

Screen Methods: Comparative Readings in Film Studies Jacqueline Furby & Karen Randell (Eds)

Here we have a collection of 'work in progress' research papers presented at a University of Southampton seminar series entitled 'The Present in Cinema'. This tells us a lot about the content, firstly that these are all new appraisals of specific films or approaches, and secondly that the methodologies applied are experimental and in the early stages of development. The result is a valuable resource for academics wishing to stay abreast of contemporary film studies. Some essays are more accessible or seemingly developed than others, but on the whole this book is not for the uninitiated. It may well provide a tool for indicating innovative research paths or as a basis for widening research on specific topics to HE Students, especially those preparing Dissertations. However it would not be suitable for those only beginning their studies as the level of evaluation required to interpret the texts is too advanced. It is more appropriate that a grounding knowledge of Film Studies and its methodologies has been acquired prior to attempting the appraisal of such hypotheses.

There are three sections to the collection: *Scape*, *Views*, and *Scenes*. *Scape* encapsulates essays concerned with film's formal context, its environment and the four dimensions that are utilised within it. The approaches adopted within this section are extremely wide ranging covering philosophy, textual analysis, historical pictorial comparison and analysis, media space, and musicology and covering the subjects of film space, temporality, validity, immersive techniques, and sound and empathy respectfully.

Views presents essays based on accepted theoretical film analysis but which have been revisited or re-appropriated to produce original readings. These employ the methodologies of the psychoanalytic cinematic gaze, post-colonial issues of race, queer theory, cultural studies and textual analysis but combine them with previously unconsidered angles, topics and/or films. The film *Romance* is investigated for its potential to liberate the female viewers gaze, Cyborg/Martial Arts films are critiqued for their presentations of race and the socio-political and cultural ramifications that both constructed and are expressed through them. *A Room with a View* is given a "potential 'queer' reading" via a specific textual analysis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is considered not from the notion of how 'true' the adaptation is to the original novel, but how the cultural factors between 1920 and 1942 have reflected in the film adaptations produced during this time. A detailed textual analysis of *Philadelphia* is performed to identify how the film fails to compensate for public misconceptions about AIDS and Homosexuality yet inadvertently presents a progressive view of race. Four Hollywood post-World War Two films are analysed in regard to their representations of masculinity and the prevailing concerns about the affect of absent fathers on juveniles. This essay draws on social discourses from the time and considers the audience (or empirical research about the audience) as the vital source to avoid creating "generalisations...in the historical, discursive construction of masculinities."

Scenes contributes to this line of enquiry, taking it further into the realm of audience research methods and personal realities. The importance of analysing and comparing the content of the greatest hits of Hollywood cinema is considered as a methodology in its own right. Followed by an investigation into the impact of audience preferences between 1945 and 1946 and how they affected the structure and practices of Hollywood film production. Boundaries of reality are explored in Chapter 14 through a discourse into the reasons why *Crimewatch UK* attained such popularity during the 1980s and how this could be construed as the precursor of the current obsession with reality TV. The thought process is then led onto a critique of the realities available through the internet and the impact this “new communication” has had, and is having, on “old entertainment.” The theme is continued even further in the final essay, where the possibility that virtual reality may well be the future replacement of film is considered through a case study analysis of *The Matrix*. An inter-disciplinary methodology is applied to develop an “understand[ing of] the nature and implications of virtual reality, its relationship to cinema, and their intertwining historical context.”

In conclusion this is a stimulating collection of essays that creates more questions than answers and which provides a wealth of innovative approaches to enliven existing film studies. The various styles and subjects will accommodate a wide audience and would be a useful resource for Colleges and Universities that provide film studies courses at HE level, as well as their Lecturers and Film Critics and/or Journalists. My only criticism would be that a small amount of the material is too formative, in that it does not provide a clear path of enquiry, by either appearing more as a review of existing approaches or feeling like its theorising for theorising sake. By this I mean that they seem to be looking for readings that just aren't there, trying a bit too hard to find an innovative slant. However this of course could still be useful to students in various ways as it demonstrates the personal synthesis required when interpreting hypotheses.