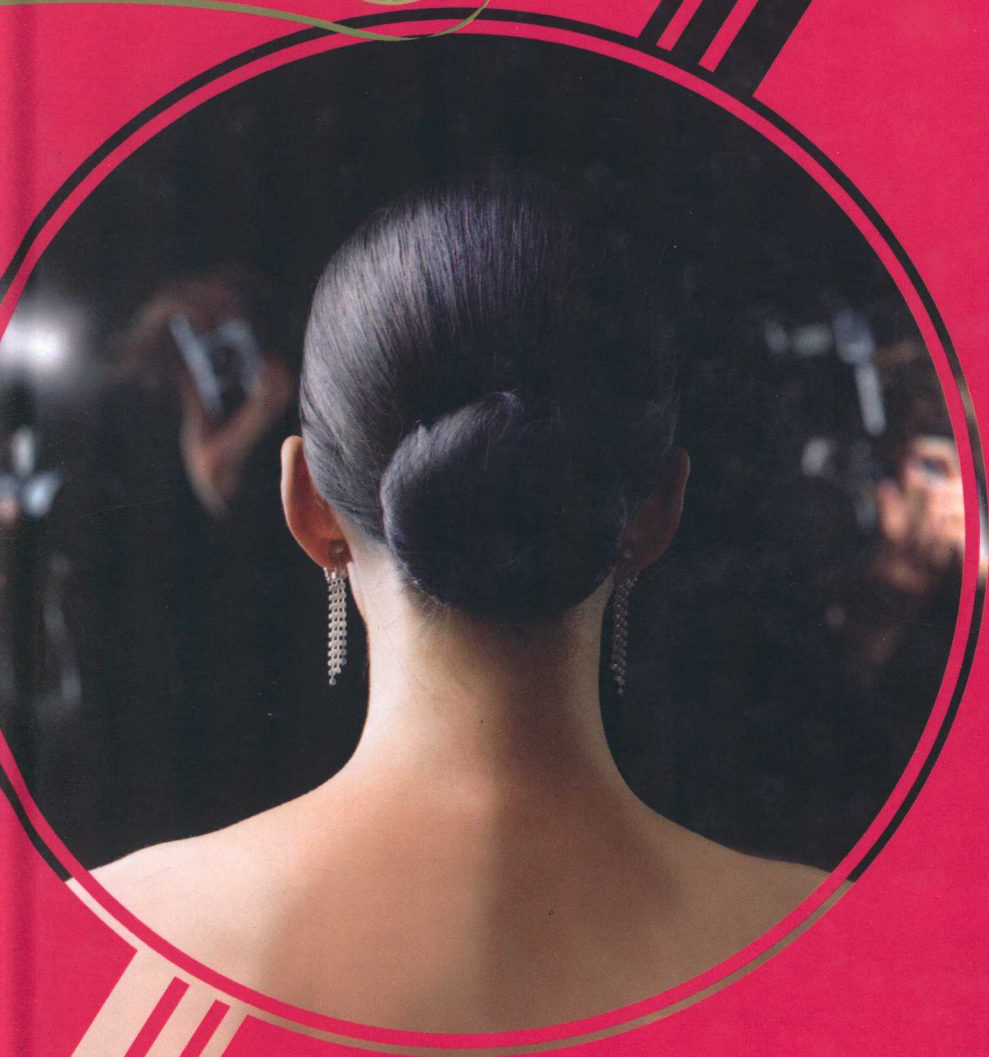


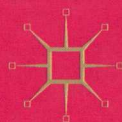
**GLOBAL
CINEMA**



TRANSNATIONAL STARDOM

INTERNATIONAL CELEBRITY IN FILM AND POPULAR CULTURE

**EDITED BY
RUSSELL MEEUF
AND RAPHAEL RAPHAEL**



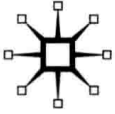
Transnational Stardom

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Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael



