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Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology, edited by Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen, London, Routledge, 2017, 264 pp., £30.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-1382-3574-8

Neoliberalism is a ubiquitous term peppered across the Humanities, Social Sciences, and increasingly in popular political discourse. Its pervasiveness has led to criticism that its deployment is often ‘catch all’ and un-nuanced in its application – a term that seems to have lost its meaning. The great achievement of *Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology*, then, lies in its multi-layered explication of neoliberalism across richly diverse lenses, restoring critical nuance to the concept in ways that are relevant to scholars of film and cultural politics more broadly.

It is common for approaches to the subject to begin with the perfunctory citing of David Harvey’s work prior to an uncomplicated and static account of neoliberalism as a byword for capitalism’s deep inculcation within the rhythms and fabrics of everyday life. Mazierska’s introduction advances significantly this paradigm. The collection begins with a historical account of the development of neoliberalism by placing Harvey *alongside* a wide variety of thinkers whose work Mazierska efficiently but sensitively examines, from Francis Fukayama, to Mark Fisher, Karl Polanyi, Slavoj Žižek, Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou and more. This lays a platform for a rich discussion of the disruptive effects of neoliberalism upon the traditional binaries of left and right – locating the particular appeal of populism *across* the political spectrum within a wider identification of a collective rejection of the narrative of progress and prosperity that neoliberalism has sought to foster. In terms of films, then, an intellectual project that ‘delineates the intellectual horizons of contemporary people’ (2) holds particular relevance for a medium that has the potential both to extend and to reinforce the parameters of the imagination.

It is in this spirit that the book is organised, examining in its first part the structures of ‘Cinema under neoliberalism’ through the lens of political economy, and thus moving the discussion of neoliberalism beyond the textual and towards a more multi-layered account of the cultures that exist to enable the production of films. Its second part is concerned with ‘Neoliberal winners and losers’, with chapters examining the representation of neoliberalism through a range of films that underline cinema’s capacity to render tangible that which is often conceptualised in the abstract, before concluding with a section on ‘Love and sexual identities under neoliberalism’, which speaks to the book’s wider concern with neoliberalism’s insidious manifestations, such that it colonises the most intimate and ‘natural’ of our practices.

Of the three approaches taken to the subject the first is the most novel, surveying as it does neoliberalism as embedded in and naturalised through the structures of the film industry rather than as a concept which is to be identified solely with the films themselves. For example, William Brown’s contribution ‘The Lure of Becoming Cinema’ examines the ways in which amateur filmmakers are forced to present a mode of highly commodified cinematicity in order to penetrate the value systems and hierarchies of the ‘independent’ film industry. In the process, Brown challenges the narrative that technological advancements have democratised and liberated access to and the production of film art by revealing the complex and insidious capitalist structures of

production, exhibition and distribution that have concealed themselves under the veil of performative independence. In the same section, David Archibald offers up Ken Loach's Sixteen Films as 'exemplary' of 'how an anti-capitalist cinema can be forged in a neoliberal world' (38). Archibald's approach to the subject is highly original, drawing on insights developed from 'extensive participation in the production process' on Loach's *The Angel's Share* (2012). This enables Archibald to access key individuals within 'Team Loach' (37), and allows insight into its collaborative working practices. The chapter rigorously critiques the individuating discourses of auteurism as neoliberal, and rightly points out the rich contribution of collaborators to the many and varied chapters of Loach's career. Taking the logic of the book as a whole, however, it is difficult to accept this argument fully. Despite his avowed opposition to the capitalist value systems of cinema, Loach has undoubtedly prospered under neoliberalism – in the sense that he has continued to make films with remarkable consistency since 1990 – through the development of the 'Ken Loach' brand, and it is absolutely the case that his writers, cinematographers and actors – those who Archibald argues are critical to his films – are marginalised from this particular discourse.

The second section is especially notable for its globalised approach to the question of neoliberalism. The focus on 'winners and losers' is most keenly felt in the contrast between two subjects of attention here: Greece, examined by Rosa Barotsi through a focus on *Standing Aside, Watching* (George Servetas, 2013), and China, examined through the lens of Corey Kai Nelson Schultz's examination of entrepreneurial narratives as developed by Chinese auteur Jia Zhangke in a series of advertisements for Johnnie Walker collectively called *Words of a Journey* (2011). The particular paradoxes of China's place at the vanguard of global capitalism are shown through Schultz's revealing analysis of narratives of self-fulfillment and determination that promote 'neoliberalism in order to solve the problems of neoliberalism' (92).

The book's final section continues this global approach while taking on a range of films that are centered on romantic relationships. While many of the subjects under consideration are 'lighter in heart' than those examined elsewhere in the book, these chapters underline the sense in which neoliberalism might be understood as simultaneously pervasive and invisible in its operation through commercially oriented fare. Mazierska is clear in her introduction that the book's focus on structural questions of politics and political economy is in response to the paucity of 'academic studies tackling class' (11) in favour of identity politics, and yet it is clear from at least one example here that intersecting questions of identity *and* class are critical to nuanced understandings and applications of neoliberalism. For example, Martin O'Shaughnessy's exploration of films that 'centre on female sex/romance tourism' (217), while putting forward a convincing case for the understanding of a range of texts in terms of consumption and consumerism of the body, suggests that *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (Kevin Rodney Sullivan, 1998) is 'post-racial' (229) because of its generic conservatism and the consequent erasure of its (overt) political potential. And yet, as Archibald's chapter teaches us, we must be wary of drawing such totalising conclusions on the basis of textual analysis alone – a commercially oriented film with a largely black cast, directed by a black man and co-written by a black woman (Terry McMillan) should not

have its wider political significance discounted because its narrative fails to ‘confront broader structural inequalities and any history of racialised oppression in Jamaica or in the United States’ (229).

If the book has a weakness, then, it is in its failure to engage with questions of audience. While multiple films are here shown as both instruments of neoliberalism and as resources with which to critique or to contemplate its effects, the book does little to consider the ways in which mass audiences are exposed to neoliberal ideology. Thus, while Paul Dave’s highly persuasive chapter on *Bypass* (Duane Hopkins, 2014) examines the ways in which the film dynamically renders the tragedies of austerity Britain, it is hard to invest fully in the argument that such a text might help us to negotiate neoliberalism when so few have watched it (the film was distributed entirely through video-on-demand with limited success). If we are to continue the examination of how ideology operates *through* cinema, it is critical that we also scrutinise highly popular films – and their production cultures – including those films that mass audiences actually watch and use to frame their experience of the neoliberal world.

David Forrest
University of Sheffield
d.forrest@sheffield.ac.uk