EDITED BY
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GENRE, GENDER, RACE, AND WORLD CINEMA

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Preface

This volume is intended for students who have had at least one introductory film course. The book's general introduction, which helps bridge the introductory level and upper division or specialized courses, describes the four topics of genre, gender, race and world cinema and their overarching themes of identities, audience reception, and the cultural and social contents of film. Contributing further to this intermediary stage, the introductions to each section: (a) map themes and histories related to each of the four topics; (b) raise theoretical issues specific to each topic to introduce theory to students; and (c) cite many relevant films to offer filmographies for this course level and for students' subsequent film studies. These filmographies permit instructors to augment the films discussed in the readings and add or substitute films appropriate to their students' backgrounds and needs from those cited in section introductions.

The selected readings: (a) focus on films readily available for class viewing; (b) introduce topical concepts; and (c) create intertextual relations among readings and films, when, for example, a topic or film is the subject of several selected readings. In creating these relations, this book hopes to make comprehensible the complex nature of identities in film. Audiences and filmmakers project, create and imagine identities out of many constituents that are learned, unstable and defined by society (race, gender, class, nation, region, age and ethnicity). Most people deploy multiple identities to fit different situations. Films play a major role in shaping, interpreting and mirroring these not-always-compatible identities. Film genres are composed of narrative and visual conventions that are nonetheless always subject to revisions and modifications. In their familiarity and modifications, genres offer psychological, cultural and sociological models of identities for individuals, groups and entire societies.

These are complicated topics whose intersections are even more complicated. The book's introductions, readings and film selections are intended to facilitate understanding of these intersections and ways of discussing them in the classroom. Each section builds on earlier sections; gender, race and national identity are not mutually exclusive or discrete topics. Many parallel issues cut across all four topics: if a "hero" in a Western is female or of color, instead of the conventional white male hero, or when the Western is viewed in Asian or African countries, the genre is markedly transformed and re-interpreted, opening up avenues for investigating genres and cultural identities together. In this way, the book hopes to expand students' understanding of films in relation to larger concepts – how social changes and cultural relations modify genres, how films help viewers imagine *and* experience their own and others' identities, how representation is greater than simply the sum of narrative and images, and how theory opens up questions rather than resolving them neatly. The book's intentions are to help students expand formal analyses, presumably the bulk of their introductory course(s), into analyses of interrelations among the four interlocking topics and toward a cultural studies approach.

All books mentioned in the introductions are listed in the bibliographies. References to films in the introductions include dates and references to books include page numbers. Most of the readings are reprinted in their entirety, but a few are abbreviated, marked by ellipses for short omitted sections and brackets for longer omitted sections. All texts appear in their original punctuation, spelling, and style.

Contents

General Introduction:
Film and Identities

There are numerous anthologies of essays on film, and many intended for class-room use. Some contain "classical" essays by theorists (e.g. André Bazin, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey). Others address specific genres, or films from a particular historical period or country, or special topics like masculinity or Orientalism. And there are several anthologies intended for introductory undergraduate courses on film.

This reader offers a different approach to ease students into sophisticated analyses of films through contemporary issues. It is intended to serve the curriculum level between introductory courses on film history and upper division courses that incorporate film theory. This anthology focuses on four topics connected to the overarching topic of identity – genre, gender, race, and world cinema. These topics introduce theory in an "embodied" way, through issues that are palpable to students. The topic of identity embraces other topics of audience reception, stereotyping in film, technical practices, production, consumption, and critical theory. Identity is also an accessible and appealing topic for undergraduates as they move toward upper level or graduate courses. These four topics are also *practices*, and as practices they offer critiques of classical film theories and Eurocentric film histories, which often constitute the body of material in many introductory courses.

This book's purpose makes it useful not only to students majoring in film, but also to students whose primary disciplines include literature, history, art history, race, ethnic and gender studies, and cultural studies. The selected essays provide flexibility for classroom viewing of many films available throughout the world. Organized thematically, rather than historically or geographically, this reader aims to encourage class discussion through several kinds of essays – some of which can be applied to a variety of recent films, and some of which provide exemplary analyses of particular films to encourage students to engage in a critical discourse

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at an early stage of their education. Students can begin to understand not only how to read films (representation) but also how to explore them in larger cultural contexts that address reception issues (historical events, critical public reception, political and social circumstances, world cultures, etc.). Too often students have difficulty shaping research and topical papers, having had little experience of studying in depth. This book is intended to explore a few topics in greater depth than offered by a survey-type text used for introductory courses.

