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# Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories

Edited by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, Oxford University Press, 2010

Reviewed by Raluca Iacob

*Global Art Cinema* proves to be a daring project, aiming to discuss the rather ambiguous concepts of 'global' and 'art cinema'. The possible scope of the subject and the difficulty of establishing exactly what either 'global' or 'art cinema' is, present a rather daunting prospect. However, this edited collection deals with the difficulty quite admirably.

Built on the accumulation of previous scholarship on art cinema, it references the work of, among others, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Steve Neale. Writing on art cinema was concerned mostly with Western post-war films, but Galt and Schoonover note that art cinema is not an obsolete subject, and its study is able to distinguish and reveal aspects of cinema which might be otherwise overlooked. As the editors write in the Introduction, the 'mongrel identity' of art cinema should be used to 'explore central questions' relevant to current film scholarship.

What the book intends to do is recalibrate the idea that art cinema discussions should be centred on the Western European-North American exchanges, for the most part ignoring contributions from other geographical spaces. Therein lies both its strength and its weakness; the book attempts to cover a rather large area—both geographically and temporally—and enriches our knowledge and understanding of art cinema that doesn't necessarily fit into mainstream cinema, but no matter how comprehensive and all-inclusive it attempts to be, there will always be aspects of the topic which will be overlooked.

The various essays in the book are interrelated, as the contents of an essay on the film festivals can be read in connection with chapters on the European art cinema (of Werner Herzog, Claire Denis or the Dardenne Brothers); or between the international reception of 'pink films' and bisexual representations in art cinema. One of these essays, authored by Mark Betz, "Beyond Europe: on parametric transcendence", looks at art cinema not as it has been associated in recent years with film festivals, but rather as a continuation, or a reversal, to modernism; a modernism which is constituted on the parametric qualities of these films defining and delimiting the field of art cinema. By critically engaging with the previous work of David Bordwell, in his description of parametric

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narrative, Betz is proposing a widening of the area of potential objects of study to include more than a select few of Euro-centric filmmakers and their films. In a counter-balancing article Azadeh Farahmand writes about the relationship between art cinema (especially in the context of national cinema—with a special focus on Iranian cinema) and film festivals. The value of the festival circuit to the dissemination of non-mainstream, art films is of paramount importance. Though limited in the focus of this article (as it discusses only Iranian cinema), the observations can be adapted and modified with the case of other national cinemas. In another article, David Andrews (“Towards an inclusive, exclusive approach to art cinema”) tries to (re)define the elusive concept of art cinema through the perspective of a theoretical framework, a daunting task and one which cannot be fully covered in one article, however—like the rest of the book, it provides a good starting point for further consideration, and more detailed and in-depth analysis.

The concept of global is not necessarily associated with the idea of geographical identities. The book doesn't focus especially on any geographical spaces, but rather looks at art films as representatives of a 'language of cinema' that crosses borders and languages. For that reason, the book is not structured in a form which would indicate a specific geographical direction—the structure of the book follows issues of concern for contemporary art cinema: from the poetic nature of art films, to the growth of the pink film movement, and from the films of the sub-Saharan region to art cinema classics. This diversity is instrumental in positioning art cinema in the larger frame of an art form accessible to all, distancing it from the rather elitist perspective generally associated with the idea of art cinema.

*Global Art Cinema* is an intriguing read. The essays are well-researched, and present a diversity of styles, some leaning towards a more theoretical, conceptual or historical analysis, while other focus on specific films and filmmakers and the aesthetics of the art film image. It is both enjoyable and thought-provoking, providing a strong introduction to art films.