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# Contemporary Cinema and Neoliberal Ideology

**Edited by Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen  
Routledge, 2018.**

**Reviewed by Ian Fraser, Loughborough University**

This expansive and excellent collection is split into three parts that consider neoliberalism and cinema in relation to political economy, winners and losers, and love and sexual identities. Ewa Mazierska's introduction offers an insightful overview of the main tenets of neoliberalism. She derives this from a number of thinkers, classical and contemporary, to its hegemonic position today, despite the 2008 crash exposing its obvious flaws. She considers the relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary cinema in the last decade of capitalist crisis. Cinema's transnationality and technological nature as an industry make it susceptible to neoliberal ideology in terms of "supercinema" and "zero-production" films. Cinema both accommodates and defies its reproduction within capitalism through its emotional and intellectual interactions on our consciousness and problematises the way neoliberalism manipulates human relations in term of sex and eroticism. Mazierska contends that despite neoliberalism's hegemony its link with cinema has been under-researched. This book fills that gap admirably as a rejoinder to those academics who absorb its ideological power by perceiving that class and class struggle are irrelevant to their lives or that identity politics is of more importance. The only other competing book, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema* (Jyotsna Kapur and Keith Wagner, eds, 2011), analyses how neoliberalism has impacted on different countries worldwide, but this study examines how the film industry and film have been neoliberalised. Additionally, there is a recognition of a multiplicity of critiques of neoliberalism, from Marxism, liberalism, humanism and nationalism, that can be particular or universal.

The political economy of cinema part emphasises the fusing of economics with normative and political considerations in decision-making in relation to film. The focus is on budget, its usage and crew-formation in a social context of subverting neoliberal power relations. David Archibald's, "Team Loach and Sixteen Films: authorship, collaboration, leadership (and football)", considers the great socialist director. Archibald draws on his first-hand and perceptive observation of Loach at work with his various collaborators as a team while also being a leader in that process, especially in his more recent work, that gives a better understanding of filmmaking and how an anti-neoliberal cinema can be forged in capitalism. Kevin Feshami, "US independent cinema and the capitalist

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mode of production”, is more pessimistic and suggests that the appearance of independent cinema as a critical alternative to Hollywood cinema founders on its funding and distribution being by the source it is meant to oppose. William Brown, “The lure of becoming cinema: the role of the internet in amateur and independent filmmaking”, examines how virtual spaces have been created to allow a democratic flourishing of low- and high-budget films, enabling both amateurs and professionals to accrue funding from the general public rather than film moguls. Even so, Brown cautions how moving into professionalism through the lure of extra finance can result in the affirmation rather than undermining of the neoliberal order as critical voices become subsumed under its emasculatory embrace. Lars Kristensen concludes this section with his, “Svetlana Baskova’s response to Russian national neoliberalism in *For Marx...*”, and her utilisation of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Strike* (1925) to critique the Putin regime’s endorsement of a Russian brand of neoliberal cinema through funding production and distribution that she eschews. Kristensen suggests that Baskova, in William Brown’s term, posits a “non-cinema” that opposes the mainstream cinematic forms and digital technology of “supercinema”. Consequently, Baskova’s filmmaking, as part of the post-Soviet Russian film industry, is an attack on this model of neoliberalism, even if its merits are disputed by certain critics.

Part 2, on the winners and losers of neoliberalism, begins with Corey Schultz’s, “The Rise of the entrepreneur in Jia Zhangke’s *Words of a Journey*”, and the contradictions of China’s form of neoliberalism and variation of state socialism. Schultz uses *Words*, an internet-based series of advertisements for a whisky manufacturer, to show the supposed positive aspects of China’s marketisation. Entrepreneurs are depicted as the agents of the “Chinese Dream” who can solve any problems that neoliberalism generates, alleviating any responsibility from the state.

