Københavns Universitet

Introduction

Riis, Johannes; Taylor, Aaron

Published in:
Screening Characters

Publication date:
2019

Document version
Peer reviewed version

Introduction: Screening Characters

Manuscript for Riis, Johannes, and Aaron Taylor. "Introduction: Screening Characters." In *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media*, edited by Johannes Riis and Aaron Taylor. AFI Film Readers, 1-15. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Onscreen characters draw the eye and prompt our imagination. As we watch a work of fiction, we become absorbed in their dilemmas, riven by the outcome of their conflicts and engrossed in debates about their cultural import. A character's form reflects not only moving image techniques and constraints, but also genre conventions and the narrative traditions of a period and place, as well as the social norms that regulate our everyday interactions. *Screening Characters* aim at exploring what it means to engage with moving image characters as well as the implications of their varied forms.

Some of the questions for which we will offer answers in this volume have long been addressed in film and media studies. This is particularly true of representational studies of race, class, and gender. The study of women's representation coincided, in many places in the 1970s, with the entry of film studies in academic institutions and gained momentum from Laura Mulvey's study of aesthetic means for representing women as objects of a male gaze, portraying female characters as objects of mystery or punishment.[1] In addition, Mulvey's article examines how a film motivates the erotization of female characters by including male characters' glances as well as by letting women perform a staged number of some kind. The 1970s also found fertile ground for film critics who, like Molly Haskell, looked for cinematic stereotypes and female myths.[2] While the subject of gendered representations has continued to thrive in film and media studies, the study of class – how characters and narratives represent types and norms pertaining to a certain position in society's economic structure – has received comparatively less attention.

One reason might be that influential theories of the 1970s tended to assume socially uniform effects, due to intrinsic features of the cinematic apparatus, thereby rendering the study of class and ideology "unfashionable" by the mid-1990s.[3]

Generally speaking, studies of representation tend to focus on how characters represent norms of the kind that regulate or, at the least, affect our identities and interactions. Since the 1970s film and media scholars have paid particular attention to identities that are marginalized or in a state of transition, often with the question of gender as an over-arching perspective. The topical anthologies on heterodox masculinity, black filmmakers, and spectatorship in, respectively, *Screening the Male* (1992) and *Black American Cinema* (1993), leave room for resistant forms of spectatorship and question the basis of aesthetic hierarchies.[4] Jackie Stacey's study of film stars as an extra-narrative resource for young fans who are looking for role models as they are about to shape their own identities provides a similar example.[5] Questions of gender and race continue to call for scholars' attention, for example in studies of how different television serials portray new conceptions of fatherhood and masculinity.[6] Not unlike these previous works, then, a number of our contributors will provide answers to the question of how screen characters, in the eye of the spectator, become embodiments of societal norms and types.

Our anthology also continues a research tradition that gained traction in the 1990s by applying insights and theories of emotion, perception and cognition from neighboring fields. Skeptics questioned the standard assumption of identification with characters. Whether based on the commonplace notion that we imagine ourselves to be in the shoes of a character or a psychoanalytic theory of identity formation in early childhood, identification was seen as being in need of either replacement or refashioning. In the first group, some theorists put particular emphasis on the asymmetry of character and spectator emotions, which in turn prompted

evaluative processes on the spectator's part. In an early version, Noël Carroll argued that "very often spectators do not have or share the identical or same emotions of the characters in question," and he pointed to emotions of suspense and compassion in response to characters who are in pain or enraged.[7] In probing what it means to engage with characters, theorists paid attention to narrative techniques, as well as the work of theorists of emotions, perceptions, and cognition, often by thinking of film viewing in terms of information processes. Works by David Bordwell, Ed Tan, Torben Grodal, Joseph Anderson, Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith, and Noël Carroll included efforts to determine various aspects of the character-viewer relationship.[8]

