

it, in recognition of the challenge and boundless nature of this responsibility.

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**Richard Koeck and Les Roberts (eds), *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 281 pp.**

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More than a decade has passed since this journal highlighted the ‘cross-fertilization’ that was taking place between the fields of film studies and geography, with a special issue on ‘Space/Place/City and Film’.<sup>1</sup> The interest that the editors had identified has continued to flourish and to set the background to diverse research projects. In the British context, one of the most successful and well-disseminated of these projects was ‘A city in film: Liverpool’s urban landscape and the moving image’, based at the University of Liverpool from 2006 to 2010. Edited after the completion of the first stage of that project, Richard Koeck and Les Roberts’s *The City and the Moving Image* brings together scholars from film and architecture backgrounds in a collection of case studies which eschew the usual suspects (such as film noir) for a startlingly varied and original range of material.

Broadly speaking, explorations into the relationship between the city and the moving image have taken two distinct methodological routes, informed by a familiar divide in film and television studies between textual and extratextual emphases. The idea of cinema as ‘a quintessentially *urban* set of practices’, introduced on the first page of this book, is contentious amongst cinema historians but has proved fruitful as an approach to the analysis of film space and narrative. Most of the essays in this collection are concerned with the cinematic presences of particular cities – not only Paris, London and Berlin, but also Dachau, Nice, Detroit and, of course, Liverpool. This exploration of different locales is stimulating because it stems from a concrete, detailed engagement with these towns rather than an abstract notion of the modern metropolis. The fact that only a couple of the chapters mention commercial feature films suggests that using place as the focus of investigation can open up a range of relevant cinematic materials, providing new talking points that need not touch on notions of quality or authorship. There is a refreshing eclecticism in the kinds of film covered in this book, from promotional films for a cruise line to the artist’s films of Tacita Dean and the mildly politicized amateur films discussed by Ryan Shand. Such variety produces uneven results, and the relative obscurity of many of the films discussed means that readers will probably not have seen them – but might well be prompted to seek them out after reading the rich, perceptive descriptions provided by some of the authors. The four articles in the second part of the

<sup>1</sup> *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1999), ed. Karen Lury and Doreen Massey.

book, 'Landscapes of Memory and Absence', are particularly successful in transcending the section's vague title through well-written, evocative accounts of both cinematic and actual spatial experiences.

It is precisely that intersection between types of urban experience that underpins the central themes of the book, so that within the diversity of perspectives and objects of study an ethical stand seems to emerge. The introduction outlines the need for a critique of 'technocratic modes of urban representation' and proposes to explore 'the potential for an *anti-spectacular* aesthetic of the city in film' (p. 6). These ideas signal the alliance of this branch of film studies with the ideas of Guy Debord and the *Internationale Situationiste*, and with psychogeographical practice and writing. At the heart of this discussion is a rejection of the instrumental commoditization of urban spaces, through both the social engineering of town planning and the displacement of lived communal experience by sanitized, spectacular architecture or sanitized, spectacular visual discourses. This argument is compellingly articulated in Alan Marcus's reflection on his own film work about Dachau, which interrogates the city's attempts at rebranding through a paradoxical disavowal of its main 'tourist attraction', namely the remains of the concentration camp. Equally absorbing and topical is Paul Newland's essay on Emily Richardson's experimental films *Transit* (2006) and *Memo Mori* (2009), which record and memorialize the parts of East London earmarked for redevelopment in advance of the 2012 Olympic Games.

As Newland observes, the films are perched between critique and nostalgia, and this is a line frequently trod by 'topophilic' filmmakers as well as scholars. The risk lies in romanticizing working-class neighbourhood life as 'authentic' while magnifying the power and single-mindedness of urban planners to conspiratorial dimensions. With its references to Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, Newland's chapter points to some of the main intellectual influences behind this book's approach – but these philosophers of everyday life are at the most tractable end of the urban theory spectrum. The prologues to the four sections of the book, as well as the general introduction, are unfortunate examples of the kind of dense prose that has fallen out of favour in film studies but seems to still thrive among architects. Yet one of the most concrete and suggestive ideas in this book comes from an urban studies perspective: in an insight that will surely be useful for a few grant applications in years to come, Robert Kronenburg suggests that archive film is 'a resource of unique visual information about how cities were used in the past', which can be used to inform contemporary urban design (p. 223).

The idea that City Council bureaucrats will sit patiently through hours of amateur footage may be wishful thinking, but at least it suggests that film – and film scholarship – can aspire to influence the direction of social change. Student occupations, millionaires' golf clubs, and the eviction of entire communities to make way for Olympic pools and Commonwealth velodromes remind us that urban space is a political issue. As a central

interest in film studies, the experience of city life and its spaces can lead to more grounded, historicized analysis and a political reinvigoration of the discipline. This book contains promising glimpses of such an engagement, and showcases some of the myriad forms it might take.

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**Ian Christie, *The Art of Film: John Box and Production Design*. London: Wallflower, 2009, 208 pp.**

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This volume outlining the career of John Box has undoubted intrinsic worth, vividly commemorating as it does the work of a prolific and exceedingly able British production designer. Yet in many respects Ian Christie's monograph is interesting as much for the conceptual problems it raises as for the data it provides.

To write an artist monograph on a film production designer is inevitably to court paradox. There is a durable industry truism (curiously endorsed in much academic writing on the subject) that a designer's work should be self-effacing – that the audience should never come out of the movie theatre humming the sets, and that design which calls attention to itself and its inventors is somehow disruptive to a film's narrative coherence. In principle, 'star designers' are therefore by institutional definition either unthinkable or aberrant. Yet public accolades alone might well seem to justify placing John Box in the 'star' category: in the course of his career he earned four BAFTAs and as many Oscars, garnered an OBE, and is renowned for his long-standing association with David Lean.

Although Box's near contemporary Ken Adam is by normative standards certainly no more distinguished, he has eclipsed Box in popular consciousness over the course of the last two decades. Indeed, Adam now embodies the notion of 'star designer', at least in Britain, and one useful function of Christie's book – seemingly not fortuitous – is to offset this. Even Christie's title reads like a deliberate challenge to *The Art of Production Design*, Christopher Frayling's sprawling, interview-based account of Adam.<sup>1</sup> Christie does not find it necessary to claim on the jacket of his book, as Frayling does of his subject, that Box was ever the world's greatest designer. The absence of such hyperbole is gratifying, as is Christie's pointed comment that production design should not be 'equated with spectacular sets and the sketches that suggest they have sprung from a single imagination' (p. 1).

Yet, to an extent, Christie protests too much. As an idiom the monograph, unless very carefully framed, de facto obscures the complex ways in which designers operate within the institutional structures of film and television (just as monographs on 'fine artists' have historically obscured the web of economic interdependencies and the intertexts that

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Frayling, *Ken Adam and the Art of Production Design* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005).