



Why  
does  
film  
matter?

Why does film matter?

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Slumdog Millionaire (2008)

# Editorial

Masoud Yazdani | Director, Intellect Publishing

Art and humanities research begins with a desire to understand the human condition. For centuries, literature has provided the source material for reflection on what it means to be human. While literature continues to enlighten us, for some time film has provided a visual alternative. Film not only offers a narrative similar to literature, it also provides an audio-visual feast for the senses, and in the quick-fix, fast-paced, Technicolor whirl of the twenty-first century, it is this feast which best mirrors our experience of modern life. When we sit down to watch a film, the sensual experience – sight and sound – is familiar, but the cerebral one, the story itself, can take us anywhere. In this sense, film is both an old friend and a new adventure. It is also through film that we have a unique means of preserving the historic past, as well as looking forward, towards an uncertain future.

At Intellect, we have begun to offer an opportunity to look at film not just as a single subject but as a universe of subjects, because we believe film offers a rich medium for reflection on human nature. By looking at films from different regions of the world, we are given a window into what makes people all over the world so different, and also what makes those people the same. In this way we can each develop a better understanding of 'the other': an understanding that avoids stereotypes and acknowledges both the unity and diversity in humanity.

## Welcome to our world, where film is the currency of intellectual debate

Front cover: James Dean (1955)

# All killer no filler

An interview with **Richard Raskin**, Editor of *Short Film Studies*

**What attracts you to short film and what do you find most intriguing about the medium?**

Jerry Seinfeld once said: 'If I wanted a long, boring story with no point to it, I have my life.' When short films are at their best, they are the exact opposite of 'a long, boring story with no point to it.' I love brief narratives that are rich in texture, saturated with meaning and tell their stories without wasting a moment on filler of any kind. It is widely known that the short film is the poetry of film-making, and the other quote I'd like to share is the most relevant definition of poetry I have ever seen. A Chinese master said: 'The writer's message is like rice. When you write prose, you cook the rice. When you write poetry, you turn the rice into rice wine.' The best short films are pure rice wine – so concentrated and intoxicating that they take our breath away, while mediocre shorts that seem to go on forever, tediously belabouring their story, are like cooked rice. The great short films tell more in as little as four or seven minutes than many feature films. And the form is much freer, much less subject to formulaic storytelling patterns and conventions.

**You have written, directed and edited a number of films, what aspect of the film-making process do you most enjoy?**

It's only a small number, really, though at the moment I have two short films in production. The writing is enormously satisfying when a script idea takes shape in what I can guess will be a promising way. But being part of a production team is a wonderful experience and I have the greatest respect for the people who can light a set in a way that creates a visually exciting experience for the viewer. One of the shorts now in progress is an animation film, and the attention being lavished on the puppets, props and set design is nothing less than awe-inspiring. Working with actors is also great fun. I have also had some disappointments, the latest one involving a film made by three directors who decided to change my story so radically that, only partly as a joke, I asked that a disclaimer be added to the final credits stating: 'Any resemblance between this film and the original screenplay is purely coincidental.'

**In your opinion what is the best venue to watch a short film, and why?**

At the moment, and I imagine this will continue indefinitely, short film festivals would be the best venue. But I am one of many people who wish short films would be shown before feature films in movie theatres, so that the broad movie-going public could also enjoy this wonderful art form.

**You are the editor of Intellect's journal *Short Film Studies*, what are your aspirations when it comes to this project?**

One of my goals is to help teachers to upgrade their courses on short films, by offering them not only access to short film masterpieces but also – for each film – a package consisting of an interview with the director, a shot-by-shot breakdown of the film, and an array of peer-reviewed articles that illuminate the film from a variety of perspectives. What more could a teacher want? Another goal is to attract to this field first-rate scholars who may never before have considered studying short films and who can help to sustain a flow of new research on the ways in which short films tell their stories.

