

## INTRODUCTION

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*Ilha do Desterro's* special number on "Film, Literature and History" reflects contemporary critical interest in the interrelationship between fictional narratives and history—specifically the ways in which historical events have been narrativized by recent films and literary texts. The discussion is informed by theories articulated by critics like Hayden White, Fredric Jameson, and Linda Hutcheon, among others, whose debate—in different ways—includes the validity of contemporary fictional narratives to represent the historical past and the problematizing of the concept "historical representation"—a process which has entailed more self-reflexive historical fictional narratives. Films and literary works by directors and writers like Oliver Stone, Alex Cox, E. L. Doctorow, and Don DeLillo can be contextualized within the production of a historiography and critical theory which allow for a new perception of a historical representation that is more self-conscious of its own narrative mediations.

Although the essays selected for this issue share certain similarities in their concern with the interrelation and status of history, fiction, and narrative, they present different interests. The first group of essays is more theoretical; the second is more illustrative in their close readings of film and literary texts which represent the history of the USA. The third is concerned with films and texts associated with the history of Latin-American countries. Diversity is evinced by the essays' specific

concerns with different national histories: USA, British, and Latin-American. In all these cases the argument stands that, although recent critical theory seems to postulate a lack of boundaries or a certain transnational quality to a postmodern issue such as the self-consciousness of fictional historical representations, these essays embody exclusive intellectual and national concerns.

The first three articles in this issue present a number of different theoretical discussions on the interrelations between history and fiction. Vivian Sobchack's article "'Shit Happens': *Forrest Gump* and Historical Consciousness" presents an overview of the problems raised by contemporary historiography and how current notions of history, as happening within one's present time—facing the camera, as documented material—are turned, in *Forrest Gump*, into a self-conscious comedy of historical accidents. In "Small Pleasures: Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television" John Caughie explores different conceptions of "nationality" as they relate to the film industry, focusing on British films that have been adapted from well-known British literary texts—a fact which, in itself, responds to the demands of an international market willing to import a "quality" cinema. In Caughie's analysis, the uses of "details" in filmic adaptations become the differentiating element to evaluate adaptations to the screen. In "O Paradoxo Traumático: Documentários, Ficções Históricas e Eventos Passados Cataclísmicos", Janet Walker examines theoretical debates over incestuous narratives as shared and validated accounts. Drawing from an analysis of a body of documentary and fictional films, Walker presents the importance of narrative openness and fragmentation facing the unrepresentability of the traumatic past in the realist mode.

The next group of essays illustrate the interdisciplinary aspects of history and fiction with close-analyses of representations of American history in film and literature. In "Modernism and the Narrative of Nation in *JFK*" Robert Burgoyne analyzes the tensions between the formal innovations in the narrative structure of Oliver Stone's *JFK* and

its attempt to express a narrative of national cohesion. Along with a definition of Stone's formal devices, Burgoyne's essay contextualizes their importance within a contemporary American arena of debates. Thomas La Borie Burns' "Gore Vidal's Early Hollywood: History, Fiction, and Film" explores the parallels and ambiguities generated by Vidal's insider's view of American politics and his portrayal, in *Hollywood*, of the film industry's fabrication of truth in the politics of the America of the 1920s. Still concerned with fictional accounts of past historical events in the USA, the third article of this group, Dilvo Ristoff's "Refazendo Cenas," focuses on John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* as a fictional literary piece in which American history is interwoven with the character's constitution, anxieties, and identity—to the point of turning Rabbit into the embodiment and actual definition of American mediocrity, or "medianidade".

On the one hand, postmodernism has been associated with the cultural production of first-world countries, whereas the production of Latin-American countries—the preoccupation of the third group of essays in this issue—has been seen as "allegorical". On the other hand, Julio Cortázar, Osman Lins, Chico Buarque de Hollanda, Hector Babenco and Carlos Diegues, to name a few, facilitate the inclusion of Latin American artistic production into the context of the postmodern.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the popularity of *Carlota Joaquina*—a fictional historical account of a dispossessed Portugal female empress, Dona Carlota, and her misadventures in Brazilian territory of the nineteenth century—illustrates the conjunction of pastiche—as a postmodern aesthetic form—and third-world productions. Accordingly, in "Os Deuses e os Mortos: Maldição dos Deuses ou Maldição da História?" Ismail Xavier explores in Ruy Guerra's *Os Deuses e os Mortos* (1970) the relationship between Guerra's allegory of the neo-colonial system in the rural northeastern Brazil of the 1920s and the film's articulation of the foreign and the national—with its self-conscious exploration of different Brazilian film aesthetics—as a revision of Brazilian history and its narrativizing.

José• Gatti's "(Re)Discoveries of Brazil" traces the reinterpretations of Pero Vaz de Caminha's Letter to King dom Manuel in which the fleet's scribe describes the First Mass held in Brazilian territory. In Gatti's analysis, Glauber Rocha's *Land in Anguish* can be seen as an intertextual reading of previous representations of the discovery of Brazil, which challenges official narratives such as those presented in Victor Meirelle's painting "The First Mass" or in Humberto Mauro's film *Descobrimento do Brasil* (1937). In "The Historical Film and Its Reconstruction of Latin American History" I analyze Alex Cox's *Walker* and Roland Joffés *The Mission* as allegorical readings of two specific Latin American historical events that suggest a closer relation between the histories and the aesthetic forms used to define the production of first and third-world countries.

The issue includes three reviews of theoretical books on the relationship between history and representation: Fernando Simão Vugman presents a comparative review of two recent works, *The Persistence of History (Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event)* edited by Vivian Sobchack—a collection of essays that analyzes the transformation of history, its definition and forms of representations, since the beginning of the twentieth century— and *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film*, by Leger Grindon, a study of different historical fictional films and their relations to historiography. José• Gatti's and Arlindo Castro's review of *Um Século de Cinema*—a collection of essays previously presented at the Museum of Sound and Image in São Paulo, published by Imago (1996)—presents the interrelationship between Film and other areas, highlighting, as Gatti and Castro point out, "the most important trends in film theory." Salma Ferraz points out the contemporariness of Jô Soares's historical novel, *O Xangô de Baker Street*, in which Soares emplots Brazilian public figures from the nineteenth century with a number of fictional crimes committed in Rio de Janeiro around 1886. The last review by Antonio João Teixeira reviews Hayden White's *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, a key theoretical work on narrative and historical representation.

Wishing to offer a comprehensive view of the recent work being developed in the interdisciplinary fields of Film, Historiography and Literature, the included Bibliography is intended as an introduction to major works dedicated to the above mentioned areas of study.

### **Notes**

- 1 Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15(Fall 1986): 73.