



## Cassavetes on Cassavetes

*John Cassavetes , Ray Carney*

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### **Cassavetes on Cassavetes** John Cassavetes , Ray Carney

Since his death in 1989, John Cassavettes has become increasingly renowned as a cinematic hero--a renegade loner who fought the Hollywood system, steering his own creative course in a career spanning thirty years. Having already established himself as an actor, he struck out as a filmmaker in 1959 with *Shadows*, and proceeded to build a formidable body of work, including such classics as *Faces*, *Woman Under the Influence*, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, and *Gloria*. In *Cassavettes on Cassavettes*, Ray Carney presents the great director in his own words--frank, uncompromising, humane, and passionate about life and art.

### **Cassavetes on Cassavetes Details**

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Author : John Cassavetes , Ray Carney

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## From Reader Review Cassavetes on Cassavetes for online ebook

### Ian says

Recommended.

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### Sydney says

Fascinating.

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### Jon says

Great book about the maddeningly quirky, often brilliant filmmaker-actor John Cassavetes. Ray Carney follows JC's life and career, largely in his own words, from his early days in TV's so-called Golden Age through the pioneering, now-classic SHADOWS, his conflict-filled time with Roman Polanski on ROSEMARY'S BABY, through uncompromising, uneven films such as FACES and HUSBANDS to the end with the disappointing (in my opinion, not Carney's) LOVE STREAMS. At one point the book suggests that Cassavetes considered becoming a documentary filmmaker, and perhaps he should have. In any case, I ultimately got the feeling that Cassavetes was trying to make film do something that the medium perhaps can't do, that he wanted to wring absolute truth from an art better suited to dreams and lies.

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### Ana Maria says

I think this was delicious.

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### Andrea says

fantastic! this book captures, in cassavetes' own words, how an ever passionate and one-of-a-kind director, actor, father, and husband can single-handedly bring to screen the reality of the human experience. his story gave me a new found appreciation for independent cinema and showcased the ability of one truly independent artist.

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### Cinematic Cteve says

This is a great series of cinema books, featuring deep, insightful interviews with the finest film directors in the world. Cassavetes, godfather of indie cinema, cuts loose with tales of his hardscrabble early years, wearing out shoeleather on Broadway when no agent would return his calls. His eventual foray into a naturalistic style of filmmaking created such masterpieces as Shadows, Faces, A Woman Under the Influence and the quietly devastating Husbands, which every real man should view at least once. Turns out much of his acting for big-budget studio product (The Dirty Dozen, Rosemary's Baby, The Fury and Two

Minute Warning come to mind) was done for the paycheck, which he immediately rolled over to finance his own projects. As an aside, I note with respect that he was married to his best friend and frequent collaborator Gena Rowlands for 35 years, which is no wee feat in show business. Cassavetes was a visionary, badass iconoclast, and the cinema was diminished by his far-too-soon passing at 59 in 1989. At the time of his death he had amassed 40 unproduced screenplays, one of which, *She's So Lovely*, was directed by his son Nick in 1997. This is a terrific book.

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### **Jack Herbert Christal Gattanella says**

One of the best and most inspiring how-to-make-a-movie books I'll ever read. I may not love all of his films, but he is one-of-a-kind and his spirit helped me make my first film.

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### **Jen says**

I gave *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* four stars because the editor did an impeccable job putting the book together. But what a horrible thing to discover: One of the greatest American filmmakers is unlikable and unintelligent (even about his own movies). I wish I hadn't gotten to know him; truly, this book has tainted Cassavetes' films for me.

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### **Marlo Bernier says**

It would be an injustice for me to "review" this book with any kind of convention, but I will suffice to say that this book is a must read for filmmakers, actors or "goers". This book gives more than a cursory glimpse into the man and the myth; it's an entire immersion.

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### **brandon says**

Cassavetes talking Cassavetes. Amazing.

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### **Evan says**

Sycophantism in extremis.

Ray Carney's idea of what art is is so dogmatic and limiting it beggars description.

But before I bash, I have to say his writings have made me think and re-think the nature of art, why it is done and when it is "genuine" as opposed to, say, crass or mere hobby craftsmanship or manufactured goods.

Carney's a real pitbull, he takes no prisoners, and his slams at fellow critics are delicious. He's a master at pointing out their inconsistencies, ferreting out claims that seem at variance with film content. Devastating at calling out those who confuse pop formulae with high art.

Like Jonathan Rosenbaum, I find him a refreshing, vital and necessary part of the critical mix, as viewers and readers of film confront the art put before them.

And yet, Carney's take on the idea that art is only the pursuit of truth is so fraught with peril it would almost take a novel to debunk him. Carney has no truck with style, which would seemingly not only put him at odds with Hollywood commercial filmmakers but also with a large segment of the experimental film crowd.

The philosophical quandary of "what is truth" would seem endless. In Carney's view, Cassavetes seeks truth, and maybe even finds it to a degree. But what is truth, and whose is it?

Shooting miles of film, hoping that "truth happens," creates a new conundrum. Who picks "the truth" out of those miles of tedious footage with actors flailing around in hysteria? Why, the artiste, of course.

But that very act of selection is an act of control, and thus artifice. It's an issue that has confronted and baffled the cinema verite movement for decades. The second the camera is turned on and records, can there truly be "reality"?

The notion that the only valid art is confrontational art, that takes us out of our comfort zone, is repeated ad infinitum here. It seems a peculiarly aggressive male view of art, that it must "attack" its audience.

