

Book Review

Telecinematic Stylistics. Edited by Christian Hoffmann and Monika Kirner-Ludwig. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-3500-4285-8, 335 pp.

This is the first edited collection published under the terminology of ‘telecinematic stylistics’, establishing a stepping stone for a wider consideration of the potential posed by the discourse of film and television for linguists. As its name suggests, *telecinematic stylistics* is concerned with the style of cinema and television, a cross-discipline between traditional film studies and stylistic enquiry. Before the field of telecinematic stylistics had been fully recognised, Dan McIntyre (309) argued that the two fields focused on different properties of artefacts: while film studies relies on the visuals, stylistics highlights the ‘dramatic texts rather than dramatic performances’. However, this view has changed over time. This volume brings to the forefront the foundations of this incipient field of enquiry by collating thirteen case studies which use various stylistic frameworks to analyse the text and co-text of film discourse.

Telecinematic stylistics draws its name from its central object of analysis, ‘telecinematic discourse’, which has been described as

an exploration of spoken and written language used in fictional/narrative film and television from various perspectives and discussing different kinds of data. [...] [It] attempts to understand, describe and define such language in its relation to real life and in consideration of its functions within the fictional narrative. (Piazza et al, 1).

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Following this, Christian Hoffman and Monika Kirner-Ludwig begin *Telecinematic Stylistics* by advancing a definition in the Introduction (5) which proposes a reactualisation of its objects of interest, referring to the discipline as an exploration of the visuals, sound and written language of cinema.

There are three noteworthy methodological issues brought forward in the Introduction, which are *the complexity problem*, *the transcription issue* and *the participation complex* (for a comprehensive account, see 6-8). Even though all the contributions differ in their expansions of telecinematic stylistics, they converge in their aim to address these specific concerns in their own ways and according to the material available at the time. The volume achieves what Michael Toolan (104, see also 2014) describes as a ‘blend of several modalities’, that is, an analysis which systematically and accurately balances the relevant techniques in both film and cinematic sound.

The contributions have been grouped under three important areas of interest in telecinematic stylistics: *film discourse*, *cinematic discourse* and *intertextuality/intermediality*. While these are an attempt at thematically organising the chapters into three main areas of inquiry which deal with the script, the visuals and the processes of adaptation, Hoffmann and Kirner-Ludwig acknowledge the existing blurriness of some of the papers and the potential for future inquiries to explore more than one avenue at the same time.

The chapters in the first part focus exclusively on various language patterns and their connotations, such as the role of demonstratives building audience expectations and characterisation (Pavesi), exploring language variation in television discourse using The Sydney Corpus of Television Dialogue (Bednarek), conflict strategies in soap operas (Jautz and Minow), and minute visual humorous instances, important in defining the trigger mechanisms of humour (Messerli).

The second part focuses on the formal visual features and strategies which facilitate multimodal delivery. This extends analysis to the portrayal of minority communities of travellers and gypsies in three documentaries (Piazza); the interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic narrator voices in documentaries (Chovanec); the multimodal representation of autism spectrum disorder in television (Reichelt);

the application of Grice's cooperative principle (1975) to horror film cinematography, more importantly to film shots and cuts (Schubert); and the advertising persuasiveness of trailers (Krebs).

The third and final part deals with issues of intertextuality or intermediality, which compare and contrast the transfer of techniques and characteristics from one medium to another: the adaptation of medieval motifs, speech patterns and settings to modern audiences (Kirner-Ludwig); the study of 'graphic cinema', or the adaptation of comics to the big screen (Sanchez-Stockhammer); the analysis of the process and effects of 'good quality' Closed Captions for the deaf and hard of hearing (Dahne and Piazza); and a look at the reflexive consciousness of creators and their consistency across their work (Gordejuela).

Collectively, these papers succeed in their intention to demonstrate that telecinematic research is able to contribute original analyses to the stylistic field. The volume does not favour one approach over another but unites case studies accomplished through quantitative methods (Pavesi, Bednarek, Jauntz and Minow, Reichelt), mixed methods (Messerli), and qualitative approaches (Piazza, Schubert, Sanchez-Stockhammer, Dahne and Piazza, Gordejuela). It explores an assortment of genres, subgenres, and hybrid genres: feature films in general (Pavesi), soap operas (Jauntz and Minow), comedy/drama (Reichelt), horror (Schubert), television sitcoms (Messerli), documentaries and broadcast performances (Piazza; Chovanec), film trailers (Krebs), historical productions (Kirner-Ludwig), and adaptations (Sanchez-Stockhammer). Likewise, it does not focus on just one type of film discourse but includes a range of analyses of cinematic dialogue and monologue, of on-screen or off-screen narrators and characters, and of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds.

As Hoffman (13) argues in the Introduction, this volume is by no means an exhaustive account of the possibilities existing at the moment in the field to study cinematic discourse, but provides a springboard. It is an eclectic assortment of methodologies, frameworks and genres which challenges the boundaries previously set by analyses performed on the telecinematic medium. Of great interest is the way in which this volume, while recognising the merits of current research, aspires to even greater avenues. This anthology

offers a practical starting point for more comprehensive analysis, such as Monika Bednarek’s argument that The Sydney Corpus can be useful in comparisons not only of characters residing in the same series but also of those in other series, or how Christoph Schubert’s analysis contributes preliminary insights into the (non-)cooperative aspect of horror film cinematography. Furthermore, it touches on the need to explore certain areas which are even more prevalent in contemporaneous film and television, such as character diversity and its cinematographic representation, as argued by Susan Reichelt.

There is an overarching sense across various chapters that the motivation behind the research has been informed by personal beliefs and expectations, on behalf of the researcher or a larger community. It would have been fascinating to include viewer data, because, as Christoph Schubert (200) argues, creators ‘appeal to their target group through the process of *audience design*’. Future accounts could also focus more, or in greater detail, on other formal features, for example the audio track, or better balance the linguistic and visual analysis.

This volume is nonetheless a valuable contribution to the discipline, presenting both the foundations and the current concerns of telecinematic stylistics through the inclusion of valuable methodologies, major concepts, theoretical frameworks, and a consideration of possible developments. It unites significant analyses which, even three years after its publication, are influential in terms of their range of theoretical approaches and findings. Along these lines, the strengths of this volume span a number of areas: clarifying the analytical requirements for explorations of this nature, challenging the problems and any pre-existing biases of other fields regarding authorial choices, and, maybe one of the most important tenets, the creative potential of these forays. I believe that, as in any other newly-emerging field, there will always be new avenues to explore and novel opportunities to develop – but then we all start from somewhere! As Christian Hoffmann reiterates in the Introduction, ‘the best is yet to come’ (13).

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