ing around inescapable narcissism, divided families, an absent God, and inevitable death; that his characters oscillate between poles of cruelty and humiliation; and that mirrors and windows, rocks and water, alienated sound and inscrutable languages, and relentless close-ups and coolly distanced but thereby all the more emotionally charged long shots help him compose the stark terrain of his films. But Cohen’s critical method yields fine surprises and insights as well. Without a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the entire body of work, we might easily miss the readable repertoire of tiny “facial, gestural, and tonal cues” (210) that Bergman elaborates. Just as, for example, smoking a cigarette in a Howard Hawks film is an index of character, stroking someone’s cheek in a Bergman film is a kind of synecdochic moral and emotional drama. Cohen’s patient analysis of all the films also reveals broader figures in the carpet. For example, he shows the gradual development of Bergman’s concern for “the social and even political forces at work on his characters,” (264) a much-neglected topic that must supplement the traditional emphasis on Bergman as an existential psychologist and metaphysician.

In such a long book attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of Bergman, some omissions are conspicuous. Apart from scattered references, there is little attention paid to other film-makers whom Bergman learned from and hardly any consideration of the collaborative or ensemble qualities of his work. Bergman subscribes to the romantic conception of the artist as exemplary sufferer and solitary creator, but this does not oblige Cohen to follow suit. And while it is certainly necessary to examine Bergman as a man and artist wriggling between strenuous doubt and equally strenuous faith and self-assertion, Cohen perhaps unduly downplays the recuperative, conciliatory, even comic aspects, broadly defined, of the films. Bergman is a keen observer of the foibles as well as the tragic assaults of life, an artist of shafts of light as well as suffocating darkness, an analyst of surviving as well as dying and killing. These talents need to be acknowledged to complete Cohen’s high praise of Bergman as a “rare creature capable of imagining and producing works of excruciating beauty, acute sensitivity, and profound compassion.” (156)

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**Looks and Frictions**

*Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*

By Paul Willemen. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1994. $35.00 cloth; $14.95 paper.

The intersection of contemporary cultural studies and film theory has occasionally been addressed by scholars in both fields, and the disciplines share applications of rhetoric and semiotics, identification and subjectivity, and social and ideological formations. Paul Willemen’s work in the British journal *Screen* in the 1970s and as editor of *Framework* in the 1980s incorporated these interdisciplinary perspectives, and *Looks and Frictions* brings together many of his essays from journals (often re-written) as well as some previously unpublished material. Willemen’s career has been characterized, as Meaghan Morris points out in her introduction, by an increasingly activist attitude toward film and cultural studies, a development which is certainly evident in the presentation of diverse essays in this volume. The introduction is a necessary and insightful overview of Willemen’s life and career as an active cineaste involved in film festivals as well as conferences, and Morris, who is a recognized cultural critic herself, stresses her admiration for the range and intensity of Willemen’s work; she reads the book “as an argument for developing the positive capacities of criticism.” (3)

Since Willemen’s writing is both polemical and yet quite often reflexive, this reading is appropriate.

The twelve essays collected here are most visibly arranged by Willemen’s years at *Screen* (Parts One and Two cover 1971 to 1981) and at *Framework* (Part Three covers 1983 to 1989), with the final section devoted to one long essay/dialogue from 1992. While Morris does discuss the chronology of a few essays, it is difficult to get a sense of exactly when many of these articles were written (some endnotes provide clues), which is a particular problem in the first half of the book where the essays are not reproduced in chronological order. Thus, the longest and perhaps most foundational essays in the book (Part One) are followed by some earlier essays that implicitly ask the reader to consider how these examples were later reformulated into Willemen’s larger concerns.

The concerns that Willemen expresses in the first half of the book are complex and engaging. In “Cinematic Discourse: The Problem of Inner Speech,” he considers many linguistic and psychological explanations of language and identification that were popular in European criticism of the 1970s, borrowing heavily from Roman Jakobson’s work and relying on the theories of
Boris Eikhenbaum in applying multiple claims about discourse to cinema. Willemen offers a comprehensive explanation of the notion of inner speech, describing it as a "cement between text, subject, and the social." (42) which remains so encompassing that it is unfortunately difficult to discern his precise linkage of inner speech with cinema. More important at this stage of the book is understanding Willemen's use of psychoanalysis, for he will significantly revise many of his ideas in the later essays. When he proposes that "inner speech is the discourse that binds the psychoanalytic subject and the subject in history," (51) he presages his later cultural studies work in which he will grapple with socio-historical identification, becoming less involved in psychoanalysis and more involved in cultural identity and subjectivity.

