

Does movie poetics dream of territories?

A concept we can not avoid in our days talking about culture and the direction we're heading towards is globalization. It stretches itself out like an umbrella surrounding cultural phenomena in a way not experienced before, and its creations make us wonder about our cinema languages. In the global movie market certain national movie industries like the US one are more dominant than others. One might question if there is a kind of 'cultural homogenization process' behind? Still, there is a language emphasizing the local, there are movies that give us tales and stories about the site-specific grounded into their own cities. This article focuses upon these movies, relying on some basic theories within Cultural Semiotics by Jurij Lotman. Perhaps it is possible to see some kind of interaction and connection between these different kinds of movies, or perhaps they are two separate languages living in their own spheres? First of all, according to Jurij Lotman [1] a culture functions as a collective memory organized and preserved by their narrative representations, which in our case are movies. As symbolic constructions and a social form of dividing, movies exert an important impact in order to create a certain spirit of the culture [2]. It might be global and transnational, or local and site-specific; however, the spirit is a dynamic being continuously changing, but still understandable for its members, who themselves take part of the process. When it comes to site-specific storytelling there are two movies that we can focus upon: "The great beauty" by Paolo Sorrentino and "Kitchen stories" by Bent Hamer. Both movies are rooted in their territories. It is not only about their everyday language with its references grounded to the place, created by the 'Byt' [3] as Lotman would call it, it is rather about the meaning given inside and from the territory. Even if the 'Byt' is certainly vital to correlate meanings to the movies, functioning as all the objects surrounding the protagonists, their attitude and habits. However, the territory itself has its own language for the spectator's interpretation of the movie.

"The great beauty" could never have been produced without Rome. With the protagonist Jep Gambardella walking in between the contrasts of La città eterna; a decadent lifestyle, a magnificent history, a spirituality opposed to a materialistic trend among the élite, he questions it all and looks for the real beauty. Every scene is consciously composed for this purpose, both in a visual and auditive level. The movie works almost like a poem dedicated to Rome and Gambardella's "midlife crisis". Rome is as much a protagonist as Gambardella.

In this it is interesting to compare it with the site-specific in "Kitchen stories". A story about Swedish researchers who in the 1950s decide to do observations on Norwegian bachelors' kitchen habits. Beyond a formal research it becomes a story of friendship created within the four kitchen walls. However, the film is not linked to a city, being situated in the silent countryside of Norway. Nevertheless the division between the Norwegian and Swedish territories creates an important part of the movie's message. A visual emphasis on this is when the Swedish researchers cross the national borders and have to drive on the opposite side of the road. All the events take place within the Norwegian territory and cultural differences emerge. Surrounded by cold winter landscapes with scenes mostly in the kitchen, the two protagonists Folke and Isak decide to let go their post-war prejudices to get to know each other. With food and discrete everyday talks, their loneliness and curiosity turn into an equal friendship. In a way, "Kitchen stories" presents the silent characteristics from a lonely man's point of view, it is a cultural meeting between two neighboring cultures that have so much, and at times, so little in common.

As seen in "Kitchen stories", a culture is defined through the meeting with the "other" [4], because in this meeting a culture's memories, past and consciousness are found in its instant and natural comparison of the differences. However, the question is if we today are experiencing a new kind of otherness? Thus, an

'otherness' presented by the US movie industry? For some this movie industry is based on a 'cultural odorlessness' [5], which means that the cultural differences in their movies have been simplified and references to other cultures expanded. In a way, they might not only transfer North-American values, but also a mixture of other ones. With movies being so easy to understand by viewers with different cultural backgrounds, one might see why import statistics from various countries' show such a dominant presence of US movie industry. On the other hand, does an 'odorlessness' mean a loss of those specificities, those layers that create the uniqueness of a single culture? Or is this trans-nationalistic tendency just a natural development of culture (that often is composed by a mixture of different influences and segments), within a globalized context that makes it inevitable?

Furthermore, it is a fact that the site-specific movies generally lack [6] a success in the global market (with only a few exceptions). Being well rooted in their territory's national culture, there is a small audience with the real understanding and ability to feel the social form of dividing, the spirit as mentioned before. In a way, these movies seem to present a non-conventional storytelling offered only to a certain circle, with little interest in connecting with the global movie language. In the end, we might wonder whether the site-specific movies function as a kind of counterforce against the dominant main stream, or they rather just reflect a human need. A need and a phenomenon taking place in its own sphere indifferent to the globalization around them.

Notes

[1] Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic. (2006) Tesi per una semiotica delle culture. Meltemi editore. Roma. pp. 28-29.

[2] "Sono i segni, i testi, i documenti – cioè forme sociali, condivise, normate e attestate – a fare la cultura. Non è la cultura (astratta, ideale) a materializzarsi discendendo nei testi." from Lorusso, Anna Maria. (2010). Semiotica della cultura Editori Laterza. Bari pp. 19-20.

[3] Byt è il consueto decorso della vita nelle sue forme reali e pratiche; byt sono le cose che ci circondano, le nostre abitudini, il nostro comportamento di ogni giorno. (...) il byt si trova sempre nella sfera pratica, è il mondo delle cose prima di tutto (...)" by Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic. (2006) Tesi per una semiotica delle culture. Meltemi editore. Roma. pp. 53-55.

[4] Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic. (2006) Tesi per una semiotica delle culture. Meltemi editore. Roma. pp. 28-29.

[5] Presented in Iwabuchi, K. (2002.) From Western gaze to global gaze: Japanese cultural presence in Asia. In: D. Crane, N. Kawashima and K. Kawasaki, eds. Global culture: media, arts, policy and globalization. New York: Routledge, pp. 256–273. Also discussed further by Crane, Diana. (2013.) From International Journal of Cultural Policy In: Cultural globalization and the dominance of the American film industry: cultural policies, national film industries, and transnational film. Philadelphia. pp. 375-376

[6] Based on statistics from European Audiovisual Observatory presented in Crane, Diana. (2013.) From International Journal of Cultural Policy In: Cultural globalization and the dominance of the American film industry: cultural policies, national film industries, and transnational film. Philadelphia.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)