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Moving images, moving subjects Representing selves and others between writing and photography

Review of: Giorgia Alù, *Journeys Exposed: Women's Writing, Photography and Mobility*, New York & London, Routledge, 2018, 220 p., ISBN: 9781138345027, £120.00; ebook: 9780429437700 € 66,99.

Rachelle Gloudemans

'How can women narrate mobility in order to reflect the permeable and fluid traits of this varied experience?' (p. 1). Departing from this multifaceted question, *Journeys Exposed* analyses photography as a particularly powerful device to reinforce women's narrations about their own mobile selves and/or the mobile lives of others. Its core argument is that the interconnections between writing and photography – and, by extension, between telling and showing, reading and seeing, the visual and the verbal – enable women to respond to questions of power, fragmentation, displacement, loss and marginality. The volume traces similarities between different genres of works by a variety of more and lesser known female artists. It brings together contemporary writers and photographers who were born in Italy, or related to the peninsula through travelling, migration and/or family histories: Melania Mazzucco, Ornella Vorpsi, Monika Bulaj, Carla Cerati, Anna Maria Riccardi, Elena Gianini Belotti, Giulia Giuffrè, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, Bernadette D'Amore, Kathy Cavaliere and Annie Lanzillotto.

Being part of the Routledge series 'Interdisciplinary perspectives on literature', this truly interdisciplinary volume fills an important gap in previous studies of photography and writing, by focusing on gender and mobility issues. The author subtly shifts the focus from stressing how women's life stories have been oppressed by (male) gazes to analysing women's creative and constructive assessment of questions of identity, self and mobility, through an engagement with verbal and visual means. In the introduction, Alù presents a rich critical apparatus, which combines feminist philosophy of narration (e.g. Cavarero) with theories on photography (e.g. Barthes) and insights into 'nomadism' and the 'mobility turn' (e.g. Braidotti). The volume is divided into three thematically structured parts, each consisting of two chapters that present a detailed analysis of one or more works by each of the above-mentioned female artists.

In the first part, entitled 'Performances: Escapes and Resistance', the author explores forms of female rebellion against cultural, social and linguistic limitations. The first chapter is devoted primarily to Melania Mazzucco's novels *Il bacio della medusa* (1996) and *Limbo* (2012), in which highly visual descriptions of photographs are employed to represent the 'unconventional space between presence and absence,

loss and return, seen and unseen, as well as life and death' (p. 30). Alù analyses how the female characters in Mazzucco's novels move within and outside the narrated photographs: both overlooked and hyper-present, the women resist fixity and search for alternative identities by exposing the elusive character of reality and the vanishing nature of identity. Similarly fleeting are the female characters in Ornela Vorpsi's written and photographic works, discussed in the second chapter. Through a strong emphasis on the imperfect – or dead – body, Vorpsi interrogates the voyeuristic gaze of (male) others and resists normative ideas about the female body. Alù thoroughly scrutinises both Vorpsi's written work, in which she consciously exposes her characters by using visual metaphors, abrupt grammar and a stark style to mimic the immediacy of the photographic close-up (p. 57), and her photographs of female bodies in the volumes *Nothing obvious* (2001) and *Vetri Rosa* (2006). She thus convincingly shows how the author-photographer reappropriates the female body and redefines her own identity as woman, Albanian and migrant.

The second part of the volume is called 'Intersections: Itineracies with a Camera' and focuses on the exposure of the life stories of 'others'. It starts with a chapter on Monika Bulaj's travel reportage *Nur. La luce nascosta dell'Afghanistan* (2013). Through an accurate analysis of photographic techniques and their narrative effects, Alù describes Bulaj's empathic attitude to her subjects, through which the artist moves away from the objectifying and orientalisating character of conventional travel writing. Becoming, herself, a transnational subject and searching for convergences between Afghan culture, her Polish background and her Triestine home, Bulaj uses the juxtaposition between photography and writing to reconfigure personal, cultural and national feelings of belonging (p. 83). The fourth chapter in the volume is dedicated to Carla Cerati's photo-textual journeys, and to the pseudo-autobiographical protagonist of the novel *La perdita di Diego* (1992). Alù retraces Cerati's 'spiralling movements' – inside and outside the house, and back and forth from Milan to the peripheries – when narrating the lives of women and marginalised others in twentieth-century Italy. In doing so, Alù demonstrates the extent to which 'the domestic and the public, the private and the social, continually co-existed in her [Cerati's, ed.] photographic works' (p. 111). This becomes especially clear in Alù's analysis of the juxtaposition of text and images in Cerati's collages, which expose female processes of becoming and a gradual fragmentation of the traditional image of patriarchy. These themes are also investigated – at times somewhat repetitively – in Cerati's *La Perdita di Diego*, where the female photographer-protagonist gains agency in ordering and scrutinising pictures of her assistant, in order to reconstruct his identity and family history.

Individual, collective and family histories narrated through the tensions between photography and writing are again central in the third part of the volume: 'Tapestries: Transits through Origins'. The fifth chapter focuses on the use of public, archival images of migration in Anna Maria Riccardi's *Cronache dalla collina* (2005), and on the reproduction of private family pictures in Elena Gianini Bellotti's *Pane amaro* (2006). Both authors use photographs to perform 'memory work': by rewriting and reciting photographs in their texts, they position themselves as reading and viewing subjects in the construction of transgenerational memories of migration (p. 165). In the final chapter, Alù concentrates on the metaphors of weaving and threading; she does so with the aim of understanding how various bicultural Italian-American and Italian-Australian, female artists have used the material photograph as part of a 'fabric' of narration through which they 'interlace' past and present experiences of migration. The majority of this chapter, at times less to the point than the others, is devoted to Annie Lanzillotto's use of photographs of her own distressed body, in order to narrate trauma, loss and displacement.

In conclusion, through a variety of well-chosen examples, the author proposes multiple perspectives on the initial question of how women can narrate mobility. The concepts of narration and mobility are employed critically and creatively to people, memories and objects. The reader is frequently reminded that the discussed female artists use the photograph both as a narrating and as a narratable object, which not only represents movements but also moves physically between temporal and spatial contexts, and has the power to *move* us emotionally. The intertwinement between photography and writing – the author concludes – ‘therefore also attests to a humanistic and ethical effort aimed at contesting narrations that often neglect the life of the marginalized who are now moved beyond constructed cultural, social and political boundaries’ (p. 207). Consistent in its theoretical approach and admirably detailed in its analyses, which are sustained by many full-page reproductions of the discussed photographs, *Journeys Exposed* offers both critical tools and inspiration for further research into works and genres that combine verbal and visual means.

Rachelle Gloudemans

Faculty of Arts - KU Leuven Brussels Campus

Warmoesberg 26

1000 Brussels (Belgium)

rachelle.gloudemans@kuleuven.be