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Leslie Barnes and Joseph Mai, eds., *The Cinema of Rithy Panh: Everything Has a Soul*. New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2021. x + 242 pp. 21 b-w images, bibliography, notes, notes on contributors, and index. \$69.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781978809802; \$32.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781978809796; \$32.95 U.S. (epub). ISBN 9781978809819; \$32.95 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 9781978809833.

Review by Thibaut Schilt, College of the Holy Cross.

Nominated for the 2022 South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) Book Awards, the 2021 collection *The Cinema of Rithy Panh: Everything Has a Soul*, coedited by Leslie Barnes and Joseph Mai, examines the cinematic output of the internationally recognized Cambodian filmmaker from a variety of angles and contexts. The volume was published as part of Rutgers University Press's Global Film Directors series (edited by Homer R. Petty and R. Barton Palmer), which explores "cinematic innovations by prominent and emerging directors in major [international] film movements" and "addresses the history of a director's *oeuvre* and its influence upon defining new cinematic genres, narratives, and techniques" (p. ii). Other books in the same series, which also aims to "open the field of *new auteurism* studies beyond film biographies" (p. ii), include Nam Lee's *The Films of Bong Joon Ho* and Jim Leach's *The Films of Denys Arcand*, both released in 2020.[1] A few weeks before I began writing this review, Rutgers University Press released a monograph on Rithy Panh written by Deirdre Boyle entitled *Ferryman of Memories: The Films of Rithy Panh*. [2] I have not read this 2023 book and am not able to compare it to Barnes's and Mai's present volume.

Rithy Panh's cinema is intricately connected to his lived experience. Panh was born in Phnom Penh in 1964, eleven years before the Khmer Rouge marched into Cambodia's capital, overthrew the government, and evacuated the city's inhabitants, sending them to forced labor camps in the countryside and starving many of them to death. Panh lost much of his family during the nearly four-year period of the Cambodian genocide but managed to survive, and after spending some time at a refugee camp in Thailand, made his way to Paris at age sixteen and studied cinema. He returned to his homeland in the late 1980s and the documentary *Site 2* (1989), shot at a United Nations Relief Organization (UNBRO) camp in Cambodia, marks the beginning of his directing career. Panh's filmography now includes twenty directing credits (documentaries, feature films, and literary adaptations) which, in the words of the two editors, "document the effects of war, genocide, displacement, dehumanization, and loss" and "explore the enduring effects of the period on the individual and collective identities of survivors: their need to memorialize what has been lost, establish a functioning truth, assign responsibility, and seek justice for crimes against humanity" (p. 1). His singular films have been shown at various international film festivals and

have received widespread accolades, including two awards at the Cannes film festival for *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) and *The Missing Picture* (2013) and, more recently, a Silver Bear at the Berlinale for *Everything Will Be OK* (2022), his latest film to date.

The volume opens with a detailed and useful chronology, which includes a history of Cambodia from 1863 (the beginning of the French protectorate) to the present, interwoven with key moments of Panh's biography as well as his entire filmography up to 2020. After an introduction, the book is divided into four parts, organized thematically. In their cowritten introductory essay, "Rithy Panh and the Cinematic Image," Barnes and Mai consider Panh as both a Cambodian and world filmmaker whose thirty-plus-year filmography is closely entwined with the turbulent history of his homeland yet also universal in its preoccupation with human rights and with trauma and healing. They highlight Panh's other work beyond filmmaking, as founder of the Cambodian audiovisual documentary database Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, and as producer, mentor, activist, and author. In their description of Panh's artistic style, they discuss the director's ethical approach to filmmaking and his reinvention of conventional cinematic technique, such as his elimination of voice-over in favor of what Panh calls *la parole filmée* (filmed speech), which allows people on camera to speak for themselves, unmediated (p. 4). Panh's films, they argue, have evolved over time to become one of the most complex in contemporary documentary, "combining autobiographical testimony, paper archives, film reels, scenes from Panh's previous films, models and clay figurines standing in for the disappeared, diorama, voice-over, animation, painting, and old family photos" (p. 6). The collection's title is itself borrowed from Panh's own words ("everything has a soul. Trees have a soul. Rice has a soul" [p. 7]), based on his belief in the interconnectedness of people, animals, plants, places, and objects.

