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Ira Jaffe: Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action

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Ira Jaffe: *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*

New York: Wallflower Press 2014, 208 S, ISBN 9780231169790, EUR 22,99

When using the term ‘slow’ to describe a movie it is often thought of as dull or boring – and in some cases this may well be a fitting description. But what is it that makes a movie slow, yet appealing aside from its plot? When analysing movies and specifically here ‘slow movies’, one has to pay attention to all aspects that constitute that movie; like all technical aspects (camera work, lighting, sound and editing) and the acting, which can either help or distract the viewer from receiving the message behind the movie.

Ira Jaffe’s book *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* is a study that explores aspects aside from the plot that result in calling a movie ‘slow’. The author tries to capture the essence of slow movies by analysing their visual style, narrative structure, thematic content, and the demeanour of the characters in specifically selected slow films. In his analysis, Jaffe puts these films into seven categories: Deadpan, Stillness, Long Shot, Wait Time, Drift and Resistance, Death-Drive, Life-Drive and Rebellion’s Limits. In each category/chapter, Jaffe compares up to four films with each other to show the similarities and differences between them and their directors. He further introduces other elements that constitute a slow movie. Moreover, Jaffe adds other film examples outside his list to the main titles in his categories. In addition to his analysis, Jaffe relies

on writings or studies by honourable film directors as well as film and culture analysts to support and convey his ideas.

In his introduction he explains that in light of these modern times it is necessary to stop and embrace the slowness of things. This thinking led to the emergence of many ‘slow movements’ like the slow-sex movement and the slow-food movement which relates to slow-gardening that encourages farmers to take their time and follow the seasonal changes instead of forcing everything to grow fast (cf. p.7). Jaffe talks about why he chose to focus on slow movies and how his study is different from other writings with the same topic – like the writings of Gilles Deleuze, Andre Bazin, Robert Bresson and Laura Mulvey. He stresses that despite the success of these movies in renowned film festivals, they remain unknown to the general public and even to a lot of film students in the U.S. and elsewhere (cf. p.2).

Then he moves to the categories and starts off with “Deadpan” where he describes the deadpan characters of the film examples and how emotion is equally important as motion in slow movies. In “Stillness” he touches on the appearance of life-like motion on the screen and the effect of still photographs. Moving to “Long Shot”, Jaffe refers to the psychological distance between the characters in the movies to their difficulties in communicating.

The author addresses the act of waiting for long stretches of time in the fourth category “Wait Time” and investigates the deliberative realism in the fifth category “Drift and Resistance”. In “Life-Drive, Death-Drive” he examines the duality of the life and death presence in slow movies. Jaffe investigates in the final category “Rebellion’s Limit” three films that include both individual and collective rebellion, which appear to be incoherent and useless. Unfortunately the book doesn’t have a conclusion of any sort.

The book might not exactly be an easy read for the ordinary reader, especially the reader who doesn’t have a background in film analysis. In addition, it is not an easy read for media students, who might lack the necessary terminology that was used in the

book. Which means that the book would be more enjoyed by film experts and analysts. It might have been a bit easier to read, if the introduction was not as long as it is. The length of the introduction in addition to the one-to-many examples may be disruptive and sometimes it becomes hard to follow the analysis. Moreover, the repetition of examples tends to be redundant. The lack of a conclusion or at least some final thoughts come with the feeling of a “cliff hanger,” which provides more confusion and dissatisfaction. I would recommend the book only to those, who are experts in slow movies or at least experts in films in general and are familiar with the examples used by Jaffe.

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