A work that embodies a multi-faceted interest in what it means to engage with characters is aptly named *Engaging Characters* (1995). Murray Smith developed a *structure of sympathy* as an alternative to identification, and suggested that it is at the center of spectators' moral evaluation of character actions and outcomes.[9] Smith offers a narrative analysis that pays attention to how information is conveyed to, or withheld from, the spectator in order to set up internal norms of what makes an action good or bad compared to other characters' actions. In the interest of a more nuanced approach than that which is afforded by standard assumptions of identification, *Engaging Characters* acknowledges that some processes may, in fact, be best understood in terms of a spectator who imagines herself to be in the shoes of characters. A conscious and voluntary effort of simulating the character's situation may, according to Smith, result from a lack of background information for apprehending a character.[10] Finally, *Engaging Characters* also makes a contribution to our understanding of what defines a character in the first place. Smith argues that narrative films rely on a *mimetic hypothesis* whereby spectators assume, as a default, that characters have the same mental and physical make-up as actual humans, but also allow for violations of specific assumptions. For instance, a demon or ghost may violate our

assumption of a single and continuous body but adhere to our standard mimetic hypothesis with regard to having beliefs and desires.[11]

The question of how we are to understand a fictional character has long been addressed in narrative theory. The idea that characters can be understood by looking for structural features informs Stephen Heath's distinction between the different levels at which we can frame our questions about them. Heath distinguishes between agency and character (a film may try to represent types as representative of an entire group as in Soviet *typage*); between character and the actual actor performing the fictional actions; between an actor unknown to the spectators and one with a public image which influences our perception of character; as well as how these levels come together as a whole.[12] The idea that narratives can be divided into distinct groups depending on whether or not characters can be thought of as active pursuers of their goals or reactive to circumstances is central to genre typologies – assuming that spectators' simulation of character is the driving force in engaging spectators. Indeed this is a central assumption of Torben Grodal's refashioning of what we are to take identification to mean.[13] At a structural level, we might expect theories of screen character to be able to benefit from theories of literary character and vice versa.

One of the problems, as indicated by Seymour Chatman, may be that "it is remarkable how little has been said about the theory of character in literary history and criticism."[14] He argues that we need to "treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions," in part because they are open to reinterpretation and scrutiny, "just as some people in the real world stay mysteries no matter how well we know them."[15] Indeed, part of the attraction of characters in a fictional work is that we can imagine character actions and beliefs beyond what we learn.[16] Characters are empirically accessible only in the work; unlike historical agents it makes little

sense to look for traces of a character such as letters and belongings outside the fictional work. As pointed out by Amie Thomasson, although fictional characters lack a particular spatiotemporal location, they are real in the sense of being empirically accessible in a work.[17]

Since Chatman's call for treating characters as autonomous beings, literary theorists have developed our understanding of what Smith calls the mimetic hypothesis. In answering the question of her eponymous *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* Blakey Vermeule suggests that our ancestral past may have played a role. She argues that living in groups may have added more adaptive pressure than nonsocial activities, with the implication "that human intelligence evolved to handle the social complexity of living in groups – to outwit fellow primates, to think several moves ahead of them on a giant social chessboard, and to keep track of alliances."[18] Literary characters are eminently suited for tapping into our sensitivity to the differential access to social information, which is offered to us in a plot, and Vermeule contends that "our social brains are just as capable of being stimulated by fiction as our sexual selves are capable of being stimulated by pornography."[19] In a similar vein, William Flesch has argued that our admiration for some altruistic characters may derive from an evolved response to actions, which serve to punish moral transgressions and violations in such a way that the group stands to benefit but the punisher stands to lose as an individual.[20]

Film studies have tended to draw more on literature studies than theatre studies but it is not clear that viewing the story world in terms of narration or drama are mutually exclusive perspectives. Moving image characters can leave the impression that events are being enacted by actors *and* the story is being narrated as the result of directors' choices. The use of camera addresses, intended for the spectator but not other characters to hear even though they are standing nearby, may be drawing on the same convention as an aside in a play: both presuppose

that characters can, for a moment, take on the role of "epic elements from inside the action."[21] In his poem *The Songs*, Bertolt Brecht has described how characters, by singing to the audience, become "undisguisedly accomplices of the playwright."[22] Indeed, a character "who wants to act one way but behaves in a way that is contrary" can drive story developments across different media.[23] Regardless of representational similarities, however, we may also find clear asymmetries as to what can be represented and how they are experienced in a qualitative sense.

