

Geoff Pevere et al., Steve Gravestock and Kate Lawrie Van de Ven (eds.), *Toronto on Film* (Toronto International Film Festival, 2009) pp. 192

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*Toronto on Film* explores an area which has received little attention in Canadian film scholarship, despite the city's prominent role in the Canadian film industry. Discussing both the history of Toronto filmmaking and the representation of the city on film, this guide is a striking collaboration. Published by the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and distributed by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, it contains the work of eleven different contributors. Piers Handling, as current director of the TIFF, takes both the foreword and introduction before giving way to essays by Geoff Pevere, Justin D. Edwards, Wyndham Wise, Brenda Longfellow, Matthew Hays and Steve Gravestock. The book ends with a list of notable Toronto films, each with brief notes from additional contributors Chris Kennedy, Kathryn MacKay, Magali Simard and Tammy Stone. Intended to function as a glossary, this proves an invaluable addendum to the essay discussions which move at a fast pace across the local cinematic cityscape.

Piers Handling's introduction sets out a compelling trajectory of the visual and textual representation of cities. In documenting Toronto's history of self-representation, Handling suggests that early twentieth-century Toronto literature was slow to engage with the city. Referring to Morley Callaghan's *Strange Fugitive* (1928), Handling positions the writer as "the first novelist to deploy Toronto as an imaginative space" (4); however, it should be noted that the city had already appeared in many fictions – some notable examples are Robert Barr's *Measure of the Rule* (1907), Suzanne Marny's *Tales of Old Toronto* (1909) and Isabel Ecclestone McKay's *Mist of Morning* (1919). This is no small point. Callaghan's literary Toronto is deployed seriously in Handling's essay, and the volume at large, to historicise the tendency of text and film to contain only tentative reference to Toronto. Despite Handling's further reference to Callaghan's short stories as source material for the film *Now That April's Here* (1958), these two useful references seem scant justification for reprinting Justin D. Edwards' compelling essay on Callaghan from its original appearance in an issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* in 1998. Given Edwards' sole focus on one Toronto novel, the essay's inclusion as the volume's third essay disrupts the discussion of Toronto on film.

Handling suggests that the collection's central concept originated from media commentator and critic Geoff Pevere, whose own essay "Flickering City: Toronto on Film until 2002" explains the need for this retrospective. Drawing upon the shock of the TIFF audience reaction to seeing the CN Tower in *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002), Pevere dwells on the significance of Toronto seeing itself on film. Acknowledging the

city's history of film production, Pevere contextualises Toronto's physical appearance in film, plotting a vacillating course from the enclosed, often anonymous, micro narratives of apartment buildings and streets to the distinct mythologising of neighbourhoods and landmarks. Pevere's story of Toronto film, as with Canadian cinema as a whole, is a mixture of documentary and feature filmmaking. These two genres overlap in an extended discussion of the quintessential sixties Toronto film *Goin' Down the Road* (1969). Don Shebib's film gives Pevere a chance to ruminate on film's place as a social document of Toronto, noting the dramatic changes the city has seen. Pevere's whistle stop tour of Toronto film does a satisfying job of introducing key moments in cinema despite his acknowledgement that the city itself "is virtually unrecognizable from one generation to the next" (32).

Wyndham Wise's essay "Up from the Underground" builds on the picture drawn by Pevere, elaborating on the history of local film co-operatives. Wise shows how many prominent Canadian directors were fostered through these local schemes, highlighting the development of Shebib, Ivan Reitman, Mort Ransen and David Cronenberg. Brenda Longfellow's contribution examines a wider context to the discussion of Toronto filmmakers which sits somewhat apart from the close focus on the city in other essays. Whilst trying to describe the local, national and international flows present, exploring Toronto cinema under the broader terms of Ontario cinema or English Canadian cinema diffuses the focus. Matthew Hays' close study of four Toronto films and their queering of urban space is a timely link to contemporary scholarship on queer Canadian cinema. The essay also builds on discussions elsewhere in the volume of *Winter Kept Us Warm* (1965) and *When Night is Falling* (1995). Steve Gravestock's conclusion returns us to the contemporary period, reflecting neatly on how the varied tropes of urban isolation and celebration are seen in recent Toronto cinema. This essay highlights the current vitality of Toronto documentary and feature filmmaking. Gravestock points to *Monkey Warfare* (2006) and *Last Call at the Gladstone Hotel* (2007) as particularly attentive films in responding to the local effects of development.

As a guide to Toronto film, the volume is essential reading. Although uneven in content, the collaborative nature of the book allows a valuable forum for highlighting the different factors which have shaped the city's sense of itself on screen. As is the case with much Canadian cinema, the reader may often despair at the lack of distribution or access to the films referenced in the text. Nevertheless, studies such as this provide essential scholarship on the long filmic conversations a city has with itself.