

Sociology Through the Projector

by Bülent Diken & Carsten Bagge Laustsen. New York, Routledge, 2007, pp. 143

ISBN: 0-203-93439-3

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ABSTRACT

The book *Sociology Through the Projector*, which bridges the disciplines of cinema and sociology, was published in 2007 by authors Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen. Viewing cinema as a unique field of social theory, the authors question contemporary approaches in modern sociology through film analysis, opening up new areas of interpretation. The book consists of eight chapters. It includes analyses of six films: Hamam (1997), Lord of the Flies (1963), City of God (2002), Fight Club (1999), Brazil (1985), and Life Is Beautiful (1997). Therefore, this work is unique in that it questions different research disciplines through sociological analysis and film aesthetics, while also providing new perspectives on the complex relationship between cinema and social reality.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 Oct 2025

Accepted 05 Nov 2025

KEYWORDS

Book review, sociology, cinema, social theory, representation, Slavoj Žižek

Sociology Through the Projector

The book *Sociology Through the Projector* was published in 2007 by authors Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen. Written by Bülent Diken, a faculty member in the Sociology Department at Lancaster University, and Carsten B. Laustsen, a faculty member in the Political Science Department at Aarhus University, this work establishes a bridge between the fields of cinema and sociology, creating a unique field of study through its interdisciplinary analyses. Diken and Laustsen emphasize that films do not merely narrate social reality but rather take on a transformative function with their structure that shapes and reproduces this reality. The book's section titled Projector in the Heart of the Social was written by the renowned philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek. In this section, Žižek examines the theoretical and political stance of the book through an analysis of the films United 93 (2006) and World Trade Center (2006), which deal with September 11 and its aftermath. Drawing on his analyses, Žižek establishes a context, emphasizing that a film is not merely a film; it is a reflection of social reality and social structure. He states that films convey this lie from the very center of social structure, even if they lie. Žižek concludes the introduction by describing the book as "commendable" and stating that everyone should read it. The book contains eight chapters that relate the theoretical tools of sociology to cinematic forms of representation. To strengthen its theoretical framework and main argument, the work includes analyses of six films: Hamam (1997), Lord of the Flies (1963), City of God (2002), Fight Club (1999), Brazil (1985), and Life Is Beautiful (1997).

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In this book, the authors examine the strong connection and relationship between cinema as an art form and the discipline of sociology. In doing so, they combine numerous theoretical approaches and modern sociological perspectives with film analysis. The authors make a unique contribution to the approach of “evaluating films with modern sociological criteria,” which has limited literature in the field. In particular, they interpret films as “allegories” through interdisciplinary concepts, conducting an aesthetic and political/ethical dual reading in their analyses. The six films examined demonstrate that cinema is a rich source for the discipline of sociology, enabling the disclosure of diverse theoretical frameworks and phenomena. However, although explanations of some concepts are provided in the sections for readers unfamiliar with the sociology literature, the inclusion of numerous concepts in the analyses necessitates further research.

The first section of the work contains the text titled Introduction: Cinema and Social Theory (pp. 1-17). In this section, the authors, who approach cinema through the metaphor of the “dream factory,” emphasize that cinema deepens social imagination and, in some cases, goes a step beyond social reality. In contrast to social theory, which mostly defines cinema as a mirror of society, this work examines how cinema and real life possess different truths. In a way, it touches upon cinema’s function as the “social unconscious,” interpreting and reproducing the objects of social inquiry. This section of the work focuses on the expression “cinematized society,” where various signs, images, and sign systems are evaluated according to their cinematic counterparts in social production and everyday experiences. The term “socio-fiction” is proposed in this work as a new conceptualization effort, emphasizing the intertwined structure of reality and fiction within themselves, going beyond the relationship between social reality and fiction. At this point, Plato’s allegory of the cave, Lacan’s “mirror stage” theory, and Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” approach are used to explain the dialectic of the imaginary and the symbolic. This section also draws on a comprehensive theoretical background, including simulacra, ideology, subjectification, representation, and allegory, to read films from a social theory perspective.