Others have tried to develop the tenets and perspectives of Smith's *Engaging Characters* within film and media studies. In his "Understanding Characters," Jens Eder distinguishes between different mechanisms at work when a spectator tries to grasp the many aspects of character.[24] In Margrethe Bruun Vaage's work on the antihero in American television series, she distinguishes between, on the one hand, a quick, emotional judgment of good and, on the other hand, a slow, deliberative judgment, based on moral principles.[25] She suggests that part of the attraction of antiheroes is that they prompt us to reflect on our emotionally-grounded first responses of sympathy.[26] While her work builds on *Engaging Characters*, it also develops the implications of what it means to morally evaluate characters. The same is true of Carl Plantinga's discussion of non-moral grounds for liking and disliking characters, often a shorter-term relationship based on other features such as appearance and athleticism.[27] In an ambitious work, subtitled *Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement*, Plantinga has recently addressed a number of implications of the idea that we morally evaluate characters, including its meaning for how we think of stereotypes and political aspects of a narrative.[28]

Characters are central to our experiences in front of a screen and invite a host of questions. The contributors to *Screening Characters* take on many of these but what sets our volume apart from others, as we see it, is a plurality of methods and a concentration on screen

characters. We have in our anthology included studies based on archives, experiments, philosophical and conceptual analysis, as well as traditional close analysis. We have tried to cover a variety of media and formats but with considerable weight placed on feature film – an emphasis that is, in part, a reflection of this particular form's narrative strength and density, and is also a reflection of the predominant focus on characterization in moving image media. We have put together a selection in which authors have been free to develop their own explanation on a narrow and focused problem, and have grouped our chapters in a manner so that they speak to two or three contributions with a similar theme or problem. Having two or three pieces on a similar problem or theme benefits also from what we see as a tone of exploration and openness to theoretical debate. The advantages of focusing solely on screen characters are multiple. A focus only on moving image characters sets this anthology apart from one, which addresses fictional characters at a more general level.[29] Our narrow focus offers not only the opportunity of reading several pieces within a theme, but has allowed our contributors to address in depth some of the medium-specific features of moving image characters.

In the interests of providing a robust investigation of screened characters, this volume is organized in a manner that addresses typical and prominent aspects of characters in each of five sections. A screened character is often (1) physically instantiated by a *performer;* (2) in accordance with prevailing *social conventions* of categorization; (3) circumscribed by the *affordances* of a specific medium, such as filmic, televisual and/or interactive media; and (4) designed with the intent of engaging audiences' *appraisals*. In addition, these facets can further be particularized according to (5) the aesthetic operations of individual *genres*. Accordingly, then, the essays in each section will address embodiment and performance, societal contexts, medium-specific features and constraints, audiences' emotional and moral engagement, and

finally, the particulars of certain generic configurations.

One of the most obvious contributions to screen characterization comes from the performers who embody fictional beings. Part One, "The Importance of Actors," addresses the essentially dramatic quality of characterization in moving image fictions. Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke interestingly suggest that actors can be considered as "ostensive signs" representing figures with whom they are (more or less) physically and expressively identical.[30] Thus, Kenneth Branagh is still very much detectable beneath Hercule Poirot's enormous moustache in *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017). What's more, the distinctive and expressive means by which Branagh manifests a piercing gaze while the detective's "little grey cells" are at work can be distinguished from a static, two-dimensional, and indexical sign of a similar contemplative moment adorning, say, the cover of a paperback edition of Agatha Christie's novel. Thus, the contributors in this section provide important new ideas about the curious challenge that well-known and easily recognizable actors present to characterization, revisiting the tension between the presentation of the actor and the representation of fictional characters.

