

WILFRIED RAUSSERT and GRACIELA MARTÍNEZ-ZALCE, eds., *(Re)Discovering 'America': Road Movies and Other Travel Narratives in North America/(Re)Descubriendo 'América': Road movie y otras narrativas de viaje en América del Norte*, Inter-American Studies/Estudios Interamericanos, Vol. 6 (Trier: WVT; Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2012), 242 pp.

The volume *(Re)Discovering 'America'* pursues an ambitious objective. In the introduction the editors Wilfried Raussert (Bielefeld University) and Graciela Martínez-Zalce (University of Guadalajara) state that there is a re-emergence of road movies. As there are surprisingly few systematic studies on the road movie as a genre and far fewer on its relation to other literary, cultural, or cinematic traditions such as the travel narrative or the U.S.-American frontier myth, the volume at hand follows a path-finding critical endeavor in examining this little-studied form. Moreover, the editors seek to approach the traditionally U.S.-American and Hollywood-centric genre through an inter-American theoretical lens of 'transculturality.' Pursuing the aim of "widen[ing] American studies to the studies of the Americas" (7), the book includes "new and alternative road movies" (as stated on the book cover) from Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The authors place particular emphasis on analyzing the ways in which place and identity in alternative road movies are constructed through mobility as attempts to rediscover 'America.'

Unlike in numerous other cultural studies publications claiming to be transcultural or transnational in scope, the proclaimed inter-American perspective is taken seriously here. The contributors to the volume analyze U.S.-American, Canadian, and Mexican movies and the volume includes an equal share of texts in Spanish and English (with a summary in the other language, respectively). The fact that such bilingual projects are still rather an exception than the rule implicitly alludes to the problem of the dominance of English in studies on the Americas whereby established scholars from the United States are 'allowed' to exclude other perspectives (because they are not in English).

Raussert and Martínez-Zalce further expand the methodological lens of 'transculturality' one can usually find as a new phenomenon in American and cultural studies by tracing

the key concept of transculturality back to Latin American (and particularly Caribbean) thinkers who had worked out the concept long before it was turned into a 'turn.' Referring to Cuban theorist Fernando Ortiz, who came up with the concept of 'transculturality,' the editors suggest that "postnational discourses in North America Studies [...] as well as the border discourses in German American Studies, are surely indebted to Ortiz's earlier concept" (6). Theoretician Ángel Rama, who expanded Ortiz's concept in his examination of narrative transculturation (which he saw most accomplished in the work of José María Arguedas), is also mentioned (the references are both unfortunately missing in the bibliography). This expansion of references beyond the usual suspects in the introduction to *(Re)Discovering America* reveals the volume's indebtedness to a politics of decolonization. However, few other relevant theorists and decolonial thinkers are mentioned as theoretical references. Thinkers such as Néstor García Canclini (who introduced the notion of 'hybrid cultures'), Édouard Glissant (who has elaborated on the concept of creolization), Aníbal Quijano (The Coloniality of Power), or Gloria Anzaldúa (and her concept of borderlands) would be worth adding. The fact that decolonial critic Walter D. Mignolo is subsumed under the highly essentializing (and U.S.-centric) notion of a 'transnational turn' in American Studies is potentially misleading. It might provide a productive hinge for further research to relate the inter-American endeavor more explicitly with power-sensitive notions as expressed in postcolonial and decolonial approaches and thereby render the related persistent colonial inequalities and asymmetries more clearly visible. In spaces like the Caribbean, transnational processes and processes of (often enforced) migration and creolization have been a reality for centuries. The respective authors' findings (e. g. expressed in a perspective of coloniality/modernity, see Mignolo) might help to avoid reducing processes of transnationalization, transculturalization, and globalization to their latest appearance in processes of a so-called globalization as some recent studies of transnationalism suggest.

In the section of the introduction on "The Road Movie as a Genre," the editors situate road movies in the tradition of the travel narrative. The travel narrative evokes notions of the individual experiences of the travelers and the journey motif as representative of

cultural production, identity politics, and, as the editors claim, the “mobility underlying colonial processes in the Americas at large” (8). For further studies on the topic, stronger reference to (historical and recent) counter-narratives or counter-chronicles from the perspective of the ones be-travelled (such as the accounts of *el indio* Garcilaso de la Vega or Guamán Poma de Ayala, as elaborated on by Pratt 1992, for example) might be a productive corrective.

As the editors underscore, the road movie has traditionally represented a masculinist perspective, hence functioning as a patriarchal medium. It has originally been mainly a U.S. genre: the editors are hence interested in “what happens when the road crosses borders” (9), postulating that “the rediscovery of America might take place on the highways of the U.S.A.” (10). U.S. highways are, however, hardly accessible for most inhabitants of the Americas. In order to expand the overall conceptual and theoretical focus on the construction of ‘place and identity’ through mobility in ‘America’ to a truly inter-American one, elaborations on the genre and its appropriations in different spaces and contexts need to be tied more explicitly to questions of the border regimes and citizenship regimes that restrict the mobility of large parts of the populations throughout the Americas. Many of the contributions to the volume delve deep into a number of such asymmetries and inequalities.

