

(p. 299). Lamar suggests that while Siringo lived a morally upstanding life, Siringo could not condemn what he viewed as the moral complexity of the West.

As much as Lamar has managed to accomplish, his simplified treatment of race detracts from what could have been a great strength of the book. Both Lamar and western historiographers acknowledge the reality of a diverse racial structure in the West. Lamar notes that African Americans numbered between one third and one fourth of all cowboys in the 1870s and 1880s, and Siringo came into contact with many. But Lamar concludes that “although he was contemptuous of Black Americans and constantly made racist remarks,” Siringo used them “to keep his business going” as if employers never hired laborers they deemed racially inferior (p. 58). Lamar reduces the race and class dynamic rather than engage in a debate about whether the West was a unique or not uncommon racial space. How might a Southerner, who came of age during Reconstruction, transplant his racial ideology into the West? Lamar also examines Siringo’s investigation of politically motivated violence against Mexican Americans in New Mexico, but one suspects greater forces were at work than simply “contempt” toward Mexican Americans (p. 152). Finally, some might find the racial nomenclature, such as “Spanish-American,” too simplistic at best and inaccurate at worst. This is not to say that these problems detract from the overall significance of the book but rather that Lamar might have offered a stronger analysis of race and the West had they been taken into greater consideration.

Ultimately, *Charlie Siringo’s West* offers more to students, historians new to the field, and antiquarians than to the historiography of the American West. Using a personal narrative to illuminate historic change is a new methodology for Lamar and has many promises and limitations. It would work well as a pedagogical tool in undergraduate classrooms. Lamar has produced a highly readable narrative that will introduce students in a western history class to important historiographic themes while engaging them with the real-life adventures of a man who lived the quintessential cowboy life.

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THE MOST TYPICAL AVANT-GARDE: *History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*. By David E. James. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005. 562 pp. \$29.95 paper.) Reviewed by Sharon Sekhon.

The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles investigates Los Angeles-based cultural productions resistant to Hollywood beginning in the 1920s and ending in the recent past. The avant-garde is a special case in Los Angeles; James posits that the force of Hollywood has “colonized” other cinematic endeavors: “The stars of the industry have shone so brightly that the non-industrial cinemas here have been made all but invisible; but in that invisibility, they nevertheless

flourished for a while" (p. 11). This book delineates the ways in which avant-garde filmmakers practiced cultural resistance in Los Angeles, a place whose economy is tied to Hollywood, and how the city worked metaphorically and literally within such resistance. Avant-garde artists could be former studio filmmakers who chose to create work that defied industrial conventionality, and avant-garde practitioners could be individuals denied a place both behind or in front of the camera by mainstream film due to their racial, ethnicity, or gender.

James' inclusive approach characterizes avant-garde traditions as "cinemas constructed, in at least some aspects of their motivation, outside the major studios and the dominant film industry" (p. 13). In a similar vein, scholars have erred in omitting certain documentaries, political newsreels, and alternative cultural forms from avant-garde cinemas. Those creating avant-garde film sometimes use other mediums and influences within their work, attesting in part to the capital-intensive nature of filmmaking. James challenges conventional definitions of the avant-garde and determines new non-celluloid-based entries to be included within the category, such as graphic comic books or 35 mm slideshows produced by Chicano activists in the mid-1970s. The book plumbs the history of independent cinemas based in Los Angeles to "understand these cinemas aesthetically, socially, historically, and geographically, by seeing the films in the plurality of contexts in which they, and the various visions of the life of the city they mobilize, were made" (p. 2).

Avant-garde cineastes in Los Angeles have used geography and setting in significantly narrative ways, and this should be a dimension for analysis. The avant-garde in Los Angeles developed in part as a response to industrial cinema and has been influenced by several factors: access to capital, changes within the larger body of filmmaking in terms of subject and style, the expansion of film schools dedicated to a diverse curriculum, and disciplinary movements. James calls this final factor a "*geocinematic hermeneutic*, the investigation of the way representation of a given place is inflected or determined by the productive resources found there" (p. 18). Thus, James situates the later work of documentarian Thom Andersen within the rise of the Los Angeles School of Geographers at UCLA and Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), a documentary that details how Los Angeles has been represented in film as both an anonymous and as a specific place. James deftly recognizes undocumented sites to show "the way movies have both concealed and expressed the city's main social tensions" (p. 421).

