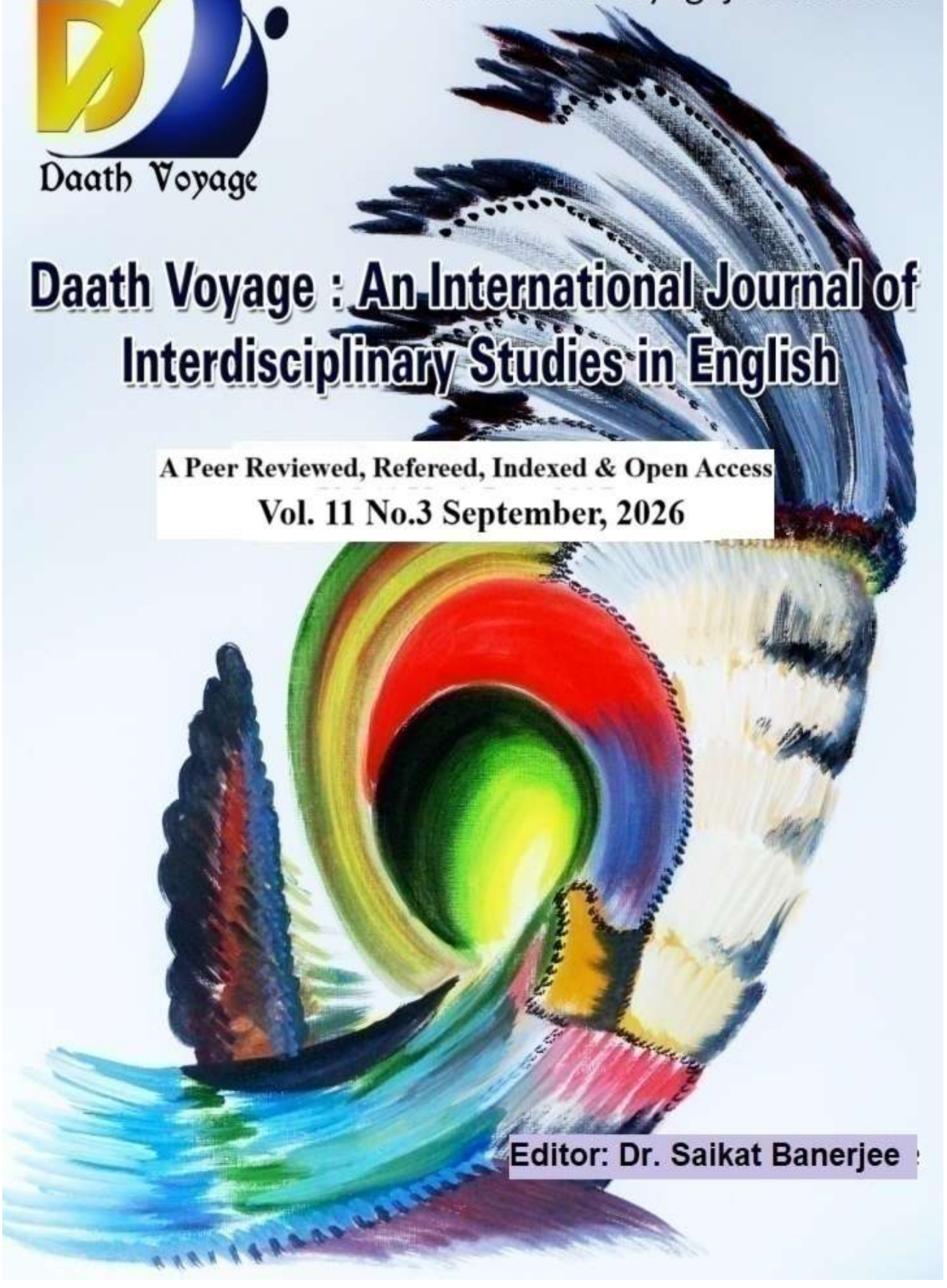
ISSN 2455-7544
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Daath Voyage

Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access
Vol. 11 No.3 September, 2026



Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee

Daath Voyage
: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)
www.daathvoyagejournal.com
ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

"I Can Do Whatever I Want": Id, Ego, and the Disintegration of the Superego in Homelander from *The Boys*

Dr. Vikas Chandani
Assistant Professor,
Veerangana Rani Durgavati Government Girls College
Takhatpur, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh

Received 26 May 2026 Revised 15 August 2026 Published 30 September 2026

Abstract: The critics of modern TV have been critically explored by popular culture scholars. Garth Ennis' comic series *The Boys* was adapted into a series for Amazon Prime Video, developed by Eric Kripke, and, in the series, the character of Homelander has some strange inconsistencies in his caricature and evolution. In the same line of thought, this discursive study focuses on the said character, using the structural model of the psyche suggested by Sigmund Freud—id, ego and superego, and instances are quoted from his dialogues from all four seasons of the series, to illustrate when his psyche has the tripartite pattern Freud proposed in his famous design. Like the popular opinion, it is noted that Homelander is a textbook case of the psychic disintegration of the individual: his id is monstrous, created by the lack of affect, his ego is perpetually unstable, because it is always lacking support from the outside, and his superego is entirely foreign to him and was imposed on him from the outside. It takes as its starting point the foundational texts of Freud, the cogitations of D. W. Winnicott on the false self, and the contemporary scholarship of television studies, to place Homelander not just as a supervillain but as a cultural symptom—a portrait of what psychic development looks like when secure attachment is completely lacking. This study enhances our understanding of the character portrayed by the celebrated series to a great extent.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Id-ego-superego, Freudian Structural Model, False Self, *The Boys*.

Introduction: The Superhero as Psychoanalytic Subject

The term "Superhero" evokes many questions in the viewer's mind. For a long time the superhero has been a screen onto which the cultural anxieties surrounding power, responsibility and identity are reflected, and the different interpretations attributed to this single figure by researchers are all applicable. Today, in the era of prestige television, the genre has gained a new critical dimension: the ability to present a sustained, serialised psychological portraiture, something which the film medium does not usually allow. It is hardly a stretch to conclude that no recent show makes as much use of this ability as *The Boys* (Amazon Prime

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

Video, 2019–2024), and no character in one of the best shows ever made deserves as much examination as the show's titular bad guy, Homelander.

The most powerful being on Earth, and perhaps the most psychically damaged, Homelander (Antony Starr) was born in a laboratory and raised in sterile isolation by Vought International. With his heat vision he can destroy a plane; he does not like to hear that he is not loved. Is this contrast of omnipotence and infantile need in one body just a dramatic irony though? This question might have more answers than can be provided at this time. In this paper I argue that it is a meticulous and intentional adaptation of the Freudian structural model of the psyche, one that makes use of the language of superhero action to produce a lucid image of psychic disintegration.

The Ego and the Id (1923) is an extension of Freud's tripartite concept, where he describes the mental life as comprising three agencies: the id, a reservoir of primitive drives seeking instant gratification; the superego, an internalized moral authority formed initially from parental prohibitions; and the ego, a mediating structure that negotiates between the demands of the id, the constraints of the superego, and the demands of external reality (Freud 631–632). A healthy mind/psychology has a balance, sometimes a tension, between these agencies. For Homelander, there could never be such a balance. Love is never really broken into this id; the superego never really internalizes; and the ego, without the scaffolding it needs to grow, mediates an increasingly desperate and ultimately futile act.

This study considers the four-season journey of Homelander to be a Freudian tragedy, the tale of a psyche that is broken before it can be mended and continually teeters on the edge of the superego and the id. He gives special attention to his dialogue, which charts this trajectory in an impressively psychologically detailed way. As seen in close reading, the character's words change from showy to honest to shameless, from saying what he says to saying what he wants to say, throughout the series.

The False Self: A Theoretical Framework by Freud, Winnicott, and Others

Freud describes the id as “a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations” which knows “no judgments of value: no good and evil, no morality” (Freud 636). The id functions according to the pleasure principle, which aims only for immediate gratification, irrespective of consequences or of regard for others. It is the psychic counterpart of infancy; that is why the developmental psychologists tie the failures of early attachment to the failure of the id to be managed in adulthood.

