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In the preface of his latest work, *Hidden Chicano Cinema: Film Dramas in the Borderlands*, Gabriel Meléndez addresses both the representation of Mexican Americans in the Borderlands from the late nineteenth century to the start of the twenty-first century and the hybrid result of filming the encounter between the Chicano and Anglo population in the region there. These film moments or “film dramas,” as the author suggests calling them, shape and explore a border reality in a multidisciplinary way that covers ethnography, sociology, history and filmic representations. Yet, the principal original feature introduced by this book is the recovery of the cultural and cinematic encounters of diverse ethnic groups in a long-forgotten land within cultural and film studies: New Mexico. As Rodolfo Acuña argues (2004), its seclusion from the rest of the Southwest and Mexico during the colonial era, and its subsequent detachment from Chicano struggles moved New Mexico to produce its own message and realities separate to Chicano development in other states. Unquestionably, this border state, unlike others such as California, Arizona and especially Texas, has been isolated from Chicano representations in films, with some notable exceptions taken from canonical Chicano literary works, such as *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988) and the recent production *Bless Me Última* (2013), which both display an interesting reflection of the “distant locale” that Gabriel Meléndez highlights through this insightful work, filling a significant gap in the literature of the region.

This book situates itself within Chicano film theory and criticism, a theoretical field that “has been closely tied to the development of Chicano filmmaking and evolved in relation to it” (Ramirez Berg 2002, 33) and which has some remarkable recent contributions such as Ramirez Berg’s *Latino Images in Film* (2002), List’s *Chicano Images: Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film* (2013) and Barrueto’s *The Hispanic Image in Hollywood: A Postcolonial Approach* (2013), to name just a few. By attempting to transcend previous critical phases, all these works provide a filmic discourse analysis in which they deal with stereotypical images in Hollywood films, how Chicanos challenge, subvert

and create their own popular portrayals of *Chicanismo* and how they insert these new Chicano voices into the mainstream discourse, reinforcing the dialectical relationship between ethnic expression and the dominant culture.

The aim of Meléndez's book, however, is not to incorporate new insights into this paradigm shift in Chicano film criticism but to simply explore and narrate some specific cinematic encounters shot in New Mexico, addressing "what happens onscreen and what happens offscreen" (vii) and situating the book in the borderlands of ethnography, film criticism and border studies.

The volume is composed of eight chapters divided in three complementary sections, each of which explores a key point of articulation between Chicano cinema and Southwest Borderlands ethnography. The chapters in the first section address the advent of photography and early film in New Mexico during the period 1880-1930, compiling examples of how natives were reproduced and portrayed alongside the borderlands through sociocultural illustrations. In the next section, the Cold War period adds a new dimension through an exploration of the sociological impact that Chicano images represented in both Mexican American and Anglo communities, asserting a progressive agency and cultural visibility in *nuevomexicanos's* filmic depiction. The last section touches on some of the filming issues produced after the advent of Chicano cinema, a period in which inspired by the Civil Rights movement and South America revolutionary documentaries, Chicanos propagated their identity, culture and consciousness through the arts.

The first section's opening chapter, "Borderlands Cinema and the Proxemics of Hidden and Manifest Film Encounters" examines the broad fascination that US ethnic explorers had with indigenous peoples as subjects at the beginning of the twentieth century. The filming of the ethnic *other* in the New Mexico region was centered around the American consciousness of the dichotomy of colonist versus native, producing cultural images in which the native population was turned into the object of the filmic gaze, rather than its subject. These early ethnographic constructs were popularized by Charles F. Lummis, the epitome of the "tourist-explorer" (15) who championed a crowd of adventure-seekers filming the people of that region. Combining scientific scrutiny and anthropology exploration, Meléndez claims, these film dramas balanced the possibilities of entertainment and science, recording the first interactions between Mexicans and Anglos in New Mexico, as can be observed in Romaine Fielding's *The Rattlesnake* (1913) and Christy Cabanne's *Martyrs of the Alamo or the Birth of Texas* (1915).

The next chapter, "Ill Will Hunting (Penitentes)" recovers the figure of Charles Lummis in order to highlight the interest in New Mexico's religious brotherhood or *penitentes*. For Meléndez, Lummis's liminal narrative functions as a borderlands drama, representing a web of personal and public associations that converged in complex and intricate ways in his relationship with the Mexican villagers. The partial recordings of the Penitents Brothers along with an inaccurate vision of their customs

had a questionable impact on American society, connecting them with wildness and exoticism. The presence of this image is analyzed by Meléndez through Jack Conway's *The Penitentes* (1915), one of the most successful examples of the Penitents' image in early cinema, a collaboration between the filmmaker D. W. Griffith and Charles Lummis in the first commercial motion picture to feature the brotherhood.