Ted Nannicelli (Chapter 1) refines Richard Wollheim's notion of "twofoldness" in order to solve the apparent paradox of star acting – that we are willing and able to perceive an imaginary figure via the medium of a familiar actor's body and voice. For Nannicelli, the apprehension of a star performance involves seeing and hearing the presentational dimensions of a star's body and voice as representational qualities of the characters they portray. The phenomenological experience of a star performance entails a willed oscillation of our attention between these dimensions and qualities. At the same time, he also compellingly argues that this experience can also be "collapsed" during our apprehension of an unknown performer, or "blocked" by an overwhelming star persona and/or certain auditory properties of a familiar and

distinctive voice.

Speaking to such "blockage," Kathrina Glitre (Chapter 2) provides a captivating rejoinder to critics who castigated Cary Grant's "hammy" performance in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944). In her extended case study of this Capra comedy, Glitre demonstrates how star persona affects characterization, outlining the complexities involved in a screenwriter's shaping of an adapted property to suit particular star talents. Starkly refuting long-running assumptions about the incompatibility of narrative and spectacle, her assessment of Grant's broad comic acting attunes us to the hitherto-ignored functionality of his pratfalls, and demonstrates the frequent interaction between slapstick and story development. In particular, Glitre helpfully notes how the double-take – a recurring comic standby – functions as a device that pleasurably disrupts the classical coherence of character and actor.

In keeping with this focus on an actor's performance choices, R. Colin Tait (Chapter 3) makes a case for a performer's authorial contributions to characterization in serialized TV dramas. Focusing on quality TV – a taste-category often configured around the executive control of writer-showrunners – Tait persuasively asserts that the stars of these programs ought to be attributed with a formative creative agency of their own. Taking *Mad Men* (2007-2015) as a case study, the chapter delineates the collaborative and authorial nature of Jon Hamm's work with showrunner Matthew Weiner, and his co-star, Elizabeth Moss. By referencing studio memos, actorly moments that reveal narrative subtext, and the stars' "kinaesthetic labor," Tait constructs a compelling argument for viewing television actors as primary "owners" of the characters that they co-create.

But despite the unique individuality an unforgettable performance might provide, the actor does not manifest the character beyond a tacit horizon of expectations. Therefore, Part

Two, "Social Types, Social Contexts," roots these imaginary beings within real world heterodoxies. For several decades now, cultural studies has provided us with powerful tools for identifying, analyzing, critiquing, and occasionally deconstructing the discursive connections between fabricated and material worlds. Much of it takes it cue from Richard Dyer's early insights on stardom's ideological imbrications.[31] As equally crucial, though, are his musings on characterization, and the means by which a star image "contains and reconciles" potentially contradictory socio-cultural values at work in a filmic narrative.[32] Such work remains an invaluable source of inspiration for social activists, scholars investigating celebrity culture, and industrial analysts alike.[33] In supplementing this tradition, then, contributors in this section provide us with thoroughgoing accounts of how theories of typicality, social cognition, and ideologically-determined affect inform mediated representations of possible people.

The tendency to conflate social types with stereotypes is combatted by Henry Bacon (Chapter 4) in an intriguing essay on the cinematic treatment of typicality vs. individuality. Bacon demonstrates how the filmic construction of character is a dialectical process, rather than a rigidly distinguished differentiation of individuals from figures who exemplify broader social categories. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, the chapter usefully suggests how an actor's accomplishments might be traced to her or his ability to provide viewers with a character's unforgettably distinctive comportment within a recognizable social and/or generic milieu. Advancing the idea that typification is "inherently mobile," Bacon invites us to appreciate the dynamism of a representation we might otherwise find hopelessly limiting in terms of the social portraiture on display.

