MEDIA FIELDS
J O U R N A L

Chaos Cinema

Assaultive Action Aesthetics

Matthias Stork

Chaos Reigns

The opening of the film immediately cuts to the action, in medias res.

A floating helicopter shot reveals a mountain landscape at Lake Como in Italy. As the disembodied camera elegantly tracks in on the picturesque scenery, suspenseful music builds on the soundtrack. Cut to black; three succinct shots of a coal-colored Aston Martin penetrate the darkness. Back to the mobile camera which now focuses in on a winding road at the edge of the mountain. As the score adds a set of dramatic strings, another mini-montage commences, revealing two black Alfa Romeos, occupied by men with assault rifles, in hot pursuit. The cross-cutting continues. The camera tracks closer, a tunnel comes into focus; the music swells; cut to the interior of the tunnel, a rapid succession of shots unveils the driver of the Aston Martin, unlocking the safety of a handgun. The music stops. Engines roar, bullets fly. All hell breaks loose.

Chaos reigns.



Quantum of Solace (2006, Mark Forster)[1]

Quantum of Solace[2], the first sequel in the monumental James Bond franchise, opens with an iconoclastic exercise. In lieu of the traditional gun barrel pre-credit teaser, an established technique designed to prime the audience for the encounter with the iconic MI6 agent, followed by the formulaic expository overture ––setup of spatial environment, introduction of heroic character, and intelligible presentation of action–– the film substitutes a complex and unconventional lead-in: a de-contextualized sequence that thrusts the audience into the middle of a frantic car chase.

This particular chase, more specifically, the way in which it is staged, is emblematic of a growing trend in mainstream action filmmaking which I have titled "chaos cinema."[3] Chaos cinema constitutes an intensification (and, one might argue, perversion) of what David Bordwell has described as intensified continuity, itself an amplified version of the classical continuity style that, roughly, governed the look of Hollywood films from the late teens to the 1960s.[4] While intensified continuity registers as "traditional continuity amped up," conveying visual information clearly yet more rapidly and intricately, chaos cinema deliberately limits clarity and increases rapidity to overwhelm, confuse, and thereby thrill audiences (and, occasionally, sacrificing the intricacies of style in the process). Its aesthetic is tied to the rise of digital effects cinema and the institutionalization of digital editing equipment, computer-generated imagery, and the newly gained functionalism of multiple-camera setups. As such, it has become the dominant approach to present action today.

The example from Quantum of Solace exemplifies some of the key parameters of chaos cinema. The sequence situates viewers in an overly disjunctive, digitally manipulated action space. It provides an

impressionistic viewpoint on the action, recorded by a guerrilla camera in the fray. The action shots are brief and close, shaky and blurry, alternating between an array of diverging positions and perspectives. The camera moves ––indeed rushes–– from Bond to his pursuers, from the tunnel's ceiling to the street, from the Alfa Romeo's bumper to the Aston Martin's tailpipe. The style is overwhelming and, at times, disorienting, emphasizing the mercurial, intangible (potentially more naturalistic) state of the action space. Yet, this visual chaos is not entirely incomprehensible. It still registers as a gripping and (for some) pleasurably assaulting action beat. One of the main reasons for this experiential quality is the sequence's meticulous sound design which grounds the visuals of chaos and renders the chase tangible, at least to a certain degree.

The discourse on contemporary action film aesthetics tends to revolve around the composition of the image and its impact upon audiences. By consequence, sound is only rarely addressed, particularly in relation to its role in defining and shaping the image's overall effect, as it is widely perceived as subordinate to the image.[5] But by considering sound more closely in the context of contemporary action cinema, it becomes clear that while the visual dimension seems progressively invested in the disruption and destruction of continuity norms for the sake of visceral spectacle, the properties of the soundtrack act as a counterpoint, stabilizing the chaotic image––and amplifying its impact in the process. Taking a closer look at this chaos thus allows for a reconsideration of the relationship between image and sound in cinema and how that relationship affects our senses and perception of onscreen action and, by extension, the look and feel of one of the central tenets of popular entertainment, the action film.

