
Book Reviews

Berliner, Todd. *Hollywood Incoherent: Narration in Seventies Cinema*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. 288 pages. \$55.00 hardcover, ISBN 878-0-292-72279-8.

In *Hollywood Incoherent*, noted American film professor and critic Todd Berliner investigates the drastic break by 1970s Hollywood filmmakers from the studio system's conventional and readily accessible narrative designs for the radical aesthetic forms which made this decade's cinema uniquely powerful. The fact that the usual Hollywood pattern ceased attracting moviegoers because of its predictability is not surprising; its comforting familiarity did indeed breed contempt. While earlier American cinema was a practice in disguising narrative incongruity, in the '70s, foreign-influenced American films developed, celebrated, and thrived upon it, unsettling and challenging audiences, forever changing the inflexibility of Hollywood, and creating some of the best films ever made. Essentially, Berliner asserts that the most innovative American films of the '70s exhibit three characteristics: frustration of logical, satisfying narratives; reinvention of traditional techniques; and, generation of confusing exigencies (p. 218), all of which effect imbalance, interest, relevance, and, ultimately, successful artistic expression. Berliner explains the difference between the "great" incoherent movies with the merely "bad" ones: "Great movies are also full of holes, but they do not appear to be so" because they progress fluidly, their inconsistencies being detected by the audience and causing significant cognitive responses and processes not activated by mere bad filmmaking (p. 219). Berliner explores the psychology of incongruence, humor, and film perception in light of examples from well- and lesser-known movies, including *The Godfather*, its first sequel, and *The Exorcist*, and directors such as John Cassavetes, Brian De Palma, and Woody Allen. His appendices display not only the most revered Hollywood films of the "era" (omitting a year or two from the beginning of the decade and encroaching into 1980), but also the "blind" evaluations of accomplished film scholars on various films' degree of "coherence," or lack thereof, concluding that public appeal is undeniably a function of incongruence. The author's arguments and evidence, copious notes, and exhaustive bib-

liography, as well as pertinent illustrations, combine to make this work an essential resource for scholars interested in film and psychology.

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McMahon, Jennifer L. and B. Steve Csaki. *The Philosophy of the Western*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2010. 368 pages. \$35.00 hardcover, ISBN 978-0-8131-2591-6.

The 2010 publication, *The Philosophy of the Western*, edited by Jennifer McMahon, PhD., and B. Steve Csaki, PhD., is a collection of essays examining issues in philosophy through the lens of Western films. This work is particularly important for American studies because of its diverse range of academic topics within a genre exclusively dedicated to America's western past. The text is easily accessible for courses in philosophy, literature, film, and cultural studies, with topics including issues of identity, community, morality, and representations of "other"—including essays that expose the complicated portrayal of women and Native Americans within the genre.

Essays within the volume include, "The Cost of the Code: Ethical Consequences in *High Noon* and *The Ox-Bow Incident*" (Hada), "Savage Nations: Native Americans and the Western" (Moses), and "Go West, Young Woman! Hegel's Dialectic and Women's Identities in Western Films" (Heba and Murphy), among many others.

In "Mommas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Pragmatists," Csaki explores the depths of pragmatism through the cinematic characterization of John Wayne's identity: *Rooster Cogburn* (1975) and *The Cowboys* (1971). By exploring these films, Csaki argues "that any cowboy hero must act pragmatically" and that John Wayne's character "enabled him to become the symbol of not only the American West but also of American men in general" (p. 55). In grounding the argument in these two films, Csaki is able to expose for readers the inherent relationship between the identity of a cowboy as hero and the physical enactments of pragmatism as a methodology for solving problems.

For scholars interested in environmental studies and cultural depictions of "other," McMahon's essay "Beating a Live Horse," exemplifies an area of research gaining prominence today, namely looking at the significance of how animals are portrayed and function within film, art, and literature. McMahon takes an existential approach in exploring the complicated relationship humanity has with horses. Specifically, McMahon argues how existentialism provides an "explanation for the polarized treatment of horses in western films: namely, their simultaneous

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