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TRANSNATIONAL STARDOM

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GLOBAL CINEMA

Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy

The **Global Cinema** series publishes innovative scholarship on the transnational themes, industries, economies, and aesthetic elements that increasingly connect cinemas around the world. It promotes theoretically transformative and politically challenging projects that rethink film studies from cross-cultural, comparative perspectives, bringing into focus forms of cinematic production that resist nationalist or hegemonic frameworks. Rather than aiming at comprehensive geographical coverage, it foregrounds transnational interconnections in the production, distribution, exhibition, study, and teaching of film. Dedicated to global aspects of cinema, this pioneering series combines original perspectives and new methodological paths with accessibility and coverage. Both "global" and "cinema" remain open to a range of approaches and interpretations, new and traditional. Books published in the series sustain a specific concern with the medium of cinema but do not defensively protect the boundaries of film studies, recognizing that film exists in a converging media environment. The series emphasizes a historically expanded rather than an exclusively presentist notion of globalization; it is mindful of repositioning "the global" away from a US-centric/Eurocentric grid, and remains critical of celebratory notions of "globalizing film studies."

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Prismatic Media, Transnational Circuits: Feminism in a Globalized Present
By Krista Geneviève Lynes

Transnational Stardom: International Celebrity in Film and Popular Culture
Edited by Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael

Also by the Editors

John Wayne's World: Transnational Masculinity in the Fifties by Russell Meeuf (2013)

Different Art: The Disability Arts Reader edited by Raphael Raphael and Christopher Smit (forthcoming)

List of Illustrations

Figures

2.1	John Wayne as 1850s US diplomat Townsend Harris arriving in Japan in <i>The Barbarian and the Geisha</i>	34
4.1	The globe-trotting Delon accepts a CIA assignment as the title character of 1973's <i>Scorpio</i>	87
4.2	In <i>The Concorde: Airport '79</i> , the top-billed Delon mostly fills space across from co-star George Kennedy	88
7.1	Tony Jaa's elephant run in <i>Ong Bak: Muay Thai Warrior</i> (2003)	148
7.2	Yanin's butterfly twist in <i>Chocolate</i> (2008)	150
8.1	Javier Bardem raising hell in <i>Perdita Durango</i>	171
8.2	Bardem's "majestic neck-up performance" in <i>The Sea Inside</i>	176
12.1	The "black panther" sequence from the "Black or White" music video	268
12.2	Close-up of "panther" dance from "Black or White" music video	269

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Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael</i>	
Part I Discussing Transnational Stardom	
1 A Panel Discussion on Transnational Stardom	19
<i>Mary Beltran, Corey Creekmur, Sangita Gopal, and Raphael Raphael</i>	
Part II Hollywood Stars, Transnational Contexts	
2 John Wayne's Japan: International Production, Global Trade, and John Wayne's Diplomacy in <i>The Barbarian and the Geisha</i>	31
<i>Russell Meeuf</i>	
3 Hanoi Jane Française: Transnational in Time	53
<i>Grace An</i>	
Part III Gender and Mobile "European" Identities: '60s and '70s Francophone Stars	
4 Alain Delon, International Man of Mystery	77
<i>Mark Gallagher</i>	
5 The Transnational Career of Geneviève Bujold	95
<i>Liz Czach</i>	
Part IV Kinetic Bodies, Labor, and the Action Cinema	
6 Hong Kong's <i>It/Ip Man</i> : The Chinese Contexts of Donnie Yen's Transnational Stardom	117
<i>Lisa Funnell</i>	

- 7 Tony Jaa: Hong Kong Action Cinema as Mode in Thai Action Stardom 139
Lauren Steimer

Part V Transnational Film Stars, Transnational Media

- 8 (Almost) Everybody Loves Javier Bardem . . . “For He Is a Good Actor”: Critical Reception in the Spanish and US Media 165
Miguel Fernández Labayen and Vicente Rodríguez Ortega
- 9 From Heroine to “Brand Shilpa”: Reality Television, Transnational Cultural Economics, and the Remaking of the Bollywood Star 187
Sreya Mitra
- 10 Pink Rupees or Gay Icons? Accounting for the Camp Appropriation of Male Bollywood Stars 207
Charlie Henniker

Part VI Popular Music Stars and Transnational Identities

- 11 Shakira as the Idealized Transnational Citizen: A Case Study of *Colombianidad* in Transition 229
María Elena Cepeda
- 12 Michael Jackson: Crisis, Resistance, and International Freakdom 257
Raphael Raphael