The Contemporary Action Film – Chaos Cinema

One of the defining characteristics of the action film is its engagement with expressive movement, captured visually. The contemporary action spectrum distinguishes two dominant forms of how this movement is presented. The traditional action model manifests itself as a literal cinematic exercise that emphasizes the physicality of the action body as spectacle, in a clearly laid-out diegetic space. The action hero chases suspects, flees from assassins, confronts enemies. His movements serve as the focus of the action style. Jump n' run action films[6]such as *Yamakasi: Les samouraïs des temps modernes* and *District B13* accordingly work to showcase the lead characters' Parkour motions as an expressive entity.



District B13 (2004, Pierre Morel)[7]

While a tight editing pattern reflects the velocity of the actors' movements on display, and close shots along with distinct corporeal sounds from the characters, convey a sense of the physical exertion of the action, wide shots establish a spatial environment in which the body's performance is clearly presented to the viewer, at dramatic high points even via slow-motion and repeated, alternating angles. Overall, the action experience created in this sequence allows for a complete consideration of the expressivity of the action body. It is a tangible and relatable entity as it directly addresses the viewer's own sense of physicality.

The Parkour style entered the action mainstream through its use in the opening sequence of *Casino Royale*[8]. The stylistic elements of the chase function as a device "to focus our attention on the spectacle of the body in action, its exertions and achievements, its persistence and agility, and the environmental risks and challenges it faces at each moment."[9] Overall, the sequence derives its dramatic heft and propulsive energy from the physical dynamic between James Bond and the terrorist Mollaka (played, fittingly, by free-runner and Parkour founder Sébastien Foucan).[10]



Casino Royale (2006, Martin Campbell)[11]

By virtue of a constant and unambiguous stylistic focus on the action body as primary audiovisual referent, Casino Royale maintains an extremely fast-paced yet overall centered, stable form of presentation that enables the viewer to assume the role of a privileged and safe observer of the action. This position within the narrative space further enables the viewer to relate to the cinematic movement on display, through an act of reciprocation, specifically by fleshing out "into literal, physicalized sense"[12] the characters' extraordinary physical feats. By consequence, the action feels visceral because it speaks to our own body (and desired bodily experience). It becomes a mediated corporeal experience. The action body's tangibility stimulates a carnal reaction that yields a sense of physical empowerment in the viewer.[13]

The second action model deviates from the body-centric approach and instead mobilizes the film body[14] as stylistic referent[15] shifting focus from the character's body spectacle in the frame to the spectacle of the frame itself. The action is not channeled through the movements of a character anymore. Instead, it is directly expressed through cinematic motion, camera movement and (digitally uber-flexible) editing in particular. An oft-cited paradigm of this aesthetic is the work of English filmmaker Paul Greengrass, specifically his big-budget Bourne sequels.



The Bourne Supremacy (2004, Paul Greengrass)[16]



The Bourne Ultimatum (2007, Paul Greengrass)[17]

The films' use of fast cuts, camera mobility, and (seemingly) haphazard shot design clearly inform the chaos style of *Quantum of Solace*. In all three examples, the viewer is catapulted into an action maelstrom. And in the process, his/her role shifts; instead of an outside observer, who occasionally moves closer to the action, while overall retaining a more distanced position, he/she is now a virtual participant in the action, exposed to the fickle, unpredictable circumstances of combat. The spatial environment, not presented from the outside but from the inside, becomes highly fragmented, imprecise, and precarious. Anything can happen. Without the grounding entity of the action body, the free-flowing perceptual realm of chaos de-centers and de-stabilizes the position of the viewer who "has nothing to hang onto".[18] Within this perceptual sphere, this danger zone, visual constancy is suspended in favor of an immediate, uncontrollable sense of chaos. Here, "the aesthetic experience becomes more important than the aesthetic object".[19] The specific contours of the action movement as well as the layout of the action space are secondary to the visceral impact their interplay engenders.

