

**E. Deidre Pribram:**  
***Emotions, Genre, Justice in Film and Television: Detecting Feeling***  
**New York & London: Routledge. 2011.**

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E. Deidre Pribram's well-written and engaging work is a return to the traditional Cultural Studies way of doing representational research and is – perhaps surprisingly to some – predominantly a refreshing read. The theoretical starting point for Pribram's analysis is Raymond Williams' concept of "a structure of feeling" as presented in *The Long Revolution* (Williams, 1961). The "structure of feeling" concept for analysing emotions represented on screen makes sense because, as Pribram argues, it is important to understand that "emotions are not solely individual or inner phenomena but, equally, a collective cultural experience" (Pribram: p. 2). This concept is particularly useful when cautiously applied in analysing individual films and television series for the purpose of detecting how they represent emotions. However, the concept sometimes invites the author to generalise a characterisation of the overall mood of a certain time on the basis of a single film analysis with no other qualifications. This strategy may be in accord with that of Williams, but it does not come across as convincing. For instance, the chapter on the action film *Man on Fire* (Tony Scott, 2004) tends in this direction: "The film performs a narrative and cultural negotiation, proposing what justice may mean and what remains worth caring about in a post-9/11 world" (p. 125). This may well be the case, but I think that the "structure of feeling" concept works much better and is more clearly argued in the analysis of *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2005), where focus rests on how emotion and different senses of justice are involved in the anger and racism present in this multi-protagonist film. For this analysis, Pribram also employs Linda Williams' argument that film analysis and film studies in general can beneficially trace "the cru-

cial relationship between emotion and bodily action in popular film” (p. 45). Emotion and bodily action have been covered from a very different perspective in the works of cognitive film scholars such as Murray Smith (1995) and Torben Grodal (1999). This perspective is not included, however, and Ed Tan is the only cognitive theorist mentioned— and then only in the introduction. One could argue that Pribram’s agenda is different in the sense that her perspective (as she states in the introduction) focuses on how emotions are represented on screen, yet it would have been good form to recognise the work done in this area, even if only to register disagreement.

The *Crash* chapter, however, also includes a close analysis of the car accident sequence in which the police officer who had earlier sexually assaulted Christine rescues her from the car wreck in the nick of time, at great personal risk. This central sequence demonstrates, according to Pribram, three different emotional actions. Firstly, Ryan acts as a police officer coming to the rescue regardless of his racial prejudices. Secondly, this rescue suggests that Ryan in some ways “has redeemed his previous racist and sexual violence” (p. 42). Thirdly, Christine is not redeemed but is “serving the role of the victim” (p. 44). In other words, the analysis focuses on how the characters interact and how their emotions and actions are interconnected both in specific sequences and in the film as a whole. *Crash* is a well-chosen case study because – as a multi-protagonist narrative – it works in contrasts as well as in parallels on several levels, making it possible to show many different sides to anger and racism.

Another eye-opening analysis is in Chapter 5 on ‘Cold Comfort: Loss and Consolation’ (pp. 92-110) concerning the television police drama *Cold Case* (2003-2010). *Cold Case* involves the investigation of ‘cold cases’, i.e. old unsolved crimes, and the series has a special focus on the emotions of both the victims and the criminals. This is combined with as a stylistic focus on “the pathos of ageing and the investigation of mutability in life” (p. 94). This is done by letting the narrative take place in past, when the crime was committed, as well as in the present, when the detectives are investigating. Pribram’s point, however, is that this focus on loss is atypical for detective fiction, paraphrasing Judith Butler to say that “The discourses of justice the genre relies upon are predicated, not upon dwelling with loss, but on excising it as entirely and expeditiously as possible” (p. 109). In *Cold Case*, Pribram concludes, “The stated ideal is that justice avenges loss: it makes otherwise senseless loss somehow bearable and, in the process, it realigns people and events, returning the social process to an equilibrium of comfort” (p. 110).

Whereas the analysis of *Cold Case* and *Crash* as well as *No Country for Old Men* and *The Dark Knight* are all insightful and thought provoking, Chapter 1 on *Cagney and Lacey* and Chapter 6 on *Man on Fire* are less productive. This is the case with Chapter 1 because it mainly serves to recapitulate previous research on female characters in television and for Chapter 6 because, as already noted, the film is less convincingly argued as an example of a post-9/11 sense of justice.

From a broader perspective, *Emotions, Genre, Justice in Film and Television: Detecting Feeling* presents an interesting means of investigating and discussing justice in film and television

precisely because these discussions of justice exist outside of courtroom dramas: Pribram's analysis demonstrates that the representation of justice abounds in films and television series and that the rational concept of justice and softer emotions often go hand in hand.

*Emotions, Genre, Justice in Film and Television: Detecting Feeling* is at first glance a return to a well-tread perspective, but it could also potentially be the start of a new cinema research focus on justice and emotion on a much larger scale.

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