BOOK REVIEW:

WORLD FILM LOCATIONS: MUMBAI

USHA IYER

Issue Editor: Helio San Miguel

Series Editor and Design: Gabriel Solomons

Pages: 128. **Price:** $18 (on Amazon)

Publisher: Intellect Books, 2012

The field of film studies has, over the last two decades, witnessed the rise of the "cinematic city" paradigm with key texts like Giuliana Bruno's *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (1995), David Clarke's edited anthology, *The Cinematic City* (1997), and Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice's collection, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Studies in a Global Context* (2001) arguing for the foundational imbrication of the cinema and the city, both products and progenitors of twentieth-century modernity.[1] Theorizations of the

---

[1] Other notable books in the cinema/city "canon" include Aitken, Stuart C. and Leo E. Zonn, eds. *Space, Place, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film*. Langham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994; Shonfield, Katherine. *Walls have Feelings: Architecture, Film and the City*. London: Routledge, 2000; Barber, Stephen. *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space*. London: Reaktion, 2002; Massood, Paula. *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003; Mazumdar, Ranjani. *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007; and Penz, Francois and Andong Lu, eds. *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*. London: Intellect, 2011.

cinema-city nexus emphasize the similarities in the sensorial, haptic fascination of the cultural form of cinema and the social organization of the city for the spectator-*flâneur/flâneuse*. The flickering images of the cinema are seen to be consonant with "the experiences offered by the flickering, virtual presence of the city" (Clarke 10). The *World Film Locations* series published by Intellect Books aims to contribute to this growing field that explores the relations between space and place in cinematic texts and the cities they depict and inhabit. The series includes edited volumes on Tokyo, Paris, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Istanbul, and Dublin, among others.[2] The volume being reviewed here focuses on the preeminent cinematic city of popular Indian cinema – Bombay.[3]

   World Film Locations: Mumbai is composed of seven essays and forty-six scene analyses segments titled "Mumbai Locations." The latter are what make this book unique and provide a strikingly visual addition to cinema/city studies. Offering more description than analysis of scenes from films located in Bombay, the "Mumbai Locations" segments are arranged chronologically, from *Aag* (Raj Kapoor, 1948) to *Dhobi Ghat*/*Mumbai Diaries* (Kiran Rao, 2010). The segments include film synopses, stills from the scenes being discussed, city maps, and present-day photographs of the locations, all of which contribute to the stated aim of the series: to explore "the relationship between the city and cinema by using a predominantly visual approach perfectly suited to the medium of film."[4] The segments cover a range of Hindi film genres and categories, including commercial films such as *Taxi Driver* (Chetan Anand, 1954), *Don* (Chandra Barot, 1978), and *Luck by Chance* (Zoya Akhtar, 2009); "middle cinema" classics such as *Guddi* (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1971) and *Rajnigandha* (Basu Chatterjee, 1974); and well-known examples from parallel/art cinema, like *Ardh Satya* (Govind Nihalani, 1983) and

---

[2] While the series does not follow up on this, its choice of locations provokes inquiry into the relation between these cinematic cities and the national cinemas they inadvertently (or intentionally) refer to. The place – literal and figurative – of Paris in French cinema or Tokyo in Japanese cinema, for example, often marks these cities (or The City) as the loci of national experience.

[3] The book adopts the newer name, Mumbai, for the city rather than Bombay. The editor makes an opening reference to the larger Hindu and more local Marathi impetus behind the renaming of the city in 1995 and notes that many consider the renaming as harming "the unique cosmopolitan character of a city built over the centuries by an amalgam of peoples and religions" (5). Given my stance that in these names lies the history of the *Bombay* of the past and the *Mumbai* of the present – marking the difference between the vibrantly cosmopolitan city and the one marked by the parochial, right-wing Shiv Sena's transformations – I will myself refer to the city as Bombay except when quoting from the book.

[4] http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/books/view-Series,id=27/

Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron (Kundan Shah, 1983), but also lesser-written-about ones such as *27 Down* (Awtar Kaul, 1974) and *Nazar* (Mani Kaul, 1991).[5] Through this selection, we traverse a psychogeography of Bombay where the Royal Opera House from *Aag*, The Asiatic Society featured in *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957), *Deewar's* (Yash Chopra, 1975) memorable shots of Marine Drive, the crowded, pulsating streets of Mohammed Ali Road in Saeed Mirza's *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989), and the Art Deco architecture of Eros Cinema in *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* (Milan Luthria, 2010) create what Ranjani Mazumdar refers to as "an archive of the city," chronicling the past and present of Bombay city through its cinema.[6]

