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## Film and Television After 9/11 [Book Review]

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**Dixon, Wheeler Winston, ed. *Film and Television After 9/11*. Carbondale, IL: U Southern Illinois P, 2004.**

Tweet

<1> One of the necessary compromises a book such as *Film and TV After 9/11* must make is the amount and variety of examples it can provide. In order to be the first book to cover the subject, the book sacrifices the types of materials covered and the variety of themes they depict. Although the editor, Wheeler Winston Dixon, does not do so, the book's twelve essays slot into four basic categories: analogies, productions altered to suit the "post-9/11" mindset, post-9/11 productions with metaphorical rather than literal linkages to the event and pre-9/11 productions whose viewing must now take that day into account. Given the focus on New York and the World Trade, one might be led to believe that Hollywood has forgotten the full extent of the attacks that day. Dixon adds an introduction which provides a brief but biting

commentary on the entertainment industry's collusion with the Bush regime's "war on terror" and subsequent intrusion into Iraqi affairs. In this regard, the final essay, which considers the hastily written (and re-written) Fall 2001 episodes of NBC's White House drama, *The West Wing*, serves as fitting conclusion to the collection.

<2> In the first category, three of the essays consider the historical analogues to the terror attacks of 11 Sept. 2001, including Pearl Harbor and the Holocaust. The Bush regime's well-documented opportunistic deployment of these analogues as justification for its subsequent action is treated, but this not the focus of the chapters. Instead, the essays attempt to deal with reading strategies now that the terror attacks have hewn their place in the sedimented knowledge of contemporary viewers. The debate frequently echoes Adorno's famous question regarding the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz. Rather than opting for the view popularly expressed by the media, that the public would be too sensitive for Hollywood's usual fair, the findings indicate otherwise. This view is upheld by the chapters which consider audience approval for depictions of extreme violence in post-9/11 productions which played to the baser motives of nationalism and of jingoism. Nevertheless, audience disapproval when the World Trade Center was removed from several movies, including *Zoolander* and *Spiderman*, confirms that viewers have been affected by the attacks, but not as expected by the entertainment industry.

<3> One of the tremendously powerful findings worth further development derives from a common reaction among viewers on 11 Sept. 2001: "it was like watching a movie." Very few commentators anywhere have asked how it is that people came to such a conclusion. Many have assumed that such statements derive from omnipresence of the visual media, but not enough has been made of

the specific and allegorical content of the images that fostered the analogy. For example, Bill Schaffer observes that on 11 Sept. 2001 and the days which followed, "no commentator dared to invoke even a shadow of the rhetoric of 'video causality' so often resorted to in the wake of comprehensibly violent acts." Here one only needs to remember the popular critiques of the Columbine shootings. This is not to suggest that Hollywood shapes public perception--and since 9/11 it has actively attempted to help the Bush regime do just that--but rather to question our own fascination not just with violent images but with spectacles, in general; a fascination that seems more insatiable after those terrible acts! More foreboding is Rebecca Bell-Metereau's essay on historical war dramas and action films. Bell-Metereau critiques the limited roles women have in the few films in which they figure. The obvious counter to this observation is that women have only recently seen combat and so this paucity is to be expected. However, the larger implication is the associated return to conservative values based on separate, gendered spheres based on traditional domesticity. This domesticity was attacked on 11 Sept. 2001 and now it needs to be defended. One need only consider the controversy regarding the disposition of the former site of the World Trade Centre to find the very terms of this debate.

<4> Ultimately, *Film and Television After 9/11* is a good first step, but more work needs to be done. Notable for their absence are animated productions (both film and television) and video games. In the latter regard, the omission of video games from the coverage might seem a logical prescriptive move given the nature of the book (and its title). However, the relationships between and among film, television, video games and (for lack of a better term) current events cannot be overlooked when one is considering the implications of the extensive intertextual web created by the multiple media. Contemporary movie production companies such as

Stephen Spielberg Productions, Lucas Films and Sony Entertainment all have video game subsidiaries and routinely produce video game companions to their films. In these games, players proceed stepwise through the narrative and the games have an undeniable pedagogical component. Indeed, the US Army has released its own post-9/11 video games, *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *America's Army* to teach and to entertain consumers. While *Film and Television After 9/11* would make excellent reading for a film or television class, it would benefit from greater attention to pedagogical strategies--such as those employed by the military--especially given the palpable post-9/11 impacts on teaching.

### **Works Cited**

Schaffer, Bill. "Just like a movie: September 11 and the Terror of Moving Images." *Senses of Cinema*. Online. Nov. 2001. Internet. 5 May 2005. Available [www.sensesofcinema.com](http://www.sensesofcinema.com).

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