Further exploring the application of stereotypes in fiction films, Tico Romao (Chapter 5) employs recent developments in social cognition studies in the service of theorizing how viewers

apprehend characters' social dimensions. Romao usefully itemizes various strategies at work in a spectator's identification of a character as a social type, including social category attribution, folk psychological notions, and a process he dubs "metonymic ascent." The chapter skillfully explains how spectators rely on mental schemas and relevance-theoretic frameworks in order to comprehend the social meaningfulness of a character's behavior. As such, Romao provides an important account of typology that not only suggests how we might establish "a poetics of social identity in film," but better alerts us to how a film might either support or resist social equalities.

Contending with the ideological facets of character engagement, then, Dan Flory (Chapter 6) considers the racial underpinnings of certain antipathetic representations of "disgusting" characters. Provocatively, Flory examines how representations of "raced" as well as racist characters intentional mobilize disgust responses in their (often singularly imagined) target audience. Helpfully distinguishing between films that invoke disgust in order to (1) perpetuate a racist ideology, (2) resist racism, or (3) promote a more active reflection on racial attitudes, Flory's arguments provide a promising link between research on revulsion and ideologically-motivated strategies of representations. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates how being alert to a film's marshalling of disgust responses can help viewers confront their own implicit biases regarding racially charged scenarios.

Our engagement with screened fictional beings is obviously facilitated and circumscribed by the technological and aesthetic particularities of the media in which they appear. A character is limned in a particularized fashion that issues from the distinctive properties of its "hosting" art form. Part Three, "Medium-Specific Features and Constraints," takes as its point of departure the importance of a specific medium for how we experience and engage with moving image characters. It makes a difference, then, whether we experience a character in a literary and

textual form, as enacted by an identifiable actor, or indeed, in a visual and animated form that bears clear traces of an artist's invisible hand. On the face of it, there is hardly much reason to think that the actions of an avatar in a computer game is shaped by hands other than our own except that he or she has been shaped by a visual artist and, to some extent, his or her actions have been designed by a game designer. Interactivity in games and social media adds a new dimension to how we experience characters even if we respond to them, in some ways, by drawing on our standard assumptions about human agents. Thus, this section provides a survey of new ways of considering the affordances of various moving image art forms as they pertain to characterization – what these forms make possible, and what they might restrict.

Paisley Livingston (Chapter 7) takes a broader tack on characterization by providing a robust analytical account of how depictions of a single fictional being can diverge across media. His account of the differences between filmic and exclusively textual representations grapples with the well-established "asymmetry thesis": that some forms of characterization, while possible for movies, are impossible for texts. The chapter demonstrates why contrasts between movies and texts based purely on representational contents, or according to putative spatial and temporal differences, are erroneous. By centering on the dynamic properties of a work within a given medium, and the relative control one exercises over a work's changing appearance, Livingston provides a significant revision of the traditional asymmetry thesis, and thus offers a hardier explanation of a character's cross-media changeability.

The fluidly-changing physical appearance of cartoon characters is addressed in Pete Sillett's innovative essay on animation and spectator proximity (Chapter 8). Our experience of animated characters typically involves our apprehension of their "performative metamorphosis": the alteration of their exterior form allowing for a direct observation of their mental states. Sillett

carefully articulates how these transformations relay character information in a manner that is particular to the medium, and distinct from analogous literary and cinematic techniques. In an exemplary analysis of *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), he demonstrates how instances of animated transformation are not mere instances of graphic wonder but are the unique means by which we can be brought into intimate closeness with hand-drawn fictional beings.

