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## Textual Practice

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## Book reviews

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## Book reviews

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### Roger Luckhurst

Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (Cultural Memory in the Present Series, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), xvii + 379 pp., £22.50 (pbk)

Rothberg's previous book, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000) was one of the stronger attempts to rethink the loud yet sterile debate that raged between Realists and Antirealists (the latter claiming that the Holocaust was unprecedented, unknowable, sublime). A judicious rethinking of trauma theory allowed Rothberg to navigate towards an aesthetic that registered the demands of reference and testimony, yet which grasped how trauma might disrupt conventional narrative and historiography. That book appeared in a crowded critical market that often fought over the same texts and critical resources. *Multidirectional Memory* marks a step-change, opening up a substantive new area in Holocaust studies and the growing body of memory and trauma theory with a persuasive attempt to link Holocaust remembrance to the history of post-war decolonisation in Europe. It is a provocative thesis, but works by the steady accumulation of a marginal or counter-tradition of texts that consistently interweave the legacies of colonial violence and Nazi genocide. Rothberg's book therefore cuts across the terms of the debate in Holocaust studies and resists the standard formulae of trauma theory but also manages to inject some new energy into post-colonial theory. If the book has the impact it deserves, it should produce significant new work in its wake.

In the introduction, Rothberg sketches out the predominant cultural situation where memory and memorialisation is conceived in largely competitive and exclusionary ways, a matter of conflict between different identity groups. So, for instance, influential writers and activists have held that the Holocaust is an exceptional and unique event, and that the very thought of comparison to other traumatic events diminishes the memory of the victims or even skirts denial. In America, liberal opponents of this stance have objected to the way the Holocaust memory has been deployed

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to ensure support of virtually any action of the Israeli state at the expense of Palestinian rights since the 1967 war or, even more controversially, has become used as a screen to avoid addressing American complicity in its own genocidal history. In an evocative image, Rothberg suggests it is as if competitive identitarian memory struggles for limited real-estate on Washington's memorial mile. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, opened in 1993, is a winning move: its very existence serves to block out any memorial to the millions of victims of slavery or the genocidal encounter of settlers with native Americans. Some of the most interesting cultural work on memorialisation has observed the consequences of this mode of competitive memory. In *Tangled Memories*, Marita Sturken has tracked how different veteran groups have argued over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, resulting in proliferating and fragmenting memorials around the site. To fix an image in stone is necessarily to foreclose other representations and generate controversy among competing identity groups.

Rothberg aims to displace this model of memory as a zero-sum game with what he terms 'multidirectional memory'. Breaking with shibboleths about singularity and exceptionality, Rothberg argues that traumatic memory is *intrinsically* comparative. His new term is meant 'to draw attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance' (p. 11). This is more than a simple awareness of historical causation – that, say, German army procedures for the extermination of the Hereros in West Africa from 1904 to 1907 were transposed, scaled up, and industrialised for the final solution of the Jewish Question 30 years later. This is only unidirectional historical memory. Rothberg strongly argues that traumatic memories explode this linear model of history: they shatter sequential time and are subject to 'restless rearticulations' (p. 16). The example that clinches his argument and is worked through in detail in the second half of *Multidirectional Memory* is that of the French post-war Holocaust memory. Rothberg concurs that 1961 was a crucial moment for the belated memories of the Holocaust to begin to be addressed across Europe. The impetus for this return is traditionally located in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, and the careful stage-management by the prosecution of over one hundred testimonies by prisoners from the camps (who were not yet called 'survivors'). Rothberg, however, suggests that in France the strong impetus in 1961 for the Holocaust memorial was the Algerian War and the sustained protest against systematic violence and torture of Algerians, culminating in the massacre of perhaps two hundred protestors in Paris on October 17, 1961 (exact figures have never been determined). For some intellectuals, antifascism, and anticolonialism coincided in this moment, although the Communist Party soon chose to forget the colonial question to

commemorate its own martyrs, nine communist protestors killed by police a few weeks later. This passage had a huge impact on French intellectual life, given the blanket ban on any representation of the war, prompting all kinds of interventions and texts. For Rothberg's argument, Charlotte Delbo is crucial. Delbo remains a central figure in Holocaust studies for her memoirs of her time as a political prisoner in Auschwitz, but she published her first book in 1961, a protest against the colonial violence of the French state in Algeria whose methods echoed those of the Nazis. Her memoirs on the concentration camps, published from 1965 (after waiting some 20 years), are actually full of comparative instances from the French in Algeria. These memories are multidirectional because protest against the contemporary events in Paris and Algiers are not simply modelled on prior events. Rather, it is the Algerian War that brings about *the very possibility* of the conditions of remembering the Holocaust, belatedly and comparatively. No Holocaust remembrance without Algeria coming 'first', as it were. This is what multidirectional memory means, 'how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites' (p. 11).

Rothberg adds another degree of complication, suggesting that we have only just begun to grasp this multi-temporal overlay in very recent years. In France, the massacre of October 17 was virtually erased from history, only to return in 1997, when the trial of the police prefect Maurice Papon began. Papon was on trial for his role deporting French Jews to Eastern concentration camps under the Vichy regime. Unbelievably, it transpired that he was also the police commander responsible for ordering the attack on Algerian protestors in 1961. Contemporary politics of memory, such as President Chirac's attempt in 2005 to pass a law limiting the teaching of colonial history in France only to positive accounts (the proposal was withdrawn), ensure that three time frames are in the picture, complexly overlaying traumatic memories and keeping them mobile. From the American context, Rothberg similarly hints that comparativists like himself may only have begun to see this counter-history as a product of a contemporary context in which American acts of intervention have produced their own traumatic and torturous results. Abu Ghraib juts up through this text on a couple of occasions, making for further multidirectionality. The French army, too, was partial to waterboarding suspicious-looking Arabs. These lost histories suddenly come into focus through the present emergency.

The great virtue of 'multidirectional memory' is that although it is a bid for a highly portable shorthand critical theory concept (much of this introduction first appeared in a stand-alone article in *Critical Inquiry* in 2006), it can really only be worked through in very specific and carefully elaborated contexts, such as the instance of October 1961 in France.

The other ambition of the book, however, is to trace out a much wider tradition of writing on the Holocaust that, from the very beginning of the post-war era, thinks about the camps in direct relation to the questions of race and colonialism. The establishment of this fragile other tradition and close readings from it is what takes up the early chapters of the book. Rothberg readjusts the focus of Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), reminding us that the book's central argument located the origins of German fascism in the imperialist logic of degrading the humanity of the colonised other in the late nineteenth century. This is a well-known and controversial text, but it is re-situated here in a reading paired with Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), which stages a similar argument, regarding the Nazi camps as a '*choc en retour*' (a shock that returns, usually translated as 'a boomerang effect') of procedures worked out in colonies. Rothberg plays up the strange temporal disturbances of trauma embedded in the term *choc en retour*, plausibly arguing that Césaire might have been familiar with Freud's sense of delayed or deferred after-effects attending a return of the repressed (Césaire moved in Surrealist circles when in Paris in the 1930s). This analysis is extended to Césaire's student, Franz Fanon, and his dynamic, multidirectional study of the trauma, differently played out for blacks and whites, of the colonial encounter and its violence. For Rothberg, these early attempts inevitably have their limits: Arendt risks locating Africa as a primitive 'heart of darkness' from which the possibility of genocide erupts; Césaire and Fanon often work with a generic category of 'whites' which cannot properly register what happens to the European Jew under Nazism.

In the chapters that follow, Rothberg uncovers a network of texts that explore this comparative ethic with more rigour. It is deeply impressive that time and again Rothberg locates essays and fictions that, however marginal, are clearly struggling to do something like the comparative work of multidirectional memory. A chapter is devoted to the visit of the African-American writer W.E. du Bois to the ruins of Warsaw in 1949, which prompted his essay 'The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto' in 1952 in the journal *Jewish Life*. Du Bois' reflections on 'double consciousness' are here folded into an investigation which allows the writer to crystallise both the atrocities of American slavery and the colour line and the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto as moving towards a mutual comprehension. Rothberg uncovers the largely forgotten work of André Schwartz-Bart, a Polish Jew who won brief fame in France for his transhistorical Jewish tale ending in the camps, *The Last of the Just* (1959). This work, he said, was explicitly inspired by Caribbeans from French colonies living in Paris, since their psychic adjustment to the historical trauma of slavery might provide a model for Jews. Schwartz-Bart married a writer from Guadeloupe, and set out to provide a 'planetary dimension' to the Holocaust by proposing

