inflicted death and to experience that as a kind of birth, and he will use every trick in the action-movie book to accomplish that aim. Small wonder that this movie has terrified as many as it has uplifted” (53). And so on throughout the book.

My one substantial grievance against Stolen Glimpses, Captive Shadows is that the parts are more impressive than the whole. As much as I enjoyed and profited from most of the essays, the book consists entirely of advocacy criticism, which has its limitations. O’Brien surely knows this, and as a film critic myself, I’m well aware of how much more satisfying it can be to illuminate the graces of a great film than to dump on the failings of a bad one. Some movies are worth dumping on, however, and O’Brien rarely shows much interest in well-deserved intellectual opprobrium.

The closest he comes to critical criticism is his discussion of Quentin Tarantino’s Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003), where he observes that “the director’s relentless enthusiasm for his own private bloodbath can begin to feel like a hobbyist’s mind-numbing guided tour of his collection of rare trading cards.” No argument from me. But even here, some of O’Brien’s disapproval sounds like praise. “The presence of Sonny Chiba,” for instance, “is enough to summon up a whole world of East Asian filmmaking in relation to which Kill Bill figures as a rogue disciple, like Toshiro Mifune in [Akira Kurosawa’s 1954] Seven Samurai” (44). O’Brien refers here to Kill Bill, not just Chiba’s performance, and this comes as a surprise after we’ve read on the preceding page that absent the film’s “formalism,” a viewer might begin to wonder why it was really necessary to make—or to see—a movie in which during most of its running time women are verbally abused, raped (albeit off-camera), slapped, beaten, stabbed, and dismembered.” (44–45). That makes the film sound less like a rogue disciple than a lunatic emanation from Tarantino’s id, and I think its antisocial attitudes should be skewed more definitively. (I’m also unpersuaded by O’Brien’s fulsome celebration of Shaw Brothers cinema, much of which seems to me a similar sort of mind-numbing tour, far less violent but no less reliant on flash and dazzlement for their own sakes.)

O’Brien’s emphasis on advocacy points to a more important limitation of Stolen Glimpses, Captive Shadows. With few exceptions, he writes about the usual suspects, and I mean the really usual suspects. I too admire Grant and Lang and Jacques Tourneur and Detour and John Ford’s Young Mr. Lincoln (1939) and Jean-Luc Godard’s Breathless (1960), and I recognize that appreciation essays have a long and distinguished history. But these movies and directors have been appreciated half to death, thanks in part to the critical clubbiness spawned by Sarris’s auteur rankings half a century ago. Where is the avant-garde, or the southern hemisphere, or silent cinema apart from a single Swedish film? O’Brien is a superb stylist, a subtle thinker, and an erudite authority on culture and the arts. I hope his next collection reflects a more expansive vision of cinema’s endless possibilities.

ALISON FRANK
Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream by Sherry B. Ortner

Sherry B. Ortner’s anthropological account of American independent cinema takes nothing for granted: She gazes with fresh eyes, defining and describing independent cinema as though her readers don’t already know what it is. The drawback of this approach is that it can give the impression of stating the obvious. We might hesitate to place faith in an author who seems to have only just discovered the object of her study.

Early on, Ortner describes her initial reaction as she began to familiarize herself with indie cinema: “I was often stunned or shocked by the heaviness or darkness of the films” (7). This characterization may seem trite to cognoscenti for whom the supposed “heaviness” of indie cinema is so familiar that it barely registers. But it is precisely this desire to investigate the obvious that is essential to anthropologists in their quest to understand the reasons operating behind the appearances of everyday life. You don’t have to be an outsider to observe a sociocultural phenomenon with the correct distance, but it helps. In fact, Ortner knows far more about independent cinema than she lets on: Late in the book, she admits that she has been a “documentary junkie” since discovering the films of Frederick Wiseman in the 1960s.

