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Jackie Stacey, *The Cinematic Life of the Gene*. (Duke University Press, 2010), Paper 978-0-8223-4507-7, £16.99.

The Cinematic Life of the Gene, the latest offering from feminist film theorist Jackie Stacey, asks what cinema can tell us about how and why genetic engineering disrupts our most basic conceptions of difference. Focusing on the effects of cloning on gender, sexuality and the body, Stacey has produced a truly interdisciplinary work that links feminist, queer and postcolonial theory with science studies, through the medium of film theory, in a work of particular value to those interested in the intersections between these diverse fields. Exploring many theoretical positions and delivering more questions than answers, *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* is an important resource for those eager to explore the geneticization of the body and its vast implications within cultural studies.

Drawing parallels between cinema and cloning, Stacey makes the compelling argument that film, as an imitative art of repetition with a unique capacity to destabilize boundaries of identity, serves as the perfect medium through which to explore how and why the geneticization of the body and the prospect of cloning disturb our most basic notions about biological difference. Animating the human body while obscuring the threshold between life and death, the overlapping mimetic intentions of both cinema and genetic engineering fundamentally alter our sense of place in the world. According to Stacey, it is the 'genetic imaginary' that 'spatializes the inner and outer limits of these disturbances' (p. 7). Using the term 'imaginary' in its more traditional psychoanalytic context, Stacey builds upon Donna Haraway's notion of a technoscientific unconscious that informs the technoscientific subject. The 'genetic imaginary' is a fantasy landscape within which we organise our fears and desires concerning biological foundations of embodied difference, the visual intelligibility of the human and the continuity of

authenticity. According to Stacey, genetic engineering, perhaps more than any previous technological development, has the effect of drastically amplifying these fears and desires. It does so by threatening to reconfigure sexuality, reproduction and kinship, by magnifying the problem of identity theft and genetic impersonation and by enhancing the codification of both the image and the body. Cinema, as a technology with the capacity to make the invisible visible and as an imitative art that mirrors the destabilizing effect of genetic engineering, is able to provide a visual manifestation of the fantasy realm in which the anxieties of the genetic imaginary are displayed. By embracing both cinema's unique ability to make visible the anxieties of the genetic imaginary and the notion that the prospect of cloning amplifies these anxieties, Stacey seizes the opportunity, through close investigation of films that deal with cloning, to analyse how these unconscious concerns inform our ideas about gender, sexuality, difference and the body.

The book is divided into three distinct, yet complimentary sections. In each section a single theoretical position concerning genetic engineering is introduced and assessed according to its perceived manifestation of the unconscious fears and desires of the genetic imaginary. Two films are then analysed as visual representations of these anxieties. In the first section, Jean Baudrillard's rather ominous proclamations on the subject of cloning are analysed to reveal an underlying endorsement of heterosexual normativity. Contending that Baudrillard's work is a 'symptomatic indicator of the condensations operating in the genetic imaginary' (p. xiii), Stacey argues that there is an intrinsic normativity that lies at the heart of the genetic imaginary. She goes on to give feminist and queer readings of the Hollywood body-horror films *Alien: Resurrection* and *Species*. Each film is said to portray genetically engineered, autogenerative female reproductive systems as the origin of dangerous monstrosities. Coupled with the

reconfiguring of sexual and reproductive drives, genetic engineering is portrayed as a threat to normative notions of human survival.

In the second section, Stacey introduces various theories that revolve around the pleasures and dangers of artifice and deception, including feminist theories of masquerade, postcolonial notions of mimicry and queer conceptualizations of impersonation. This section highlights the anxiety that grows when identity and hidden genetic coding are conflated, rendering surface appearances indecipherable. Stacey then turns to the art-house thrillers *Gattaca* and *Code 46*, in which genetic engineering aims to satisfy our desire for technology to provide security through transparency. In these cinematic landscapes sexualised and racialised bodies obstruct our technological capacity to secure a sense of reliable biological purity.

In the third and final section, Stacey uses Walter Benjamin's theory of the art object's loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction, extending its conclusions to the digital age. This leads into a discussion about how the technological form shapes our genetic imaginary and disturbs our desire for authenticity. In this light, Stacey analyses the independent feminist films *Teknolust* and *Genetic Admiration*. These films are said to turn the manipulation of bodies into an empowering art form; *Teknolust* performs the very techniques of imitation it re-enacts, while *Genetic Admiration* seeks to undo generic cinematic formulas. Both films reveal and disrupt the masculine teleology that is seen to underlie our technological drive toward genetic engineering and cloning.

Scholars with an interest in the writings of Baudrillard could find Stacey's analysis of his thoughts on cloning somewhat cursory. Her reading of his work relies heavily on interpretations offered by Judith Butler and Lee Edelman, both of which focus on very specific facets of his analysis. A more comprehensive examination of Baudrillard's theoretical underpinnings and his

fears of an impending cybernetic hegemony would have helped elucidate certain aspects of Stacey's argument. By framing her critique of Baudrillard within the parameters of the unconscious functioning of the genetic imaginary, Stacey succeeds in raising some important and stimulating points of contention within Baudrillard's work. However, pushing these contentious points to their theoretical limits would have revealed some key issues surrounding the genetic imaginary itself, thereby assisting Stacey's wider project. Such an approach could have led Stacey to question whether the 'detraditionalization of sexual reproduction and the queering of biological processes' (p. 11) have in fact already been incorporated into a wider cultural normativity, as Baudrillard suggests. This would have enabled Stacey to clarify her position on the notion of normativity as a fluctuating cultural standard. Consequently, this could have prompted her to discuss whether she believes the fears and desires within the genetic imaginary are biologically fixed or if they possess the capacity to evolve with a changing cultural normativity, further informing her discussion on the role of cinematic technology in the production of subjectivities.

While some readers may desire a wider exploration of the theoretical positions analysed in the book - most notably in Stacey's treatment of Baudrillard's work - this is by no means symptomatic of insufficient scholarly rigour. In fact, Stacey's research is remarkably extensive and deserves to be commended. The likelihood that readers will want to further investigate the theoretical dimensions behind the work attests to the compelling nature of Stacey's project. It is a work that manages to skilfully introduce many diverse theoretical positions to a topic that provides countless avenues for academic exploration. As a cultural study that aims to bring these potential avenues centre stage, the book is a profound success. From feminist, queer and postcolonial perspectives, Stacey seamlessly merges contemporary film theory with science

studies, in a style sure to fascinate and inspire those with an interest in any of these varied fields. With lucid theoretical expositions and illuminating film readings, *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* identifies and establishes a fertile area of inquiry, enticing its readers to further investigation.

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