Notes on Contributors 277

Index 281

Introduction

Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael

At the peak of racial tensions in the United States in the late 1960s, Sidney Poitier became a top commercial draw in Hollywood with a string of films probing racism and discrimination, including the classics *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). These films resulted in Poitier being named the top male star in 1968 by the National Association of Theater Owners and helped him cement his place not simply as a talented actor (he had by this time already become the first black male to win an Academy Award) but also as a marketable and internationally recognizable movie star. Poitier's popularity was rooted in his ability to navigate the turbulent racial politics that marked a cultural crisis in the late 1960s in the United States. But that ability cannot be understood outside the context of his transnational background. Born in Miami as a result of his parents' international labor migrations but raised in the Bahamas (then a British colony), Poitier attained his distinctive vocal articulation as a result of years adapting his British-tinged Bahamian English to the United States. And it should not be forgotten that his late 1960s commercial success also came through his performance in the British film *To Sir, with Love* (1967), about a school teacher in 1960s London. Thus, his transnational circulation and personal history appear to resolve the impossible contradictions of national race conflict in the United States, using Poitier to critically examine structures of racism and the legacy of discrimination against African Americans but also insisting upon a certain sophisticated, international "otherness" in the celebration of Poitier and the characters he plays. Poitier's example suggests, then, not simply the important role that stars and celebrities play in the negotiation of cultural politics but also the impossibility of understanding stardom within the singular scale of the nation.

Despite the common popular assumptions that the culture of celebrity is superficial and vacuous,¹ over the past few decades, film studies, media studies, and cultural studies (among other fields) have demonstrated the

cultural importance of stardom and celebrity, recognizing the role that stars and celebrities play in dramatizing not only the cultural status quo but also the tensions of cultural change. In addition to being an important means of marketing films and television (and music and sports), stars—or at least the discourses and images that make up our collective understanding of a particular star—provide sites where cultural and ideological conflicts surrounding gender, sexuality, race, national identity, class, and individualism can be dramatized and mediated.

The ability of stars to act as such sites of contestation, moreover, is particularly important given the transnational mobility of popular media (and its audiences) throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As media, such as film, circulate internationally (through the massive international distribution structures of theatrical release, through the circulation of VHS and then DVD, and now also via the Internet, both legally and otherwise), stars continue to function as a kind of currency of cross-cultural exchange, the most visible (and visibly marketed) icons of the many transnational film industries at work today. As audiences in Japan swoon over Johnny Depp, a teenager somewhere in middle America is streaming a Tony Jaa film over Netflix in his parents' basement.

This volume interrogates these cross-cultural dynamics, analyzing the transnational circulation of stars and celebrity with a particular emphasis on film stars.² The concept of “transnational,” of course, has become somewhat problematic through overuse and under-clarification by academics. As Mette Hjort has effectively argued, the use of the term “transnational” by film and media scholars has been characterized by a general and too-broad set of assumptions about globalization rather than a critical debate concerning the definition and meaning of the term. Hjort notes that “the term ‘transnational’ does little to advance our thinking about important issues if it can mean anything and everything that the occasion would appear to demand.”³ And yet, too strict of a definition or set of qualifying circumstances can also be stifling and unhelpful, especially given the dynamic and fluid kinds of phenomena usually described as transnational. For this book, therefore, we will rely on the description of transnational put forth by Nataša Durovicová, which effectively outlines a broad set of boundaries while still emphasizing the openness of transnational flows:

In contradistinction to “global,” a concept bound up with the philosophical category of totality, and in contrast to “international,” predicated on political systems in a latent relationship of parity, as signaled by the prefix “inter-,” the intermediate and open term “transnational” acknowledges the persistent agency of the state, in a varying but fundamentally legitimizing relationship to the scale of “the nation.” At the same time, the prefix “trans-” implies

relations of unevenness and mobility. It is this relative openness to modalities of geopolitical forms, social relations, and especially to the variant *scale* on which relations in film history have occurred that gives this key term its dynamic force, and utility as a frame for hypotheses about emergent forms.⁴

