



PROJECT MUSE®

Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture by Rey Chow (review)

Nicole Simek

symploke, Volume 22, Numbers 1-2, 2014, pp. 405-407 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

symploke
editor
Jeffrey S. Bell

AUSTERITY

Volume 18 Numbers 1-2

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/566864>

Rey Chow. *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012. 194 pp.

Bringing together a range of pieces written over the course of the last decade, Rey Chow conceives of her latest book as a collection of essays “in the fundamental sense of the word,” that is, “as attempts at thinking through a series of recurrent, overlapping issues” (1). Composed without “a preemptive unitary focus” in mind, *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* accomplishes the difficult task of doing justice to the essay form. What makes *Entanglements* more than the sum of its disparate parts is Chow’s willingness to take seriously the force of recursive, looping modes of thought, and to explore the critical potential of montage, which serves as an object of study as well as a structuring principle of the collection. Thinking entanglement in or as montage (that technique of “cutting-reconnecting” that seeks to spark new ways of seeing) allows Chow to highlight the way in which knots involve not only proximity, but also distancing; entanglements are thus “the linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together” (12). Focusing broadly on aesthetic captivation, the volume probes the imbrication of estrangement and affective attachment, as well as the ways that the democratization of categories of knowledge remains haunted by hierarchical relationships of subordination that persist in mechanisms of captivity.

Chow likens the collection as a whole to “the assemblage or installation of a critical aperture” (12), and as an attempt to provide a framework for, or opening onto, further thought, *Entanglements* proves refreshing. Chow cuts and reconnects texts and theoretical approaches in innovative ways, moving fluidly between attentive, detailed readings and meditative, speculative modes, stylistically enacting the interplay of lucidity and opacity that serves as a focal point throughout the volume. The expansive comparative scope of the work is impressive, and sure to draw in readers of very different theoretical persuasions and areas of expertise. Selections from Benjamin, Brecht, and Rancière shape the opening chapters. Chapter one, “When Reflexivity Becomes Porn,” questions the role of fragmentation as both impetus and impasse to reflexivity, asking whether staging reflexive estrangement can still be deemed useful today. In favoring rationality and alienation over sensual pleasure and captivation, staging attempts to democratize thought—to distribute the capacity for rational critique—yet appears to have been coopted “in the days of proliferating, hypermediatized screens and frames” (25). Chow leaves open the question of staging’s future role, but suggests that any answer must deal both with the pornographic violence inherent in the act of “laying bare” on which defamiliarization relies, as well as with the uneasy question of sensual pleasure—has the time come for a rehabilitation and (re) distribution of the senses? Chapter two pursues this question obliquely by focusing on medial reflexivity, or the specificity and autonomy of a given artistic medium, such as novel writing. Chow explores Rancière’s reading of

Madame Bovary (as ushering in a new view of the novel's specific, anti-instrumentalist uselessness) alongside the 2006 film, *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*), creating a spark between these pieces through anthropologist Alfred Gell's notion of the trap. As a metaphor for art, the trap highlights not only the heteronomous experience of aesthetic captivation—to which Emma Bovary falls prey—but also the unequal subject positions occupied by hunter and hunted. In bringing the notion of the trap to bear on Flaubert's work, Chow proposes to follow Rancière's logic past the point where he stops, rereading Emma Bovary's suicide as the act of a hunger artist, as an act of allegiance to fiction that shows captivation—a curious experience of “pleasure and unfreedom”—to be a “deranged remainder” that belies concepts of autonomous freedom underpinning capitalist and social revolutionary narratives of choice and emancipation (52). Chapter three takes up the question of fidelity and group identification from a different angle, reexamining the notion of commodity fetish and intimacy with material objects through a reading of Lao She's short story, “Lian” (“Attachment”).

