



Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons

By Jonathan Rosenbaum



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In his astute and deeply informed film reviews and essays, Jonathan Rosenbaum regularly provides new and brilliant insights into the cinema as art, entertainment, and commerce. Guided by a personal canon of great films, Rosenbaum sees, in the ongoing hostility toward the idea of a canon shared by many within the field of film studies, a missed opportunity both to shape the discussion about cinema and to help inform and guide casual and serious filmgoers alike.

In *Essential Cinema*, Rosenbaum forcefully argues that canons of great films are more necessary than ever, given that film culture today is dominated by advertising executives, sixty-second film reviewers, and other players in the Hollywood publicity machine who champion mediocre films at the expense of genuinely imaginative and challenging works. He proposes specific definitions of excellence in film art through the creation a personal canon of both well-known and obscure movies from around the world and suggests ways in which other canons might be similarly constructed.

Essential Cinema offers in-depth assessments of an astonishing range of films: established classics such as *Rear Window*, *M*, and *Greed*; ambitious but flawed works like *The Thin Red Line* and *Breaking the Waves*; eccentric masterpieces from around the world, including *Irma Vep* and *Archangel*; and recent films that have bitterly divided critics and viewers, among them *Eyes Wide Shut* and *A.I.* He also explores the careers of such diverse filmmakers as Robert Altman, Raúl Ruiz, Frank Tashlin, Elaine May, Sam Fuller, Terrence Davies, Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Orson Welles. In conclusion, Rosenbaum offers his own film canon of 1,000 key works from the beginning of cinema to the present day. A cogent and provocative argument about the art of film, *Essential Cinema* is also a fiercely independent reference book of must-see movies for film lovers everywhere.

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