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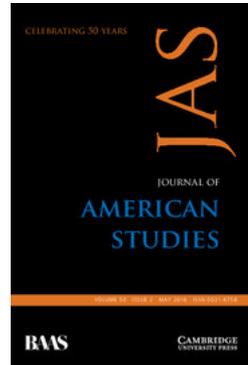
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Guy Westwell, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2014, \ \$27.00/£18.50). Pp. 240. isbn 978 0 2311 7202 8.

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Guy Westwell, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2014, \$27.00/£18.50). Pp. 240. ISBN 978 0 2311 7202 8.

There is no question that since the events of 9/11, the United States has been on a perpetual war footing, quite unlike anything in its history. World War II was over in a matter of four years; the quagmire of Vietnam lasted nearly two decades, but was eventually resolved after a fashion, to no one's satisfaction. But 9/11, with its direct attack on one of the totemic icons of the United States, was clearly unprecedented, and in the months following the tragedy it seemed that no one really knew how to react. Some films dealt directly with the attack, such as *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis*, a 2003 television movie directed by Brian Trenchard-Smith starring Timothy Bottoms as President George W. Bush, trying to deal with the immediate fallout in the initial moments after the disaster; Peter Markle's *Flight 93* (2006), another television movie for the A&E Network, which chronicled the last moments of the doomed flight; Michael Moore's intensely controversial *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), a documentary that traced the events leading up to 9/11, and the American response to it; Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006), recounting the events immediately after the attack, and the subsequent efforts to rescue survivors; and Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006), which also recounted, in painful detail, the final flight of the plane headed for the World Trade Center which was thrown off course by the passengers who revolted against the hijackers.

There were, of course, a host of other films of every political persuasion, including the multi-director examination of the aftermath of the attack, *11'09"01–September 11* (2002), created by an international team of auteurs including Youssef Chahine from Egypt, Amis Gitai from Israel, Alejandro González Iñárritu from Mexico, Sean Penn from the United States, Samira Makhmalbaf from Iran, Claude Lelouch from France, Ken Loach from the UK, and other distinguished filmmakers, in an attempt to come to some sort of international understanding of the horrific events of the day. This list is far from complete; there were also a number of sketchy conspiracy-theory films, most notably Dylan Avery's *Loose Change*, which went through several versions between 2005 and 2009, arguing that the entire attack was an "inside job," engineered by the United States government itself.

But one could argue, as Westwell so effectively does, that even those films that did not directly deal with the events of 9/11 were affected by it; that, further, *all* American cinema, even comedies, bears the imprint of 9/11, whether aware of it or not. The tragedy of the Twin Towers has become so much a part of the fabric of American existence that even the slightest reference to September 11, 2001 brings back a host of horrific memories, and those films made before the attack that show the Twin Towers dominating the Manhattan skyline—including, for example, John Guillermin's 1976 version of *King Kong*, in which Kong climbs not the Empire State Building but the two towers of the World Trade Center—seem to instantly belong to a simpler, more innocent time.

Since then, the United States has been flooded with a plethora of directly themed 9/11 films and television programs, such as the highly successful Fox TV series *24*, in

which the threat of terrorism is the nucleus of the entire plotline; Stephen Daldry's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011), which attempts to bring the 9/11 attacks down to a more intimate scale; Mike Binder's *Reign over Me* (2007), an Adam Sandler film that also deals with the direct human loss of the tragedy; and perhaps most prominently Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), an account of one CIA operative's obsessive attempt to successfully facilitate the raid in Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden, the self-confessed mastermind behind the attack.

But Westwell goes well beyond these films, and others like them, to examine a huge number of supposedly mainstream entertainment films that exist in an atmosphere of uncertainty and a lack of solid ground; no one knows, really, where we are anymore, as the United States continues to battle an enemy that belongs to no one nation-state, which operates in the shadows, which is driven by violent extremism of the most desperate sort, and which seeks nothing less than the destruction of the US as its ultimate and only goal.

In such an atmosphere, now going on fourteen years after the attack, casual entertainment is something that is seemingly impossible; action and spectacle films featuring nonstop sequences of mindless destruction continue to proliferate, and such recent films as Roland Emmerich's *White House Down* and Antoine Fuqua's deeply similar *Olympus Has Fallen* (both 2013) seem to dwell in a world of ceaseless paranoia, where betrayal and deception are simple facts of existence, and there is really no safe place where one can return to any semblance of normal, peacetime society. Westwell's comprehensive study of post-9/11 cinema thus makes for intensely compelling and thoroughly researched reading, as perhaps the most inclusive study of American cinema in the post-9/11 era, in which every film, directly related or not, bears the scars of a national tragedy that no one – in the truest sense of the phrase – can ever forget.

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