



The Film Snob*s Dictionary: An Essential Lexicon of Filmological Knowledge

By David Kamp, Lawrence Levi

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From the same brain trust that brought you *The Rock Snob*s Dictionary*, the hilarious, bestselling guide to insiderist rock arcana, comes *The Film Snob*s Dictionary*, an informative and subversively funny A-to-Z reference guide to all that is held sacred by Film Snobs, those perverse creatures of the repertory cinema. No longer must you suffer silently as some clerk in a “Tod Browning’s *Freaks*” T-shirt bombards you with baffling allusions to “wire-fu” pictures, “Todd-AO process,” and “Sam Raimi.” By helping to close the knowledge gap between average moviegoers and incorrigible Snobs, the dictionary lets you in on hidden gems that film geeks have been hoarding (such as Douglas Sirk and Guy Maddin movies) while exposing the trash that Snobs inexplicably laud (e.g., most chop-socky films and Mexican wrestling pictures). Delightfully illustrated and handily organized in alphabetical order for quick reference, *The Film Snob*s Dictionary* is your fail-safe companion in the video store, the cineplex, or wherever insufferable Film Snobs congregate.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A witty, often devastatingly funny, ultra-sophisticated guide for the uninitiated, the would-be cinephile’s equivalent to decrypting the Rosetta Stone. Even I had no idea that Clint Howard was a cult figure.” —Bruce Goldstein, Repertory Program Director, Film Forum (New York) and founder, Rialto Pictures

About the Author

DAVID KAMP is a longtime writer for *Vanity Fair*, where short versions of *The Film Snob*s Dictionary* and the *The Rock Snob*s Dictionary* first appeared, and also contributes regularly to *GQ*. LAWRENCE LEVI has written about films and film culture for *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, and many other publications, and was a colleague of Kamp’s at *Spy*, the much-missed satirical magazine. Both Kamp and Levi live in New York.

ROSS MacDONALD’s illustrations have graced many major periodicals, including *The New Yorker* and *Rolling Stone*. He lives in Connecticut.

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The Film Snob*s Dictionary

A * symbol indicates a Snob Vanguard item, denoting a person or entity held in particular esteem by Film Snobs.

Agee, James. Fast-living, Southern-born journalist-novelist-poet (1909-55) whose 1940s film criticism for *Time* and *The Nation*--posthumously compiled in the books *Agee on Film* and *Agee on Film, Volume II*--is better known to Snobs than his Depression-era masterwork, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, or his Pulitzer-winning novel, *A Death in the Family*. Presciently recognizing movies as something more than disposable diversion for moony housewives, Agee was among the first writers to take the film beat seriously, glorying in the works of the silent-comedy masters at a time when they couldn't get arrested (and almost singlehandedly spearheading the resuscitation of HARRY LANGDON's reputation) and loosing zingers in print back when PAULINE KAELE was still vaguely girlish. (On *Random Harvest*: "I would like to recommend this film to those who can stay interested in Ronald Colman's amnesia for two hours and who could with pleasure eat a bowl of Yardley's shaving soap for breakfast.") Forming a mutual admiration society with John Huston, Agee collaborated with the director on the screenplay for *The African Queen*.

Ai No Corrida. High-toned Japanese skin flick from 1976, featuring actual intercourse, that dragged pornography from the GRINDHOUSE to the art house. Putatively the story of a 1930s brothel servant's affair with the madam's husband, the film legitimized the Snob's furtive desire for smut by allowing him to watch coitus out in the open under the guise of taking in "a study of desire." In the United States, the film carried the repertory-cinema-friendly title *In the Realm of the Senses*, rather than the direct translation, *Bullfight of Love*.

AIP. Commonly used shorthand for American International Pictures, a crank-'em-out production company, founded in 1954, that was among the first institutions to be exalted as a font of Important Kitsch; as far back

as 1979, AIP was the subject of an adoring retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Unabashedly chasing the whims of fickle teens, AIP's mandate switched from Westerns (ROGER CORMAN's *Apache Woman*) to teen horror (*I Was a Teenage Werewolf*) to Vincent Price's Poe movies (*House of Usher*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*) to the Annette-and-Frankie Beach Party movies--though, in later years, AIP's output skewed ever more exploitatively toward GRINDHOUSE fare (e.g., PAM GRIER in *Black Mama*, *White Mama*). *Kutcher exudes the bland hunksiness of a juvenile lead in an old AIP feature.*