a story arc of novels that would encompass a world history of oppression. Rothberg has more sympathy with the contemporary writer Caryl Phillips, a second generation English-Caribbean writer, who has worked through his early identification with Jewish victims of the Holocaust as a means of figuring his own diasporic identity. As the focus moves to Algeria, the striking concrete examples of comparativism and multidirectionality keep on coming. Jean Rouche and Edgar Morin's film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) for the parallel intrusions into this study of everydayness of colonial dispossession and the round-up of Jews in the centre of Paris. Marguerite Duras' 'The Two Ghettos' asks a Warsaw ghetto survivor and an Algerian in Paris the same set of questions in a provocative act of comparison. *The Stone Face* (1963), a novel written by William Gardner Smith, an African-American journalist living in Paris, is one of the few texts to deal directly with the October 1961 massacre, and prompts the black protagonist to return to engage in the Civil Rights struggle in America at the end of the book. If these texts have been forgotten or overlooked, then Rothberg argues that it is because the paradigm of competitive memory has simply rendered this ongoing comparative effort invisible. The stronger argument is that this counter-tradition shows that the model of exclusion and exception emerges long *after* these cultural exercises in cross-identification and solidarity, and that we have lost some of the progressive chances implicit in this way of understanding the legacies of violence. The book culminates in a set of readings of recent texts that includes Michael Haneke's popular art-house film *Caché* (2005), read as a text that shatters the bourgeois self-satisfaction of a French intellectual through a *choc en retour* of the forgotten violence of October 1961 that shadowed his childhood. The events re-emerge as the early months of the invasion of Iraq unfold on TV screens in the domestic spaces of the film. Haneke's work provides Rothberg with a metaphor for this counter-tradition that has always been there but never been read collectively: it is all hidden, like traumatic legacies of violence, in plain sight. Disavowal produces cycles of violent repetition until such memories are directly addressed, but that means changing our point of focus. Competitive memory reinforces repression and ensures violent return; progressive comparative memory might do a better job than an arms race of identity groups competing over the gravity of their trauma.

Some similar work is beginning to emerge alongside Rothberg's project. In a special issue of the journal *Studies in the Novel* in 2008, Gert Buelens and Stef Craps brought together new work under the banner 'Postcolonial Trauma Novels'. In an acute afterword to that collection, however, Rothberg warned that he did not especially wish to see the simple rolling out of the trauma theory to new pastures of colonial violence and legacy. The point of multidirectionality is that the concepts of trauma

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or collective memory would necessarily be transformed by new colonial and post-colonial contexts. He is surely right to warn against a very specific psychological theory of trauma being extended indifferently across global contexts. At the same time, Rothberg takes aim at what he calls 'our scholarly moment and its turn towards extreme historicism'.<sup>1</sup> Rothberg's work mounts a strong defence of the resources of critical theory against historiographical 'particularism'. In *Multidirectional Memory* there is a similar, uncharacteristically belligerent tone against the historians, perhaps a hang-over from the 'theory wars' of the 1990s that were particularly intense around the question of representing and narrating the Holocaust. At a key point in the argument, Rothberg states that 'the exploration of historical causality is not the focus of my study', while conceding that working through just how colonial procedures of domination translated into European Nazism is 'crucial' (p. 102). His point is that conventional historiographical causation cannot cope with the 'boomerang' temporality of trauma. Even so, it seemed odd to me to separate his own work as theoretical 'conceptualisation and configuration' when the argument of his book is at its most vital when historical specificity grounds the theoretical sophistication and when it digs into the fine grain of the texts that it reads. This, however, is only the tiniest gripe with a book that could help bring about an important change in the paradigm of both memory studies and post-colonial theory.

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## Note

- 1 Michael Rothberg, 'Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response', *Studies in the Novel* 40(1 & 2) (2008), pp. 224–234, 229.

## Robin Bagon

Martin McQuillan, *Deconstruction After 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2009), 216 pp., £65.00 (hbk)

If deconstruction once stood widely accused of political quietism,<sup>1</sup> then Martin McQuillan's latest book underlines just how successfully the political discourse of deconstruction has now been developed and disseminated. For by the end of *Deconstruction After 9/11*, rather than question whether there is a politics of deconstruction, it seems more pertinent to ask whether there can be a politics *without* deconstruction. This book convincingly



argues that a politics worthy of the name must actively engage with and mobilise Derrida's rich and nuanced political vocabulary, including the terms 'autoimmunity', 'democracy to come', a 'justice that does not wait' and 'messianicity without messianism' in a manner which would radically transform politics as we know it. McQuillan develops the question of deconstruction and politics through varied and multifocal analyses of the historical and political events of Europe and beyond, since the fall of communism. In doing this, the book is exemplary of the task which it calls for, namely, 'to provide critical readings of singular events as they arrive monstrous and misshapen in the present' (p. 90). Highly readable and engaging, this book takes on the formidable task of sketching out a practical politics of deconstruction, a politics which resists programmes, calculation, and dogma and which remains open to an unknowable future.

McQuillan is a key figure in the field of politics and deconstruction and although this is his first full-length work on the subject, it follows his editorship of *The Politics of Deconstruction* (2007) and *Deconstruction Reading Politics* (2008), both of which present a range of essays from distinguished academics. This book adds impressively and with clarity to discussions of deconstruction and politics such as Richard Beardsworth's account of violence and the deconstructability of the law in *Derrida and the Political* (1996), and Michael Naas' detailed reading of autoimmunity in *Derrida From Now On* (2008). McQuillan's reading of politics and deconstruction is particularly engaging in that it responds directly and specifically to particular moments in contemporary politics, developing the figure of autoimmunity to offer impressive readings of the suicidal tendencies of politics today, from Guantanamo Bay to the discourse of multiculturalism in Britain. This self-defeating inclination is also used to present a striking and detailed analysis of the construction of international law. Rather than homing in on the second Iraq war, it is the NATO-led intervention in Kosovo which McQuillan sees as a far more decisive moment in international politics, an event he describes as establishing 'important principles of international non-law' (p.22). This law without law is the aporetic establishment of a law which suspends law. The Kosovo intervention therefore exposes the world to the risk of a total absence of law. It positions the NATO nations as a kind of international mafia with an almost unbounded potential to harm, not least, themselves.

The first of McQuillan's deconstructive gestures is evoked in the title of his book. Commenting on the 'singular and essentially repeatable' (p. 3) characteristic of dates, he suggests that '9/11' might refer to at least three dates: the 2001 attacks on America, the 1973 military coup in Chile, and the 1903 birth date of Theodor Adorno. After a further page of '9/11's, ranging from the 1919 US invasion of Honduras to 'the unaccountable



number murdered on the orders of Ceausescu in Timisoara', we begin to understand that this book is not to be concerned with an America-centred politics which understands the attacks on the World Trade Center as representing a paradigm shift in global politics. Indeed, if McQuillan has a primary geographical focus, it is on Europe. He has a particular interest in Central and Eastern European states, the latter of which he sees as being in a state of deconstruction, that is, in flux and at risk of collapse at the hands of contradictory internal and external forces. This connection between deconstruction and Eastern Europe is traced back to *Specters of Marx* (1993)<sup>2</sup> in which Derrida links the development of deconstruction with the collapse of communism from the 1950s. What is suggested here and elsewhere is that not only does deconstruction provide a powerful way to read what we call '9/11', but that the forces of deconstruction are evident in the fall of the Soviet union, the Vietnam war, the states of Eastern Europe, and in the politics of Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, and America today.

Unlike many radical critiques of Western politics and globalisation, *Deconstruction After 9/11* does not attempt to debunk Western politics *en masse*. Following Derrida's respect for a 'certain post-Enlightenment Europe', McQuillan's compelling account of the West is that 'it is not Western enough' (p. 10), that it fails to live up to the democracy which is putatively at its heart, that while its ideals are not at fault, they are too often compromised by the politics of nationalism and economic privilege. Hence McQuillan sees hope in the European Court of Human Rights as an organisation which circumscribes the sovereignty of European nation states in the name of democracy. In addition, he calls for the establishment of a sovereign international court as the only hope for a move towards world justice and as a part of the deconstruction of the ontotheological foundations of nation states. McQuillan, however, does not merely call for change. Instead, he advocates what he calls 'textual activism', a practice which the book exemplifies. This form of writing derives from Derrida's thinking regarding the university without condition.<sup>3</sup> Premised on an academic freedom that insists on the right to say anything, it situates the scholar beyond the control of state power in a way which can only compromise that power. McQuillan describes the textual activist as the 'scholar-without-condition' (p. 32), who finds strength in utter powerlessness. With this gesture, he underlines the importance of the university's role, which he conceives as a ceaseless engagement with politics.