Ortner’s congenial narration of her experiences and observations makes Not Hollywood eminently readable. Her writing features as much colloquial usage as anthropological jargon, and any references to theory are explained with
a clarity that borders on oversimplification. It is to Ortner's credit, though, that her book centers on her own original research and interpretations. The work of theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, and Jürgen Habermas inspires, supports, and explains her work, but doesn't direct it. Ortner's study is governed not by received ideas, but by great openness and curiosity toward her subject.

_Not Hollywood_ is also easy to absorb because much of what the author describes is familiar or unsurprising. This is not to criticize the research: Ortner seems to have delved into the independent-film world as thoroughly as possible, watching a few hundred films, attending festivals with their Q&As and panel discussions, interviewing indie directors and producers, and even gaining access to film sets to observe production practices and interpersonal dynamics.

In her introduction, Ortner explains that she originally set out to update Hortense Powdermaker's anthropological study of Hollywood, _Hollywood—The Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers_ (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), but was unable to gain the necessary access. In the meantime she encountered the indie film scene and decided instead to study American independent cinema since the late 1980s, the moment when non-Hollywood films moved beyond the art house. She examines how neoliberal capitalism has influenced both the sociocultural context of independent film production and the content of indie films. Accordingly, the eight chapters of _Not Hollywood_ alternate between the practicalities of production and analysis of the films themselves.

On the practical side, Ortner begins by outlining common characteristics of indie films. She also quotes indie directors describing their own vocation, typically in terms of passion, realism, and a lack of concern for popularity or profit. Ortner treats their discourse with healthy skepticism, dispassionately assessing the role of Hollywood specialty divisions in supporting (or compromising) independent cinema and whether it is still possible for filmmakers to be truly independent.

Ortner looks back to the rise of indie filmmaking in New York and Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, economic deregulation gave birth to a new class of wealthy individuals who were not politically or culturally conservative and who embraced independent cinema as spectators and investors. Ortner outlines other important support structures including film schools, magazines, funding and awards organizations, festivals, and production companies, but with scant detail. As an anthropologist, Ortner spends most time on the human, social side of film production.

She devotes a whole chapter to the underappreciated role of the producer and makes three key observations. First, compared to directors, producers tend to be more highly educated and come from wealthier families. She further contends that those from an upper-class background tend to be better equipped for being producers because the role demands good taste, people skills, and confidence. Second, she describes the producer as proud, protective, and a disciplinarian, essentially acting like a parent to the director. Finally, she notes a surge in the percentage of women producers, rising from 0.3 percent in the 1970s to 45 percent today. [Is 45% correct? Seems high.] Ortner sees any rise in female representation as a source of optimism, but she suspects that the increase in women producers perpetuates traditional gender roles. As Ortner notes, female producers take on the role of the nurturing mother, doing a huge amount of work behind the scenes. Meanwhile, I would point out, it is the director who receives the public recognition, and in that role, women remain woefully underrepresented. The percentage of female directors in Hollywood has hardly risen (from 1 percent in the 1970s to about 7 percent today). The situation is better among indies, where women directors now account for 18 percent.

Describing her experience of the indie-film set, Ortner again finds grounds for optimism. There is a clear division between white-collar creatives and executives and blue-collar technicians, but Ortner sees the film set as one of the few preserves of workers’ rights and pre-Fordian job satisfaction. Indeed, one of the surprises in this chapter is the widespread practice of gift giving: Everyone working on the film receives tokens of appreciation.

In the film analyses, Ortner’s general strategy is to highlight common moods and themes and seek a socioeconomic explanation. She begins with the generally “dark” atmosphere of indie films, ascribing it to the directors’ own disillusionments. Many are members of Generation X, which makes them the first to have experienced the death of the American Dream: The economic crisis of the 1970s meant that they could no longer expect to do better than their parents. Indeed, they may even have a “fear of falling,” slipping from the middle class back to their lower-class origins.

Ortner identifies the latter anxiety in a strand of films where women directors focus on the struggles of lower-class mothers.

