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## Impossible dreams: EUROPE AND LOVE IN CINEMA

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5. 'For about sixteen years Béla Tarr was not the same as Tarr Béla' (p. 171). In playing with language (in Hungarian the surname is placed before a person's given name) Kovács refers to the fact that Tarr's international recognition only came around the second half of the 1980s.
6. Rancière 2013, p. 34.
7. It would not be fair to conceal the fact that sometimes Tarr himself fuels such emotions. See for example the ill-fated interview in *Der Tagesspiegel* (Schulz-Ojala 2011) and a follow-up article about the controversy it unleashed in Hungary (Schulz-Ojala 2011b).
8. The quote, translated and cited by Kovács (p. 2 and, in a slightly different version, p. 145), is part of Tarr's announcement after the release of his film *The Man from London* (2007); Malusia 2008, p. 25.

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## Impossible dreams: 'Europe and Love in Cinema'

Fiona Handyside

As its title makes clear, *Europe and Love in Cinema*, edited by Luisa Passerini, Jo Labanyi, and Karen Diehl (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), offers an intriguing and

provocative encounter between three concepts – ‘Europe’, ‘love’ and ‘cinema’ – which may not initially seem to have that much in common, at least in the field of film studies. Initially, I could envisage ways of considering the relationship between love and cinema through, for example, studies of romantic comedies. Of course, the relationship between Europe and cinema has been the object of much historical, stylistic, and political analysis. However, I struggled to see how the three terms could be forced together and what, if anything, love stories on film set within European spaces could demonstrate that would not pertain elsewhere.

One of the considerable strengths of this collection is its ability to move beyond this rather obvious representational perspective. Indeed, although several contributors do inevitably somewhat conflate the terms in the title of ‘Europe’ and ‘cinema’, so that some chapters do become a consideration of ‘love in European film’, on the whole the book makes an admirable effort to consider all three of its titular nouns as complex topics in their own right rather than Europe simply having an adjectival function. As such, the book aims less at offering some kind of overview of representations of romantic love in European film, although this emerges as a strand within the collection, and more at a mapping or triangulation of what each of these three terms may have to complement the others. What is particularly invigorating from a film studies perspective is the way that such an approach takes the term ‘Europe’ – which has been of recurrent interest and interrogation for studies considering such issues as (trans)national cinema, (film) history, stylistics, and the globalised politics of production, distribution, and exhibition – and places it alongside ‘love’. If discussed at all love has tended to be considered in studies of affect, emotion, grief, and loss (for an excellent example of the former see *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* by Rosalind Galt [New York: Columbia University Press, 2006]; for the latter see *Love, Mortality and The Moving Image* by Emma Wilson [Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012]), so the approach allows for a methodological meeting point.



It is through allowing each term space to breathe that we can come to a chapter such as the remarkable personal account by Thomas Elsaesser which opens the book. Thinking about love and cinema leads him not to talking about the romcom but rather to discussions of cinephilia and the institutional position of film studies within the academy (perhaps in some ways a rather suspect subject precisely because it still inspires love – a thorn in the side of the UK government's increasingly Gradgrindian approach to higher education). However, while an elite cinéophile position was carved out in the specifically European cultural milieu of the postwar Parisian cinéclubs in the (for our purposes) suggestively named Latin Quarter, can cinéphilia itself be claimed as a specifically European experience? Is the association of cinéphilia with the European (and therefore highbrow) a way of simply ignoring other forms of passionate love for cinema (such as cult movies, star worship, or hugely successful blockbusters) which are as important for European audiences as ones elsewhere but that do not fit into the dominant historical model? Does the impact of feminist film scholarship not teach us that love of the image is a scopophilic instinct that could be applied to all film-viewing experiences within mainstream models, rather than being unique to a small enclave of privileged men? In other words cinéphilia, while a very suggestive term for approaching the interrelations of Europe, love, and cinema, seems to raise as many questions as it answers.

