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Review/Reseña

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Exploring New Angles of Perception in Jens Andermann's *New Argentine Cinema*

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New Argentine Cinema, the title of Jens Andermann's latest book, is appropriate as it conveys the breadth of the book's scope—fifty five films are analyzed in depth and a good deal more are referenced—while leaving hidden the multiple and complementary lines of inquiry that Andermann defines to guide his “survey”, all of which can hardly be evoked or summarized in a title. Similarly, the constraints of the review genre only allow us to hint at the evenly spaced succession of interpretative *tours de*

force contained in this rich, theoretically inflected survey of Argentine cinema over the past fifteen years.

Setting as a premise for his study cinema's lag in acknowledging the events that shook Argentine politics and society to its core in 2001, as well as the social, economic, political and cultural shifts leading to and caused by this crisis, Andermann argues that the films analyzed develop strategies of *staging* and *refraction* that situate them in a critical position vis-à-vis contemporary reality (xiv). If, in broad terms, studies in North American and UK-based academia have circumscribed their scope by examining questions of justice, trauma, memory, gender identities and capitalism, whereas scholarship based in Argentina has tended to emphasize these films' aesthetic and stylistic aspects—contextualizing them in relation to film history and analyzing their implications—Andermann combines both these tendencies as he defines his own thematic lines of inquiry stemming from these films' form and use of filmic language. Andermann's interpretations consistently demonstrate how, through the use of form and style, these films develop a unique, often reflexive stance on key questions such as trauma, loss and post-memory, economic specularization, deindustrialization, social destabilization, and the ensuing creation of new social (and spatial) margins.

In each chapter, Andermann develops and follows a distinct analytical path. "Locating Crisis: Compositions of the Urban" examines the multiple redefinitions of urban spatialities—public and private spheres—and notions of place in films as different as Juan José Campanella's commercially successful genre films that inscribe the community in more traditional places responding in part to middle-class anxieties, Israel Adrián Caetano's gritty films focusing on marginal spaces of exclusion, and various nuanced filmic documentary approaches to the lives of immigrants. These spatialities emerge from the 1990s' neoliberalism that imposed a new precariousness and created new forms of marginality. "Margins of Realism: Exploring the Contemporary Landscape" focuses on landscape and non-urban spatialities in the filmic *oeuvre* of Lisandro Alonso, Pablo Trapero and Lucrecia Martel and in lesser-known films such as Mariano Donoso's *Opus*, examining how these aspects fit within a mode of producing film (for

example, by using “non-professional actors” or by naming characters after the actors that interpret them) and within an aesthetic that innovatively uses filmic language to generate moments of observation in our spectatorship, distancing us from an action-oriented mode of perception, and opening up possibilities for a perceptual mode more attuned to the marginal, even liminal reality of the (deindustrialized) hinterland and the relatively unkempt natural spaces detached from Buenos Aires and its experience of (the) crisis. “Perforated Presence: The Documentary between the Self and the Scene” explores documentary’s performative turn in its approach to new forms of marginality, to memory and trauma (indeed, its unique ability to convey the experience of post-memory through audio-visual means), and to social and cultural history, thus redefining this mode’s epistemic thrust and objects. “Embodiments: Genre and Performance” develops interpretative hypotheses about new acting styles and uses of genre contributing to the critical repositioning of Argentine cinema with respect to social and political reality and in relation to its antecedents in the 1980s. Finally, focusing on two of Lucrecia Martel’s films, and on Enrique Bellande’s documentary *Ciudad de María*, “Accidents and Miracles: Film and the Experience of History” provocatively probes cinema’s ability to critically stage reemerging forms of popular religiosity, particularly the belief in miracles that, in the face of (the provinces’) social and economic stagnation, has acquired new legitimacy.

While Andermann’s critical readings most deeply and consistently engage with the filmic image, as well as filmic technique and style, his interpretations constantly link these aspects to broader discussions, thus expanding their relevance. By including precursor films from the late 80s and 90s by Martín Rejman, Raúl Perrone and Esteban Echevarría, Andermann provides a welcome historicization of the aesthetic innovations and the repositioning of cinema over the past decade in relation to contemporary social reality. Introductions to the chapters on landscape and on documentary cinema provide additional historical insights into the tone and filmic strategies favored at key points of the twentieth century. In addition to historicizing, Andermann theorizes in multiple ways, for example, when suggesting how some strands of this cinema allow for a

reflexive and critical relation to the image to come to the fore through "actor-mediums", as Gilles Deleuze had theorized them, or when demonstrating how some films produce landscapes by slowing down the pace of our perception, thus showing the consequences of deindustrialization, coining new ways of filmically approaching life on the margins, and questioning previously existing modes of filmic realism.