**Why does film matter?**

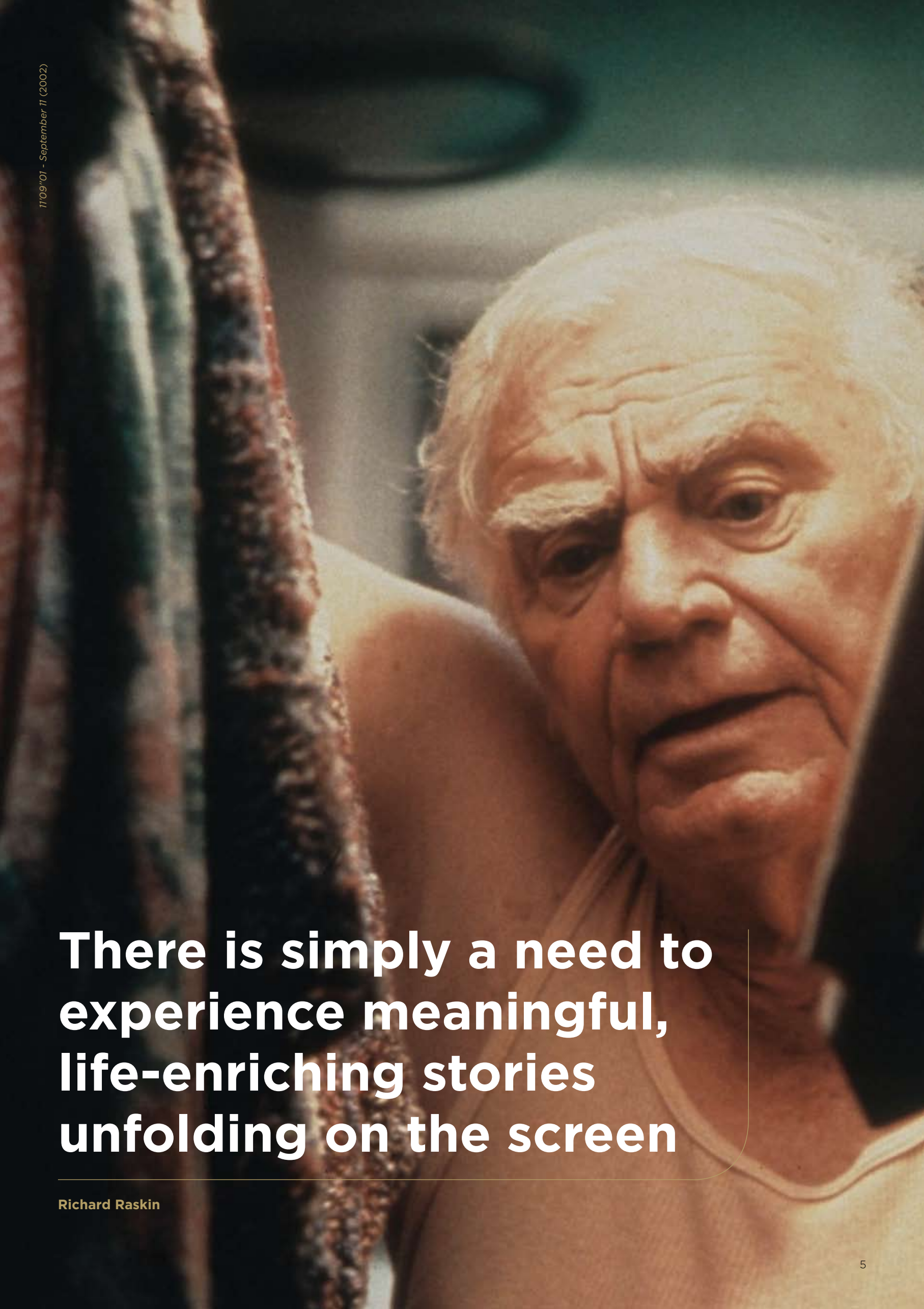
For some people, that would be like asking: why does food matter? There is simply a need that has to be fulfilled – a need to experience meaningful, life-enriching stories unfolding on the screen.

#### Read on...

**Richard Raskin** | Aarhus University, Denmark

Editor: *Short Film Studies*, ISSN 20427824

Contributor: *Journal of Media Practice*, ISSN 14682753



There is simply a need to experience meaningful, life-enriching stories unfolding on the screen

**Richard Raskin**

# As long as we continue to enjoy the peculiar sensation of gathering with a bunch of strangers in a darkened theatre, film will still matter

Geoff Lealand

## Why does film matter?

In all its old and new manifestations, film is still vitally important. Hollywood seems to have run out of interesting or compelling stories and television drama is increasingly taking up the responsibility for producing complex and compelling narratives. So it is up to national and trans-national cinema to create films which connect with the personal, the local and political. As long as we continue to enjoy the peculiar sensation of gathering with a bunch of strangers in a darkened theatre, film will still matter.

## From your perspective what does the future hold for film?

No one else will make New Zealand films other than New Zealanders. It is great that we have Peter Jackson and 'The Hobbit movies' but these are global films for global audiences, and it is quite incidental that they are being shot here [NZ]. New Zealand films will continue to be modest ventures in need of forms of cultural subsidy but they remain a vital part of our sense of being connected to each other - linked to wider worlds but also distinct from them.

## Read on...

Geoff Lealand | University of Waikato, New Zealand  
 Editor: *Directory of World Cinema: Australia & New Zealand*, ISBN 9781841503738  
 Contributor: *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, ISSN 17503175

The Piano (1993)



# Hollywood: A history?

Lincoln Geraghty | Extract from *Directory of World Cinema: American Hollywood*

The history of Hollywood is bound up with the history of America. As a nation growing to become an international superpower during the twentieth century, America took the lead in global politics, manufacturing and business. Likewise, as Hollywood grew to become the leading producer of films in the early part of the century, it defined what makes film popular: the story. Hollywood makes stories, it is after all dubbed the 'dream factory', and whether they be complex dramas or spectacular blockbusters, the story is what makes people go out to the cinema, go out and buy the DVD or watch a rerun on TV. A good story, the film's narrative, will always attract an audience. The following short 'history' is about how making stories became the main aim of Hollywood and is, in essence, the reason why Hollywood still reigns supreme; for stories entertain and, whether or not we like to see it in such simple terms, audiences want to be entertained.

In the late nineteenth century, film was considered a technological marvel; an attraction to wow an audience and advertise the technical genius of the film-maker. Those who made films, early short recordings of everyday life screened to select audiences, considered the new medium emblematic

## The dominance of narrative over spectacle is perhaps central to film becoming the popular form of entertainment it is today

of scientific advancement rather than a necessarily artistic practice. Louis and Auguste Lumière's projected images on the wall of the Grand Café in Paris grabbed people's attention but offered no story to keep it and make it last. *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895), a recording of people leaving their workshop, showed that film had the potential to capture attention but their films, a mixture of actualities, scenics, and topicals, only played back images that people could experience for real in the everyday. Alternately, France's Georges Méliès, a magician and film-maker, saw the potential in film to really challenge the intended audience. His films differed from the actualities made by the likes of the Lumières and were far more fantastical, using camera tricks, magical illusions, stages and props to deliberately confuse the audience – taking them, momentarily, to another world beyond the confines of their daily lives. The use of tinted film, early special effects such as smoke and stop motion, allowed Méliès to create alternate worlds on screen: his *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) and *Voyage à Travers l'Impossible* (1904) depicted, albeit rather inaccurately, the possibility of life on other planets. His films can be considered paintings that

viewers could gaze upon. Both examples of early film-making constitute a period in film history dubbed 'The Cinema of Attractions'. Méliès, like the Lumières brothers, used the new medium to delight and astonish the audience. For example, *A Trip to the Moon* may have depicted space travel and extraterrestrial life but what fascinated Méliès even more was the potential for the 'scenario' to act as 'pretext' for stage effects, tricks, and a 'nicely arranged tableau' (Méliès cited in Gunning 1990: 57).

