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On: 23 March 2014, At: 07:42

Publisher: Routledge

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Visual Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rvst20>

Crash: Cinema and the politics of speed and stasis

Erin Siodmak ^a

^a City University of New York

Published online: 21 Oct 2011.

To cite this article: Erin Siodmak (2011) Crash: Cinema and the politics of speed and stasis, *Visual Studies*, 26:3, 276-276, DOI: [10.1080/1472586X.2011.610965](https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2011.610965)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2011.610965>

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complex range of meanings makes *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* a model text for anyone interested in emulating such analytical methods. Further, Areford's treatment of these prints, a subject that had been largely dismissed as lacking aesthetic rigour, redresses the divide between sacred and secular art. His embrace and elevation of popular reception and the demonstrated ability of this wider net to catch more abundant sense of meaning makes his methodological lessons applicable to anyone whose work crosses into the popular.

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Crash: Cinema and the politics of speed and stasis

by Karen Beckman

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 320 pages

ISBN: 978-0-8223-4726-2 (paperback) Price \$24.95

Reviewed by Erin Siodmak, City University of New York

Crash, by Karen Beckman (*Vanishing Women: Magic, Film and Feminism*, 2003), offers a nuanced aesthetic, cultural and social theoretical look at the role of the car crash motif in film, beginning with early silent films and slapstick (*How It Feels to Be Run Over*, *Hot Water* and *Two Tars*) to the auto safety films of the 1960s, and more recently to road trip and sexualised auto-philic films (*Amores Perros* and *Crash*). Like the films she describes in her analysis, Beckman has woven a complex story around the trope of the car crash, giving an historical and social narrative to the under-theorised use of stasis, non-movement and arrest in film. Beckman provides an especially close analysis of films such as Godard's *Weekend* (1967), Warhol's *Since* (1966/2002) and González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* (2000). Each of the seven chapters focuses on a different theme and moment in the more than 100 years of film history. Throughout the text, the body, affect and shifting subjectivity are central to the analysis of the automobile and its significance as a paradigm for contemporary culture and art. Beckman engages cultural and social theory, film theory and criticism, psychoanalysis and feminist and

queer theory, providing a useful theoretical frame for a wide range of scholars.

For Beckman, the trope of the crash, unlike the familiar focus on speed and mobility, is under-theorised in film theory. She instead explores and retools theories of mobility, movement and speed through which automobiles have been understood, and examines the role that stasis, crash and non-linear or alternative temporalities have played in film. She looks not just in the postmodern period marked by non-linearity, but reaches back earlier to the inchoate era of cinema at the turn of the twentieth century. One of the most interesting analyses is Beckman's queering of the films of Laurel and Hardy, such as *Two Tars* (1928), by moving past the reductionist reading of women's absence to consider the homosexual and mobility-laden undertones of the film.

Beyond an analysis of cinematic objects, Beckman also provides a critique of the field of cinema studies. In acknowledging cinema studies' position as a 'thoroughly bastardized field' Beckman demands that scholars address their objects' relation to capitalism, media, various technologies and other disciplines (1). She also keys in on the problem of subfields in the fracturing of the discipline. Subfields both demonstrate the success of cinema studies but also potentially lead to a loss of critical engagement within the larger field (3). However, Beckman holds that cinema studies provides an ideal site for discussion about the larger crises in the humanities around increasing privatisation and the 'uncomfortable proximity to the "development" office' (233).

This book is a valuable contribution to cinema studies and a good resource for scholars of visual culture, modernity and postmodernity, and affect studies, and for those critically engaged with theorists such as Baudrillard, Benjamin, Virilio, Laplanche, Deleuze, Debords, and Barthes. The chapters complement each other well, though each may stand alone, making them more manageable reads for undergraduate students.

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