



From the Editor

This issue of *Projections* focuses on movie violence, a topic of continuing controversy. Concerns about screen violence are not new. Because of their visceral power, popular appeal, and the seeming ease with which they bypassed established channels and norms of socialization, movies swiftly drew the attention and scorn of social critics and reformers. The city of Chicago passed the nation's first movie censorship ordinance in 1907. Numerous state and municipal censor boards were established in its wake, and movie violence drove the first court-adjudicated censorship case in American film history. *The James Boys in Missouri* (1908) and *Night Riders* (1908) were Westerns that Chicago authorities deemed to be immoral because they concentrated on showing the exploits of violent outlaws. The Chicago reformers felt that the films lacked an appropriate moral balance in failing to devote sufficient attention to law-abiding characters.

Filmmakers swiftly learned from one another. They studied the techniques their peers employed for staging violence and found ways of making screen action more intense and for prolonging violent episodes. As I show in my book, *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1968*, the formal methods of accentuating screen violence achieved through lighting and composition, sound and editing swiftly entered the industry's general archive of trade knowledge and practice. They could not be unlearned by industry professionals. Instead, as they were implemented and refined, subsequent filmmakers felt a challenge to surpass existing practices.

Meanwhile, as filmmakers were growing more proficient in their framing and editing, local censors were cutting images of spears and arrows striking characters, footage of beatings and bludgeonings, and shootings, especially of law officers. Tired of having to edit movies into different forms so that they could clear specific censor demands in Kansas, Virginia, or Pennsylvania, the Hollywood studios formulated a list of do's and don'ts for filmmakers in the 1920s and a more elaborate Production Code in the 1930s that addressed representations of brutality. The Code lost its teeth over time, and courts struck down the local censor boards starting in the 1950s. By the late 1960s, movie

ensorship was over, and more lurid and graphic forms of violence were permitted on screen.

Today there is very little in the way of violence that cannot be shown. Movies have excelled at capturing the excitement, the visceral thrills, and the horror of violent action. Cinema seems inherently drawn to violent action and its lexicon of visual and sonic techniques has been honed to accentuate this sensual display for the spectator's spectacular pleasures. What movies in general miss is the aftermath, the way that violence scars individuals and communities and leaves horrific emotional devastation in its wake. The aftermath of violence is not as visual as its explosive outburst; thus, cinema often has been less interested to explore this toll. Movie violence tends to be about the explosion, the fireworks, the choreography of action; it has not been concerned so frequently with what bloodletting costs individuals and society or with the moral and philosophical issues that it poses.

The fall of censorship in the 1960s and the more explicit gore that followed on screen intensified the simmering and never-resolved questions about whether and to what extent movies influence personal and social behaviors. These questions are as much ideological as they are empirical, and they have retained their salience. Each time a horrific public shooting occurs—as at Virginia Tech in 2007 or in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012—the shooter's media consumption becomes an issue and topic of close scrutiny.

This special issue of *Projections* addresses the representational and behavioral issues involved in screen violence as these show no signs of depletion or resolution. Guest editor Dirk Eitzen provides an introduction to the articles selected for the issue and a scholarly as well as a personal exploration of the manner in which film violence can be appealing as well as a cause for concern. I thank Dirk for his help and work in putting this issue together.

The issue concludes by stepping away from the topic of movie violence in order to present a symposium on George M. Wilson's recent book, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies*. How is it that viewers "see" a fictional character? How should scholars understand this kind of perception, and how does cinema exploit this category of seeing? In his new book, as well as a previously published *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, Wilson explores the philosophical problems posed by narration and point of view in cinema. Paisley Livingston, Douglas Pye, and Robert Stecker appraise Wilson's philosophical work on these questions, and Wilson offers a reply to their readings of his work. I thank Paisley for his initiative and his work in organizing this symposium.

Stephen Prince
