

Zunshine, Lisa. *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture*. Pp 240. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. US \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1421406169.

Review by Karen J. Renner

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Lisa Zunshine's *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture* rests on a fascinating assertion: that the appeal of popular culture relies on its ability to engage us in the practice of theory of mind (ToM), "the evolved cognitive adaptation that makes us attribute mental states to ourselves and to other people" (xi). Zunshine claims that we are "*a culture of greedy mind readers*" (11) ever eager to exercise our innate ToM abilities, and since real life proves an inadequate supplier of sufficiently complex occasions we turn to fictional texts.

Chapter 2, "I Know What You're Thinking, Mr. Darcy!", discusses in detail what Zunshine terms "embodied transparency": those moments in fiction—especially important to romance narratives—"when characters' body language involuntarily betrays their feelings, particularly if they want to conceal them from others" (23). Zunshine claims that in order for moments of embodied transparency to be effective and satisfying, three conditions must be met. First, the character's transparency must stand in stark opposition to other characters' relative lack of transparency or to his or her own lack of transparency moments before or after (the rule of **contrasts**). Second, moments of embodied transparency must be brief (the rule of **transience**) in order for the transparency to be believable as well as to prevent us from becoming uncomfortable from observing emotional nakedness for too long. Lastly, characters become transparent through their very effort to hide their true feelings (hence, the final rule of **restraint**).

Having laid out these important concepts, Zunshine then spends the following chapters either exploring a caveat of embodied transparency, demonstrating how a popular culture text or genre is reliant on such moments, or both. In Chapter 3, for instance, Zunshine briefly discusses "sadistic benefactors": characters who are not content to wait for moments of embodied transparency but who force others into those moments. In chapter 4, Zunshine points out how certain arenas, like theaters, were once treated as spaces in which someone's true feelings could be observed; it is this belief, after all, that prompts Hamlet to stage a play in order to gain definitive evidence of Claudius's guilt. And

when Julia Roberts' character in *Pretty Woman* is moved to tears at the opera, this moment of embodied transparency helps us see that although she may not have the polish of the upper classes, she has something they lack: authentic emotion. As Zunshine points out, however, once the word is out that people are using a cultural activity to observe others and gauge their true natures, these events then become prime opportunities to engage in false shows of emotion that can be used to manipulate the onlooker. Thus, Richard Lovelace affects to be affected by a moving drama in order to fool the naive Clarissa.

Later chapters are devoted to particular genres. Chapter 5 explores key scenes from Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) and Stephen Frear's *The Queen* (2006), among other films, in order to illustrate that the need for restraint in moments of embodied transparency arises "not because restraint is good in and of itself but because restraint may be used as a means for *interestingly complex* embodied transparency" (85). Chapter 6 very briefly takes on *cinéma vérité*, photography, and the comedian Andy Kaufman, but its most interesting point relates to the UK series *The Office* (2005-2013), particularly its penchant for making us uncomfortable by encouraging us to gawk at others during moments in which they are uncomfortable; relishing others' negative moments of embodied transparency is often considered rude and so we feel we are misbehaving. In Chapter 7, Zunshine briefly investigates reality television, arguing that its appeal has to do with our assumption that those we watch are ordinary people and not actors, and that their moments of embodied transparency are therefore putatively more authentic. Chapter 8 considers how songs in musicals can (but do not necessarily) function as moments of embodied transparency.

The book closes with an examination of painting. Chapter 9 begins with a discussion of "absorptive" paintings, a genre that depicts subjects who are "not aware of the presence of the beholder" (146) and thus would seem to offer premier examples of embodied transparency. Zunshine points out, though, that it is not only the subjects of a painting upon whom we may exercise our ToM abilities. We may also try to analyze the mind of the artist who created the painting or perhaps scrutinize the reasons behind our own emotional response to the work of art. Chapter 10 contrasts the "proposal composition" with "problem pictures." The proposal composition, a compositional pattern common to later nineteenth-century European painting, focuses on a woman's ambiguous response to a man's proposal to advance their relationship. Such paintings give the impression that male intentions are transparent while women's require interpretation, a tendency we might assume expresses contemporaneous anxieties about the inscrutability of women. But Zunshine notes that this presumption is complicated by the fact that the proposal composition overlapped in time with problem pictures. These ambiguous paintings show both men and women absorbed in thought, yet neither gender is more readable than the other.

The appeal of Zunshine's book results from the general usefulness of her theoretical framework; embodied transparency is obviously a key aspect of popular culture, and one need not accept Zunshine's sweeping claim that "no cultural form will endure unless it lets us attribute mental states to somebody or something" (12) in order to see the pertinence of her claims and the applicability of her concepts. Scholars of popular romance, I think, will find the ideas she details especially relevant to their studies; after all, romance frequently relies on miscommunications, manipulations, and missed cues between characters which the reader/viewer can see through with an often agonizing clarity.

In addition, Zunshine's prose is more lively, personal and funny than one might expect from a formal academic study involving such heady concepts as theory of mind. Each chapter begins with a humorous summary of what's to come. The opening synopsis of Chapter 2, for example, reads as follows:

In which a new concept is introduced; a phobia is revealed; a four-letter word makes a bold-faced appearance (but the French take the blame); Frederick Wentworth betrays himself; Elizabeth Bennet rejects Mr. Darcy; Bridget Jones triumphs over a rival; Tom Jones can't see what's in front of his eyes; and the author admits that she has no clue what her nearest and dearest are thinking. (20)

The stylistic frivolity of this passage is characteristic of Zunshine's prose, yet the flippant tone in no way dumbs down the reading but instead makes the ideas seem more relevant and relatable.

My major complaint about the book is that it does not satisfy the promise of its title: this is not *really* a book about popular culture. Although it gestures toward some truly popular texts like *The Office* and reality television, *Getting inside Your Head* primarily deals with classic literature and film and other genres more highbrow than low, such as musicals and painting. The problem that results is not simply a matter of inaccurate titling. Rather, the omission of the most popular and contemporary forms of popular culture from the study—including, say, advertising, graphic novels, video games, and current genre fiction—raises the question of whether Zunshine's claims regarding the centrality of ToM hold true within popular culture's 'lowest' forms. Perhaps embodied transparency is simply a penchant of high culture. Perhaps, in fact, appeals to ToM are used to distinguish high culture from low. At any rate, I found myself wishing Zunshine had turned her incisive gift for analysis toward culture truly meant for the masses.