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## Reviews

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## REVIEWS

### **CINEMA AND POLITICS: TURKISH CINEMA AND THE NEW EUROPE (2009)**

Deniz Bayrakdar (ed.), Aslı Kotaman and Ahu Samav (assisted),  
Uğursoy: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 330 pp.,  
ISBN 978-1443803434 (hbk), £44.99

*Reviewed by İclal Alev Değim, Southern Illinois University*

The discussion of Turkish identity both within the boundaries of the country and outside has been a part of an ongoing debate since Turkey began the long and still-unfinished process of accession to the European Union. Turkish identity, having a multi-layered structure, is connected to various religious, political and social systems that complicate the process of defining ‘the Turk’ and where he or she might stand within a given context. When projected onto the cinema screen, this issue takes on a whole new perspective that both harmonizes a certain aesthetic value while also showing the struggle of ‘Turkish’ characters in society. What is more, the question of origin and ethnic roots comes into play, as in the case of ‘Turkish’ directors who were born and/or who have lived in Europe, such as Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Fatih Akın.

*Cinema and Politics* is a collection of essays that emerge from the eighth annual ‘New Directions of Turkish Film Studies’ conference in 2007, and which relate to the issue of Turkish identity and its representation in cinema. Deniz Bayrakdar’s introduction outlines the major issue that is addressed in almost every article: what is being a ‘son of Turk’, and what does this mean in terms of politics and its relation to cinema? The most interesting example given is the case of Cem Özdemir, a ‘son of Turk’ who was elected co-chair of the German Green Party in 2008. With his election the question of Turkish identity was debated in the European media, especially when considered in light of Turkey’s ongoing EU application. Bayrakdar points to the fact that this

debate not only questioned the nature of Turkish identity, but it also opened up a new platform for Europe to discuss its own definition of identity, too:

Looking at politicians and parliamentarians' discourse on making a living and career in Europe, the Turkish identity is amalgamated in sayings like 'We are more German, we are more Danish'. This dedication of the European Turks to the new country is a 'new identity model' in my opinion, for they tend to build the dynamic character of the 'new European citizen'.

(p. xxiii)

Bayrakdar also mentions that most of the Turks living in Europe believe themselves to be making bridges between the two identities, Turkish and European. The cinema of the 'son of Turk' stands at the core of this issue. Defining and associating artists with a certain country seems to be a common process even though artists often strongly reject it. Bayrakdar points to the differences between the Turkish and European media coverage of such issues in relation to directors and artists. While the Turkish media points to the 'fairy-tale-success stories' (p. xxvii), the European media is unsure how to place and define such people: 'He [Fatih Akın] confuses us. We say so because we cannot accept him either as a Turk or as a German' (p. xxix). This is the central issue that the rest of the book discusses.

The first section starts with Ella Shohat's consideration of the image and its implications in the theological context. Since the beginning of the monotheistic tradition, the image has been prohibited, especially the image of God: Judaism, Christianity and Islam all prohibit 'the practice of "graven images"' (p. 4). Shohat's argument is compelling in addressing the relationship between image and theology and its connection to the visual representation of the sacred on the screen.

The second section of the book is on European cinema. The articles focus on specific films and directors. For example, Frank P. Tomasulo considers the politics of *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), creating links between the political/historical reality of Germany and the film text. Giacomo Manzoli considers Pier Paolo's influence on Italian cinema in the following chapter, while John Hill analyses the realism of Ken Loach's films. Finally, Elif Akçalı discusses the political implications embedded in Lars von Trier's aesthetic choices. *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005) were both shot on sound stages, and their style reflects a certain moral questioning that is interwoven into their respective plots. This questioning becomes important when the final credits show photographs of real life events. Here Akçalı points to a possible connection between von Trier's political views and the storylines that evolve in the unrealistic atmosphere of the sound stage.

The third section of *Cinema and Politics* is on European cinema and migration. Nevena Daković discusses Serbian cinema and its treatment of Serbia's integration with the EU, while Levent Soysal and Bayrakdar consider Turkey's own relationship with Europe as manifested in recent cinema, with the latter looking in particular at Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite/The Edge of Heaven* (2007). Zeynep Koçer offers a cogent analysis of the late Halit Refiğ's often-overlooked *Gurbet Kuşları/Birds of Exile* (Turkey, 1964), while Murat Akser and Eylem Kaftan consider Yılmaz Güney's cinema in terms of his political statements and the effects of performance in his films. Güney stands out as one of the most important figures in Turkish political cinema, especially

through his portrayal of prison life, and Akser and Kaftan's essays work well as a complement to Hamid Naficy's (2003) recent analysis of Güney's work as part of the 'transnational independent genre'.