This is perhaps not a problem, for the book situates itself very much as the start of a conversation about the place of cinema within the entangled private/public, political/emotional world of Europe and her citizens. As the editors state, cinema is a particularly privileged vehicle for the public articulation of private sentiment, as 'films express powerful fantasies about what is felt to be desirable or undesirable [...] inviting audience identification with particular models of desire' (p. 3). As the editors explain in their introduction the book does not 'attempt to offer a historical overview of European cinema' but rather positions itself as an intervention at 'the interface between cultural history and film studies' (p. 3), opening up the very problem that my discussion of cinéphilia above reveals about what Europe has to offer to questions of (political and personal) desire. Clearly, there is a complex dynamic involved when considering explicitly European perspectives on civilisation and courtly love, their expression through art and politics, and the changed perspective the coming of modernity brings to these historical debates (including the invention of cinema and its rapid diffusion as mass popular entertainment). Furthermore, none of these perspectives can be considered in glorious isolation. As discussion of the historical claim that 'Europeanness and the concomitant sense of belonging to Europe are characterized by particular kinds of love relationship' (p. 5) demonstrates, this definition of the European depends on a notion of an Other. So, for example, European chivalry was contrasted to classical antiquity,

or 'emancipated' European women to their enslaved Oriental counterparts. By the time cinema was invented at the turn of the century the Europe-love equation had solidified into a concept of Europeanness grounded in the colonial experience, and Eurocentric – indeed often racist – formulations which both feared (romantic/sexual) love between European and non-European couples yet simultaneously promoted colonisation as a humanistic civilising mission born of fraternal love.

It is unsurprising given this historical relation between colonisation, love, and cinema in Europe that many of the chapters in the collection consider the depiction of the colonial relation on film. As Luisa Passerini explains, a sizeable corpus of European films dealing with colonial relations emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. This offered European audiences 'a concrete vision of a colonial world of which, for the most part, they had only an abstract notion' (p. 103). The film she investigates in some detail, *La dame de Malacca / Woman of Malacca* (Yves Allégret, 1937) is highly unusual and it allows its colonial relation (between a European woman and a non-European man) a happy end, in which the couple marry and she becomes a Sultana. However, while the film characters are a mixed couple, the stars playing them – Edwige Feuillère and Pierre Richard-Willm – are both European. Furthermore, 'while in the novel the Sultan wears a European suit with a toque and earrings plus other jewels, in the film these Oriental trappings are absent' (p. 109). In this film an impossible dream is realised whereby the European heroine Audrey can cross boundaries between worlds and become

something even better than the Other – teaching an Oriental man to love, and becoming a Sultana. In this fantasy, Europeans can teach Orientals (provided they are sufficiently aristocratic) to love 'properly', and can impersonate Orientals better than the natives in the sense that their impersonation makes Orientals more modern, more open and capable of greater happiness. Cinema lets such a dream come true through its technical apparatus, ignoring or disguising everything which appears too openly Oriental to European eyes and yet appropriating the Oriental's fabulous riches. (p. 118)

The masquerade here, whereby Europe substitutes for/impersonates the Orient, enables mastery and assimilation.

In contrast, Laura Mulvey's discussion of *Piccadilly* (Ewald André Dupont, 1929) illustrates the way that the tragic end was inevitable given the race of its main star Anna Mae Wong. Comparing its tale of forbidden love across class lines to that of *Hindle Wakes* (Maurice Elvey, 1927) – both films feature working-class girls falling for the boss/the boss's son – Mulvey explains that, whereas in the latter film the failure of Fanny and Allan's relation is accepted as part and parcel

of everyday life and Fanny simply starts dating another mill worker, Valentino and Shosho's love story

is over-taken by the death-ending implicitly necessitated by interracial sex [...] Thus, while Wong's star presence enabled the film to be made, her ethnicity brought with it a 'difficulty' that had affected her own career and the narrative structure of the films in which she performed. (p. 99)

Some taboos and barriers cannot be crossed, even in the 'safe' fantasy space of the cinema. At the same time, the very mechanics of cinema itself – its interest in movement, speed, and thrill – can at certain moments, such as when filming Fanny and Allan enjoying a roller coaster-ride, 'assert its own transcendence' over such forces, as 'the thrill and excitement of speed, at which the participants scream and clutch at each other in fear, leads onto and easily merges with the thrill and excitement of sex' (p. 93).

