

SELECTED BY: RICHARD ABEL

Mark Garrett Cooper, *Love Rules: Silent Hollywood and the Rise of the Managerial Class* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

For a book whose text runs just slightly more than 200 pages, *Love Rules* is quite ambitious and provocative in its overall argument, extremely useful for its summaries of theoretical issues and debates, consistently insightful in its analyses of specific films – and yet also a bit maddening.

Basically, Cooper argues that the “the commonsense form of Hollywood narrative” was the visual love story, established during the feature film’s development in the 1910s and 1920s, a story in which “a particular kind of couple,” and the family which it founded, eventually was located in “a particular kind of space.” In this way, Cooper continues, Hollywood movies “made classification by race and gender essential means of determining where various individuals belonged,” and according to what “rules,” within a new national culture. Moreover, by securing the authority (in a rising professional managerial class [PMC] and its “teams of information specialists”) for how the spatial arrangements that the couple’s safety and prosperity required would be managed, the Hollywood love story contributed “to the shift that occurred, roughly speaking, between 1880 and 1930, when the America of industrial capital and ‘island communities’ gave way to a corporate America at once more tightly knit by mass media and more vocally subdivided into diverse groups.”

Of particular interest, for me at least, is the alternative this book offers to the paradigm that has dominated histories of American cinema, most recently and influentially in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson’s *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*:¹ that is, historians have tended to “distinguish the Hollywood feature film from other types of films

and chronicle the relationship between its formal development and the organization of its production” through their “investigation of shots” as “the privileged units of analysis”. Although Cooper does not engage with Miriam Hansen’s current conceptual reworking of classical Hollywood cinema as “vernacular modernism” – in which “the hegemonic mechanisms by which Hollywood succeeded in amalgamating a diversity of competing traditions, discourses, and interests on the domestic level [...] accounted for at least some of the generalized appeal and robustness of Hollywood’s products abroad”² – his argument complements hers, especially in that it seeks to frame quite differently what, “on the domestic level,” from quite early on, was specifically American about American cinema. Indeed, Cooper works from this assumption: that “the distinctive patterns through which Hollywood tells that most familiar of narratives” are “spatial in character” – that is, “the love story does not happen in space so much as to space.” Consequently, it progresses, from an incorporeal vantage point, through “the opposition, transformation, and reconciliation of different kinds of spaces,” in order to restore “the lovers’ mutual gaze within a clean, well-lighted space” (the masculinist connotations of that reference are telling). In other words, the love story inspires the viewer’s desire “not for more and more visual information, but for the proper arrangement, stability, and mastery of dangerous differentiation,” reducing “the visual field to the space surrounding the socially reproducible couple.”

Cooper is especially persuasive in exploring certain ramifications of this argument in his analysis of specific films, from *Enoch Arden* (1911) to *The Wind* (1928) or *The Crowd* (1928). First of all, he extends and condenses the modifications that have long accrued to feminist psychoanalytic theory by arguing that “the privilege accorded the heroine’s face” through lighting, camerawork, and mise-en-scene does not simply objectify her as the figure “to-be-looked-at” by the hero but

presents her as “both part of a space and the site of a soulful interior,” an alluring image that suggests a subjective depth with the “power to signify an invisible source of desire.” As a crucial, paradoxical component of the lovers’ mutual gaze – for instance, in *La Bohème* (1926) – the woman’s face implies “a desirable, because desiring, consciousness, behind it.” Second, he deftly explains how the normative desire associated with “the face of love” is made “white” through the management of racial and ethnic differences, in relatively obvious cases such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and in much more complicated ones such as *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Third, as a corollary, he demonstrates how sound could be used to organize space according to patterns already established by silent features, so that, in *The Jazz Singer*, for instance, Al Jolson’s Jewish voice serves to resolve his character’s struggles through the unconventional (at the time) technique of musical numbers. Specifically, whereas “*Kol Nidre*” places that voice in the synagogue and locates its American audience (through his intended fiancée Mary) in the Jewish parlor, “*Mammy*” creates a new arrangement by seating his Jewish mother Sara in a Broadway theater to hear her son. “In bringing together these differences” and softening the boundaries between them, Cooper concludes, “the Jewish voice enriches America without losing its identity.”