At stake in this definition of “transnational” is the ability of media, such as cinema, to produce cultural meaning in relation to (but not dictated by) the existing power structures of nations and states, to remain mobile, flexible, and open to multiple avenues of meaning and pleasure in different contexts of politics, social relations, and cultural assumptions. Thus, Kathleen Newman, referencing the work of Mary Louise Pratt, asks how we might “consider the geopolitical scales of cinematic exchange to operate as contact zones,” as moments of cross-cultural interaction that are not dictated by existing power relations between nations and cultures but rather are structured within the more open and flexible scale of the transnational, “wherein the connections established between the here and now of relatively distant locales overcome all the uneven relations of power of other scales such as the national, regional, continental, or international scales.”⁵ For Newman, the idea of transnational cinema as a contact zone explains the ability of cinema and other transnational media to forge connections (even if only momentary) between peoples and localities that may reflect global inequalities but yet also transcend them:

What is now at stake in film studies is the question of how motion pictures register, at formal level of narrative, broad and long-term social transformations, that is, changes in the capitalist-world economy at the regional and global scales and over multiple decades. While this is a question of recognizing ongoing inequalities and how that may articulate one with another, it also must be a question of how film registers, and therefore serves as evidence of, equality among and between peoples over and against the hierarchies of capitalism.⁶

The powerful images and narratives surrounding media celebrities are a key example of such contact zones; the zones act as sites of transnational media circulation in which the constructs of nation or the inequalities of global capitalism, even when glaringly present, can be obscured or put aside in favor of the seemingly intimate and personal connections created by consuming transnational stars. The pleasures of the star system, after all, are deeply tied to the idea of individuality—when we appreciate the style, charm, charisma, beauty, or personality of media celebrities, we create connections with media discourses that are meant to replicate sensations of individual attachments, to feel as though we “really know” the star. These personal connections and the idea of stars as “real” and complete

individuals (rather than an assembled set of media fragments) engender the kind of flexible, open contact zone that Newman describes, a site upon which inequalities and structures of international power can seemingly melt away within the pleasures of a personal, cross-cultural identification. From a more cynical perspective, the pleasures of consuming transnational stars might simply be an ideological distraction, a means through which international politics and power relations can escape critical or resistant questioning. But in the true spirit of the contact zone, we must also consider these connections as important moments of cross-cultural communication, open and flexible connections facilitated by transnational media that can reveal a great deal about the foundations of individuality within a changing global modernity.

The idea that stars are able to bridge ideological gaps and contradictions through an appeal to the ideal of the modern individual has been central to the foundational theory on stardom, even if the historical roots of star theory have been focused on the context of the national rather than the flexible dynamics of the transnational. Richard Dyer, for example, has famously argued that stars offer examples of individuals that are simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary, appearing to be just like the common person and yet also more beautiful, glamorous, or skilled. This paradoxical combination then allows stars to hide the gaps and fissures within dominant ideological systems by repressing the contradiction behind the veneer of the discrete and complete individual.⁷ Marilyn Monroe, to use one of Dyer's examples, remains iconic around the world today because of the ways her image combines innocence and naïveté with sexual availability, disguising the cultural contradiction that women in modern society must be simultaneously sexual and virginal. Instead of a fractured gendered subjectivity split between "virgin" and "whore," the spectacle of Monroe's image suggests a complete individual, occluding the contradictions of gender ideologies. That Monroe was an international icon of femininity and sexuality, of course, says a great deal about the international projection of Western gender norms through the processes of colonialism and imperialism. As this suggests, the appeal of other transnational stars can also be tied to their negotiation of the global and the local, their ability to function as local heroes integrated into local or national cultures and simultaneously as icons of global modernity. Similar to Monroe, the images and narratives surrounding Indian mega-star Aishwarya Rai, for example, collapse the contradictions between traditional Indian femininity and modern notions of love, romance, and independence into a stylized image of modern individuality that is somehow intensely local, nationalistic, and indicative of a model of global femininity.