The theme of the entanglement of 'public' political issues of colonialism and race with personal questions of intimacy and sex finds a new inflection in more contemporary films considering Europe's relation to her former colonies. In the case of *Chocolat* (Claire Denis, 1988), discussed by Liliana Ellena, cinema enables the reconstruction of the past; this is one of many modes which allow for the return of colonial memory to (post)colonial Europe – whether as object of nostalgia or in an attempt to uncover repressed trauma. The use of a journey back to Cameroon to trigger memories of French colonial life in the mid-1950s in this small outpost of empire enables the film to exploit the link between 'cinema and transportation, constructing the viewer as a passenger journeying through a slice of the past [...] but this] does not serve to tame history, nor carve a reassuring linear path through a story of progress' (p. 175). Rather, the past confronts the viewer in a disruptive fashion, as France remembers Protée, the African houseboy and her childhood friend and his non-relation with her mother. In the claustrophobic space of the colonial house (France's mother) Aimée's desire for Protée remains forbidden and unspoken, articulated only at the level of the visual via a play of gazes. 'In this respect, cinema becomes a powerful medium for the representation of empire as desiring machine, which [...] brings to light the material geopolitics of colonial history' (p. 176). Protée's refusal to allow Aimée to touch him is his one avenue of resistance to colonial power and the reifying, depersonalising European gaze.

Ironically, Denis was advised that her representation of the impossibility of intermixing would be bad for box office and was asked by the production company to change it. In the European colonial imaginary constructed in the cinema we have moved from *Piccadilly* and an inability to show interracial relations to a desire to see interracial relations, as if the latter would somehow offer a redemptive or

recuperative possibility to the colonial project Denis is so keen to renounce. The theme of love as redemptive possibility is found elsewhere, such as Sean Allan's discussion of *Das Leben der Anderen* / *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), where yet another cinematic fantasy (here of the 'good' Stasi officer moved by knowledge of transcendent love) 'reflects the desire of a new post-68 generation to "normalise" the German past and renegotiate an understanding of German national identity in terms that circumvent [...] conventional Cold War politics' (p. 167).

The chapter that most impressively brings together these themes and ideas is Tim Bergfelder's discussion of *La Haberna* (Douglas Sirk, 1937) and *Auf der Anderen Seite* / *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin, 2007). As Bergfelder acknowledges, comparing these two films from such different historical periods and production contexts 'may seem a daring leap' (p. 72), but through the lens of a specific sensibility (in this case cosmopolitan desire) Bergfelder explains that both films articulate complex ethical and emotional attitudes towards the non-European Other while also being fully inscribed into the complex journeys and encounters that mark German cinema history – from Sirk's exile to Hollywood, Fassbinder's passionate attachment to Sirk, and Akin's re-writing of the melodrama narrative. The concept of cosmopolitan desire is one Bergfelder suggests could be a useful corollary to film studies and its insistence on the category of the transnational. Turning to the work of Mica Nava on 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (p. 64) – and at one point coining the delightful phrase 'visceral cosmopolitanism' – Bergfelder argues that the intimacies of love relations (not just romantic heterosexual relations between husband and wife but also those of mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, friends, queer lovers, political comrades, perhaps even a prostitute and client) offer a vision of contact between different people that is not dependent on a privileged position but that can be incorporated into everyday experience. While traditionally the term cosmopolitanism evokes a rarefied elite, here it offers a valorising personal agency beyond social class. Equally, it enables us to sidestep some of the essentialising problems inherent in discussions of transnational cinema, where the biographies of directors are used to determine the extent to which their films are able to discuss Otherness (a trap that Akin's films often fall into, and that he protests). In turning to 'attitudinal' (emotional, affective, ethical, imaginative) mobility, a more fluid and nuanced account of Europe's cinematic encounter with the Other and their challenge to our ability to love can be given. This is an optimism Bergfelder locates in Akin's German-language titles, which suggests the ability for contradictions to be held together – 'on the other side' recalling the English phrase 'on the other hand'.

