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Cinematic Narratives: Transatlantic Perspectives, edited by Morris Beja, Ellen Carol Jones, Cecilia Beecher Martins, José Duarte, and Suzana Ramos. Húmus, 2017, 335 pp.

David Klein Martins

Though cinema is often defined by national and culture-specific influences, in a highly interconnected global world it is near to impossible for a film to be fully bound to one place. Indeed, cinema almost always exists in relation to a wide array of international forebearers as well as contemporaries dialoguing with and building upon one another. The idea of a purely national cinema is further complicated when taking into consideration that a large percentage of movies are indeed distributed, produced and screened all over the world, in the process not only being made accessible but also, to different extents, made comprehensible to a variety of cultural differences.

Cinematic Narratives: Transatlantic Perspectives takes on an intricate journey to question the dynamic, and oftentimes blurred, relation between national and more globalised cinematic identities, conventions, as well as the lasting effects these can have on audiences. As stated in the introduction of the volume, these dynamics are of utmost interest as they not only reveal "how the local is both dominated by and yet effectively resists the global", but also because the transatlantic dimension of cinema ultimately can have more profound consequences by creating "spaces of alternative imagining, spaces of interrogation and intervention [that] can effect a hybrid moment of political change: the re-articulation, translation, transformation of authority" (11). Front and centre to this discussion stands the issue of diverse ways of border crossing, both in form of physical practices—as seen for instance in the endless journeys of migration that cross the Atlantic—and more intangible variations, which, amongst many others, include the transgression of traditional definitions of gender, nationality, race, and identity. Seeing that the matter at hand comprises a rather wide-ranging field of discussion, this anthology is divided into four sections, each featuring a selection of essays that focus on distinctive ways in which traditional boundaries can be subverted, in turn written by authors residing in countries from both sides of the Atlantic.

As the title of the first section "Cinematic Traditions" implies, this segment takes into consideration certain deep-seated filmic conventions as well as the breaking of the same. Beginning with an exploration of the importance that auteur theory still holds today, "Body Double: The Author Incarnate in the Cinema" dives deep into the history of ideas surrounding authorship as well as issues that arise when trying to pinpoint masterminds and individual creative markers within a filmmaking process. Grounding her essay in key theories on

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auteurism, Lucy Fischer glides into a discussion about the representation of fictional writers on screen that serve as body doubles for the actual filmmaker of a motion picture. To this end, the author takes a closer look at David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1991), a film that Fischer claims eventually gives us more glimpses into the director's life than into that of William Burroughs, whose biographical details loosely inspired this movie.

Another essential discussion that has engaged film studies ever since its inception is taken up next, namely that of genre. In "Many Came Running: Notes on Tradition in Classic American Film Melodrama", Mário Jorge Torres traces the origins of the American melodrama with utmost familiarity, revealing that the subgenre can be perceived as a crosscut between different art forms. In doing so, Torres provides ample evidence that the rural melodrama established itself as an all-American subgenre by principally adapting certain features of the nineteenth-century literary tradition of French and English Romantic melodrama, eventually turning into a staple of the American film landscape that has itself undergone many mutations over time.

When pondering on the most profound breaks with tradition in film history, the move from silent to sound film immediately comes to mind, a topic closely inspected in "Sounds of Silence: Sound in *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Artist*". In this essay, Maria Wojdylo examines the importance of body language and expression in silent film especially when used in dialogue to convey meaning. Hereby, the author focuses on Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) as well as Michel Hazanavicius' *The Artist* (2011), two movies about silent film stars struggling in a world in which talkies have taken centre stage. Considering a variety of scenes from both films, Wojdylo ventures deeper into critical discussions of silent and sound film throughout the history of cinema as well as the paramount significance of image and sound and the fusion of both occupy in cinematic tradition.

With growing popularity, adaptation studies has been establishing itself as an independent academic discipline in recent years. The general perception of this area of study is nonetheless still plagued by reductive ideas around adaptations-as-copies—perhaps best evident in how "a newspaper's cinema column or fan blog, for example, [quickly resorts to] the obvious 'not as good as the book' conclusion, whenever the subject is a filmic adaptation of a well-known novel" (95). In "Watching Austen, Reading Ourselves" Ana Daniela Coelho therefore tackles the often-ignored fact that adaptations are able to reveal certain particularities about the socio-cultural climate they were made in. To gain more insight into questions of reception and social impact, Coelho focuses on two contemporary adaptations of Jane Austen novels, the film *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) and the 2008 BBC TV miniseries *Sense & Sensibility*. Indeed, as the author concludes, both versions update Austen's stories by emphasising romantic storylines so as to meet modern expectations about relationships, love, and happiness—all characteristics in turn used to maximise profit by pleasing younger viewers.

Finally, this first section ends with "'You Like Watching?': Fear and Desire in the Films of Stanley Kubrick", in which Morris Beja provides an overview of Kubrick's oeuvre with the purpose of highlighting how the relationship between love (or sex) and death is found over and over again throughout his filmography, beginning with his early noir titles such as *Killer's Kiss* (1955) and ending with his final feature film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999).