Kaya Özkarcılar, Müberra Yüksel and Hande Yedidal all discuss the notion of nationalism in Turkish cinema, with Yedidal focusing on the image of the invincible Turk and its evolution from comic strip to the movie screen. Yedidal's essay in particular stands out for its consideration of an important aspect of Turkish cinema that has not yet been thoroughly explored. 'The history, constructed in the name of creating a national memory and strengthening the sense of belonging,' writes Yedidal, 'is given to the members of society in many different forms but with the support of heroic legends containing victimisation and only a construction along the lines of this pattern would have found acceptance by the society' (p. 190) Although the issue of acceptance seems to be vague, the historical role of heroic characters and legends in the construction of a nationalist ideal becomes important in the analysis of the cinematic transformation of the characters to the screen.

The final sections of the book involve several essays on the issue of ephemeral identities in Turkish cinema and the politics of remembering and forgetting. Özla Avcı and Berna Uçarol Kılınç's essay on the depiction of the Islamic way of life stands out in its detailed discussion/analysis of *The Imam* (İsmail Güneş, 2005), along with the empirical data that it offers on films that since the 1990s have shown Islamic sensibilities.

*Cinema and Politics: Turkish Cinema and the New Europe* is an important resource for understanding Turkish cinema and its evolution in terms of politics, religion and history. It is especially noteworthy for its articles on Turkish cinema and its place in both Europe and the rest of the world.

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## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Alev is currently a Fulbright scholar. She is in the Ph.D. programme at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. She graduated from Bilkent University as a valedictorian in 2009 and earned her MA degree from the same university in 2011. She is co-editor of the book *Image, Time and Motion: New Media Critique from Turkey (2003–2010)* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011).

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**MICHAEL HANEKE, PETER BRUNETTE (2010)**

Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 184 pp.,  
ISBN 978-0252077173 (pbk), £15.99

*Reviewed by Neil Archer, Keele University*

In the tradition of the great European *provoc-auteur*, Michael Haneke's work is almost indivisible from his own much-publicized proclamations. Peter Brunette's compact volume, part of the University of Illinois Press' Contemporary Film Directors series, subsequently considers Haneke's films through the prism of the Austrian's comments on contemporary society, the ethics of spectatorship and the related representational role of cinema and other media. This decision, made possibly through the dictates of space, results in a book that is claustrophobic in its focus, yet perhaps suitably so, given Haneke's notoriously stringent moral outlook and film-making method.

Because of its narrow approach, the book resists drawing on bibliographical material that might, in theory, be used to support or contest the didacticism prevalent in Haneke's work. This lack of a wider film theoretical or historical discussion seems a serious omission: Brunette's reference points, indeed, smack of high-canonical reverence, putting his subject in a line-up of usual suspects that includes Antonioni, Kubrick and Godard. The author however justifies the absence of a more contemporary cinematic context in his assertion that Haneke is a throwback to the high cinematic modernism exemplified by the earlier European art cinema tradition.

Brunette can nevertheless be refreshingly critical of Haneke's output. While he occasionally lapses into the same grouchy generalizations as his subject (his suggestion, for example, that Haneke's long-take aesthetic is anathema to the MTV generation, which in reality means anyone under 40), much of Haneke's work and his more hectoring statements often come in for stinging criticism. While, for example, the exacting formal exercise and interrogation into the ontology of the image in *Benny's Video* (1992) and *Caché/Hidden* (2005) are given weighty consideration, Brunette questions the Brechtian self-reflexivity and condescending tone of *Funny Games* (1997), arguing that this aspect of the film, and Haneke's justifications for it, are both duplicitous and misplaced. Brunette is also right to query Haneke's obsession with a notional pre-televisual 'reality', or his lack of faith in the possibility of a discerning viewer of mainstream narrative cinema (even if, disappointingly, little counter-evidence for these views is provided).