Given this ability to collapse or bridge cultural contradiction, Stephen Hinerman has claimed that “stardom [. . .] is not a ‘problem’ but a blessing in the chaotic conditions of modern life.”⁸ For Hinerman, transnational stars provide a set of shared images and ideas that help individuals manage the cultural changes inherent in global modernity. In a technological world in which social relations are increasingly stretched across geographic space rather than being based in proximity and shared cultural values, “highly valued common images provide individuals with shared communication experiences across geographical boundaries. In the process, global stars are born.”⁹ Stars, then, entice audiences into identification with global media systems and their ideological underpinnings, acting as a kind of “access point” with which global audiences can put their trust in the structures of global modernity. But they also provide powerful images that help generate and articulate a sense of modern identity amidst the deterritorialization of culture: “Stardom has become a ‘glue’ that can connect individuals across time and space, create identities, and hold them together. Stars grant modern people a sense of self and a sense of (placeless) place. [. . .] stardom provides significant emotional connections for otherwise relatively disconnected individuals.”¹⁰

Hinerman, of course, is perhaps too optimistic and Eurocentric in his evaluation of global stardom as a “blessing” in the modern world. Circulating in different national and local contexts experiencing varying levels of modernization, global stars insist on the primacy of individualism, more specifically a vision of individualism and subjectivity intertwined with the implementation of modernity and capitalism. Given that the rise of mass mediated global celebrity has coincided with the height of imperialistic modernization and the transformation of traditional cultures around the world, one might suggest that stars, rather than a “blessing,” can just as easily be seen as a primary means through which Western modernity has projected its vision of modern subjectivity in its global campaign.

Stars, after all, always function as agents of the global media systems that create them while also acting as sources of pleasure and identification for their audiences. It is through this balance that transnational stars become such dynamic and effective sources of ideological negotiation. Thus, Simon During, discussing the future of cultural studies in a world of globalization, turns to the spectacle of Arnold Schwarzenegger to explore the pleasures and power of global media. During argues that what he calls the “global popular”—the set of films, stars, and other media images that are globally popular at a given historical moment—should be understood in terms of cultural changes stretching across national borders due to globalization and the ways individuals experience such changes: “the

appeal of the audiovisual global popular is [...] to be read in terms of the limited capacities of particular media to provide for individuals' needs and desires, especially male needs and desires, across the various territories that constitute the world image market."¹¹ Pointing out that Schwarzenegger's body is constantly situated within narratives and contexts that emphasize the "body-as-resource," During suggests that the global appeal of Schwarzenegger can be understood in the ways that it provides a sensational fantasy of male bodies that directly responds to and mirrors the experiences of bodies within the global economy. Schwarzenegger's global resonance, then, balances an affirmation of systems of modernity and capitalism while also appealing to the kinds of needs, desires, and lived experiences of individuals within global modernity.¹²

The connection between stars and the sensations of everyday life, moreover, indicates more of a need to understand the emotional and visceral appeal of stars in the context of globalization rather than simply approaching stardom as a semiotic or discursive phenomenon. The frequent use of the term "star text," while a helpful tool in separating the actual individual from the constructed idea of them in popular discourse, reflects the tendency to understand stars as purely textual instead of grappling with the range of emotions and visceral sensations that inform audiences' appreciation of and identification with certain stars. Indeed, in the case of transnational stardom, a more developed understanding of global modernity as not simply a set of political, social, and economic structures but rather as a major transformation in the textures and sensations of everyday life can help to situate the appeal of, say, Shah Rukh Khan's comedy-laced and yet tear-jerking balance of modern life and traditional commitments or Jackie Chan's playful yet painful appropriation of spaces of everyday modernity for adrenaline pumping action.

And yet, as this suggests, an appeal to the personal sensations of consuming and appreciating stars should not obscure their role within larger historical trajectories. Many of the essays collected in this volume make evident that stars attain transnational resonance at very particular moments of historical crisis or transition, offering up the ideologies, emotions, and sensations informing subjectivities that are able to manage or assuage the tensions of historical crisis. In fact, in addition to exploring issues of national identity, race, and geopolitics, of central importance to many of the chapters of this book are the gendered tensions of globalization and global modernity. The large-scale processes of globalization, modernization, and global capitalism are often assumed to be gender-neutral transformations of politics, infrastructure, or bureaucracy. That the dramatic social and cultural changes produced by such processes impact men and women unequally is often seen as an unintended by-product

