

Book Reviews

Copertari, Gabriela (2009) *Desintegración y justicia en el cine contemporáneo argentino*, Tamesis (Woodbridge), viii + 186 pp. £50.00 hbk.

This book presents a series of close readings of six films produced in Argentina during the period surrounding the popular uprising of December 2001. Copertari's analysis

departs from 'the social experience of lost and disintegration produced by neoliberal globalisation [...] during the nineties' (p. 14). She reads the films as 'national allegories' of disintegration and justice that purpose 'reconstruction, reparation and/or negation of what has been lost' in the terrain of national narratives and identities (p. 14).

According to Copertari, *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* (Agresti, 1996) and *76 89 03* (Bernard/Nardini, 1999) focus on the continuity between the last dictatorship and neoliberalism. She also views *Nine Queens* (Bielinsky, 2000) and *Son of the Bride* (Campanella, 2001) as 'reparatory fantasies' of the 'a-historical disenchantment of the [European] migratory project' (p. 71), while in the last two chapters she reflects on *Heritage* (Hernandez, 2001) and *The Game of Musical Chairs* (Katz, 2002) as reconfigurations of the immigration/emigration tensions. This inner logic of disintegration and justice as national allegories operates within the dispute over 'imagined communities' anchored in the recognition and evocation of a specific legacy of national reintegration.

The result is uneven: it produces very detailed, interesting, and debatable close readings, but the argument that connects justice with disintegration loses force within the allegorical approach. This may have to do with the films selected, which presume a middle class imaginary based on a national perception of Argentina that operates exclusively from and in Buenos Aires. All films take place in the city, and they prevalently present the horizon of social disintegration as the threat to impoverishment of the middle class. Copertari is aware of the classist and racist scope of the films (pp. 165–168). However, only *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* depicts a counterpoint between urban middle class and lower class on their perception of the effects of disintegration and the possibility of justice.

Beyond the selection, Copertari argues for an allegorical reading even though the films themselves do not pursue such a goal. In fact, only two films present some sort of national model as 'reparatory fantasies' against neoliberal globalisation. Both of them, interestingly and problematically, opt to reopen (or remodel) a restaurant based on the old European immigrant imaginary. As Copertari recognises, they operate an 'erasure of history' (*Son of the Bride*) and 'the reestablishment of the hierarchy' of European immigration over internal migration (*Heritage*). The paradox of her exploration of disintegration and justice is that she finds, inversely, the irreversibility of an alternative community of integration and injustice.

The brilliant analysis on (ir)reversibility in *The Game of Musical Chairs* could present an alternative reading of the text that attempts to overcome the limitations of national allegories. Copertari states that irreversibility of time and reversibility of gazes permeates the performances of memory that the family re-presents for Victor, the emigrated family member who returns for a brief visit. She shows the paradox that the family, in the attempt to reincorporate the lost member, reproduces his exclusion. At the end, Victor reads a dedicatory of his sister (who won the game): 'I love you until the end of the world'. It is this unconditional statement that makes Victor call his mom and give her his cell phone number – perhaps the only real encounter of the whole film. Likewise, the old TV store at the end of *Buenos Aires Vice Versa* is one among other sites for real social encounters, as is the *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* protest that the blind woman joins after suffering torture, and the embrace between son and daughter of *desaparecidos*. Their conception of justice seems to be anchored in these intimate connections that overcome the logic of (ir)reversibility of disintegration – 'game', 'vice versa' – presented by both films.

On the other hand, the end of *76 89 03* – the kidnapping of a famous model with the goal of raping her – evokes the disappearance's *dispositivo*. But it also presents

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the new kidnapers as victims of the (failed) subjective inscription of depoliticisation and hypersexualisation produced by the genocidal dictatorship. Copertari doesn't say it, but such irreversibility (con)fuses, very problematically, the impossible return of *desaparecidos* with the potential possibility of all Argentinians, as victims of dictatorship, to commit such crimes.

Finally, in *Nine Queens*, the reversibility of justice is evaded by a final ironic gesture that calls into question the credibility of the film itself: the conspiracy prepared for the thief by other thieves. An effect consciously sought by the director who understands cinema as a 'scam', some sort of machine of deception for 'making people believe things that are not' (p. 79) – which could be interpreted as deception over political projects of national reintegration.

In summary, despite the national allegorical approach, the book encompasses a rich variety of close readings whose ideas are a fine source of polemical debate.

Federico Pous
University of Michigan