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

For Freud, the superego has emerged from the resolution of the Oedipus complex: external prohibitions are internalized and become the internal conscience (Freud 643–644). This internalisation is of vital importance. A superego which has been genuinely absorbed becomes the basis for moral agency—for doing the right thing even when no one is watching. A superego that is imposed upon a child from the outside, but not internalized in the developmental process, is a foreign body, as Freud describes elsewhere, and can only restrain behavior under conditions of surveillance; it cannot produce genuine moral emotions. These two are incapable of being proscribed from the term, but the difference between them, as we shall see, is everything.

The thought of D. W. Winnicott about the "false self" is essential to this analysis. In the essay Ego Distortion in terms of True and False Self (1960), Winnicott claims that when the infant's spontaneous gestures are not met appropriately by the caregiver, the infant will learn to meet the demands of the caregiver instead, as a result of consistently failing to meet the infant's needs in the right way. As time goes by, this compliance becomes a persona—a false self image that emanates out to the world, while hiding and denying the true self underneath (Winnicott 146). Importantly, Winnicott notices that the false self bears a huge psychic price and is very fragile. It is empty because it is not based on any real experiences, and it cannot stand up to the pressure. As the conditions that gave rise to it—regular approval, a stable social position, the maintenance of a coherent fiction—begin to come undone, the false self starts to crack and what springs up from below is the unsocialized true self—needy, rageful, and unable to deal with the social reality.

These two frameworks, used together, make Homelander a character of extraordinary readability. The false self is his Vought-manufactured "persona" (cape, flag, smile, patriotic slogan). The id is the lab-like baby that was deprived of touch and attachment. And the mechanism in his case is the ego that keeps his performance going—until it can't anymore.

"I Just Want to Be Loved"

The conditions of Homelander's formation are a starting point for any serious reading of Homelander. Born without a mother, he was gestated as a conscious corporate experiment and raised in a Vought laboratory from birth. The series is clear that he was the victim of a regime designed to create "the perfect weapon" (to paraphrase Dr. Vogelbaum later): a psychoanalytical interpretation of this phrase would be that the

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

subject was systematically deprived of everything that might constitute a self. No primary caregiver, no regular attachment figure, no experience of being met as a person instead of an object of experimentation. Winnicott clearly states the consequences of such a setting: “There is but little point in being good if no one is there to be good to” (Winnicott 152). Without that experience of continuity, of being real, that lies at the base of the subsequent psychic structure, the infant cannot develop it. Instead is a being of pure need, and a feeling of the need not being satisfied.

This is the name of the id that Homelander carries. It's not the identity of the classical villain: cold, calculating and power-hungry. It's an empty crib, with a god's body in it, of an abandoned baby. The most telling moment in the whole run is when he makes a Season One confession to Madelyn Stillwell, Vought's executive and surrogate mother. At the point when she asks him what he really wants, he says:

“I just want to be loved. I just want to be loved is not too much to ask for? I simply want people to love me!”

The simplicity of this declaration is amazing! He is not seeking power for power's sake. He has no desire for dominion or control in any high-flown political meaning. He is seeking love, unconditional love, which he had yet to experience in his childhood. His way of asking for it is too childish as well: he does not want to be loved through a relationship, he wants to be loved, unconditionally, at a distance. The scene of the series, where the nurse sits with Stillwell is a deliberate placement of the series, making the developmental regression clear; this is an infant at the breast, and not a man in a relationship.

The Superego: “America's Greatest Hero”

If the id is the lab baby Homelander, his superego is the Vought brand. He's been molded, costumed, scripted and rehearsed from his debut performance to become a political fiction: a 100% patriotic, morally flawless, all-American hero. The flag on his chest is not a mere add-on—it's the superego done in a new and interesting fashion. It declares that his public image is a product of the corporation and ideology and not his personal accomplishment.