This book is most inventive and persuasive where it seeks to think through what might be considered a practical politics of deconstruction. Yet, as Geoffrey Bennington points out in his essay 'Derrida and the Political',<sup>4</sup> the metaphysical nature of the concept of politics means

that there can be no Derridean politics as such. And so having dismissed the possibility of a 'Derrida Party', McQuillan's move is to suggest that the best place for a deconstructive politics would be in the area of policy. In typical fashion, he begins by deconstructing this term, exposing policy's basic assumption as 'the logo-rhetorical illusion par excellence that theory translates (and is translatable in principle) into practice'. Thus having demonstrated the various absurdities of this 'discourse of stupidity' (p. 82), McQuillan advocates the concept of 'counter-policy', conceived as an intervention which would 'set policy making against itself. To make policies to which policy was itself allergic' (p. 83). This impossible policy, without a telos, without a programme, without policy as such, would be concerned with a democracy which remains to come, a quasi-transcendental notion of justice (which renders the very notion of policy-making unstable), and sovereignty decentred by an inability to master or control the other. The oppositional force of this policy is such that it would be incompatible with political culture which McQuillan describes as 'untenable' and would instead require the removal and rethinking of the entire apparatus of Western political culture. McQuillan's call for the establishment of a 'counter' think tank (perhaps called the International Forum of Philosophy and Policy) demonstrates that there are practical ways for deconstruction to engage with politics while once more underlining the importance of thought as a political act.

The epigraph to the book's introduction reads 'I hope that there will be, "in Europe", "philosophers" able to measure up to the task . . .' Taken from Derrida's most overt response to '9/11',<sup>5</sup> this wish is one which calls McQuillan to account throughout the book. 'The task', as McQuillan sees it, is to engage ceaselessly with what is done, said and thought in the name of politics, mobilising Derrida's writings to respond to and analyse the world that we find ourselves in. While Derrida sees this as the task of the philosopher–deconstructor, McQuillan expands this subject position to the 'reader-theoretician-philosopher-deconstructor-political-citizen' (p. 90), refusing to distinguish between an engagement with deconstruction and an engagement with politics. McQuillan writes with one eye on the notion that 'once . . . the last bullet has been spent, it is philosophy which carries on speaking' (p. 170), and it is with this thought that we come to understand the unbounded responsibility of 'the task'. Philosophy goes beyond. Like literature, it has the right to say anything, it is without limit. McQuillan is also insistent, ultimately, on its power: 'give it a couple of hundred years and philosophy changes everything' (p. 18). Written in his characteristically witty and lucid prose, McQuillan's *Deconstruction After 9/11* is a profound and politically radical book which calls,

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through clear, direct, and incisive readings of Derrida, for nothing short of the unending re-thinking of Western politics.

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## Notes

- 1 See for example: Terry Eagleton, 'Marxism and Deconstruction', *Contemporary Literature*, 22:4 (1981), pp. 477–488.
- 2 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006).
- 3 Jacques Derrida, 'The Future of the Profession or the University Without Condition', in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24–57.
- 4 Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derrida and the Political', in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 5 Jacques Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and symbolic suicides', in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 85–136.

## Chiara Alfano

Sean Gaston, *Starting With Derrida: Plato, Aristotle and Hegel* (London/New York: Continuum, 2007), 223 pp., £12.99 (pbk)

Sean Gaston's *Starting With Derrida* is not your average introductory book on Jacques Derrida. This is signposted by the fact that he not once mentions 'deconstruction' – an ellipsis that its unwilling father would have liked. What most distinguishes *Starting With Derrida* from other secondary literature on the subject is first that Gaston combines literary perceptiveness with thorough and lucidly expressed knowledge of philosophy and its history, and second Gaston's choice to tackle the early part of Derrida's oeuvre: his dissertation on Husserl *The Problem of Genesis* (1953–1954), his introduction to Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* (1961–1962), 'Cogito and the History of Madness' (1963), 'Violence and Metaphysics' (1964), *Writing and Difference* (1963–1967), *Dissemination* (1982–1972) and *Glas* (1974) among others. Considering that Derrida's work has from the beginning been more welcomed in literary circles than in philosophical ones, this choice is a doubly bold one. In looking to Derrida's work on Aristotle, Plato, and Hegel for an introduction, Gaston is reminding us that Derrida in fact inhabits a philosophical territory that is as often

as not denied him. Gaston is also turning away from Derrida's more popular material on literature to a realm in which many students of literature would perhaps not feel at home. The absence of that latter part of Derrida's work – what some call the 'ethical' or 'political turn' – may meet with wonder. In focusing on Derrida's early work and in interspersing his own re-reading of it with citations and links to his later work, Gaston elegantly shows that what is often thought to have come later in Derrida was already there in the beginning: in Derrida the realms of literature, politics, and philosophy are always intertwined. In giving us a fresh perspective both on Derrida's philosophical roots and his penchant for reading and philosophising with and about literature, Gaston's book thus fills an important gap in Derrida studies, which is itself about gaps. Neither merely alluding to the philosophical readings or context in which most of Derrida's philosophy happens, nor taking them as read, Gaston embarks on the difficult task of producing a book that wishes to speak simultaneously to a philosophical and a literary audience. At its most ambitious, *Starting With Derrida* wants to create a new literary-philosophical reader.

Gaston's project hinges on the conviction that to start with Derrida one must go back to the three philosophers populating the space behind the column of Gaston's title: Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel. This might seem counter-intuitive, but Gaston's approach is justified by the fact that Derrida is first of all a reader and then a writer, and second that many of the key concepts of his philosophy both take root and are illustrated by his early readings. Hence, going back to the philosophers who came before him and in the readings from which many Derridean concepts emerge, seems only logical. But 'going back' here means more than returning to a beginning. When Derrida went back to Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, but also Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas, he did not simply 'go back', but rather produced readings that turn back and 'startle' themselves (p. 168). When Gaston writes about starting by 'going back', he refers to the movement of what Derrida calls *palintrope*<sup>1</sup>: not only starting and ending in the same way, but starting again differently, thereby 'startling' itself and losing its 'logos' (p. viii). Losing the 'logos' here means also losing 'Being', losing 'the present' or 'the Origin'. Going back to the roots of philosophy with Derrida, Gaston reminds us, means following 'a turning backwards that happens more than once, a turning backwards that – already – repeats, splits, doubles and exceeds itself' (p. viii). The importance of the notion of *palintrope* as introduced by Derrida and then taken up by Gaston is that it makes the movement that resurfaces again and again in Derrida's writing, each time under a different guise, i.e. *dif-férance* or iteration etc., to an integral part of the writing and reading of philosophy.

With Derrida there are no shortcuts and the value of Gaston's account lies in his understanding of this. Some philosopher's might see this palintropic style as a ground for criticism – claiming that it smacks of a lack of philosophical rigour, which in turn allows Derrida to hide behind his obfuscations. But Derrida's palintropics, Gaston argues, are not a stylistic flourish but an integral part of his philosophy and of how Derrida understands philosophy in general to work: Hegel and Husserl 'go back' to Plato, Parmenides, and Aristotle. Plato 'goes back' to Socrates, Socrates 'goes back' to Plato. As Gaston shows in the second part of his book, which consists of a palintropic re-reading of phenomenology through Hegel, Husserl and Aristotle's *De Anima*, Aristotle goes back on himself, encircling the history of philosophy in metaphysics. The matter/ potentiality and form/actuality dichotomy, on which *De Anima* is founded, is a fallacious one. As Gaston writes: 'Potentiality – force, dynamics – is always an eschatology and a teleology on its way (back) to an archeology' (p. 100).

From the start the path's of philosophy, Derrida argues, are palintropic. This is, for Derrida, where the literariness of philosophy comes in. Surveying Derrida's early readings and re-inscriptions of Plato and Aristotle, Gaston convincingly argues that Derrida's notion of a 'history – of literature' suggests 'a different way of starting again with metaphysics' (p. 83). Derrida's philosophy does not work against 'the displacement of the first place, the origin or first principle' (p. 33) as the term 'deconstruction' might suggest. By visiting and re-visiting Aristotle, Plato, and Hegel among others, Derrida works *with* philosophy's 'displacement of the first place'. As the dash, itself a graphic mark tracing *palintropics* – inserted between 'history' and 'of literature' – indicates, Derrida's way of doing philosophy always takes into account that history (hence the history of philosophy, the way it is bequeathed and inherited) never simply 'is' because every ontology 'always starts – with itself' (p. 29). Gaston writes:

The line, the train *en retrait* that Derrida marks between 'the history – of literature', between a history *of* literature and a literature *of* history, is always with-drawing, retreating and repeating and exceeding itself, re-marking a *gap* that is at once irreducible and ungraspable. The gap, the trait between 'the history – of literature' *moves* – it oscillates, exposing history *to* literature and literature *to* history, without one ever resolving itself entirely into the other or without one separating itself entirely from the other – without rest. (pp. 58–59)

*Starting with Derrida* is not an easy book to read, but then again what Gaston is writing about is not easy. Gaston's talent lies in giving clarity

to complexity and having the courage not to shy away from the *palintropes* of Derrida's writing. An introduction to Derrida that does not take them into account might have been easier to read but it would soon have proved a false friend. The fact that *Starting With Derrida* itself consist of a series of back- and forth-trackings, of course, presents its own problems. Gaston's palintropic strategy embeds famous, and at times notorious, Derridean concepts to the readings in which Derrida formed them. The flipside of such a thorough approach is, however, that Gaston has to some extent opened a palintropic can of worms: as few other books on the subject, *Starting with Derrida* makes you face the fact that you will never be done with starting with Derrida. This can, of course, be read as a strength, as a proof of Gaston's command and understanding of the Derridean opus. Somebody who might really be just starting with Derrida, however, will be in danger of losing direction and heart. But while it is perhaps not especially suitable for raw beginners, *Starting With Derrida* is a must-read for all those interested in how Derrida reads and re-reads Heidegger, Hegel, Husserl, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as those who have a background in literature but would like more firmly to anchor their understanding of Derrida in the literature – of philosophy.

