The structure of the book itself is very simple: separated into fifteen chapters, each chapter focuses its analysis on one film, organized by chronological order. Focusing on the paradoxical elements evinced in Sokurov’s cinema, Szaniawski ties together films which are superficially dissimilar, separated by time, form, and plot. For example, Szaniawski discusses Sokurov’s preoccupation with a “nostalgia for an impossible space” (179) in Days of the Eclipse (Dni zatmenija, 1988) as easily as he does in Russian Ark (Russkij kovcheg, 2002), during both of which we view “characters … in a cinematic present trying desperately to be reconnected with an idealised past, from which they are separated” (73).

Though the analysis of each film is thoughtful and well researched, some of the most interesting criticism takes place when Szaniawski relates one aspect of a film to a larger discussion pertaining to Sokurov, thereby giving the book, which could otherwise feel too narrow or pedantic, a breath of fresh air. For instance, in Chapter 3, Szaniawski highlights (with appropriate imagery) the importance of German Romantic painting in Sokurov’s cinema; in Chapter 9, we are treated to an eloquent appraisal of the similarities between Sokurov and Ingmar Bergman; and in Chapter 12, Szaniawski takes us through the implicit resonances Sokurov’s films share with queer cinema.


Bruce Bennett’s analysis of the major canon of Michael Winterbottom’s work serves as an in-depth investigation into the themes and stylistic choices that Winterbottom has made during his 25-year career. Part of Wallflower Press’s Director’s Cuts series— which more recently has published books on Agnés Varda, Alexander Sokurov, and Raúl Ruiz—Bennett’s book focuses on three aspects of Winterbottom’s work as described in the subtitle, “Borders, Intimacy, Terror.” From his early television work to his more recent films, Bennett examines the political, social, and personal aspects of Winterbottom’s cinema ranging from a first person delusional serial killer in The Killer Inside Me (2010), to a fictional historical adaptation in Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story (2005), and back around to a futuristic brief-encounter love story in Code 46 (2003).

Winterbottom’s themes are beyond the natural realm of traditional contemporary filmmakers. His work is comedic, violent, sexual, dark, but above all there is always a sense of social and political commentary. Bennett’s dissection of Winterbottom goes into levels of...
the director’s representation of sexual encounters, breaking the fourth wall, the war on terror, and issues with border relations/immigration. Speaking on Winterbottom’s adaptation film *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), Bennett writes,

> Of Winterbottom’s authenticity in his political films, Bennett sees his shooting style as one of realism and penetrating legitimacy. Return ensemble casts is another of Winterbottom’s motifs studied in Bennett’s book. Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan have been appearing together for quite some time now, and more specifically in films like Winterbottom’s *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* and *The Trip,* which more recently premiered its sequel *The Trip to Italy* (2014) this spring at Sundance.

When breaking down the career of a director who is still consistently pumping out films on a yearly basis, it is often difficult to keep up; but Bennett’s book is a fruitful examination of a filmmaker who has spent years honing his craft and who still consistently manages to surprise his audiences. Bennett’s examination of Winterbottom dives deep into themes and modes of interpretation. However, he leaves the final act to the reader to go out and study the cinema of Winterbottom, to see where Winterbottom defines the borders, intimacy, and terror in each piece of his filmic work.

The decision to shoot much of the film on location gives the non-documentary material a greater sense of authenticity. Most of the film was shot in Sarajevo, only a few months after the war ended in December 1995, and so the ruined buildings and shrapnel damaged streets and roads, and makeshift grave markers are a very visible backdrop to the action. (29)

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WHERE YOU LOOK TODAY there are advertisements, talk shows, articles (like the one you’re reading!), etc., with a particular film owning the focal point. Have you realized just how much our culture – or even people of almost every culture – enjoys, and dare I say, is obsessed with films and their respective concepts? How many times have you made small talk about a current film you’ve found interesting? Or taken a class that referenced a film?

Paul Kahn’s book, *Finding Ourselves at the Movies: Philosophy for a New Generation,* explains itself in the title. People today subconsciously find film to be an equal ground from which to relate him/herself to the world, including the other people in it. The first part is titled “From Philosophy to Film” and can be quite intellectually demanding. In it, Kahn explores the philosophical theory of film and how it relates humans to their everyday experiences and interactions.

The second part, “Film and the Social Imaginary,” narrates to people with a film background – like myself – a bit more easily. Kahn takes his philosophy, including the conclusions of his theories on politics and love/family, and applies it to several films of the 2000s. He even compares the act of watching pornography to watching a horror film, a particularly interesting section of writing due to the cultural taboos surrounding both film genres.