In the 1920s, as Hollywood formulated its production and distribution processes, independent filmmakers emerged who accepted some Hollywood practices such as actually producing mainstream cinema while rejecting others such as producing films solely based on commercial motivation. As James argues, this relationship between traditional filmmaking, what the author refers to as "industrial cinema," and the avant-garde mirrored their counterparts in Europe, especially in France. However, unlike European filmmakers, many of Los Angeles' early filmmakers consisted of expatriates whose passage to Hollywood was preceded by immigration legislation making global moves possible such as the 1926 Parufamet Agreement, which allowed German émigrés to more easily join filmmaking efforts in Hollywood. Importantly, despite the current obscurity of some avant-garde work, its imprint may be visible in industrial films within Hollywood by filmmakers exposed to such productions.

Avant-garde films set in Los Angeles can take on self-reflexive tones. In investigating films that took on Hollywood in their subject matter, James' scope spans nearly fifty years, beginning with *The Life and Death of 9413—A Hollywood Extra* (1928) by Robert Florey, Slavko Vorkapich, and Gregg Toland and ending with Chicano filmmaking efforts in the early 1970s through the concept of "No-Movies" by Los Four, the political art group founded by Harry Gamboa, Jr., Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Willie Herron. Among other cultural productions, "No-Movies" usually were short scenes publicly performed and recorded on 35 mm slides. Using these examples to create a chronological continuum, the book maps out the changes within avant-garde cultural production and the influences that would shape later incarnations. James positions *The Life and Death of 9413—A Hollywood Extra*, a parody of the life of the unknown extra in the chaos and hierarchy of Hollywood, as "integrally involved" in the industrial film industry, as its plot and methodological choices reflected traditional cinema and in that its filmmakers went on to enjoy professional careers within the Hollywood industry. "No-Movies" remained more of a political resistance rooted between the Chicano mural movement and film itself. In addition to enacting plots that upended traditional stories about Hollywood and capturing such scenarios in places rarely seen in mainstream film, for several years the group honored its filmmakers with "No Oscars," illustrating the group's simultaneous self-isolation and its imposed exclusion (as artists of color) from Hollywood.

Using a diverse array of cultural productions, James painstakingly looks at what constituted "minor cinemas" in Los Angeles and asks his readers to re-think not only how independent cinema operated but what it produced in material form and why it emerged. David E. James' writing is engaging, and he carefully shows that his examples are at once representative and unique. Hollywood's relationship with the avant-garde naturally waned and grew depending on the nature of the avant-garde production at hand. This relationship, argues James, brings new meaning to the use of Los Angeles and how Hollywood certifies (by using) or renders invisible (through omission) places and communities within Southern California. James elaborates, "The continual reconstruction of the city as a movie set has been reciprocated by the cinema's use of the city as a set, so that over the city's places are superimposed the shadows of their roles in old movies and television shows" (p. 9).

The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles confronts how independent cineastes operated in the shadow of Hollywood and how its physical proximity to the American film industry remains palpable within much of avant-garde cultural production. Coupled with how many of these productions remain unseen—in archives like the Library of Congress or un-viewable due to physical damage—the emergence of alternatives for viewing non-industrial film like Robert Redford's Sundance Institute in 1985 would highlight the goals of avant-garde filmmakers. If the presumed goal of avant-garde artists, ultimately, is the viewing of their work, an expanded exploration of foundations, museums, and festivals in the support and dissemination of the avant-garde throughout the twentieth century and the networks of fans, patrons, and students these fostered would perhaps speak more specifically to audience reception and response.

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