

*NON-CINEMA: GLOBAL DIGITAL FILM-MAKING AND THE MULTITUDE*

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One of the intriguing questions in the digital age is the question of visibility. How would the digital interfere with the traditional or conventional views? The views that make cinema becomes barriers or burdens in its depiction of the modern way of life. Cinema and its close association with capital have affected certain inclusion as well as exclusion of visibility and erasure in many places or other cinema outside the cinema capital. William Brown's book, *Non-Cinema: Global Digital Filmmaking and the Multitude* attempts to investigate the close relationship among the creation of images, the inventions that come out of its processes, the shift in the understanding of using the "non-professional" tools, digital technologies, and the approaches in making identities possible.

Brown explains that in the era of capitalism where everything is measured by the visibility, non-cinema gives hope as counter-movement to capitalist notion of presence = visibility. For Brown, capitalist has always embedded in the reality of the visible. Today is the era "when gaining and maintaining attention not only helps to constitute reality but also profitability (the more people pay attention to you or your products, the more money you make), then we can see how capital has in large part come to take on the characteristics of cinema (and vice versa)" (p. 1). With this understanding, non-cinema relates to two linked forms of invisibility. First, it deals with the idea that often those who are invisible cast as unreal, barbaric, useless and/or not valid. Then there is the other side of the coin, the worker of capital itself is invisible. Capital, for Brown, functions more smoothly when these things (labor, line of production, chain of distribution, etc.) are kept hidden. One of the basic agendas of capital is to keep its operation patterns out of sight. The same thing happens in cinema which for Brown is not only constitute the "high" cinema but also the "invisible" ones. "Non-cinema, then, involves an attempt to challenge the limits of cinema and, by extension, the limits of what is constituted as real in our world of cinema capital" (p. 2). Brown embraces the notion of barbaric which coined by Enrique Dussel, an Argentine-Mexican philosopher, "barbarian cinema, typically characterized as poor, is in fact rich" (ibid). That non-cinema is about heterogeneity, the unusual, the minor, and the multitudinous. While cinema is, as defined by capital, "about both homogeneity and hegemony (the repetition that is the pursuit of box office returns that in turn reinforce power)."

In this book, Brown attempts to demonstrate that, “barbarian cinema, typically characterized as poor, is in fact rich (p. 3). Also, the ‘wretched of the screen,’ the term Hito Steyerl used, should be used to “demonstrate that non-cinema also exists and is important” (ibid). In the first chapter, ‘Digital Dreams in Afghanistan,’ Browns examine how Afghanistan often portrayed to conform the western eyes and “fall within Orientalist discourse” (p. 16). From three basic categories such as: *The Kite Runner*, Marc Forster, (USA/China, 2007); *Out of the Ashes*, Tim Albone/Lucy Martens/Leslie Knott, (UK, 2010); and films made or produced by the prolific Makhmalbaf family create the idea of Afghanistan as ‘A country without an image’. Brown suggests us to look at micro-budget action films made by Afghans and the Afghan diaspora: *Anjam/End* (Basir Mujahid, Afghanistan, 2008) and *Ehsaas/Emotion* (Farid Faiz, Australia/Germany/UK/Afghanistan, 2006). By drawing upon Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concept of the multitude, those digital films aspire the creation of non-cinema as they demonstrate the concept of nation and a unified national people. The realm of the multitude.

In chapter 2, ‘The Iranian Digital Underground, Multitudinous Cinema and the Diegetic Spectator,’ Brown engages with Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of witness. Witness linked to the multitude has helped films like *Kasi az gorbehaye irani khabar nadareh/No One Knows About Persian Cats* (Bahman Ghobadi, Iran, 2009) give expression not to the national sense of filmmaking but to the multitude as well as the concept of being singular plural. Analyzing the form of traditional theatrical of *ta’ziyeh* plays in the work of late Abbas Kiarostami, Brown suggests how in non-cinema the spectator does not detach. They become part of the film; the spectator might be diegetic.

‘Digital Entanglement and the Blurring of Fiction and Documentary in China,’ the third chapter, elaborating the work of feminist physicist Karen Barad on how the blurring of fiction and documentary suggests not separation but something related to witness, namely entanglement (p. 61). Brown argues via the documentaries of Wu Wenguang’s *Fuck Cinema* (China, 2005) and activist film work of Ai Weiwei, that we are not detached from the world, but active participants with it. Furthermore, Brown looks briefly at the works of Andrew Y-S. Cheng’s *Wo men hai pa/Shanghai Panic* (China, 2002) and Lou Ye’s *Suzhou he/Suzhou River* (Germany/China/France, 2000) to demonstrate how this entanglement extends beyond documentaries and into digital fiction film-making (p. 55).

Brown works with David A. Grandy’s philosophy of light (p. 103) in the fourth chapter, ‘Digital Darkness in the Philippines’ to elaborate the role that darkness plays in non-cinema in the work of punk digital film-maker Khavn de la Cruz. Khavn’s work of darkness not only serve as the aesthetic of non-cinema but also related to the historical facts of Philippines as non-nation. *Kommander Kulas*, one of Khavn’s film “positions itself within a complex web of

Philippine cinema and history of European literature” (p. 97). The work of minor virtuosity of ‘cinematic disobedience.’

