

Introduction

New modes of theorizing are necessary. We must start again.
(Noël Carroll)

The idea for *Encounters of the Filmic Kind* was born of teaching experience. It was apparent from the onset of this book project that there was a real need for an easily comprehensible guidebook for students covering the most influential theoretical grids in the history of film studies. We agreed to write this book in order to make it an authentic guide for those who want to be more than just superficially initiated into the terrain of film theories. What we did not want: yet another dense text that would give a hard time for BA students. We had to remember how we read theoretical texts back in our early student years and decided to draft our chapters accordingly, in order to put together a manual that would not ultimately find its place in one of the corners of a (perhaps, dorm's) room having been ripped of pages containing information served in an irritating manner. Similarly to the combined use of computer technology and music in the communication with aliens in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), we assembled sometimes difficult texts with a number of interpretations in order to make them easily understandable. Most of all, this guidebook is intended to drive people back to consciously watch (more) movies and not to take away the pleasure of watching, talking, and, especially, writing about films.

This text is meant primarily for BA students majoring in English and American Studies with interest in film issues, and intended also to all of those intrigued by the ways in which films can make sense. The subjects and the material of this guide were chosen on the basis of personal experience – seminars and lectures – with BA students struggling to understand classical and contemporary theoretical texts about cinema.

Encounters of the Filmic Kind is conceived as a text contextualizing and enhancing further thought. It is not intended to shape a new theory of film or to build a unifying theory of the cinema; it is rather a summary of theories about film with mostly English and American examples and relevance. The result of a practical encounter with the celluloid world, this work is intended to function as an introductory, pragmatic guide to cinema.

To paraphrase Andrew Sarris's statement on auteur theory, this book reflects an attitude towards movies rather than a rigorous method of studying the wider discipline of film studies.

Therefore, the content of this work is less essentialist and more context-based. We follow an interdisciplinary mode of discussion; there is no dominant, overarching theory but plural, sometimes transgressive modes of seeing films, channeled into a book divided into eight chapters.

The first chapter, "Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film," outlines the most significant historical and scientific origins of film and contextualizes these in the realm of appropriate film theories. It focuses on the difference between the cinema and film, analyses a few proto-cinematic forms, and follows special episodes in the development of film; discusses the realistic and the formative approaches to movies, sketches the historical and economic backgrounds that contributed to the appearance of movie-theaters, and shows some technological innovations that stand at the origin of certain genres; talks about theoretical concepts behind the myth of total cinema and the essence of cinema, goes into relevant details concerning color and sound in film, and deals with the beginnings of film theory in the English-speaking world. At the end of the chapter readers can find a selected list of recommended online glossaries for film/cinema terms.

The second chapter, "Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation," looks at the ways film has been defined as language, and examines the implications of such a claim in various contexts, from the issue of narrativity to that of adaptation. The issue of film language is discussed through the concepts of film narratology (narrative, the types of narrator, focalizer, grand imagier, and diegesis) and investigated through the special case of textual transformation known as adaptation.

The chapter "Dream On: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," provides an overview of different orientations in psychoanalytically informed film theories. The issues of identification, the Oedipal trajectory, castration, fetishism, cinematic subjectivity, the difference between the gaze and the look, and the procedure of suture are discussed in detail. As psychoanalytic film theory largely relies on Lacanian ideas and theoretical concepts, the chapter focuses on concepts that have been rethought by recent new Lacanian theorists in order to show the relevance of psychoanalytic thought in film theory and criticism after the heyday of the approach in the 1970s.

Chapter four, "Cowboys, Deadly Women and Co.: Genres of the Cinema," discusses the significance and theoretical potentials of tackling film genre. Taking its cue from literary genre theory, the chapter focuses on the way film theory frames the issues of genre in categories of production and reception, providing descriptions of and background to particular film genres such as western, screwball comedy, and film noir. While genre theory in film is fused with problems, it still points at new directions in its strive to put history and criticism into dialogue.

Chapter five entitled “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star” considers the development of authorship in film and treats the most important features of the auteur theory; outlines the development of the Hollywood studio system and discusses its social, economical, and political characteristics; presents the activity of the Production Code Administration together with other censoring and rating institutions, and examines the most important features of the star system.

The sixth chapter, “Gender and Cinema: All Sides of the Camera” is an incursion into gender arrangements in and outside films. This part of the book is concerned with the appearance and proliferation of feminist and gender theories in film. The chapter presents the origins of feminist filmmaking and criticism, discusses a number of women directors and focuses on the woman’s film; surveys the topic of counter-cinema and the theoretical grounds of feminist filmmaking; analyzes some non-visual cinematic tools subversively representing women and discusses the question of gendered and racial spectatorship, together with key issues regarding gay, lesbian and queer film criticism. The chapter concludes with selected lists of recommended films about women, feminist issues, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) topics.

Chapter seven, “Third Cinema Encounters,” goes beyond the frontiers of the mainstream, Western cinema and encounters the world of the Third Cinema. Since this is a vast area of study that would need volumes for discussion, this chapter surveys, without the claim to totality, the main ideas that generated this cinema. It focuses on issues of the Third Cinema and on the difference between the Third Cinema and the Third World Cinema; goes through the concept of hungry cinema and aesthetics of hunger, as well as that of the imperfect cinema, guerrilla cinema, cinema nôvo, and the Tropicalist movies; scrutinizes small slices of Latin American, Indian, African, and some Asian cinemas, discusses the issues of postcolonialism and postcommunism with regard to the Third Cinema; analyzes transculturation, the concept of the middle-worlder, and the realms of transnational cinema.

Chapter eight, “Ultimately Onscreen: The Futures of the Cinema in the Age of the New Media,” looks at film in the wider context of contemporary forms of media. The chapter gives an overview on how the concept of the cinema has been transformed due to fast technical development by the new millennium; focuses on issues of the different types of screens, interfaces, and the theoretical implications of digitalization; discusses digital and online forms of life, virtuality, and their relation to reality; presents theories of the subject, the hypertext, and the age of Hollywood 2.0. The chapter concludes with a call for new modes of theorizing in a new age in which the cinema is part of the new media, as opposed to being the new medium.

The objective of the above-mentioned chapters is to initiate students into the practice of critical understanding of films. The guidebook provides an easy-going connective tissue between theory and practice in film studies, and endows students with a discipline-specific language needed for further explorations; that is why at the end of each chapter pertinent key concepts provide instant feedback for the reader, while works cited function also further readings in the topic. In a methodological sense, the book is an attempt to translate sometimes impassable theoretical texts and concepts into a user-friendly way of understanding.

Marie Claire Kolbenschlag claimed that “a film like any cultural expression or gesture is a bundle of [...] complex energies intersecting at a given point in time. It is an event, rather than an art object, and as such commands a systematic and comprehensive critique.” The authors subscribe to this critical position and offer an equivalent world view for introspection in the following pages.