

Manovich embeds his analysis of new media's distinctive formal characteristics within two broad historical contexts, which transforms his book from a mere catalog into a rich cultural history. Rejecting a model of sudden paradigm shifts, he locates new media within the long historical evolution of modern visual media, tracing out its continuities with earlier cultural forms, including print, Renaissance painting, photography, and, above all, cinema, which he sees as providing the basic template for new media. At the same time, he reads new media as expressing the cultural logic of a postindustrial, post-Cold War, consumer capitalist information society in which military technology spills into civilian entertainment applications.

Manovich's cultural-historical approach makes this book an excellent introduction for students of new media and for scholars of old media looking to extend their horizons. The enumeration of formal properties provides readers with the conceptual tools to undertake their own analysis of individual texts, while the dual historical approach allows them to map new media's connections with the more familiar genealogies of old media and to locate new media in relation to other forms of culture that express the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial society and from modernity to postmodernity.

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***The Godfather and American Culture: How the Corleones Became "Our Gang."* By Chris Messenger. Albany: SUNY Press. 2002. viii, 344 pp. Cloth, \$75.50; paper, \$25.95.**

***Class, Language, and American Film Comedy.* By Christopher Beach. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2002. viii, 241 pp. Cloth, \$55.00; paper, \$19.00.**

These two studies take essentially literary approaches to popular culture. Messenger's reading of *The Godfather* treats Puzo's novel, Coppola's movies, and their many sequels and by-blows as one composite text, and he tends to concentrate on plot, character, theme, and language. Beach analyzes resonances of class difference and conflict in the language and plots of film comedies from the Marx Brothers to the Coen brothers. To authorize and enable their inquiries, both authors look to Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and other Men of Respect among critics of culture, with only an occasional mention of editing, cinematography, and other distinctive formal qualities that make movies more than just novels-in-motion.

While their studies do not always take full advantage of the range of evidence that film provides, Messenger and Beach offer valuable insights into particular genres and, more generally, into the ways in which popular narrative can mean. And they model two very different ways to deliver the critical goods: Messenger is allusive, recursive, purposefully meandering, always self-interrogating; Beach, who stays crisply on task, offers close readings of individual movies framed by no-nonsense introductions.

Messenger works mostly by juxtaposition. He reads his composite text, which he calls “Godfather narrative,” with and against a variety of thinkers about culture (Hume, Kant, and Barthes, among others) and analogous texts: naturalist melodramas like *The Call of the Wild* and *The Octopus*, Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (which crosses some of the Godfather’s turf), and *The Sopranos*. The analysis roams freely, from a consideration of writing about bad writing to an excursus on epic in popular fiction to an incisive note on Sicilians’ traditional antipathy to American-style civil contract.

The impulse to account for the proliferation and influence of Godfather narrative in American culture gives this richly digressive book its through-line. Messenger positions Godfather narrative, which has the demotic power of sentimental formula and the literary gravitas of epic, in a shifting ground of overlaps between popular and elite, art and commerce, American and immigrant-ethnic, family and business. If Godfather narrative has the ideological charge of New World capitalist mythmaking, broadly Protestant in understanding history as progressively lonelier stages of development toward self-realization, it also has the broadly Catholic immigrant-ethnic charge of Old World tribalism, peasant skepticism, and familial blood-obsession. Some of Messenger’s most compelling analysis comes in his discussion of Puzo’s struggles with artistic in-betweenness. Puzo tried for many years to live up to a conventional ideal of literary art, but he finally he gave up and wrote *The Godfather* as an act of commerce. In Messenger’s layered analogy, Puzo “went bad,” just as Vito and then Michael Corleone do, and just as the critic supposedly does by taking seriously a hack like Puzo. Of course, as the Corleones’ story reminds us, going bad can have exciting results. Like Chester Himes, another uninspired “serious” realist who initially regarded his own turn to money-making genre fiction as an aesthetic defeat, Puzo wrote his most inspired and influential fiction after he went bad. And because *The Godfather* was so plot- and atmosphere-intensive and so “free of exposition, character reflection, and subjectivizing” (8), it readily offered itself for adaptation and cultural repurposing by Coppola and others.

Beach’s study of film comedy traces the representation of class as expressed in the speech of characters. Beach proposes that the introduction of sound allowed comedies to move beyond “slapstick caricatures” of class difference and “to reflect more nuanced social distinctions” via “highly specific codes involving speech” (2). It’s a straight line from there to the moment in *Ball of Fire* (1941) when Sugarpuss O’Shea mounts a pile of reference books in order to stand lip-to-lip with Professor Potts, just the position from which to declare, “I came on account of because I couldn’t stop thinking of you” and to inform the befuddled linguist that he’s “a regular yum-yum type.” Beach positions that scene at an intermediate point in a longer line of development from “more overt representation of class antagonisms” in film comedy of the early 1930s (4) to an increasingly coded and indirect treatment of class—filtered especially through dramatizations of gender difference and sociocultural distinction.

Beach couches this account of generic mutation within the outline of a historical argument featuring the Production Code, the waning of Depression-era class consciousness, the postwar expansion of the middle class, and a growing emphasis on finessing white-collar status anxiety, each stage tending to make characters' relationships to the means of production less explicitly the point of film comedy. But these gestures at a context external to the genre are not full arguments, nor do they extend into the close analyses of individual movies. Beach is more interested in the genre's interior dynamics, particularly the tension between comedy as social critique and as utopian dream. This is where he seeks greatest complexity, showing how "transgressive" elements do not always add up to a sustained challenge to dominant ideology and how a pat ending does not void the serious questions that even the lightest-seeming comedy can raise.

Both authors' literary approach to film sometimes mutes the vitality of their subjects, especially because their form-centered arguments largely ignore some principal elements of film form. To take an obvious example or two, Messenger's discussion of the thematic interplay between family and business might have considered the studied contrasts in lighting and the pattern of crosscutting in the wedding and baptism sequences of *Godfather I*. And Beach's argument about the increasingly indirect representation of class in film comedies might have been strengthened by, for instance, examination of the increasingly stylized rhythmic interplay between high-speed dialogue and classical editing technique in screwball comedy. Both books, though, mitigate and ultimately transcend any narrowness of approach by treating their subjects with a respect—even a delight—that enlivens their arguments and helps to make them satisfying.

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***Looking like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity.* By Lisa Walker. New York: New York Univ. Press. 2001. xvii, 279 pp. Cloth, \$50.00; paper, \$18.50.**

***Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall.* By Christopher Nealon. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press. 2001. xi, 209 pp. Cloth, \$54.95; paper, \$18.95.**

Lisa Walker's and Christopher Nealon's books, although written from within the sometimes shared, sometimes divergent concerns of queer theory and gay and lesbian history, seem at first glance to be entirely dissimilar. *Looking like What You Are* discusses the endurance of models of visibility as identificatory regimes in an era of poststructuralism and queer politics. *Foundlings* considers how queer texts and politics imagine a relationship to history that can both provide compensation for the historical exclusion of gay and lesbian