In contrast, America's Edwin S. Porter used film to tell a story. With the aid of Thomas Edison's newly developed camera and projection equipment, his adaptations of American classics such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903 and variations on the Wild West theme seen in *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) are examples of narrative becoming central to the film-maker's art. As audience tastes became more sophisticated film-makers had to develop new ways to keep people engrossed and entertained. Thrilling scenes of daring could only entertain for as long as the story that got people to that point was interesting and captivating in its own right. As film became more of a business than a form of artistic expression, producers and exhibitors trying to make a profit

believed that longer and more engaging stories would pack more people into the nickelodeons and get them coming back for more. Hollywood's greatest achievement was to take a technological wonder that the Lumières and Méliès experimented with and make it into a money-making form of storytelling. At this point in film history the medium truly became American.

The dominance of narrative over spectacle is perhaps central to film becoming the popular form of entertainment it is today. Film clearly had the potential to make some people a lot of money – producers, actors, writers, stars, exhibitors, for example – but for a lone entrepreneur the profit margins were small. What Hollywood did was to make film a business, make it profitable and adaptable to suit differing audience tastes. As cinemas opened up in every town and city across the country, owners cried out for more movies to show. Demand was met by Hollywood, which, by 1911, had established itself as the most suitable location for film production. At the heart of it, the new fledgling studios started to perfect the techniques and methods of making multiple films at the same time. Film production became more like the factory

### Why does film matter?

Film matters because film is us. We as a society use the filmic form to tell stories about who we are and our society – they are a record of what makes us human and what concerns us in the everyday. Even with the influence of new media technologies that have changed the way we now watch films (not in the cinema but at home and online) films are still very much part of the media landscape. The film form, narrative and styles with which we are so familiar, from Hollywood blockbusters to the avant-garde, shape our own personal narratives. Film offers us a language to speak to each other across national, class, economic and racial lines – film is a phenomenon that allows us to understand cultures and people.

The Searchers (1956)



line seen in the American manufacturing industry and the formula that made it work was the adoption of the 'classical norms' of film-making. Classical Hollywood cinema, as we know it today, 'put emphasis on narrative continuity and the coherent ordering of space.' As a result, the techniques of film-making were linked to 'a unified mode of storytelling' (Grainge, Jancovich & Monteith 2007: 74).

Making ten films in the same time that it used to take to make one or two drove studios to maximize time and effort. The division of labour on film projects allowed for a team of writers to concentrate on writing scripts, or parts of scripts, that could be taken on by a team of directors who would use the stages and back lots of the studio at the same time but shooting different scenes. Similar plots for similar stories also meant that props and sets could be reused and recycled for different films. Set designers, lighting technicians, cameramen and editors could work on different films contiguously, as the production schedule called for them to join at different stages of production. These deliberate and segmented modes of film-making relied on the adoption of the continuity script, which meant films were made according to the availability of location, staff or stage set rather than the order in which each scene came in the story. The linear narrative of the film was brought to life through the editing of footage after it was finally shot, piecing together scenes that perhaps happen at the same time in the story but in different places. Thus narrative film was largely defined by the establishment of production techniques designed to keep costs low and increase output to satisfy audience demand.

Due to the nature of the studio system and the classical norms of Hollywood, film-making genres were, and still are, reliable means through which producers could maximize profits and guarantee an audience. Studios set up to make a certain type of film, using the same sets, directors, stars, and writers for example, became known for a particular genre since that was what they made in the most cost-effective fashion. Film genres created expectation on the behalf of

audiences, who knew what they wanted to see, that they would get it, and studios fulfilled demand based on a system of factory-line production. Tom Ryall stated that 'Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film-maker, and their reading by an audience' (cited in Hutchings 1995: 65-6), therefore genres not only offer the primary framework for Hollywood storytelling but they also determine how we ourselves categorize films. My book is, in some ways, all about the categorization of Hollywood film, but, in defining what genre a film is and thinking about the relationship between different films of the same genre, we are forced to take notice of the industrial drives that influence the production and reception of individual films. Recognizing that genres are bound up with the history of storytelling in film acknowledges both the level at which films are conceived and made industrially and how we, as an audience, are innately familiar with how stories speak to us culturally. For Steve Neale, 'genres function to move the subject from text to text and from text to narrative system, binding these instances together into a constant coherence, the coherence of the cinematic institution' (cited in Hutchings 1995: 72).

So the history of Hollywood is not one history but an amalgam of histories: a history of spectacle versus narrative, technological change and development, industrial practices, artistic differences, economic forces, and the formation of a set of norms. Out of these histories come the popular and entertaining genres we still enjoy today and the variety of Hollywood films discussed in *American Hollywood*.