The collection adopts a truly interdisciplinary approach in order to contextualize, analyze, and (re-)assess Panh's oeuvre from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, aiming to provide fresh readings of the artist's previously discussed and more familiar films while also spotlighting his lesser-known work. Contributors to the volume are specialists in wide-ranging fields, from history and anthropology to literature, philosophy, and film studies, and reliance on the work of Western intellectuals is combined with "explorations of Cambodian ways of remembering, coping with trauma, and seeking justice and spiritual healing" (pp. 8-9). Though thematically distinct, the book's four sections overlap in their shared preoccupation with Panh's innovative, personal, and political filmmaking and in his constantly evolving methods of storytelling. Entitled "Aftermath: A Cinema of Post-War Survival," part one focuses on the concept of survival as it emerges in Panh's onscreen treatment of Cambodian life during the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s and in the subsequent regimes in the 1980s and 1990s. Opening this section, Boreth Ly considers the figure of the "mad mother" in three films by Panh—*Rice People* (1994), *One Night after the War* (1998), and *The Burnt Theatre* (2005)—as a way to represent the social world of gender inequality during and after the Khmer Rouge period, point out the dispossession of the mother as a consequence of shifting political regimes, and highlight the social taboo of mental illness. *The Burnt Theatre* is also the focus of Joseph Mai's chapter, in which he discusses the nation-building project of New Khmer architecture and the rebirth of artistic practice among the ruins of post-Khmer Rouge Phnom Penh, and argues that the film's depiction of the creative resilience of artists mirrors "Panh's own place in, and contribution to, the arts of his city" (p. 44). Khatharya Um closes this section by examining "the wounds of memory," or the multiple forms of individual and family trauma and survival depicted in *Exile* (2016) and *Que la barque se brise, que la jonque s'entrouve* (2001), and contending that "both remembering and forgetting torment in the genocidal aftermath" (p. 46).

Part two, “From Colonial to Global Cambodia,” begins with Jack A. Yeager’s and Rachel Harrison’s discussion of Panh’s 2008 adaptation (and reinvention) of Marguerite Duras’s anticolonial novel *The Seal Wall*, originally published in 1950, midway through the First Indochina War. The authors posit that Panh’s adaptation reasserts the original novel’s political critique, which was downplayed in its reception in the 1950s, thanks to the film’s exclusion of the city in favor of rural space as a site of potential resistance. Jennifer Cazenave considers the figure of Panh as a *chasseur d’images* through her discussion of his 2015 silent film *La France est notre patrie*, which employs amateur and professional archival footage from colonial Indochina that compile “visual memories of empire that primarily denounce sexual and ecological exploitation in the colonies” while also “bear[ing] witness to the centrality of Southeast Asia in the French imaginary of the early twentieth century” (p. 73). Panh’s fourteenth film, the relatively unknown and understudied *Shiiku, the Catch* (2011) is the focus of Cathy J. Schlund-Vials’s essay. The author contends that this loose adaptation of a short story by Kenzaburo Oe, first adapted for the screen by Nagisa Oshima in 1961, stands out from the rest of Panh’s filmography because of its hybrid format, which marries aerial archival footage taken by Americans during the Vietnam War with a narrative viewed “from below” (p. 86) about the rise of the Khmer Rouge in rural Cambodia during the Cambodian Civil War. Leslie Barnes concludes part two with an analysis of Cambodia’s migrant labor in Panh’s *The Land of the Wandering Souls* (2000) and draws on Marxist and feminist critiques of labor to “examine how migratory labor alienates while also creating the conditions for the workers’ discovery and expression of a seemingly impossible solidarity” (p. 101).

Part three, “The Question of Justice,” opens with a chapter on “archiving the perpetrator” in which Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier and John Kleinen analyze the ways that the films *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003) and *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* (2011) work to retrieve, document, and archive the body of the perpetrator, and compare Panh’s approach to that of other filmmakers. Next, Donald Reid focuses on the figure of Duch, the *nom de guerre* of convicted Khmer Rouge official Kaing Guek Eav and compares and contrasts the account of French ethnologist François Bizot’s encounter with Duch with that of Panh. In this section’s last essay, Raya Morag draws on Holocaust survivor and writer Jean Améry’s work to assess the paradigm of “nonvindictive moral resentment” in Panh’s cinema, concluding that this concept becomes “a way to distinguish how evil might be experienced, symbolized, judged, and finally incorporated into a system of ethics” (p. 156).

