

# BRADATAN, Costica and UNGUREANU, Camil (eds.), *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation.*

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'One must recover words like 'grace', 'holiness', for the profane world; we should not simply grant organized religion a monopoly over this language' (DUMONT in SMITH, 2010). These suggestive words by the French director Bruno Dumont could be an apt motto for Costica Bradatan's and Camil Ungureanu's new book. The book explores the relationship between European cinema, philosophy, and religion after *the death of God* (Nietzsche) and beyond the conventional delimitation of religion. The volume brings together the contributions of important scholars in film studies and philosophy so as to reflect on *religion without religion* (Derrida) as expressed through the cinematic works such as *Mamma Roma* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962), *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005), *Habemus Papam* (Nanni Moretti, 2011), *The life of Jesus (La vie de Jesus)*, Bruno Dumont, 1997), *Blind Chance (Przypadek)*, Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1987) or the *Trilogy of Yusuf* from Semih Kaplanoğlu<sup>1</sup>. The result of the interdisciplinary enterprise is original, and is part of a cinematic and philosophical trend that is likely to develop in the near future. This *postsecular* trend challenges the old-age secularist vision proclaiming the inevitable decline of religion and of the belief in God in modernity. Different chapters in the book contribute as well to the recent philosophical turn in film studies by making use of postsecular theoretical reflections of Derrida, Taylor or Nancy (see, for instance, Richard Sinnerbrink's, Catherine Wheatley's, Paul Coates's, Camil Ungureanu's and John Caruana's contributions).

But what exactly is postsecularism? And does this philosophical and socio-theoretical concept have any use in cinema studies? The scholars included in this volume understand and relate to

*postsecularism* differently. Divergences apart, the argument is that the postsecular trend pertains to the very development of modernity; it emerges as a reaction of dissatisfaction with the influential tradition of militant atheism and rationalist secularism built on the Manichean opposition between reason and faith, emancipation and religion. The secularist creed has turned out to be implausible: for better or worse, spirituality, religion and religion-related phenomena—from experiences of transcendence and faith to fundamentalist violence—maintain their salience. In contrast to secularism, postsecularism regards the relation between religion and modernity as one of tension and, at once, as a positive-sum game of mutual interaction and transformation; from this perspective, experiences of transcendence, conversion, faith, transfiguration and sacrifice are not seen as the monopoly of Church or other religious institutions, but can be vital for heterodox believers and even atheists as well<sup>2</sup>.

The volume illustrates, in the broader context of the crisis of the secularist paradigm, the view that there is a growing *postsecular* cinematic that takes seriously religious practice and tradition as a wellspring of values and experiences even independently of the belief in God. Various chapters of this book support the view that there is a current wave of outstanding European directors who, from their position as self-declared atheists (Dumont, Haneke, Moretti) or unconventional believers (Sokurov, Kaplanoğlu), make innovative films dealing with religious experience without celebrating an official religious discourse or dogma. Disparities between these directors notwithstanding, they express by cinematographic means the conviction that it can be a powerful source of values and experiences (of

1. Composed of *Egg (Yumurta – Avgo)*, Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2007), *Milk (Süt)*, Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2008) and *Honey* (Bal), Semih Kaplanoğlu, 2010).

2. For useful reflections on the concept of postsecularism, see as well UNGUREANU, Camil and THOMASSEN, Lasse (2015). "The Post-Secular Debate: Introductory Remarks", in *The European Legacy*, 20(2); UNGUREANU, Camil (2014). *Uses and Abuses of Postsecularism*, in REQUEJO, Ferran and UNGUREANU, Camil. *Democracy, Law and Religious Pluralism in the New Europe. Secularism and Postsecularism*, Routledge.

faith, forgiveness, responsibility, guilt, solidarity, gift-giving, sacrifice, transcendence, mystical insight and conversion) that a secularism focused exclusively on an immanent reason is unable to account for.

Three questions can be raised with respect to this volume. First, while the definition of postsecularism is suggestive, it remains controversial whether we can detect a *novel* postsecular trend in the European cinema. The choice of the cases seems at points eclectic; the volume includes films from different historical periods, and does not clarify how the nexus religion-film is played out in these periods. Second, the contributions are not always coherent in methodological terms: not all chapters reach a balance between filmic and philosophical analysis; and some analyses give relevance to historical contexts, while others overlook it completely. Third, whereas the volume makes a laudable effort not to focus only on the usual suspects (Von Trier, Pasolini), the category of *European* cinema is need of more questioning and problematization in the age of global cinema.

In sum, the phenomenon of religion after the death of God and the decline of the dogmas of old-style secularism is likely to remain central in contemporary societies. The *crisis of religion* is itself a form of spiritual-religious life. A sense of complex, subterranean interaction between religious, heterodox, secular and atheistic experiences has thus emerged, which makes the phenomenon all the more fascinating to study. This is what *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema* does so well by focusing on the death of God not as the symptom of the decline of the religious, but as a transformation of the relation to the sacred and the divine.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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