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### Note

- 1 Jacques Derrida, 'Cogito and the History of Madness', *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 62.

### Lara Cox

Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 254 pp., £17.75 (pbk)

Lacanian theory, in recent years, has suffered a bad press, at least in terms of its application to reading film. Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', by associating the Lacanian mirror stage with the film spectator's experience, paved the way for the interlinking of psychoanalysis and cinema. Yet, after a mass of Lacanian film theorists in the 1970s who followed in Mulvey's wake, the popularity of this body of theory in film studies dwindled. Todd McGowan, in a 2003 article, pinpointed the reason for this, arguing that early Lacanian film theory was based on a misreading of Lacan's work itself. McGowan laments: 'The

point should be made that film theory is not yet Lacanian enough. Rather than minimizing Lacan's influence, we should proffer a genuinely Lacanian film theory'.<sup>1</sup> By this, McGowan means that Mulvey *et al.* assumed that the gaze belonged purely to the Imaginary realm. Consequently, it propped up a film spectator's subject position in dominant ideology. Following this logic, Lacanian theory offered little hope for the development of a subversive mode of film spectatorship. McGowan above argues that this resulted from a misunderstanding of Lacan. The gaze, which Lacan never mentioned in his article on the mirror stage, was not Imaginary but an example of the *objet petit a*. This latter is translated as an 'object-cause of desire'. The gaze, as the *objet a*, propels a subject's flow of desire in the visual field. The *objet a* arises out of the subject's confrontation with the linguistic and ideological Other in the process of interpellation. The object-cause of desire, as the term implies, is aetiological rather than teleological. It is unknowable, invisible, and vanishes when we believe that we have attained it. Ultimately, and this is what McGowan stresses above, the *objet a* is a remainder of the Real, this latter being the unsignifiable realm of subjectivity that undermines the ideological stranglehold of the Other. McGowan argues that early film theorists missed the potential of the Lacanian gaze, because they misconstrued it. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* is McGowan's own response to his above demand for a 'genuinely Lacanian film theory'. By focusing on the gaze as related to an encounter with the Real, the author rescues Lacanian theory from its potential demise in film studies. He shows how a theorisation of the gaze, by turning back to Lacan's seminars, offers film spectatorship a radical edge.

McGowan devises a politics of cinema based on 'deployments of the gaze'. His work can be situated in terms of other recent Lacanian interventions in aesthetics and the arts. For instance, Jennifer Friedlander's *Feminine Look: Sexuation, Spectatorship, Subversion* (2008) provides a corrective to earlier Lacanian film theorists by seeking out the radical potential of the *objet a* and feminine spectatorship. Alenka Zupancic in *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (2008), in a similar vein, proposes that there is subversive potential within comedy if the impossible *objet a* is kept separate from the master signifiers that tend to marry comedy to dominant ideology.

For McGowan, it is both the formal and thematic elements of film that determine the influence of the gaze on spectatorship. Either film bolsters dominant ideology, or the filmic gaze is deployed in such a way as to undercut the Other. The former dupes the spectator into believing that desire is satiable, that the Other provides complete satisfaction by way of fantasy. The latter is achieved by underscoring the impossibility of desire. In this cinematic system, fantasy is desire's pale imitation.



Broadly, McGowan differentiates an ideologically complicit Hollywood, narrative cinema from the subversive potential offered by the European, non-narrative cinema of directors such as Agnes Varda, Alain Resnais, and Andrei Tarkovsky. The author provides a comprehensive systematisation of cinema, drawing together a large range of geographically and historically disparate films (including Fellini's *8½*, Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind*).

One of the main strengths of this work lies in McGowan's focus on the particularities of each film and director. The author identifies four modes of cinema, each one having differing political valence: 'the cinema of fantasy', 'the cinema of desire', 'the cinema of integration' and 'the cinema of intersection'. The author contextualises each self-styled cinematic system both in terms of psychoanalytic theory and socio-historical issues. For instance, early film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein as well as the work of Slavoj Žižek inform and enrich McGowan's reading of the 'cinema of fantasy'.

Although he clearly sides politically with a cinema that is able to stress the impossibility of desire and the spuriousness of fantasy, McGowan gives each cinematic system a fair trial. He places, for example, *The Wizard of Oz* in the section 'The Cinema of Integration: The Marriage of Desire and Fantasy', indicating that desire is collapsed into the ideological fantasy propounded by the Other. Nonetheless, McGowan seeks out the political potential within this film. The author explains that even though this film deals with an utopian fantasmatic space of Oz, for the most part, this is kept separate from the protagonist Dorothy's world of unsated desires in Kansas. Formal aspects such as the separation of the monochrome Kansas from the resplendent Technicolor of Oz help to stress this fundamental disjunction between desire and fantasy. It is only at the end, McGowan argues, that fantasy and desire are conflated and are presented as homogeneous. This perpetuates what McGowan identifies as a Hollywood dictum that the impossible is possible, that the dominant ideology can answer the subject's desire. Dorothy, ultimately, derives equal or even more satisfaction when she returns to the previously lacking Kansas, implying that the object of desire is an 'empirical possibility'.

McGowan's chapter on the films of D.W. Griffith shows in concrete and tangible terms how the film can exploit its spectators to perpetuate extra-filmic oppression and discrimination. McGowan argues that by employing the filmic device of suspense, the director eliminates the uncomfortable impossible object-cause of desire that undermines ideology. As such, Griffith, by harnessing form and content in films such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, is able to lull the spectator into a false sense of security that the Other provides all the answers. This, McGowan posits,

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strengthens the racist and sexist undercurrents of the film. This chapter, albeit briefly, demonstrates the concrete ways in which ideology can assert its grip on the spectator. The author's argument of the radical potential of the Lacanian gaze in the cinema is made all the more cogent by examples such as this.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that McGowan's readings emerge from a strict adherence to Lacanian thought. Rob Lapsley and others have noted the limitations of Lacanianism: 'its reductionism; its pernicious sexual politics; its philosophical naivete – more precisely what Derrida famously termed its "phallogocentrism"; and, following Deleuze, its life-denying misunderstanding of the nature of desire'.<sup>2</sup> At times, McGowan risks over-simplifying his arguments by overlooking such charges. The author's dogmatic application of the Lacanian theory to film sometimes risks proffering a conservative version of a Lacanian politics, such as in his analysis of pornography: 'The oft-noted tedium of the porn film stems from its obfuscation of the objet petit a in the effort to explore it. Pornography fails because the gaze, the objet petit a in the field of the visible, is irreducible to the field of the visible itself (p. 28)'.

This is nonetheless a comprehensive work that showcases not only the radical potential of the Lacanian theory but also the importance of films as an instrument of politics. McGowan's attention to the ethical implications of the cinematic gaze, as well as the particularities of spectatorship justify the return to a reading of filmic spectatorship through a Lacanian lens.

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## Notes

- 1 Todd McGowan, 'Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and its Vicissitudes', *Cinema Journal* 42:3 (2003), p. 44.
- 2 Rob Lapsley, 'Cinema, the Impossible, and a Psychoanalysis to Come', *Screen* 50 (Spring, 2009), p. 15.

## Rachel Potter

Peter Brooker & Andrew Thacker (eds), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume one, Britain and Ireland 1880–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 976 pp., £95.00 (hbk)

The proliferation of little magazines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries formed part of more general shifts in the publishing

industry. While there was a notable move towards producing books and newspapers for the mass market – the circulation of daily newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, for instance, hit one million in 1903 –, the publishing industry also became fragmented and specialised in order to direct books and journals towards specific target readers. The creation of avant-garde or modernist little magazines, whose central role in the sponsorship of modernist writing has long been recognised, forms part of this latter trend.

There is an extensive and long-standing literature – starting with the ground-breaking 1947 book by Hofmann, Allen and Ulrich on *The Little Magazine* – detailing the artistic enthusiasms, collaborations and in-fighting which surrounded little magazines such as *The New Freewoman* (later *The Egoist*), *Blast* and *The Little Review*. The dependence of these financially shaky publications on the goodwill of generous benefactors and fickle readerships has also been well-documented. Less notorious, or less obviously ‘little’ magazines have also been the focus of specialised studies, and there have been a number of excellent books in this area, such as Francis Mulhern’s *The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’* (1979) and Jason Harding’s book on Eliot’s editorship of *The Criterion* (2002).