### Read on...

Lincoln Geraghty | University of Portsmouth, UK  
Editor: *Directory of World Cinema: American Hollywood*, ISBN 9781841504155  
Contributor: *European Journal of American Culture*, ISSN 14660407

## Film matters for the same reason all art matters

# Noir again?

Emily E. Auger | Extract from *Tech-Noir Film: A Theory of the Development of Popular Genres*

Popular genres arise as adaptations of myths relative to and as part of the content and form of discourse emphasized in a particular time and place: such emphases are a principal means by which a particular ideology or world view is both arrived at and perpetuated. All of the traditional forms given to discourse, including those related to 'entertainment' considered here, have developed historically in relation to earlier and alternative forms: the novel descends from such sources as letters, contracts, and wills; the easel painting from manuscript illumination, wall painting, and oral and literary narratives; and film from novels, painting, and theatre, to name just a few. While all of these forms seem to have the capacity to reformulate and represent myths, their popularity has varied over time. It is also apparent that some myths lend themselves more readily to articulation within some fields of discourse than others. Historically, as interest in different fields of discourse changes, so does the identification with particular myths – as the shifts of attention from Antigone to Oedipus, to the more recent engagement with Prometheus, indicate. While some tech-noir films are based on a narrative first written as a short story, play, or book, most are developed as film scripts; and, like all popular genres regardless of form, tech-noir films perpetually re-ground myth in real world events and issues. These events, as always, include war, but the years between 1970 and 2005, the years of the release dates for most of the films considered, were also years of extraordinary scientific and technological developments. Many of these developments, like the home computer, are related to digital technology, while others, like environmental pollution, are less seemingly innocuous: these realities echo through the Promethean genre of tech-noir.

New genres arise then, not 'merely' as matters of form, but as means to convey meaning in relation to content. Contemporary popular genres, both literary and filmic, share certain aspects of ideology grounded in myth and related to the individual's coming-of-age by finding a place in society, but they are usually distinguished from their antecedent, the medieval 'romance,' with its interlaced structure, complex

and overlapping plots, and extensive character lists, by the modern preference for more Aristotelian literary qualities: that is to say, more linear narrative structure, plots of more limited scope, and fewer characters. This transformation of form indicates, among other things, a change in emphasis away from a sense of the complex interrelatedness of cosmic metaphysics and the materiality of the physical world toward a melodramatic fixation on simplified dualistic models for generating meaning in relation to characters, particularly victims, who are intentionally chosen as mirror reflections of the anticipated audience, or rather as reflections that match the members of the anticipated audience as they imagine themselves.

These general changes in popular genres find more particular manifestations in many examples of tech-noir and its literary antecedents, including the three classics considered: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Herbert George Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), all of which have been variously described in relation to both gothic and science fiction. Tech-noir films tend to be more melodramatic than these texts, and provide more thorough and extensive depictions of technology, sexuality, and violence. They also fill out the roster of 'characters' and sets so as to appeal to a larger film audience and lend special dramatic attention to the experiences of the victim or victims of technology. Many of these films have very little dialogue and rely on visual ways of conveying the tech-noir message, notably the frequent treatment of the human form within the *mise-en-scène*, such that it and its representations become part of a conceptual *mise en abyme* that revises the hierarchy or chain of beings. This *mise en abyme* contributes to the overall complexity of tech-noir films, even as they maintain the conventions of melodrama and genre: in tech-noir films the interrelations of the metaphysical and physical are reasserted by proxy in layered representations of technologized realities.

### Why does film matter?

Film matters for the same reason all art matters – because it embodies and conveys the values and beliefs of the culture within which and for which it is made. Popular art forms, such as film, are of special importance because they speak to the most central of those values and beliefs.

### From your perspective what does the future hold for film?

Like the gothic, detective, and science fiction genres, tech-noir conveys didactic messages in relation to particular fields of discourse. Genre itself is a historically evolving and cumulative form of discourse that is dedicated primarily to the person in relation to society and invention. The tech-noir genre is thus likely to last for as long as technology itself has currency within discourse, and it will surely have that currency for as long as it provides new and problematic possibilities for life.

### Read on...

Emily E. Auger | Independent scholar

Author: *Tech-Noir Film: A Theory of the Development of Popular Genres*, ISBN 9781841504247

# It can help audiences, 'old' and 'new', to rethink their place in the world

Pietari Kääpä

## Why does film matter?

As a scholar of transnational / eco-critical cinema, it is increasingly clear to me that cinema is one of the most efficient ways to debate political and cultural issues in a global society. This is especially the case with cinema's potential to visually capture the transnational and even global scale of ecological problems, and engage with them in a way that reaches wide global audiences. Cinema is not only a communicator of ideas and an essential component of the culture industries. It is also a crucial pedagogical tool that facilitates efficient learning and motivates participation from new generations of audiences. It can help audiences, 'old' and 'new', to rethink their place in the world, and crucially, it can also motivate them to do something about the injustices and exploitation to which they are witness.

## From your perspective what does the future hold for film?

Film studies has only recently begun to truly understand the important roles theoretical paradigms such as eco-criticism and transnationalism play in conceptualizing cinema's social responsibility. As film production and distribution technologies become more effective and immersive, cinema has an increasingly vital role to play in improving sustainable production and distribution as well as communicating these innovations to global audiences. For example, emerging distribution networks and 'green' production methods (i.e. less expensive and mobile technology) provide new ways of conceptualizing sustainable and ecological cultural production. Yet, technological innovation is a constantly on-going process, and more remains to be done in film and media studies on the ecological potential of media convergence. Accordingly, we must remember that emerging forms of media production and distribution can build barriers between peoples and reinforce exploitative relationships on a global scale. Simultaneously, they can, and often do, breach these barriers and make us rethink our positions and responsibilities in a global society.

