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***The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History***  
**ed. by Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers**  
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Are we facing a new school of film historiography? Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, Philippe Meers, and the other authors of this volume, as well as all the contributors to that very productive network that goes by the name of HoMER (History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception) firmly believe in the commitment to examine ‘unexplored dimensions of the cinematographic experience’ (p. 3). The advanced state of their research is presented here. The volume is divided into two methodological sections and four themes, dedicated to: a) film distribution and trade, b) exhibition and c) programming, as well as d) ‘audiences’ cinemagoing practices, experiences and memories’ (ibidem). It is precious first of all for its methodological clarity and its distinction between different players in the production cycle of film in keeping with their specific roles. Much of the volume’s lexicographic work is also of great interest, inviting us to review the usual categories of analysis and standard periodizations: as in the lucid analysis of the ‘evergreens and mayflies’ of distribution, by Karel Dibbets (to whom the volume pays due posthumous homage), or in its reflection on the notions of seriality and cyclicity proposed by Tim Snelson.

The common thread that intersects the contributions is the inspiration that comes explicitly from the French *École des Annales*; the authors accept its challenge to broaden the historian’s horizon of observation through the discovery of new objects and the study of the social sciences, potentially through increasingly sophisticated quantitative methods and online research programs. Indeed, on the one hand, Richard Abel and Eric Hoyt propose using investigative tools to analyse the wealth of data respectively transmitted by the critical reception in newspapers and the role of individual operators on the market. On the other, explicitly or implicitly, Carlo Ginzburg’s call to give value to minor, small and singular experiences, which are irreplaceable in their singularity, also returns several times.<sup>1</sup> Within a purposeful view, such a value can take on the meaning of a ‘circumstantial’ trace (Mariagrazia Fanchi, p. 388), something that effectively happens in many case studies presented here — and in particular those devoted to the history of cinematographic companies and institutions: from the history

<sup>1</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

of itinerant film exhibitions in the United States, reconstructed starting from the 1904 datebook of the exhibitor W. Frank Brinton (Kathryn Fuller-Sweeley), to the reconstruction of the market panorama of early film exhibition in colonial Indonesia, validated through a comparison with the geography of local transport (Dafna Ruppin); from the clarification of the distribution policies that we often understand only in broad terms, such as the practice of double billing in the 1930s (Richard Maltby), or the 1962 launch of ‘showcases’ as a ‘daring new method of film circulating in New York’, by United Artists (Zoë Wallin, p. 173), to system conflicts in international distribution, for example between the Motion Picture Export Association and the Netherlands Cinema Association at the end of World War II (Clara Pafort-Overduin and Douglas Gomery). In this context, a multi-ethnic history of the first movie theatres in Smyrna in the early twentieth century can become a circumstantial feature of the greater history of the ‘short’ century, with all its dramas and phantoms (Dilek Kaya).

The examples given already indicate, in the selection of themes and approaches, a further merit of the project and the volume. Everything and everyone in these pages push for film studies to go beyond the comfort zone of the English-language culture and market, and the distinctions of colonial and Eurocentric heritage. This is a commitment that we can adopt as a litmus test for the future of HoMERica’s undertaking. We know that new historiographies move dangerously close to the crest of two steep slopes: the micro-history of the peasant, with his worm-riddled cheese, and the macro-history of the court of the Inquisition that overwhelms him. The use of the resources offered by new, big data analytics can challenge this difficult balance, for example from the point of view of the collection of data, which today is certainly more widely available and completely digitalized in the English-speaking world, or at any rate with substantial differences between countries even within old Europe. Can the availability of indexed databases be the factor that guides historian’s choices? More generally, what is the relationship between the individual case study, even if it is exemplary, and big data, when the horizon becomes that of metadata or the mere application of an algorithmic logic? And again: even if the history itself at work selects the case studies as points of departure — perhaps simply because they are the only surviving possibilities — is it still possible to operate between micro and macro when we shift our gaze to the contemporary, when the data becomes incommensurable? Not surprisingly, on some pages, almost timidly, and despite all the opposing positions expressed by the authors, films themselves finally emerge: the original capital of the discipline.

In short, do we really need another new school of cinema historiography? The answer, as for every *Nouvelle Histoire*, will lie in the project’s capacity to produce other useful tools for the scientific community and to impose a paradigm. All that remains is to wish the authors good luck.

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