CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Introducing Transnational Cinemas
Authors	de la Garza, Armida;Shaw, Deborah
Publication date	2010
Original Citation	de La Garza, A. and Shaw, D. (2010) 'Introducing Transnational Cinemas', Transnational Cinemas, 1(1), pp. 3-6. doi: 10.1386/trac.1.1.3/2
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/index/ - 10.1386/trac.1.1.3/2http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/trac
Rights	© 2010, Intellect Ltd. This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Intellect Ltd in Transnational Cinemas. doi: 10.1386/trac.1.1.3/2
Download date	2026-10-30 08:17:06
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/2962



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

PDF Proof/Planman

TRAC 1 (1) pp. 3–6 Intellect Limited 2010

Transnational Cinemas
Volume 1 Number 1
© 2010 Intellect Ltd Editorial. English language. doi: 10.1386/trac.1.1.3/2

EDITORIAL

DEBORAH SHAW AND ARMIDA DE LA GARZA

Introducing *Transnational Cinemas*

The main reason for the genesis of a new journal is that there is a community of academics addressing and discussing issues with no natural home for their work. With the creation of this journal we aim both to provide that home and become the primary forum for debate for scholars in the developing field of transnational film studies. Historically, film studies has often been comfortable dealing in fairly narrow terms with boundaries determined by concepts of national cinema – perhaps because a strand within our discipline evolved from language departments, at least within anglophone education establishments. This approach has generated and continues to generate much fruitful research with authors from area studies backgrounds bringing specialized contextual knowledge to the study of cinema; nevertheless, national paradigms are shifting, and new questions are emerging which still necessitate specialized knowledge of national contexts, but now require further issues to be taken into account. Scholars are embracing the challenges of the opening up of borders within academia and within film-making, and are, at the same time, casting an historical eye back to the transnational practises that have often characterized film-making in both textual and industrial terms. This issue demonstrates the productive and exciting ways in which key academics in transnational film studies are formulating new questions and new responses.

We are not going to tackle the thorny issue of definitions here: the question 'What is transnational cinema?' can only lead us into an essentialist trap, whereby complexities are flattened in the search for over-simplified answers

TRAC 1.1 Editorial_03-06.indd 3 1/19/10 7:44:13 AM

PDF Proof/Planman

(an approach warned against by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim in this issue). While we will leave the in-depth theorizing of the term to our contributors in this and future issues, we can assert that what is needed is for theorists to tease out separate strands that have been conflated under the umbrella of transnational cinema in an attempt to distinguish between a number of key areas. These include industrial practices, working practices, historical factors, aesthetics, themes and approaches, audience reception, ethical questions, and critical reception. This is why we have given a great deal of thought to the possible research topics outlined in our aims and scope, which are worth reproducing here:

- Modes of production, distribution and exhibition
- Co-productions and collaborative networks
- New technologies and changing patterns of consumption
- Transnational film theories
- Migration, journeying and other forms of border-crossing
- Exilic and diasporic film-making
- Film and language
- Questions of authorship and stardom
- Cross-fertilization and cultural exchange
- Indigenous cinema and video and the cinemas of ethnic minorities
- Cultural policy
- The ethics of transnationalism
- Historical transnational practices
- Interrelationships between the local, national and the global
- Transnational and postcolonial politics

There are inevitably gaps, but from the above it is clear that this field, and thus the foci of our journal, is extremely broad; nevertheless, we are very aware of the danger of becoming the *Journal for Everything Studies*. We have already had to reject excellent articles that focus on aspects of national cinema or individual films, but which do not address questions relating to transnational film cultures. It is not that we seek to downgrade 'the national' in debates on contemporary film. Indeed, we hold with Higbee and Lim's contention that 'the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational film-making practices' (p. 10). What interests us in this journal is the relationship between the two terms in a range of contexts, and all of the articles included demonstrate the productive readings which emerge when this approach is taken.

