

Take 100

Review by **Nigel Andrews**

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Take 100: The Future of Film: 100 New Directors, Phaidon,
RRP£45, 448 pages

This is the year's most fascinating oddity in film publishing. "Find a gap in the market" is the time-honoured advice given to entrepreneurs or aspiring innovators. Well, Phaidon has found – or fantasised – a gap in the film lover's bookshelf; or more exactly on his or her coffee table.

How ever did we moviemanes manage all these years without an illustrated A-to-Z of barely heard-of emergent international filmmakers? Ten film festival programmers, themselves hardly celebrities in the world of published cinephilia, take turns to write up directors' calling-card movies. The resulting book weighs in at over 400 glossy full-colour pages.

It must be art cinema's most defiant hour. I am mystified by the tome as a practical publishing venture – but also mesmerised by it. Whom is it meant for? Who, other than a library, museum or university, could afford it? Yet it challenges us to take serious cinema seriously. And no one could dispute the front flyleaf's claim: "*Take 100* is the first-ever film festival attempted between the covers of a book."

Few of the chosen directors are household names. Unless you live in a household abuzz with breakfast-table debates on Estonia's Veiko Ounpuu, New Zealand's Taika Waititi or Hong Kong's Ho-Cheung Pang. The photographs are sensational, adding to the sense of Dadaist incongruity.

These are small-budget films that in some cases have had a medium-large acclaim at festivals. (Two or three movies are exceptions: Jonathan Glazer's *Birth*, Judd Apatow's *Funny People* and Tom Ford's *A Single Man*, more resembling commercial products with an auteurist twist).

Yet they are illustrated with glossy plates, lovely but bewildering. Won't readers experience anti-climax when they discover that Aditya Assarat's small, beautiful Thai drama *Wonderful Town* doesn't look on screen like David Lean? Or when they see Chilean director Pablo Larrain's *Tony Manero* at a theatre and learn it isn't *Saturday Night Fever*, brash and bronzy as the illustration suggests, but a mournful, bitter, low-key riff on it?

The accompanying texts are anything but glossy. Earnest, intelligent, sometimes insightful; at other times dowdily prolix. Festival programmers know how to programme, but not necessarily how to write. Couldn't we have had a little more zing with the prose? "For Pang, quoting and referencing the history and film of Hong Kong is a process of remembering the past and an introspective means of understanding where contemporary feelings of unease are rooted ..." Yes: you can't fault this kind of writing; nor can you always stay awake during it.

So why, despite its shortcomings and longwindedness, have I fallen for the book? Because I admire its quixotry: how it goes into battle against the windmills. It seems to say: "We'll take the charge to the army of gesticulating philistines, even though we're over-dressed and under-equipped, even though we're armed with any utensil that comes to hand – and even though we don't quite know what we're doing, since this is the first time anything like it has been done."

Of course, it is desirable that the world wakes up to intelligent cinema and the importance it can have in our lives. If fracturing our coffee tables will do it, bring on the mega-books.

I myself found *Take 100* quite an education. There are a dozen directors here I have barely heard of – even as a full-time, festival-traipsing critic. Now, lured by the glossy pics, incentivised by the prose, I shall go out and find Turkey's Seifi Teoman, South Korea's Noh Young-Seok, the Philippines' Pepe Diokno and Algeria's Rabah Ameer-Zaimeche.

Let the new age begin. Let Hollywood blockbuster cinema be consigned to slim or dusty paperbacks while art cinema is embraced by publishers with a Babylonian, even Brobdingnagian, vision.

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