Moving into the arena of interactive media, Philippe Gauthier (Chapter 9) addresses new possibilities for transmedia character engagement made possible by various social media platforms. With a focus on new media interactors, Gauthier posits a distinctive, "inclusive" mode of reception, which differs dramatically from the immersive experiences most typically associated with classical cinematic style. Such inclusivity poses a challenge to the time-honored boundaries between fictional and actual worlds, as well as the static spatiality and discrete temporality of traditional viewing processes. Focusing on *Mobile Hornets* (2009-2014), Gauthier demonstrates how this popular transmedia narrative experience achieves intimate proximity with interactors via the integration of cryptic online forum posts, chilling YouTube videos, and enticing tweets – all somehow "produced" by the characters who populate its fictional world.

Shifting the subject of interactivity into the realm of video games, Andreas Gregersen (Chapter 10) provides an account of how players might be said to "identify" with the avatars they control. Through a case study of *The Witcher 3* (2015), the possibility of an isomorphic relation between the virtual body of a video game character and the player's actual body is explored. With a focus on the goal-oriented behavior of avatars in action-based games, Gregersen demonstrates the utility of incorporating theories of empathic engagement into discussions of ludic engagement. In so doing, he suggests that the concept of "identification" still yields considerable explanatory value – especially for those interested in how new media reconfigures

traditional modes of spectatorship and viewer agency.

Part Four, "Emotional and Moral Engagement," delves into the question of what is means to engage with characters if there is more to it than imagining ourselves to be in the shoes of characters. As noted earlier, this is a discussion, which has been theoretically advanced by Murray Smith in *Engaging Characters*; in particular his distinctions between experiencing the actions from the inside and from the outside, called the structures of empathy and sympathy. Needless to say, the idea that we respond to characters in evaluative ways has been expressed by discerning film critics as well. The late Raymond Durgnat advances a similar argument when stressing the importance of "the spectator's sharing of, and concern for, the experiences of *these* characters in *these* predicaments," and adds a mimetic hypothesis when he stipulates that "it is a simple empathy-sympathy – and no more uncritical than is our sympathy for friends and acquaintances in real life."[34] Our contributors will discuss the cognitive, emotional and moral underpinnings of our relation to characters in film and television by applying different methods and approaches, including an experimental audience study.

Contending with an ongoing propensity to castigate viewers who evaluate characters' behavior, Carl Plantinga (Chapter 11) takes on recurring, neo-Brechtian admonitions against positing fictional beings as moral agents. Plantinga asserts that not only are we warranted to conceptualize characters in moral terms, but that certain types of fiction necessitate our moral evaluation of their actions. Through a case study of *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) – a series that fundamentally constructs its characters as moral agents – it is demonstrated that an interest in the ethics of certain fictional scenarios can do more than illuminate a work's socio-political subtext; such interest is, in fact, essential to our very comprehension of and investment in the work itself.

Countering a tradition of cognitive studies that only contends with the psychological

basis of character engagement, Katalin Bálint and Ed Tan (Chapter 12) offer instead a phenomenological description of audience's absorbed encounters with fictional beings. As the participants in their qualitative interview study speak to facets of this engagement – including moral evaluation, empathy, self-other comparison and blending, embodied simulation, and parasociality – Bálint and Tan craft a portrait of a dynamic, complex and self-aware process of reception. The chapter provocatively agitates for increased empirical attention on audiences' accounts of their relationships with characters, rather than a continued reliance on theorists' accounts of mechanism-driven forms of "identification."

With a focus on television antiheroes, Malcolm Turvey (Chapter 13) examines viewers' long-term relationships with morally complex characters. Providing a different take on the parasocial interactions we might have with characters over time, Turvey critiques the frequent assertion that we usually come to form more positive attitudes to challenging fictional beings the longer we are exposed to them. In surveying the likes of Tony Soprano, Dexter Morgan, and Don Draper, the chapter challenges explanations of our sympathy for such devils that are predicated upon exposure effects. Instead, Turvey presents an interesting alternative solution, whereby a lack of cognitive fluency in our uptake of antiheroes is a significant component of our fascination with such compelling characters.

