

## “Hulk? Smash!”: The Impact Aesthetics of The Avengers

David Kociemba

While many cinema studies scholars have dismissed action movies as mere cultural products of a misogynist backlash of the 1980s or as obvious, dialogue-light spectacles produced by an industry that lost its mind in pursuit of global markets and video game tie-ins, other scholars have a more nuanced understanding of the aesthetics of action. Yvonne Trasker described the central appeal of images of physical power in their counterpoint to a world defined by restrictive limits. Richard Dyer describes these movies' persistent and detailed attention to the exerting body in almost sensual terms, calling them spectacles of extreme sensation “experienced... in the body's contact with the world, its rush, its expansiveness, its physical stress and challenges.” We viscerally experience the body first in crisis and then triumphant through synaesthesia, as our mirror neurons respond in much the same way whether we perform or mentally rehearse an action. While Richard Slotkin observes that “regeneration through violence is at the heart of American mythology,” the hero's body too is in a continual state of becoming that renegotiates the limits imposed upon it by real-world physics or narrative descriptions of superpowers. The superhero's Action Body is uniquely American in its redefinition of limits and, increasingly, provides a freedom and power available to women in film.

In addition to this survey of action theory, this paper will use Lisa Purse's book to discuss how *The Avengers* applies the impact aesthetic of the intensified continuity style, the performance of mastery through posture and gesture, and adapts the splash page of the comics to film. With Agent Coulson and Bruce Banner, this paper will discuss how regeneration through violence works in this film. This paper will also discuss the very Whedonesque Black Widow, who plays the Everywoman Superhero every bit as much as Captain America does, and serves as a counterpoint to the Everyfan figure of Coulson. Finally, with Early and Kennedy, Trasker, and Purse, this paper will trace the roots of female action heroes from *The Perils of Pauline* to the warrior women of the 1980s to the 20-year trend of highly feminine superpowered women in film and television.

Preliminary bibliography:

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