This involvement becomes somewhat evident in the next essay, "Notes on Subjectivity," (written three years later), in which Willemen's cinematic examples again serve a larger theoretical argument. He uses Edward Branigan's comparative analysis of two films to exemplify how structures of subjectivity should not be studied, stressing that text readers should not be viewed outside of ideology, social formations, or history. While he may make Branigan's analysis seem more definitive than it is, his argument against text-specific readings is convincing, as he carefully explains the polysemy of the author-text-reader dynamic of communication. For Willemen, subjectivity in cinema must always be considered in terms of its cultural construction, and film studies must account for these constructions, otherwise "films are read unpredictably, they can be pulled into more or less any ideological space, and can be mobilised for diverse and even contradictory critical projects." (70)

The five shorter essays which follow are more specific in their topics and thus provide helpful models of Willemen's critical practice. "The Sirkian System" is an appreciation of Douglas Sirk's films as ideological parodies, and of his style as serving intellectual and industrial demands, originally written at a time (c. 1971) when scholars were first starting to rescue Sirk's films from academic disregard. "The Fourth Look" is a more problematic essay, if only because Willemen attempts to expand Laura Mulvey's triptych of patriarchal cinematic looks (in Hollywood narratives) by claiming a fourth look that, in his rhetoric at least, also limits women as viewers. In looking at the experimental films of Stephen Dwoskin, Willemen sees a "gaze" at the viewer by the film, a "look which constitutes the viewer as visible subject." (107) He thus claims an exhibitionism on the part of the viewer, which nonetheless does not pertain to all films (or genres) nor to all viewers. Dwoskin's films may embody this fourth look most effectively in Willemen's eyes, but this look, and the looks described by Mulvey, have been elaborated in a plurality of ways that Willemen does not acknowledge. "Letter to John" continues Willemen's examination of viewer subjectivity in terms of porn films, posing a critical rebuttal to an article on pornography by John Ellis, although Willemen's argument, to a lesser extent than in his previous essay, still preserves a rather masculinist perspective. "Photogénie and Epstein" is a passionate response to the essentially impossible claims of French "impressionist" critics who believed certain films contained mystical moments of revelation that could not be verbalized. Willemen identifies photogénie as a hegemonic construct, and almost implies that its etiology is pathological. The final essay of the Screen section, "The Ophuls Text: A Thesis," is a direct consideration of different perspectives on Ophuls' use of the moving camera, offering a brief summary of Willemen's interests in the viewing of cinema.

The second half of the book begins with "An Avant-Garde for the 90s" (published as "for the 80s" in 1984 and not updated despite the title), in which Willemen calls for a reconsideration of the cinematic avant-garde that frees it from the constrictive modernist-realist debate and addresses its social and historical context and its production of meaning and ideology. Here you can see a clear move from his more formalist and psychoanalytic readings to the cultural and political, as his attention to historical and aesthetic experiences illustrates his resistance to specificity in intellectual endeavors.

An even more deliberate critique is noticeable in "Bangkok-Bahrain-Berlin-Jerusalem: Amos Gitai's Editing." By arguing stridently against the intellectual elitism of pseudoactivist drives by certain academics and film-makers to protect "the oppressed" from dominant readings, Willemen finds in Gitai's films "a strategy of address that tries to mobilise meanings rather than impose them." (166) Willemen thus continues his fight against hegemony in interpretation, but here seems to miss an important hypothesis: that the shooting and editing of Gitai's (or anyone's) films are often the result of production conditions and are not always predetermined by theoretical concerns.

