

## Hollywood Incoherent: Narration in Seventies Cinema

Todd Berliner. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Todd Berliner's book is certainly one of the best I have seen about 1970s cinema. Berliner noticed that the films of that decade just didn't make sense in the usual way that Hollywood studio cookie-cutter films of the 1940s and 1950s did. Leslie Halliwell, once a presumptive touchstone of popular taste, complained about the "arrogance" of the 1970s filmmakers, objecting to the narrative peculiarities of their films. But that alleged "arrogance" was exactly what made them appealing to audiences of the generation after Halliwell's. Berliner calls that "arrogance" *narrative perversity*, and celebrates it as one component that set the films of that decade apart from all others, and also helped to make them popular.

Berliner is especially interested in American filmmakers influenced by European and Asian art cinema, who then began creating odd, moody, ambiguous, and unpredictable characters populating looser narrative structures dominated by elliptical, disrupting flashbacks, and flashforwards, influenced by films as diverse as Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and Bergman's *Persona*, and rendering both characters and plots mysterious and inscrutable. Especially influenced himself by the narrational notions of David Bordwell and others, Berliner should be able to press forward with more confidence than he sometimes seems able to muster. Nonetheless, during this experimental period, American cinema became less parochial and more interesting, more mature, and sophisticated than it had heretofore been. Some films got multiple viewings because viewers just were not sure what had conspired (in such films as Antonioni's *Blow-Up* or Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, for example). Berliner takes a particular interest in the creative implications of many of the films Tino Balio describes in his book *Foreign Film Renaissance* (2010).

I only wish that Berliner's book had been published earlier, before *The Encyclopedia of Francis Ford Coppola* (which I co-authored) was published, for I believe Berliner's thesis unlocks one of the secrets of Coppola's success. No book has so far explained Coppola's process of serialization so well as Berliner, and the subsequent success of *Godfather II*, which is, appar-

ently, another exercise in "narrative perversity." By 1974, Berliner claims, "seventies narrative design was firmly established, and *The Godfather, Part II* epitomizes that form" (88). The family was perverse, the morality was perverse, and so was the fable, so the "perverse" *treatment* made it all of a piece. Audiences not only noticed this, but *loved* it. The strategy was brilliant.

The last two chapters examine the "limits of seventies narrative design" as evidenced in two films, Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and the John Cassavetes film, *Woman Under the Influence* (1974), each intended to demonstrate both the "extremes" and the "commercial hazards" of this newly discovered "narrative perversity." Of course, other scholars (like David Cook, for example) noticed that many of the films of the 1970s were artistically innovative. Peter Lev linked that innovation to the decade's "conflicting ideological currents." But explaining ideology and culture won't necessarily explain box-office popularity, or *what*, exactly, the "innovations" involved, or *why* they caught on with popular audiences. Todd Berliner does just that, and that is why this book is so important. In conclusion: Don't attempt to teach the 1970s without it. This is surely one of the most important film books of the decade, pure and simply. Ignore it at your own risk.

**Note:** Jim Welsh is coauthor and coeditor (with Rodney Hill and the Rev. Gene D. Phillips, S. J.) of *The Francis Ford Coppola Encyclopedia*, published in 2010 by The Scarecrow Press.

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## Jack London, Photographer

Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Sara S. Hodson, and Philip Adam. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Less than a year after Jack London scored an international success with *The Call of the Wild* (1903), the Hearst Syndicate enlisted him to cover the Russo-Japanese War. Along with his stories, London submitted hundreds of photographs; the *San Francisco Examiner* gave his reports above-the-fold play and syndicated them to other newspapers around the world. A selection of these and others of the 12,000