Chapter 5, ‘Digital acinema from afrance’ considers the role that dark skin plays in non-cinema. Brown takes his cue from the work of Alain Gomis’s *L’Afrance* (France/Senegal, 2001) to argue that it is not only cinema as a form that favors whiteness, but technology as well. “If cinema-capital is constructed as whiteness or light, then blackness is non-cinematic, as my first two viewings of *L’Afrance* made clear: the quasi-invisible black characters did not quite shine, and certainly did not glow, but instead seemed to absorb light, like a black hole” (p. 116). Brown also considers the digitally shot films of *Wesh wesh, qu’est-ce qui se passe?* (Rabah Ameur-Zaimeche, France, 2001) and *Baise-moi/Rape Me* (Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, France, 2000). *Baise-moi* for Brown serves as the example that “cinema meets its extremities and pushes into non-cinema” (p. 114). The other equally ‘extreme’ cinema Brown discusses in this chapter is of Philippe Grandrieux, *Sombre* (France, 1998). This film explains the similarities and differences between J.F. Lyotard’s concept of acinema and non-cinema as well as Akira Lippit’s concept of ex-cinema.

The next chapter, ‘A Certain Compatibility: The British Digital Wave,’ discusses how Michael Winterbottom’s treatment of the British weather and Francois Truffaut’s suggestion that cinema and Britain are incompatible. Brown wishes to show “how Britain and non-cinema are paradoxically very compatible, especially as a result of digital cameras and their increasing use in British film-making” (p. 138). The essay-film of Mark Cousins and Mania Akbari’s *Life May Be* (UK/Iran, 2014) and Andrea Luka Zimmerman’s *Taşkafa, Stories of the Street* (Turkey/UK, 2013) also explore in this chapter to suggest that the ‘suppressed’ component of cinema, landscapes, and animals, as the key ingredients of non-cinema. Brown takes the opportunity to argue the non-cinema relation with the anthropocentrism.

Giuseppe Andrews and the mumblecore movement are the focus of ‘Non-cinema in the Heart of Cinema’ chapter. For Brown, “unlike mumblecore, Andrews creates a cinema not of the gentrification of poverty, then, but of the poverty of poverty, a cinema of total failure” (p. 170). Nevertheless, Andrews’ is an example of a sovereign cinema. Although it exists right on the doorstep of cinema-capital, Andrews creates “a cinema that shows aspects of the world and the body that many might consider unbecoming, in the sense of being unfit for polite society. In creating an unbecoming cinema, Andrews’s films unbecome cinema, or become non-cinema” (p. 176).

In ‘Globalisation, Erasure, Poverty: Digital Non-Cinema in Uruguay’ Brown takes us to the south of the Americas. Uruguay to be precise, the country which “being eliminated from cinema as its films are remade in the global north” (p. 10). Brown focuses fully on Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel on wider relationships between the so-called global north and south in the era of globalization as well as the ethical pursuit of the liberation of the poor.

Brown argues how Uruguayan cinema, such as *La casa muda/The Silent House* (Gustavo Hernandez, Uruguay, 2010) and Federico Veiroj's *La vida útil/A Useful Life*, is a cinema of erasure, disappearing in the age of the blockbuster. Brown suggests that "if the blockbuster has taken over cinema, then perhaps it is in non-cinema, or in a cinephilia that includes not just certain types of cinema, but cinema and non-cinema, that hope for cinema's future survives" (p. 10).

Brown continues his proposal that "the small, the poor and the low have equal value to the big, the rich and the high" (p. 213) to focus on two films shot in part using smartphone camera in chapter nine, Jafar Panahi and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb's *In Film Nist/This is Not a Film* (Iran, 2011) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Film Socialisme* (Switzerland/France, 2010). Brown suggests how technological advantages could help established the realm of non-cinema. On the other hand, smartphone camera and various other devices would also be "process involves a socialist, or democratic, principle: all films – be they rich or poor – are equal" (p. 10).

In chapter 10, 'Farewell to Cinema; Hello to Africa' Brown looks at Godard's *Adieu au langage/Farewell to Language* (Switzerland/France, 2014), to continue the shift away from modern national film concepts to a technological context. Brown proposes that Godard's 3D film "knowingly engages with the limits of cinema, and that it is thus exemplary of non-cinema, especially through its treatment of hair, language (including the 'language' of film) and Africa" (p. 237). Given that, Brown continues to discuss the Nollywood production of *Osuofia in London* (Kingsley Ogoro, Nigeria, 2003). For Brown, Nollywood is "perhaps the most significant hub of non-cinema ... also is the most vibrant and prolific producer of non-cinema in the contemporary world" (ibid). As we look closely to *Osuofia in London*, Nollywood, and Africa, we would learn that the hope for future of film-making may be located in the site which long been neglected by the center of the cinema. However, it certainly serves a greater purpose for non-cinema as it opens equal opportunity for all.

Non-cinema is an interesting entry in our attempt to map and understand the contemporary issues in film and media world as well as pointing out the incapability of capital to penetrate the symbolic realm of many "non-culture" society. The tendencies to place people into certain groups such as the center and periphery, the first world and third world, the colonizer and colonized, or the *I-thing* relationship (the relationship of subject to object (p. 195)) as suggested by Dussel has become the erasure for those who live outside of capital. Moreover, it also maintained our ignorance of the multitude.

It would be fascinating to pick up Brown ideas and analyze conditions in other countries or regions. How the advancements of digital technologies would help make visible many other "national" cinemas which have been erased for so long. For instance, how is the cinema in Indonesia as the most populous Muslim-majority country? Where is it located in the

cinema capital? Would it be more thrilling if we examined it via non-cinema lens rather than how much is it invested in the capital?

Our mediascape has been flooded by the emergence of new audio-visual forms and products which enrich as well as complicates our understanding of this field. Non-cinema is a way to understand as well as to redefine the current condition. Non-Cinema offers how images should be seen in its relationship with the continuity of its meaning. The notion which embraces the multitude instead of homogeneity. Especially in the situation where everything is being valued by its capital function.