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'Out of this world (cinema): French cinema studies now'
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Durham, Carolyn A. (1998) *Double Takes: Culture and Gender in French Films and their American Remakes* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England) xiv + 246 pp. ISBN 0-87451-874-1 (pb).

Greene, Naomi (1999) *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press) viii +274 pp. ISBN 0-691-00475-7 (pb).

Mazdon, Lucy (2000) *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French Cinema* (London: BFI) vi + 169 pp. ISBN 0-85170-801-3 (pb).

Vincendeau, Ginette ((2000) *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London & New York: Continuum) xii +275 pp. ISBN 0-8264-4731-7 (pb).

In recent years, French cinema, in academic and film distribution circles, has joined the ranks of 'everything-which-isn't-Hollywood', nesting in the catch-all category of 'World Cinema'. At the same time, the past five years have seen an explosion, not just in French cinema itself, with the advent of a new generation of young filmmakers, but also in major books on French cinema in the UK and the USA, special issues of major journals (*Screen* and *Nottingham French Studies*, both in 1993, *French Cultural Studies* in 1996, and *Australian Journal of French Studies* in 1999), and in the establishment of a new journal and association devoted entirely to French cinema in 2001, *Studies in French Cinema*. The reasons behind this explosion are no doubt the RAE, the centenary of the cinema in 1995, but more obviously the gradual increase of staff teaching and researching French cinema courses in French/Modern Languages university degrees.

To put this in perspective, there are now some 45 staff in universities in the UK alone regularly publishing material on French cinema. This compares well with staff in Spanish and Latin American (about 30) and German (about 20) in the UK. It seems to me that these factors make French cinema stand out, in research terms at least, from the others in the 'World Cinema' category; hence my (provocative) title. The purpose of this review article, however, as my subtitle suggests, is more humble. It is to survey the current state of French cinema studies (both French and Anglo-American, but more the latter, for reasons I shall return to), with a particular emphasis on determining current shifts in the discipline, as well as considering in some more detail a few of the more recent major publications, as listed above.

New courses mean new markets for publishers, and there has consequently been an increase in particular in general histories, compendia, and single-film studies. It also means new theoretical approaches as colleagues develop new ways of talking about French cinema. An example of what I mean is Jeff Kline's brilliant revisioning of the New Wave, along with the cinema of the 1930s, the most canonical of areas in French cinema studies, through the lens of intertextuality (Kline 1992). It is auteur studies

and general histories, however, which have dominated academic work on the French cinema since the 1960s.

In the latter category, there has been in recent years Williams in English (1992), and occasioned by the centenary, two very large volumes in French (Billard 1995, Frodon 1995). Following on from Susan Hayward's rather different conceptualization of the history of the French cinema in the opening volume of the Macmillan national cinema series she edits (Hayward 1993), there have been significant volumes in English focusing on specific periods. The interest of these volumes is that instead of mapping out a general history where individual films are lucky to get more than a few lines of text devoted to them (the thumbnail approach), these more recent works have critical agendas, and develop new ways of thinking about periods of French cinema. In silent cinema, there has been the groundbreaking work of Richard Abel (1984, 1994), who has almost single-handedly put the earliest periods on the critical map. In what most of us now call the 'classical French cinema', there have been two major volumes in the mid- to late 90s (Andrew 1995, Crisp 1997). In the post-New Wave period, there have been histories which do not try to be all-encompassing, but select specific genres, directors, or approaches. Forbes (1992) has chapters on less-well-known directors, such as Allio and Garrel, for example; Austin (1996) has a substantial chapter on the *cinéma du look*, an important but under-researched area of 1980s production; and Powrie (1997) focuses on the 1980s through the lens of gender studies.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the publication in French and in English of numerous auteur studies, with a particular emphasis on New Wave directors such as Truffaut and Godard. In English, it is worth singling out major studies on Resnais (Monaco 1978), Renoir (Sesonske 1980), and Gance (King 1984). 'Auteurism' as a concept was much questioned during the blockbuster 80s, with the *Cahiers du cinéma* mounting a spirited defence. This did not of course prevent large numbers of volumes, in France particularly, devoted to the canonical New Wave directors. Anglophone auteur studies have recently taken off again with the vibrant Manchester University Press 'French Director' series, whose first volume was published in 1998. Not least amongst its merits is the coverage of directors who are not from the French classical period or the New Wave. At the time of writing there have been volumes on Besson (Hayward 1998), Bresson (Reader 2000), Chabrol (Austin 1999), Kurys (Tarr 1999), Méliès (Ezra 2000b), Renoir (O'Shaughnessy 2000), Serreau (Rollet 1998), Truffaut (Holmes and Ingram 1998) and Varda (Smith 1998), with volumes on Beineix, Blier, Carax, Cocteau, Duras, Godard, Leconte, Resnais, Tavernier, Téchiné and Vigo to appear in the next couple of years. An additional interest of this series is that in general the conceptual approach taken is a the combination of what one might call the old-style auteurist approach, but placed in crisis, with the conceptual paradigms which developed during the 1970s in mainstream film theory, most importantly feminist film theory. Quite apart from the statement made by publishing three of the first six volumes on women film directors, the approach taken by authors on men directors such as Besson and Chabrol has been heavily influenced by feminist paradigms.

