

CHANA BATYA ANZI ZALIS

Amity University, India

ON INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS AND HYBRIDITY IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM "PRESENTING PRINCESS SHAW" (2016)

Abstract:

The documentary film by Ido Haar, "Presenting Princess Shaw" (Israel, 2016) depicts a cultural encounter between Samantha Montgomery - a lesbian African-American woman who uses the stage name "Princess Show" - and the Israeli composer and musician, Ophir Kutiel, who goes by the nickname "Kutiman". Kutiman collects YouTube clips that have been uploaded to the web by amateurs and professional YouTubers. He then re-edits and "mixes" them visually and musically into an independent art-work defined as Mashups. As in reality-shows that constitute a "star" from an anonymous person, the film follows the process of transforming Samantha from an anonymous, socially incompetent and marginal black woman, into a cultural heroine. Samantha works for a living as a nurse in a retirement home in New Orleans until she becomes a celebrity. Throughout the film she is not aware that at the other end of the world, in a kibbutz in southern Israel, Kutiman, one of Israel's leading music producers and one of the world's most accomplished producers, is creating a movie/music project, that will become a viral hit. Only at the end of the film, after the music clip/movie is published on the web, Kutiman and Samantha meet and prepare for a collaborative performance at "Habimah", Israel's National Theatre.

Most of the criticisms of the film and Kutiman's 'mashup' practice underscore the subversive aspect of Kutiman's work and the democratic nature of the Internet that makes it possible. The film is described by critics as a 'story of Cinderella' penetrating the journey of a poor heroine who lives on the margins - to the mainstream through the altruistic mediation of Kutiman and Haar. Yair Raveh (2016), for example, views this inter-cultural encounter as an egalitarian ideal and calls it "a creative meeting." Similarly, Ohad Landesman (2016) claims that Kutiman and the film's director Haar redeem Samantha from her anonymity and give her an opportunity to fulfill herself as a musician.

This paper will examine the issues that arise from transitions and intercultural contacts in the film. It will examine whether the Internet is a democratic space that undermines social strife or rather preserves the existing balance of power in society. At the center of the paper questions such as, if Kutiman's hybrid symphony manages to undermine the power balance (or relations) between the 'center' and the 'periphery', and whether this project can be treated as an honest cooperation between artists or rather an example of exploitative relations will be discussed. The paper will explore the role that the virtual space (www) plays in this context and the contemporary meanings of the Internet.

In order to discuss the role of the web in the film, several theories that analyze the impact of the Internet on social dynamics will be presented. In addition, postcolonial theories (i.e. Franz Fanon, Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha) will be implemented in order to analyze the power dynamics between Kutiman and Samantha. The virtual space of the web will be put to test in the case of Kutiman's praxis as a "third space" according to Bhabha's terminology. Furthermore, it will examine if this "third space" undermines the social hierarchy, whether Kutiman's hybrid 'mashup' technique/strategy - and Haar's directorial approach - is subversive, as Bhabha's theory suggests, or does it rather pave a new path to exploitative relationships. Later, it will be argued that the 'exoticism' that Samantha's character undergoes in Kutiman's project - and in the film alike -

enables her 'unappealing' to penetrate the heart of the mainstream. Yet, at the end she returns to her grim life as an attendant.

The methodology applied includes an elaborate analysis of film reviews and theories dealing with the practice of 'mashup' and the Internet. In addition, the film's cinematic expressions will be analyzed along with an elucidation on how these cinematic tools serve the thesis of the film.

Keywords:

Gender, Hybridity, Inter-cultural, Post-colonialism, Social justice, Video-Music, "Mash Up", YouTubers, Exoticism