But might it be worth considering the expansion and particular features of literary magazine publications, rather than simply ‘Little Magazines’, in the early twentieth century, and their role in the creation of modernism more generally? Can literary magazines be said to represent a coherent materialist base for the production and dissemination of modernist writing? If so, what were the common features, and how did they shape the work they produced? Indeed, was the relationship between modernism and the literary magazine a shaping one, or was it more fragmentary and idiosyncratic? And how did the materialist conditions of this relationship impact on the essays and claims made in these journals, or elsewhere, about the relationship between the magazine, art, and the market?

Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s new, magnificently produced *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume one, Britain and Ireland 1880–1955* takes on the task of answering these questions, or at least, of providing a platform for new research on a large number of literary magazines produced in Britain and Ireland between 1850 and 1951. The book is composed of an impressive 37 essays by leading scholars in the study of nineteenth and twentieth century literature. It is volume one of a three-volume project on Modernist magazines. The next two books will cover North America 1880–1955 and Europe 1880–1940.

In a book of this size and with this many contributions it is bound to have a slightly fragmentary feel. The editors have judiciously split the book into ten largely chronological sections and provided introductory essays to

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each. There is also a more general 26 page Introduction which details existing debates on the modernist magazine and contextualises the essays that follow.

The book will be an invaluable resource for the study of modernist culture. I particularly enjoyed the sheer level of detail of many of these essays, a focus that the editors had clearly encouraged. Such minute scrutiny brings alive the historical activities of editors and publishers in the period. There are some brilliant individual contributions. Some of them work to summarise and extend previously published work, such as Laura Marcus's essay on the film magazine *Close Up*, Jason Harding's discussion of Eliot's editorship of *The Criterion*, Jean-Michel Rabaté's analysis of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist* and Sean Matthews' essay on *Scrutiny*. Others are fresh and serve to add to our understanding of magazine production in the period, such as Rod Mengham's account of the late 1930s/early 1940s British Surrealist magazines *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, *London Bulletin* and *Arson: An Ardent Review*, Peter Brooker's essay on *The Blue Review* and *The Signature*, Andrew Thacker's discussion of *Coterie*, *New Coterie* and *The Owl* and James Kerry's concluding essay on M.J. Tambimuttu's editorship of *Poetry London* (1939–1951) and *Indian Writing* (1940–1942) during the war and after.

I have two main questions about the book, both of which relate to its overall rationale. The book clearly styles itself as a kind of compendious cultural historical resource for the study of modernism. In the General Introduction, the editors provide two extremely helpful tables, one detailing a timeline for selected periodicals 1908–1919 and the other giving the prices of selected periodicals 1850–1950. I would have liked more of this kind of information. These tables acted as a kind of taster for what could have been a more thorough synthesis of the material details of magazine production and dissemination contained in the volume. It would have been incredibly interesting to have tables showing information such as the following: amount paid to contributors – even if this was the detail about the range of fees paid or the fact that contributors were not paid at all; geographical scope of circulation (i.e. was the journal distributed across England only? Did it travel to the USA? To Ireland? To France?); what kind of circulation? (i.e. was it circulated through particular outlets or through subscription only?), and numbers of copies circulated. The volume, in its self-styled resourcefulness, seems to head in this direction; only to stop short somehow. As it stands, some essays carefully document details of fees and distribution; others do not.

Secondly, considering the book's claim to be a 'critical and cultural history of modernist magazines' there is something odd about the dates covered by this book. The study effectively begins in 1850 with a discussion of *The Germ* and ends in 1951 with James Kerry's analysis of *Poetry*

*London* (1939–1951). There is a bit of a jump between the opening section of the book ‘Victorian Precursors’ and ‘*Fin De Siècle* Ventures’, with the rather isolated study of *The Germ* acting as a beginning point for the book. Both sections are less strong than later ones, partly because their position is slightly anomalous. There is an understandable anxiety in these essays – given the title of the book – to claim nineteenth century magazines as precursors, in one form or another, to modernist ‘little’ magazines. Unless there is a fairly solid agreement that the modernist magazine is quite a specific thing – something that the book as a whole seems keen to demystify – this does not really make sense as an argument. The organising principle of the essays included in the volume is surely historical, rather than conceptual: the strength of the volume lies less in claiming that the scope and aims of *Blast* and *The Athenaeum* can be synthesised; more in the idea that they are distinct forms of literary publishing which emerged in a particular historical period and which both contribute to the development of the arts.

As the volume progresses, such worries fall away and writers get on with the business of analysing the fascinating details of personal connections, editorial, and fund-raising decisions, and, above all, on the fantasies about group cohesion and potential readerships which often seemed to drive editors in the initial stages of launching magazines.

It is in its revelation of the details about the last of these things that this volume really makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the arguments and ideas, rather than just the materiality, of modernist writing. It has long been recognised that the essays and fictional works published in modernist little magazines were often overtly hostile to the mass market books and newspapers that emerged alongside them. Despite this, some of the editors of these same magazines were canny manipulators of the marketplace. One key element of their success was the ability to identify, cater to, and create a sufficiently specific and self-defining intellectual readership. Even if the content of many of the magazines that emerged in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, were stridently hostile to the market, then, editors were forced to consider their target readerships. In the debates and fantasies about readerships which many of the essays in this volume bring alive, we get a hugely significant insight into the intellectual coordinates informing particular moments in British literary culture. Rod Mengham’s essay, to take one example, provides a fascinating account of the distinctively London-based mix of elements that worked to define British Surrealism in the late 1930s and early 1940s, a definition which was partly forged through editorial discussions about readerships.

This book is hugely important in the way that it brings such histories alive, partly because the effects of these histories were significant in the

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development of later trends in British poetry or prose. I look forward to the next two volumes.

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## Leigh Wilson

Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), viii + 236 pp., £50.00 (hbk)

Wittgenstein famously ends his *Tractatus*, the English translation of which came out in 1922, the *annus mirabilis* of modernism, with the assertion that over those things about which we cannot speak – ethics, God, religion, the mystical – we must pass in silence. Certainly a silence of some kind has cast itself over the question of religion in relation to the central writers of European modernism. As Pericles Lewis argues early in his riposte to this silence, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, narratives of both modernism and the novel have conventionally seen secularism as their *sine qua non*. Lewis locates these narratives in what he calls a wider ‘secularization thesis’ which ‘characterizes the emergence of modernity as the result of increasingly rational modes of thought and a rejection of belief in the supernatural’ (p. 23). While this thesis may be assumed indeed to silence any talk of religion’s continued relevance, Lewis disturbs such a straightforward relation between speech and silence by linking his own ‘secularisation thesis’ to Foucault’s ‘repressive hypothesis’. In both, the West in the twentieth century sees itself as liberated from an injunction not to speak (about sex, or about the absence of God), and sees itself as the first to speak freely about such taboo subjects. However, as Foucault challenges the ‘repressive hypothesis’ by demonstrating the prolixity of the nineteenth century on matters of sex, so Lewis asks: ‘If the modern age has so comfortably dispensed with the supernatural, why do we continue to produce so much discourse about the need to abandon it, from Nietzsche and Freud through the existentialists to the post-structuralist critique of “grand narratives” and the “metaphysics of presence”?’ (p. 27).

Lewis’s study is not, of course, the first to link modernism and the supernatural. The disinterment of such a relation has become a particularly strong area in the general historicist reconsideration of modernism over last few decades. Works by Timothy Materer, Leon Surette and Helen Sword, among others, have shown, in very different ways, how intensely modernism is imbricated with various aspects of the occult, and how significant these imbrications have been in the development of modernist artistic

practices. However, such studies tend to assume that such occult interests – in spiritualism, in theosophy, in mysticism and so on – have their origins in the outright rejection of more orthodox forms of religion. In contrast, Lewis's study of five modernist novelists – Henry James, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce – and their representation of religious experience shatters any doubts about either the illusory nature of a secular silence or the limiting of modernist interest to the heterodox. He mines from their work an extraordinary cacophony: Biblical language, Christian symbolism, pagan rites, and mythology, characters based on figures from religion, the lexicon of magic. The novels of these writers, he argues, act as new spaces of enchantment (p. 22), but spaces which draw on, reproduce and rely on the old spaces, rather than repudiating them as dead and lifeless.

