
REVIEWS

Abigail Child. *This is Called Moving: A Critical Poetics of Film*.
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Abigail Child's *This is Called Moving* reminded me of one of the earliest and most thought-provoking experiences I have had in college. In 1984, as an undergraduate at Berea College in Kentucky, I was exposed to the ways in which different art forms interconnect through a series of classes which were broadly categorized as the Arts Matrix. These classes focused on Music, Literature, or Visual Art, but included the study of related works in all three divisions. By studying the French version of the chivalric romance *Tristan and Iseult* and then hearing Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, I began to view the arts as a continuum of processes. In this way Horace's famous comment about art instructing and delighting took on new importance; both my criticism and creative writing became parts of this artistic matrix.

In a similar fashion, *This is Called Moving* offers the reader a cogent analysis of the nexus between poetry and filmmaking. Child takes us on a voyage of discovery during which we see the ways in which narrative, characterization, and plot are constructed in a poem or in a film, and the ways in which these processes are similar. While this does not mean that the processes are identical, many parallels are invoked by Child both consciously and subliminally. While Child's ideology seems at points to overlook difficulties with her logical framework, the book provokes enough thought to restore an enthusiasm to these processes that academia frequently strips away. The text also focuses on a comprehensive look at artistry within our society, limiting abstraction by looking at art as a component of all levels of human experience and demystifying these discussions into a natural, everyday occurrence.

The skeletal way in which functional elements are telegraphed and constructed by the artist is rigorously approached by Child, a poet and filmmaker. In other words, the economy of space that is dictated by keeping the audience interested in both film and poetry follows similar lines in both media. Drawing on examples of contemporary film-makers (these instances come from a list that includes television, Michael Snow, Luis Buñuel, and Robert Wilson) as well as her films, Child gives us a vivid sense of just how far this connected nature extends. Any number of classes that have film, literature, poetry, or criticism as their basis could use this book as a constructive text. Child discusses both artistic process and theoretical

concerns, extending her argument to relate to all critical perspectives. Well-written and accessible, *This is Called Moving* was the basis for many personal meditations on writing as well as conversations with professors, students, friends, and aficionados of film and literature.

It is only upon deep reflection that flaws to this nexus become evident. To cite one case, Child examines the Andy Warhol film *Beauty Part II*. In Child's opinion, the film demonstrates that "Warhol maps off-screen territory within the integrity of the film screen" (156). While this might indeed be the case, the very same film points out the danger of using the precepts of visual art to construct a motion picture without realizing that film is more than just a series of pictures with words attached. Warhol does not take into account the narrative component of a film that is essential to meaning in the mind of the audience. Although the point is obviously debatable, a film that is not constructed in some manner by the mind of the filmmaker into a narrative with a beginning, middle, and ending is not a film, in my opinion. While any length of celluloid meets the definition of "motion picture," I do not think that it qualifies as an artistic product unless some structure is imposed during filming or during the editing process. While Warhol was a master at creating stylized and beautiful visual images, his films fail to satisfy the need for the images to add up to more than they individually stand for. Even Child's unedited films are preconceived in her mind, obviating the need for adding structure through editing. Warhol seems to have never grasped this, leaving his films largely unedited, which point out his deficiencies as a storyteller. His techniques work extremely well in creating prints and paintings but leave the viewer of any of his motion pictures wishing he had taken a workshop in their authorship. This was the only part of the work which did not seem to be fully explored in terms of both merits and flaws.

Illustrating the similar nature of writing a poem and constructing a scene in film, Child produces extremely polished expository prose that pulls the audience into her mind and thoughts. In doing so she elevates her essays to the level of complex intellectual analysis. The ideation of this common ground seems disingenuous. Linking visual and poetic explication, Child is able to show that these seemingly disparate artistic pursuits follow a similar logic of creation and meaning. Juxtaposition of sounds, the image as gateway to building a larger scene, and the fleeting perception of small details operate to form a very concise, ordered manner of building the end product in the mind of the audience. Her framework enlarges itself beyond these media; when thought of in this fashion, plays, short stories, and even novels seemingly must follow similar precepts in order to be successful. Child makes the reader come to the conclusion that studying art as discrete entities is somewhat handicapping to the critic, failing to give us true comprehension of individual genres or media. While

this does not preclude the individual study of any of these broad categorizations, it lends a great deal of credibility to the value of studying the arts in an integrated and comprehensive manner. This is not to say that the overwhelming majority of content in a literature, art history, or creative writing class should include these concerns, merely to suggest that including this type of discussion could be of great benefit to both student and instructor. Child shows us that artistic processes feed each other and nourish the portion of the mind that is the seat of creativity. This work has managed to neatly project the economy of Child's art into her expository prose. This polished volume creates a desire to read similar books and to further explore the ideas which the author approaches so skillfully. *This is Called Moving* is ultimately a hybrid work: part criticism, part theory, and part craft book. In its pages, the professor, the student, and the novice or seasoned artist can all find nourishment for both critical and creative personal needs. ✱