## Book Review – *Cinema Against Doublethink: Ethical Encounters with the Lost Pasts of World History* (2019).

*Cinema Against Doublethink: Ethical Encounters with the Lost Pasts of World History*, by David Martin-Jones, is an extremely ambitious and, at points, brilliant, book, that raises many important questions related to the politics and ethics of representation. Composed of six chapters (excluding the Introduction), grouped into three broad parts, many of which are interwoven with detailed and perceptive case studies, it is a book that both draws from and radically develops a number of seminal studies in film, notably Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994)*,* and Lucía Nagib's *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (2011). It represents a significant contribution to the de-colonisation of Film Studies as an academic discipline, and the de-colonisation of film-philosophy, as a critical approach.

Both the Introduction and Part 1 of *Cinema Against Doublethink* are largely theoretical, introducing the interdisciplinary methodology that will subsequently be deployed throughout the book. One important thinker included in this section is the Argentine-Mexican philosopher, Enrique Dussel, whose notion of transmodern ethics – based, as it is, on a belief in recovering stories that 'have been dominated, silenced, forgotten, and excluded' in and from dominant historiography (Dussel cited in Martin-Jones 2019: 42) – forms one of the guiding critical concepts in the book. As the Introduction and Chapter 1 illustrate, *Cinema Against Doublethink* is also indebted to two other critical concepts associated with Dussel: firstly, colonial modernity (as a worldview that emerged in 1492, with the discovery of the Americas, yet continues to hold sway over much of the contemporary Global South); and, secondly, the denial of coevalness (a concept Dussel links to how colonial ideology effectively relegates the colonised to an archaic primitive past, prevented from acquiring the status of the 'modern'). It is upon these discussions regarding ethics and ethnicity, history and *temporality* that Martin-Jones builds a further, more contentious, yet compelling, argument, that will reappear throughout this book: that, in order to facilitate the process of 'recovery' theorised by Dussel, directors working in different countries have deployed a specific formal-aesthetic strategy, famously theorised by Gilles Deleuze in his seminal *Cinema 2* (1985), and known as the time-image.

For anyone unfamiliar with Martin-Jones's work, it is worth noting at this point that the author has already built up an established reputation for his scholarship on Deleuzian film-philosophy. Unsurprisingly, therefore, much of Chapter 2 of *Cinema Against Doublethink* – 'Ethics/History: Hesitating in encountering lost pasts (Gilles Deleuze)' – displays a deep understanding of how the time-image functions: as a cinematic trope blending past and present, often at the detriment to narrative causality and linearity. It also includes a compelling attempt at revising our understanding of the time-image, in order to correct what Martin-Jones sees as the latent Eurocentrism of Deleuze's theories. In the first stage of this process of theoretical revision, the author thus suggests that we understand the time-image less as a symptom of the Second World War (as per Deleuze), and more as a symptom of a series of broader 'shocks' (2019: 68) that have taken place 'for different reasons in various locations', notably South Korea, Argentina, Spain and Brazil (2019: 68). In the second stage of this revision, Martin-Jones argues that we

need to refocus our attention away from the Eurocentric corpus of New Wave narratives analysed by Deleuze (notably directed by Orson Welles, Alain Resnais, Federico Fellini et al), and towards the polycentric modes of cinematic production in operation in different countries around the world. So prevalent is the concept of the time-image in Martin-Jones's book that it is somewhat surprising that it doesn't feature in its *title*, the significance of which I will return to towards the end of the review.

Expanding upon these discussions of Dusselian ethics and Deleuzian temporality, Chapter 3 then proceeds to delve into the temporally unstable worlds of the Chilean documentary *Nostalgia for the Light* (Guzmàn, 2010), and the ecologically-orientated Thai art drama, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul, 2010). In the former, Martin-Jones examines what he sees as a complex analogy, between astronomical attempts at uncovering the origins of the universe, mediated though 'time-images of planetary pasts' (2019: 92), and archaeological attempts at uncovering the bodies of those killed by Pinochet, during the 1970s and 1980s; whilst, in the latter, the author uncovers 'a need for a natural contract to rescue nature from colonial modernity' (2019: 109). Both of these case studies are, from a theoretical point of view, extremely dense, giving rise to a string of arguments that are at once undeniably rich yet also unwieldy, especially given the author's propensity, in this chapter at least, to multiply the use of Deleuzian concepts – faceification, any-space-whatsoevers, affection-images – rather than focusing solely upon the undiluted power of the time-image alone. This propensity for theoretical density, for instance, can be seen in observations such as 'the faceified any-space-whatever of the time-image, then would imply that the viewer is encountering an other in this affection-image [consistent with the idea of the face, in close-up, as paradigmatic of the affection image]' (2019: 93). The most compelling parts of *Cinema Against Doublethink* occur when the author strips back such condensed use of theoretical terminology, privileging argumentative clarity over conceptual complexity.