While extending this investigation of violence, materialism, and competing loyalties, chapter four shifts attention to the unusual pairing of sacrifice and mimesis in the work of Agamben and Girard. Tracing the antimimetic stance underpinning Agamben's rejection of the sacrificial term “Holocaust,” Chow links sacrifice to representation itself, reconceptualizing mimesis as “part of an inescapable structural relation—the relation of exchange and substitution, absence and presence, disappearance and appearance, and so forth, without which the acts of thinking and writing would be impossible” (90). Chow argues in favor of understanding mimesis as originary force rather than derivative act, and draws out of Girard's work a dialectical conception of victimhood, “wherein victimhood has no intrinsic quality to it but can be both horrendous and redemptive” (102). Ending by evoking the potentially nihilistic implications of this claim, Chow moves in chapter five to a similarly provocative critique of religious and secular ethics centered on Christian forgiveness by reading Arendt, Derrida, and Auerbach in tandem with Lee Chang-dong's 2007 film *Miryang* (*Secret Sunshine*) and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Chow ends this essay with the question of how to coexist with those whose intransigent attachments make of them outsiders to a Christian framework of tolerance, a question to which she responds obliquely in the following piece, which sympathetically examines Naoki Sakai's concept of the heterolingual address. Conceived of as “a kind of categorical imperative” or ethical attitude of inclusivity, the heterolingual address takes the audience not as a pre-constituted “we,” but as a collectivity *à venir*, a collectivity marked by heterolinguality that must be brought into being as a collectivity in the act of speaking. Chow takes as models for heterolingual address two Kurosawa films, *No Regrets for My Youth* (1946) and *Rhapsody in August* (1991).

Like the essay that precedes it, “Postcolonial Visibilities: Questions Inspired by Deleuze's Method” also seeks to move through the impasses

or aporias addressed earlier, arguing that Deleuze's work on visibilities—combined with Rancière's insights into the collapse of the time lag previously separating reality and photographic copy—has the potential to open up new paths for a postcolonial studies that has failed to engage with “the transformative potential of the ongoing encounters between Europe and the rest of the globe” (159). This chapter's lack of discussion of work already ongoing in this area (most prominently, that of Edouard Glissant) is puzzling, but also reflective of the montage approach, which focuses on reassembly of key ideas for their transformative potential, rather than on an extensive overview of a given thinker's or concept's reception. It also reflects the suggestive, open-ended quality that Chow's writing increasingly takes on as each chapter, and the book itself, draws to a close. The final essay in the collection pursues Chow's interest in new technologies of image-capture through a concise reading of Ang Lee's 2007 film *Se, jie* (*Lust, Caution*), while the postscript, “Intimations from a Scene of Capture,” fittingly closes the work with thoughts on visibility as trap in Julian Rohrer's *Vogelscheuche*—four photographs capturing the haunting shadow of an “anti-lure,” a bird-shaped decal affixed to a glass window.

Dense and wide-ranging, *Entanglements* provides both innovative analyses and pointed questions for any scholar interested in aesthetics, democratization, and domination in an age of digitization.

Nicole Simek, *Whitman College*

William D. Melaney. *Material Difference: Modernism and the Allegories of Discourse.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 255 pp.

William D. Melaney's complex comparative study depends on a number of theoretical moving parts, including philosophy of language, aesthetics, modernism, materiality, and the distinction he maintains between traditional allegory and allegorical works of modernist literature. Although the thunder and lightning produced by these components sometimes distract from Melaney's own theory of modernist literature, the insights that this book offers for thinking about the literary text as a disruptive material object are worth braving the storm. Melaney argues that the modernist text is located at the intersection of two critical discourses. The first is the discourse of linguistics, which he identifies with Nietzsche and traces through Freud and Lacan to Derrida. The second is the discourse of aesthetics, which he identifies with the work of Hegel and traces through Marx to the Frankfurt School, especially Benjamin and Adorno. Although these lineages themselves are not novel, Melaney makes the case that the first discourse, that of linguistics, has typically dominated discussions of modernist literature to the exclusion of the second discourse of aesthetics. He thus sets out to demonstrate how