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### Film-Kino-Zuschauer: filmrezeption/ Film—Cinema—Spectator: film reception

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2013.765098>**Film-Kino-Zuschauer: filmrezeption/Film—Cinema—Spectator: film reception**

IRMBERT SCHENK, MARGRIT TRÖHLER and YVONNE ZIMMERMAN (Eds)

Marburg, Germany, Schüren Verlag GmbH, 2010

482 pp., €29.90 (paper)

*Film-Cinema-Spectator: film reception* is a substantial tome in every sense of the term, containing German translations of important pieces originally published in English, such as Annette Kuhn's essay on heterotopy (pp. 27–41), and Thomas Elsaesser's analysis of spectating practices in early cinema (pp. 137–58). The book incorporates some fascinating interventions from different parts of the globe for English-speaking readers as well. Originally published in French, Michèle Lagny's 'Historicizing Film Reception' rejects any totalizing theories of reception; at best, scholars can produce 'abounding and fragmentary' analyses of audience reaction. However, such 'micro-histories' are collectively extremely significant, as they reveal how films are consumed in different contexts (pp. 75–85).

Several contributions reveal the ways in which German approaches to audience reception have been influenced by cultural studies—for example Rainer Winter and Sebastian Nestler's 'Doing Cinema,' which focuses on the ways in which the Mexican film *Amores Perros* (Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, 2000) was consumed in different territories. I was fascinated by Sabine Hake's discussion of Béla Balázs—one of the great German theoreticians of the Weimar period, whose work did not appear in English translation until 2001. Unlike his near-contemporary Siegfried Kracauer, who read the entertainment needs of the people in progressive terms, and possibly emancipatory, mass culture, Balázs turned to the past to illustrate film's potentially redemptive qualities. Although understanding that film was shaped by capitalism, he believed that it could engender new ways of seeing; the promise of a better life such as one might experience through a fairy tale (p. 165). For Balázs, film was form of folk art, a means of compensating for the experience of fragmentation and shock in the early 20th century (p. 166). His position was the direct antithesis of the leftist materialism embraced by Eisenstein or Walter Benjamin; he favoured holistic concepts such as 'life and experience to reclaim the unity of the subject against the shocks of modernity' (166). Hake believes that Balázs' writings have been largely dismissed by film scholars more preoccupied with the relationship between cinema and modernity. However, Balázs transcends the kind of binary oppositions—passivity/activity, bourgeois/proletarian, knowledge/ignorance—that used to dominate reception studies, especially in the Anglo-American context. Rather he sets forth an active approach to spectatorship that treats film-goers as active presences, utilizing their experience of cinema to initiate change.

Some of the other contributions to *Film-Cinema-Spectator: film reception* cast doubt on whether Balázs' views actually work in practice. Stephen Lowry's piece on 'Movie Reception and Popular Culture in the Third Reich' discusses how films stimulated patterns of consumption—the desire for fashion, interior design or

household goods. They were supported by advertisements in other media such as newspapers and magazines (p. 225). Such strategies were not dissimilar to those used in Hollywood during the same period: through skilful advertising campaigns, audiences were introduced to alternative lifestyles that could be embraced if they were prepared to part with their hard-earned dollars. Helmut Korte's theoretical piece 'Reconstructing Historical Effects' comes to a similar conclusion: through adept manipulation of the *mise-en-scène* individual film-makers can render their messages 'plausible and attractive' and hence 'influence the standards of people's behaviour' (p. 243).

This view might suggest a certain degree of cultural homogeneity: German spectators, like their American counterparts, were readily manipulated by capitalist producers and their allies. However, Philippe Meers Daniel Biltreyst and Lies Van der Vijver offer a convincing piece of research on 'Minuets, Movies and Cinemagoing' that makes a mockery of such assumptions. Through a series of interviews with film-goers in Antwerp and Ghent, who spent their formative years in the Thirties and Forties at the cinema, the researchers discovered just how idiosyncratic they were in their preferences. One respondent claimed that Hollywood films were 'all about glamour and love'—completely different in terms of theme and structure from the French and Italian films (that formed the bulk of the film-going diet at that time), which were 'more the real life like it was in that period in Europe' (p. 326). Another opined that American films were 'too much blabla. So over the top' (p. 326). People went to the cinema at that time because it was cheap, accessible and offered a site of emancipation: 'Movie-going was part of a *rite de passage*, whereby childhood memories while teenagers (and their partners) were engaged in going to city-centre cinemas' (p. 333). Perhaps Balázs was right after all; at certain points in history, film-goers use the experience of film-going to forge better lives for themselves.

*Film-Cinema-Spectator: film reception* is an inspiring text, reminding us of just how fascinating and culturally diverse the field of reception studies actually is. So long as we bear in mind the specificities of time, place and audience composition, we can obtain a unique insight into the way people consume cinema in different contexts, as well as discovering (or perhaps re-discovering) new ways of writing about or discussing the topic.

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### **What is Media Archaeology?**

JUSSI PARIKKA

Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012

viii + 205 pp., £15.99 (paper)

At first glance, the title of this book might seem to represent a contradiction in terms: in the popular imagination, archaeology is almost exclusively concerned