Chaos cinema cultivates an aesthetic of direct assault and aggressive motion that seeks to overwhelm and disorient viewers, to destabilize their perception and overpower their senses – whether the style's effects are in fact disorienting is relative to viewer perception (considering the (d)evolution of visual literacy in the post-MTV, attention deficit era, the main point might be that chaos cinema works to awaken audiences out of their spectatorial stasis; then again, the dominance and popularity of the chaos style in contemporary media – ranging from music videos over YouTube filmmaking and indie productions to mainstream blockbusters – invites the argument that modern viewers, digital natives in particular, are attuned to the style's aggressiveness). Overall, the aesthetic's main characteristics include elliptical editing patterns, close framings, and multi-perspectivist camera positions. The techniques that most explicitly express chaos cinema are the shaky-cam and what I dub the crash-cam. Both are direct results of cinema's digital evolution, created through the use of lightweight digital cameras and seamless CGI effects.[20]

The shaky-cam is utilized to simulate the precariousness of action combat.[21] Its restless, jittery disposition denotes a constant state of mobility and exertion. It stages action as a microcosm that consumes everything else on the screen. It is essentially a camera-eye on the run, unstable, volatile, deriving its visceral impact from its disorienting hypermediate effect.



Battle Los Angeles (2011, Jonathan Liebesman)[22]

The crash-cam escalates the immediacy of the shaky-cam aesthetic. Objects move towards the camera, at a high pace, and penetrate, indeed fracture, both the (intra-diegetic) camera apparatus and the screen, crossing the invisible dividing line between spectacle and audience,

thereby intruding upon the viewer's personal space.[23] This self-conscious act of visual brutality emphasizes the materiality of the cinematic apparatus, and further underscores the precarious space chaos cinema creates for the viewer. The shaky-cam disorients and de-centers our perception (ironically, by sometimes aligning and embodying us with a character); the crash-cam tears it to pieces.



The Island (2005, Michael Bay)[24]



Crash-Cam: Through a Lens Shattered (2012, Matthias Stork)[25]

As opposed to the traditional action model's sense of physical empowerment, chaos cinema offers an experience of sensory overload, the thrill of being directly assaulted, overwhelmed, and overpowered.[26] It shifts focus from the action body to the visible body of cinema, its style,

presenting it as an attraction.[27] Thus, it is not the narrative evolution of the action hero's spectacular body but the spectacular image of the camera that drives chaos cinema.

And this image is deliberately de-stabilizing. Some critics and movie-goers regard it as headache-inducing and nauseating while others embrace its aesthetics as riveting and pleasurably straining.[28] By radicalizing the norms of filmmaking, continuity editing in particular[29], the overall style may no longer signify a coherent logic but it nevertheless, as Steven Shaviro astutely observes, "does work, perhaps more than ever,"[30]

It creates the illusion that the fastidiously constructed florid set pieces can pass as real in the viewer's mind. The primary objective of sound is thus to anchor the spatial environment created by the image, to render it comprehensible, relatable, and, by extension, believable. By virtue of its synchronicity with the image and its resulting ability to intensify the realness of the medially constructed diegetic world of a film,[31] it "functions as the elementary 'frame of reference' enabling us to orient ourselves in the diegetic space".[32]

In the context of chaos cinema, the role of sound is especially important. The chaotic image, designed to de-center and de-stabilize, engenders an extremely fragmented diegetic space which lacks coherence and consistency. By consequence, sound has to act as a counter-entity, balancing the audiovisual construct (contract) in order to render it tangible for the viewer.[33] The methodology of the chaos sound is thus rather unusual. Instead of serving as a constant aural presence to provide stability and "anchor the body to a single continuous experience"[34], it imitates the chaotic image through discontinuity.