In each of his five main chapters, Lewis reads one novelist alongside a theorist of religion. In the chapters on James, Proust, Kafka, and Woolf, these are the theorists who are founding various social sciences in the early twentieth century. James' late novels are read alongside the work of his brother, William James, and in particular his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902); Proust is read alongside Émile Durkheim; Kafka alongside Sigmund Freud; and Woolf alongside Max Weber. This method has many advantages; wider debates about religion, and political and cultural events, such as the Dreyfus Affair, are deftly woven with sometimes illuminating reading of the novels. However, rigorous conceptual links between the novelists and the theories are not always fully established. Very often biography is cited in order to make these links – Henry and William James grew up amidst the religious heterodoxy of their father, and often commented on and engaged with one another's work; Proust and Durkheim shared teachers at the Sorbonne; Kafka and Freud shared a number of experiences as assimilated Jews in the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire – and these biographical links are made to work too hard. On a number of occasions, as below, the prose strains for connection, but in the end only circles round an absent point of comparison:

Like Kafka, Freud turned to the question of the origin of community in some of his final writings. Freud had among his patients the Rat Man and the Wolf Man, named for animals associated with their dreams and neuroses. Kafka, too, had a stable of animal figures, from the vermin Gregor Samsa, through the dog in the posthumously published 'Investigations of a Dog', to the ape in 'A Report to the Academy' (1917). Kafka's own final portrayal of the history of a people is 'Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse People' ... Once again, this is a text about interpretation ... (p. 139)



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This problem of an insufficiently justified comparison is evident in the chapter on Woolf too. As Lewis admits, 'Weber and Woolf had less in common with one another than did Durkheim and Proust or Freud and Kafka', and they did not read each other's work (p. 145). Lewis argues, though, that what unites them is a common analysis in their work of 'the rationalization or "disenchantment" of modern life' (p. 145). This is certainly the case, but there it seems to me the comparison ends. The value assigned by Weber and by Woolf to, for example, charisma, or the retreat of 'sublime values', as Weber names them in his lecture 'Science as a Vocation', into private life are only very problematically related. While, as Lewis acknowledges, Weber lamented this retreat to the private sphere, surely it is this 'retreat' that makes possible the kind of novel Woolf was creating. These differences are not teased out by Lewis, but it is indeed these differences that beg exactly the question of the difference that fictionality makes.

Lewis says a number of times during his study that an attempt to represent religious experience is precisely what produced the formal innovation of modernist prose fiction (pp. 5, 6, 18, 50–51); the modernists sought, he says, 'through formal experiment, to offer new accounts of the sacred for an age of continued religious crisis' (p. 24). However, he does not really interrogate formal questions, and he never really substantiates fully his claims about the significance of religious experience for form. The effect of this is particularly clear in the discussion of the significance of mourning for modernist novelists in the final chapter. While Lewis rightly asserts that modernists saw the novel 'as having a particular ability to represent the process of mourning because of its powers of ironic distancing' (p. 173), he does not suggest how the *modernist* novel does this in a way that is more significant or successful than the novels of nineteenth-century realism. This chapter reads *Ulysses*, not against a social scientist, but against Dante, and argues that Joyce's 'mythical method' is a reworking of Dante's medieval typology. It is not that this is not convincing in itself; it is more that it does not get to grips with the radical formal disruption of *Ulysses*. Realist writers too overlaid the ordinary representativeness of their characters with Biblical and Classical models (Dorothea Brooke springs to mind). What marks *Ulysses* as a beginning and an end for the novel form is the way this overlaying is done. Contra Eliot, it is not the Homeric schema alone that makes *Ulysses* important, it is what Joyce does at the level of the sentence. While the Homeric schema, along with the others passed to Stuart Gilbert, are *aids* to reading, Joyce's sentences fox readerly expectations completely. Some consideration of how this remaking of language relates to questions of transcendence and belief, of how the confusion of 'word' and 'world' (the central pun of the novel, according to Michael North<sup>1</sup>) relates to religion, would have been

rewarding. In the end, however, Lewis's claims for the modernist novel do not distinguish it very clearly from any other kind of literature: 'Yet, if they deny the promise of personal immortality or bodily resurrection, modernist novels do promise a different kind of immortality: the traditional immortality that literature confers, as well, perhaps, as a particular conception of survival in the memories of the living . . .' (p. 190).

The lack of precise justification for the comparisons of novelist and social scientist, and the lack of precise formal analysis, mean that in the end the literary texts are read rather strangely. Most noticeably, Kafka's eerie silences are rather domesticated. Surely Wittgenstein – whose *Tractatus* acts out the uncanny effects of the relation between speech and silence around questions of religion – would have been a better comparison than Freud? Marjorie Perloff has called Wittgenstein and Kafka 'two of the great avant-gardists to come out of the assimilated Jewish world of the Austro-Hungarian empire',<sup>2</sup> and Kafka's writing is more about the significance of what is not said than a method, such as Freud's, that attempts to *replace* disorder, lacunae and silence with narrative. Benjamin and Adorno's work on Kafka is an obvious absence here, and Lewis misses precisely their sense of how Kafka's work produces its effects because he concentrates on filling out what is there rather than noting what is not.

Lewis has ended the silence about religion, and his study is richly suggestive of new avenues of investigation in the way the best scholarship should be, but any further work will need more precision, perhaps in particular a more precise teasing out and articulation of difference rather than similarity, in order to do the subject justice.

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## Notes

- 1 Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 29.
- 2 Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 5.

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### Alex Pestell

Kristin Bluemel (ed.), *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), vii + 254 pp., £65.00 (hbk)

Kristin Bluemel's edited collection of essays seeks to bring to light a range of writers and film-makers who, she writes in her introduction, have been overlooked, or rather deliberately excluded, by a conception of modernism that preserves and expands its cultural legitimacy precisely through this exclusion. The artists this volume is occupied with were all active in the interwar and immediately post-war years, but, as Bluemel explains, intermodernism is not just a chronological term: it also has ambitions to become a 'functional . . . analytical tool' for scholars, offering a set of coordinates within which to organise studies of the mid-twentieth-century literature in ways which elude the strictures of the 'New Modernist Studies'. Bluemel's introduction portrays the volume as a bold intervention in an area encumbered with outmoded assumptions about the value of aesthetic experimentation, and structured by a series of 'binary terms' – 'elite and common, experimental and popular, urban and rural, masculine and feminine, abstract and realistic, colonial and colonised' – which it is intermodernism's task to 'deconstruct' (p. 3). By contrast with 'other studies of mid-century British writing', which cosy up to the conceptual hegemony represented by New Modernist Studies, *Intermodernism*, Bluemel claims, 'is not so well behaved' (p. 5).

As a descriptive tool, intermodernism's particular advantage is to be able to comprehend relations between a wider range of literary, journalistic, and institutional forms than the prevailing view of mid-twentieth-century culture allows, focusing in particular on radical, working-class, and 'middlebrow' cultural products. However, at least as far as the introduction goes, it is unclear exactly what approaches or strategies are being advocated for the pursuit of intermodernism's iconoclastic ambitions. In particular, anathematizing New Modernist Studies as the safe option for analysts of mid-century culture does not leave much room for intermodernism. For Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, the authors of an article cited by Bluemel in her introduction, the New Modernist Studies are characterised by the analysis of precisely those cultural contradictions mentioned above. Mao and Walkowitz write of the 'vertical' expansion in recent work on modernism, 'in which once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; . . . in which works by members of marginalised social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception'. They explicitly

confirm that what is new in this work is a 'disruptive force on modernist studies' which moves beyond the dichotomy of high and low culture – the very disruptive force Bluemel claims is the distinctive characteristic of intermodernism.<sup>1</sup>

As an embryonic critical genre, intermodernism's lack of firm critical coordinates is perhaps salutary, and is tacitly acknowledged from the outset. Bluemel refers to two or three works which have begun to lay the groundwork for its intervention in modernist studies (among them Bluemel's own *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London*, and Nick Hubble's 'Intermodern Pastoral: William Empson and George Orwell').<sup>2</sup> While the four sections into which *Intermodernism* is divided – work, community, war, and documents – give some indication of its conceptual framework, it is left to the book's contributors to fill in the details.

However, the gesture of ostentatious refusal characterising *Intermodernism's* relationship with modernist studies poses a problem for its contributors. Bluemel writes that her project is 'not especially concerned with the critical vocabulary of high modernism or with tracing the relations between intermodern and modernist texts' (p. 5). Laudable as this independent stance might appear, it begs the question of what critical vocabulary might be necessary or sufficient to successfully defend middlebrow art's capacity to engage with those socio-political questions high modernism is accused of hogging to itself. This problem is highlighted in several of the essays in this volume. Faced with the task of disturbing the consensus that, say, popular fiction does not possess the aesthetic resources to handle in a non-naïve way the political complexities of modernity, and lacking the critical terminology to analyse the *aesthetics* of artistic engagement rather than its thematics, some of the collection's contributors end up merely reinstating the proscribed duality of realism versus modernism. In her essay on Storm Jameson, for example, Elizabeth Maslen complains that 'the classifying "brow" terms continue to suggest a league table of intellectual ability' (p. 21). Having disposed of the apparently egregious idea that the intellect might have a role to play in the aesthetic recreation and critique of society, though, it is difficult to see how critical judgement can obtain a purchase on its objects of study. Several of the essays suffer from a postponement of aesthetic critique in the name of 'upset[ting] the dualities' (p. 76) between various high- and middlebrow conceptions of literature, with the result that they remain moored in a thematic analysis that seems to confirm the prejudices which surround middlebrow literature.