Pedophilia is another common theme that Ortner identifies in indie cinema. Within the films’ narratives, the abuse takes place because middle- and upper-class parents fail to protect their children. Ortner therefore argues that
these films reflect a broader concern with the breakdown of the family, as divorce had become prevalent among the parents of Generation X. She also suggests that the films may allegorically represent how neoliberal [Should neoliberal be neoconservative?] government policy abuses children by cutting programs that benefit them.

Finally, Ortner examines the role of Generation X in redefining and popularizing documentary. Moving away from the calm, academic, factual style of classical documentary, Generation X has followed in the footsteps of boomer Michael Moore and made their documentaries more like dramatic features, complete with irony, playful humor, and a central star figure that audiences can relate to. Excelling in films about environmental concerns and the global impact of capitalism, they challenge accusations of political apathy among their generation.

Although Not Hollywood offers some interesting observations and interpretations, a book of this length simply can’t cover 20 years of indie cinema in a truly exhaustive way. Nonetheless, for a general overview of American independent cinema and how it fits into broader changes in U.S. society as a whole, Ortner’s book offers a comparatively light yet thoroughly engaging study.

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J.E. SMYTH

Go West, Young Women! The Rise of Early Hollywood by Hilary A. Hallett

Here’s a western narrative to please any film historian. By the first decades of the 20th century, women on the frontier trek westward outnumbered men. And as Hilary Hallett demonstrates in a thoroughly engaging study, many of them were heading to Hollywood. Move over, Frederick Jackson Turner and John Ford! Hallett’s cast of pioneers includes not only the “Bank of America’s Sweetheart” Mary Pickford and cowgirl daredevils Florence Lawrence, Helen Holmes, Pearl White, and Ruth Roland, but also Rudolph Valentino star-maker June Mathis, columnist Louella Parsons, and writer Elinor Glyn.

Frontier metaphors and the role that women played in the rise of Hollywood’s new West aren’t news to the film industry. Remember Janet Gaynor’s portrayal of the star-struck, one-in-a-hundred-thousand Esther Blodgett in William A. Wellman’s A Star Is Born (1937)? She was a frontier girl from North Dakota who, following in the footsteps of her grandmother, made another move farther west for financial independence and personal freedom. As star Vicki Lester, she would eventually “own” the town. But as Hallett points out, although historians have had a tendency to erase Los Angeles from traditional histories of the West and the frontier, many film historians, unconsciously copying Turner in his 1893 Frontier Thesis, have also erased women from the narrative of Hollywood’s rise and consolidation of cultural power.

Hallett puts women back where they belong, at the center of a social transformation between 1910 and 1922 that saw Hollywood become the heart of motion-picture production and the site of controversial debates about emancipated, working women. She takes issue with the canonical interpretation of the origins of American movies and the Hollywood film industry, which stresses the dominance of D.W. Griffith, Mack Sennett, and Charles Chaplin. As Hallett contends, the slapstick comedies and westerns that are the subject of so much attention by other film historians actually appealed to an increasingly marginalized audience of kids and young men. She notes that “an origin story about how Hollywood became Hollywood that marginalized women cannot hope to explain why its first ‘social imaginary’ lit up imaginations around the world” (9). Female audiences came to dominate in the late 1910s and 1920s (some say 75 percent of theater seats were held by women), changing production trends and patterns of star consumption.

It’s key to point out that California passed state suffrage and mandated the eight-hour workday in 1911, with a minimum wage for women to follow in 1917. But although historians have argued that early passage of women’s suffrage in other western states was only a sop to the small number of female pioneers (there weren’t enough of them to make political trouble), there were more than enough women in California by the turn of the century, and they were working. Those who worked for the film industry often made more as extras than men earned in office jobs. But Hallett doesn’t focus on the invisible extras, secretaries, script girls, and editors; she looks at the most public examples of America’s New Woman and the ways in which these stars, their publicity, and their films constructed “a multilayered performance that signaled the crumbling of sexual difference’s ability to define individual achievement and desire” (30).