Single-film studies (whether chapters in books or monographs) began in earnest in the late 1980s in both France and the UK. They have increased in the 1990s, complementing the general history approach with careful and sustained analysis of individual films. There have been significant anthologies of essays on individual

films, beginning with the influential *French Film: Texts and Contexts* (Hayward and Vincendeau 1990, reprinted in 2000), covering films over the whole of the 20th century, followed by two on 1990s films (Powrie 1999, Mazdon 2001). There have also been short monographs devoted to individual films, some more research-led than others. For example, the BFI's 'Classics' series, a 360-strong list of which 50 have so far been published, has (so far) seven French titles. This is more than the six British films in the series so far; and when you place this in the context of the rest of Europe (Germany with four, Russia with one, Italy with three, and two Bergmans), I may perhaps be forgiven for making my provocative opening comments (and sounding like a triumphalist French football team tallying its European scores). The French films dealt with in the series are *L'Age d'or*, *L'Atalante*, *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, *César*, *Les Enfants du paradis*, *La Nuit américaine*, *Last Year in Marienbad*, *Napoleon*, and *Pépé le Moko*. Meanwhile, in France, there has been a similar development of single-film studies for the university market, with some twelve out of thirty handbooks published by Nathan in their (admittedly now-defunct) 'Synopsis' series on French films. The directors represented are mostly classic French cinema or New Wave: Carné, Demy, Godard, Ophüls, Pialat, Renoir, Resnais, Truffaut.

Histories, auteur studies, and single-film studies will no doubt continue, although the shift to 'World Cinema' has meant that French cinema studies often rubs shoulders, productively it has to be said, despite my provocative opening, with more general European cinema studies, as for example in Forbes and Street (2000). What interests me more for the purposes of this article, is to determine the paradigm shifts which are occurring within these types of generic studies, as well as in more research-focused volumes. Put briefly, these are, in my view, and in no particular order, the historical study of the silent period, audience study, star studies, the focus on historical crisis and trauma, and, finally, cultural identity with a strong emphasis on the Franco-American debate (remakes).

The emphasis on early cinema history and the related focus of audience reception is taking time to establish itself in French cinema studies. This is because the dominant paradigm in Anglophone French cinema studies remains the gender studies focus emanating from psychoanalytically-inspired and feminist-inspired spectatorship theory (a key volume, now in its second edition, exemplifying this trend is Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's 1990 study of the films of three women directors). More general film studies scholarship, however, has moved significantly away from this paradigm towards the early history of (Hollywood) film, and the analysis of specific audiences. This occurred as a result of the perceived impasses of spectatorship theory and the development during the 1980s of the empiricist and formalist Historical Poetics of the anti-'Grand Theory' Wisconsin School (Bordwell, Carroll, Staiger and Thompson). Fifteen years on from the great debates between Screen theorists and empiricists in the pages of *Screen*, there is evidence of a shift in this direction by scholars in French cinema studies, such as Darren Waldron and his work on *Gazon Maudit* (2001). As yet, though, there is no substantial work in this area, nor even a transitional study comparable to Jackie Stacey's Hollywood-based *Star-gazing* (1994). On the other hand, work on the early cinema is increasingly done, with the Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma and its periodical being a leading force. Two names in Anglophone French cinema studies stand out in this respect. Richard Abel, as mentioned above, and Elizabeth Ezra (see her work on Méliès, Ezra 2000b, and the chapter on Josephine Baker's French films in Ezra 2000a) have made sustained

