BOOK REVIEW

The Europeanness of European cinema: identity, meaning, globalization

Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina (Eds)

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xiii + 267 pp., illus., bibliography, index, £58.00 (cloth)

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AQ1

According to its editors, the aim of *The Europeanness of European cinema* is 'to revisit the issue of the significance of European cinema as a category in the wake of the recent acceleration in transnational filmmaking and globalization as a whole' (p. 7). Taking the transnational prominence of European cinema as a starting point, the anthology's introduction presents some brief reflections about what 'Europeanness' – the central, overarching concept for the various chapters – has meant historically up to the present day. Although attempts to pinpoint the characteristics of 'Europeanness' are always questionable, as 'Europe' is as much a social, contingent and dynamic construction as other politically or geographically defined entities, the editors take on a nuanced approach, ending with the observation that 'Europe is more visible than ever, but its image is also more negative than ever' (p. 5), a contradiction inviting cinematic and scholarly reflections.

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The book is divided into three more or less coherent thematic sections, offering 15 chapters (mainly written by UK based authors) on issues of representation, production, distribution and reception of European cinema. The first section is the most encompassing one in terms of contributing to the bigger picture of European cinema. It provides chapters by some of the established authors in European cinema debates, such as Thomas Elsaesser, who makes some insightful reflections on European cinema's contemporary 'general condition of marginality and irrelevance' (p. 25) and the issues of freedom this condition raises, thereby illustrating his argument by focusing on Michael Haneke's *Das weiße Band* (*The White Ribbon*, 2009). Tim Bergfelder shifts the attention to the concept of 'popular European cinema' and what it signifies today by studying the generic traditions and cultural hierarchies in contemporary European cinema.

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The next two chapters approach European cinema from an industrial standpoint by focusing on the practice of co-productions. While Mariana Liz explores the shifting meaning of the 'Euro-pudding' concept, Anne Jäckel investigates the role of the Council of Europe's fund Eurimages for European co-productions, thereby emphasizing the European level in the idea of public funding mechanisms as one of the key defining features of European cinema. Interestingly, Jäckel does not only take into account the institutional and industrial side of the story, but

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rightly asks questions about the relation between European film policy (also in the form of the EU's LUX prize) and the textual dimensions of the films. While Eurimages' aims are to promulgate 'European values' and 'identity', the films under consideration are often concerned with social and moral issues, not at least by focusing on issues of migration and displacement, and as such challenge 'the very notions of cultural, national and even European identity' (p. 66). The first section closes with a chapter by Catherine Wheatley on the place of Christianity in contemporary European cinema, thereby highlighting the differences with North America, and Greg De Cuir Jr.'s analysis of the representation of the Roma in *The Feather Collectors* (1967, Aleksandar Petrović).

The second section of the book tackles some of the major concepts in film studies: stardom, language and genre. Two chapters focus on the problematic issue of European film stardom. Olof Hedling departs from the intriguing contrast between the large number of stars in European football and the lack of stars in European cinema. Although some things might be said about the 'medium specificity' of both forms of popular culture and their different relations with the USA, Hedling links the problematic character of European film stardom primarily with the still prevailing dominance of national film support mechanisms and the 'cultural exception' idea in European film policy. Ginette Vincendeau goes into dialogue with Hedling. She points out that contemporary European film stardom is indeed rare, but possible, as the case of Juliette Binoche and her surrounding sense of 'Europeanness' indicate. The three other chapters in this section deal with another much discussed issue in European cinema debates: language, particularly the use of English in European films. While Mary Harrod examines contemporary French comedies and insightfully discerns various stances on the use of English and *Franglais*, Laëticia Kulyk provides a quantitative analysis of the use of English in European films between 1990 and 2010. Furthermore, by focusing on the films of Jacques Tati and the Swedish comedy duo Hasseåtage, Alison Smith shows how multilingual comedies can celebrate language diversity.

The third section brings together four last chapters on various aspects of European cinema. It opens with Neil Archer's analysis of 'Europhobic' content in French film director Pierre Morel's first three films. While these films can easily be positioned within a 'Hollywood style' of film making, Archer rather argues to see them as 'motivated by a commercial imperative which, within a global cinematic market still dominated by Hollywood, demands that wide-export European cinemas accommodate dominant cinematic norms' (p. 196). Lucy Mazdon continues the Hollywood-European cinema reflection by focusing on the Hollywood remake *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011, David Fincher) of the Swedish/Danish co-production *Män som hatar kvinnor* (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2009). These two chapters confirm that the relations to Hollywood cinema, together with the art-commerce dichotomy, are still major issues characterizing (discourses on) European cinema. In the next chapter, Sally Faulkner pays particular attention to the creative decisions taken in the production phase of films and conceptualizes Spanish heritage films as 'European' cinema due to their strong associations with British television and film. The final chapter shows how the films of Pavel Lungin, focusing on Russia, were met with critical appreciation in Europe, but evoked rather negative responses in the director's home country. Throughout her

discussion, Alissa Timoshkina demonstrates how the ‘Europeanness’ of films can also be constructed through the films’ contexts, in this case by gaining critical acclaim at the Cannes film festival.

The focus on the ‘European’ element in the ‘European cinema’ concept may not be as innovative as the book’s marketing tagline may suggest – didn’t previous works on European cinema do something similar? – but this takes nothing away from the volume’s intrinsic value. This new anthology on the fast evolving area of European cinema, offering some of the most recent scholarly insights and reflections on current hot issues, is most welcome.

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