Aldrich, Robert. Tough-guy director (1918-83) who, despite his machismo-infused CV (*Kiss Me Deadly*, *The Dirty Dozen*, *The Longest Yard*), enjoys unlikely godhead status among Camp Snobs for his two hyper-macabre Bette Davis horror-melodramas, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) and *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1965), which begat a whole movement of using aging female studio-system refugees as clown-makeup grotesques. *Love that lunatic pirouette dance that Bette does with the ice-cream cone at the end of Baby Jane--pure, demented Aldrich.*

Almendros, Néstor. Painterly Spanish cinematographer (1930-92) revered by Snobs for his purist's respect for natural light; worked with French New Wavers (ERIC ROHMER, Francois Truffaut) and American mavericks (MONTE HELLMAN, Martin Scorsese), and, most famously, gave TERRENCE MALICK's *Days of Heaven* the golden-hour glow that camouflaged the film's narrative lapses. *Much as I admire Conrad Hall's work on In Cold Blood, I can't help but think that Nestor Almendros would have shot it better.*

Altering Eye, The. Must-have Snob book, first published in 1983, that offers a cogent but sawdust-dry analysis of the modernist film movements in Europe and Latin America from ITALIAN NEOREALISM onward. Long a knapsack staple, the book has now been posted on the Web in its entirety by its author, Robert Kolker, a professor of film studies at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Anger, Kenneth. Hollywood-reared child actor, ne Kenneth Anglemyer, turned trash-cinema auteur. Falling under the spell of Aleister Crowley, the suave English occultist, Anger, upon reaching young adulthood, took to making homoerotic, crypto-Fascist shorts such as *Fireworks* (1947) and *Scorpio Rising* (1964)--the latter a locus classicus of gay-biker chic, and a harbinger of Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino in its juxtaposition of jukebox pop and ultraviolence. Still, Anger is best known as the author of *Hollywood Babylon*, his overamped 1960 compendium of scabrous Tinseltown gossip.

Anime. Catchall term for Japanese or Japanese-style animation, an understanding of which is said by Snobs to be crucial to understanding the future of cinema (yea, of our very culture!), since it, like CHOP-SOCKY, will inform all filmmaking visionaries worth a damn--even though it reliably focuses on species-nonspecific furry animals and childlike humanoids with enormous, saucery eyes. A societal subculture as much as it is a genre, anime takes many forms, including merchandise-shifting product (*Pokémon*), lyrical children's fare (the films of Hayao Miyazaki), and explicit pornography (the subgenre known as *hentai*, in which the childlike humanoids have enormous, R. Crumb-inspired bosoms to go with their enormous, saucery eyes). Anime has established an American beachhead with the Chicago-based Manga Entertainment (*manga* is the Japanese word for comics), the distributor behind the cult hits *Ghost in the Shell* and *Blood: The Last Vampire*.

Antihero. Film-crit term, borrowed from comp-lit studies, that achieved hypercurrency in the late 1960s and '70s when the EASY RIDERS, RAGING BULLS generation took wing, its auteurs constructing their films around morally compromised, usually runty, usually ethnic protagonists--such as Robert De Niro's Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Al Pacino's eponymous character in *Serpico*, and Dustin Hoffman's Ratso Rizzo in *Midnight Cowboy*. *Vincent Gallo hustles and skitters like a real-life embodiment of a Scorsese antihero.*

Antonioni, Michelangelo. Art-film director regarded, despite his age (he was born in 1912), as a sort of Italian auxiliary to the FRENCH NEW WAVE because of his audacious, conventional-narrative-shunning early-sixties trilogy, *L'Avventura*, *La Notte*, and *L'Eclisse*. For all the critical kvelling that these MEDITATIONS ON "aliention" and "disaffection" produced, it was Antonioni's English-language debut, 1966's *Blow-Up*, that earned him a gilt pedestal in the Snob pantheon, with its *Austin Powers*-inspiring Swinging London-photographer ANTIHERO, dolly-bird sex romps, Yardbirds-concert interlude, unresolved intrigue over a possible murder, and opening and closing scenes in which Antonioni, in his pursuit of profundity, actually deployed an unexplained gaggle of mimes. Regarded in some Snob circles as a painterly, betwitching allegory on the illusory nature of modern life and in other circles as a full-on con (PAULINE Kael wrote that old-timers like Ben Hecht banged out satirical comedies about vain, greedy jerks "that said most of what Antonioni does and more, and were entertaining besides"), *Blow-Up* was followed by two more English-language Snob causes célèbres--the train-wreck sixties-activist-tumult movie *Zabriskie Point* (1970) and the artiest Jack Nicholson movie ever made, *The Passenger* (1975).

