

Review: Roberto Rossellini's Rome Open City

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of the war, democratization propaganda then required yet another set of foundational assumptions.

Each of these movements is as incompatible with the others as they are with later documentary principles, leading not only to their neglect but to breaks within the idea of what constitutes documentary in the first place. Any attempt to imagine such disparate models of production in the same context risks a retreat to a unity founded on nationalism, but Nornes is alert to the complexities and contradictions of such reductive simplification. Unlike Europe, where Grierson theorized a documentary mode of representation that derived from Flaherty and Vertov and encountered propaganda as a challenge, documentary in Japan evolved through a series of repudiations and occlusions, never to establish a history, at least until now.

Yet another reason why Japanese documentary film has remained invisible to the world is that the most important films were often censored or suppressed, while film criticism and theory were restricted within the boundaries of a highly regulated public discourse. Like Burch before him, Nornes has nonetheless been able to locate heterogeneity and resistance in what had previously seemed the monolithic period of 1931–45. Iwasaki Akira as theorist and Kamei Fumio as filmmaker exemplify the repressed and forgotten possibilities of documentary in Japan, and Nornes recognizes and restores their roles in film history. At the same time, he argues a theory of hidden discourses, extended from James C. Scott, to infer what remains absent from public representation. Complex processes of heterogeneity and dissidence are precisely what fascist policies seek to suppress and Nornes restores to history much of what has been missing by carefully reading through lacunae and nuance.

Nornes argues that “fascist” has become a problematic term to describe the 1931–45 period, since it suggests both too easy a parallel with Germany and Italy, on the one hand, and too monolithic a society, on the other. He does not hesitate to insist on the brutality and monstrosity of the militarist regime, but discusses competing factions within the military, such as the conflict between Araki Sadao’s Imperial Way faction of the Army and the very different policies favored by the Navy, as seen in the films *Japan in Time of Crisis* and *Life-line of the Sea* (both 1933), in the context of a modernizing and multidimensional Japanese society.

Key to understanding Nornes’s method is an understanding of *tenko*, as notably theorized by Tsurumi Shunsuke. *Tenko* is the method of coerced ideological public consent that the militarists successfully used to control and suppress dissidence. Execution or even extended imprisonment were relatively rare and were primarily used to motivate conversion. More common was a forced display of public agreement with national policy and repudiation of past deviance. As a result, in Japan, most leftists survived and continued to participate in public discourse, but only through the loss of any overt independence. This is very different from Germany’s policy of exterminating the Left through concentration camps, and led to very different effects in public representations during the war. Filmmakers and theorists remained relatively free to represent

doubts and problems through nuance and indirection, as long as they did not overtly challenge the government or its most insistent myths. Kamei’s *Fighting Soldiers* (1939), for example, seems more concerned with personal hardship than one would expect in an obligatory nationalist policy film. Nornes’s project is to read *tenko* against the grain in order to account for the survival of resistance through covert and indirect strategies. He argues “the conception of *tenko* as ‘conversion’ or ‘apostas’ . . . blinds us to important continuities and factors outside repressive state force” (125).

Nornes’s book not only makes a valuable contribution to the study of international documentary film, but also to understanding the ambiguous work of such fiction filmmakers as Mizoguchi, Ozu, and Kurosawa during the war, which appears officially patriotic yet contains contradictions that simultaneously question or undermine authority. *Japanese Documentary Film* is of major importance for Japanese and documentary studies, but its significance is not limited to specialists. The issues raised here are important for all of film and cultural studies.

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Roberto Rossellini’s *Rome Open City*

Edited by Sidney Gottlieb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. \$55.00 cloth; \$22.99 paper. 206 pages.

The field of Film Studies has shelved *Rome Open City* in the comfortable place of film history, where it is gathering dust. But while these essays allude to this problem, they replicate the conditions that create it: a mode of formal analysis that never really moves beyond the film itself and its cultural–historical context. For a film that has been modeled and emulated in countless revolutionary film movements, it is a particularly glaring oversight. In her essay, for example, Millicent Marcus brings the film up in relation to Italian political struggles in 1996, but only to demonstrate how the film itself resists a poststructuralist status as text and functions as “the stable object at the bottom” (77). Such a revisionist look at the status and function of film is instructive and interesting, but only serves to add new twists to our understanding—replicating at the same time, however, the very conditions that engender stasis in historical discourse. This is the case throughout the book, which looks to raise several theoretical as well as critical and historical questions about the film. Chief among these is the whole issue of a reexamination, which Gottlieb and several essays give at least passing attention to. *Rome Open City* in particular evidences how interpretation will always be incomplete. The essays here assert that it is impossible to sum up *Rome Open City* and the more one tries to do so, the more one will fail.

As several of the essays here point out, however, stylistic complexity, collaborative authorship, and temporal proximity between the fictional narrative and historical events all contribute to a pervasive indexicality to the film: a “something” beyond that the film, however indirectly, points to, but which analysis can never seem to put its finger on.

