

Postclassical Hollywood/Postmodern Subjectivity

Representation in Some 'Indie/Alternative'
Indiewood Films

Jessica Murrell

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of postmodern subjectivity in what Geoff King calls the “indie/alternative” Indiewood film (*Indiewood* 38), through a close examination of some particular examples.

In the late twentieth century, Hollywood cinema made a series of excursions into postmodernism and its effects on subjectivity. Scholarship on Hollywood’s ventures into this territory has, historically, focused on the representation of the cyborg in the science fiction films of the 1980s and 1990s and the destabilisation of the “human” that this figure engenders. This thesis argues that, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some indie/alternative Indiewood films exhibited a similar tendency to explore postmodern subjectivity through experimenting with the representational conventions of the classical Hollywood cinema and the model of subjectivity this has historically supported.

This thesis offers close readings of formal/aesthetic strategies in six indie/alternative Indiewood films: *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000), *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999), *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *American Splendor* (Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman, 2003), and *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). I contend that these films not only thematically explore the effects of the postmodern on subjectivity, they also use representational strategies that appear to break with the classical Hollywood cinema’s emphasis on coherence, continuity and verisimilitude, conventions that sustain a model of subjectivity inherited from the Enlightenment. By privileging depthlessness, fragmentation and simulation, the indie/alternative Indiewood films addressed in this thesis appear to construct their characters as postmodern subjects.

It is my argument, however, that the films struggle, in different ways and to varying degrees, to exceed the classical conventions for representing character and subjectivity. I further contend that the limits I have identified in this group of indie/alternative Indiewood films do not represent the boundaries of what the cinematic medium, or even American popular narrative cinema, can represent. Through a detailed examination of *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 1997, 2001 and 2006), I show that it is possible for American popular narrative cinema to mobilise representational strategies that more fully support a postmodern model of subjectivity.

This thesis argues, then, that American popular narrative cinema is capable of exceeding the conventions that support the Enlightenment model. This prompts questions about the persistence of this model in the versions of this cinema produced in Hollywood. The broader concern of this thesis lies not with the postmodern but with the imperative to critique the representational conventions of Hollywood cinema, and to question the model of subjectivity – be it Enlightenment, postmodern or otherwise – that it supports.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Signed

Jessica Murrell

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