In the second chapter, Ferzan Özpetek’s film *Hamam* (1997) is analyzed from the perspective of representations of the East, focusing on bodily pleasure, the presentation of gender, fantasies of despotism, and approaches to social gender and identity (pp. 18-38). It is noted that the image of the Hamam, an Orientalist cliché, is transformed in this film into a metaphor for both a place of physical and cultural cleansing and a place where the modern Western subject discovers their own identity and desires are revealed. In this section, the authors argue that the dichotomy between the West and the East established in Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721) is also constructed through letters in the film *Hamam*. It is pointed out that Rome, representing the West, is presented with its word-centered, rational, orderly, and teleological structure, while Istanbul, representing the East, is presented as an image associated with relaxation and peace, where desires are revealed in a hyperbolically deviant degree. In this section, the reading of the film *Hamam* from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective is explained through its imagery and symbolism, relating it to Orientalist fantasies and desires.

In the third chapter, Peter Brook’s 1963 film *Lord of the Flies* is analyzed within the framework of the concept of “sociology of spite” (pp. 39-56). The film, which tells the story of a group of boys on a deserted island attempting to rebuild civilization with a dystopian twist, is interpreted as depicting a clash between democratic utopianism and fascist violence. In particular, the attempt to build a civilization on the deserted island is analyzed in the context of the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The authors identify several important metaphors in their analysis of the film. They argue that the seashell found on the beach is a metaphor for democratic methods and legitimacy as a means of keeping violence at bay, while fire is a metaphor for the connection to civilization and the desire for civilization. It is emphasized that the thematic conflict of the film is highlighted in the

character of Ralph, representing democracy, and in the character of Jack, representing fascism and barbarism. The power struggle between these two characters is resolved through important scenes in the film. The authors argue that the fear of the “monster” in the film is a perfect example of the formation of the crowd, which interprets it as a post-political allegory of society, which sees security as the *raison d’être* of a society living in fear. In this section, the authors use concepts such as scapegoat, dominant power, symmetrical figures, agora, lynch law, allegory of hatred, homo sacer, speechlessness, and rational and radical evil in their analysis to concretize their theoretical perspective related to the film *Lord of the Flies*.

In the fourth chapter, the authors analyze the film *City of God* (2002), directed by Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, alongside the phenomena of polarization, exclusion, violence, and bullying emerging in modern society (pp. 57-70). The authors introduce readers to the depiction of the favela in Rio de Janeiro, the film’s setting. This favela is defined by the authors as a wild area with no value for human life, far from society and civilization, with no way out, leading to the production of homo sacer. The authors define the term “camp” as a concept related to the film, as “an area of uncertainty where law and chaos, inside and outside, become indistinguishable.” Therefore, life in this camp is defined as lawlessness, irrational violence, deviance, and despotism. The authors use the concepts of displacement, liquid modernity, and nomadism to analyze the power relations in this favela depicted in the film. Particular attention is drawn to the interpretation of the two authority figures in the favela. According to the authors, “while the first authority commands obedience, the second’s command stems from the violation of the Law, and thus from pleasure.” It is argued that the basis of violence in the film arises as a result of this violation. The social reality depicted in the film is deepened through the concept of simulacrum, with the interpretation that the images transform the favela into a virtual self and a simulacrum. It is argued that reality, that is, the “camp” established in the film, dissolves within a fiction and is reproduced throughout the film as a space of indifference.

In the fifth chapter, David Fincher’s 1999 film *Fight Club* is examined from the perspective of network society, focusing on concepts such as the crisis of masculinity, the ideology of capitalism and consumer society, loss of identity, and micro-fascism (pp. 71-89). The authors examine the network society depicted in this film as a society where capitalism commodifies everything, where people navigate a space of flows, and where individuals suffer from sleep deprivation. The authors detail the contexts in which the critique of consumer society is presented through the two important characters in the film, Jack and Tyler. They develop the interpretation that *Fight Club*, in which these characters are involved, initially carries a critique of capitalism through deviance and transgression but ultimately transforms into a fascist organization. The authors interpret the characters Jack and Tyler through Freud’s concept of the “superego,” discussing the concept of the surveillance society through laws and transgressions. While numerous theoretical frameworks are incorporated into the analysis, the critique of networks and modern society is presented primarily through Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of rhizome, deviation, and nomadism. The authors analyze the chaos project in *Fight Club* through the concept of micro-fascism. They interpret this project image, which they define as “anarchy bureaucracy,” as the result of a violent escape route that has become a death line with fascism as the escape route.

