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Book Review
Serge Goriely / Jean-Luc Maroy / Arnaud Join-Lambert (eds.), Visions et apparitions au cinéma

L'instant de la révélation

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The collective book *Visions et apparitions au cinema. L'instant de la révélation* (Visions and Apparitions in Cinema. The Moment of Revelation), edited by Serge Goriely, Jean-Luc Maroy, and Arnaud Join-Lambert, tackles the wide-ranging theme of visions and apparitions in movies and TV series, as well as the subject of spiritual and/or supernatural manifestations. Notably, it offers a multidisciplinary reading of a topic that is often observed under a theological or religious microscope. The singular moment of apparition, the "instant" of revelation (as the book's subtitle indicates) in which the real world tips over into an "alternative world", is the focus of the articles, with particular emphasis on the spectator's perception, understanding, credulity, and need for transcendence.

The articles are divided into two main sections: the first part, entitled "Lueurs théologiques et bibliques" (theological and biblical insights), brings together texts devoted to audiovisual works in which references to religion, the Bible, and sacred texts are identifiable. The second part, entitled "Eclats étranges" (strange glimmers), broadens the context and considers films and series whose characters come from different cultures and whose narratives may evolve in universes at the frontiers of reality, where spectral phenomena can emerge in subliminal manners.

In the introduction, Serge Goriely and Jean-Luc Maroy ask, "How should we approach visions and apparitions in the cinema?" (p. 6). Each author in

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this volume seeks to answer that query in light of their field of expertise. In the first article, Régis Burnet explains how the apparitions depicted in cinema movies and TV series are generally codified for the viewer, even if the elements of these theophanies are "tirelessly reworked, altered and reinterpreted" (p. 16). He takes as an example the desert (in the literal sense as well as in the broad sense of a place where the individual is isolated), which by creating a rupture with everyday reality allows apparitions to occur. This does not prevent a subtle interplay of the codes (the use of symbols, the voice, the tremendum) which, depending on the film, allows the mise-en-scène to oscillate between spectacular demonstration and elliptical suggestion, especially in contemporary movies.

Chris Deacy explores the role of apocalyptic visions in cinema and their interaction with the real world in films with non-religious content (for example, Taxi Driver [Martin Scorsese, US 1976], Armageddon [Michael Bay, US 1998], Waterworld [Kevin Reynolds, US 1995], Outbreak [Wolfgang Petersen, US 1995]). These movies are characterized, he writes, by a subtle shift from the "transcendent to the immanent sphere" (p. 39). Theological approaches to the end of the world give way to glorification of the saving action of the individual, as in Outbreak, in which the two main characters reconcile and rediscover love as they confront a virus that threatens humanity.

Katia Malatesta considers Marian apparitions in contemporary Italian audiovisual works to identify current trends in such representations and their relationship with both historical and cultural evolution. Through the film Troppa Grazia (Lucia's Grace, Gianni Zanasi, IT 2018) and the series Il Miracolo (The Miracle, Sky Italia / Arte, IT/FR 2018), she shows how contemporary Marian theophany humanizes the figure of Mary, places her back at the heart of the debate on feminist and gender issues, and redefines her "as a living person 'who' is interested in people's ethics and lives" (p. 54).

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary are also the topic of Geneviève Fabry and Sophie Dufays' article, which looks at two recent films, La pasión de Michelangelo (The Passion of Michelangelo, Esteban Larraín, CL/FR/AR 2013) and L'apparition (The Apparition, Xavier Giannoli, FR/BE/JO 2018). In these movies, the characters/investigators find their initial rational stance indirectly confronted by issues of faith. Their doubts are transformed by the magic of the image-icon, entering an "epiphanic dimension, which thus draws an unexpected and enigmatic path towards [...] the world of souls" (p. 68). Supernatural apparitions thus bring a radical transformation of the human being.

The film Lazzaro Felice (Happy as Lazzaro, Alice Rohrwacher, DE/FR/IT/CH 2018) is the subject of Aurel Rotival's article. In this film, the apparition of a wolf provokes a double shift, both narrative and political. It enables the miraculous resurrection of the main character, who from this point is "out of time", and then recontextualizes this phenomenon to make this character "the privileged messenger of a decisive critique of capitalism" (p. 88). The apparition is therefore the pivotal moment that offers potential deliverance from the bounds of the real world.

Jean-Luc Maroy provides an interesting reading of the futuristic film Bird Box (Susanne Bier, US 2018), in which the forces of evil – the mysterious entities that bring death by forcing humans to look at them – remain totally invisible to the viewer. This salvific ban on catching sight of evil raises the issues of "seeing" and "believing". In this moment of revelation "seeing" is not in the gaze (which kills) but in "the possibility (or necessity) of opening up a fraternal space for a shared vision of the future" (p. 105).