Cooper also includes extremely useful discussions of a number of theoretical issues that ground the book’s argument. One, of course, is the historical relationship between the concepts of race and ethnicity in the early 20th century, which he traces through the influential writings of Horace Kallen, Robert Edward Park, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Although ethnicity generally came to designate a more palatable cultural difference, it supplemented rather than supplanted race: one category was hardly intelligible without the other. A second is the historical relationship between the concepts of private, public, and mass. If 19th cen-

tury print media’s configuration of those concepts grounded the bourgeois nation-state in the proposition that “reading and writing would allow the masses to rule themselves,” early 20th century visual media’s reconfiguration exposed that proposition as faulty. Here, Cooper offers a lengthy yet invaluable reappraisal of Walter Lippman and John Dewey’s landmark 1920s debate, out of which he teases a “state-of-the art theory of mediation.” A third is the rise of the PMC (first analyzed by Barbara and John Ehrenreich) and its acquisition of authority, chiefly through “new institutions of producing and disseminating knowledge” that “transform the division of labor and provide the basis for management’s power.” Wielding that authority, Cooper argues, depended on creating “what the public wants” through such means as advertising, controlling a commercial aesthetics that feminized the public as consumers, and managing reformist institutions and their discourse in such a way as to incorporate “critics in a nationwide public relations apparatus.”

Although the overall argument of *Love Rules* is provocative as an intervention in writing early American cinema history, the individual sections are consistently cogent and intriguing, and the concluding paragraph a model of concision, what I find a bit maddening is how tenuous sometimes are the links that hold the book together. For instance, the Lippmann-Dewey debate, the dangers of racial and ethnic difference, and the rise of the PMC are yoked together through what seems sheer homology in order to read the allegory of the Jewish movie mogul. More important, why the visual love story and its “clean, well-arranged, and illuminated space,” and not some other story or stories, became the prerogative of Hollywood’s PMC and its means of ordering the world and defining a new national culture remains a crucial, unaddressed question. Here, Richard Ohmann’s study of mass magazines at the turn of the last century,³ which Cooper cites approvingly in his introduction, may have

provided more of a model for Love Rules, especially since Ohmann argues that the “paradigmatic story of courtship” in such magazines as *Munsey’s*, in the 1890s, extolled a particular kind of American modernity, constructed a secure place within it for two supposedly autonomous selves, and through both character and narrative voice “naturalized” the outlook of the PMC and its new corporate order.

- 1 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1985).
- 2 Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” in Christine Gledhill, Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 332-350.
- 3 Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazine, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996). See especially chapter 10: “Fiction’s Inadvertent Love Song,” pp. 287-339.

SELECTED BY: FRANÇOIS ALBERA

Jean-Claude Milner, *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2003)

L’hypothèse que poursuit Milner dans ce petit livre à l’argumentation serrée, situe la pensée de Barthes dans une problématique née dans la caverne de Platon. Lieu des apparences mais surtout du sensible, des sensations, la caverne doit-elle être quittée pour aller contempler les Idées, débarrassées des faux-semblants des cinq sens? Barthes postulerait que non et se serait efforcé, via Sartre, puis le marxisme, enfin la sémiologie, d’élever les qualia du sensible au rang d’idées, avant d’“aménagement” la caverne avec le plaisir du texte et, constatant l’inanité de cet hédonisme

proclamé, en sortir dans la lumière du “souverain Bien” qui n’est que le chagrin de la perte, lieu de retour du passé, chambre d’échos, cette chambre claire du souvenir où désormais les images, les apparences, sous les espèces de la photographie, s’éclairent dans l’aura. Ces points d’appui de Milner “parlent” suffisamment aux spécialistes de cinéma – mythe de la caverne, camera oscura, christologie de l’image, aura – pour éveiller leur intérêt. Plus encore le fait que Milner déclare avec tranchant l’incompatibilité de cette pensée barthienne de l’image reproductible, la photographie, et de la pensée benjaminienne: “Il n’est pas un paragraphe de *La Chambre claire* qui ne prenne le contre-pied de *L’Œuvre d’art* [à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée]. En sens inverse, il n’est pas une proposition de *L’Œuvre d’art* qui ne porte en elle la condamnation de *La Chambre claire*.” (p. 28).

La doxa – dont Milner définit si bien la nature et la fonction dans son étonnante réévaluation non dupe du structuralisme – répugne à repérer du discord, du différend entre les références qu’elle s’oblige à révéler. Dans “*le Journal*”, comme dit le mallarméen Milner, et dans l’exercice académique qui le flanque, on cite volontiers ensemble des noms inconciliables. On dit Deleuze et Derrida, Bazin et Benjamin, Barthes... Affaire de cadrage, de consensus. Après l’épisode structural, en effet qui ne cessait de diviser, on rassemble, c’est la politique de l’apaisement, sans enjeux, on énumère (mille e tre..., principe du catalogue celui-ci doublant l’exposition ou l’étalage, formes devenues dominantes dès lors qu’on répugne à l’articulation).

Ce mince et dense ouvrage dérive en quelque sorte des deux chapitres consacrés à Barthes dans *Le Périple structural*. Le pas reprend et détaille l’évocation qui y est faite de l’itinéraire barthésien du Degré zéro à *L’Empire des signes* et surtout, il la poursuit jusqu’à *La chambre claire*. Dans *Le Périple*, on s’arrête à *L’Empire des signes* – où le pluriel qui affecte le mot “signe” indique une sortie de l’épistémologie minimaliste du structuralisme. Il