

*Les Écrans de l'ombre: La seconde guerre mondiale dans le cinéma français (1944–1969)*. By SYLVIE LINDEPERG. Paris, CNRS Éditions, 1997. 443 pp.

For most non-French viewers, the history of the Second War in French cinema effectively begins in the early 1970s, with the successive debates around Marcel Ophüls's *Le Chagrin et la pitié* and Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*. Sylvie Lindeperg's magisterial survey draws attention to the range of different cinematic representations of the conflict produced in the quarter-century after it came to an end — some (Melville's *Le Silence de la mer*) now regarded more as *auteur* films than as historical documents, some (Clément's *Paris brûle-t-il?*) once immensely influential but now largely forgotten, many more never seen or likely to be seen by British or American audiences. Her book is a splendid example of what has become known as the 'new historicism' in film studies, dealing as it does not only with individual films but also with the struggles within the industry over how the Liberation in particular should be represented. The 'constitution du passé en enjeu artistique' (p. 12) undertaken by any historical reconstruction appears also as a series of political battles between Gaullists and Communists, reflected in the respective importance granted by film-makers to the *Forces françaises de l'intérieur* and the *Franco-tireurs et partisans français*. The imbrication of the political, the industrial and the artistic in the 'reglements de compte internes au monde du septième art' (p. 295) yields a fascinating and exhaustively documented narrative. The tightrope that the makers of *Paris brûle-t-il?* had to walk between the fear of offending the Gaullist regime on one hand and the Communist-led cinema technicians' unions on the other is as tense a tale as any of those that go to make up the film itself. Lindeperg's analysis of the films is acute in detail and stimulatingly synoptic, drawing attention to such features as the handful of French soil regularly clutched by dying soldiers in the nationalistic products of the immediately post-Liberation years or the importance of what Jean-Pierre Jeancolas has called the 'contemporain vague' in skirting the strictures of the censor. My only quibble is one of genre; the presentation of the book seems unsure of whether it is a historical text (as the publisher's imprint implies) or a work on the cinema. That only names from the cinematic world are included in the 'index des noms' would suggest the latter; but in that case it is frustrating not to have a more comprehensive and detailed filmography, the more so given the rarity of so many of the films discussed. I only wish that the CNRS had 'gone for broke' and given us both such a filmography and a socio-political as well as cinematic index. This, however, is a minor criticism of a remarkable book that will add immeasurably to our knowledge, not just of the cinema, but of post-War French cultural history in general.

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