The collection closes with part four, “Memory, Voice, and Cinematic Practice,” beginning with Lindsay French’s return to Panh’s *Site 2* in an attempt to understand who the director was when he made this first film and to define his cinema as a constantly mutating “work in progress” (p. 162), before “projecting forward” (p. 161) to his ensuing, extended filmography. In the next essay, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca hones in on the recurring presence in Panh’s films of Hout Bophana, a woman whose letters to her spouse led to her execution and analyzes what this presence reveals about Panh’s cinema. The penultimate essay by David LaRocca situates Panh’s *The Missing Picture* (2013) within the work of other documentary filmmakers interested in war, trauma, and genocide, and argues that Panh’s “distinctive contribution... does not forestall the act of judgment but invites it and... compels it to continue” (p. 189). Finally, Soko Phay rounds out the volume with an essay on Panh as “storyteller of the extreme” in which she considers three works—*The Missing Picture*, *Exile*, and *Graves without a Name* (2018)—in which the “I” of the autobiographer

is noticeably present, “speaks on his own behalf and presents himself as a ‘witness-as-survivor.’” (p. 203).

This collection’s fourteen essays by sixteen scholars represent a remarkably comprehensive examination of Rithy Panh’s complex artistic project. The breadth of contributions, and the wide-ranging areas of expertise of the book’s contributors, give justice to the multilayered, ever-shifting methods of a celebrated world filmmaker who, regrettably, remains fairly unknown to the general public. As is perhaps inevitable in all edited collections, some chapters are more accessible than others to readers unfamiliar with the subject, but the overall coherence of the volume (its focus on a singular filmmaker) mitigates the diversity of writing styles and approaches. Still, all essays successfully contribute to the editors’ resolve to deepen and broaden the perspective of Panh’s work, shedding new light on his better-known films and unearthing those that have not been granted as much attention. The book assumes a university-educated audience with particular knowledge of and interest in world history, film and media studies, genocide studies, and/or trauma and memory studies. To this end, excerpts from the collection could easily be used in university courses dedicated to these subjects, particularly at the graduate level and in senior seminars at the undergraduate level. The detailed chronology that opens the book is especially useful in contextualizing Panh’s life and work within Cambodia’s larger history. Readers may have also welcomed the inclusion of abstracts summarizing each of the fourteen chapters, but this may not be customary as part of this press’s particular series. Still, *The Cinema of Rithy Panh: Everything Has a Soul* is an innovative and extensive study of a world director whose groundbreaking work deserves more attention and coverage.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Leslie Barnes and Joseph Mai, “Introduction: Rithy Panh and the Cinematic Image”

Part One, Aftermath: A Cinema of Post-War Survival

Boreth Ly, “The ‘Mad Mother’ in Rithy Panh’s Films”

Joseph Mai, “Resilience in the Ruins: Artistic Practice in Rithy Panh’s *The Burnt Theater*”

Khatharya Um, “The Wounds of Memory: Poetics, Pain, and Possibilities in Rithy Panh’s *Exile* and *Que la barque se brisé*”

Part Two, From Colonial to Global Cambodia

Jack A. Yeager and Rachel Harrison, “Rithy Panh’s *The Sea Wall*: Reinventing Duras in Cambodia”

Jennifer Cazenave, “Rithy Panh as *Chasseur d’images*”

Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, “Aerial Aftermaths and Reckonings from Below: Reseeing Rithy Panh’s *Shiiku, the Catch*”

Leslie Barnes, “Cambodia’s ‘Wandering Souls’: Migrant Labor and the Promise of Connection”

Part Three, The Question of Justice

Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier and John Kleinen, “Archiving the Perpetrator”

Donald Reid, “Creating Duch: The Projects of Duch, François Bizot, and Rithy Panh”

Raya Morag, “Rithy Panh, Jean Améry, and the Paradigm of Moral Resentment”

Part Four, Memory, Voice, and Cinematic Practice

Lindsay French, “Looking Back and Projecting Forward from *Site 2*”

Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, “Bophana’s Image and Narrative: Tragedy, Accusatory Gaze, and Hidden Treasure”

David LaRocca, “Memory Translation: Rithy Panh’s Provocations to the Primacy and Virtues of the Documentary Sound/Image Index”

Soko Phay, “Rithy Panh: Storyteller of the Extreme”

NOTES

[1] Nam Lee, *The Films of Bong Joon Ho* (New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2020). Jim Leach, *The Films of Denys Arcand* (New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

[2] Deirdre Boyle, *Ferryman of Memories: The Films of Rithy Panh* (New Brunswick, Camden, and Newark, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2023).

Thibaut Schilt
College of the Holy Cross
tschilt@holycross.edu

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