

METTE HJORT AND URSULA LINDQVIST (eds.):

A Companion to Nordic Cinema

Wiley Blackwell, Chichester and Malden 2016. Pp. 614.

ISBN: 978-1-118-47525-6.

From the earliest days of the medium until today, Nordic cinema has had a strong global presence. Despite paradigmatic shifts in the way that films are produced and consumed, these ‘small nation cinemas’ continuously produce auteurs (from Carl Th. Dreyer to Aki Kaurismäki), film stars (from Asta Nielsen to Alicia Vikander) and traditions (from Nordic silent cinema to Dogme 95) that spark international attention,

not least from a scholarly point of view. The main challenge for the editors Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist, it seems to me, is to create a reference work that approaches these topics with fresh perspectives. One of the main aims of *A Companion to Nordic Cinema* is to identify the specificities of the region's film culture using a transnational starting point. The volume, which contains 26 original contributions by a variety of scholars, indeed situates Nordic cinema in a wider, global context, and, in this sense, it constitutes a welcome addition to scholarship in the field.

The ambition, Hjort and Lindqvist state, has been to produce 'a comprehensive scholarly volume that not only provides a rich history of the Nordic cinematic traditions, from their origins to the new millennium, but also links already well-known names and titles to the practices and forms of institutional creativity that facilitated their emergence' (p. 7). The book is divided into six different sections: 'States of Cinema: Nordic Film Policy', 'Making Filmmakers: Models and Values', 'Reeling 'Em In: Spectatorship and Cinephilia', 'Reinventing the Reel: Transitions and Triumphs', 'Connecting Points: Global Intersections' and 'The Eye of the Industry: Practitioner's Agency'. On the one hand, the order of these sections seems natural, beginning with investigations into mostly top-down state initiatives and institutions and ending, via sections on audiences, revisited traditions and global connections respectively, in a section where the practitioners' own reflections take center stage. On the other hand, there is no apparent logical flow within the sections, and the editors do not spell out the reasoning behind the order of the individual papers.

The emphasis on the Nordic in relation to the global, which is consistent throughout the volume, ensures a fruitful revision of film historiography in the region. While it is impossible to account for every essay in this context, some contributions stood out in terms of originality. Laura Horak's exploration of the global distribution of Swedish silent films before the so-called Golden Age, for instance, pokes holes in many narratives associated with the period in question. In 'The Art of Creating an Appetite for Nordic Cinematic Spaces', Maaret Koskinen eloquently delineates the appeal of real and imaginary landscapes/cityscapes of Scandinavia, a much discussed but generally

under-theorized topic when it comes to 'Nordic Noir'. Moreover, the easy access to practitioners and policy-makers in Scandinavia, highlighted by both editors and authors, makes for several thought-provoking papers, especially in the final section on practitioner's agency. For example, drawing on observational studies and interviews, Eva Novrup Redvall is able to open up a 'black box' and offer an insight into television drama writing in Denmark.

Additionally, one should note that the editors have been careful not to omit minor cinemas within the region. In fact the anthology includes chapters on both Icelandic and Sami cinema, bolstering the claim that their collection contributes to the understanding of the heterogeneity of Nordic cinema. While the volume provides much information on the historical and contemporary connections between the Nordic cinemas, for instance with regard to funding mechanisms and aesthetic tendencies, less emphasis is placed on cases of failed transnational exchange. One such problem, which Ib Bondebjerg mentions in his paper on regional and global dimensions of Danish film policy, is that films rarely travel well between the Scandinavian countries. In a volume firmly grounded in its transnational approach, I believe this issue should have been addressed more in-depth.

This collection would serve excellently as assigned reading in courses on Nordic cinema or the countries' respective national cinemas. The editors underscore this ambition when stating that the *Companion* has been designed partially with 'the needs of the classroom' in mind (p. 7). Although the ambition to put together a more comprehensive and less fragmented volume on Nordic cinema is praiseworthy, the retail price (£120) will certainly act as a deterrent to many students. In relation to the hefty price tag, one could also note that images are few and far between, something which, given the visual nature of the medium, strikes me as unfortunate.

A *Companion to Nordic Cinema* provides much information on the historical and contemporary connections between the Nordic cinemas and the rest of the world. Bringing together an international array of high-pedigree scholars, whose entries complement each other excellently, the volume serves as a scholarly benchmark in the field of Nordic film studies. All academic libraries catering to students in

Scandinavian Studies (as well as Film Studies more broadly) should ensure that this reference work is available.

EMIL STJERNHOLM

LUND UNIVERSITY