Readings introduce various critical theories, including post-structuralism, cultural studies, postcolonial critiques, theories of identity and society, and psycho-analytic analysis, and are drawn from a combination of single-authored books, anthologies, and journals. Readings were chosen to expand film studies into wider cultural terrains and contexts of history, politics, economics, and social conditions. These critical streams dislodge "naturalized" assumptions about culture, identity, and the "other." Films suggested for study in this volume include films directed by women and people of color and from many countries.

Although these four areas of genre, gender, race, and world cinema are not new, in the past 20 years each of these topics has been radically changed in meaning and function (genre, gender) or has emerged as a major focus (race, world cinema). Genre, for example, once considered easily identifiable and fixed, has become problematized by new or mixed genres (e.g. the "racial family" film), radical transformations of conventional genres (Westerns used and parodied in many countries), and the trans-genre of independent films and non-Hollywood/non-Eurocentric films. Gender, once defined by feminists, has been transformed by studies of masculinity and queer theory. Filmmakers, as well as audiences, now come from worldwide identities of gender, race, geography, nationality, ethnicity, and class, with overlapping identities (e.g. Black women, diasporic ethnic communities) that are often conflicted for individuals and for social groups. While Third Cinema is rooted in 1960s political radicalism among Latin American filmmakers, its definition and categorization have significantly changed with the critical mass of Asian, African, and indigenous films now made, produced, available, and accumulated over the past 20 years, making "world cinema" a more appropriate and inclusive phrase.

These four areas share a focus and reflection on identity. Identities' once-presumed biological "naturalness" has given way under post-structuralist analyses that have recognized identities as transient, political, social, and historical, subject to cultural changes and historical circumstances, and not natural or transcendent in any way. Identities of nations, ethnicities, genders, and races can no longer be definitively categorized or classified as monolithic. Identities are bricolaged, shifting, fashioned to fit social norms, self-fashioned, performative, contradictory, and inconsistent, and in every presumed category there is a range of identities, some of which contradict others – not all people in a nation or ethnic or racial group think alike or agree on social or cultural issues, for example. For this reason, some essays in this volume address overlapping topics: for example, the gendering of male melodrama crosses and disturbs the genre of melodrama, usually associated

with an appeal to a female audience. Furthermore, globalization has created its own set of issues, as film has become a site of contention between global transnational or transcultural content, and the persistent authority of local cultures with their range of identities and intended audiences.

The reception of film is a crucial element of what constitutes film as a culture industry, and it is an issue that binds the four topics of this anthology. Essays in this anthology explore film's power to reflect, shape, and disturb audiences' assumptions through innovative voices and dialogues from new populations now making films. Topics of reception and identity have gained prominence, and even urgency, partly from an inverted global distribution – no longer simply the distribution of American/Hollywood and European films to the rest of the world, but the spread of non-Eurocentric films into the USA and Europe from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and films produced by indigenous peoples not primarily identified with any nation state. A global culture has emerged everywhere due to diasporic mobility and to the mobility of virtual culture to every corner of the globe.

Distribution embraces technological changes, especially digitalization, as well as changing venues for viewing films (e.g. on computers or TV at home through video or DVD, rather than in theaters). Seeing a movie at home does not connect us to the larger social community with whom we could share a film in a theater, resonating and connecting our responses to those of others beyond our immediate family or friends. On the other hand, home viewing may increase our intimacy with a film, permit us to see a film again and again, and alter our film viewing behaviors (we don't have to be so quiet at home and can interrupt or stop and pause our viewing periodically).

Finally, genre, the first topic, also becomes an overarching theme, as sections on gender, race, and world cinema demonstrate repeatedly that genres are never fixed categories but are always subject to changes, reinterpretations, and cultural variations and mutations. Genre is "a multivalent term multiply and variously valorized by diverse user groups" (Altman, 1999, p. 214), and these groups are the subjects of parts II, III, and IV of this book. This means that receptions, readings, and interpretations of any genre or film may include acceptance, revision, or resistance of a genre's formula and retrofit that formula into new historical, cultural, racial, and gendered ideals and needs.

Pedagogically, this volume is designed to treat these topics in such a way that instructors and students can choose from many relevant films for each section, within loose parameters, in order to provoke discussion. Essays in each section survey new approaches, criticisms and multiple views of the four topics. Some sections have two essays on a single film to help students broaden their notions of analysis and interpretation. Theoretical issues are embedded in the essays in order that theory can help to open up new problems and trouble their solutions, demonstrating to students an accessible and useful function of theory – to raise questions about filmic representation and to offer complex, unresolved, and even conflicting answers and interpretations. Suggested readings at the end of the book are designed not to be comprehensive, but to suggest additional approaches

