While some may argue that only commercial directors and fads lend themselves to this form of study, I would love to see critical studies of recent movements such as slow cinema, smart cinema, and other artistic or critically acclaimed movements of recent years. Any cinema, in any form, is always embedded in a commercial environment, and although Bernard's book is very different, it is a worthy successor to Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System*. The study of production, industry, and technology holds a lot of promise for future research.

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Ryan Bishop. *Comedy and Cultural Critique in American Film*. Edinburgh University Press, 2014. 192 pages. ISBN 9780748698042.

What is film comedy? If you ask Ryan Bishop, laughter is only half the picture. Instead, comedy, particularly film comedy, should be regarded as an irruption, a challenge to the visual field and visual culture. Comedy becomes a way to question the very *techne* of film and visual technologies through exposing their inner logics. If this seems like a heady thesis for an often overlooked and ignored genre, Bishop argues it with convincing vivacity. We should not, Bishop argues, ignore comedy's capacity for revealing our culturally hoodwinked perception by making us appear foolish.

At heart, *Comedy and Cultural Critique in American Film* is not a conventional genre study. Bishop neither discusses genre histories, repetition and variation, nor the accretion of formal conventions. His errand is completely different and the book is stronger for it. Bishop outlines three ways in which he adds to the body of research on film comedy: 1) comedy stages cultural criticism; 2) comedic film addresses technology and *techne* head-on and so inevitably addresses the visual culture comedic film generates and questions; 3) adds to questions regarding the comedic in a critical theory vocabulary, rather than the psychoanalytic and representational debates that have dominated issues of comedy.

Bishop brings some much needed cultural critique into comedy, but at the same time this critical shift comes at the expense of moving slightly outside comedy proper. Bishop shifts between "comedy" and "comedic film" and other variations that seem to point to the same subject but in fact are slightly different. For Bishop, *Bowling for Columbine* is comedic, although

few would argue that Moore's documentary is a comedy. However, Bishop points to Moore's use of juxtaposing a broad variety of clips to form an outrageous whole. In this way, the comedic becomes something larger, something closer to Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque dialogue, which Bishop himself points out. Comedy is not simply a genre for Bishop, but instead what he calls a "glitch" in the cultural machine. Any film (conceivably any work of art) can throw a wrench into the smooth functioning of culture, and that would partake in the comedic. Interestingly (although Bishop never extends this discussion), this culturally disruptive function of the comedic could well be why comedy holds such a low cultural status: hegemonic forces suppress the moments that expose power as trivial, in order to obfuscate the revelations and their power.

For all that, Bishop's book remains within comedic film and regards film comedy as primarily targeting our epochal *techne*: the ways in which cinema has shaped and molded contemporary visual culture in ways that we have naturalized. Bishop argues from a Heideggerian position, adapting Heidegger's technology thesis: the essence of technology is nothing technological (paraphrased from "The Question Concerning Technology"). Briefly, Heidegger argues that technology enframes our world and modifies our perception. Adapted to Bishop's comedy thesis, the essence of comedy is nothing comedic, would be to argue that the essence of comedy is not that we laugh, but rather the way in which comedy makes us see the world (and our culture) differently. In fact, this argument is against Heidegger's, in the sense that Heidegger's enframing argument suggests that we are caught unawares by technology. Bishop, on the other hand, suggests that comedy can make us recognize how we are enframed. In fact, this is the very strength of comedy.

I have spent so much time on Bishop's central thesis because it is what I find most interesting and significant about his book. His readings of a broad variety of films—everything from Chaplin and Keaton (of course) to *Team America*, *Blazing Saddles*, and *Wag the Dog*—mostly serve as illustrations of this central thesis of comedy as disruptive. It is refreshing that Bishop does not overly emphasize genre as a limiting factor, and instead includes a broad variety of films that are only borderline comedies. The other thing that Bishop does well is to provide plenty historical and cultural context for all the films, in order to delineate exactly what the films target. This makes the book eminently useable as a textbook as well, although some of the more abstract and philosophical arguments would need unpacking for undergraduates.

From an American studies perspective, the book works well as both a cultural history and a way of engaging with cultural issues through texts. Bishop's critical perspective lends itself well to include more comedic works, and not only film, in studies of American culture. One has to accept Bishop's initial premise of cinema as a critical voice, which also shapes the visual culture of the 20th century. In doing so, one gains an invaluable resource for critical readings of American culture.

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