

Theatre, Cinema and the Rest: The Proliferating Spaces of *Birdman*

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The cinema of Alejandro González Iñárritu contains stories with a strong sense of space. The fictional worlds constructed through sophisticated filmic strategies in collaboration with his DPs Rodrigo Prieto and Emmanuel Lubezki convey atypical perspectives on vividly depicted spaces, from the global metropolis of Mexico City (*Amores perros*, 2000) and Barcelona (*Biutiful*, 2010) to the American frontier in the early 19th century of *The Revenant* (2015). When we describe some of these as “human spaces” (Deleyto and Azcona, 2010), we refer both to the fact that those spaces are constructed around the intense experiences of the protagonists and the ways in which those characters become embodiments and human distillations of those spaces, the real and the imagined. Cinematic and social space are central concerns in Iñárritu’s movies.

In this context, the Mexican director’s fifth feature film, *Birdman or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014) came as something of a surprise. The enclosed location and narrow backstages and corridors of the St James Theater on Broadway (although partly shot on a set outside the theater) invite, at first sight, a more purely psychological conception of space, apparently designed to convey a purely internal journey. Yet, even in such a confined location, spaces have a way of proliferating in *Birdman*. The film narrates three days of previews of the Broadway adaptation of Raymond Carver’s short story “What We Talk about when We Talk about Love” (1981). Not exactly a classical instance of filmed theatre or, indeed, of a filmic adaptation of either a short story or a play, *Birdman*, however, constructs, through what passes for one long take (with the exception of the final scene), a multilayered cinematic space out of its theatrical location. Raising interesting questions about intermedial layers of fiction, theatrical and cinematic performance and movement in different media, the movie situates its characters as elements, if not products, of the various, interlocking spatial realities, which are as much economic, social, cultural and ideological as psychological, around which it weaves its fiction.

In this paper we would like to explore some of the implications of these proliferating spaces through a close reading of the film that will be framed by geographical and social theories of space (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977; de Certeau, 1984; Soja, 2000 and Massey, 2005) as well as the insights of Shiel (2001), Rhodes and Gorfinkel (2011) and other proponents of the “spatial turn” in the cinema, and the ways in which the various artistic media that are used in the film construct meaningful spaces.

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Key words: space, intermediality, Alejandro González Iñárritu

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