to the area and some historical background instructors may want students to examine. Films selected are largely from the 1990s to the present, but the main criterion for choice of essays is the importance of a recent film in relation to the topic. Finally, parts III and IV, on race and world cinema, respectively, have longer bibliographies than the first two parts, because the topics embrace a wider scope of possible examples whose complexity, and the differences among them, must be underscored. It is important to provide a sufficient number of essays to keep students from reducing differences to a monolithic "other" and to make students aware that people of color in America and Europe and people from countries outside the "West" are highly differentiated from one another as well as from the West and from whiteness, which cannot and must no longer be the presumed standards or criteria for analysis or measures of subjectivities.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague Dana Arnold who first suggested my putting this book together and whose suggestions in its early stages were very helpful and illuminating. My editor Jayne Fargnoli offered probing critiques and scintillating conversations about films. Ken Provencher of Blackwell Publishing was very helpful in answering my questions and offering suggestions during the writing, editing, and publication processes. I want to thank my Arizona State University colleague Peter Lehman for sharing his profound film expertise with me, for his insightful comments on early drafts, and for our many talks about films and about teaching films, and the anonymous readers for their valuable criticisms and suggestions at several stages of my writing and essay selections.

I dedicate this book to my mother who encouraged my lifelong love of the movies and to Ethan and Ted, my favorite movie fans.

Reference

Altman, Rick (1999) *Film/Genre*. London: British Film Institute.

Part I
Genres:
Ever-changing Hybrids

Introduction

Genre is perhaps the most often invoked and used concept in film studies and scholarship. Many film books are devoted to one genre or another (e.g. film noir, the Western, science fiction), some originating in film practice, and some borrowed and modified from literature. Rick Altman's now classic 1984 essay "A semantic/syntactic approach to film genre" (reprinted several times and modified and republished in 1999) maps a useful set of categories and ways of defining genre using linguistic terms. One is the semantic approach, in which a genre is defined by its common traits (e.g. stock characters, settings), which make up a kind of grammar of "building blocks" that remain relatively stable over time once a genre becomes developed and prominent. The semantic approach casts a wide net, so that a genre may include films with a different number of building blocks, but this approach does not attempt to explain the content or meaning of these films. The other approach, which Altman calls a syntactic approach, is one in which the genre is defined by a "constitutive relationship between undesignated and variable place-holders," by which he means the structures or central problems/dilemmas/themes in which the semantic elements are arranged (Altman, 1999, p. 219). The syntactic approach embraces a narrower field, but explains meanings and structures, and suggests that genres change, as languages change, through use and the impact of historical and social conditions.

Altman considers these two approaches complementary, though many critics prefer one or the other. In his synthesis of these approaches, he offers

a way to understand genre as socially shifting, subject to historical conditions such as changing audience tastes and experiences. He also helps to explain why some genres persist, while others peak at a particular period in time, or others never seem to reach a level of critical mass of films to form a generic category. One example Altman (1999, p. 222) gives is the musical. This genre's syntax changes from expressions of sorrow in the late 1920s to expressions of joy and social integration into community in the 1930s, despite enough identifiable grammatical elements to fit these changes into a single genre. And, of course, new genres are always emerging.

The application of semiotics, introduced into film studies by Christian Metz, parallels film to language. Altman emphasizes attention to changing historical conditions under which films are made and viewed to underscore a function of genre as communicative, a complex, many-sided dialogue (or multilogue) between filmmakers and audiences. Audience reception is part of the definitions of genres. Through viewing experiences, audiences learn what to expect when they watch a Western or film noir or science fiction film. Those expectations are part of film viewing pleasure and are also generic features that can be used, modified, and parodied by filmmakers (think of John Ford's parody of Westerns, and self-parody, in *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962; or the playful parody of musicals in *Pennies from Heaven*, 1981) to excite, thrill, challenge, or sometimes, unintentionally, disappoint audiences. Genre binds viewers to films as part of viewers' own past film experiences. Genres are conventions, and viewers learn them as a shorthand of information that permits later films in a genre to play with the conventions or abbreviate them, knowing that audiences are familiar with those conventions. Having seen hundreds of Westerns, audiences no longer need extensive visual cues for such features as the final gun battle or "showdown."

As Thomas Schatz notes, "Like language and myth, the film genre as a textual system represents a set of rules of construction that are utilized to accomplish a specific communicative function" (Schatz, 1995, p. 96). Schatz considers the effects of the commercial commodification of Hollywood studios' production methods on Hollywood's mythic expression. Whereas myths tend to be stable over time or change slowly, commercial demands on Hollywood films force a constant state of change and cultural preoccupations that tend to destabilize mythic representations.