We are delighted that the first issue of *Transnational Cinemas* features articles by some of the most respected scholars working in a number of key areas of the field, and we anticipate that their contributions will help to map transnational film studies and encourage further debate. The first article, by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, considers theoretical aspects of the use of the term transnational in cinema and lays the foundations for the articles that follow. The authors provide a thorough analysis of the different ways in which the concept of the transnational has been used in film studies, and identify some of the contradictions and problems, as well as insights, which have emerged through a critical survey of previous research in the area. They call for a critical form of transnationalism to 'help us interpret more productively the interface between global and local, national and transnational' (p. 10). The

TRAC 1.1 Editorial_03-06.indd 4 1/22/10 9:15:53 AM

PDF Proof/Planman

article manages to both interrogate and suggest a way forward in conceptualizing the transnational in film theory through a focus on diasporic and postcolonial cinemas and Chinese and East Asian cinemas, the two main areas of expertise of the authors.

Such an approach demonstrates that should the word 'transnational' continue to be used in the all-encompassing way that the authors critique, or simply as a synonym for 'international', it is bound to become a fad that will soon have had its day. On the other hand, if attention is paid to the way that the transnational allows film studies to address the changing relationship between cinema, states and nations, and explore the reconfiguration of cinematic landscapes through practices of globalization, it will become a promising area of research.

This is demonstrated in the following three pieces, all of which furnish ample empirical evidence that a focus on the transnational can be illuminating. Niamh Thornton's article 'YouTube: transnational fandom and Mexican divas', explores the ways in which YouTube, as a new cultural form, aids the transnational circulation of star texts. The focus of this piece is on YouTube videos of María Félix and Dolores del Río and, using interviews with YouTubers, the author explores the relationship between new technologies and the changing nature of globalized fan cultures.

The theme of technology and its impact on film production is taken up from a different perspective in Pam Cook's contribution. Using original research carried out in Australia, Cook deals with the vexed issue of the relationship between the national and the transnational in the film-making of Australian director Baz Luhrmann. The article includes an analysis of Luhrmann's career, his relationship with the Hollywood studios and the way his films are marketed and received. The author concludes that 'Luhrmann and his team actively engage with digital technologies and the complexities of global media production and consumption to give value and visibility to Australia as a local centre for creative endeavour' (p. 23).

Taking his cue from Raymond Williams' assertion that 'our hardest task, theoretically, is to find a non-metaphysical and non-subjectivist explanation of emergent cultural practice' (cited in Kerr, p. 38), Paul Kerr seeks to account for the rise of the network narrative in contemporary film production: an approach to film-making that takes on transnational dimensions in *Babel,* directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. Indeed, *Babel* is regarded by many as a quintessential transnational film, not only because of its narrative form and content, but also on account of its production processes. It intertwines four narrative strands that are set in three continents and includes a focus on travel, migration and border-crossing, and examines the theme of intercultural communication in a digitally-divided world. The post-Fordist practices of flexible accumulation that characterize what we might call 'the transnational moment' are embodied and find expression in *Babel*. Kerr carefully links the global production context of the film to its narrative structure and content: an analysis he presents in contrast with accounts that have focused on the cultural aspects and national contexts of film-making.

The third section of the issue is devoted to historical investigations of aspects of transnationalism in early cinema. Although many may think of co-productions as a relatively new phenomenon in Europe, closely linked to the evolution of the European Union, Andrew Higson's research presents the 1920s as a time in which a number of European companies established co-production arrangements – with the aim of competing with Hollywood film

TRAC 1.1 Editorial_03-06.indd 5 1/22/10 9:16:44 AM

PDF Proof/Planman

production and distribution. The study also examines the careers of some key film-makers who both worked in a range of national industries and explored transnational relations in their films. It includes a focus on Mihaly Kertesz who became Michael Curtiz following his move to Hollywood. The article also reassesses the 'Britishness' of a number of films of the period, which, in this light, come across as transnational productions.

The article by John Sedgwick and Mike Pokorny is an example of the way in which film history and film economics benefit from both a national and a transnational focus. The authors examine archival data on Hollywood's domestic and foreign earnings during the 1930s and build on, and challenge, previous research in this area. They argue that foreign markets were as central to home markets for the film industry in this period, and highlight the transnational commercial nature of early Hollywood, while also demonstrating the importance of domestic profits.

In sum, we have aimed for both breadth and depth in the coverage of transnational cinema and we have been fortunate to get a superb range of contributions that have made it possible to do just that. We hope our readers will find the material as engaging and inspiring as we have, and we look forward to continuing these exchanges in further issues of the journal.

TRAC 1.1 Editorial_03-06.indd 6 1/19/10 7:44:13 AM