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Reviews

The Cinema of the Low Countries

edited by Ernest Mathijs. London: Wallflower Press, 2004.

Marco Abel

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and Stoppard—in which the space of the theatre and the constructedness of the characters has been used as a way of exploring the theatricality and scriptedness of our actual lives. Like Pirandello's and Stoppard's characters, many of the major characters in the trilogy offer their own self-reflexive commentary about the “drama” in which they find themselves. For the Merovingian, of course, nothing is outside the script; everything is determined by principles of cause and effect. The Oracle, however, seems to pose a challenge to this principle. Although she herself is just one of the many programs of the Matrix, her task is to investigate “certain aspects of the human psyche” and, in doing so, she necessarily unbalances it, creating the possibility for the “revolutions” of the final film. Indeed, Sheehan notes that love itself is repeatedly shown to undermine the causality and determinism championed by the Merovingian, and Sheehan sets this observation alongside a consideration of philosophers who have refused the “faith” of causality, including Kant, Hume, and, most powerfully, Nietzsche, who saw all reasoned principles as being built on anthropomorphic images rather than on any ground of immanence. Of course, Neo is the ultimate figure to test the hermetic causality of the cyberworld. By the end of *The Matrix Reloaded*, however, he has realized that he is essentially a “hope machine,” a creation of the Matrix itself, designed to channel and ultimately disperse subversive energies. Even so, Morpheus refuses to concede to this cynical possibility, resting his faith in Neo on a distinction between fate and providence that derives, Sheehan argues, from Augustine. If Neo recovers his Messianic qualities at the trilogy's closing, however, he is seen to be the providential instrument not of an anthropomorphic god, but of a mega-machine, “and a bleak, retrospective shadow is cast over the Matrix trilogy” (171).

Sheehan's essay is a strong closing to a book, which, on the whole, is rather uneven in depth and facility of argumentation. Certainly, one should expect that the essays in a contributory volume would form more of a hypertext than a monologic text, but those *Matrix* enthusiasts committed to reading the whole volume may wish that Gillis had imposed a stronger editorial hand. The two large sections into which she divides the book (and which I have largely ignored in this review) do not really facilitate its digestion. And while academics will be able to endure the convoluted style that is practically the hallmark of contemporary academic discourse on culture, the general reader will likely prefer to “take the blue pill” and reimmerse herself in the world of the Matrix.

Steven Woodward is Assistant Professor of Film and Literature at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec. He is the editor of the book *After Kieslowski: The Legacy of Krzysztof Kieslowski* and the author of numerous articles on such subjects as architecture in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*, villains in the James Bond movies, and cinematic depictions of girls who kill

The Cinema of the Low Countries, edited by Ernest Mathijs. London: Wallflower Press, 2004

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This is the fourth title in Wallflower Press's “24 Frames” series, which devotes its pages to the study of national and regional cinemas. Specifically, it approaches these cinemas' “historical

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