interventions in this area, which is attracting an increasing number of younger scholars. Paul Sutton, for example, has in a recent thesis investigated Feuillade's *Les Vampires* in relation to Assayas's 'remake' *Irma Vep*, and has also reconsidered early cinema spectatorship and its relation to trauma in the same thesis (2001).

Star Studies is very much associated with the work of Richard Dyer of Warwick University. His colleague Ginette Vincendeau has, amongst other things, worked systematically on French stars during the 1990s, her work in this area culminating in a recent volume, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*. This builds on her major work on Jean Gabin published in France in 1993. The two volumes taken together are a formidable intervention in what is becoming a vigorous area of enquiry in scholarship on several national cinemas.¹ The volume begins with a remarkable analysis of the French star system. Vincendeau points out the closeness of screen and stage in the history of stardom in France, one amongst several differences with the Hollywood star system outlined in the volume, another being its artisanal nature, due to the absence of vertically-organized studios. The introduction also anchors the star system within other key promotional vehicles, such as the various fanzines, the relationship with television, and shows how, unsurprisingly, there is a gulf between what one could call the quantity and quality issues: the biggest stars historically are less well-known than those who have been consecrated in academic and cinephile work. The most fascinating part of the introduction, and the strength of the volume as a whole, deals with issues of stereotype and identity; more specifically, how particular stars 'embody' the French nation. Particular attention is paid to the appearance of the stars: Bardot's combination of *gamine* (the fringe) and mature womanliness (the beehive), Belmondo's drooping cigarette, and the air of 'superior indifference' (166) it creates, fetishizing shots of Delon which construct a 'cruel beauty' at the service of lifestyle advertising (176), showing the shift away from subject-oriented identification (with Gabin, say) to 'spectatorial desire for a commodity: a face, a body, locations, consumer goods' (184). There are many more insights, such as Vincendeau's analysis of Deneuve's image as 'the simultaneous representation of extreme beauty and its defilement, from reverence to rape rolled into one image' (203), or Binoche whose 'sexy melancholy' 'combines the sexual appeal of French female icons (...) with the anguish of male stars' (250), sexualizing anguish, as Vincendeau so memorably puts it; or the characterization of New Wave acting as a '*combination* of authenticity and *décalage*, which parallels the filmmakers' paradoxical drive to realism and personal expression' (118; her emphasis), and the teasing out of Jeanne Moreau's importance as the key New Wave actress who concentrated 'the values of romantic love, sensuality, sensitivity and modernity', and in so doing 'brought a feminized surface to the New Wave which superimposed itself on its male and misogynist foundations' (130). By contrast, Louis de Funès, 'born middle-aged', Pujadist 'hero of the *France profonde*' (150), represented the antithesis of the New Wave's youth culture, grounded in middle-class values, but is of interest precisely because those values were under attack; his rage and dysfunctional masculinity are as much symptoms of social change in the 1960s as Bardot's hairstyle.

Several of the chapters may well have appeared in different forms during the 1990s (Bardot, Binoche, Deneuve, Depardieu and Gabin); however, these have been

¹ For example, Chris Perriam's work on Spanish male stars, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2002.

updated, sometimes quite considerably, and the completely new material (on the female stars of the New Wave, Belmondo, Delon, Linder, and de Funès; the chapters on the last two, are quite brilliant), when placed next to the earlier work, make this, in my view, and despite some remarkable work by other scholars, the single most important volume in French cinema studies of 2000. Quite apart from the strategic importance for the discipline of working on stars (both because this complements single-film studies and because star study explores issues of cultural identity), Vincendeau's limpid exposition anchored in extensive research worn lightly turns the *pensum* of scholarship into a pleasure. Amongst others working in this area, there is Arnaud Chapuy, with a major volume on Martine Carol published in France, and there are a number of scholars who have recently produced conference papers on stars; for example, Graeme Hayes on Alain Delon (2001), and myself on the 1920s star Pierre Batcheff (2001). Star studies is clearly an area which will expand.

