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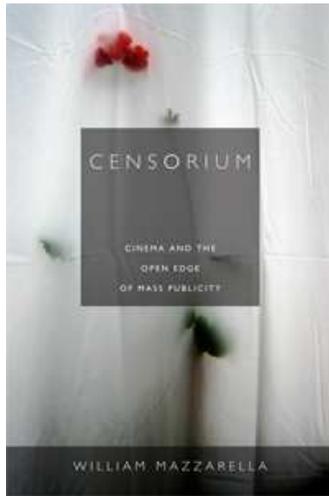
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Book Review

***Censorium: Cinema and the Open Edge of Mass Publicity* by William Mazzarella**



Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2013.
pp. ix +284. Notes. Bibliog. Refs. Index. Pb.
£16.99. ISBN 9 7808 2235 3881

Commissioned by: Dr. Jacob Copeman

*Review by
Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi
Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Jammu, India*

In his carefully researched ethnographic project, William Mazzarella uses the dialectical approach to analyze censorship in the Indian film industry, and he highlights that censorship has become a “burning topic of public controversy in India” (p. 3). To do so, he develops a theory of *performative dispensation* to show that “any claim to sovereign power is also a claim on a particular relation between sensuous incitement and symbolic order” (p. 3).

The book is organized into six equal, thematic sections, including introduction and other five interpretative chapters, and eschewing conclusion as a chapter, deliberately it seems, so that this work should be evaluated as a “contribution to the political anthropology of mass media” rather than “a history of Indian film censorship” (p. 3-4).

The author demonstrates a close reading of contemporary literature and popular culture, including, quotations, excerpts from newspapers’ editorials, interviews, film scenes, and court cases. His ethnographic approach throughout this book is amply justified and informed by the growing scholarship and references on the themes of public culture with reference to history, society and politics inside and outside India from 1830 to 2013.

Every chapter has a title and sub-titles; in the first chapter the author explores *Performative Dispensation*. He gives an outline of the history of censorship in India

juxtaposes a problem of distance between audience's pleasure and moralizing discourse which professes liberal principles and practices authoritarian pragmatics, which the author defines "a classic colonial symptom" to Indian film industry (p. 74). The author gives a reference of Article 19(1) (a) and Article 19(2) that ensures freedom of speech and expression, and also limits it respectively in India, probably to show that the transition period in India demands a permanent institutionalized discourse.

The second chapter recounts the grounds of the censor's judgment by interrogating *who the hell do the Censors think they are?* Mazzarella actively argues whether the age of strife/a transitional phrase in India calls for incompetent Censor Board members whose "parallax view" fails them to synthesize between policing and pedagogy (p. 78). Quite suggestive in his tone, the author engages himself with everything in cinema that is against the so-called healthy entertainment of Indian cultural/social/political perspectives. He quotes Polanski's remarks "Fuck the censors... .." while giving references of political and social intervention for the flicks *e.g.* Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (Trans: The Seedling) (1974) (Trans: and *Nishant* (Trans: End of Night) (1975); Amrit Nahata's *Kissa Kursi Ka* (Trans: Tale of Thorne) (1977); Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* (1994).

The book is largely jargon-free but Mazzarella coins his own register for his narratives: "the pissing men" represents ignorant and illiterate Indian minds which he uses throughout the book (p. 13). The same pissing men, echoing in the chapter three, according to the author is responsible for not getting a "unified performative dispensation" and it also helps other Indians to project the "uncannily extimate self-relation" and maintaining distinction between "continent spectator-citizens and incontinent pissing men" (p. 191). Probably, this line of thinking in India makes "public man" as an actively engaged citizen and "public woman" as a prostitute (p. 13). The chapter provides references of how the pissing men react to Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* (1994), Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* (1995), and Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1998).

The next chapter *Quotidian Eruptions* is supported by the theory of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan to describe "something in the way" which is in between aesthetic distinction and extimate squirm (p 190). The author argues that the role of the censorship is to fill the gap between something that is uprooted from tradition and not properly educated. The final chapter argues that obscenity is a tendency, and it should not be seen as obscene materials. He further suggests that is not an obstacle but a "provisional name for the amorally generative potential" (p. 191). As Deleuze puts that the virtual tends toward actualization, without undergoing any form of effective concretization.

This documentary on censorship shows that censorship is essential to the sovereignty of a state, and it presents an analysis to the regulation of mass publicity in India. The book is informative and worth reading. Researchers and readers who are interested in ethnographies, anthropology, media studies and critical theory are advised to read this book as well.

There is but one criticism of this book. The consistency of providing a sort of summary or wrap-up chapter has been employed only partially. The author should have

translated the Romanized names of the Hindi movies to give more meaning to the narration. There are no posters and movie stills in this book, I think these inclusions will make it more reader's friendly and consequently increase the sale of the book.

Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi is Assistant Professor (Linguistics), School of Languages & Literature, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Katra, Jammu, India.
