



The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture

Henry Jenkins

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Henry Jenkins at Authors@Google (video)

Vaudevillians used the term "the wow climax" to refer to the emotional highpoint of their acts—a final moment of peak spectacle following a gradual building of audience's emotions. Viewed by most critics as vulgar and sensationalistic, the vaudeville aesthetic was celebrated by other writers for its vitality, its liveliness, and its playfulness.

The Wow Climax follows in the path of this more laudatory tradition, drawing out the range of emotions in popular culture and mapping what we might call an aesthetic of immediacy. It pulls together a spirited range of work from Henry Jenkins, one of our most astute media scholars, that spans different media (film, television, literature, comics, games), genres (slapstick, melodrama, horror, exploitation cinema), and emotional reactions (shock, laughter, sentimentality). Whether highlighting the sentimentality at the heart of the Lassie franchise, examining the emotional experiences created by horror filmmakers like Wes Craven and David Cronenberg and avant garde artist Matthew Barney, or discussing the emerging aesthetics of video games, these essays get to the heart of what gives popular culture its emotional impact.



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