Apparatus. Comically obtuse blather-term used in semiotics-driven film studies to denote both the camera and the "cinematic system of meaning"; stubbornly used by semioticians as if in fear that they'll be reamed with a cattle prod if the words *camera* or *narrative* pass through their lips. *In its relentless voyeurism and implied violence, Michael Powell's Peeping Tom makes deft use of the apparatus to signify the male gaze.*

Argento, Asia. Tattooed sexpot Italian actress, incapable of keeping her clothes on, who, perhaps by dint of being the daughter of DARIO ARGENTO, has managed to position herself as an art-damaged alterna-auteuress rather than a mere soft-core goth girl. Having directed and starred in such brutal, sex-filled features as *Scarlet Diva* (2000) and *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things* (2004), Argento has also dipped a toe into the mainstream, appearing, to rapturous Snob response, in the Vin Diesel vehicle *XXX* (2002).

Argento, Dario. Italian horrormeister who forsook his legitimate screenwriting background (he cowrote Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*) to popularize a genre of splatter pic, known in Italy as the *Giallo*, whose films, like those of HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS, are required viewing for Gore Snobs. His Snob-ratified classic is *Suspiria* (1977).

Art of the Moving Picture, The. Nearly impenetrable but historically significant book by Illinois poet Vachel Lindsay, originally published in 1915 and upheld by Snobs as the first critical appraisal of movies as a bona-fide art form. Though prescient in its anticipation of film's cultural influence ("Edison is the new Gutenberg. He has invented the new printing"), the book's antiquated prose (movies are "artistic photoplays") makes it rough going for all but the most dogged of Snobs, even in the snappy new edition published by the Modern Library with an introduction by STANLEY KAUFFMANN.

Ashby, Hal. Beautiful loser of the *EASY RIDERS*, *RAGING BULLS* auteur pack, a fuzz-faced, genial, doob-smoking late-bloomer who, Snobs bitterly contend, never gets his due alongside Coppola, Scorsese, Lucas, Altman, Friedkin, BOGDANOVICH, et al. A longtime film editor for director Norman Jewison, Ashby came to national attention with his second movie, *Harold and Maude* (1971), starring the wee BUD CORT as a puckish, suspiciously Ashby-like ANTIHERO in love with an elderly woman. Thereafter, Ashby went on an artistic tear, directing *The Last Detail*, *Shampoo*, *Bound for Glory*, *Coming Home*, and *Being There*, and establishing himself as an "actor's director"--a designation that, like the sports term "player's coach," suggests a mixed blessing of amiability and erratic discipline. Increasingly drug-dependent, Ashby floundered in the eighties, making such inferior films as *Lookin' to Get Out* and *The Slugger's Wife* and struggling with completion anxiety, before succumbing to cancer in 1988, a good decade before Revivalist Snobs began to press his case.

Aspect ratio. The ratio between the width and height of the film frame; 1.85:1 is the American widescreen standard. Though once known only within the filmmaking industry and among those who used to be called "AV nerds" in high-school projectionist clubs, the term has become commonplace on DVD sleeves, a reassurance to potential buyers that their DIRECTOR'S CUT version of *Donnie Darko* hasn't been trimmed to fit TV screens. *Don't get that Assault on Precinct 13 DVD--they didn't preserve the original aspect ratio!*

Auberjonois, Rene. Lean, often mustachioed character actor who was a member, along with BUD CORT, of Robert Altman's repertory in the director's muddy-brown period, appearing in *M*A*S*H* (as the original Father Mulcahy), *Brewster McCloud*, and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*--a body of work that makes him a casual name-drop for Snobs, who would just as soon ignore his later fame as the sniffy, officious chief of staff on TV's *Benson* and as the shape-shifting Odo on TV's *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

***Auteur theory, the.** Immutable tenet of film theory that holds that the director, rather than the screenwriter, producer, or star, is the "author" of a film. First posited by François Truffaut in *CAHIERS DU CINÉMA* in 1954, Americanized by ANDREW SARRIS in *Film Culture* in 1962, and then ridiculed by the gadfly PAULINE KANEL in *Film Quarterly* in 1963, the theory contends that a director's signature style--or "filmic personality," in Snob-speak--is of greater significance than the actual quality of his individual films. Though the debate over the auteur theory's worth subsided long ago, Snobs still brandish the theory to make cases for the greatness of such unworthies as David Fincher.

