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Book Review

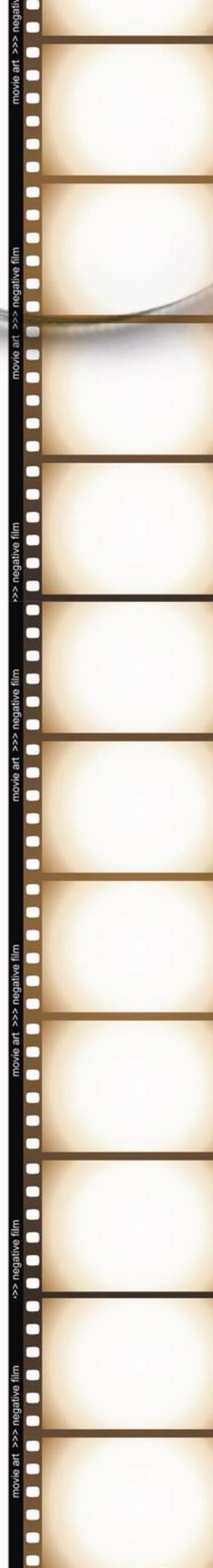
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Global Cinematic Cities: New Landscape of Film and Media falls under the category of books – proliferated in the past decades – which gravitate towards rethinking the ontology of a particular discipline in the situation of digital revolution and/or globalization. Not quite introducing the new theories or approaches, such publications look at how a particular field has emerged and is emerging as we read – with the development of technologies and global processes.

The editors of the volume, Johan Andersson and Lawrence Webb, make their task more challenging by looking into two cases at once – film studies and urban studies – and their combinations within the array of interdisciplinary enquiry. Interestingly, it is exactly globalization and the rapid development of digital technologies that make these disciplines merge and complement one another, as the editors reveal in the introduction. Film studies are ‘remapping’ their understanding of national cinema in the context of the transnational and the global. Urban studies, in turn, are dramatically influenced by the audiovisual media and their role in the production of space. The purpose of the volume, therefore, is in the exploration of these evolving relationships, while a specific emphasis is put onto rethinking the basic terms and concepts of both film and urban studies.

One of with the most important terms in this regards is of course ‘the cinematic city’ from the title. The volume is structured to explore this concept in four thematic blocks. Transnational Screen Cities present the strongest theoretical case of the book with Thomas Elsaesser’s comprehensive exploration of generic and cluster cities and cinema in the global. Elsaesser starts with the claim that any discussion of a ‘cinematic city’ today is grounded in the semantic field of ‘Modernity’, which he traces back to the ideas of Charlotte Brunsdon, Frederic Jameson, and

Walter Benjamin among others. Then what does the global city add to or take away from the modernist and postmodern ones? The answer lays in economic and cultural networks, including film festivals, behind-the-scene agencies, and most importantly, in the trope of ‘cinematic city’ as discussed in the urbanist discourse by Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas and Robert Venturi. Following these discussions, Elsaesser proposes to add to the global city two important modalities, what he calls ‘generic city’ and ‘cluster city’, and to look at such global cities through the lens of film festival circuit.

‘Traversing the Oresund: The Trans-National Urban Region in Bron/Broen’ by Pei-Sze Chow presents an original case study on the ways a particular cinematic representation of two cities reshaped the identity of two nations. Base on the Danish-Swedish co-production of the TV series Bron/Broen, Chow demonstrates how cinematic discourse has influenced real identities and cultural memory of the Oresund region.

The next section, Global City Imageries, takes the reader to three non-European urban landscapes – Buenos Aires, Los Angeles and Kolkata – with valuable discussions of the way cinematic imagery works in these contexts. Based on Thomas Elsaesser’s discussions of ‘cinophilia’ and Gaston Bachlard’s concept of ‘topophilia’, Malini Guha pictures Bengali cinema in its struggle to embrace globalization with the notions of displacement and dislocations.

Public Screens and New Media Landscapes takes cinematic imagery beyond the film screen to what Chris Berry in his contribution on public screens in Cairo and Shanghai calls ‘post-cinematic screen culture of the glance’, while Yomi Braester presents an exciting case study of a surveillance cameras in one particular Uniqlo shop in China.

Finally, New Narrative Topographies present alternative forms of storytelling in the city, from immigrant experience in contemporary French cinema, to social mobility in Korean gangster noir and chase sequence and transport infrastructure in global Hollywood spy films.

Altogether, the volume does a great job in showcasing diverse and fresh examples from truly global backgrounds, which perfectly illustrates the shift towards interdisciplinarity even in such established fields as film and urban studies.

However, when it comes to theoretical framework of the articles in the collection, such an open approach makes it difficult to connect and compare, to build up one strong united narrative, that very ontology of the disciplines the authors were referring to in the introduction. At the same time, demonstrating the complexity and hybridity of global cinematic city as a concept of enquiry is in itself a valuable task, which is performed here with comprehension and great enthusiasm.

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