One of the thorny issues regarding Haneke's work more generally, especially his more Brechtian experiments, is that it only 'works' if you already 'get' it – meaning that, from the point of view of provocation, it does not really 'work' at all. From this perspective, Brunette's insistence on Haneke as a late cinematic modernist is useful: his readings suggest that we think of Haneke's work mostly in terms of the history of images and their relationship to reality, or simply as audio-visual essays on the effect (and affect) of a specific filmic language. Indeed, Brunette saves his most eloquent passages for the analyses of long takes, especially the celebrated ones of *Funny Games*, *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages/Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* (2000) and *Hidden*. The decision to divorce formal concerns from industrial ones, however – what the author calls 'the aesthetic protocols of international art-film

production' (p. 4) – is unfortunate, even if the result of spatial expediency. This is especially so because the contexts in which Haneke's films are seen and discussed are both what sustain and limit them. By disregarding the particular French contexts of *Hidden*, for example, and the middlebrow and star-driven circumstances of European film that subtend its production and consumption, Brunette overlooks the more varied discursive impact of Haneke's output.

Readers looking for a comprehensive approach will be pleased to see Haneke's earlier Austrian films receiving equal coverage as his well-known recent works, even to the extent that Brunette's least favourite films, *Code Unknown* in particular, and to a lesser extent *Le temps du loup/The Time of the Wolf* (2003), receive quite short critical shrift. The decision to focus on the director's ten films in turn, though, rather than adopt a more thematic approach to the material, results in a slightly fragmentary and repetitive structure. The virtual scene-by-scene analysis of each film, though rich in detail, is as exhausting as it is exhaustive, especially when the writing (especially on *Code Unknown*) starts to reflect the lack of enthusiasm for the material. At points the readings are basically a gloss on the work, as opposed to a thorough critical analysis; at its best, though (on *Funny Games* in particular), the readings are insightful and combative.

The book's structure and methodology also raise significant readership issues. Those coming to the book as a student of Haneke's work, or simply as an enthusiast, may know the films well and therefore find the detailed exposition frustrating. Brunette also passes quickly over salient theoretical ideas, such as the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, because they are (incorrectly) deemed either overly familiar, or simply of little relevance. For its purpose as a general introduction, the decision not to get deeply into complex aesthetic and ethical theory is perhaps a good one, especially as these ideas are explored elsewhere (the book's back-cover blurb, incidentally, says that Brunette's is the first full-length study of Haneke's work, even though Catherine Wheatley's *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image* (2009) predates it by a year). At the same time, the ideal reader of an introductory volume such as this may question the lack of explanation given on this score.

This is not to say that a thorough and persistent reading of *Michael Haneke* does not bear fruit, for either the student, the devotee or teachers of film studies. Beyond its willingness to deflate the more hyperbolic or high-minded assertions around Haneke's work, especially those made by the director himself, the weight of interview material used throughout – including two translations from the French journal *Positif*, printed in full as an appendix to the volume – provides a thorough overview of a distinctive and original cinematic voice. If this voice comes across here as frequently infuriating, Haneke would no doubt claim this as a sign of our repressed First World guilt, and proof of a job well done.

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## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Neil Archer is a lecturer in Film Studies at Keele University and has published on a variety of topics in numerous journals and books. He has recently published a monograph on the French road film entitled *The French Road*

Movie: *Space, Mobility and Identity* (Berghahn, 2013) and a study guide to *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Auteur, 2012).

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**FILM THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION THROUGH THE SENSES, THOMAS ELSAESSER AND MALTE HAGENER (2010)**

New York/London: Routledge, 232 pp.,  
ISBN 978-0415801010 (pbk), £21.99

*Reviewed by William Brown, University of Roehampton*

Even though books ‘in honour of’ Thomas Elsaesser have already begun to appear (see Kooijman, Pisters and Strauven 2008), he continues apace to produce work, including *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*, co-authored with Malte Hagener.

The book offers an introduction to the various theories that have been used to frame the film-viewing experience. That is, the book provides an overview of the various film theories that have developed around our relationship with films: from films as a window onto the world (chapter one), to films as an entry point into other worlds (chapter two), from cinema as a mirror of reality (chapter three), to cinema as a means of mimicking human vision (chapter four).

