

Book gives glimpse into mind of former critic Pauline Kael

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Book review

Pauline Kael is arguably the most studied and celebrated film critic of all time, praised by many as one of the few writers to elevate the act of criticism to an art form.

Kael was film critic for The New Yorker throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Since her retirement in 1991, many have wondered what she'd think of the current state of filmmaking. Sporadic interviews have offered some insights, but since her death from Parkinson's disease in 2000, many believed we'd never get another analysis from Kael herself. But one last glimpse of the brilliance of her observations is of-

ferred in the book "Afterglow: A Last Conversation with Pauline Kael by Francis Davis."

During her tenure at The New Yorker, Kael became as much a part of the 1970s film scene as the filmmakers themselves. She showed an uncanny ability to recognize those directors who would become some of the premiere voices of the era, including Steven Spielberg, Robert Altman and Martin Scorsese. In the days before opening weekend grosses defined success, a glowing review from Kael could rocket a film to a higher level.

Davis' book is a short and sweet collection of conversations with Kael recorded in 2000. It should be noted that this book does not offer a comprehensive examination of movies, but is instead just what the

title implies. Though the book offers Kael's thoughts on current filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and Paul Thomas Anderson, it is more or less a final glimpse into the mind that created some of the most incisive film essays ever written.

Though the book contains the last published thoughts of the writer, it actually emerges as a good introduction to Kael as a person. We learn that Kael was a woman far ahead of her time. For instance, we find that the father of Kael's daughter, Gina, was not one of her three husbands, but a gay friend and poet named James Broughton. This was in the 1950s, long before David Crosby and Melissa Etheridge made headlines for a similar arrangement.

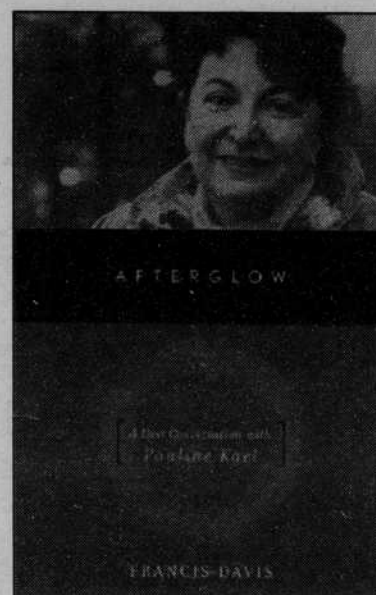
It's obvious from certain passages that movies eventually took a back

seat to the full-time job of fighting her illness. In terms of films, though, Davis reveals that Kael thought American Beauty was overrated and Three Kings was unjustly overlooked by critics. Some of her recent favorites also included High Fidelity, Magnolia and The Matrix.

Though the book's style is easy-going and enjoyable, it's a little frustrating how much time Davis gives to Kael's thoughts on current television shows, instead of pushing for more thoughts on movies. Regardless, the work is a must for Kael fans and first-timers alike.

For the best examples of Kael's film essays, check out "For Keeps" and "5001 Nights at the Movies."

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Luaka Bop continues to 'expand the mind' with world music

Music review

Aaron Shakra
Pulse Reporter

You can never quite pin down what New York's Luaka Bop Records is going to release next. However, diversity, in the best possible sense of the word, still reigns.

The label's history goes back to the late 1980s, David Byrne and his former band, the Talking Heads. Byrne had long been releasing side projects complementing Talking Heads albums, but when he signed a solo contract with Warner Brothers Records, one stipulation was the creation of his own label. Luaka Bop was the result.

For the past decade or so, Luaka Bop has signed a cadre of unique recording artists from all

corners of the world — from the "hick-hop" folk sounds of the Florida-based artist Jim White to the Brazilian, tropicalia-infused pop of Tom Zé. The label has also released a steady stream of complications of hitherto unknown forms of music — from Brazil, Africa, Cuba, Brooklyn, Peru and India.

Luaka Bop releases approach music as a form of art capable of inspiring the listener's mind and body. If it weren't for the label's existence, it's unlikely some of this music would ever be heard by a wide audience. The label has been incredibly successful in giving listeners a context for the music's political, historical and cultural roots. This is especially notable in the compilations. In "I Hate World Music," a 1999 article Byrne wrote for The New York Times (also available at the Luaka Bop Web

site, www.luakabop.com), Byrne said: "The term is a catchall that commonly refers to non-Western music of any and all sorts ... It's a marketing as well as a pseudomusical term."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Byrne himself put together Luaka Bop's first compilations, and only recently has returned to this occupation again. He compiled Luaka Bop's two most recent releases, "Cuisine Non-Stop" and "The Only Blip Hop Record You Will Ever Need, Vol. 1."

"Cuisine Non-Stop" is subtitled as an "Introduction to the French Nouvelle Generation." The genre is steeped in the traditions of afrobeat, funk and musette music. The artists are contemporary, but an awareness of history contributes to their identity and music. Some tracks are sung in multiple languages; some of the tongues are

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hardly spoken anymore. The notable tracks are "Naïve Derviche" by Arthur H, which is a seven-plus minute musical movement brimming with horns and strings and Louise Attaque's "De Nord Au Sud," a song that flirts and saunters with the fleeting, beautiful immediacy of life in just a few short minutes.

"The Only Blip Hop Record You Will Ever Need, Vol. 1," is diametrically opposed to "Cuisine," but no less creative. The album is filled with electronic music of the strangest order. This doesn't equate to typical repetitive, techno-house beat fare,

but rather, samples, mixed and matched with odd rhythms and the occasional human voice.

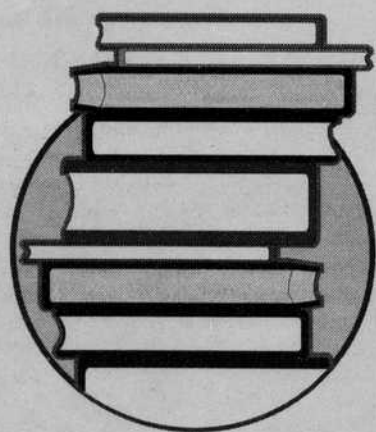
"Blip Hop" is a joint effort with the International Center for Comparative Sound, which, according to its Web site at www.comparativesound.com, "exists in order to catalog, classify, quantify and compare all varieties of recorded sound."

The great thing about these complications is that they act as a launching point to explore any of the artists. Each track has the potential to lead the listener to discover hordes of new and different musicians.

Although Luaka Bop is an independent label, its music is distributed by Virgin Records. This means these releases should be easy to find at most record stores.

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