CINEMA and the POLITICS of MEMORY

Derrida’s “Phantoms” of Cinema in the Post-Global Context

PROGRAM: Derrida managed mostly to avoid writing on “cinema” and comments on this lack in a late interview, “Cinema and its Phantoms.” Three Catalan thinkers of cinema from the University of Barcelona depart from the enigma of Derrida’s disavowal of cinema to interrogate the politics of mass cultural memory today. Each will address Derrida’s Cahiers du Cinema interview in a different context: respectively, the cinema of Shoah; cinema and post-colonial memory; and, popular culture and singularity. The last will be followed by a response from Tom Cohen and an interrogation of Derrida’s ambiguous evasion of cinema.

*An advance copy of Derrida’s short text in translation is available to attendees (recommended) at: tomcohen13@gmail.com.

ELOI GRASSET, “Belief without believing”: truth and verisimilitude in Theresin: a documentary film from the Jewish Settlement Area”

MARTA SEGARRA, “(French?) Cinema and the Politics of Memory”

JOANA MASÓ, “Culture vs. Cinematograph—Or, the Culture that we don’t have”


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ELOI GRASSET teaches French literature, art and cinema at the Romance Philology Department, University of Barcelona. His research is focused on the exploration of birth of modernity, and the Rethoric of fictionality. He is an associate member of research group CRIMIC at the University of Paris-Sorbonne where he taught from 2005 to 2008. His teaching focuses on the exploration of French poetics of modernity and the connections between literature and different arts (music, cinema, and photography). Among his most recent publications: Necesitar devenir-minoritario. Sexualidad, territorio y escritura, in: Repensar la comunidad (Icaria, 2012, M. Segarra (ed.)), and Jordi Sarrà. De la mirada a la visió (Viena, 2011). He is currently engaged in a study of literary relations between modernity and language change.

ABSTRACT: “Belief without Believing”

For Jacques Derrida, cinema is an art form where we can “believe without believing”. Taking this statement as a starting point, I discuss Derrida’s interpretations of Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah and the ethical question regarding to the approach to pictorial testimonies. I also attempt to specify the connections among truth, fiction and images. Finally, I provide the example of a film where fictional framework seems to be altered. In 1944, the Nazi propaganda produced a film about Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. They intended to use the film to prove the International Red Cross and the word that Jews were well-treated in the concentration camps. It is a fictional film that portrays the camp life in a completely false manner. I focus on some questions: What kind of relation can we establish with these images? Can we, in this case, still accept Derrida’s “Belief without believing”?

MARTA SEGARRA is full professor of French literature and Gender studies at the University of Barcelona, director of the Centre Women and Literature and coordinator of the UNESCO Chair Women, development and cultures at this university, as well as associate scholar at the Centre d’Études féminines et d’études de genre of the University Paris 8, where she has been visiting professor on several occasions. She has published various books and articles in the field of women's literature, feminist critique and literary theory and French contemporary literature, and she has edited several collective books. She is General Editor of the Series "Mujeres y Culturas", published by Icaria, and of the international journal Expressions Maghrébines. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the journal Lectora and of "Critical Studies" (Rodopi). She received the Icrea Academia award 2009.

ABSTRACT: “(French?) Cinema and the Politics of Memory”
The Algerian war for independence finished in 1962, that is 50 years ago. Since, France and Algeria have constructed two different, and even opposed, histories of this war. In other words, those of Benjamin Stora, a “war of memories” is now being fought between these two countries. My paper, based on the Derridean conception of the archive, will problematize how two films by Franco-Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb (Indigènes [Days of Glory], 2006, and Hors la loi [Outside the Law], 2010) place us, as spectators, in “a spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time” (Derrida, Specters of Marx: xx).

Bouchareb chooses not only to create a historical reconstruction of the past, he also frames these films in two stereotyped genres while using the same actors to represent different characters in different historical periods, which provokes meaningful spectral effects.

JOANA MASÓ teaches French literature and essay at the University of Barcelona. She has translated into Spanish texts by Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Catherine Malabou, Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Luc Nancy, and she has published articles on some of these authors, as well as edited some of their texts. She has edited the following books: Escrituras de la sexualidad (Icaria, 2008), La llengua m’és l’únic refugi by Hélène Cixous (Leonard Muntaner, 2009) and Cixous sous X (PUV, 2010, with M.-D. Garnier). And, with Marta Segarra, Cixous's writings on art in French (Peinetures. Écrits sur l'art, Hermann, Paris, 2010), in Spanish (Poetas en pintura: de Rembrandt a Nancy Spero, Ellago, 2010) and in English (Writings on Contemporary Art and Aesthetics, Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

Presentation: “Culture vs. Cinematograph—Or, the Culture that we don’t have”

TOM COHEN is Professor of English at UA and co-director of IC3.