Freud argues that a truly developed superego would emerge from the individual's own history: a history of incorporation of certain parental figures, ones that were feared and loved. Homelander did not have any such figures. He got instead the training program of Vought, the watchful eye of Dr. Vogelbaum and the image management system of Madelyn Stillwell. These external structures were able to get compliance but they were not able to get conscience. In fact, the difference is all-important.

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

In Season One, the distance between superego-performance and id-reality remains quite intact, yet seams are present. In public, Homelander is flawlessly presidential—warm, commanding and gracious. His relationships with others in private indicate that he does not have an understanding of the purpose of the performance. His goodness is not goodness of his own choosing, but goodness that is demanded of him, and, for the time being, that is what he finds still brings approval. His public relations manager Ashley Barrett urges him to "get his act together" for his public image, but he does not respond with the goodwill of a man mindful of his public obligations, but the scornful obedience of a child expecting a prize:

“I don't need you to handle me. I'm Homelander; I can do whatever I want.”

This line is just a Freud line. The pure id is the pleasure principle that says “I can do whatever I want!” against constraint. What is restricted is his own superego-persona, however, imposed from the outside and kept alive by the continual affirmation of approval. Here, the superego is upheld as the approbation is yet to come. It won't be permanent.

A Collapse of the Ego's Mediation: Season by Season

The most psychologically fascinating aspect of the character's arc of Homelander is that his ego—the mediating force that holds the id in check in the four seasons—weakens continually. This is no quick collapse, it's slow, and the series is so fastidiously watched that the writers pay close attention to the behaviours and verbatim dialogue.

In Season 1, the ego is still in a working order, albeit put to the test. He is very consistent in suppressing his more dangerous impulses; he maintains the performance, directs the demands of his id into socially legible channels (Stillwell's approbation, his creation of a public image). The murder of the plane passengers is hidden from the public, it is the id erupting, but the ego still can see that it has to be hidden. The divide between the public and the private still exists.

This divide is significantly lessened by Season Two. When he discovers he has a son named Ryan, he has a new id-demand: that he be loved by his own, the only one who can't decide not to love him. But his discussions with Ryan show the depths of his lack of ego resources in terms of actual relationship. His fear of his son he does not know how to receive; he can only respond to with an escalating performance. Homelander's desperation is well felt when Ryan doesn't develop his powers when summoned:

“You’re like me, Ryan. You're better than everybody else. You have to know that.”

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

At first glance the line is an encouragement but its structure is revealing. It isn't about the experience of Ryan, it's about the need of Homelander to confirm a story about himself. This ego is no longer the one that tries to balance between the id and the child's real needs, but it is the one that translates the id's demands in the language of parent's care.

The turning point of deterioration is in Season Three. The superego-mask starts to fall in public. Homelander faces a group of people who are yelling for him to cheer and cheer after he has engaged in open violence, to the man's visible surprise. This moment, one of the most talked about moments in the series, is a catastrophic shift in his internal economy:

“You can't do anything about it, I can do whatever I want.”

This is no ordinary villainy that's being dramatized. It's the failure of the central aspect of the ego, which is reality testing. According to Freudian theory, the ego strives to judge what the outside world is and is not willing to accept. The external world or audience, like Homelander's, will allow anything—the ego's mechanism for controlling the id is broken. When the external reality no longer reprimands the id-discharge, there is no foundation for the ego to extinguish it. The admiration of the mob was not the thing that released Homelander, but rather the last structural support that the ego had.

This is the journey of the ego, from whispered “I just want to be loved” to public “I can do whatever I want,” that unfolds in Season One, and then Season Three. The first line is the id speaking through an ego which still knows that it must disguise its desires. The second is the id which speaks for itself, for the ego has seen that the camouflage is no longer needed. The mask isn't taken off, it dissolves, and the environment that needed the mask doesn't need it anymore.