Despite this rewarding and invigorating argument, what emerges overall from this book is a different perspective. This is not a perspective that is actually ar-

ticated within any individual chapter but that emerges from the overall project. It is striking how many of the films discussed in the book deal in some way with the questions of borders, the moment where Europe is no longer Europe, or where national and transnational identities fracture with sometimes violent results; or, where what it means to be European shifts. As well as the colonial encounters considered above, Sean Allan discusses films that interrogate the difference between East and West Europe in the contested site of Cold War Berlin; Lucy Mazdon analyses *Western* (Manuel Poirier, 1997), a French film set in Brittany with a title that playfully evokes both the American genre and Brittany's liminal status as the far West of Europe, the moment where it shades into the Atlantic; Enrica Capussotti assesses two films, *Poniente / Wind From the West* (Chus Gutierrez, 2002) and *Tornado a casa / Sailing Home* (Vincenzo Marra, 2001), which both make use of the Mediterranean as a thin membrane between Europe and her Others; Karen Diehl's wide ranging corpus includes *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992), a film with a narrative that hinges on questions of national identity and terrorism in the context of the Irish Troubles, and *Non ti muovere / Don't Move* (Sergio Castellitto, 2004), an Italian film in which a Spanish actor, Penelope Cruz, plays a woman of Albanian origin named Italia.

Diehl's chapter concludes the collection and brings the book full circle, as it reprises Elsaesser's engagement with Europe and cinema as an institution rather than individual films within it. However, if Elsaesser's discussion began in the postwar period and identified Europe with a passionate love for cinema, Diehl's conclusion is rather different. She traces the ways in which European audiences reject European film, explaining that 'if British releases in other European film markets are excluded, the percentage of non-domestic films of European provenance screened in European countries is on average less than two percent' (p. 253). While a variety of EU initiatives support the production and distribution of films across the EU audiences tend to watch films from the US and possibly some domestic fare, but rarely films from other European countries. Producers argue that in such a context Europe is actually producing a surplus of films and thus reducing the chances of any one of them making significant inroads at the box office. In this way, despite the EU's MEDIA programmes being in place since the early 1990s, the situation does not seem so very different to that described by Andrew Higson in his discussion of films made by Sascha, the leading Austrian film company at the time, with an eye to a pan-European market. As Higson summarises,

it is difficult, despite the cosmopolitan make-up of the creative team, to see them as articulating a 'European imagination', enabling audiences to imagine themselves as European or even belonging to Europe. The goal was not to produce 'European' films that stood above national interests. On the



contrary, the goal was to produce films that were carefully tailored to the perceived interests of audiences in different national or language markets [...] Such films may look excitingly transnational at the point of production and distribution, but they are often designed so they appear comfortingly local at the point of reception. (pp. 52-53)

In contradistinction to the idea suggested by the discussion of cinéphilie that opens the collection, its focus on the fractured, riven, indeterminate nature of European identity and the failure to produce any kind of genuinely 'European' audience would suggest Europe's relation to (its own) cinema is not one of love but rather indifference or apathy, at least outside of the academy.

Furthermore, such a reading is underlined by the striking number of chapters that consider films where relationships fail. Although one section is named 'impossible loves', several chapters that fall outside of this section also consider representations of relations that are marked by sexual violence, death, suicide, blackmail, or at the very least refusal and rejection. The love relations envisaged within a space marked as connected in some (incoherent, confused) way to some abstract notion of 'Europe' are marked by discomfort and dislocation. Indeed, perhaps we could speculate that all three terms this volume sets out to explore are marked by hauntings, traumas, and death. It is clear that there is no agreement on how exactly Europe is to be defined (politically, economically, geographically), as the emphasis on liminal spaces and border-crossings in the filmic corpus amply demonstrates. Equally, cinema itself is fragmented under the pressure of new media and the digital economy, to the extent that the volume's claim that feature film is the privileged popular cultural arena for the negotiation of the European imaginary may not be true of the contemporary period. Whether love itself is as damaged, decaying, and vulnerable as the other two terms, I will leave it to the reader to decide.

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