As with many other theoretical problematics, this book provocatively raises such issues, but then leaves them suspended for the sake of critically examining the film. Unfortunately for the essays in this book, such questions are central to their undertaking and not addressing them leads to covering ground already covered. This is most glaringly the case with the argument that that *Rome Open City* does not constitute the radical break with Fascist film that it was once thought to—indeed, that there are several points of continuity between the two. This historical revisionism, however, was fairly well accepted by the late 1980s. James Hay’s *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* and Marcia Landy’s *Fascism And Film* effectively laid the groundwork for such debunking in 1987 and 1986 respectively. Since Landy is a contributor to this book, it is a strange oversight indeed (both books show up in citations, but not in discussions). The book is rich in historical detail and insightful analysis. One should make no mistake about it, the scholarship here is thorough and engaging, as is the case with Peter Bondanella’s essay on the making of *Rome Open City*. Here too, however, it is easy to get lost in the film and never get around to the issues engendered. In the making of *Rome Open City*, for example, the amount of contingencies, obstacles, setbacks, and collaborations is so staggering, it becomes the story—if not history—itsself. There is not a sense that the history of this overtly political film also moves forward, intervening in and speaking to political situations beyond Italy. *Rome Open City* holds a place in film history not just for its style, but, like *Strike* or *Battleship Potemkin* (both 1925), for its synthesis of style with politics. All the essays in this book point to the politics surrounding *Rome Open City*, and even gesture to the politics of *Rome Open City*, but fail to situate *Rome Open City* and its critical examination, beyond that context. The volume was pulled together one month after the United States invaded Afghanistan and the timing shows. The essays were written in a more innocent era—when scholarship did not have such a pressing cultural mandate to make historical critique relate to contemporary social conflicts.

In summarizing David Forgacs’s contribution to his volume, for example, Gottlieb argues that “Rossellini’s ‘cinema of thought’ unfolds most fully when we are alert to the many layers of signification embedded in the visual design of *Open City*” (26). This summary accurately characterizes an analysis dedicated to exploring the intricacies of signification in a polyvocal, stylistically complex text. Unfortunately, however, Forgacs’s analysis goes no further: there are no broader connections, no object lessons, no insights into contemporary hegemonic struggles that the film might possibly address. Forgacs very ably demonstrates with his analysis of spatial relations that “The ‘open city’ was in fact a divided city” (27), but the analysis ends there. The same criticism can be leveled at Marcia Landy’s essay, which attempts to demonstrate that

Open City frequently shatters “cliché by means of cliché” (88). Backed up by the theories of Deleuze, this analysis has great potential to serve as an object lesson for contesting hegemonic meanings, but instead stays bound to the parameters of the film, serving more as a restorative discourse to the film’s status within film history. Landy ably demonstrates that far from just recycling melodramatic forms and clichés, *Rome Open City* contests them. There is no attempt, though, to discuss the success or failure of contestation strategies and their impact on current cinema.

For students and fans of *Rome Open City*, the book is an excellent introduction to a critical examination of the film. In addition, the book contains reviews from the film’s release and a filmography for Rossellini—all great source material. For film scholars, however, the book is endemic of a strange irony of the field. For all its explosive and multifaceted impact, Italian neo-realism never really garners the attention of contemporary high-power theorists, especially compared to, say, Weimar cinema, which produced little that could stand in comparison to even lesser known neo-realist films like *Outcry* (Aldo Vergano, 1946). Deleuze would be a notable exception, but here too, neo-realism is subordinated to a theory of cinema more than it is explored as a multidimensional sociopolitical phenomenon. In the end, this book does not offer the kind of paradigm-breaking or cutting-edge theory that could reverse that trend. *Rome Open City* not only promotes the promise and potential of social transformation, but also tries to participate in it through cinema. If for no other reason, it deserves a more cutting-edge approach.

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Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: From Banderas to Bardem

By Chris Perriam. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. \$74.00 cloth. 240 pages.

In this ambitious and thought-provoking examination of the careers of ten prominent Spanish male actors of the 1980s and 1990s, Chris Perriam poses a highly original alternative to the conventional reading of contemporary Spanish film history, building his argument around the revaluation of the ideological weight of its star system and, as his title indicates, the reconstruction of masculinities. Historically framed against the backdrop of two decades of rapid modernization in Spanish society, as reflected in the evolution of the country’s film industry, *Stars and Masculinities* explores the ways recent Spanish star discourse condenses and recirculates a series of culturally specific ideological scenarios that define contemporary Spain.

Perriam focuses principally on the careers of Imanol Arias, Antonio Banderas, Carmelo Gómez, Javier Bardem, Jordi Mollà, and Jorge Sanz. The on-screen performances of these stars also mirror the euphoria and disillusionment with