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Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel (review)

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composite experience of travel as a “Yodisea,” a journey of personal discovery. However, the most salient aspect of his narrative is the preservation of the East-West dichotomies, a difference that tends to cast non-European cultures as inferior and therefore subject to political and economic exploitation, “just wars,” and religious intolerance. This is precisely what Spain had done in the Americas, with disastrous results. After reading Nunley’s analysis of *Panoramas Orientales*, one is left to wonder about the lessons Alcalá Galiano learned about democracy, rule of law, and political economy during his exile in Great Britain.

Nunley succeeds in putting in perspective the motives these four Spanish travelers of the nineteenth century had for undertaking their various journeys. Despite the many differences in style, subject matter, and interpretative strategies, their commonality lies in the desire to bring about a change in Spanish mentality. Their goal was to reverse or slow down its historical and cultural downfall, brought about by a lack of national unity, its persistent mystification of other cultures associated with underdevelopment, and a refusal to bring about institutional changes that would move the country forward. As the author states, “They all utilized the spaces of foreign travel to respond to and shape the literary and cultural perceptions of their time.”

This is an extremely interesting and useful study that stimulates research about travel and travelers. It is a book well researched and clearly written. The author’s many insightful observations about the journeys, and about those who wrote them, result in an excellent work for serious students on the subject. The book is complemented with a useful bibliography and a corpus of footnotes that broaden the subject and inform the reader.

Jorge L. Bacelis

Jeffrey Ruoff, ed. *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. xiv + 298 pp. ISBN 0-8223-3713-4, \$22.95.

Billed as “the first book of travelogues,” *Virtual Voyages* examines an underappreciated body of films representing “an intrinsic form of cinema.” Usually associated with the silent film era, when they illustrated live travel lectures (replacing nineteenth-century lantern slide shows), travelogues belong to the road less taken—and less recognized—in a medium dominated by fiction and narration rather than non-fiction and documentation. This anthology suggests that early travelogues evolved into various types of “travel films,” ranging from expeditionary and ethnographic films to tourist promotions and home movies. Even directors of fiction films such as Jim Jarmusch in *Mystery Train* and Wim Wenders in *Until the End of the World* are said to have “returned to a ground-zero travelogue aesthetic as a means of reinventing the cinema,” and

Ross McElwee's quasi-autobiographical *Sherman's March*, with its geographical and narrative detours, is hailed as one of "the most accomplished cinematic travelogues." Yet while acknowledging the relevance of such films to his study, editor Jeffrey Ruoff keeps a tight rein on his subject. His own essay is devoted to the purest form of contemporary travelogue: 16mm travel lectures attended by older viewers, typically in their sixties, who unlike younger consumers of Hollywood fare, "prefer information over identification, discourse instead of spectacle." (One imagines a different picture emerging, however, had youth-oriented TV programs like PBS's "Globe Trekker" series been taken into account; by limiting itself to film, the anthology neglects what an endnote refers to as "the extraordinary diversity of travel material on television.")

Despite Ruoff's interest in correcting "the erroneous impression . . . that the travelogue faded from view after a brief period of primacy in the first decades of cinema," most of the contributions to this volume are devoted to this period. In his essay on the travelogue's early history, Rick Altman identifies 1910 as a turning point. Not only had "virtually every corner of the globe" been filmed by that time, but travel films began to come into their own as independent commodities. Instead of serving as illustrative props in live performances given by itinerant lecturers, films left the lecturer behind to embark on their own travels, reaching new and larger audiences in the form of feature documentaries. "One of the most frequent locations" for early travel films, notes Jennifer Lynn Peterson, was the American West. Before its portrayal in the popular fictional genre of the western as a wild region of bygone days, nonfiction travel films presented the West in an updated, domesticated form as a "tourist playground." A similar process occurred overseas, as Peter J. Bloom shows in his essay on "crossing films" documenting trans-Saharan automotive safaris in the 1920s. These filmed expeditions sponsored by the French automakers Citroën, Renault, and Peugeot amounted to "an invitation to a world of travel," and showed how automobiles could grant viewers-turned-tourists "privileged access to exotic landscapes."

The use of transportation and film technologies to domesticate and colonize wild, exotic territory is aptly summed up in travel lecturer Burton Holmes's dictum, "To travel is to possess the world." Several early film companies expressed this sentiment in their motto, "The Whole World Within Reach," which Tom Gunning uses as the title of his lead essay. Gunning argues that the "explosion of travel images" in the twentieth century both gratifies and arouses the modern, Western desire to "appropriat[e] the world through images." An extreme example of this endeavor is the vast *Archives de la Planète* survey begun by the French banker Albert Kahn in 1912 and extending into the 1930s. What Paula Amad calls Kahn's "panoramic hybris" led him "to

collect and order the planet in visual form.” By mid-century, the appropriation of the world through images assumed ethnographic legitimacy as the preservation of vanishing cultures in the form of “cinematic trophies” and “celluloid taxidermy” described by Amy J. Staples in the case of Lewis Cotlow’s popular expeditionary film *Jungle Headhunters*.