## Read on...

**Pietari Kääpä** | University of Nottingham Ningbo, China  
 Author: *The Cinema of Mika Kaurismäki: Transvergent Cinescapes, Emergent Identities*, ISBN 9781841504094  
 Contributor: *Transnational Cinemas*, ISSN 20403526



Syriana (2005)

# Film is dead... Long live film

Mulholland Drive (2001)

## David Lynch, film-maker and visual artist

Allister Mactaggart

David Lynch started to make films as an art student in the mid-1960s at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia because he wanted a painting that 'would really be able to move.' This fine art sensibility has persisted throughout his film-making career in which he has produced a singular and remarkable body of work which crosses the borders between different art forms and thus challenges some of the tenets of film theory as it currently stands.

In Lynch's practice the film set is treated as a living painting which changes and develops via intuition and experimentation as the work is made. This fine art approach is apparent from his first feature film, *Eraserhead* (1976), through to his experimental pieces on his website, DavidLynch.com, and becomes even more pronounced in the labyrinthine digital film-making of *Inland Empire* (2006). The open nature of much of the work also provides a space for the viewer to become enmeshed in the complexities of what is presented on screen, and who can thereby become an 'extra' by becoming embroiled in the continuing life of the films as audiences critically engage with them, in print and digital forms, producing supplementary knowledge beyond the rigidities of an auteur approach to film studies.

The connection between startling individual images and diachronic narrative in these films creates a dialectic that problematizes the relationship between different art forms, and which may, partly, account for the wide divergence of critical responses to these films as they cross boundaries between film and fine art. In box-office terms some of

the films might be considered wilful failures, such as the seemingly paradoxical decision to make a prequel feature film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), after the television series had been stopped, but this is a film the director felt compelled to make and whose critical reputation has in fact grown over the years. These films are situated within the North American film industry, but at its edges, and which perhaps explains some of the responses to the work. His later films, particularly *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006), critique the history of the industry and particularly Hollywood, from the position of women damaged by their attempts to become film stars.

In a practice that fully embraces new technology it will be fascinating to see where Lynch goes next. For him the freedom that digital technology provides brings film-making and painting closer together as greater creative control is brought into the film-maker's hands. This increased freedom is also present for the viewer, in terms of interactions with the film text in the cinema, on DVD and the Internet, in either a professional or amateur capacity, in which the continued engagement with this body of work provides these 'extra' voices with an expanding, unfolding space for critical interactions to extend the life of the films and to provide supplementary knowledge.

The end results of Lynch's film paintings are always startling; continually moving, changing shape and creating new forms; no wonder they elicit such strong reactions.

### Why does film matter?

Since its inception film has delighted, amazed and confounded audiences, and it continues to do so. Film came into being as part of a new mass visual culture in the late nineteenth century and went on to become the pre-eminent art form of the twentieth century. As such, its strengths have always been in its intermediality and intertextuality, breaking down false divisions between high and low culture. This status also provides film with the potential to mutate and cross over into the new media frameworks opened up by the digital turn. Film continues to provide audiences and the individual spectator with incomparable opportunities to experience imaginatively the lives of others, which can only affect and enrich us, making us more rounded individuals by such encounters.

### From your perspective what does the future hold for film?

It has been widely reported that upon seeing a daguerreotype in 1839 Paul Delaroche said that 'from today painting is dead.' However, this story is probably apocryphal and Delaroche was actually an advocate of the nascent art form of photography. And, instead of acquiescing to the death of their medium, forward thinking painters from that time onwards entered into a new engagement with painting's radical possibilities that photography opened up for them, to produce startling new ways of seeing, depicting and understanding the modern world. In recent years, David Lynch has stated: 'for me, film is dead... I'm shooting in digital video and I love it.' The digital turn similarly provides new opportunities for forward thinking film-makers to take film into new portals which can, and will no doubt continue to, reinvigorate the medium and its radical possibilities. Film is dead... Long live film.

### Read on...

Allister Mactaggart | Directorate of Art, Design and Creative Industries, Chesterfield College, UK  
Author: *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory*, ISBN 9781841503325



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# Film is the most pervasive form of communication and entertainment

Keyan Tomaselli

## Why does film matter?

Film, in the generic sense, is the basis of all motion picture forms, and is the most pervasive form of communication and entertainment in the postmodern world.

## From your perspective what does the future hold for film?

With the development of new technologies film becomes much more ubiquitous and accessible. It is used as a developmental impulse by some less developed countries on the one hand while generating different forms of aesthetics on the other.

## Read on...

**Keyan Tomaselli** | University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa  
 Editor: *Journal of African Cinemas*, ISSN 17549221  
 Contributor: *Studies in Documentary Film*, ISSN 17503280  
 Contributor: *Journal of African Media Studies*,  
 ISSN 2040199X



Tsotsi (2005)

# The importance of genre

Mark Browning | Extract from *Stephen King on the Small Screen*

Genre is inherently intertextual. Audiences are constantly asked to place a narrative within other known narratives – it is often the means by which we make sense of the experience of watching a film. Difficulty in doing so leads to a range of emotions, very occasionally surprised pleasure but more often disappointment, confusion and possibly even anger. My book is looking at a very specific sub-genre, televisual adaptations derived from the work of Stephen King, but its considerations have wider ramifications for the operation of genre and the use of literary properties on television, such as whether generic hybrids foreground their generic credentials more strongly than ‘purer’ examples, for their blending to work effectively.

