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***Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representations of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema*, Russel J.A. Kilbourn. New York: Routledge, 2010 (313 pages). ISBN: 9780415801188.**

A Review by Colm Ryan, University College Cork

Based on the hypothesis that cinema (alongside photography) represents memory in its fullest and most meaningful sense, owing to its place as a dominant mode of narrative in the twentieth century, Russel J.A. Kilbourn's *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* focuses on modern and contemporary films influenced by what he refers to as Western European Art Cinema. Drawing from key writers on film, memory and the flashback such as Gilles Deleuze, Maureen Turim and David Bordwell, alongside critical theorists, psychoanalysts and philosophers including Derrida, Freud, Augustine and Levinas, Kilbourn aims to discuss cinema and memory within the context of a society where digital technology and globalisation have become prevalent. In this regard, Kilbourn invokes ideas of ethicality and of cinema as "prosthetic memory", whereby film images become an extension of an individual's personal memories. Questions of apprehension are also debated, as many of the films analysed display a "katabasis" structure, within which a hero must undertake an underworld journey in order to gain special knowledge (Holtsmark qtd. in Kilbourn 30). Concluding his Introduction, Kilbourn emphasises four interconnected but distinct ways in which film engages with memory. The first three are: representation via formal-stylistic features, memory as intertextuality and memory as cultural context. The final point is the impression of cinema itself as memory, or "the totality of signs and meanings that make up a given culture" (45). This is a central argument that Kilbourn will return to throughout the book.

The book comprises five chapters. The opening section, "No Escape from Time", focuses on the production of identity through the intersection of individual memory and modern history. In order to elucidate this intersection, Kilbourn makes reference to sources such as Bordwell's categorisation of the art film as a style or mode rather than a genre, Bazin's favouring of deep space, Tarkovsky's use of the long shot and the distinction between Deleuze's action-image and time-image (47). In this chapter, the focus is on films more concerned with an image, but not the "real thing" (59). As such, Kilbourn is analysing cinema in terms of Marxian reification, whereby an inanimate object is imbued with human qualities or a human being is transformed into an object. This is combined with Proust's idea of the madeleine image, which Kilbourn uses to discuss involuntary memory in cinema (62). Involuntary memory and films more concerned with an image rather than the real thing are expanded into an intertextual reading of *Vertigo* (1958) and *La Jetée* (1961), as both focus on women who are intended as images from the protagonists' pasts (66). This idea is further developed in Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), albeit on a more complicated level, wherein the

same actress (Margarita Terekhova) plays both the protagonist's wife in the present and his mother in the past scenes. This chapter ends with a discussion of Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (1987). Once again, Kilbourn invokes the idea of characters with an interest in the image of something, rather than the thing itself, as the angels in this film observe the action in Berlin but cannot interact with it (87). "What is memory for us, today?", the question that concludes this part of the book, leads the reader nicely to the following chapter (94).

In "The 'Crisis' of Memory", Kilbourn focuses on cinema from the past two decades, emphasising key sequences where protagonists experience a memory (96). Once again, Kilbourn divides the films analysed on the basis of their differences in form and style, but also notes certain crossover elements. In particular, he singles out the *Bourne* trilogy (2002, 2004, 2007) and its use of what David Bordwell considers "intensified continuity style", which employs rapid editing, close framings in dialogue scenes, free ranging camera movement and bipolar extremes of lens focal length—something that can also be found in *The City of God* (2002). This chapter allows for some of Kilbourn's more perceptive insights into certain films, when considered under the rubric of memory. In his discussion of *Europa* (1991) he notes that Von Trier's film is not only made too late to share the neorealist setting found in *Orpheus* (1950), but does not use archival footage like *Wings of Desire*. Its intertextual references to a film such as Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948), however, represent a postmodern cinema of nostalgia or a "cinematic collective memory" founded on the Brechtian distanciation effect rather than on realism (108). On the other hand, he views Wong Kar Wai's *2046* (2004), with its discontinuity editing and the yearning for nostalgia of its 1960s setting, as an allegory for the "trauma of living in the present moment" (123). Yet, it is in his rich analysis of Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) that Kilbourn reveals his most astute and in-depth knowledge of trauma and memory. Viewing the flashback scenes wherein the character of Joel (Jim Carrey) is transported to his childhood (in a similar visual manner to the flashback scenes in *Wild Strawberries*, 1957), he notes that certain memories only become traumatic in their repetition, as the adult Joel re-experiences a scene from his childhood as "traumatic for the first time" (134). For Kilbourn, many of these films focus on the distortion of nostalgia by characters attempting to re-experience or re-present the past.