Section 2, "Cinema, Social Translation, Politics" goes deeper into the topic of the crossing of political boundaries and the translation of filmic texts into diversified cultural realms. Accordingly, "Portuguese Americans on Screen: Hollywood Gone-a-Changing or the

Power and Persistence of Stereotypes?" takes up this idea by discussing the ethnic minority of Portuguese-Americans that has not only long been underrepresented and marginalised within the American filmic landscape but also in academic circles, thus granting this study a certain urgency and sense of originality. By looking at six American films, Reinaldo Francisco Silva delineates how representations of Portuguese immigrants have changed over the years from highly stereotyped depictions, to those of ethnic acceptance that, nonetheless, bear problematic characteristics of their own, especially in their treatment of the Other as an exotic curiosity that is never examined on a deeper level.

Longstanding stereotyped portrayals of a specific minority group are also reflected upon in "Locating a Post-Black Aesthetic in the Cinema of Spike Lee", in which Teresa Botelho discusses how controversial filmmaker Spike Lee tackles the ways popular culture has perpetuated racist imagery. Grounding her study on the history of African American filmic traditions, Botelho describes how, in his 2000 film *Bamboozled*, Lee is able to challenge deadlocked portrayals of blackness in America by providing multifaceted black experiences on screen. In other words, through the use of irony, Lee is able to unmask certain conventions and essentialised racial identities that dictate and censor how black Americans should be portrayed.

Censorship also becomes of central importance to "Manipulating Taboo in Film Discourse: The Case of Subtitling in Portugal". As Catarina Xavier demonstrates in this chapter, when it comes to translating subtitles, taboos often pose a great issue as they entail a plethora of obstacles: not only can literal translations of swearwords lose specific cultural signifiers in the process, but traditions surrounding taboos may also vary from country to country. To better demonstrate the issues that may arise, Xavier discusses three movies and the translation of swearwords therein to see how they are handled in the Portuguese context. Finally, Section Two ends with a more theoretical exploration by examining how method acting and modernist style, two seemingly opposed forms of expression, were skilfully joined in 1960s American cinema. Hereby, Jeffrey Childs particularly considers Peter Yates' movie *Bullitt* (1968) to plunge further into this question.

"Cinema, the Body, The Psyche", the third section of this anthology, delves into the breaking of corporeal as well as psychological boundaries. Accordingly, "Gestating Monstrosity: Cinematic Representations of Artificial Wombs" investigates science-fiction's fascination with altering reproductive functions of the human body, or rather the development of embryos in artificial environments outside the uterus. Indeed, as Aline Ferreira exemplifies, in the majority of cases where ectogenetic imagery is present in film, it is portrayed as threatening, dehumanising and technophobic, usually leading to disastrous or monstrous outcomes. Interestingly, as the author illustrates, this has significant repercussions in everyday life as our general understanding of artificial reproduction is highly influenced by negative depictions portrayed in film.

Prejudiced and one-sided representations that might have harmful effects on audiences are also considered in "Consuming Passions: Appetites for Sex, Food, and Love in Contemporary Romantic Comedy". As Emily Fox-Kales explains in this essay, due to certain patriarchal demands concerning the female body, American cinema has long shunned and policed representations of women's appetites for food and sex in (sub)genres that, in turn, predominantly target female audiences. The rejection of displaying women in an act of joyful consummation has the goal of teaching female audience members restraint so as not to fall into "excessive" behaviours. This essay therefore takes into account a wave of romantic comedies that allow their protagonists to dwell in the joy of eating. Yet, as the author skilfully explains

on the basis of Ryan Murphy's *Eat Pray Love* (2010), while permitting its female lead to take pleasure in food might appear quite subversive at first sight, romantic comedies seem to only legitimise female desire for consumption as long as it serves the narrative function of leading towards a happy ending in which the freedom of indulgence is tamed by monogamous heterosexual domesticity.

Fox-Kales' essay becomes all the more interesting when seeing its intersections with Cecilia Beecher Martins's "Mirrors and Open-Ended Questions in Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown*", as both choose the often-derided subgenre of the romantic comedy as a main focus, yet approach it in almost opposite ways. While Fox-Kales focuses on how certain stereotyped and imprisoning portrayals are still being upheld under the guise of "liberating" women, Beecher Martins is instead interested in the perks of watching a rom-com. Indeed, Beecher Martins embarks on a thought-provoking journey by joining neurobiology with film studies. Basing her discussion on theories that argue that human beings are biologically inclined to process narratives in ways that help to construct a sense of self and to handle certain issues in life, Martins measured the anxiety levels of an audience right before and after the screening of Cameron Crowe's *Elizabethtown* (2005). In follow-up interviews with the audience members, she detected a general reduction of anxiety levels, while further recognising that the movie actually helped some participants cope with difficult situations in life, such as unemployment or the death of a family member. Beecher Martins, therefore, chooses to look deeper into the structure of *Elizabethtown* to understand this phenomenon.

