

# Explosions in the Narrative: Action films with Lacan

by

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## ABSTRACT

Since the late seventies, the violence, speed and spectacle associated with the genres of war films, Westerns and the spectacular melodramas of early cinema have developed into a distinct genre of its own – the action film. With the development of the stylistic language at the core of this generic universe came derogatory generalisations and a tendency to categorise simplistically. To overcome these simplifications, this thesis explores the shifts in generic language to distinguish its subtleties and complexities of logic. Overwhelmingly the genre is considered masculine, but the purpose of this thesis is to explore the logic of this masculinity and analyse the effect of the feminine upon it.

Beginning with overviews of the theoretical attempts to grasp the concept of genre that focus primarily on the limitations of the view of their having distinct boundaries, the theory that genre theory has failed is investigated. Leaving this view of boundaries through an exploration of symbolic universes that have translucent boundaries, the filmic movement of genre passes back and forth through the theoretical frameworks. The intention is not to analyse the overall concept of genre, but to focus on the symbolic universe and the language intrinsic to action films. The rules of action cannot be simply transposed onto other generic categories but stand-alone. Genre theory does not fail if approached from a perspective of discourse analysis focusing on the development of symbolic universes. Using Jacques Lacan's theory of the four discourses, and focusing primarily on the oppositions of the Master's and the Analyst's discourse, the question moves from the listing of conventions as the markers of the boundaries of genre, to exploring why the combination of certain conventions and signifiers coming together created the genre.

Through Lacanian discourse analysis it becomes apparent that the generally acknowledged logic of masculine and feminine are limited. The masculine is the 'norm' that appears to need no explanation, but the feminine has transgressed the norm and shown the construction of fantasy inherent in the genre. This has led to post-action films that are ambiguous both in their generic structure and symbolic language.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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