1 General

Colin Crisp, French Cinema: A Critical Filmography. Volume 1, 1929–1939. Volume 2, 1940–1958, 2 vols, Bloomington, Indiana U.P., x + 326, x + 348 pp., is a dense two-part filmography which charts in meticulous and idiosyncratic detail the enormous range of films produced by the French cinema between 1929 and 1958. For too long, French cinema from 1946 to 1958 has been marginalized and underexplored, by virtue of its perceived recourse to moribund storylines and excessive reliance upon production design and star actors. c. frequently makes the point that even as it was being produced, it was being denigrated by François Truffaut and his Cahiers du cinéma colleagues as a vacuous ‘cinema of quality’ in which technical finish supplanted thematic relevance and creativity. To counter this enduring discourse, c. pays close attention to all manner of costume dramas, poetic romances, musicals, and réalisme noir to show how post-war films were often relentlessly bleak: life is meaningless, society a source of constant suffering and oppression, and any attempt to escape is a pitiful illusion. A far cry, it is safe to say, from Truffaut’s cinéma de papa.

Featuring original contributions from top film scholars relating to all aspects of contemporary French cinema, A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema, ed. Alistair Fox et al., Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, xx + 691 pp., presents a comprehensive collection of original essays addressing all aspects of French cinema from 1990 to the present day. Using a diverse range of methodological approaches and perspectives (genre, gender, auteur, industrial, economic, star, postcolonial, psychoanalytic), 27 chapters includes new research on matters relating to the political economy of contemporary French cinema, developments in cinema policy, audience attendance, and the types, building, and renovation of theatres, as well as approaches that focus on documentary, amateur, and digital filmmaking. Essays of note include Martin O’Shaughnessy, ‘Contemporary Political Cinema’ (117–135), Raphaëlle Moine, ‘Contemporary French Comedy as Social Laboratory’ (233–255), Alison J. Murray Levine, ‘Contemporary French Documentary: A Renaissance, 1992–2012’ (356–376), and Nick Rees-Roberts, ‘Hors milieu: Queer and Beyond’ (439–460). Along with the editors’ concise and thought-provoking introduction (1–14), this marvellously eclectic and illuminating should become a mainstay on university reading lists for years to come.

2 History

Guy Austin, ‘Political Depression and Working Practices in Recent French Cinema’, sfc, 15:156–167, addresses the concept of political depression, as defined by Anne Cvetkovich in Depression: A Public Feeling (2012). Drawing comparisons between c. and the more extended interrogation of capitalist working practices in the sociology of Alain Ehrenberg, a. probes how recent French film depictions of the workplace have created representations of loss that might be construed as images of political depression (including a parallel between French corporate working practices and the Holocaust). a. looks closely at Laurent Cantet’s Ressources humaines (1999) and L’Emploi du temps (2001), and Nicolas Klotz’s La Question humaine (2007), addressing the question of agency and resistance and whether they re-
main as possibilities within representations of political depression.

Peter Baxter, ‘The Cinema of Jacques Chirac: Governing the French Film Industry, 1995–2007’, Screen, 56:357–368, is an insightful article that attests to the former President’s vigorous advocacy of France’s system of state assistance to the film industry. B. charts how, from 1995 to 2007, C. worked with Ministers of Culture in governments of right and left to bring state attention to bear on the condition of French film production, distribution and exhibition. Throughout these years, C. took the stage at home and abroad to advance and defend ‘a certain idea of France’ and the cinema’s role in its culture.

Michèle Bissière, ‘L’immigration dans le cinéma français: quelques tendances depuis la fin des années 2000’, CFC, 40:215–233, detects trends in the representation of immigration in French cinema since the end of the 2000s. Films about postcolonial immigration—from the Maghreb, in particular—take a fresh look at the banlieue and continue to explore the past. B. argues that this period has also seen the rise of narratives that focus on Spanish and Portuguese immigrants in France, and of films on illegal immigration that criticize recent immigration policies. B. examines, amongst others, Neulilly sa mère! (Gabriel Julien-Laferrière, 2009), La Cité rose (Julien Abraham, 2013), and Chroniques d’une cour de récré (Brahim Fritah, 2013).

Les Misérables and its Afterlives: Between Page, Stage, and Screen, ed. Kathryn M. Grossman and Bradley Stephens, Farnham, Ashgate, xiv + 232 pp., explores the enduring popularity of Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables (1862) and offer incisive analysis of both the novel itself and its multiple film adaptations. G. and S. draw together essays from across a variety of fields, combining readings of Les Misérables with reflections on some of its multimedia afterlives, including musical theatre and film from the silent period to today’s digital platforms. Delphine Gleizes, ‘Adapting Les Misérables for the Screen: Transatlantic Debates and Rivalries’ (129–142) deepens our understanding of the novel as a work that unites social commentary with artistic vision and raises important questions about the cultural practice of adaptation.

Ben McCann, ‘The Return of Trauner: Late Style in 1970s and 1980s French Film Design’, pp. 157–173 of Framing French Culture, ed. Natalie Edwards, Ben McCann, and Peter Poi ana, Adelaide U.P., vi + 291 pp., examines three of production designer Alexandre Trauner’s late-French-style films—Monsieur Klein (1976), Subway (1985), and ‘Round midnight (1986)—and notes how T.’s creative methodology altered the conception of the set design and its relation to the film director’s role. In the case of T.’s historical reconstructions for this trio of films, the visual, the cinematic, and the discursive are bound together in ways that complicate history’s relationship to an objective retelling, framing very specific historical moments in such a way as to invite a symbolic reading.

Sarah Leahy, ‘Screenwriters in Post-war French Cinema: an Overview’, SFC, 15:11–36, sketches out the landscape of screenwriting in mainstream French cinema in the post-war period (1945–1958). Taking the box office top 20 for each year as its corpus, L. lucidly sets out the situation of screenwriting in France in relation to the variety of genres and types of films favoured by audiences. By examining the way screenwriting is portrayed in the popular film press of the time (notably Cinémonde), L. also re-centres the debates away from the politique des auteurs which dominated the so-called cinéphile press of the time (Cahiers du cinéma, Positif, Arts, etc.) and considers what discourses dominate in a publication which does not have any particular axe to grind with the so-called ‘tradition of quality’. As such, L. also addresses one of the foundation myths of the New Wave—that post-war French film was dominated by a literary cinema which was a cinema mired in convention.