Two historical issues have dominated French cinema scholarship in the 1990s: war and colonialism/postcolonialism. In the latter category, Sherzer (1996), Norindr (1996), and Ezra (2000a) have explored colonial and postcolonial issues (and a special mention should be made here of Carrie Tarr's consistent body of work, as yet uncollected in a volume, on Beur films). Dine (1994), like Atack (1999), is not entirely devoted to cinema, but is an important intervention in thinking through the Algerian crisis in film, as is Atack's volume in relation to May 1968, that ever-fertile ground for debate. French historians, and French society more widely, have, however, shown more interest in WW2 during the 1990s than May 1968 or Algeria, with well-publicized affairs of collaborators such as Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon causing considerable navel-gazing; hardly surprising then that there should be a number of volumes on the Occupation and related issues, such as Colombat (1993) and Chateau (1996).

Of particular interest here is Naomi Greene's *Landscapes of Loss*, which examines what one might call, in a Proustian sense, the involuntary memorialization of the traumatic past. Whereas the focus of Higgins (1996) is very period-specific (and includes some literary texts as well as the films of Resnais, Truffaut and Malle), Greene ranges wider. There is a chapter which explores the way in which Resnais focuses on amnesia and repression, and, given the dearth of work on Tavernier, a fascinating chapter on his historical films showing how they chronicle liminally the collapse of the Marxist 'Grand Narrative'. There is a final chapter which shows how the films of the *cinéma du look* (*Diva*, *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf*, *Delicatessen*) have recycled nostalgically the community films of the 1930s. The chapters which interest me more for the purposes of this discussion, however, are the two which are articulated around broader themes and placed firmly in the context of contemporary debates in French historical writing. There is a chapter which explores what the French historian Henri Rousso called 'The Vichy syndrome' in film, the truth value of *Le chagrin et la pitié* being contrasted with the myth of resistancialism in *Lacombe Lucien* and *Le dernier metro*. Greene's placing of these films in the context of 'Jewish memory' vehicled through documentaries highlights the slippery nature of fiction only too well as a means of forgetting while seeming to remember, a Pascalian *divertissement* if ever there was one. There is also a chapter devoted to colonial films, which focuses principally on two very contrasting films, and their difficulty in 'representing a past both unforgettable and yet inadmissible' (134), Schoendoerffer's *Le crabe-tambour* and Roüan's *Outremer*. Greene is particularly good on the latter

film, with its 'displacement and ellipses, the repetitions and fragmented images, (...) dreams' (146), and illuminatingly shows how these films can be compared with the work of the historian Pierre Nora, whose *Les lieux de la mémoire* (1986-1992) has, along with Rousso's work, been a defining moment in history-writing.

Whereas Greene explores trauma through contemporary French historians, Emma Wilson has used the work of the more psychoanalytically-inspired Cathy Caruth, amongst others. Two recent volumes (Wilson 1999 and 2000) are particularly interesting for their application of 'trauma theory' to films concerning WW2 and Kieślowski respectively. This, when taken with the work which has been done by many, including myself, on the French heritage film, suggests that revisiting the past in film has become a fertile area of analysis.

The final area I would like to explore also involves revisiting. It is recent work on the remake, to which two important volumes have been devoted in the last couple of years. Both Lucy Mazdon and Carolyn Durham take issue with the standard view of remakes, whether by French or American reviewers, that somehow the remake must always be worse, a debased version of a high-art original. Mazdon's opening chapters on the context of production and the history of the remake show how many other factors need to be taken into account, not least the frequent exchanges of financing, personnel and themes between the French and American industries. These suggest rather more interaction and cross-fertilization than most reviewers would allow for. Mazdon is particularly good at explaining differences in 'original' and remake by locating films in the context of their production and reception; thus, for example, the Hays Production Code caused significant plot changes in the 1938 remake of *Pépé le Moko*.