Genres are a key mechanism by which expectations are managed. In different contexts, the ‘managers’ of these expectations might be networks, producers, writers or even ourselves as viewers. It is often said that programmes ‘find their audiences’ as if they have some kind of sentient power, but what kinds of expectations are raised, their intensity, and how far they are met, play a crucial role in how a given piece of television is scheduled, how it is received or indeed whether it is made at all. Arguably, generic categorizing in television is even more important than cinema. Both media need to find their audience and for the audience to find them, but in the case of cinema, that battle is won by the time viewing commences (even if individuals walk out, tickets have been sold). The commencement of viewing guarantees little in the context of television, where there is instantly, via the remote control, access to an array of other viewing choices and the home environment, with increasing numbers of multi-media platforms, as well as social interaction (such as with family, friends, and even pets), means that the television must fight with an array of potential competition for the attention of the viewer.

As a result, generic signs must be flagged up even more prominently, so that in the case of the programmes discussed, the term ‘a Stephen King adaptation’ becomes a generic label in itself with potential overtones of science fiction and horror but often only tangentially delivering those elements. The steamroller of the King brand is such that it is a means of delivering a large audience drawn from his readers and fans of previous movies and TV adaptations and, in America at least, an apparent commitment to ‘quality’ drama. In Great Britain, such implicit status (designated by early evening or prime-time scheduling) is rarely given to King adaptations, which routinely occupy later night slots (except the more mainstream coming-of-age narratives, like *Stand By Me* (Rob Reiner, 1986) and *Hearts in Atlantis* (Scott Hicks, 2001)). Here there is a synergy of marketing interests with historical televisual development, in British public service broadcasting at least, in which ‘the TV series’ might be seen as the twentieth century’s equivalent of the nineteenth-century novel, hence the BBC’s production of costume drama adapted from so-called ‘classic’ literature.

This could also be seen to have a further consequence in possibly producing a greater drive for narrative closure in the case of a mini-series, where a viewer has invested more time than in a feature film. Like the standard epilogue in a nineteenth century novel, where readers are told what happens to fictional characters in the ‘future’, so it takes a great effort of will and commercial muscle to kill off a main character or leave narrative strands open in a TV (mini) series.

Specific theory on television genre is rare. As one of only a handful of academics working in this area, Jason Mittel (2004) places genre firmly within a wider process of cultural studies, analysing the context of cartoons, talk shows, or quiz show scandals in the 1950s, stating that ‘the text alone cannot determine its cultural meanings.’ However, neither can its cultural meanings be determined without it. Television is clearly a social medium, found in most homes, often in many rooms within one domicile and programmes are frequently watched or at least experienced within a domestic environment. This has implications for reception studies and behavioural science but also for the text itself: meaning is not generated solely outside it. This book does not deny the importance of industrial or reception factors but the lacuna here remains the text itself, which is often talked around as if its meaning were transparent. The importance of contexts of production quickly fade and contexts of reception vary and are extremely difficult to analyse. What remains is the primacy of the text as a repository of meanings, which are not given but contested, primarily in relation to other texts, both print and filmic.

The importance of genre lies not in indulging in a futile generation of labels or lists of expected features of each form (something which, while entertaining, can quickly become something of an irrelevant parlour game as undisputed examples are extremely rare). However, neither the tendency to blend genres nor the explosion of television programming available, deny the importance of genre as a concept. In fact, the opposite is true. With so many programmes vying for our attention, rapid audience identification of, and with, material is even more important. When Jeffrey Sconce (2004) asserts that, ‘If a series is to succeed [...] it must feature an appealingly familiar and yet ultimately repetitive foundation of premise and character relations,’ he is also articulating the fundamentals of genre theory, of the tension between familiarity and novelty.

#### Read on...

**Mark Browning** | Independent scholar  
 Author: *Stephen King on the Small Screen*, ISBN 9781841504124  
 Author: *Stephen King on the Big Screen*, ISBN 9781841502458  
 Author: *David Cronenberg: Author or Film-maker?* ISBN 9781841501734

Children of the Corn (1984)

Why does film matter?

**Whether we like it or not, our most profound thoughts and most intimate secrets, are now constantly expressed and experienced via moving pictures on screens big and small**

Mark Browning

# Film is everywhere but cinematic film is still, at its best, extraordinary

Ron Inglis

## Why does film matter?

Films matter because they can provide compelling and creative artistic and entertainment experiences for audiences. Some films are just fleeting entertainment but others are magnificent, wondrous, thought provoking works of art – from seven minute Warner Brothers cartoons to highly personal non-fiction films to dramatic features and musicals – and from all parts of the world. In the age of the laptop and mobile smartphone, 'film' is everywhere but cinematic film is still, at its best, extraordinary.

## Read on...

Ron Inglis | Director of Regional Screen Scotland  
Interviewed: *The Big Picture Magazine*, ISSN 17590922  
*The Big Picture App* available on iPad

Mesrine: L'Instinct De Mort (2008)

# Past projections

Words: **Scott Jordan Harris** | Pictures: 'The Projectionist' | Article from *The Big Picture Magazine* (1.4)

Known only as 'The Projectionist', an intrepid Asian blogger is on a mission to document rundown cinemas in his corner of the continent.

'This is a photographic archive of derelict or converted movie theatres in Southeast Asia. Ever since the convenience of the home entertainment centre has become widely available, movie theatre-going has been on the path to extinction. Declining audiences and rising operational costs have made the business feasible only for larger conglomerates, while the independent, family-run theatre has been squeezed out of the picture. Here their memories are kept alive. Going or gone, but not forgotten' - The Projectionist.

