

## film review

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# Letter Boxed

By Josef Woodard, September 14, 2006

### **This Film Is Not Yet Rated**

A documentary written by Kirby Dick, Eddie Schmidt, and Matt Patterson, and directed by Dick.

*Reviewed by Josef Woodard*

It seems fair to lump together the films *Super Size Me* and *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* into a fairly new subgenre of documentary. Both take on dubious behemoth American institutions —

McDonald's and the MPAA — using guerilla tactics and inserting the filmmaker into the very machinery whose dysfunction they seek to unveil. The underlying messages in both films question the authority of their targets and their pernicious influence on America, whether it is the tragic dietary legacy of fast food or the censoring nature of MPAA ratings, which always give good grades to violence, but thumbs down to sex.

Ratings founder and longtime guru/overlord Jack Valenti, unfortunately, was not interviewed for this film (there was no Michael Moore-style ambush attempt to reach him), but he is frequently seen from other footage. He chums around with studio heads and utters the mantra that the MPAA board is made up of "parents, neither gods nor fools, who make mistakes on occasion."

In director Kirby Dick's estimation, mistakes are not only frequently made by the "secret" rating board, they are driven by political and industry insider factors. He only found a few filmmakers who would speak out, including Kimberly Peirce (*Boys Don't Cry*), John Waters (too many dirty movies to mention), and Trey Parker, whose early indie film *Orgazmo* ran afoul of the board, whereas later studio projects had an easier time.

A subplot about a private investigator's stalking project — including going through raters' garbage — is an attempt to inject some half-comical suspense into the film, but it's labored. The payoff results in "outing" all the rating boardmembers. Late in the film, Dick submits his own almost-finished film for a rating. He uses courtroom-style drawings to recount his Kafka-esque encounter with the appeals board.

Dick also includes plenty of explicit footage, ostensibly as "exhibit A" brand material. But the clips also serve a clearly titillating function in the film, including Jane Fonda's extended orgasm scene in *Coming Home* and a funny montage illustrating how pelvic thrusting is often a route to MPAA scorn.

Dick's film is a fascinating guerilla documentary with some cheesy tactics along the way, but also makes fundamental points about how the incredible cultural power of the movies, a funnel of public consciousness, is more controlled than we know.