The seven short essays in the volume are authored by journalists, film instructors/practitioners, as well as film scholars, in an attempt, one imagines, to ensure a mixture of academic and popular discourse, and make the volume accessible to a wide range of readers. The result is a mixed bag of observations, mostly on contemporary cinema, ranging from introductory essays on popular Hindi cinema and on its post-liberalization avatar: Bollywood, to more engaging discussions of "Counter-Bollywood," "Mumbai Noir," and representations of communal conflict in Bombay cinema. The city of Bombay features in all these essays whether by way of being the locus of Hindi film production, via recognizable city monuments (Mayank Shekhar notes the importance of VT or the Victoria Terminus railway station in Bombay cinema), through events that have marked the character of the city (Lalitha Gopalan writes about cinematic representations of the 1993 bomb blasts in Bombay), or by addressing questions of genre (as Ranjani Mazumdar and Nandini Ramnath do). Mazumdar's essay on "Mumbai Noir" – a term that gained currency in the 1990s and is synonymous with

---

[5] It is worth noting that the 1960s are represented only by two films, triggering the question: were fewer films *set* in Bombay during this decade? Unlike the preoccupation of the socials of the 1950s with the city-village binary (where Bombay was inevitably The City of the cinematic imagination), or the "angry young man films" of the 1970s that were concerned with urban angst, corruption, and civic dystopia, the films of the 1960s stepped out of the Indian city to "exotic" locations such as Kashmir, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, and London in films like *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964)*, An Evening in Paris* (1967)*, Sangam* (1964)*, Love in Tokyo* (1966)*,* and *Around the World* (1967). For more on "cinematic tourism" in Bombay cinema of the 1960s, see Mazumdar's essay, "Aviation, Tourism and Dreaming in 1960s Bombay Cinema." It is also worth exploring whether an interest in certain genres such as film noir or the gangster film in the 1990s rekindled an interest in Bombay as the perfect cinematic space for staging the dark, morbid narratives of *Satya* and *Parinda*, for example. Questions of genre are thus significant for studies on the cinematic city.

[6] Mazumdar's book, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City,* is the most in-depth exploration of the cinematic city paradigm in the Indian context, and extends the modernity-urbanism-cinema relation that characterizes this area of study by arguing for Bombay cinema as a "hidden archive of the modern," where "it is through the fleeting yet memorable forms of urban life in popular Bombay cinema that the texture of modernity in India can be understood" (xxxiv).

"urban decay, crime, claustrophobia" (68) – discusses films such as *Parinda* (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 1989), *Is Raat ki Subah Nahin* (Sudhir Mishra, 1996), and *Satya* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1998), the last being the defining film of this genre. Mumbai Noir is characterized by tropes of film noir, including moral ambiguity of characters, nocturnal journeys through the city, and in Mazumdar's formulation, the "aesthetics of garbage" (a term she has expanded on in her book), referring specifically to *Satya's* depiction of urban waste, reflected in Bombay's spaces and its characters. Interestingly, Mazumdar expands the ambit of Mumbai Noir beyond the gangster genre, including psychological thrillers like Anurag Kashyap's unreleased *Paanch* and Homi Adajania's *Being Cyrus* (2006) that underscore the pervasiveness of violence in the everyday life of the city. Gopalan's essay on the "Space and Time of Communalism" addresses specific instances of extreme violence in the city – the communal riots and bomb blasts that followed in Bombay after the demolition of the Babri mosque by right wing Hindu extremists on 6 December 1992. Employing Mazumdar's term, "a cinema of ruins" to describe the mise-en-scène of communal violence in films like *Bombay* (Mani Ratnam, 1995), *Naseem* (Saeed Mirza, 1995), *Zakhm* (Mahesh Bhatt, 1998), and *Hey Ram* (Kamal Hassan, 2000), Gopalan pays attention to cinematic and narrative elements as well as censorship regulations that determine the cinematic representations of these events. A key insight offered by the essay concerns the role of television in turning the protagonists of these films into "passive witnesses or active agents in the unfolding of communal antagonisms," (88) with Gopalan arguing that these films are often able to represent the trauma of the event only through televisual quotation. The imbrication of mediatized representation, the experience and consumption of events, and actions then taken on city streets, in this case, is powerfully suggested through this argument. Both essays focus on the "city of ruin," populated by shanties, abandoned factories, ganglords' dens, and dark alleys with angry mobs running through them, a landscape of catastrophe in stark contrast to the "city of phantasmagoria" evoked by Bollywood's glittering mise-en-scène of global consumer products, glamorous stars, and opulent mansions that retreat entirely from the streets of Bombay (into interior spaces or other metropolises such as New York and London).[7] The book's investment in "real" locations is echoed in Nandini Ramnath's essay, where she includes in the category of "Counter-Bollywood" the films of Saeed Mirza (*Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*, *Albert Pinto Ko*

---

[7] For more on these two categories of imagining cinematic Bombay, see Mazumdar's discussion in her book of the gangster film shot on location versus the Bollywood "family film" shot on extravagantly designed sets.