The exploration of Penitente Brotherhood continues with "A Lie Halfway around the World," an exploration of this Catholic sect as barbarians for touristic purposes and the consequences that filmmaking had on the perception of the borderland's community. The chapter examines the report of the Modesto Trujillo incident and the subsequent filmic approach, seen in Roland C. Price's *The Lash of the Penitentes* (1936). The chronicle traces the violent death of scholar Carl Taylor at the hands of Modesto Trujillo, his Mexican houseboy who was involved in the Penitent cult. Meléndez makes an insightful reflection about the tropes of depravity and immorality assigned to Mexican Americans and foregrounds the image of traveler-explorer risking his life among the barbarians.

The notion of pre-movement Chicano cinema is put to the test in the next section's opening chapter, "Lives and Faces Plying through Exotica." Here, Meléndez crafts a discussion through three pivotal works from the Cold War period: Russell Lee's ethnic photographs, Herbert J. Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* (1954) and James B. Clark's *And Now Miguel* (1963). These three examples document the devastation of the Depression Era in the Mexican American community, cinematic works that transcended the documentary purpose of previous stories by reflecting high technical and aesthetic values.

The possibilities of such a challenging emergent cinema are suggested in the next chapter, "*Red Sky at Morning*, a Borderlands Interlude," where Meléndez shows the attempt to film a project in the Southwest Borderlands about how Anglos and Chicanos viewed one another as neighbors. This pastoral exploration of ethnic Chicano groups in their local context was filmed in the heat of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in 1971 and breaks, according to Meléndez's view, the contrasting role between heroic whites and stereotypical Mexicans. He traces the historical importance of James Goldstone's film by comparing it with another film which accepted that a new social arrangement was under way: George Stevens' *Giant* (1956) and its revisionist literary counterpart, Villanueva's *Scene from the Movie Giant* (1993).

The last chapter in this section, "The King Tiger Awakens the Sleeping Giant of the Southwest," focuses on Chicano activist and filmmaker Moctesuma Esparza, representative of the first generation of Chicano directors who, through their works, dismantled the dominant system of representation held by the Anglo American population. Meléndez's review of Esparza's films shows an illuminating film production which compiles the most notable landmarks in New Mexico's history. Whether screening a biopic of the greatest *nuevomexicano* leader, Reies López Tijerina, or bringing to the big screen the politics and ethnic composition of the prize-winning novel *The*

*Milagro Beanfield War* (John Nichols 1974), Esparza's autonomy supported the rising expansion of New Mexico productions, and in turn, the Chicano presence in Anglo cultural conditions.

The final section of this volume opens with "Filming Bernalillo," a chapter in which the author rediscovers three Post-Civil Rights Chicano films, Lyon's *Llanito* (1972), *Willie* (1983) and *Murderers* (2002), all connected by their technically amateurish style and the choice of the town of Bernalillo as the filming location. The extended exploration of these films highlights their exclusion from mainstream cinema and their link with a more direct, observational way of filming that emphasizes the everyday experiences of the characters, the mixing of cultural heritage and the rupture between the filmmaker and the subjects that are filmed. Meléndez demonstrates that far from mainstream productions, these *pure* works, or Chicano ethnographic films, give a voice to outsiders, peripheral voices, thereby carrying out a considerable cultural task.

In "Toward a New Proxemics," the volume closes with an extended exploration of the crucial role of the Center of Regional Studies (CSR) at the University of New Mexico today. This research unit's main concern is to document traditional Hispanic/Chicano lifestyles through documentary, interweaving the participant and observer role and therefore dismantling previous imperialistic approaches. According to Meléndez, the commitment of CSR in funding documentary films is related to the idea of endorsing the connection between the film itself and the events occurring behind the scenes, thus contesting the mainstream discourse in media and its unrealistic images of the Southwest.

Due to the extensive archival research and the wide scope the book adopts, collecting narrative, documentary and hybrid films, this volume seems to be a useful tool to enrich the field of Borderlands and Chicano film studies. However, it presents some limitations. Although the book's title specifically highlights the Chicano cinema issue, the author only points out the sociohistorical facts that surround the films, avoiding any digression about the consideration or rejection of these works as Chicano cinema; in other words, many readers will miss an in-depth investigation of the classification of the films, as either Mexican, Chicano or US. Regardless of this flaw, the essays in this volume constitute an enriching and valuable contribution that broadens the kaleidoscopic field of Chicano studies.

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