I just have big trouble with someone who poo poos 99.9 percent of cinematic output and consigns it all to the bin of the artless based on a very limiting view of art -- one that assumes the truth means rubbing our noses in the shit of life. I'll never be persuaded that an Astaire and Rogers dance scene is not art, for instance. But there is no room in Carney's art universe for fantasy, and that seems rather sad and pathetic.

I read some of this book and got the point fairly early on. Cassavetes had a tendency to repeat himself. I mean, how many ways can you say you shoot miles of footage to get at the truth? Not many, as it happens.

I find it funny that Carney has respect for Frank Capra, based, I would have to think, on Cassavette's own love of the great American pedantic fantasist - a practitioner of the kind of minutely controlled artifice and populist platitude that would seem to be the opposite of what Carney would consider "truth seeking." I like Capra and Cassavetes myself, not every single thing they did, but in my universe there's room for many artists, craftsman, showmen -- call them what you will.

And I find it funny that in promoting his own books, career and scholarship on his website that Carney freely appropriates the iconography of the commercial cinema -- glowing marquee and such...

I'd say that the minute an aesthetic becomes dogma it becomes like a dangerous church you should walk away from, because it can only convert with bloodshed. And somewhere in the confusion, it chops off its own ears. (The mind already went some time ago...)

I was going to write more, but I have a job.

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**Anhelo says**

I can't really put into words how much I enjoyed reading this book. I read it as I watched the films, one by one. I am definitely keeping this book for future reading and consulting. I am not the biggest fan of J.C. but I definitely appreciate his work on film way more than I did when I watched his movies without having a clue about his creative process.

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### Jared Busch says

Probably the most fascinating and exhaustively in-depth book on one filmmaker I've ever read. Carney has pretty much devoted his life to studying Cassavetes and telling the true story of his life, much to the chagrin of his wife, Gena Rowlands, who has stopped every great thing Carney has tried to do to preserve his legacy, including releasing early cuts of *Shadows* and *Faces*. This book moves from Carney's biographical narration to long passages of Cassavetes' own words. I think this monster is about 500 pages long, devoting about 80 pages to every one of his major films, so I would recommend it only to die-hard Cassavetes fans.

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### Madelyn says

This is actually "Carney on Cassavetes." It's interesting, but not helpful to anyone with a serious interest in John Cassavetes' films.

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### Antigone says

This book is part of a unique series on legendary directors, though the concept is dubious at best.

The idea here is to have a writer sift through all the commentary made by a director (on his life, his work, his influences, his vision) and then arrange this material in loose filmographic order in a valiant attempt to create a cinematic memoir where none in fact exists. To be fair, the writer has some expertise on the man in question and, in this case at least, goes to great pains to structure the content and deliver the quoted statements in context. The downside, of course, is that the director's words were not offered with this intent in mind and were frequently reactions or responses made in a variety of circumstances, most of which were designed to promote a film. So it's all a little dicey, and you should know that going in.

That said, there is no doubt in my mind that John Cassavetes was a beast to tackle. He certainly put Ray Carney through his paces, and posthumously to boot.

You may remember John from his acting roles in *The Dirty Dozen* and *Rosemary's Baby*. Or you may, as I do, remember his stewardship of the film *Gloria* and refer to him often as "that guy who married Gena Rowlands." (Because, you know, **Gena Rowlands**.) However both recollections fail to accommodate the substantial contribution he made to the field of direction in American cinema.

Cassavetes was part of the vanguard of the independent film movement. While he wasn't the first to split off from the pack, he was definitely the most notorious. He was opposed to many elements of standard film production. Any sort of supervision drove him up the wall. He abhorred studio executives, investors, unions and distributors. You might think that would be enough fodder for rebellion, yet he was also perfectly disgusted by writers who were too attached to their scripts, cameramen who were too attached to accepted forms of shooting film, actors who had been corrupted by too much experience (who had learned too many

"tricks") and, sad but true, the movie-going audience itself whom he felt had been conditioned into somnambulism by years of easy and inferior cinematic fare. Looking for a renegade? That buck stops here.

Still, there were dichotomies and, it must be said, they were legion. He was averse to violence and sexual content in film. He wanted to tell stories about emotional life and emotional truth, yet was repelled by narrative structure and anything that smacked of resolution. He couldn't stand Strasberg's Method, he believed acting rooted in psychological motivation was a complete waste of time, yet he spent the bulk of his directorial energy keeping his performers off-balance and off-script so that he might pull their neuroses forward. He ripped all the subtle protections out of the process, then virtually filled his cast and crew with the people closest to him - not because they worked cheap but because he claimed great affection for them. (I was reminded of that line from *Tootsie*: "I don't take this kind of [abuse] from friends, Michael. Only lovers.") He was maddening, mercurial, megalomaniacal; a hard and profoundly complicated man.

Carney aims for a through-line, which is impossible to get with Cassavetes. John had a lot to say, but the words didn't mean that much to him. I encountered a lot of repetition. In all honesty, there's a mid-section of approximately a hundred pages that grows tedious in the extreme. Yet the director emerges on the page in all his tempestuous glory, and I think that's the best one can expect from a compilation of this nature.

I could pull any number of quotes, but let's leave it to the one that brought a smile. Here's the section on our renegade director in negotiation with a certain Mr. Penn:

*"Everyone says they want to work the way I do or work with me; but they don't really want to. They don't want to go all the way to work this way. In the end they want to protect themselves. They are afraid. They don't really want to take the chance."*

**Another less publicized issue also came between them.**

*"Sean wanted Madonna in the movie. It was out of the question. I've worked with lots of non-professionals, but I have to draw the line somewhere!"*

Color me tickled - a (generous) four-star shade of pink.

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