The chaos sound stitches together the fragmentary visuals of a film. While the images plunge the viewer into a chaotic space, the sound design works to clarify that space, providing a degree of tenuous certainty; not by means of a universal, unifying aural atmosphere, however, but a discrete moment-by-moment, frame-by-frame sound suture procedure. The sound locates and reacts to every chaotic image, auralizing accurately what is onscreen, no matter how blurry or shaky it appears. With this chaotic approach it consistently shifts and reorients its design in relation to the visuals. Mark Kerins refers to this practice as the "ultrafield" and links it specifically to the Dolby surround soundtrack which sacrifices aural continuity for a continuity of space. He writes,

"[T]he ultrafield-based soundtrack changes its orientation every time the image track cuts, constantly reorienting itself to the viewpoint implied by the onscreen image. This creates the impression not of viewing the action from a distance, but rather of being in the middle of the action and looking around quickly."[35]

The ultrafield thus does not construct a complete, coherent space. Rather, it signifies its individual fragments. The overall architecture of space remains unclear but its single parts are clearly defined. The aural specificity of the soundtrack provides stability, not in spite but because of its discontinuity, its reaction to every arbitrarily placed visual. This act of stabilization, however, does not decrease the impact of the chaotic image. In fact, it renders its ability to overwhelm even more powerful. The ultrafield amplifies the viewers' sense of physical risk in the precarious chaos space precisely because it enables them to have a vague spatial awareness. The impression of stability and safety, gained through sound, is set up only to be consistently shattered by the chaotic image.[36]

This aural aesthetic of chaos is evident in *Quantum of Solace*. The car chase is composed of three distinct segments, all of which display a distinctive use of sound: the introductory cross-cutting pattern (non-diegetic sound), the chase in the tunnel (diegetic sound), and the chase outside of the tunnel (a complete aural landscape with diegetic / non-diegetic sound). In short, the segments constitute a cumulative sonic space of chaos.

The sound design of the first segment mirrors the elliptical editorial style of the visuals, which consistently alternate between stable landscape shots and obscure inserts. The non-diegetic musical score lacks a stable harmonic framework as orchestral sounds crescendo and decrescendo from the overall mix to create an eerie atmosphere of suspense and anticipation. Similar to the visuals, elements of the sound (including a few faint diegetic sound bites) fade in and out of the film, thereby yielding a synchronicity of sound and image by means of disjunctive editing patterns. This audiovisual dialectic gradually weaves the viewer into the fabric of the film, approaching the action carefully, and implicitly.

The score uses the typical Bond action leitmotif to generate both suspense and familiarity. The diegetic sound still prevails on the soundtrack, however. And the post-tunnel chase further emphasizes its importance in enabling the viewer to flesh out the precarious spaces of chaos created by the visuals. The traditional action model would use the open environment to delineate the action space and then cultivate an aesthetic that

alternately moves the viewer in and out of the chaos, to feel and understand it, to see and relate to the physical mastery of the action hero, manifested in his exceptional driving skills. Quantum of Solace, by contrast, offers impressions of the action. Bond's actions are dispersed, sliced up into brief gestures and reactions. He performs super-human actions, including a seemingly impossible evasive maneuver to avoid a collision with a truck and a high-speed slide around a narrow sand curve. But the images do not convey these actions to the viewer. The visual information merely constitutes a barrage of brief motions which do not amount to a series of recognizable actions.[37] It is the effective use of chaotic sound, the precise application of aural material to the image that creates Bond's actions. We may not see exactly how Bond accomplishes his insurmountable tasks. But the sound design transforms our perception of the sequence, rendering the abstractness of the images tangible, relatable, believable.

