Recent years Scottish films have emerged as a fresh and vivid voice on the world stage. Cult hits like Danny Boyle’s *Shallow Grave* (1995), Gillies McKinnon’s *Small Faces* (1996), and Ken Loach’s *My Name is Joe* (1998), to name but a few, have helped to define Scottish cinema production in the 1990s as something notably different from an earlier era in Scotland and Britain in general. These films have also traveled outside the country receiving international release, albeit limited, and critical acclaim. Boyle’s *Trainspotting* (1996) in particular pushed Scottish cinema to the forefront becoming a popular and critical success on both sides of the Atlantic. Furthermore, larger Hollywood productions like the Oscar winning *Braveheart* (1995) and Danish director Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* (1996), a European art film set in the Western Highlands, have helped foster Scotland’s reputation as a nation where quality films are being created.

*Screening Scotland* is a response to this recent insurgence of Scottish films as Petrie attempts to explain the phenomenon and chart its growth. His analysis is divided in two parts: Scottish film production as an extension of a London based cinema and Scottish film production as depicted and financed by Scotland. The division does not correspond with a date per se, but with the decline of productions associated with Tartanry, Kailyardism, and Clydesidism and the rise of documentaries, television, and art cinema. These new formats of expression sought to address...
the historical and contemporary reality of Scotland and not the myths of reality associated with three aforementioned cultural traditions. Moreover, the division within the book is associated with the decline of British film production centralized in London, a consequence that compelled artistic emigration south, and the emergence of Scotland as both the producer and consumer of cinema. Petrie does not make the mistake of reducing earlier cinema to myth making, kitsch, or inauthentic representations of Scotland. As he demonstrates, Tartanry, Kailyardism, and Clydesidism have their place and continue to live on as Scottish cinema is still engaged with their dominant themes: resurrecting the historical, reworking the idea of peripheral, and reengaging the urban experience. To believe that an authentic representation of Scottish reality can be created is a fallacy as a myriad of ‘Scotlands’ exist in a pluralistic society; old myths can only be rejected when new ones take their place.

Other leading cultural commentators, Angus Calder for example, argue that this recent renaissance in Scottish cinema and Scottish culture in general has been the product of the political developments of the last twenty odd years: the failed devolution referendum of 1979, the Thatcher administration, and the rise of a ‘Middle England’ sentiment south of the Tweed. Such developments have served to alienate Scotland and weaken a conception of Britain as a nation. In response, so the argument goes, Scottish cinema has been infused with a dosage of national spirit stirring film makers to a high level of productivity. The underlying assumption of the argument being that artistic work spawned from cultural nationalism is inherently of good quality. Petrie, however, downplays such a thesis and examines the broader historical framework citing the financial backing that has gone into the film industry. The “Scottish Film Production Fund/Scottish Screen,” the “Glasgow Film Fund,” and the “Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Fund,” as well as numerous schemes to support shorter films have provided new opportunities and helped raise the number of productions throughout the nineties. Petrie’s evidence demonstrates that the establishment of a supportive infrastructure explains both the volume and quality of recent Scottish films. The influx
of money going towards film production further attests to a recognition of the importance of film production to a nation. Funding has been provided for films that have nothing to do with Scotland, such as Terrence Davies’ *The House of Mirth* (2000) which used Glasgow to represent Edith Wharton’s turn of the century America, however, most of the funded films attempt to engage the reality of contemporary Scotland indicating that while economics is a consideration in the doling out of funds, culture is of primary concern. Such a selection process by these organizations demonstrates a belief that a nation’s health is tied to its artistic creations.

*Screening Scotland*, while an entertaining and illuminating book, never provides a satisfactory discussion of the relationship between cinema and nation. Can we speak of a new national cinema in Scotland or even national cinema in general? Is location, setting, or the nationality of the director sufficient to label a film ‘Scottish’ or is it required to capture a nation’s history? French filmmaker Jean-Luc Goddard maintained that there have been only a handful of nations (Italy, Germany, America, and Russia) who can speak of possessing a national cinema, though his comments were made in 1991 prior to recent developments in Scotland. Goddard argued that it was only by necessity, by feeling a need to construct images of themselves, that nations created national cinemas. Such a definition has dubious merit. It is absurd to think that nations exist that do not have a compulsion to construct images of themselves through motion pictures. Scotland, a nation stricken by its need to express itself as autonomous but also limited in its sovereignty through its connection with Britain, would seem to be a nation where cinematic representations of the nation would have a great appeal. Petrie does not wholly disagree with Goddard’s statement. While he dismisses Goddard’s explanation as “characteristically provocative,” Petrie does agree with Goddard’s contention that national cinemas are few and far between. Of Scotland, Petrie concludes that a national cinema has not yet arrived. What has emerged in recent years, according to him, is a distinct component of a devolved British cinema, rather than a new Scottish cinema as an independent entity. Whether this
means that a national cinema comparable with Italy or Germany will eventually emerge and what steps are necessary for this to occur, are, sadly, questions the author does not address.

Nevertheless, Petrie has produced a solid work here, as is evident by the Saltire society recently short-listing him for a non-fiction award (which he did not win). His analysis has not only drawn upon the history of Scottish cinema, but also historical work done on Scottish national identity indicating the value of this contribution to Scottish studies as a whole.

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