As villainous types are continual subjects of fascination, such figures therefore also remind us of Stanley Cavell's proclamation that "types are exactly what carry the forms movies have relied upon."[35] Distinctive characters can perhaps serve as the faces of entire fictional categories. On one level, we can refer to the insights of structural narratologists who identified the functionality of typological roles. These are the *actants* whose specific diegetic behavior is not only constructively necessary for a narrative's meaningful coherence, but whose roles also

might be dictated by broader storytelling patterns. Structurally speaking, characters *must* embody the traits and perform the actions that their roles necessitate, and the "spheres of action" they occupy are also dictated to a certain extent by generic conventions.[36] A genre sets certain parameters for character behavior, just as the iconic activity of select, memorable exemplars give the genre its own distinctive character. In other words, genres have an *empeopling* function: they ensure that diegetic orders are populated by sets of unified types that lend their storyworlds structural cohesiveness.

Cavell's insight about cinematic types – that they are distinctively fictional instantiations of certain social categories – is equally important to keep in mind when speaking of characters' narrative functions. The idiolect of a memorable character concretizes our sense of such a type's possible comportment. For example, we return to slapstick or hard-boiled crime productions for the familiar faces and social types that personalize their broader generic traditions – the rubberoid visage of Jim Carrey, say, or the troubled police detective whose personal issues jeopardize partnerships. A traditional approach to understanding genres looks for specific "semantic and syntactic" configurations.[37] By putting characters at the center of this quest, we may hope to reveal not only the narrative opportunities that they afford but equally well some of the pleasures of looking at a recognizable social type.

Part Five, "The Character within Genre," brings together some of previous sections' perspectives under the rubric of certain narrative traditions. By examining Asian narratives that employ a time-leaping narrative, we may reveal historically contingent norms for gendered representation, in particular culturally embedded assumptions about what boys and girls can do. In a similar vein, we may try to understand action films by focusing on our enjoyment in watching a problem be solved by the action hero's imaginative use of his or her body. Or, we

might invoke the gifted investigator who struggles with personal issues and has difficulty in becoming part of a law enforcement unit. By putting these conventions at the center of a study of moving image aesthetics and storytelling strategies, we may identify distinct narrative traditions. In short, the case studies that follow look at a specific genre through the lenses of characters particular to it – both functionally and constitutionally.

The first chapter in this section addresses an intrepid figure from science fictional traditions: the time traveler. However, Jinhee Choi (Chapter 14) concentrates on how this figure operates in the hybridized context of time travel romances, focusing on the gender politics of the much-overlooked female time travelers in contemporary East Asian media productions. Through her interesting examination of several early 21st century anime, films, and web series, Choi demonstrates how these speculative fictions help to cultivate new forms of *shojo* culture. Such works, she argues, introduce a new type of heroine whose disruptions to linear time are distinct from the explorations of their male predecessors, and further provide a captivating representation of the ephemerality of girlhood itself.

Shifting from considerations of characters' movement in time to their situation in space, Birger Langkjær and Charlotte Sun Jensen (Chapter 15) address the surprising physical abilities of action cinema heroes. Drawing from theories of embodied cognition, they assert that the action hero is characterized by her/his ability to perceive and utilize environmental affordances in highly inventive ways that provide an advantage over adversaries. In turn, a considerable degree of pleasure for viewers lies in how this genre aligns our perception with that of the hero's remarkable ability to apprehend latent possibilities for astonishing action within an ordinary setting. If character is indeed discernible through action (as Aristotle would have it), Langkjær and Jensen provide a unique reformulation of this classic trope, identifying how a popular genre

articulates a distinctive and exciting reciprocity between character and environment.