Propelled by precisely this argumentative clarity, Chapter 4 of *Cinema Against Doublethink* proposes to look at how directors have represented Sixteenth Century colonial relations between Europeans and indigenous Americans. In the first part of this chapter, the author thus hones in on Nelson Pereira dos Santos's Brazilian black comedy, *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (1971)*, defining it as a film that mobilises the trope of cannibalism as part of an allegorical mediation on the cannibalistic impulses of colonialism (2019: 124-134). To this argument, Martin-Jones then adds an equally compelling example, illustrating how *Even the Rain* (Laverty and Bollaín, 2010)*, critiques the water wars that took place in Bolivia from 1999 to 2000, through the allegorical, self-reflexive, tale of a Spanish film crew, who attempt to shoot a historical drama about Columbus's 1492 discovery of the Americas. Analysing *Even the Rain* in reference to Deleuze's time-image, this section of Chapter 4 is particularly illuminating and perceptive.

Chapter 5 represents a subtle shift in focus: from how the legacy of Sixteenth Century colonial conquest has been represented in fictional narratives, to how Twentieth Century patterns of colonial modernity have been represented in documentary narratives. As part of this analysis, Martin-Jones firstly examines *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, Cynn, Anonymous, 2012), deploying Bakhtin/Agamben's

concept of the carnival/carnivalesque, to analyse how the documentary infamously chronicles the 'state of exception' into which Indonesia had fallen during the mass killings of 1965 and 1966, before again orientating *The Act of Killing* towards a revised version of Deleuze's time-image. As Martin-Jones succinctly states: 'the past is forever haunting the present in *The Act of Killing*, as is most apparent when Anwar Congo confesses that he struggles to sleep, fifty years on, due to the insistence of memories of this period' (2019: 165). Extending these discussions of how such scenes effectively prise open the cracks, or flaws, in dominant narratives of the past, revealing a subterranean stream of pasts that have been hidden or repressed by the apparatus of the State, in the second half of this chapter, Martin-Jones then draws our attention to the Uruguayan documentary *At the Foot of the White Tree* (Neme, 2007), itself based upon the discovery of an archive of photographs, taken during the brutal years of military rule in Uruguay, which lasted from 1973 to 1985. Focusing again on how *At the Foot of the White Tree* acts in order to reveal what has been concealed by the parameters of dominant historiography, it is a highly compelling chapter that combines ethical questions of collective memory with ontological questions of medium specificity.

Edging even further into the historical present, the final chapter of *Cinema Against Doublethink* is largely concerned with how the ideology of colonial modernity has been preserved in the neo-colonial ideology of neo-liberalism, and how narratives from Latin America and Asia have attempted to critique such ideologies, through a shared use of the body, as allegory for the nation. In the first part of this chapter, Martin-Jones thus identifies the Argentinian production, *Carancho* (Trapero, 2010) as one such film, illustrating how, by combining an apparently innocuous tale of automotive accident insurance with the visual trope of the 'exhausted body' (2019: 189), Trapero effectively demonstrates that there is no escape from the flows of global capital that have permeated neo-liberal Buenos Aires. Following on from this argument, the second part of the chapter is subsequently concerned with the retributive-mercenary logic of Park Chan-wook's *Lady Vengance* (2005), and, in particular, how the film castigates the neo-liberalisation of South Korean society, catalysed by the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. Punctuated with measured textual analysis, and anchored once again in the Deleuzian notion of the time-image (or, to be more specific, the crystal of time), it is here that Martin-Jones crafts what is undeniably one of the compelling sections of the book, identifying the character of Geum-ja in *Lady Vengance* as someone who exists beyond the neo-liberal temporality of the narrative: in an archaic state of world-time, as the vector of an immense world-memory.

This is not to say that *Cinema Against Doublethink* is entirely devoid of imperfections. The author's decision to reference the Orwellian concept of 'doublethink' in the title of his publication, for example, appears, on reflection, doubly puzzling: firstly as it is largely absent from the book; and secondly, as it does not seem to correspond to the *colonial* regimes of power that are described, in great detail, by the author, throughout each and every chapter (colonial modernity, coloniality, Eurocentrism, and neo-colonial neo-liberalism).

A second limitation concerns the scope of *Cinema Against Doublethink*. As the sub-title suggests, this is a work that purports to examine 'the lost pasts of world

history' through the lens of *world* cinema. Nonetheless, after plotting the setting of the twelve films examined by Martin-Jones on a map, what emerges is a slightly different story, pointing instead towards three, specific, geographical locations: Europe (*Alone in Berlin*, *Even the Rain, Celine and Julie Go Boating*); Asia (*Lady Vengeance, The Act of Killing, Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*); and, in particular, Latin America (*Carancho, At the Foot of the White Tree, How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman, Nostalgia for the Light, Embrace of the Serpent, Another Story of the World*). With this in mind, framing the book as a sweeping atlas of world cinemas, is, again, slightly misleading.

Despite these minor flaws, *Cinema Against Doublethink* is, however, an undoubtedly ambitious and illuminating publication – one that dazzles in its theoretical complexity, and dares to uncover a plethora of stories that have not only been marginalised and censored through local legacies of colonial modernity and neo-colonialism, but have also been somewhat ignored by scholars working in film studies and film-philosophy. Highly recommended.

Dr Mani Sharpe (the University of Leeds)
m.sharpe@leeds.ac.uk