The second half of the book, which takes in more recent film theoretical developments, is perhaps the most exciting: the haptic nature of cinema is considered in chapter five, with film sound the focus of chapter six. Chapter seven, meanwhile, surveys cognitive approaches to film and the possibility that cinema can constitute a ‘brain’ of sorts. Finally, the book’s conclusion offers a summary of the way in which digital technology has affected what cinema is and, as a consequence, of how we understand it.

The authors have a clear writing style and illustrate their arguments with clear examples, although perhaps at times the authors assume a greater familiarity with the films under consideration than they do a familiarity with the theories being discussed. That is, while Elsaesser and Hagener provide a clear overview of, say, Slavoj Žižek’s re-reading of suture, whereby shots that cannot be attributed to a single character’s point of view render the gaze itself the object of the viewer’s look (pp. 104–05), the authors will refer somewhat hurriedly to *Code Inconnu/Code Unknown* (Michael Haneke, 2000) as presenting a ‘film-within-a-film, but the film “within” is not marked, reframed, or otherwise “contained” ’ (p. 154). What happens in either the framing narrative of *Code Unknown*, or the film within it, is assumed by the authors to be familiar to the reader. This would be fine – but given that this book offers an *introduction* to film theory – that is, perhaps its major readership will be film studies undergraduates – then assuming familiarity with even a relatively well-known Michael Haneke film might be problematic.

That said, as an introduction to film theory, Elsaesser and Hagener’s book could, and perhaps should, find its way on to many undergraduate

(and postgraduate) reading lists, if not becoming a core teaching text for film theory teachers – even if Elsaesser and Hagener face competition from other recent publications such as Richard Rushton and Gary Bettinson's *What Is Film Theory?* (2010) and Christine Etherington-Wright and Ruth Doughty's *Understanding Film Theory: Theoretical and Critical Perspectives* (2011).

What is more, the book will no doubt be of use to researchers who wish to catch up on recent developments in understanding film not as a disembodied object to be looked upon, but as an experience to be lived through. This has at its root discoveries in cognitive science such as mirror neurons (pp. 78–79), which in turn have reinvigorated film theory in a supposed post-theoretical age (see Bordwell and Carroll 1996).

Given its acknowledgement of the importance of cognitive film theory, it seems a pity that the book does not take a step back from its tour through the various bodily senses through which the film experience has been understood to acknowledge how cinema, like humans themselves, is heavily mediated by metaphor. That is, in the spirit of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* offers us various metaphors that film theory 'lives by' – but it does not overtly acknowledge as much. Film itself is neither frame, nor window, nor mirror, nor door. It does not have an eye, or a skin, or an ear or a brain – not literally, anyhow. A 'meta-film theory', then, might have helped elaborate not just the metaphors through which we think about film, but how all of these involve an orientation towards film that could itself be radically rethought. For example, by positing film either as an object (door, mirror, window, frame), or as a subject in its own right (with eye, ear, skin and brain), we can recognize that film theory has historically been underpinned essentially by a strict subject-object binarism. Forasmuch fecund up until now for informing our understanding of cinema, perhaps this entire system also has its own inherent limitations that, if recognized, might lead to productive work in film theory.

Finally, Elsaesser and Hagener describe their book as a 'cartography' of film theory (p. 130). This in and of itself is a loaded metaphor, in that map making might be deemed a western tool for domination and Empire; perhaps neither film nor film theory needs maps, but a different framework through which to 'read' it. This is not a shortcoming of the book per se, which is a thoroughly enjoyable and engaging text that excellently supplements and clarifies the wide range of theories to which the authors refer. But it does perhaps point towards a future direction in film theory: as Euro-American scholars have begun to turn their attention to world cinema, perhaps it is also time to turn attention to non-Euro-American film theory, especially non-Euro-American philosophers whose work might help to further our understanding of what the film experience might mean in different places, at different times and to different peoples.

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William Brown is a Senior Lecturer in Film at the University of Roehampton, London. He is the author, with Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin, of *Moving People, Moving Images: Cinema and Trafficking in the New Europe* (St Andrews Film Studies, 2010), and of *Supercinema: Film Theory in the Digital Age* (Berghahn, 2013). He is also the editor, with David Martin-Jones, of *Deleuze and Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

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