However, the reality in China is the neoliberal nightmare of increasing disparities in wealth between rich and poor. Ewa Mazierska, “Capitalist realism in European films about debt”, considers those who accepted this neoliberal pipe dream but became its victims. Three films depict this: *Rogue Trader* (1999), *Time Out* (2001) and *Debt* (1999). The realism emanates from the fictional account of real characters who share a desire of obtaining success by borrowing and investing money, a strategy that ultimately leads to their demise. Paul Dave, “*Bypass*, obscure forces and ontological anxiety”, illustrates how the director, Duane Hopkins, uses the notion of “bypass” for the devastating effect neoliberalism’s ruthlessness has on working people’s lives but also highlights their inability to understand or fight against it given their dire circumstances. Dave contrasts the didactic realism of Loach and the more preferable New Realism of Hopkins that emphasises diversity, expressiveness and ambiguity. Rosa Barotsi, “Aggressive posterity, violent austerity in *Standing Aside, Watching*”, brings the Greek dimension to the neoliberal

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brutality inflicted on that country to the fore. The film shows the impact on the middle class as epitomised in the main protagonist Antigone who rages against the establishment for acquiescing with the imposition of austerity. Doro Pop, "Multiplexing Marx in contemporary American cinema", proclaims that contemporary Hollywood in films such as *Hail, Caesar!* (2016) trivialises Marxism by minimising instances of alienation and exploitation to show workers as being well-treated. Marxism becomes "Communism for dummies" as something to be mocked rather than feared as a challenge to neoliberalism.

Part 3, on love and sexual identities under neoliberalism, begins with Constantin Parvulescu's "Hedges of Manhattan", which examines Jonathan Demme's *Rachel Getting Married* (2008). Parvulescu interprets the film as "cultural hedging" appearing as a counterculture with checks and balances within capitalism. This suggests that moments of amelioration are present but in reality the system continues untouched as people accept it unquestioningly. "Hedging" reoccurs in Elżbieta Ostrowska's, "Corporations of feelings: romantic comedy in the age of neoliberalism". She identifies how an endorsement of neoliberalism permeates bromances, bromcoms and wedding movies by targeting a wide audience across sex and age differences for profit maximisation. Characters "hedge" by commodifying their assets of sexual emotion and money in the market but veer between the need to find an authentic love and the reduction of everything to profit making. Kamila Rymajdo, "Why is everyone not falling in love? Love, sex and neoliberalism in film adaptations of Bret Easton Ellis' works", argues that the films represent the permeation of neoliberalism into every aspect of people's lives in its destructive impact on human relationships and the absence of love. Nonetheless, hope is present in this negativity by indicating that a more positive love can re-appear and prosper in different circumstances. Martin O'Shaughnessy, "Cinema, sex tourism and globalisation in American and European cinema", continues the theme of love as romanticised in the exotic locations of Kenya and the Caribbean through three films, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998), *Heading South* (2005), and *Paradise: Love* (2012), which are seen by certain feminists as less exploitative than the actual practices of female prostitution or sex trafficking. Even so, he detects how in *Stella* the inequalities between the older woman and younger southern man remain hidden, whereas the other two films reveal neoliberalism's preservation of postcolonial inequalities, offering Western exoticisms in the confines of a tourist compound without any of the dangers lurking outside. Finally, Bruce Williams' "Polymorphous consumption: Eytan Fox's *The Bubble* as gated community", focuses on a homosexual relationship between two men, a Palestinian and an Israeli, in a critique of identity politics. While recognising the advances in gay liberation, Williams exposes its negative side by showing how depoliticised gay life can be. These affluent

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characters immunise themselves in the gated community of Tel Aviv, devoid of the horror of the conflict around them, as they consume the benefits of globalisation at the expense of its victims.

The book is an absolute delight in encouraging us to think critically about neoliberalism and its relationship with cinema in many different ways, covering an impressive array of films that will appeal to students and academics across the disciplinary divides.

**Notes on Contributor**

Ian Fraser is Senior Lecturer in Politics, Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at Loughborough University. His most recent book is *Political Theory and Film: From Adorno to Žižek* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).