

Vincent Gallo's *Brown Bunny*

Critical Analysis

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What at first seems like a mistake soon becomes a large and interesting comment on space in Vincent Gallo's *Brown Bunny*.

Vincent Gallo, who stars, directs, writes, edits, and does just about everything else in his film *Brown Bunny*, uses space on multiple levels to convey moments of closed off isolation and detachment, with each method resonating to reinforce Gallo's portrait of a lost man.

Gallo instills various barriers in *Brown Bunny*, all of which utilize space in out of the ordinary ways. Barriers in the audience screen relationship, emotional and social barriers that are depicted onscreen, psychological barriers within the lead character, and barriers in narrative structure to keep the audience from connecting the various pieces of information.

The structural devices that keep the spectator's relationship to *Brown Bunny*'s lead character Clay at a superficial level are the use of out of focus images and the temporal construction of the narrative. Clay is a wandering man adrift, searching for that missing piece to put his life back together. Gallo keeps the audience at a distance by objectifying Clay and calling attention to the cinematic apparatus. Clay's search is not entirely clear as he picks up on various women and in doing so comes across as a misogynist

or a male chauvinist. The first time the image peters off into a significantly out of focus blur the initial reaction is that the assistant cameraman made a mistake. Conventionally, sharpness is always to be maintained, especially of the faces. A face that is out of focus is distracting and calls attention to the camera and the artifices of the film. As these out of focus images became reoccurring throughout the film it no longer seemed like a mistake (although with its low budget and mostly one man crew who knows) and started to resound with the inner psyche of the lead character. As Clay's emotional condition is unclear and his journey hazy the use of out of focus images from his point of view reflect this. As Clay is unable to connect with or maintain connections with those he spontaneously comes across with on screen, the audience might also be unable to enter his world. Sequences in which his face is out of focus keeps the audience from aligning themselves into the main characters vantage point. Instead they are cast out of this role and kept at bay. The scene in which Clay drives his motorcycle out into the salt marshes brought to mind Bill Viola's desert mirages in *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)*, and the work as it depicts, as Viola states, "the inner

space of the mind no telescope can reach."

Although unclear if Gallo is referencing this work, it seems fitting all the same.

Clay's internal journey is not revealed until the end of the film when all is put to rest. His reuniting with Daisy occurs in a hotel room where the film peaks into its ultimate climax (perhaps Gallo is attempting to metaphor the standard Hollywood plot structure with sexual foreplay leading to an ultimate climax). After a perpetual build up throughout the film Clay is finally allowed his sexual release and from this a bond is finally formed. *Brown Bunny* unfolds as if Clay is returning home to his girlfriend after being out on the road, but like the brown bunny that has lived well past its expected lifespan so has his dead girlfriend Daisy. As this narrative structure ends in a reveal the audience may for the first time understand the film's devices. It was not until this point that I fully understood all that Gallo was attempting to create through his use of space in this film.

Space in *Brown Bunny* is effective because it enriches and reinforces the narrative. It is used both within the film and within the spectator film relationship. As Clay is unable to come to terms with his girlfriend's death the audience is lost and unsure of the

direction or actions of Clay. Space is also illustrated in proximity and social interactions, as Clay is unable to form attachments or sustain relationships. His communication skills have dwindled into short soft-spoken sentences. His sharing the frame with other females ends abruptly into departure. All of which offer various facets that reinforce Clay's disconnection and disillusion with the world.

#### Bibliography

Kustpit, Donald. "Deep TV: Bill Viola's via negative." *ArtForum*. May 1995.