However, there are several essays here that attempt to give some definitional thickness to intermodernism, and which suggest that there are valuable insights to be gained by operating within its parameters. John

## Textual Practice

Fordham's essay on Harold Heslop, for example, shows what is to be gained when comparisons with conventional modernist categories *are* permitted. Intermodernism, Fordham writes, 'is defined by a constant textual struggle to elaborate the experience of an emergent historical condition' (p. 56). Referring to Williams, Lefebvre and de Certeau, Fordham shows how the sense of region Heslop returns to in his miner's fiction cannot be adequately represented by any single modernist or realist approach, but is instead characterised in a series of alternating conceptualisations of space and the ways they are appropriated, resisted and transformed by its inhabitants. In addition to giving intermodernism some theoretical depth, Fordham's descriptions of Heslop's richly detailed fictions load the genre with a historical specificity that takes it beyond mere bad behaviour.

While every essay in this volume devotes space to those qualities which make its subject intermodern, often the discussion goes no further than a cursory restatement of Bluemel's introductory thematics. Nick Hubble's chapter on William Empson and Mass-Observation offers a corrective to this tendency, grounding his statements about intermodernism's generic integrity in an interdisciplinary understanding of poetic and documentary form. Mass-Observation's significance for intermodernism inheres in its blurring of the boundary between observer and observed. While Hubble's contention that mainstream modernist studies is 'determined to preserve the status of "a handful of esoteric performers"' is debatable, his focus on Mass-Observation does lay bare a realm of expressive experience which might helpfully be claimed as intermodernism's especial terrain (p. 172). This leads on to a fascinating discussion, by way of I.A. Richards's theory of value, of Empson's criticism and its implications for a proletarian literature, bringing to life issues at stake in the collection as a whole.

Similarly, Laura Marcus's piece on John Grierson and the thirties documentary film movement in Britain effectively demonstrates, through a close reading of articles published in the thirties journal *Cinema Quarterly* and a convincing critique of the complex relationship between cinematic and poetic form, that formal analysis can provide a more textured account of intermodernism than can plot summaries and thematic sketches. The emphasis in this chapter on representations of working towns and industries, and on a modernist sensibility brought to the people via film (here Marcus makes use of some illuminating passages from Hugh MacDiarmid's *Cinema Quarterly* article, 'A Poet Looks at the Cinema'), fills out the aesthetic and socio-political concerns animating intermodernism. Marcus's conclusion suggests that "Documentary" . . . offers one of the most significant and complex constellations for intermodernism, in its intertwining of a modernist aesthetic and a realist imperative, a poetics and a politics' (p. 205). Along with some other chapters in

this volume (Debra Rae Cohen's nuanced exploration of Rebecca West's 'intergeneric voice' stands out), these essays underscore the fact that intermodernism has the most to gain when the founding gesture of *Intermodernism* – its rejection of the ideas and figures traditionally preserved by modernist studies – is refused, and the difficult task of negotiating the relationship between middlebrow culture and its supposedly elitist counterpart engaged with head-on rather than condemned from on high.

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## Notes

- 1 Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008), pp. 737–738.
- 2 Kristin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Nick Hubble, 'Intermodern Pastoral: William Empson and George Orwell', in David James and Philip Tew (eds), *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Press, 2009).

## John Pilling

Steven Barfield, Matthew Feldman & Philip Tew (eds), *Beckett and Death* (London: Continuum, 2009), 229 pp., £60.00 (hbk)

Nothing – according to the first of the *Texts*, which are, after all, *For Nothing* – 'nothing like breathing your last to put new life in you'. There is certainly plenty of new life in the essays collected here, all of which in their different ways address the oldest of subjects, one which never goes out of fashion, but one which has never to the best of my knowledge been given, as it were, an innings to itself by way of eleven contributors and three umpires, two of whom (Barfield and Tew) occupy a space apart from the third (Feldman), and none of whom interfere with the proceedings once they have been brought to life, although the third offers the conventional consolation of an introduction to the essays, and a very helpful one. All three of these editors were instrumental in organizing the conference at which these essays were first given as papers (University of Northampton, December 2006), and all three of them are to be congratulated for having 'translated' the issues from spoken discourse to the written form, and for having chosen their team so wisely in the first place. Symposia almost always raise questions as to how much quality

control can be, or has been, exercised. But no-one reading this collection – perhaps rather surprisingly presented as ‘chapters’ – need fear that there have been compromises along the way.

In an attempt to avoid any imputation of my being overly partisan or prejudiced, I propose to adopt the impersonal logic of the alphabet in what follows. This way the last item (Chris Ackerley on ‘Beckett’s Cemeteries’) comes first, and of Ackerley one can certainly say – with a Hitchcock-like photograph to confirm it – that ‘personally’ he has ‘no bone to pick with graveyards’, having visited Redford near Greystones (south of Foxrock), Ohlsdorf in Hamburg, Père Lachaise in Paris, and even, God help us, Shandon in Cork to commune with ‘Father Prout’ (the Rev. Francis Sylvester Mahony, born 1884, died 1966). There are many fine touches throughout, after a perhaps superfluous (given Feldman’s sensitive account) review of the ‘chapters’ preceding, in what I suppose is largely an exercise in topophilia, and literally and figuratively exhibited as such. In David Addyman’s ‘Space and Place in Beckett’s Forties Fiction’, by contrast, we encounter *topomania* at Mr Knott’s house in *Watt*, and *topophobia* (p. 95) as Mercier and Camier do their best, first of all not to meet at the Saint Ruth Square, and subsequently to keep their problematic separateness alive as they look at the carpet in Helen’s house. This so-called pseudocouple seem to have become all too spectral in Beckett Studies, and greatly benefit from one of their rare outings here.

Elizabeth Barry (‘Beckett, Augustine, and the Rhetoric of Dying’) naturally explores ideas rather than specific locations, and moves a topic ‘not yet completely understood’ (p. 72) on in directions partly mapped (J.P. Mahaffy on Descartes) and virtually untouched (*The City of God*, the ‘Viktoria Gruppe’ notes at the Beckett International Foundation). Liz Barry explores her chosen terrain with exactly the right combination of acumen and flexibility. Julie Campbell focuses on, or rather listens to, ‘The Dark Comedy of *All That Fall*’, and very shrewdly assesses ‘performance issues’ (p. 152) as illustrative of more abstract ones, from *Proust* to the ‘trilogy’ and beyond. There is, quite naturally, a reversal of this balance in Peter Fifield’s concern with ‘Amnesiacs, Neuropsychology, and Temporal Moribundity’, which takes in Korsakoff’s syndrome, A.R. Luria and Oliver Sacks, with *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* and *Waiting for Godot* the most prominent testing-grounds for analysis in these contexts. There are ‘Big Ideas’ aplenty here, but the essay by Sean Lawlor on ‘Finding Words for the Big Ideas’ presents what can be found in the no less demanding terrain of Beckett’s poetry, the 1933 story ‘Echo’s Bones’, and ‘What A Misfortune’ and ‘Draff’ from *More Pricks Than Kicks*. This very searching account is compelling in its own right, and has over a hundred footnotes, several of which amount to excellent miniature essays in themselves.



Steven Matthews writes on 'Beckett's Late Style', starting with Edward Said, and using the 'Sottisier Notebook' at the Beckett International Foundation to move towards *Worstward Ho* and *Stirrings Still*, with the 'cadences of death' (p. 202) at the end of *Rockaby* left to echo at the last gasp of the 'chapters' proper. Mark Nixon, at the opposite end of affairs, studies 'Textual Existence and Death in Beckett', grounding admirably acute insights in readings of *ur*-texts: Beckett's letters, and the 'unpublished dramatic piece rather misleadingly called "Last Soliloquy", dating from 1958' (p. 25). Paul Stewart's theme is 'Sterile Reproduction': *All That Fall* again, and *Malone Dies* again, and St Augustine again, but with everything seen from different angles, with the Gnostics very aptly brought into play, and with the too-often-neglected *Eleutheria* for once given a chance to figure, as of course it cannot easily do on stage.

In Erik Tonning's journey 'from *Malone Dies* to *The Unnamable*' we are given a Jeremy Taylor-inspired perspective on 'Unholy Dying', a 'first aperçu' (as *The Lost Ones* would say) from an excellent point of vantage, and one that is also just about visible in the story 'Echo's Bones', which at the time of writing is still by no means as accessible as could be wished. In every way accessible is an essay in *Enough's* 'art of combining', Shane Weller on 'the politics of death', which opens with Adorno and ends very movingly with father and son 'hand in hand' (pp. 42–45).

