas Doherty's *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist*, among others.<sup>10</sup>

Another book that contemplates the *how* of film history is *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, which aims to “integrate the history of film into a broader history of cinema as a sociocultural institution.”<sup>11</sup> This collection is essential for film historians thinking about how their work will fit into the field in the coming years. One chapter features Melvyn Stokes's journey moving into film history from a related field. Some of the first histories of film were insider accounts of the medium, such as Terry Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights* (1926) and Benjamin Hampton's *A History of the Movies* (1931). Stokes notes how film studies as an academic field began not with historians but with experts in a multitude of different fields that relied on semiotics and psychoanalysis and could unify around theoretical analysis. As history worked its way into the field, film studies moved from a “great men” approach to specific period studies to local microhistories, trade press histories, and the social experience of cinema, as well as cinema across national borders.

Of course, the newly refined focus in *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* is due in large part to access to digital collections such as those organized by the Media History Digital Library (MHDL) and its Lantern search engine. In his chapter, Eric Hoyt, director of the MHDL and lead developer of Lantern, provides insight into using these resources and sets up a case study about researching the history of film exhibitors using large datasets that allow us to identify patterns and trends previously difficult to unearth by physically sifting through thousands of pages of documents. Hoyt argues that the MHDL along with Lantern and its accompanying data visualization program Arclight allow historians to zoom in close as well as search far and wide.<sup>12</sup> The impact of these technologies is part of what Gaines sees as changing the landscape of empirical research. Using such digital resources helps historians look beyond an individual film to the larger “institutional, social, cultural, and industrial structures that shape media production, circulation, and reception.”<sup>13</sup> Using Lantern, the MHDL's search engine, and Arclight, its visualization tool, one can search a list of names to find who comes up most frequently in the trade press. Of course, one must be careful because this archive is currently dominant in material prior to 1964. Therefore, searching for your favorite 1990s film will only harvest irritation.

In another chapter, Maltby observes, “New cinema history is conditioned in its concerns and its focus by its cognizance of the centrality

10 Emily Carman, *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); Thomas Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Steven J. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); Laura B. Rosenzweig, *Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); and J. E. Smyth, *Nobody's Girl Friday: The Women Who Ran Hollywood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

11 Biltreyst, Maltby, and Meers, introduction, 2.

12 Eric Hoyt, “Arclights and Zoom Lenses: Searching for Influential Exhibitors in Film History's Big Data,” in Biltreyst, Maltby, and Meers, *New Cinema History*, 84.

13 Hoyt, 84.

of social experience of cinema. This perspective provides it with a view from the audience, rather than from the producer.”<sup>14</sup> By being able to dig through large collections of fan and trade publications, in addition to the studio archives, historians can craft narratives from multiple perspectives. Robert C. Allen argues that film scholars tend to “overestimate how much individual films have mattered” and “underestimate the magnitude of cinema as a social and cultural phenomenon.”<sup>15</sup> Allen goes further, calling the digital landscape the “anti-archive,” a set of accessible information that “is so huge and undefinable, and produced not in relation to a fixed object of study.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense, historians have moved from an era of data scarcity to one of abundance. This will even change how we teach and how students learn film history. As Allen suggests, “[T]here’s an opportunity for a cinema studies class to become a laboratory.”<sup>17</sup> To wit, students in my introduction to film class spend time analyzing primary documents in the MHDL, a practice that exposes them to primary sources and engages them in the rewards of research.

The chapters in this collection largely agree that digital tools are reinvigorating cinema history research by expanding the canon beyond physical archives by allowing researchers to dive deeper into accepted narratives and, in some cases, to explore other stories that have longed for archival support. For example, Judith Thissen posits that “the history of cinema should include studying the material conditions under which movies were produced, distributed, and consumed.”<sup>18</sup> Thissen echoes Rosen, who suggests “[a] major part of the work of historiography would have to consist in filling in the inevitable gaps between sources and synthesis; and relatedly in establishing some kind of positionality that can maintain the authority of the historiography against the threat posed to stable position by temporality.”<sup>19</sup> In sum, new cinema history can offer scholars new avenues for film theory as previously obscure information will come to light using technologically enhanced resources.

Each of these texts highlights major changes in film studies, which asks cinema historians and theorists to reevaluate the field by taking stock of the old boundaries drawn by traditional narratives supported by physical archives and finding ways to grow in new directions. Instead of being seen as competing aspects of film scholarship, film history and theory should be seen, as these works suggest, as operating in tandem. Historians work to continually fine-tune timelines, uncover production details, and expand our knowledge of different forms of social and cultural engagement with cinema. This gives theorists material to ponder and challenges the field at large with

14 Richard Maltby, “Perhaps Everyone Has Forgotten How Pictures Were Shown to the Public”: Continuous Performance and Double Billing in the 1930s,” in Biltereyst, Maltby, and Meers, *New Cinema History*, 161.

15 Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers, “Connections, Intermediality, and the Anti-Archive: A Conversation with Robert C. Allen,” in Biltereyst, Maltby, and Meers, *New Cinema History*, 17.

16 Maltby and Meers, 24.

17 Maltby and Meers, 25.

18 Thissen, “Cinema History,” 124.

19 Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 127.

provocative questions about what cinema means to different people, how it operates around the world, and how the medium shapes our perspectives. With the new historical turn expanding film history catalogues at many university presses, Gaines, Groo, and the contributors to *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* remind us that we should never stop questioning *how* and *why* we write cinema history.

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