

Book Notes: Law on the Screen, by Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas and Martha Merrill Umphrey (eds)

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BOOK NOTES

LAW ON THE SCREEN. BY AUSTIN SARAT, LAWRENCE DOUGLAS & MARTHA MERILL UMPHREY, EDS. CALIFORNIA: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2005. Pp. xi + 264. Index. USD \$55.00 cloth.

BY JACK KIM

One of the more recent additions to the legal pantheon of interdisciplinary mergers is the law and film movement. *Law on the Screen* is a collection of essays that explores the relationship between law and film.

The study of law and film can be split into two domains: how law is treated within film, and how audiences have reacted to films that deal with the law. The opening three essays examine the first domain under the subtitle, "Studies in Representation." Orit Kamir in "Cinematic Judgment and Jurisprudence: A Woman's Memory, Recovery, and Justice in a Post-Traumatic Society" explores the notion of "cinematic judgment" in the film *Death and the Maiden*, and argues how positivist notions of neutrality may be inept to deal with the yearning for justice in post-traumatic societies.

In "The Racial-Spatial Order and the Law: *Devil in a Blue Dress*" Michael J. Shapiro focuses on racial-spatial order within the film. Notably, he explores the concept of the racial space of Los Angeles from both inside and outside the film, looking at the black/white spatial dichotomy using such examples as the "home."

Richard K. Sherwin in "Anti-Oedipus, Lynch: Initiatory Rites and the Ordeal of Justice" argues that the film work of David Lynch in *Mulholland Drive* is a re-enactment of Oedipus' desecration of the founding rites of law's legitimacy. He explores how this is a reaction to "neo-baroque law" and an intertwined exploration of the foundations of justice: knowledge, power, and desire.

The last three essays examine the second domain under the subtitle, "Studies in Reception." In "Reproducing a Trial: Evidence and its Assessment in *Paradise Lost*" Jennifer L. Mnookin tackles several evidentiary issues discussed within the two *Paradise* films, especially problems regarding confession and character evidence and how they play out under the manipulation of the directors. She also looks at the advocacy impact the film has had in creating support networks for the so-called "West Memphis Three."

Diane Waldman in "A Case for Corrective Criticism" uses *A Civil Action* as a case study to criticize the filmmakers' decision to 'eliminate aspects of actual events and the partial reality that ensues. Criticizing the way the film was marketed, she examines the actual response to the film, especially the companies portrayed negatively within it.

In the final essay, "Everyone Went Wild Over It," Eric Smoodin sifts through the mountains of fan mail that Frank Capra received for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* to gauge reaction to the film. He argues that the film had a significant pedagogical impact on the audience, teaching a generation of Americans about law, democracy, and government.