"Global Memory" looks at the idea of cinema as *lingua franca* or how cinema functions as a commodity and recycles images in order to resonate with audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This chapter continues with a discussion of *Blade Runner* (1982), which Kilbourn describes as "a landmark film in its deeply intertextual investigation of modern memory's crisis of authenticity" (146). This is achieved by the film's view of the future through the past, utilising analogue equipment such as the Esper machine, which is similar to the single reflex camera (149). Although Kilbourn does employ some of Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory", he does not fully embrace it. While Landsberg feels that technology empowers the individual, Kilbourn argues that such an empowerment would have to "entail a mode of technical mediation beyond the capacities of conventional cinema" that acknowledges that the full spectrum of human psycho-emotional experience is determined primarily through the visual senses (159). A highly detailed discussion of contemporary consumer culture and commodity fetishism leads to an analysis of Gore Verbinski's *The Ring* (2002), a remake of a Japanese film from 1998. This is perhaps the section in the book where the emphasis shifts most pertinently from theories of memory to those of modernity. Displaying his knowledge of theories of the commodity fetish (citing Marx and Freud alongside the influential discussion by Laura Mulvey), Kilbourn relates them to the film's use of Samara's videotape, and how this is seen as a perverse anti-commodity

fetish object (166-169). Since the tape itself has no origin, it becomes a special example of Baudrillard's *simulacrum* (176).

Chapter Four, “The Eye of History”, focuses on surveillance and ethicality in contemporary film, using the examples of *After Life* (1998), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Caché* (2005). Kilbourn analyses ethical issues through a “tripartite eschatological structure” representing Heaven (*After Life*), Hell (*Lost Highway*) and Purgatory (*Caché*) (180). He asserts that these belong to a specific group of films “that do not simply *represent* memory but even more significantly employ memory *as* the basis of a cinematic aesthetic” (183). In each film, the use of digital video and its ability to shoot a lot more footage at a low cost points to a self-reflexive critique of filmmaking as a form (187). By maintaining throughout a focus on these three films, Kilbourn’s writing remains productive and engaging. While all three films are radically different, Kilbourn finds that *Lost Highway* and *After Life* converge at the same point: death. As he argues, in *Lost Highway* it is death that is life, while in *After Life* the opposite is the case (200). In the conclusion, he offers a pessimistic view of *Caché*, where he sees an escape from time as “more dangerous than ever”, as there is no relief from individual or historical memory in relation to the character of Georges (Daniel Auteuil) (203). Yet, if there is any “redemption” at all, then it will come through memory—a principle that is denied in *Lost Highway* but reaffirmed in *After Life* (203). As such, the three films represent a “globalised” view of memory, leading to the discussion of a successful transnational film in the final chapter.

“‘Prosthetic Memory’ and Transnational Cinema” takes a look at the Brazilian film *City of God*, which Kilbourn views as a “transnational memory-film” representing the re-thinking of memory (204-205). Kilbourn asserts that *City of God* functions as “film as memory” in two ways: firstly, it uses the specific codes and vocabulary of flashback (216); secondly, this is achieved through intertextuality, whereby a team of hoodlums holds up an oil truck, in a scene reminiscent of the American television show *Charlie’s Angels* (218). Kilbourn notes that for many people in the developing world, cinema still represents “the primary locus of encounter with those transnational identities desired by many but truly possessed by none” (221). This chapter is informative, and Kilbourn’s argument of *City of God* as a transnational memory-film represented through the gaze of the photographic camera is lucid and well structured. It also represents a strong case for film that can communicate globally, thus reinforcing the idea of film as *lingua franca*.

Kilbourn ends the book with a coda entitled “Remembering to Forget”, where he expresses his views that memory today has become harder to define through cinema. He writes: “In the twenty-first century, cinema’s role vis-à-vis memory continues to provide us with the means to remember, even as the commodified content of much popular cinema militates against this very process” (227). Throughout the book, he seeks to define cinema’s ability to represent memory, but also the development of memory parallel to changes in modernity. For Kilbourn, the representation of memory in cinema will continue to exist outside of the mainstream, allowing for “alternative modalities of memory” (229).

Cinema, Memory Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema is a detailed, insightful and, at times, brilliantly perceptive view of this difficult and expansive subject. Kilbourn’s choices are certainly representative of memory in post-World War II cinema; however, the lack of films by female filmmakers is noticeable—a film such as Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail* (1999), among many others, would have been a very worthy addition. His endorsement of Bordwell’s theories of narrative and art cinema

style could have been reinforced by an engagement with contrasting theories, especially those concerning the term “art cinema”. Nevertheless, Kilbourn’s analysis of memory in the cinema, an ongoing theoretical debate often full of incompatibilities and abstractions, is lucidly argued in relation to the ideas of the theorists with whom he either agrees or disagrees. This book provides an engaging read for those who are interested in this aspect of cinema, but will also appeal to scholars of modernity and philosophy at the same time.

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