In "The Third Cinema Question," Willemen provides a solid overview of the history of Third Cinema writings, particularly the manifestoes written by some of its creators. He makes it clear that Third Cinema must not be defined against "dominant" cinema, and that the production and reception of Third Cinema are not reducible to assumed cultural differences in terms of class or nationality (hence the abandonment of "Third World Cinema" as a term). He concludes the essay with a discussion about Mikhail Bakhtin and national identification, which he picks up in his next essay, "The National."
Here Willemen offers a well-articulated account of the ways in which so-called “multicultural” practices actually serve to further marginalize and fetishize the very cultures that are meant to be somehow integrated by a host culture. Where his Third Cinema essay was a fine combination of film studies and cultural history and theory, this essay becomes so absolutist as to imply that virtually no cinema scholar has been able to properly address questions concerning the production of particular socio-cultural formations. Willemen proposes that Bakhtin offers a fruitful rubric for recognizing other cultural practices and understanding them in relation to film studies; he extracts from Bakhtin a notion of “double outsidersness,” in which “the analyst must relate to his or her own situation as an other, refusing simple identifications with pre-given, essentialised socio-cultural categories.” (216) Willemen sees this double outsidersness as a “precondition for any useful engagement with ‘the national’ in film culture,” (218) thereby begging the question of just how difficult (or easy) it is to achieve.

The final essay in the book finds Willemen dealing with many of the issues that have characterized his writing for twenty years, although it serves as an odd conclusion. “Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered” uses a dialogue (between Willemen and his colleague Noel King) to consider cinephilia, the “desire for cinema,” which is an effective device in that Willemen is able to readdress many diverse issues about cinema that have been presented throughout the book, while preserving a certain concern for and curiosity about the future (and possible extinction) of film studies. The piece is simply too long and repetitious, and much of what Willemen has to say about epiphanic moments in cinema lacks the insight or intrigue of his earlier writing. He nonetheless concludes respectfully by stating that he remains “enough of a cinephile still to wonder about cinephilia.” (256) and the essay (as well as the entire book) bears testament to that fact.

Paul Willemen distinguishes himself with this collection as an erudite and provocative scholar of the emerging discipline that has become cinematic cultural studies. The looks and frictions he identifies in cinema and criticism offer significant challenges to various notions that have formed among recent generations of film scholars. Despite my disagreements above, I consider most of the arguments expressed in these essays as crucial to film studies now as when they were first written.

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Melodrama and Meaning

History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk

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Melodrama and Meaning explores the diverse ways in which various institutions have positioned the 1950s melodramas of Douglas Sirk. Barbara Klinger researches the historically changing meanings of the films over the past forty years in order to topple current monological understandings of Sirk. Since the 1970s, academic critics have appropriated Sirk’s films as representatives of the progressive text, one capable of self-consciously producing critiques of American bourgeois culture. Klinger argues that this view of Sirk is rooted in auteurist assumptions—in the director’s ability to artistically transcend a universally conservative 1950s social climate. Borrowing Janet Staiger’s method of a “historical materialist approach to reception studies,” (xvi) Klinger uses detailed historical research—what she terms “a contextualist perspective” (160)—in order to topple both the vision of Sirk as monolithically progressive and of the 1950s as monolithically conservative.

Klinger’s approach demonstrates “how different historical, cultural, and institutional contexts produced meaning and ideological significance for Douglas Sirk’s melodramas from the 1950s to the 1990s.” (157) These five contexts are academia, the film industry, review journalism, star discourse, and mass camp. Each chapter works to demonstrate the tentative nature of Sirk’s subversiveness by arguing that the meaning of the films is by no means unified and fixed, but instead constantly in flux and out of Sirk’s authorial control.

The first chapter explores the historical development of the academic reception of the films. Klinger argues that since the 1970s a critical orthodoxy has developed, solidifying into a vision of Sirk as producer of films subversive of the dominant social order. While this has largely been the case, Klinger’s review of the Sirk criticism undervalues significant sites of dissent, such as the work of Brandon French in On the Verge of Revolt and Peter Biskind in Seeing Is Believing. While Biskind does read Sirk as a leftist film-maker, his vision of the contradictory politics of the 1950s works to challenge Klinger’s assumption about the linear trajectory of Sirk criticism during the early 1980s. Klinger’s narrative of the consolidation of Sirkian progressivity suppresses the importance of critical debate in order to forward her own argument of uniformity.

Chapter Two is the book’s best, wherein Klinger