of such social forces rather than an intrinsic set of gendered assumptions within the ideologies of global modernity. But as sociologists such as R. W. Connell and Joan Acker have argued, assumptions about gender have always been inseparable from the ideological assumptions of capitalism, imperialism, and now globalization. And the processes of globalization have resulted in emerging forms of gender relations as well as shifting constructions of masculinity and femininity.¹³ Within these global transformations of the world gender order, transnational film stars can often act as powerful images reflecting these transforming gender subjectivities, helping to reify the emerging gendered norms of global modernity by negotiating them against more traditional conceptions of gender and identity. Throughout the collection, therefore, many essays provide examples of these negotiations, from the re-working of John Wayne's rugged and patriotic masculinity in the context of global trade and cross-cultural exchange in an international production in Japan to the complex intersections of gender ideologies and racial/ethnic identity manifest in pop singer Shakira's construction of transnational "latinidad" identity.

Of course, with the increasing emphasis on "globalization" to describe the flows of media and culture in the contemporary world, it might be assumed that the power and resonance of transnational stars have been increasing as systems of media distribution become more international and inch toward becoming truly global. This is, perhaps, the case, but since the early 1900s, with the emergence of film stars and the modern star system as we know it, the culture of celebrity has always been transnational, marked not simply by Hollywood stars crisscrossing the globe as part of the US industry's international dominance, but by a variety of transnational flows as international film industries sought to market their films abroad and as performers followed their popularity into new markets and industries. A prominent example is Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa, who became a major US silent film star, carefully balancing exoticism and assimilation in the United States while sparking debate in Japan about his supposed "Americanization."¹⁴ Daisuke Miyao's meticulously researched book on Hayakawa effectively illustrates the transnational nature of the star system in the 1920s and 1930s, and other examples abound, from Clara Bow's popularity in Japan as a model of "modern" femininity,¹⁵ to the myriad success stories of European actors who have migrated to Hollywood,¹⁶ to the popularity of Indian actor-director Raj Kapoor across Asia and parts of Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, to name but a few examples. In short, there is no mythical "national" past for the star system that the current era of globalization and transnationalism marks a distinct break from.

And yet, there has been a distinct and steady intensification of the transnational flows of the star system beginning, it could be argued, in the

1950s as the breakdown of the classic Hollywood studio system spurred the imperative to further exploit international markets and international funding sources by Hollywood. This shift not only helped push the globalization of the US film industry, but also helped provide the foundations of international productions and co-productions that would become the norm for many other international industries. But perhaps more importantly, the increasing popularity and pervasiveness of other media technologies that circulated not only films but also the images, gossip, and narratives of the star system has made contemporary stardom particularly intense and transnationally flexible. Starting with television, and then VHS and DVD, and moving on to new media such as online gossip, social networking, and now sites like Twitter that make direct access to stars so easy, the dominant narrative of stardom and celebrity in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has been one of increasingly invasive and highly transnational access to the mediated images and words of stars.¹⁷ The impact of these new technologies, in fact, was made salient in the production of this book, which was undertaken mostly online across continents between the United States and Kazakhstan—our online discussions about which stars were most indicative of transnational stardom today (or simply which stars we enjoyed the most) often reproduced the same kinds of transnational fan discourses so common in the consumption and production of international stardom today.

The phenomenon of transnational stardom, then, offers an increasing multiplicity of the contact zones that Newman describes, an array of instances in which the transnational circulation and popularity of media celebrities help mediate and articulate the social, cultural, and political transformation of a rapidly changing world. To help explore the full complexity of transnational stardom, therefore, Part I of the book offers a broad range of discussions on the topic by a small panel of scholars with expertise in the area of stardom, transnational cinema, and cinema's globalization. Featuring Mary Beltran, Corey Creekmur, and Sangita Gopal, we present here the transcripts of an online discussion panel organized around the topic of transnational stardom. This discussion helps complement the depth of the research in the rest of the book by offering a glimpse into the lively academic debates that surround the study of transnational celebrity.

Next, in Part II, we present a series of case studies in which different stars from a variety of national contexts have provided the grounds for these cultural contact zones, providing a site upon which issues of national identity, gender, sexuality, class, and politics can be managed and negotiated. Focusing mostly on the transnational celebrity in film after World War II, the chapters of this book clearly do *not* provide a systematic and thorough history of transnational stardom—such an undertaking would