Here, then, from a multiplicity of viewpoints, is 'new life' very likely to stimulate further investigations designed to disprove the last words of *The Expelled*: 'Living souls, you will see how alike they are'. The collection is dedicated, no doubt very aptly in the circumstances, 'In Memoriam/ Detlef Mühlberger (1943–2008)/A scholar and gentleman'.

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### Federica Mazzara

Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre & Áine O'Healy (eds), *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 268 p., \$85.00 (hbk)

*Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* edited by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy – as part of Palgrave Macmillan's Comparative Feminist Studies Series – contributes successfully to the theorisation of 'transnational feminism', a field which is increasingly gaining attention as an important contemporary paradigm, in relation to the more general framework of cultural aesthetics, and more specifically to cinema and visual arts.

Among the several recent anthologies on transnationalism, we can mention: *Transnationalism* by Rocco and Selgas (2006), *Transnationalism* by Steven Vertovec (2009), and *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis)order* (2009) by Ben-Rafael and Sternberg.<sup>1</sup> In these, transnationalism is conceived as a concept strictly related to issues of migration and diaspora, and particularly explored within the context of social sciences. *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* is innovative in its way of merging interests in mobility, gender, and media in relation to the present cultural and political urgency of exploring the dynamics of transcending national borders.

Ten years earlier in a volume also dealing with transnational feminism, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, the editors Grewal Inderpal and Caren Kaplan<sup>2</sup> stated that, 'without an analysis of transnational scattered hegemonies that reveal themselves in gender relations, feminist movements will remain isolated and prone to reproducing the universalising gestures of dominant Western cultures' (p. 17). *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* is promptly responding to this urgency with a collection of essays that present ways in which feminism could engage with global as well as local, ideological, historical, economic, and political issues (e.g. race, migration, nationhood, gender, sexuality, and economic exploitation).

The most significant contributions to this volume show an ability to open up a dialogue between transnational feminism and transnational film studies; the latter revolving around recent research in diasporic and exilic cinema, which is fundamentally marked by a concern with borders, migration and foreignness. Hamid Naficy's theory of 'accented cinema', in particular, gives rise to most of the reflections on films developed in these essays. Naficy's concepts of 'interstitial', 'global and local' and 'deterritorialisation', applied to films produced by displaced migrant filmmakers, are here effectively (re)applied.

On the other hand, as the editors state in the introduction, a transnational feminist approach to global media culture 'does not delineate a specialized subfield or set of films for and about women only', while the concept of feminism 'is not a decorative addition or an optional perspective that can be applied to studies of transnational media, but an acknowledgment that transnational processes are inherently gendered, sexualised, and racialised. The borders they erase and erect affect different groups differently' (p. 4).

The volume is organised around three paradigms: 'New Frontiers of Migration', 'Circulation of Bodies' and 'Modalities of Foreignness', indicating the dominant emphasis of the individual essays, rather than their exclusive focus. The authors, often 'transnational' individuals themselves, challenge and problematise feminist theory, at least one based on a first-

world hegemonic perspective. They offer gendered readings engaged in issues of human rights, political, and economic exploitations, not necessarily seen with 'Western' eyes.

A central aspect of several of the essays included in the anthology is, in fact, their insistence on integrating, in their theorisation the often-forgotten 'second world' (post-socialist nations), a space of 'perpetual invisibility', as Anikó Imre defines it. Essays by Anikó Imre, Genette Verstraete, Ursula Biemann, and Alice Bardan, in particular, concentrate on the filmic and video-art production of Eastern-European film makers, developing different aspects of transnational feminism in the process: Imre's essay, 'Affective Nationalism' and 'Transnational Circuits of Vietnamese Popular Culture', analyses a nine-minute film, *Pusztá Cowboy* (2004), by a Budapest-based lesbian filmmaking collective and its ambivalence towards nationalism and Western liberal feminism. Genette Verstraete and Ursula Biemann's essays are in productive dialogue with each other. Verstraete's 'Women's Resistance Strategies in High-Tech Multicultural Europe' shows the importance of studying transnational migration in conjunction with global capitalism and information technologies. She expands on this by taking into account video works by Biemann, who, in 'Videographies of Navigating Geobodies', reflects on the different aesthetic strategies available to her in order to produce a gendered sense of border.

Another common denominator of most of the essays collected in this volume is their challenge to the durable concepts of national identity and belonging. Asuman Sunner refers to works by third-world women film-directors and to their way of directing attention to issues such as deterritorialisation, displacement, and migration. They accomplish this by offering a timely non-stereotyped representation of non-Western women. The issue of the reproductive body of women set in contrast to nationalism, is particularly central in films by transnational women directors of Maghreb descent, as analysed by Patricia Pisters in her essay 'Refusal of Reproduction: Paradoxes of Becoming-Woman in Transnational Moroccan Film-making'. While Lan Duong's '*Long-Legged Girls* and the 'Transnational Circuits of Vietnamese Popular Culture' investigates the ongoing shift in Vietnam from a nationalised and centralised system to an increasingly transnational film industry.

The global genre of a 'cinema of borders' is theorised in 'Screening Unlivable Lives' by Tyler and Bruce Bennett focusing on two recent films directed by Michael Winterbottom: *In this World* (2002) and *The Road to Guantánamo* (2006). The authors investigate what and who remains outside, marginal and unrepresented in these films; in other words, which borders and which 'border lives' remain unrepresentable in a Western trope of visibility. The issue of 'border cinema' is also central in the essay by Merguerite Waller, 'The Abjection of Patriarchy: Ibolva

Fekete's *Chico and the Transnational Feminist Imagery*, whose analysis concentrates on a film by the transnational filmmaker Idolya Fekete. Here, the border between fictional and factual elements is permeable, since the main character is played by the same person on whose life the film is based.

The cinema of migration in Italy is examined in 'Border Traffic: Reimagining the Voyage to Italy' by Áine O'Healy. She questions the xenophobic response of Italian media to recent immigration flows, where especially migrant women are represented as eroticised victims. The films considered by O'Healy, as she argues, refuse to problematise these representational strategies, implementing, on the contrary, a passive and compassionate spectator's gaze. The issue of spectatorship and 'easy viewing' is also theorised by Katarzyna Marciniak in an essay that interrogates the possibility of using pedagogy as an effective way through which to stretch the conceptual and geographical limits of transnational feminism. She introduces the paradigm of 'palatable foreignness' to refer to 'certain kinds of onscreen female foreignness ready for spectatorial visual consumption: non-threatening, sentimentalised, often "comforting" in its awkwardness, shyness, and "otherness"' (p. 193). In her reading of three film cases, she successfully disrupts this discourse through which both classroom practice and mainstream representations tend to control (female) foreigners.

The anthology opens with an introduction co-written by the three editors. An anthology of this nature, laying out such a specialised and interdisciplinary field, should include an introduction, such as this, that brilliantly displays the main issues and the main goal of the volume. It does this by investigating a film the editors consider a perfect example of a case that unravels gendered and racialised discourses of transnationality. The film is the much-awarded *Babel* (2006)<sup>3</sup> by the Mexican director, Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu – the film is self-consciously 'global', which, as the editors state, 'offers a counter-narrative to the elitist discourse of cosmopolitanism' (p. 5). *Babel* and its success is pointed to as an exemplary case of how important it is today to think in critical transnational terms, 'demystifying the rhetoric of global equality and progress, and questioning the legitimacy of national borders is reaching a level of urgency that cannot be ignored by mainstream audiences' (p. 3). *Babel* condenses, in fact, all the crucial topics of the book: female alterity, border crossing, migration, gendered domestic labour and transnational servitude; and even if most of the films analysed in these essays, unlike *Babel*, are low-budget, independent films, they still share with Iñárritu's the intention to 'de-romanticising "travel" and to de-exoticizing "otherness"' (p. 5).

*Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* is a collective project that contributes in an innovative and effective way to the important and unavoidable debate concerning the crossing of borders in a global world,

where borders are not simply meant to be geographical, but are also increasingly being recognised as related to issues of gender, identity, citizenship and belonging.

A great accomplishment of this book is to have put together two pressing contemporary disciplines, gender and media studies, and to have presented their relevance to the burgeoning concerns of transnationalism.

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### Notes

- 1 Rocco R., García Selgas F., eds. *Transnationalism: Issues and Perspectives* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense 2006); Vertovec S. (ed.) *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge 2009); Ben-Rafael E., Sternberg Y., with J. Bokser Liwerant and Y. Gorny, eds. *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis)order* (Leiden: Brill 2009).
- 2 Inderpal G., Kaplan C., eds. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 3 Inárritu A.G., *Babel* (USA, 2006).