The section ends with two essays, each focusing on a different filmmaker whose work significantly influenced the independent film scene: Jim Jarmusch and Todd Haynes. In "Don's Journey: *Broken Flowers* by Jim Jarmusch" José Duarte offers us a well-informed synopsis of Jarmusch's road films. He outlines the distinctive characteristics which help to undermine the tradition of the subgenre, highlighting especially the slow pace, lack of linearity, and aimless quests. Drawing on these distinctive qualities helps to inform his close reading of Jarmusch's 2005 feature film *Broken Flowers*. While throughout the film the protagonist appears to be stuck in life, on closer examination the character's journey introduces a deeper meaning as it ultimately propels personal growth, and arguably even brings a new hope to his existence.

As implied in the title "'They Were Fictions!': Creating Fictions as a Way of Accessing Legends in Todd Hayne's *Velvet Goldmine* and *I'm Not There*", Helena Carneiro's article compares and contrasts two films by queer filmmaker Todd Haynes. Hereby, Carneiro dives into matters concerning the varied layers of constructing identities by pinpointing how personalities such as Dorian Gray, David Bowie, or Bob Dylan can never be recreated in any truthful way in film. This is due to the fact that, as she concludes, even in reality the public perception of these personas is merely based on performances and myths that have been created around them—and were therefore never authentic to begin with.

Having presented a wide-ranging scope of topics in almost kaleidoscopic fashion, *Cinematic Narratives: Transatlantic Perspectives* ends with a more focused chapter by concentrating on Irish filmmaker Thaddeus O'Sullivan, whose work more than often deals with the breaking of borders in different ways. In "'Heart-Mysteries There': The Films of Thaddeus O'Sullivan", Ellen Carol Jones offers a comprehensive deep dive into O'Sullivan's oeuvre, highlighting how the filmmaker continually returns to ideas and narratives about migration. Taking into consideration that, at least in Thaddeus O'Sullivan's filmmaking, Ireland was long marked by "isolation from the modern world, religious fervor, and societal proscription" (304), the idea of border-crossing in his films also touches upon the fact that the Irish national identity

has been greatly formed through foreign film and media. In order to provide a more expansive look into his work, this essay works closely with the subsequent interview Ellen Carol Jones and Morris Beja held with the filmmaker, in which not only are recurrent themes in O'Sullivan's filmography exposed (most conspicuously those concerned with immigration, memory and forgiveness), but also his biggest influences and his experience in working within the British film industry are addressed.

With great interdisciplinary appeal, *Cinematic Narratives: Transatlantic Perspectives* presents an amalgam of texts about various places, times, and socio-political backgrounds that deal with a whole range of diverse topics related to cinema. Its variety and focus on deconstructing traditional boundaries of film (as a medium and a larger industry) make it a thrilling and diversified read for both scholars interested in expanding their knowledge on specific film-related questions, as well as novices to the field of study looking for a collection of varied subject matters. Indeed, this anthology offers a great balance between topics that are deep-rooted in, yet still of current interest to film studies, and underrepresented innovative approaches in need of more exposure.

Even though the entire body of work presents utmost stimulating and thought-provoking ideas, and although the topic of transgressing and crossing boundaries can be found throughout, at times the transatlantic connection within a few essays could have been strengthened to better suit the general idea of this anthology. While the focus on specific directors and countries—particularly Ireland, Portugal, and the United States—might reduce the scope of this volume to a more narrowly defined idea of transatlantic exchange, it also opens up the much-needed discussion on the subject matter and allows for future publications to follow the work developed here. With this said, narrowing down the geographies of *Cinematic Narratives*, to a certain extent, also heightens the quality of the work as it prevents the anthology from drowning in the endless pool a wide-ranging topic such as transatlantic cinema represents by giving it a more concrete focus.

References

The Artist. Directed by Michel Hazanavicius, Studio 37, 2011.

Bamboozled. Directed by Spike Lee, New Line Cinema, 2000.

Bullitt. Directed by Peter Yates, Solar Productions, 1968.

Broken Flowers. Directed by Jim Jarmusch, Focus Features, 2005.

Eat Pray Love. Directed by Ryan Murphy, Columbia Pictures, 2010.

Elizabethtown. Directed by Cameron Crowe, Paramount Pictures, 2005.

Eyes Wide Shut. Directed by Stanley Kubrick, Warner Bros., 1999.

I'm Not There. Directed by Todd Haynes, Killer Films, 2007.

Killer's Kiss. Directed by Stanley Kubrick, Minotaur Productions, 1955.

Naked Lunch. Directed by David Cronenberg, Recorded Picture Company, 1991.

Pride & Prejudice. Directed by Joe Wright, Focus Features, 2005.

Sense & Sensibility. Prod. Anne Pivcevic, BBC, 2008.

Sunset Boulevard. Directed by Billy Wilder, Paramount Pictures, 1950.

Velvet Goldmine. Directed by Todd Haynes, Channel Four Films, 1998.

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