Serge Goriely discusses season two of Fargo (FX/Netflix, US 2014–2023), a detective series about a massacre in 1979. A completely offbeat and unexpected event occurs during this season when an out-of-context flying saucer appears, reverses the course of the action, and saves the main character. Is this an intervention by compassionate aliens or the expression of a divine manifestation that has its origins in the biblical story of Job, "with at its core a challenging of Man, a vision of what God might be, and the possibility of a revelation for the heroes" (p. 123)?

Bruno Dumont's transfiguration of reality through the cinema is analyzed in Jean-Benoît Gabriel's article. Showing "the sacred in the profane" and by giving "through cinema, a sacred dimension to an ordinary man" (p. 134), Dumont involves the viewer in the revelation via the power of uncluttered mise-en-scène and acting that sometimes lacks verisimilitude.

In the second part of the book, Christophe Collard and Christophe Meurée focus on "Jaco Van Dormael's Visions", the title of their article: the multiple visions and apparitions featured in the Belgian director's films are an "attempt to repair the tragedy inherent in existence" (p. 139), multiplying the possible interpretations and championing a cinema that favors mystery over truth.

Alice Michaud-Lapointe and Annaëlle Winand propose film archives and found footage of two experimental films be read through the prism of specters and ghosts as instances of revelation. Absence/presence, they argue, as much as "the emergence of the past in a present media, constantly updated (p. 167)", allows the intersection of temporalities and contexts.

Nausica Zaballos explores the Amerindian visionary experience and its stereotyped representation in Hollywood productions, noting that this visual reproduction is excluded from films produced and directed by Amerindians, which instead privilege "an oral representation, in accordance with the tradition of storytellers" (p. 184) and offer viewers a different conception of history.

Benjamin Campion investigates the interaction of the marvelous and strange with the fantastic in the series Servant (Apple TV+, US 2019–2023), particularly in the first episode. The multiple levels of "vision" – that of the father, the mother, the nurse, and the viewer – ensure the apparition involving the baby/doll makes the series oscillate between "skepticism and credulity, pragmatism and dogmatism" (p. 200). Does this mix of genres hold out the promise of an imaginary world that can contain both life and death?

Cécile de Coninck examines the film Axolotl (Olivier Smolders, FR/BE 2018), analyzing the variations in rhythm and between still and moving images, between montage and composition, between blur and sharpness, in parallel with the apparitions, disappearances, and multiple duplications of the characters. She proposes that "Smolders' aim, through the multiplication of visions, is to assert his creative freedom, as well as man's freedom to constantly invent, molt and metamorphose" (p. 217), even if this means shaking the viewer's certainties and convictions.

Exploring two films by Russian director Vassili Sigarev, Natalija Masjova shows how a revelation, that of death, creates a rupture between "worlds constructed by an individual and those conceived by a collective entity, based on an experience of love" (p. 221). The characters' experience of revelation enables them to see the world differently.

The afterword by Arnaud Join-Lambert, a co-editor of the book, revisits the film L'apparition (2018), focusing on the four apparitions of the icon of the Virgin Mary that punctuate the main character's journey and accompany, even provoke, his inner transformation: from *seeing and believing* to *believing without seeing*, "his journey leads him to doubt both what he sees and his non-belief" (p. 244).

"Do we not therefore need visions rather than images?" ask the editors in their introduction (p. 11)? Faced with such a complex and topical question in a world dominated by all kinds of images, this book has the merit of suggesting diverse and in-depth readings on an important subject and opens the field to further studies of theophanic representations in apparently non-religious contemporary movies and TV series.

Filmography

Armageddon (Michael Bay, US 1998).
Axolotl (Olivier Smolders, FR/BE 2018).
Bird Box (Susanne Bier, US 2018).
Fargo (Created by: Noah Hawley, FX/Netflix, US 2014–2023).
Il Miracolo (The Miracle, Created by: Niccolò Ammaniti, Sky Italia / Arte, IT/FR 2018).
La pasión de Michelangelo (The Passion of Michelangelo, Esteban Larraín, CL/FR/AR 2013).
L'apparition (The Apparition, Xavier Giannoli, FR/BE/JO 2018).
Lazzaro Felice (Happy as Lazzaro, Alice Rohrwacher, DE/FR/IT/CH 2018).
Outbreak (Wolfgang Petersen, US 1995).
Servant (Created by: Tony Basgallop, Apple TV+, US 2019–2023).
Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, US 1976).
Troppa Grazia (Lucia's Grace, Gianni Zanasi, IT 2018).
Waterworld (Kevin Reynolds, US 1995).