

Heroes in Hard Times: Cop Action Movies in the U.S., by **Neal King**. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. 282 pp. \$59.50 cloth. ISBN: 1-56639-701-4. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-702-2.

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"Cops," writes Neal King, "just can't get the respect they used to get. Now, those damn families and bosses want them to be nice. Cops regard this pressure as valid in its way; they should be nicer. But they also see it as foolish emasculation of the guards at their community's gates. If cops can't play hardball at work and at home, then the world will fall further into decline, into the hands of white guys even meaner and more corrupt than cops" (p. 12).

Who are these cops? Has the author interviewed them, collected their stories and experiences, and arrived at a common profile, while referring to specific case studies? In writing up his findings, Neal King appears to have taken the point of view of his presumptively male subjects, adopting their voices and language. What kind of social analysis emerges from this subjective approach to the group being studied?

The "cops" the author strives to make real for the reader are fictional characters in movies. The "cop action" genre, in King's uncritical and thankfully unique approach, is "a culture that can make as much sense as any other if we look at it closely" (p. 213). The characters are "aware of and able to recognize the patterns in their behavior, in part because they so often comment on it." Thus, "we should look for evidence of its moral logic in the self-reports of characters, just as an ethnographer would in conversation with members of any subculture" (p. 72). King calls this approach to the movies "mak[ing] them talk" (p. 220).

Just in delving this far into the kind of film studies King invents, my head has spun around several times. To begin with, popular films certainly do not need to be made more real. Whatever the theoretical orientation, cinema study over the past eight decades has taken as its starting point the apparent simplicity, "naturalness," and finished nature of the feature film. Films present themselves as "real," and their constructedness almost inevitably becomes an analyst's project. Speaking of "cop action," King caricatures such a relation between researcher/

critic and text as "analyst smart, movie dumb" (p. 231).

King attempts to enter the movies, positing himself almost as one of their heroes—an aggrieved rescuer defending his chosen turf against the powers (unappreciative critics) that have maligned it and dragged it down. This extreme internalization of the object of study by the researcher wipes out the films as films. Gone are the creative artists who brought the movies into being, the industry that produced them, the commercial and aesthetic imperatives that kept the genre going for, as King points out, at least 17 years. Gone, too, are critical distance and, most important, any sense of the fictionality of the works. The viewer, as actual audience or as theorized ideal "spectator," also vanishes. King commits the fallacy of experiencing characters as the center of narrative works, and of discussing them as if they were real people.

A great irony of the book is that it negates the very spectacular and charismatic qualities that make movies so appealing to mass audiences. Imagine a discussion of a genre intrinsically dependent upon stars that mentions the names of such icons as Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Van Damme, Willis, and Eastwood less than half a dozen times each in over 200 pages. There is never a sense of what these movies look and sound like, of what they are like as cinematic experiences. One result is that the violence that may be these films' *raison d'être* is side-stepped, as is the films' considerable misogyny.

Here we have the odd spectacle of a sociologist not discussing the social effects of films, but treating the depicted worlds of these movies as societies to be studied. All cultures can be called fictions in that they run on mythologies that their people have come to believe about themselves. There is still a fundamental difference between real communities in which people invest their values and beliefs, and a fantasized form that has evolved as a wish fulfillment in order to give pleasure and express fears and desires of the culture that produces it.

In choosing not to deal with the films as objects—albeit dynamic, participatory ones—King accepts the ideologies they act out. Ideological formation, as seen in films, is complex, contradictory, and comes from many sources, but King repeatedly equates ideological analysis with disapproval. This seems too automatic. Ideological analysis does express ambivalence, an attraction to the object balanced by an

attempt to understand its cultural underpinnings. But to join with an object is to give oneself to its ideology. While critical distance can lead to disapproval, it can also end up expressing fascination, admiration, or appreciation, all because the critic has opened him/herself to a range of responses that may illuminate contradictions in the work.

By avoiding critical distance, King has closed off any points of view in the films but the most immediate, surface-level ones. In effect, King does not perform film criticism; he recreates the films in a different form. His method finds in action films what film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson call the “literal” and “explicit” levels of meaning and tries to describe them from the inside, creating a narrative that has little to do with the films themselves. King might have been better able to achieve his ambitions had he dropped the pretense of scholarship and written a work of fiction that discoursed upon the “cop action” genre.

Clearly—or better, muddily—we are through the looking-glass in a film study that manages not to study the films, but to restate them. Films don’t need to be “made to talk”; they do plenty of that in image and action. Films do need to be talked—and thought—about. In relinquishing the scholar’s responsibility to do that, King has produced an ungainly monument to his own fandom.

American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, edited by **Mike-Frank G. Epitropoulos and Victor Roudometof**. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998. 212 pp. NPL cloth. ISBN: 0-275-95051-4.

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From the ever-present demand for Levi’s jeans to the recent events surrounding French farmers dumping apples in McDonalds, the influence of American culture in Europe, for better or worse, is undeniable. The theme of Americanization is not new in sociological literature, and with the increasing discussion of globalization, it is a topic of mounting contemporary relevance. This issue is addressed by Epitropoulos and Roudometof in their edited volume *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. With contributions from sociologists, political scientists, and historians, this book addresses

several divergent topics about how American cultural influences have found their way into European social organization. Epitropoulos and Roudometof have pieced together works that investigate not only cultural imperialism, but also the active appropriation of elements of American culture, giving rise to what was referred to in the conclusion as *glocalization*. Additionally, it was refreshing to see that the editors took a broad approach to defining Europe, including not only Western Europe but also two pieces on Eastern Europe.

The chapters are loosely unified by an unstated theme of cultural synthesis: The process of Americanization is characterized not as cultural replacement, but as local redefinition via selective appropriation of certain elements of American culture. This point is most explicitly made in the conclusion by Victor Roudometof and Roland Robertson; here the authors argue for a reconceptualization of globalization in spatial-temporal terms. In an admitted first attempt at defining such an approach, the authors make an interesting case for this reconceptualization. Additional support for the theme of cultural synthesis is made in the chapter on Greek youth culture (by the editors), and in Peter Bergman’s piece on duality of the German reaction to the process of Americanization.

The second half of the book far outweighs the first in both content and style. David Lempert’s piece on the colonization of the Russian political and legal system dominates this section. Lempert fluidly mixes ethnographic research with recent historical events to explain the how the Russian system was remade in the image of the West. This rebirth was marked by the creation of a legal and political system designed to benefit capitalist interests, especially those of American multinationals interested in the emerging market of post-Soviet Russia. Lempert expertly explains how legal revision was undertaken via elite-to-elite interaction among American and Soviet attorneys and state officials, offering only the establishment of property rights without creation of laws assuring individual protection. Further supporting this piece, as well as Steve Fox’s work on African-American images in German advertising, is a short photo spread. The inclusion of these brief visual works benefits both pieces tremendously. Other chapters that deserve mention are Greg Robinson’s, concerning Richard Wright’s self-imposed exile in Paris, and Steve Fox’s, on the