Furthermore, genres have become so "naturalized" that we often fail to consider why certain films taken together (Westerns, musical, noir), despite their different intentions or historical production modes, share generic features, while other films, however successful, never spawn genres or fit into any. Altman's synthesis helps us understand how films within a genre can change beyond the genre's presumed defining features or can change a genre by using generic elements in new syntactic ways.

Altman, however, recently has revised his own theories to introduce practice or the pragmatic factor into his earlier theory. He insists now that the study of genre be guided by an approach that recognizes that every film has multiple users; that different users have different readings/interpretations; that users have relationships among them, as well as between them and the cultural and social circumstances in which they live; that multiple, often conflicting, uses and interpretations have an effect on production, genre categories that are never fixed, and the reception and experiences of watching, hearing, and socially discussing a film within the contexts of any viewers' other film and other broader cultural experiences (Altman, 1999, p. 214). Throughout this book, the ways in which genres morph and mutate through the viewing practices of audiences around the globe and the cultural and economic production practices of studios and filmmakers endorse Altman's recent modifications of this linguist approach.

Genres can proliferate. Linda Williams suggests the category of body genres, including a wide range of films usually defined within other categories, some new and some old (slasher films, tear jerkers, pornography, horror films). Her body genre films all share a low cultural status, the spectacle of the female body, female victimization, and a bodily effect or response from the spectator (fear, tears, desire). Williams's suggestion reminds us that, just as in the application of genres in literary or art historical studies, the concept of genre in film studies is a convenience that helps us make some sense of heterogeneous films over time and helps us integrate films with social and historical conditions. How genres emerge, change, mutate, or die over time is a matter of importance in understanding how films function in a society at a historical moment or among diverse social groups in society (race, gender, class, nation).

As Williams's suggestions indicate, films' relationships to other films depend on criteria of such topics as content, style, and audience experience. Altman's approach emphasizes that films as genres are *intertextual* – they dialogue with other films and sometimes with literary sources from which films may be derived. They are also *discursive*. Discourse is a set of language and image-based knowledge that becomes institutionalized, expressing social and political relations, not "facts." As discursive, films are open to interpretations and reactions from audiences, including audiences born generations after the film was made. Films' meanings, then, can be expanded through new interpretations and historical viewing contexts, as Williams demonstrates by reshuffling horror and mystery genres into a new category of body genre. To reshuffle, she applied feminist theories on cultural representations of the human body to horror and mystery genres to find shared features that had been hidden or invisible in the parameters of those older genres.

One major issue is genres' changing, including their birth, death, and modifications. While the Western seems uniquely American, its format and structure were imitated in many UK films on the British Empire that borrowed Westerns' battle scenes, racial stereotypes, presumed historical "truth," and justifications for domination, while modifying the genre to fit the subject of the British Empire in India or in Africa. Some films seem to escape generic definition or blur generic distinctions with features that have been defined as postmodern – blending high and popular cultures, mixing author/director's views with audience views, refusing to follow a generic pattern or to stick to one, and often using this mixing to parody a genre while also heightening its generic identity. Genre parodies raise issues about how genres construct identities of gender, race, and nation in films.

As viewers we often expect what is called the institutional mode of representation associated with the classic Hollywood film: characters appear to be "realistic" and develop or progress in the film; the narrative is linear and its dramatic highpoints are clear, and continuities of time and space are maintained, often through techniques such as the establishing shot and shot reverse shot. Avant-garde filmmakers challenge the institutional mode of genre's presumed fixed or stable state. Some films use lighting, plot, setting, character development, and interactions to unhinge the expectation of a linear "development" and instead to mix past, present, and future time frames, confuse "reality" with "fantasy" or dreams, and raise issues of narrative credibility and narrator identity.

To explore this kind of narrative challenge to genre, I would suggest several recent films that employ a schizophrenic character or structure. While movies that apply this schizophrenic structuring may not mature into a persistent genre, they have become more prevalent over the past several years (*The Big Lebowski*, 1998; *Sixth Sense*, 1999; *Being John Malkovich*, 1999; *Fight Club*, 1999; *Memento*, 2000; *A Beautiful Mind*, 2001 (which also intersects with the biopic genre), *Identity*, 2003 (which intersects with the horror genre), and, perhaps, *The Usual Suspects*, 1995). Some of these films have been associated with certain directors (e.g. David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, 2001, and *Lost Highway*, 1997). Many of these films are categorized as a combination of mystery, thriller, and horror. These films are not narratives of mental states that can be carried out in the linear narrative and institutional mode (*Frances*, 1982; *Rain Man*, 1988). Instead the mental states in these films *become* the narrative within the film itself. An examination of some of these films will give students a chance to determine whether they are a genre and to explore on their own how a genre is defined and grows from historical and social circumstances, as outlined by Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard in their essay on postmodern cinema.