In the sixth chapter, Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil* (1985) is analyzed through the concepts of surveillance society, power, and bureaucratic rationality (pp. 90-109). Before beginning their analysis of the film, the authors present the reader with a theoretical framework, drawing on George F. Kennan’s approach to totalitarianism, Levi-Strauss’s approach to totemism, and George Orwell’s novel *1984*. The authors define the world in the film *Brazil* as a dystopian society model where surveillance and intelligence invade every area of life, where the threat of terror is everywhere, and where the people have been reduced to individuals who are almost unaware of

attacks or victims. The authors interpret the society model in the film as one where terror is part of everyday life and “anyone who opposes the system is ruthlessly crushed.” In particular, this fictional society model is presented in relation to certain terrorist events that have occurred in the present day. The authors evaluate intelligence methods used after the September 11 attacks—along with the Afghanistan–Iraq wars, terrorist attacks, and torture methods in prisons—and relate them to the fictional world depicted in the film. They relate the film’s underlying context to the concept of the “Big Other” through certain characters and plot lines from a Lacanian perspective. In this section, the authors analyze the film *Brazil* from different theoretical frameworks, breaking it down into subheadings such as anti-terrorism, the reign of the meta, cynicism, resistance, skepticism, and the parallax of optimism.

In the seventh chapter, Roberto Benigni’s film *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) is examined by the authors in relation to the concepts of trauma and memory, specifically in the context of the Holocaust (pp. 110-125). The authors find problematic the film’s representation of evil, as it aestheticizes the experience of genocide ironically. From this perspective, the film is analyzed from a critical viewpoint. After a summary of the film, the analysis moves on to a more abstract reflection on the nature of the Holocaust as a memory. Focusing on the memory practices of the post-war generation, this analysis touches upon how an ethical relationship can be established with the memory of the camps. Unlike other sections, the authors take a critical view of the film *Life Is Beautiful*, arguing that it violates numerous implicit rules regarding the representation of the Holocaust. In this regard, the authors summarize various criticisms under three main points to support their argument. Firstly, it focuses on criticisms that the film misrepresents camp life and trivializes the Holocaust; secondly, that comedy is the wrong choice for this plot; and thirdly, that the plot is unrealistic and implausible, and that camp life should be represented as realistically and comprehensively as possible. The subheadings “the indescribable” and “the Muselmann” discuss Nazism, Nazi racism, and the concept of radical evil. The final subheading offers a critical perspective on the director’s autobiographical connection to Nazi camps.

In the eighth and final chapter, titled *Aesthetics against Post-Politics*, the historical perspective related to the September 11 attacks and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is explained first to clarify the book’s purpose (pp.126-130). The reasons for selecting films released before the September 11 attacks for analysis in the book and their relationship to allegory are explained. The final chapter of the book analyzes the film *Independence Day* (1996), which focuses on the September 11 attacks, through the lens of terrorism and the American perspective. At this point, in reference to the book’s theoretical and political stance outlined in the “Introduction” chapter, the final chapter paints a general portrait of America and its thought structures in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

This book, which builds a strong bridge between the fields of cinema and sociology, encourages a rethinking of the concept of social theory while expanding its scope with numerous theoretical backgrounds and frameworks. The sample films selected from those released after September 11 also include comprehensive film analyses that serve to reinforce the book’s fundamental assumptions and political stance. Offering the opportunity to be read from different perspectives, these sample films also prompt discussion of the current trends in modern sociology. This book discusses cinema’s position as both a mirror and a producer of social experience, presenting social realities. In this context, the authors contribute to the literature by presenting an original study that analyzes films based on social theory and modern sociological approaches within the limited literature that addresses both cinema and sociology.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).