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□ Stokes, Melvyn & Richard Maltby (Eds):

Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange

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A Review by Heather Nunn

Hollywood Abroad continues critical work on the reception of Hollywood films undertaken by Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes since the late 1990s. Their previous volumes have included essays on early twentieth century film-going experience; the crucial relationship between production strategies and audience's consumption and interpretation of output from the 1920s-1990s; the ways audience reception is crucially bound to recent changes in distribution and exhibition.

Much of the power of Hollywood has resided in its explicit design for 'universal' exhibition; this carefully constructed mass appeal has underpinned its domination of international movie screens since WWI with international markets often providing over half of its earnings since the 1920s. It has become a commonplace of critical approaches to communication technology and cultural identity that Hollywood signifies social, cultural and psychic as well as economic globalisation. The richness of its production values and visual spectacle has ensured Hollywood's mythologized America as an imaginative home to many foreign audiences.

This collection explicitly avoids easy condemnation of the 'Americanisation/ globalisation' of culture and equally the homogenisation of popular audience cinematic experience underlying, for example, some prescriptive work on national cinema which positions itself against Hollywood. *Hollywood Abroad* then, is timely, in tapping into current concerns with media globalisation. Many of its essays share the editors' common interrogation of Hollywood cinema as cultural resource intimately bound to its richly diverse communities of viewers – in Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Australia, India, Japan and Central Africa. These chapters attest not only to Hollywood's global reach but also to the importance of addressing the specificity of viewing context and imaginative possibilities for non-American audiences to fully understand their adoption of Hollywood film.

Costa de Beauregard and Stokes' chapter on the reception of American films in France, 1910-20, covers familiar worn ground. It acknowledges the failure of the French film industry to develop strong vertical integration; its restrictive cinema law and the aggressive export policy of the US post WWI. However, they attempt to introduce the audience into this set of crucial factors. Lacking substantial archival material on cinema-going in the early 20th century, they draw instead on print culture specifically involved with film culture: newspapers such as *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro*; trade journals aimed at

distributors and exhibitors and specialist film journals – all of which produced a cultural repository of information on US movies for the French. They place this textual promotion of American films within the broader cultural context of a growing number of American residents in Paris; a fascination with ‘Americanised’ entertainment such as vaudeville and jazz and the emotional realism of American films with their less theatrical acting and high production values that made better use of the close-up and *mise en scène*.

Nezih Erdogan draws on journalism and letters to the editor in Turkish film magazines of the 1940s to demonstrate Hollywood’s establishment of a commercial hegemony in this decade. He argues convincingly that the magazines constructed a popular Turkish imagination of the US which displaced the former ‘modernisation’ of a now war-torn Europe to represent wealth, technological prowess and freedom. The chapter’s strength lies in the way it illustrates the magazines’ ambivalent articulation of the impracticality of readers’ desires to emigrate to America as utopian dream alongside their perpetuation of the myth of the Hollywood star. Journalists celebrated film icons as embodiment of a democratic ideal – anyone could become a star – and denigrated their lifestyle as offence to Turkish moral codes. Erdogan argues that Turkish journalists search for a home-grown female icon reveals how fantasies of the exotic otherness of America were carefully negotiated through Turkish views on appropriate gendered behaviour.

Charles Ambler, examines the 1940s and 1950s in British-ruled Northern Rhodesia to discuss the evidence of the impact of American films on colonial audiences. The ‘Copperbelt cowboy’ -groups of African boys dressed as Western heroes playing endless games of cowboys and Indians - and the idiom and symbols of Westerns entering popular discourse revealed the appropriation of Hollywood imagery. They enabled an engagement with modernity within a colonialist patrician environment in which concern was expressed for the effect of American culture on African audiences. These audiences may not have had the cultural competencies to closely follow Hollywood plot and narrative but, he argues, they adapted characters and plot of the Western to more locally grounded witchcraft and kinship politics.

Similarly, Priya Jaikumar’s account of the multiple constituencies of Hollywood in colonial India of the 1930s and 1940s reveals a continuum of responses to Hollywood film from the British state and Indian nationalists who shared an opposition to American films; the former through their institutional anxiety over effect on colonial subjects and the latter for the imported films’ perceived debasement of cinema. In-between fell a variety of constituencies including Indian journalists and British and Indian viewers who responded to the films through registers of trade or culture and ‘responded to them as a cinematic achievement worthy of imitation, as a rationalised business practice, as a pleasurable distraction or an index of modernity’ (p.93).

Hiroshi Kitamura’s analysis of a film theatre in Tokyo between 1947 and 1950 illustrates the role Hollywood film played as emblem of cultural and political democratisation. In the neo-colonial space of postwar Japan, the theatre’s enthusiastic embrace of Hollywood product was evident in the ideologically offering of American films as high culture in both

the film screening to educated audiences of office workers, students and public officials and in its representation of American beliefs and lifestyles in the accompanying printed programmes. Kitamura reveals the dynamics of cross-cultural transmission in a period of Allied occupation to also acknowledge the ways in which Japanese audiences enjoyed a formalised and respectable viewing experience that was uniquely provided by the Japanese film exhibitor.

Michael Hammond's description of a local screening of Thomas Ince's pacifist-inclined war film *Civilisation* at the Palladium Theatre, Southampton, Britain in August 1917 is interesting but flawed. Its strengths lie in the accumulation of historical data to conjure the distribution and exhibition processes in a port town that was the main disembarkation point for soldiers arriving often wounded back from war service on the Western Front. Hammond invokes the locally inflected political and communal events – from the sinking of the *Lusitania* to the suffragist pacifist relationship to local debates about women's rights – and how these may have provided a specific cultural imaginary through which local audiences would have interpreted the film. Less successful was his attempt to create a fictional couple Mabel and Walter, both eighteen, who go to view the film. This account of their viewing experience, largely through the eyes of Mabel, is shot through with gendered assumptions about Mabel's emotional responses to the film as against the barely outlined rational responses of Walter who is sketched as having a firmer sense of the casualties of war through his direct contact with transporting the wounded from the docks. This fictionalisation is not adequate to the documentary evidence and technique of oral history claimed for it by the editor and flaws an otherwise detailed chapter.

Huggett and Bowles' oral histories of local cinema-goers in Illawarra, a region south of Sydney, Australia in the first half of the twentieth century is a fascinating research piece on the local discourses of cinema, community life and social segregation in the context of the Depression. 'Larrikinism', or acting up, was expressed by younger members of the community in the cinema through minor acts of rebellion – ticket-stealing, throwing lollies, testing the patience of older patrons and theatre staff and could be interpreted in hindsight in the context of broader acts of resistance that challenged the capitalist system which was falling apart in regional and rural communities. Local memories of subsidiary cinema experiences – such as the food consumed and seen on screen – mark out the local memories of pleasure that accompany the cinema experience in a given moment and place.

These and other chapters illustrate how the audience is the carefully targeted hub of Hollywood's global commercial nexus but, as this collection also illustrates, the audience negotiates, moderates and inputs American culture into non-American, more immediate structures of feeling and being in nationally or locally-specific ways. *Hollywood Abroad*, reveals the complex assimilation of Hollywood's powerful product revealing less a homogenisation of cinematic experience than culturally specific appropriations.

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