The essays included in *(Re)Discovering ‘America,’* which stem from a symposium held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2011, cover a wide range of aspects and discourses and give an insightful overview of the manifold forms of road movies in the Americas. Will Straw’s “Driving in Cars Without Words” elaborates on the connection of the automobile as technological form and the landscape as a medium and shows through film example from Canada, Mexico, and the USA how travel is differently linked to freedom, disruption, difficulty, or routine in national cultures. A whole section of essays focuses on the Canadian context and range from Ana Paulina Gil Vargas’s revision of Columbus’s log book in Robert Finley’s 2000 novel *The Accidental Indies* (as a critical review of the past and its texts) to Wilfried Rausser’s innovative examination on the possible function of an “own life” of soundtracks. Elaborating on the question “what if what we see is different from what we hear?” (68), Rausser analyzes the soundtrack

of the film *Highway 61* (1991) and follows the film’s “travelling sounds” (67) along the journey from Canada to Louisiana. The essay examines the crossroads between the road movie as a filmic genre and music, focusing on the disjunction between soundtrack and narrative rewriting “U.S. American-Canadian relations through both synchronic and different narratives of mobile and hybrid musical cultures” (68). Underlining the multiplication of routes (and their turning into “transroutes” [78]), Rausser concludes that “the soundtrack as alternative narrative voice suggests [that] Canadian culture has always had its vital impact on U.S. popular culture” (78).

Two essays—Ger Zielinski’s “Driving around Los Angeles: On Gregg Araki’s ‘Irresponsible Movie’ *The Living End* and the Urban Road Film” and Paulina Sánchez’s “Travelin’ through: el camino de regreso a casa”—dealing with queer perspectives in road movies offer particularly insightful dimensions of alternative appropriations of the genre of the road movie. On the basis of textual analysis in relation to postmodern forms of pastiche, parody, and citation, Ger Zielinski reads the film *The Living End* (1992) as a queer and gender-based revision of the genre. As a side effect, his essay offers a helpful overview of the genre conventions and the U.S. genealogy of the road movie. She points out the problems such a perspectivation—or queering—poses to the genre, particularly with regard to the relation to urban space. Paulina Sánchez offers an inspiring audio-visual analysis of the road movie *Transamerica* (2005). Analyzing the ways in which the film depicts the journey of a female-to-male transsexual with her gay son and subverts the tradition of the buddy movie, Sánchez concludes that *Transamerica* provides alternative visions both due to the fact that the film is an independent production and to its presentation of transborder subjects who challenge conventions and boundaries on several levels.

Caroline Bem’s analysis of the “Narrative Reconfigurations and Generic Border-crossings in the films of Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodríguez” is a further innovative contribution, which brings into light the “transgeneric cannibalism” (155) of the examined road movies as well as the symbolic functions of border crossings at various levels, such as between the United States and Mexico or through transborder figures like vampires. In her examination of “Homeless in the Bor-

derlands: (Re)defining the Concept of ‘Home’ in *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*,” Miriam Brandel elaborates on the concept of ‘home’ in relation to borderland experiences and cinematic representations with a particular emphasis on the concept of ‘journey’ underlying this “crossover between road movie and borderland western” (14). She focuses on examples that represent a sort of crossover between road movie and borderland Western and between the concepts of ‘there’s no place like home’ (typical for the classical Western) versus ‘you can’t go home again’—a reality many migrants have to face and adapt to, especially when crossing undocumented and from the south of the United States.

A further section of essays focuses on Mexican films and the ways in which regional and cultural contexts redefine the genre. The essays of this section offer a great variety of different appropriations of the road movie topos in Mexican cinema: Álvaro A. Fernández’s essay “El *road movie* en México” analyses two Mexican road movies on the basis of the concept of ‘chronotope’ (Bakhtin) with regard to their redefinition of time-space relations and their impact on the spectators. César Othón Hernández examines the psychic journey of the protagonist of the Mexican novel *Se está haciendo tarde (final en laguna)* (2007) focusing on the reworking of the *katabatic* subgenre from a countercultural point of view. Analyzing the 1953 bike journey from Mexico to Canada depicted in the documentary *Ciclo* (2006), Victor Manuel Granados Garnica delves into the dimension of the psychological, cognitive, and emotional processes involved in the process of overcoming boundaries in this re-enacted version of the journey.

*(Re)Desubriendo ‘America’* provides a challenging starting point for future studies of road movies and other contemporary travel narratives from an inter-American perspective and new understandings of what ‘Amer-

ica’ means. The introduction by Raussert and Martínez-Zalce arouses curiosity to learn more about the intriguing topic of road movies in the Americas, and the surprising fact that there are very few systematic introductory studies to be found yet calls for further elaborations of the field. For the reader not familiar with the little studied tradition of road movies in the United States and other parts of the Americas, a short (and somewhat systematic) overview of the history of the genre (and its different traditions) would prove helpful.

In a second volume, it might be exciting to complement the North-South perspective proclaimed on the cover with a stronger focus on South-North perspectives, which will most probably sharpen the focus on colonial legacies and the impact of related persistent inequalities in the Americas and the respective experiences. Further studies might include, for example, more examinations of depictions of the experiences of poor migrants who depend on walking or dangerously jumping on trains or self-made rafts in order to make their journey and who probably have completely different mental maps of their ‘roads,’ ‘roots,’ or ‘imagined communities.’ It would be interesting to add analyses of the numerous films on such experiences, e.g. documentaries narrating the experiences of the precarious journeys and illegal border crossings of migrants (such as *Sin Nombre*, *La Bestia*, *Babel*, *The Invisibles*, *El Coyote*, *De Nadie*) or the *balseiro* (raft people) movies from Cuba (such as *balseiro, una noche*). As one can see, *(Re)Discovering ‘America’* provokes a number of inspiring starting points for delving deeper into an emerging field of road movie studies and challenging trans-boundary perspectives on the Americas and for theorizing the Americas as a hemispheric and entangled space.

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