The Projectionist is an unusually focused blogger; since beginning *The Southeast Asia Movie Theater Project* in March, the mystery cinephile has made almost 100 entries. Three parts photo-essay to one part travel log, each post details the decrepitude of a formerly thriving picture house. Mixing a film enthusiast's anger at the changing times with an anthropologist's interest in the ability of people to adapt to them, The Projectionist has created, in *The Theater Project*, a startling standout amongst the dross that clogs the blogosphere.

What's so extraordinary about the entries, aside from the dedication that drives them, is their way of capturing three time periods - a cinema's glorious past, sad present and inevitable or uncertain future - with a single sentence or image. To look at The Projectionist's picture of what was once Bangkok's Capital City Cinema Hall but is now its Klongthom Market is to see, in an instant, the hopes of those who opened it; the rapt attention of those who attended its screenings; the cooling commercial climate that forced its closure; and its future as either a garish mall or dull redevelopment without a sign of its picture house past. What we don't see, but The Projectionist points out, is that between the theatre's decline and its fall, it survived as cinema by illegally playing porn films.

Other cinemas still do. Introducing the Hawaii Theater in Bangkok, The Projectionist, endearingly and comically, stresses its historical significance as 'one of the few [cinemas] in Thailand to feature an escalator in the lobby' before wistfully noting, 'most of the neighbourhood residents I spoke to didn't even realize that the Hawaii is still open, stealthily showing pornography to cover its costs.' Its owner is happy

to be interviewed, and photographed, and to talk about the Hawaii's heyday, when it employed '40 full-time staff' and boasted 'at 1860... the largest seating capacity of any theatre in Thailand ever.'

The operators at other, now off-the-radar, establishments aren't so accommodating, shooing The Projectionist from the premises with unsubtle threats and admonishments that their kind of customer, watching their kind of film, is unlikely to welcome immortality on the pages of *The Theater Project*. At the architecturally-impressive Phaholyothin Rama Theater, The Projectionist and his girlfriend are welcomed by 'a snickering ticket lady' but warned they might prefer to visit the cinema across the street. Intrigued, they press on inside.

Hoping for a family film show but admitting to each other they are expecting porn, they find instead a gay cruising location: the movie ('a weird 1980s made-for-video British film, dubbed in Thai and... coming from an LCD projector') running only so the patrons can assess each other before pairing up and heading for the lavatories. 'How come nobody is watching the movie?' asks The Projectionist's girlfriend. 'Let's go and I'll tell you outside,' he replies.

But not every cinema he visits has fallen into disrepute as well as disrepair. Some have been turned into car parks, others into restaurants; some house noodle sellers, others house the homeless. In Burma, The Projectionist finds The Kemarat Cinema. Once its screen hosted Bruce Lee and seated scores of his adolescent admirers but now it has a more sedate inhabitant: an aged woman who has made it her home. The Projectionist wishes to talk to her, to learn how and why she came to live in an otherwise abandoned picture house, but cannot cross the language barrier between them and is 'limited to visual pleasures'. Upset by this, he resolves to return soon, and to bring a guide.

## Read on...

**Scott Jordan Harris** | Film critic

Contributor: *The Big Picture Magazine*, ISSN 17590922

Contributor: *Film International*, ISSN 16516826

Contributor: *World Film Locations: New York*, ISBN 9781841504827

The Kemarat Cinema in Keng Tung, Shan State, Burma

# Film... has an extraordinary capacity to expand our reality

Mette Hjort

## Why does film matter?

Film matters, among other things, because it has an extraordinary capacity to expand our reality, to deepen our moral sensibility, and to shape our self-understandings, sometimes by moving us closer to cultures, problems, and realities that are distant from those we know well. That said, I think it is far from being the case that all films matter. The task, I think, for film scholars in the future will be to help to ensure that films that genuinely do matter continue to get made, and that they receive the attention they deserve.

## What does the future hold for film and Scandinavian film particularly?

My sense is that the future is bright especially for documentary film, and not only in Scandinavia.

## What is the 'New Danish Cinema' and what excites you about it?

Broadly speaking the term 'New Danish Cinema' refers to films made from the early 90s onwards, by film practitioners who, oftentimes, had been trained at the National Film School of Denmark. As a result of their highly collaborative approach to film-making, and their strong interest in well-developed stories and in film as art, these film practitioners were able to make films that effectively revived the small national cinema in question. I'm interested in the New Danish Cinema because it succeeded against all odds and because it helps us to understand that, given effective artistic leadership and insightful cultural policy, constraints can become the basis for creative opportunities.

## Which director most exemplifies the New Danish ethos and why?

I would have to say Lars von Trier, because the New Danish Cinema is so intimately connected with his films, initiatives, and practices. Von Trier raised the bar for Danish film, set a new standard. Collaboration, networks, the sharing of prestige, reputation, and talent, these are all things that Lars von Trier put on the agenda. And these things have been crucial to the development of the New Danish Cinema.