The critical perspective guiding this book is wide-ranging and encompassing, as it doesn't limit itself to considering film form's way of relating to a historical and social reality, but additionally examines the use of genre in Argentine cinema of the past decade, as a point from which to posit (some of) this cinema's global inscription, also considering the materiality of film in diverse ways, including filmic uses of intermediality, the consequences of new, collaborative modes of production, as well as—perhaps most interestingly—acting styles and the recurrence of specific actors whose mode of looking is used in a destabilizing way to generate suspense (Andermann's analysis of Julio Chávez' performance in *El custodio* is particularly stimulating in that sense).

This book participates in a critical dialogue with the scholarship of Gonzalo Aguilar, Emilio Bernini, Gustavo Aprea and Joanna Page, also including a good range of critics and scholars whose work focuses on Argentine cinema. Part of what makes this book unique is the breadth and variety of its corpus, a characteristic that usually lends itself better to historical overviews or analyses of specific styles or tendencies. The better part of its uniqueness stems from Andermann's lines of inquiry. These are inevitably informed by his previous work on spatial and territorial logics in Argentine literature and visual culture analyzed in relation to national and class identity, modernity and the State. This functions to the reader's benefit as this book addresses the more classical topics of thematic analysis of contemporary Argentine cinema that stem from an approach more explicitly focused on the filmic image. In examining these films' production of landscapes, their incorporation of spatial practices that redefine the city, and their remaking of documentary as a space of performance, Andermann traces this cinema's "cognitive mapping" of a new reality, also implying that this mapping has at its basis historical (non-cinematic) modes of visuality

and regimes of visibility. As these lines of inquiry become thematic focal points, they are adroitly woven with carefully selected theorizations of film, sketching out the complex modes and the diverse tones in which cinema engages and deals with social, political and cultural realities, either comedically, critically and reflexively, or sometimes in a compensatory way. This approach encourages us to go beyond tired dichotomies between mainstream and independent cinema (an appropriate move given the dramatic changes in modes of film production highlighted in chapter 1) or the tendency to reduce the political thrust of cinema to an overtly militant attitude.

In addition to the rigor of its interpretations grounded in Andermann's thorough knowledge of Argentine culture, one of the most impressive aspects of this survey is possibly the author's ability to weave together corpuses. The three middle chapters focusing on spatialities and on the documentary mode are the most dense, including analyses of some fifteen films each, and each chapter is subdivided into approximately three different corpuses. This organization encourages us to trace connections between corpuses, between films and across chapters—a possibility that is further generated by the author's critical eye and the steady attention he pays to specific elements, such as sound. Andermann's interpretations of some of these corpuses are particularly enjoyable, such as his analysis of the urban experience of sexual minorities, in addition to other lines of analysis that acquaint readers and spectators with films that may not be readily available outside of Argentina. Their diversity makes each of these dense chapters particularly entertaining and also makes the two final chapters' change in tempo welcome, along with their deeper engagement with more innovative aspects that haven't been examined systematically in Argentine cinema or cultural production. In sum, this variety of corpuses successfully and uniquely unifies traits of this cinema over the past fifteen years.

As English-language publishers specialized in visual culture develop collections dealing with national cinemas apt to be categorized as "world cinemas", Andermann's book is a stimulating, articulate, thoroughly informed and brilliantly written addition as it carves out a diverse, a broad

but carefully defined corpus bound to appeal to both students and scholars. It introduces us to films that seem to be hidden gems (such as the documentaries *Bonanza* and *Estrellas*) and offers stimulating readings of films that have been widely analyzed. While the depth and rigor of its analyses encourages us to think about (Argentine) film from new angles and notice the ways these contemporary films open up new angles of perception, its thorough engagement with scholarship on Argentine film, with film criticism and theory additionally allows readers to reconstruct these critical narratives. Since its perspective combines lines of critical inquiry that are crucial to film studies with others that are more vital to Argentine and Latin Americanist cultural critique, *New Argentine Cinema* is poised to invigorate these various fields. Since interpretative perspectives focused on global coordinates and processes are almost inevitably foregrounded in recently published books on non-English-language cinemas, some readers may find a more explicit consideration of such aspects wanting. While they aren't prominently featured here, they can be thought through further in this book's approach to immigration, in some of the spatialities therein examined, and in its constant dialogue with critical tools and with theoretical insights drawn from other cinemas.