Most of Mazdon's book, like Durham's, deals with remakes since 1980, however. There are illuminating discussions about *Trois hommes et un couffin/Three Men and a Cradle* (also dealt with by Durham), and *Mon père ce héros/My Father the Hero*, focusing on issues of gender and particularly paternity; *Le Retour de Martin Guerre/Sommersby*, a comparison of which shows how both 'enable representation and/or critique of national myths and the construction of national identities' (78). Mazdon's choices of remakes are mostly comedies: *Un éléphant ça trompe énormément/The Woman in Red*; *Le Grand blond avec une chaussure noire/The Man with One Red Shoe*; *La Totale/True Lies*; and *La Cage aux folles/The Birdcage*. As she points out, the fact that it is mainly French comedies which are remade by Hollywood gives the lie to the standard view that the original connotes 'high art', since French comedies, in France at least, are not connoted as such.

Mazdon also looks at a few thrillers, principal amongst which are *Nikita/The Assassin* and *A bout de souffle/Breathless*, a pair also analysed by Durham. Interestingly, whereas Durham points out how McBride works towards coherence and inclusiveness with his camera, with Godard preferring discontinuity and rupture in gender relations, Mazdon sees fragmentation and incoherence in the remake. Both agree, however, that *Three Men and a Cradle* is more concerned to assert heterosexuality and masculinity than the French 'original'.

Durham's chapter on *Trois hommes et un couffin*, published originally in 1992, and here updated with material on *Three Men and a Little Lady*, is a remarkable piece of

writing. It shows how there is incompatibility between the drugs plot (male) and the domesticity plot (female), a confusion erased by the US version which masculinizes the narrative by including sequences familiar in action films. Durham also shows how the ideologies of the two films are moulded by different feminist contexts: women in the French film are excluded, because French feminists promulgated radical differences between the sexes, while the US remake does not reject women, stressing rather the equality of parenting, as might be expected from the different Anglo-American feminist tradition. Similarly, with patient and detailed comparison of cinematography and *mise en scène*, Durham shows how cultural issues affect the remake; for example, in Schumacher's remake of *Cousin Cousine*, the French emphasis on freedom gives way to a very American emphasis on happiness, a general point also made by Mazdon, who shows how French acceptance of infidelity (in this case in *Un éléphant ça trompe énormément/The Woman in Red*) becomes moral lesson in the American remake. I particularly liked Durham's straightforwardness when trying to tease out specific issues; she points out for example how 'it is useful for a feminist critic to be reminded that not only is gender not the only issue, sometimes it's not an issue at all' (122).

Another view of the remake, advanced by Mazdon, but questioned by Durham, is that Hollywood chooses French films to minimize the risk factor. Much more interesting is her claim that Hollywood remakes films because they are consistent with the US cultural climate. Commenting on what she rightly says is 'the otherwise astonishing decision to remake *La Cage aux folles*', she suggests that '*The Birdcage* is in so many ways the logical continuation of Hollywood's ongoing exploration of the homoerotic subtext that both consistently underlies the development of male friendships on screen and accompanies changes in traditional masculine roles within the family' (200). At a time when the French state has successfully managed to argue for French 'cultural exception' in the 1993 GATT round, and carries on jealously guarding its cultural heritage, it is particularly useful to have two cogently-argued and detailed volumes on the apparently raw nerve of the remake.

I am conscious of course that by focusing principally on published volumes rather than conference papers and journal articles in this review article, I may well have misrepresented some aspects of current trends in French cinema studies. Nevertheless, I think it is relatively uncontroversial to say that the main areas of investigation currently fall within the broad paradigms of gender studies and socio-historical studies. Within these broad areas, I would contend that, although the academic genres of the film history and the auteur study are still dominant, if inflected by the paradigms mentioned, the new trends are towards the study of early cinema; star studies; historical trauma; and what one might call the crisis in cultural identity.

Until now, a paradigm gulf seems to have existed between Anglophone and Francophone film studies. Schematically, one could say that the former seems to have been characterized by gender studies, while the latter, with honourable exceptions seems to have been characterized by aesthetic concerns.² It is reassuring, then, that in these latest trends I have highlighted, the two academic cultures seem to be growing

² For example, the work of Bonitzer and Aumont, whose more influential volumes were published in the 1980s; an honourable exception is Sellier & Burch (1996).

closer, with the possible exception (paradoxically, since it involves the bringing together of Anglophone and Francophone) of work on *le remake*.

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