Season Four ties this all together. Homelander is starting to abandon the act as a whole. With Ryan, Vought, the Seven and the political machine he has developed himself, he has developed a character that no longer tries to convey his id-demands in a socially acceptable form. He is expecting loyalty in return for nothing. He is a fierce and violent retort to criticism. He is in need of adoration, in the here and now, in public, as an essential part of his emotional existence. If a fan expresses an adoration with a caveat, the expression is clearly unsettled, but a secure ego would cope easily with such expressions. The most obvious sign that he has an id in control is that he can't stand being loved and criticized at the same time,

“I'm just love, or else—there isn't a halfway house for me.”

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed& Open Access Journal)

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

It is so much a self-diagnosis in the Freudian system. Ambivalence is not tolerated by the id, nor can it contain conflicting feelings in regard to the same object. Freud described this as the "splitting" of the early psychic life, that is, the tendency to divide experience into two extremes: all good and all bad (Freud 647). The sentence said by Homelander: "There's no in-between" is, structurally speaking, the id declaring that it has definitely claimed the ground of the ego.

Homelander as a Cultural Symptom

To only look at Homelander's psychology in terms of pathology is to miss the point. *The Boys* isn't just a satire, it's also a cultural icon, as much as a psychological case study. His superego—the American hero myth—is not simply a part of his pathology; it is a part of it. The argument of the show, that can be read in the way its narrative is structured, is that the mythology itself is the disease: a performance of virtue which serves the corporate and political power, and is maintained by the desire of the crowd for a symbol rather than a relationship.

The antihero has been noted by scholars of television and ideology as a tool for embodying a cultural critique, one which is capable of extended psychological portraiture that can trace the mechanisms by which social structures produce damaged subjectivities (Martin 76; Mittell 44). In this reading, Homelander is not merely a broken man; he is a product of capitalism and nationalism, the image management machine that they wield on a human being from a young age. Vought failed not only to give him a self but on purpose replaced a self with a brand.

The monster is always a return of the culturally repressed—the thing which the normative social order cannot accommodate and therefore expels, only to have it return—as Robin Wood argues in the foundational essay on the American horror film. In the superhero genre, this would be the return of the repressed id in a genre dedicated to the repression of the fantasy.

Conclusion: The Triumph of the Infant

When it comes to *The Boys*, and its four seasons, the arc of Homelander is read, through the Freudian lens, as a portrait of an inevitable psychic collapse. Starting with an ego that is strained but still functioning, the Vought superego-persona takes steps to shift further and the id's demands are displaced more and more, and increasingly violent and infantile.

The main mechanism that brings this down is the lack of steady disapproval of the id by the environment. The ego is the mediator between the id (inner child) and the outer reality (the audience), and the external

ISSN 2455-7544
Vol.11/No.3 September, 2026

reality—the audience—starts to validate the id directly, meaning the function of the ego is denied. Homelander is not really a monster in any substantial way; rather, he is a failure of the developmental conditions for anything else to have occurred—and he is a failure of the cultural conditions that could have held him up.

On this score, his statement in the final scene, "there's no in-between with me," is not an ultimatum but rather a confession: that of an id that has reached the end of mediating through the ego and speaks directly.

What makes *The Boys* so brilliant is that this is not a horrific performance, but a tragedy. Although what Homelander does is frightening, what he does isn't frightening in itself; what he does is the logical extension of what was done to him. The series doesn't excuse him, it simply explains him. In explaining him, it implicates the structures—corporate, cultural, and political, which made him. To say that the monster, as ever, is a reflection is no exaggeration. We can say with confidence that, besides the psychoanalytical terms, the much acclaimed series does its job of depicting psychic disintegration pretty well in all the cultural, ideological, and artistic degrees.

Works Cited

Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, vol. 19, Hogarth Press, 1961.

Martin, Brett. *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*. Penguin Press, 2013.

Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press, 2015.

The Boys. Created by Eric Kripke, performances by Antony Starr, Karl Urban, and Erin Moriarty, Amazon Prime Video, 2019–2024.

Winnicott, D. W. "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self." *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development, International Universities Press, 1965, pp. 140–152.

Wood, Robin. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film." *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, edited by Bill Nichols, vol. 2, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 195–220.