

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



David Clarke, ed. *The Cinematic City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. ix + 252 pp. \$59.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-12746-2; \$220.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-12745-5.

Reviewed by Bianca Freire-Medeiros (Binghamton University)

Published on H-PCAACA (May, 1999)

The Cinematic City covers an extensive list of film genres, cities, and historical contexts, examining the relationship between cityscape and screenscape. Although mostly relying on the theoretical terrain dominated by semiotics, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism, the authors deal comfortably with post-modern and feminist theories. This cross-disciplinary approach derives its collective thrust from Clarke's introductory essay, a compelling analysis of the intersections between cities and films and the pertinence of both terms to the understanding of the (post)modern condition.

The lead essay, by Colin McArthur, sets the context by displaying a theme to be explored in the following chapters: the cinematic city as either a utopian or dystopian symbolic space. Although the emphasis is on Hollywood cinema and the cinema of Weimar Germany, the essay is strong enough to furnish the reader with a theoretical framework suitable for comprehending different genres and periods.

In Chapter Two, Giuliana Bruno writes with power and passion on the travels of both films and people between Naples and New York at the turn of the century. The third chapter, by John Gold and Stephen Ward, has a less poetic tone but is equally competent on its analysis of how British documentary films (1935-52) depicted not only the process of urban planning but also the planner responsible for inventing the future city.

Frank Krutnik is the author of the obligatory chapter on the *noir* city and its tales of crime and self-dislocation. A less explored genre—the “urban confidential”—is analyzed by Will Straw in a rigorously written and lucidly executed essay.

Chapter Six, by Antony Easthope, takes Foucault's notion of heterotopia to analyze the cityscapes presented by Godard's and Antonioni's films of the 1960s. The tensions between modern and postmodern spaces is also the main theme of Marcus Doel and David Clarke's essay. The highly debated *Blade Runner* gains here a refreshing approach and is seen as a modern narrative rather than a postmodern one. Through readings of some 'post-modern' films, Elizabeth Mahoney offers the salutary reminder that the contemporary cityspace is still a gendered and political one.

The last three chapters go deeper on the theoretical issues raised by the preceding articles. Rob Lapsley, heavily relying on Lacanian theory, discusses how central themes such as subjectivity and alterity can be reconceptualized through the examination of the cinematic city. Cinema's comprehensive relation to the city is also investigated by James Hay who raises important questions about academic film history examining the celebrations around cinema's centennial anniversary. The book concludes with Iain Chambers' essay, a trenchant set of reflections on culture, music and memory.

Some of the essays allude to but do not explore audience responses to the cinematic cities. This points to one of the principal shortcomings of the book: devoted mainly to reading the intentions of the creators of such filmic representations, the analyses generally ignore how those images have been interpreted by viewers. Still, the book provides a thought-provoking and imaginative collection of essays.

This review is copyrighted (c) 1999 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations.

It may be reproduced electronically for educational or scholarly use. The Associations reserve print rights and permissions. (Contact: P.C.Rollins at the following electronic address: Rollinspc@aol.com)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pcaaca>

Citation: Bianca Freire-Medeiros. Review of Clarke, David, ed., *The Cinematic City*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. May, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3049>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact P.C. Rollins at Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu or the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.