

*DELEUZE, JAPANESE CINEMA, AND THE ATOM
BOMB: THE SPECTRE OF IMPOSSIBILITY*

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David Deamer. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 326 pp. ISBN: 9781441178152.

David Deamer begins his project with the important question of how Japanese cinema can adequately depict the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while also considering those suffering through the aftermath. These two history-altering events have been approached through a variety of cinematic styles, from authentic documentary footage to monsters crashing through cities to Japanese mafia (Yakuza) films. With the incorporation of several wide-ranging films, Deamer investigates the presence of the atom bomb (*pika*) and the affected survivors (*hibakusha*) while looking to the guidance of Gilles Deleuze, whose dual works, *Cinema 1*¹ and *2*,² serve as the roadmap for Deamer's cinematic exploration. The goal of this work is to provide a solid argument that Japanese directors have indeed created a vast film catalog of movies that directly or indirectly deal with the atomic events.

Worth noting is that while this work is an overarching look at Japanese atom bomb filmography, it is also a handbook of sorts for the application of Deleuzian film studies. As Deamer notes, Deleuze was no stranger to Japanese cinema, and *Cinema 1* and *2* incorporates thirty-one Japanese films. Deamer extrapolates the Deleuzian theories, including cinematic signs that become constructed into a semiotic system, and then he extends these by applying them to the thematic methodology found in more than thirty Japanese films. The specific focus in this work, then, is to use Deleuze's approach and engage it directly with films that Deamer believes represent "the mechanism of homogeneity" (13) of atom bomb films: a homogeneity through differences in the choice of depiction, as no director portrays the events in the same manner. Throughout much of the book, Deamer sufficiently engages the reader in his discussion, providing several black and white stills from sections of the film being discussed. Deamer extensively explains his terminology relating to cinematic theory by dividing each chapter into clearly

defined sections, first dealing with theory (predominantly Deleuze) and then applying that theory to a wide variety of films.

Deamer does not restrict his approach to merely a Deleuzian-based theory; rather, he freely incorporates certain critical concepts of Walter Benjamin, Charles Sanders Peirce, Henri Bergson, and Friedrich Nietzsche, among others, to support his arguments. Additionally, Deamer looks to previous scholarship from Japanese film scholars, often agreeing — as well as disagreeing — with the ideas of Donald Richie, Stephen Prince, and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto concerning the films under discussion. With the incorporation of these scholars, at times, Deamer does seem to be merely confirming their previous arguments, rather than advancing or demonstrating new essentials in the conversation. Indeed, in the analysis of certain popular films among critics, Deamer sometimes fails to bring about substantial new revelations concerning his interpretation of the film.

In-depth theoretical exploration of Deleuze's *Cinema 1* and *2* before each film analysis, often results in a feeling that certain films do not get enough attention, that they are too quickly examined and insufficiently utilized to prove a point. Such films as Tsukamoto Shinya's *Tetsuo* (1988) and Teshigahara Hiroshi's *Tanin no kao* (*The Face of Another*, 1966) are so briefly connected to Deamer's thesis that it seems the films could have just as easily been left out of the discussion. Nevertheless, Deamer adequately creates a sense that each chapter is building on the previous, often recalling both the points made in the prior chapters and the thematic images of the films. Back-referencing creates a cohesive whole to the work and proves a meaningful read in its entirety. The chapter on the Godzilla film series and the chapter on Kurosawa Akira are worth highlighting for their explanation and application of the Deleuzian ideas surrounding the action-image and the mental-image.

Occasionally becoming bogged down by Deamer's extensive focus on Deleuze's *Cinema 1* and *2* is an issue. Also, there are more than thirty tables that Deamer incorporates but they are far from transparent, suggesting that other forms of visuals might have proven more valuable for understanding the sometimes convoluted Deleuzian theories. Another drawback is Deamer's meticulous incorporation of Deleuzian theory that causes the reader to feel overburdened with the jargon and at times the text becomes rather tedious — causing the reader to want to plow through the theory parts to arrive at the more interesting film analysis sections. It is not that Deamer fails to be engaging, instead it is the extensive theory explanation followed by (sometimes) short film analyses

makes this work foremost an exposition on Deleuze and second an approach to Japanese atom bomb films — it is perhaps for this reason the Deleuze's name appears first in the title of the book. Overall, Deamer's work is worth exploring and the categorizing of each chapter (as well as a detailed index) provides readers an organized approach to the Japanese films dealing directly and indirectly with the atom bomb.

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1. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: L'Image-Mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983).
 2. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: L'Image-Temps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).