Conclusion – Chaos Rules

Chaos cinema has established itself as a popular form of commercial filmmaking. In the critical discourse, it has become a polarizing entity, dividing critics and audiences. Some find the assaultive nature of the style pleasurably straining and riveting; others dismiss its use of self-conscious address and confrontational immediacy as headache-inducing and nauseating, instead advocating for the lucid presentational model of the traditional body-centric action film. Yet, in spite of their different aesthetic approaches, both models share the goal to unleash a sensory force that captures the carnal sensibilities of the audience, by virtue of affective image-sound interplay. In action films that emphasize physical mastery, sound complements and enhances the impact of the images. In chaos cinema, this technique carries even more significance. The sound design not only ensures the visceral affect of the action, it further assures that it makes sense. Without a judicious sound design, chaos cinema would merely amount to an unintelligible mess. But as it is, it constitutes an intriguing form of action cinema, the study of which can reveal further insights into how the aesthetics of image and sound touch our senses, our carnal instincts, be they nausea, disorientation, or thrill.

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank Vivian Sobchack whose insightful comments on this essay and the subject in general have fundamentally informed my argument. I am also indebted to James Gilmore and Harrison Gish for feedback, suggestions, and extensive action discussions.

Endnotes

1 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfYC_CBNtiM
2 *Quantum of Solace*, dir. Marc Forster, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Columbia Pictures, UK, 2008.
3 For a detailed audiovisual analysis of chaos cinema, see my video essays on the indiewire blog *Press Play*: blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/video_essay_matthias_stork_calls_out_the_chaos_cinema (20 June 2012). For a rather rudimentary (and admittedly incomplete) discussion of sound, see the section between 07:32 and 09:40. The conclusion I draw on sound in the video essay is too simplistic. But it served as a starting point for further considerations. This essay, conceived as an elaboration and modification of the video essay, offers a more comprehensive analysis of sound in chaos cinema.
4 David Bordwell, David. *The Way Hollywood Tells It. Story and Style in Modern Movies,*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006).
5 See Michel Chion's argument about the traditional "audiovisual contract" in mainstream sound cinema, in *Audio-Vision*: *Sound on Screen*, transl. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
6 *Yamakasi: Les samourais des temps modernes*, dir. Ariel Zeitoun & Julien Serin, EuropaCorp, France, 2001. *District B13*, dir. Pierre Morel, EuropaCorp, France, 2004.
7 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR8-HvTuwNY
8 *Casino Royale*, dir. Martin Campbell, United Kingdom, Columbia Pictures, 2006.
9 Lisa Purse, *Contemporary Action Cinema,* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 39.
10 Sébastien Foucan co-created the technique with David Belle who starred in the Parkour action films *District B13* and *District B13: Ultimatum*.
11 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5M5R2pcPJ0
12 Vivian Sobchack, "What my Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004), 82.
13 David Bordwell observed this phenomenon in his study of Hong Kong action cinema. See *Planet Hong Kong*: *Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
14 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

15 In this context, Richard von Busack aptly observes "the change of cinema's focus from human to objects." See Richard von Busack, "A Cranky Film Future,"*Metro Active,* 4 August 2012, http://www.metroactive.com/metro/10.04.06/crank-0640.html.

16 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzfSLgWkTlY

17 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnYzb6P_1Wg

18 Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 182.

19 Thomas Elsaesser , Thomas & Malte Hagener, Malte, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses,* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

20 These techniques are associated with cinematic modernism and have their roots in documentary filmmaking (cinema vérité and direct cinema) as well as avant-garde movements such as The French New Wave from the 1960s.

21 The shaky-cam can align itself with a character's perspective or roam freely through the action space.

22 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3JE5ClxatI

23 Geoff King has explored a similar phenomenon in which objects move progressively towards the screen in order to envelop and overwhelm the audience. He dubbed this stylistic convention "impact aesthetics". The crash-cam constitutes an elaboration of this technique as it penetrates and shatters the screen. For more information on King's argument, see Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 91-141.

24 *Youtube* Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-PCs8V7nLg

25 I created this video essay to better visualize the notion of the crash-cam which has widely established itself as the dominant *impact aesthetic* (King 2000) in the digital age. The examples listed in the essay equally display an exemplary use of sound design. *Vimeo* Clip: https://vimeo.com/47263836.

