



The Fascination of Film Violence

Henry Bacon

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Most of us fear and avoid real violence. So why do representations of violence form such a significant part of our art and entertainment? Norms that control our attitudes towards violence have to be negotiated against the uncanny fascination of observing violence, both real and fictional. Representations of violence in mainstream cinema respond to our violence-related fears and desires on an imaginary level. We have a fantastic capacity for taking fictional character seriously and, through them, to processing fundamental real-life concerns. Above all, we have a primitive urge for retributive justice that real-life institutions in charge of maintaining law and order seldom satisfy. Narratives of lonely heroes of the wild west as well as solitary urban vigilantes offer a fantasy scenario that justifies the use of counterviolence in setting things right. In this book, Henry Bacon argues that cinematic means are used effectively either to make violence appear palatable, acceptable, enjoyable, funny – or genuinely horrible.

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