## Read on...

**Mette Hjort** | Lignan University, Hong Kong

Author: *The Danish Directors: Dialogues on a Contemporary National Cinema*, ISBN 9781841508412

Author: *The Danish Directors 2: Dialogues on the New Danish Fiction Cinema*, ISBN 9781841502717

Contributor: *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, ISSN 1601829X

Contributor: *Studies in Documentary Film*, ISSN 17503280

Martin Pieter Zandvliet's *Applause* / *Applause* (2009), produced by Mikael Riéks, Koncern Film

# A divided world

Nick Smedley

With the passing of the New Deal, the idealism and liberalism of Roosevelt's first two terms of office faded. Republican gains in both Houses signalled a political shift, and the New Deal ran out of steam. As soon as the war was over, a tangible shift in American culture became apparent. New Deal liberalism, including intervention in business affairs, social housing and unemployment relief programmes, became identified with communist leanings. There was soon no room for those fictional Hollywood characters who, in the 1930s, had denounced big business and the profit motive. But Hollywood film-makers did not simply switch their affiliations and start making movies that denounced the liberal idealism of the previous decade. Instead, many film-makers began to deny the probability of moral triumph in society – a stark contrast to the complacent, celebratory optimism of the 1930s. Films of the 1940s offered a frank recognition of a crisis of faith, portraying American ideals as now alien to ordinary life. Unable any longer to present the nation with images of triumphant idealism, the film industry had to find new methods to promote its liberal values. Four themes can be identified.

The first theme was the depiction of the dream of American success as more akin to a nightmare. The pursuit of success had destroyed deeper values of democracy, justice and communal help – so much had been acknowledged by Hollywood films at the height of the New Deal. But in the 1930s, New Deal values were reinstated by the conclusion of the films. In the 1940s the nightmare was simply shown as the new reality. It might be criticized, but it could not be vanquished. The second theme introduced a fundamental change in the status of the New Deal idealist hero opposed to materialism. In the 1940s this character became isolated. No longer was he able to dominate the film's narrative, determine its outcome and be included at the centre of a celebratory and optimistic finale. Instead, these characters occupied the margins of society and often ended up alienated and alone when the film finished. In such films, participation in society was not an option for the male hero of ideals, because society no longer shared his values.

A third theme was the use of mysticism and fantasy to escape from the horrors of modern life. In a fairy-tale world, populated by ghosts, the old ideals might still hold sway. Film-makers who adopted this strategy filled the moral vacuum of the 1940s with a pseudomystical centre. They felt unable to ground their moral solutions in 'real' life, as

had been possible at the height of the New Deal. Instead, they relied on elements of fantasy or divine intervention to solve society's problems. Such fantasizing would have been seen in the 1930s as pessimistic escapism and defeatism. There was no need in that confident decade to ground solutions to social ills in fantasy. Morality would triumph sure enough in everyday life. No such confidence permeated the films of the 1940s. The fourth and final response to the moral crisis was simply to deny reality, to insist on an optimistic assessment of the prospect of a return to the New Deal's consensus society.

## Why does film matter?


Does any cultural activity matter? At one level film, like other cultural art forms, matters only as a source of entertainment, escapism and fun. And it is one of the most successful (because it is so accessible) art forms for that purpose – one approaches an evening watching a film with a sense, usually, of relaxation and anticipation (unless it's something by Tarkovsky). Going to see Shakespeare or Pinter, for instance, or the opera or ballet, then there is a conscious effort to engage the brain and concentrate hard. Film works so well because it takes us into its world with scarcely any effort on our part. But in a more profound sense, film matters because, again like other cultural products, it tells us something about ourselves and gives meaning to our lives. Even while apparently mindlessly absorbed in a Hollywood entertainment, we are subtly and unconsciously washed with layers of cultural values, idealistic aspirations, an understanding of good and evil, the transformation of the everyday into the heroic and the mythic, the redemption of past mistakes, the finding of love, the losing of love, the acknowledgement of our hidden desires and secret pain – the discovery of the meaning of our lives.

## Read on...

**Nick Smedley** | London University, UK  
 Author: *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948*, ISBN 9781841504025

**Film works so well because it takes us into its world with scarcely any effort on our part**





**Film matters because it has the power to connect us to a world outside of our own, even if the only travelling we do is from our sofa**

Gabriel Solomons

**Why does film matter?**

Film matters because it has the power to connect us to a world outside of our own, even if the only travelling we do is from our sofa. We can glimpse cultural differences and engage with all kinds of diverse attitudes to life when we broaden our viewing horizons beyond the mainstream. Themes explored in film, also speak a universal language that anyone can understand regardless of background, education or race, which makes it a truly democratic art form.

**Read on...**

Gabriel Solomons | Creative director  
Series editor: *World Film Locations*, ISSN 20459009

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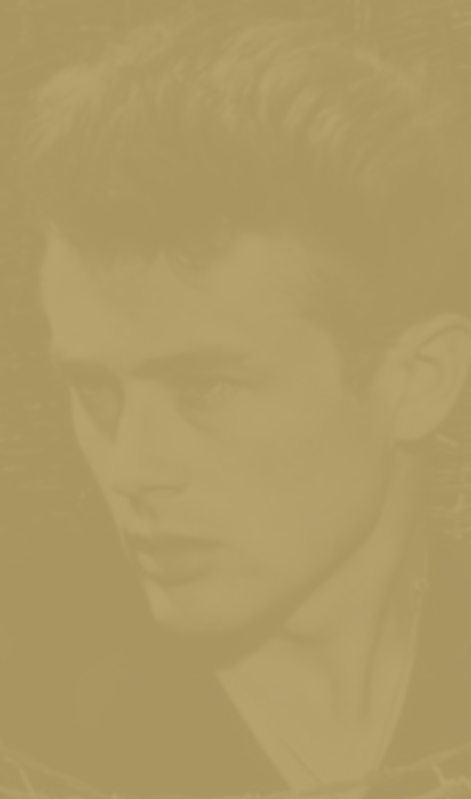
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