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CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE OPTICAL UNCONSCIOUS: WOMEN OF THE PAST IN HISTORICAL AUDIOVISUAL TEXTS BY WOMEN DIRECTORS IN LATIN AMERICA

Abstract:

This paper discusses the construction of female characters in television series and movies as compelling expressions of cultural memory through an analysis of the concept of the optical unconscious. Cultural memory is basically defined as the interplay of past and present in socio cultural contexts, and it is expressed in processes of communication through a variety of symbolic systems, such as language, writing, images, artifacts (Erl, Sturken). In TV series "Screams of death and freedom" (Mexico, 2010; Dir. María Fernanda Suárez), "Juana Inés" (Mexico, 2017; Dir. Patricia Arriaga), and movies "Let's not talk about it" (Argentina, 1994; Dir. María Luia Bemberg), and "I, the worst of all" (Argentina, 1990; Dir. Maria Luisa Bemberg) female characters are constructed through the use of slow motion, close-up and other visual narrative techniques which allow a connection with the optical unconscious.

The optical unconscious, a concept developed by Walter Benjamin -which runs parallel to the instinctual unconscious in psychoanalysis-, refers to the contribution of photography and film towards an understanding of human perception, that is, movement and dimensions of reality that otherwise go unacknowledged in the analysis of visual images. In film, close-up and slow motion are not only narrative devices and techniques, but tools that by "bring[ing] to light entirely new structures of matter" (Benjamin) function as the means to a state of heightened perception -the optical unconscious- and facilitates new ways of seeing and of conceptualizing reality. Directors Arriaga, Bemberg and Suárez display a more intuitive and powerful approach to narration about women of the past through the use of technical resources, such as slow motion. Other than the most common purposeful use of slow motion camera to re orient the viewer's attention and perspective by highlighting dramatic attitudes and gestures in specific scenes of climax or resolution, Arriaga, Bemberg and Suárez are revealing in themselves, and facilitating in the viewers, a point of entry to the optical unconscious. Thus, they create new ways of seeing. Equally important, the use of those techniques potentially illustrate the close and reciprocal connection between "historical viewing and historical thinking" (Anderson).

Keywords:

cultural memory, optical unconscious, history, women, women directors, film studies, television studies.