26 This tendency towards novelty and spectacle has been a mainstay of cinema since its inception. Consider, for instance, the Lumière short film *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1895) which dramatized the arrival of a train by placing the camera at a low angle, right beside the end of the track, creating the effect that the train could potentially continue through the barrier of the screen. In *Chaos Cinema*, this tendency is exaggerated to the extent that the train actually fractures and explodes the screen, rendering the early 20th-century illusion a postproduction imaginary reality (see Philip Hayward and Tana Wollen, *Future Visions: New Technologies and the Screen* (London & New York: British Film Institute, 1993). I provide an audiovisual dissection of this phenomenon in

my video essay *Crash-Cam – Through a Lens Shattered*.

27 Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8 (1986).

28 My video essay on chaos cinema inspired heavy debate on numerous websites and in print publications, including *BadAssDigest* , *Chud*, *IFC*, *SlashFilm*, *The New York Times*, and *The Week*. For a brief overview of the extent of the debate in terms of the rhetorical tenor, see the comments section for the video essay at *Indiewire*: http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/video_essay_matthias_stork_calls_out_the_chaos_cinema (06.20.2012).

29 Continuity has been modified continuously over time. David Bordwell argues that post-1960s American cinema operates on "intensified continuity", an update of classical continuity editing which incorporates increased camera mobility, close framings, short average shot length (ASL), and more use of extreme focal length, while, overall, maintaining a clear, continuous presentation of onscreen action which emphasizes narrative coherence, albeit more frantic and fast-paced (see *The Way Hollywood Tells It. Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006). While I concur with Bordwell's argument, I hold that some films, particularly in the action genre, either exaggerate and thereby obscure continuity practices, what I call trans-continuity (the rules of continuity are still adhered to but they are not visible to the naked eye in the overall presentation and thus do not register), or disregard them, what I tend to refer to as anti-continuity (continuity's explicitly subverted in favor of pure visual chaos). A comprehensive terminology on contemporary filmmaking aesthetics is proposed by Steven Shaviro who argues that contemporary digital action films have entered an era of post-continuity (see *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK & Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2010). I agree with his argument that "although these rules [of continuity] continue to function, more or less, they have lost their systematicity; and – even more – they have lost their centrality and importance." (Steven Shaviro, "Post-Continuity," talk delivered on March 22, 2012 at the *Society for Cinema and Media Studies* conference in Boston, MA, USA, and later published online at http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1034).

30 Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, (Winchester, UK & Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2010).

31 For more information on the "added value" of film sound see Dästner, Corinna Dästner, "Sprechen über Filmmusik: Der Überschuss von Bild und Musik," in *Sound: Zur Technologie und Ästhetik des Akustischen in den Medien,* eds. Harro Segeberg, Harro & Frank Schätzlein, (Marburg:

Schüren Verlag, 2005). For an English-language correlate, see Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

32 Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 40.

33 Knut Hickethier argues that sound is instrumental for the construction of continuity (see *Film- und Fernsehanalyse* (Stuttgart, Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2007), 93. The same argument can be found in David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

34 Rick Altman, "Sound Space," in *Sound Theory / Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 62.

35 Mark Kerins, *Beyond Dolby (Stereo): Cinema in the Digital Sound Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) 116.

36 If the soundtrack did not provide a sense of stability, the chaotic effect of the image would be lessened.

37 This becomes particularly clear when the *Quantum of Solace* sequence is played without sound. The images then lack the signifying function of the sound and, at times, become unintelligible or at least hard to comprehend logically (although continuity is still in place, for most of the sequence).

Matthias Stork is a Ph.D. student in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of California - Los Angeles. His research focuses on the intersections of cinema and digital media, neo-spectacle, and media discourses. He currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of UCLA's film and media studies journal *Mediascape* and is co-editor of the upcoming anthoogy *Superhero Synergies: Studying Genre in the Age of Digital Convergence*. His work has appeared in several anthologies, *Frames Cinema Journal*, *Mediascape*, and *rabbiteye*. His video essays have been featured in the *New York Time*s, the *Huffington Post*, *The Week,* and numerous blogs.