toriography, why is Hayden White neglected? In a chapter devoted to the TimeLife Drew documentaries, why is there no mention of each film’s dramatic rationale: one or more figures who face a test or challenge, the outcome unknown? (Primary also encountered exceptional synching problems in editing, an undiscovered aspect of technological history). Many things are absent, but nevertheless, most of what is here is exemplary and its motives commendable.

Another case study might apply the methods of Film History to film history in the trenches: Aesthetic. What is viewed is a function of what can be afforded, itself a consequence of copyrights, vagaries of availability, distributor greed, room size (TV monitors), and the relation of a course to enrollment and to curricular function. A canon of film titles may reflect not Masterpieces, but recent articles the instructor has read or is writing.

Technology. The quality of a classroom-projected image exists in inverse proportion to the generation of the print (see Aesthetic), the inattention of the projectionist, the decrepitude of the projector, and the gauge. The character of the experience is further a function of air conditioning and the design of classroom seats, factors unique to schoolrooms.

Economic. The availability of assistants and the generosity of budget allocations is a function of the politics of class size (see Social).

Social. The quality of the instruction is a result of complex interactions among the instructor’s experience and overload, enrollment, and the heterogeneity of student population, itself a consequence of culture (the seventies, the eighties), time schedule, and departmental reputation.

Text. The character of assigned reading is defined by the experience of instructors and their teaching strategies (indignation, advocacy), class size (library assignments), and socio-economic circumstance (the availability of used texts).

Film History appears to be intended both to supplement survey texts and to support historiography as a matter of serious attention in film programs. Preferably both. It will be interesting to see what happens.

—JOHN FELL

LAUGHTER THROUGH TEARS
The Yiddish Cinema


Like the Yiddish films which are the subject of her book, Judith N. Goldberg’s Laughter Through Tears is a charming little work, flawed in many ways, but ultimately quite likeable. The book deals with the 130-odd Yiddish-language films produced in both Europe and America. The majority of these works are sound films made during the thirties, but there are also a few silent works with Yiddish inter-titles. On the whole, American-Yiddish cinema constitutes a body of artistically naïve works, made on a shoestring budget by second- and third-rate film-makers. Their European counterparts are generally superior. In their day these films were kept alive by Jews proud to see their minority culture validated on the screen or anxious to keep in touch with a world quickly being assimilated. Today they have found new audiences whose responses emanate from a nostalgia for a bygone era, a passing interest in ethnic roots and a more scholarly concern for the sociology of Yiddish culture.

Goldberg has organized her material chronologically, subdivided by country—America, Poland and the Soviet Union. The structure allows for treating the films within an historical context which documents the situation of Jews during differing eras of this century. She provides good information about the Yiddish film industry, with specific details on film-makers, actors, and the production and reception of individual works. The strength of the book lies in this background material.

Where Goldberg fails is in the presentation of the films. Brief summaries are provided, but analysis is weak or nonexistent. This is especially regrettable when the films, although often lacking in artistic sophistication, are on the other hand rich in religious, moral and sociological signification. And certainly the more ambitious works such as the four features by Edgar G. Ulmer, the Polish version of The Dybbuk, and the screen adaptations of Sholom Aleichem’s Tevya and Jacob Gordin’s Mirele Efros deserve full critiques.
Further, little material is given on the immigrant culture or aspects of Yiddishkeit from which these works emerged. Perhaps Goldberg felt that Irving Howe had said it all in *The World of Our Fathers*, but for readers unfamiliar with other available texts, this is a major deficiency; without knowledge, for instance, of the Jewish involvement with radical politics and unionizing, *Uncle Moses* (based on a novel by Sholem Asch) and even the flawed *Motel, the Operator*, lose their significance. In view of Hollywood’s reluctance to treat these matters, Yiddish cinema offered another perspective on American history.

Laughter Through Tears* is the first book on Yiddish films. A more recent work, Eric A. Goldman’s *Visions, Images, and Dreams: Yiddish Film Past and Present*, has subsequently appeared. Together, these materials are bound to draw attention to this newly rediscovered cinema which is winning new audiences yearly. (MoMa is planning a retrospective of Yiddish film for the near future).

I am delighted that the work has appeared, but saddened that Goldberg never brings the works alive nor convinces readers why they should make an effort to catch the next showing.

—PATRICIA ERENS

A METHOD TO THEIR MADNESS:
The History of the Actor’s Studio


Ostensibly a history of the Actor’s Studio, Foster Hirsch’s book covers a very broad range of materials, including the Moscow Art Theater’s 1898 staging of *The Sea Gull*, the Group Theater productions of Clifford Odets, the heyday of Method acting in fifties Hollywood, and Robert De Niro’s portrayal of Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*. In fact one of Hirsh’s problems is that many of the celebrated performances he describes can be related to the Studio only very loosely if at all. The potentially more important subject here—blurred by emphasis on a single institution—is the influence of Stanislavskian on American theater and movies.

True, the Actor’s Studio had a role in shaping and sustaining a Stanislavskian technique, but its formative work occupied only one phase in the history of this country’s devotion to expressive-realist acting, and its achievements are difficult to substantiate. Established in 1947 by Elia Kazan and Cheryl Crawford, it produced no especially significant theater, it offered no coherent theory of acting, and its reputation as a training ground for professional players has been somewhat exaggerated. Two of its most famous “pupils”—Marlon Brando and Marilyn Monroe—can hardly qualify. Brando was trained by Stella Adler at Erwin Piscator’s Dramatic Workshop, and Monroe did little more than attend a few sessions at the Studio, where she sat in the back row and unwittingly helped Lee Strasberg become famous. (Hirsch acknowledges these facts, but then goes on to discuss both Brando and Monroe in a section entitled “The Actor’s Studio on Stage and Film.”)

This is not to deny certain virtues of Hirsch’s study. He has written an engaging account of how the Method contributed to the sociolect of New York acting, and his research into the Studio itself is quite thorough. In addition to archival materials, he draws upon experience as a theatergoer, interviews with countless actors, and personal observation of the Studio’s working sessions. He is good at showing the financial structure of the organization, the nature of its teaching, the maneuvers for power within its hierarchy, and the grinding contradictions of Lee Strasberg’s career. Although his viewpoint is highly sympathetic, he recognizes many Studio failings, and he quotes freely from its detractors. Reporting on its recent activity, he gives balanced portraits of famous “moderators,” and offers pointed comments on the inadequacy of Method teaching for certain types of drama.

As historical interpretation and critical analysis, however, *A Method to Their Madness* is disappointing. Hirsch contends that the Studio’s “exploration of psychological realism” has “perennial value,” but this claim cannot be justified by the evidence. Lee Strasberg’s rather woolly-brained romanticism, his emphasis on ego psychology instead of training for the voice and body, his obvious courting of celebrities under the guise of philosopher and therapist—all these things were retrograde developments in a conservative but more thea-