Bass, Saul. Bronx-born animator, graphic designer, and director (1920-1996) whose strikingly imaginative title sequences introduced dozens of films, including some of the best by Otto Preminger (*Anatomy of a Murder*), Alfred Hitchcock (*Vertigo*), and Martin Scorsese (*Goodfellas*), and, in some cases, were more memorable than the films themselves (Edward Dmytryk's *Walk on the Wild Side*, Scorsese's *Casino*). A Snob controversy rages over the extent of his involvement in *Psycho*'s shower scene--some swear he actually directed it, while others say he just drew the storyboards--and hard-core Bassists extol his sole feature as director, *Phase IV* (1974), an impenetrable sci-fi story about superintelligent ants.

Beery, Wallace. Thickset, Doberman-faced character actor (1885-1949) who found unlikely success as a leading man in late-period silent features and early-period talkies, most notably in *Min and Bill* (1930), a salty harborside slice-of-life tale costarring the equally linebackerish Marie Dressler, and *The Champ* (1931), in which he played the faded-boxer dad of towheaded Jackie Cooper (winning an Oscar for his efforts). Cherished by Snobs as the embodiment of the sort of "real" mug that old Hollywood embraced before shallow youth culture and Kabbalah took hold, he was paid tribute by the Coen brothers in *Barton Fink* (1991), in which it was the titular character's accursed fate to script a "Wallace Beery wrestling picture."

***Bogdanovich, Peter.** Cinema's foremost callow-Film Snob-turned-auteur until Quentin Tarantino came along. Gaining a foothold in the movie world by writing a MONOGRAPH for the Museum of Modern Art's Orson Welles retrospective in 1960, when he was only twenty-one, Bogdanovich moved into film criticism for *Esquire*, and, in the mid-1960s, became one of ROGER CORMAN's many proteges, which afforded him the chance to direct his first picture, *Targets* (1968). A dedicated auteurist and treasurer of Hollywood's Depression-era golden age, Bogdanovich scored a massive critical trifecta with *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), and *Paper Moon* (1973), all of which convincingly evoked vanished American milieus and were suffused with flagrant MOVIEINESS (*What's Up Doc* in particular, with its rat-a-tat echoes of HOWARD HAWKS's screwball films). Bogdanovich's subsequent hubris (along with his dumping of first wife-secret weapon Polly Platt for yowza actress Cybill Shepherd) made him ripe for a nasty comeuppance, and, accordingly, his next few films flopped, and he never regained his momentum. Semi-redeeming himself by becoming Welles's friend, protector, and official interlocutor in the 1970s (and later publishing a book of their conversations, *Directed by Orson Welles*), Bogdanovich has managed a series of

modest comebacks in his later career, directing *Mask* (1985) and *The Cat's Meow* (2001), and playing Dr. Melfi's psychiatrist on *The Sopranos*.

Bollywood. Broad term for India's Bombay-based film industry, which, though it has produced visionaries like Raj Kapoor, more routinely pumps out soapy, mass-market movies that, when projected in theaters in American university towns, somehow morph into art films.

A GUIDE TO SNOB NOMENCLATURE

How to Correctly Identify Esteemed Personages of Filmdom in Conversation with Other Snobs

"Jack," never "John," Ford (for the iconic Western director)

"Marty," never "Martin," Scorsese (for the Italian-American cine-maestro)

"Bobby," never "Robert," De Niro (for the Italian-American powder keg)

"Mank," never "Herman" or "Hank," Mankiewicz (for the *Citizen Kane* screenwriter)

"Woody," never "W.S.," Van Dyke II (for the director of the *Thin Man* movies)

"The Emperor," never "Akira Kurosawa" (for the king of Japanese cinema)

"Il Maestro," never "Federico Fellini" (for the king of Italian cinema)

"Billy," never "William," Friedkin (for the temperamental *Exorcist* director)

"Bernie," never "Bernard," Herrmann (for the soundtrack composer)

"Tony," never "A. O.," Scott (for the *New York Times* film reviewer)

"Terry," never "Terrence," Malick (for the mystique-laden director)

"Pete," never "Haskell," Wexler (for the venerable cinematographer)

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