



Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory (Film and Culture Series)

By Jörg Schweinitz

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Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory (Film and Culture Series) By Jörg Schweinitz

Since the early days of film, critics and theorists have contested the value of formula, cliché, conventional imagery, and recurring narrative patterns of reduced complexity in cinema. Whether it's the high-noon showdown or the last-minute rescue, a lonely woman standing in the window or two lovers saying goodbye in the rain, many films rely on scenes of stereotype, and audiences have come to expect them. Outlining a comprehensive theory of film stereotype, a device as functionally important as it is problematic to a film's narrative, Jörg Schweinitz constructs a fascinating though overlooked critical history from the 1920s to today.

Drawing on theories of stereotype in linguistics, literary analysis, art history, and psychology, Schweinitz identifies the major facets of film stereotype and articulates the positions of theorists in response to the challenges posed by stereotype. He reviews the writing of Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Theodor W. Adorno, Rudolf Arnheim, Robert Musil, Béla Balázs, Hugo Münsterberg, and Edgar Morin, and he revives the work of less-prominent writers, such as René Fülöp-Miller and Gilbert Cohen-Séat, tracing the evolution of the discourse into a postmodern celebration of the device. Through detailed readings of specific films, Schweinitz also maps the development of models for adapting and reflecting stereotype, from early irony (Alexander Granowski) and conscious rejection (Robert Rossellini) to critical deconstruction (Robert Altman in the 1970s) and celebratory transfiguration (Sergio Leone and the Coen brothers). Altogether a provocative spectacle, Schweinitz's history reveals the role of film stereotype in shaping processes of communication and recognition, as well as its function in growing media competence in audiences beyond cinema.

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Editorial Review

Review

Jörg Schweinitz's study of film stereotypes is impressively comprehensive, admirably rigorous, and appropriately international. It will surely invigorate debates on conventionalized shapes in dominant cinema and well-known patterns of recognition in film genre. Schweinitz also revisits classical and contemporary film theory in provocative ways, opening up this field of possibility and offering new points of departure. (Eric Rentschler, Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Harvard University)

Offering an unusually sophisticated, exhaustively researched and wide-ranging theoretical analysis as well as a series of deftly argued case studies, Schweinitz brings considerable erudition to bear on a subject that has until now often eluded scholarly attention. *Film and Stereotype* represents a novel contribution to ongoing debates concerning genre, style, national cinema, and identity. (Noah Isenberg, editor of *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*)

Film and Stereotype does a masterful job unpacking one of the thorniest concepts in film studies, tracing its multidisciplinary origins with theoretical agility and robust argumentation. This book is indispensable for those interested in the historical, cultural, and industrial utility of stereotypes; Schweinitz's use of theorists such as Béla Balázs and Rudolf Arnheim to reread the stereotype makes an important intervention in the theoretical and textual form of stereotypes. *Film and Stereotype* offers a rigorous critique of the form, function, and power of stereotypes within both the media industries and the cultural imaginary. (Alison Griffiths, Baruch College and the Graduate Center, The City University of New York)

About the Author

Jörg Schweinitz is professor of film theory and film history in the Department of Cinema Studies at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. He specializes in the history of film theory and culture, especially silent cinema, and also focuses on narratology in film and genre criticism. He is a coeditor of *Montage AV*, the leading German-language journal in film theory.

Users Review

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Jeffrey Smith:

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Kelsey Dehart:

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