Read in conjunction with one another, the essays in this volume underscore the ongoing symbiosis between fiction and documentary cinema. Thus the classic 1924 expedition film *Grass*, which records a nomadic tribe’s seven-week trek across Iran in search of pasturage, is described by Hamid Naficy as a “hybrid” work that “contributes to an emerging nonfiction cinema” by borrowing search-and-discovery scenarios and other conventions from silent fiction films. Yet Dana Benelli uses the same term to describe fictional “Hollywood genre adventures” of the 1920s and 1930s that borrowed from “travelogue-expedition films” of the early sound era. Two “specialists” in this hybrid genre, Ernst Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper, had collaborated on “the ethnographic documentary” *Grass*, and ultimately went on to incorporate travelogue conventions like exotic cultural scenes, hunting sequences, and animal fights in their 1933 adventure fantasy *King Kong*. Less than two decades later, Cotlow’s *Jungle Headhunters* exemplified what Staples calls the “hybrid form of commercial expeditionary film”—a mix of popular and scientific filmmaking that paved the way for all the “academically based ethnographic films in the Amazon.”

The feeling of appropriating the world through images that comes with watching travel films—and perhaps by watching *any* film *as* a travel film—is not only a matter of knowledge and wonder, but is often accompanied by sensations of pleasure and power. Indeed, the best example of a “virtual voyage” isn’t the travelogue in its “archetypal” form of the travel lecture film (whose viewers, as Ruoff admits, are hardly “transported on some imaginary voyage”), but the “motion-simulation rides” based on action films like *Back to the Future* and *Star Wars*. Lauren Rabinovitz points up parallels between these technology-driven trips of the late twentieth century and the amusement park “movie rides” of the early years of film, showing how these virtual tours “transform the landscape into pure spectacle” that overwhelms viewers even as they “conquer” it with their gaze. The insight or awareness gained from such thrill rides remains unclear. Large-scale IMAX technology—described by Alison Griffiths as a “museum-based educational resource” that relies “on the travelogue as its key structuring principle”—would seem to offer an ideal way of modernizing the travelogue while preserving its informational value. Yet its use of 3-D imaging and vehicle-mounted cameras in roller-coaster “phantom rides” lends itself more to visual spectacle than dramatic

narrative, and to “history churned out for the tourist market.” By locating its new theaters in shopping malls rather than museums, IMAX has found “a way out of the education and museum market ghetto,” and presumably, a way back to Hollywood.

As a genre positioned at what Ruoff calls “the intersection of the industries of travel and entertainment,” the travelogue is bound to make us aware of “new hybrid forms, new modes of production and reception, and new kinds of spectators.” Yet one wonders what relation, if any, exists between the new spectators represented by younger viewers who thrill to the visceral sensations of IMAX widescreen and Hollywood blockbusters, and more traditional audiences consisting of older viewers who calmly absorb information provided by live 16mm travel lectures. Do these new/young and traditional/old viewers have anything in common? It doesn’t seem so until we reflect that today’s spectacular, hyper-realistic cinematic effects are not as new as they seem, and that some of film’s most shocking sensations date back to its earliest years, when the medium itself was new. Readers of this anthology may well have the feeling that at the end of its first century, the history of film has come full circle, and that after all the experiments in narrative and documentary forms, we are once again witnessing a cinema of *actualités* and attractions, of virtual reality tours and movie rides. A century later, the old debate about film’s function as an educational or an entertainment vehicle—or as some intermediate hybrid form—remains as unresolved as ever.

Joel Black

Tang Alice Delphine. *Ecritures du moi et idéologies chez les romancières francophones*. Muenchen: Lincom Studies in Language and Literature, 2006. 178 pp. ISBN 3-8958-6477-3, 69 euros.

This second volume of LINCOM Studies in Language and Literature focuses on four female Francophone novelists who base their works on the personal and are inspired by real-life events to make a difference through their writing. Delphine examines the autobiographical dimensions in eight ideological novels by Claire Etcherelli (from France), Gabrielle Roy (from Canada), and Were Were Liking and Delphine Zanga Tsogo (both from Cameroon). Her study “des témoignages de la vie, de l’expérience [des] auteures” (105) is nonetheless superficial. Because it lacks critical substance, the reader who is serious about biographical research will likely find it of limited use.

To her credit, Delphine convincingly demonstrates in the first four chapters that parallels do exist between the lives of the authors she studies and their various narrators. *Elise ou la vraie vie*, “la paraphrase d’une vie” (15),