Gussa Kyon Aata Hai), Basu Chatterjee (*Chhoti Si Baat, Baton Baton Mein*), Sai Paranjape (*Katha*), and also contemporary directors like Anurag Kashyap (*Black Friday*) and Kiran Rao (*Dhobi Ghat*). The common factor in all of the films she cites is the use of city locations to generate the verisimilitude that produces the "reality effect" of this kind of "realist" cinema. What is interesting is the relation of stardom to this production of realism. It is the lesser-known actors of these Counter-Bollywood films, who are less likely to be recognized and mobbed, that enable these films to be shot in Bombay's streets, parks, restaurants, buses etc.

World Film Locations: Mumbai is refreshing in not focusing only on the glitzy, global attractions of Bollywood, as many recent popular publications have, but in touching upon various categories of Bombay cinema that provide a kaleidoscopic view of the city and capture the variety of experiences the city and its cinema afford. As mentioned earlier, the visual emphasis of the book sets it apart and brings alive films and their locations for readers familiar and unfamiliar with the city and the cinema. It is not clear whether the mandate of the series is expressly to produce short and widely-accessible volumes, but the restricted length of the essays (two pages each) does not always allow for in-depth analysis of what are often interesting topics, germane to the fundamental questions the series hopes to address: "How is cinema helping to shape our view of the city? What is the role of the city in film?"[8] Rather than the simple descriptions of the urbanscapes of Bombay in filmic narratives found in some of the essays and scene analyses, it would have been much more productive to integrate Bombay cinema into a larger historical inquiry that examines how motion pictures substitute for or even constitute our memories of a city.[9] The scene analyses segments, for example, could have analyzed further the role of the city in the films discussed rather than just describe key locations where these films were shot. What, for instance, was the *place* of the Opera House in Bombay's popular culture and how is it figured in *Aag*? What is the differing valence of a space such as Dharavi's sprawling slum in films like Sudhir Mishra's *Dharavi* (1992) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan, 2008)? How do "cinemascapes" become integrated in the imagination of the city's inhabitants so that film becomes a specific form of urban experience in

---

[8] http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/books/view-Series,id=27/

[9] While the volume quotes Suketu Mehta: "Through the movies, Indians have been living in Bombay all their lives, even those who have never actually been there" (*Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, 350), further analysis is needed to examine how and why Bombay came to occupy this space in the cinematic imagination.

places like Bombay? How is "cinematic" Bombay produced through mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing etc.? What elements are mobilized to represent the city? Addressing these questions would have made the scene descriptions cohere into a more intellectually interesting exercise. In this context, I would have also liked to see some discussion of that legendary Bombay location – the film studio, where the Hindi film industry's landscape has been conceived and produced for more than eight decades, creating cinematic worlds within this cinematic city. The elaborate sets constructed for films as far apart as Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) and Rohit Shetty's *Golmaal: Fun Unlimited* (2006) in Bombay's Film City or in its many independent studios are as much a part of the cityscape as the "real" locations captured in the films mentioned in the book. The lack of attention paid to spatial practices in the city, or to the characters that define cinematic Bombay (after all, cities are located as much in their people as in their places) highlights further the volume's somewhat narrow conception of the term, "location."

Some minor quibbles: the "Mumbai Locations" segments begin only from 1948, without any discussion of the vital role of Bombay in the cinema prior to that; film producer and founder-CEO of UTV, Ronni (sic) Screwvala is referred to as a cutting-edge, contemporary film director. Despite these criticisms, I believe the book is a vibrant addition to the body of work on the cinematic city, and particularly on Bombay cinema, serving as a distinctive visual accompaniment to more theoretical texts, and bequeathing to fans of the city and its cinema an archive of film stills that charts a geography of space and memory.

About the Reviewer: Usha Iyer is a PhD candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. Her dissertation focuses on dance and female stardom in popular Hindi cinema. She grew up in Bombay, abandoned it for the relative peace and quiet of smaller cities, but now finds herself once again enchanted by this unruly, magnificent city.
Contact: usha.iyer@gmail.com

References:

Bruno, Giuliana. *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Clarke, David B., ed. *The Cinematic City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Mazumdar, Ranjani. *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.
---. "Aviation, Tourism and Dreaming in 1960s Bombay Cinema" in BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies 2.2. (2011): 129-155.

San Miguel, Helio, ed. *World Film Locations: Mumbai*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2012.

Shiel, Mark and Tony Fitzmaurice, eds. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Studies in a Global Context*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001.