Addressing televisual crime dramas, Lennard Højbjerg analyzes the stylistic and narrative strategies utilized in building up new characters in long running series (Chapter 16). Comparing the American program *CSI* with such European shows as *Midsomer Murders*, *Spiral*, and *The Bridge*, Højbjerg addresses the aesthetic means by which previously-unseen characters are integrated within the workings of a larger law-enforcement unit as well as the representational strategies of protagonists' personal issues. Some intriguing differences in the integration of star performers vs. relatively unknown actors are identified, and the chapter also establishes the ways in which noir-inflected European programs introduce their new crime-fighters in a more stylized manner than their formulaic American counterparts.

In light of developments since the 1970s, we hope to renew and further theorizing and debate on what it means to engage with characters. Our focus on screen characters should serve to find ways in which characterization is a component of form and the medium, and our section on genres should serve to call attention to genre-specific as well as gender-specific ways of shaping characters. The question of what it means to engage emotionally with characters has called for a section on its own, the same is true for social types such as questions of class and race, and both draw on insights and experiments by psychologists. Our anthology aims to be part of an open research field in which we continue to draw on a variety of findings and perspectives in order to know more about characters.

---

[1] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975).

[2] Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[3] David E. James and Rick Berg, "Introduction: Is There a Class in This Text," in *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, eds. David E. James and Rick Berg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 16, 20. More recently the question of how ideas may hold sway, seemingly against one's own economic interests, has become topical in studies of creative labor and creative industries, see for example Vicki Mayer, *Almost Hollywood, Nearly New Orleans: The Lure of the Local Film Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

[4] Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds., *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Manthia Diawara, ed. *Black American Cinema*, Afi Film Readers (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[5] Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).

[6] See Amanda D. Lotz, *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). For studies of cinematic representations of gender and race, see Mia Mask, ed., *Contemporary Black American Cinema: Race, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2012). For a broad-ranging introduction to gendered representations, institutions and consumption, see Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[7] Noël Carroll, "Toward a Theory of Film Suspense," *Persistence of Vision*, no. 1 (1984): 88.

[8] Joseph Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996); David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1989); Ed Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*, ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann, trans. Barbara Fasting, Lea's Communication

Series (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass., 1996); Torben K. Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith, eds., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1999); Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

[9] Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[10] Ibid., ch. 3.

[11] Ibid., 21.

[12] Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (London: Indiana University Press, 1981). pp. 179-82.

[13] Grodal, *Moving Pictures*, 88-93.

[14] Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 107.

[15] Ibid., 119, 118.

[16] See Aaron Taylor, "Uncelebrated Lives: Reflections on the Supporting Player," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29, no. 2 (2012): 114-28.

[17] Amie L. Thomasson, "Fictional Characters and Literary Practices," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 2 (2003): 140.

[18] Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 30.

[19] Ibid., 17.

[20] William Flesch, *Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

[21] Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 76.

[22] Quoted in Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, 80.

[23] Zachariah Rush. *Cinema and Its Discontents: The Dialectical Nature of Character* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 3.

[24] Jens Eder, "Understanding Characters," *Projections* 4, no. 1 (2010).

[25] Margrethe Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, Routledge Advances in Television Studies (New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), xvii.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Carl Plantinga, "'I Followed the Rules, and They All Loved You More': Moral Judgments and Attitudes toward Fictional Characters in Film," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2010): 34-51.

[28] Plantinga, Carl. *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[29] Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider, eds., *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010).

[30] Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 90-97.

[31] Richard Dyer, *Stars*, New ed. (London: BFI, 1998), 20-32.

[32] Ibid., 116.

[33] Surveys of such invaluable work can be found in numerous anthologies, including the following helpful collections: Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York:

Routledge, 1991); Jeremy G. Butler, ed., *Star Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press,

1991); Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy, ed., *Stars: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge,

2004); and Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael, ed., *Transnational Stardom* (New York:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[34] Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1967), 173.

[35] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, rev. ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 33.

[36] For additional details, see A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans.

Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Veli (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,

1983), and Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott (1928;

repr. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 79-83.

[37] Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 6-

18.