

King, Edward. *Virtual Orientalism in Brazilian Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print. 214 pp.

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Virtual Orientalism in Brazilian Culture by Edward Smith King is a much-needed addition to the field of Asians in the Americas as well as Latin American and Asian Studies. By examining representations of Orientalism in Brazilian cultural productions, the author offers readers the theoretical language to understand how imagining Asia, or more specifically Japan, contributes to the formation of a Brazilian modernity. The virtual emerges from the cross point between the real and the fantastic, allowing for a rearticulation of national identities to emerge from the movement of a continuous difference. Here, this difference captures the “paradoxical use of orientalist discourses in the denaturalized context of technoculture to continuously challenge boundaries” (12). King’s diverse interests in this book provide analyses of *quadrinhos* (Brazilian comics) in the form of manga, novels, photographs, films, and concrete poetry. The diverse primary sources allow him to engage outside of Luso-Brazilian Studies with many fields, but primarily visual culture, Japanese Studies, literary studies, and diasporic theories. In six chapters, an introduction, and an afterword, King not only offers an introduction to Asian representations in Brazilian cultural productions but also an overview of orientalism in Latin American literature.

Chapter One, “Graphic Fictions of Japanese Immigration to Brazil: ‘Pop Cosmopolitan’ Mobility and the Disjunctive Temporalities of Migration” introduces *O Vento do Oriente: Uma Viagem através da Imigração Japonesa no Brasil* [Eastern Winds: A Journey through Japanese Immigration in Brazil] and *O Catador de Batatas e o Filho da Costureira* [The Potato Picker and the Seamstress’s Son], two examples of Brazilian graphic fiction in the form of manga. Both published in 2008 as a way of commemorating the centennial celebrations of Japanese immigration to Brazil, these graphic fictions offer a futuristic vision of Brazil that places this particular immigration group at the center. In this chapter, King engages with Japanese Studies to consider how the characters’ “media-driven pop cosmopolitanism comes up against the ruptured and jarring movement of migration” (25). What is most intriguing in this chapter is how both of these orientalist texts access a pre-modern past in Japan in order to create the space for a Brazilian modernity. Although this chapter speaks to those scholars in Asian Studies as well as Luso-Brazilian Studies, King’s description of the narrative

techniques of graphic fiction and use of animals is compared to Art Spiegelman's work. This seemingly ignores Japanese Studies genealogies that trace this use back to early manga and anime of the 1920s and 1930s. Most Japanese Studies scholars instead would argue that these animal characters were influenced by Walt Disney's early work and did not coincide with the emergence of *kawaii* (cute, which coincidentally is transliterated without the extra 'i' throughout the text) culture in Japan since this is a more recent phenomenon circa 1980. This example illustrates how although King is well read in contemporary Japanese Studies, his contribution to the field of Japanese Studies is limited due to the lack of Japanese linguistic skills and limited knowledge of Japanese literary / cultural genealogies.

In the second chapter, "Otaku Culture and the Virtuality of Immaterial Labor in Maurício de Sousa's *Turma de Mônica Jovem*," King turns to a beloved character in Brazilian popular culture, whose genre has been relabeled from *quadrinhos*, or Brazilian comics, to a mangaesque form. Mônica and her friends are not only teenagers in this new version; they also have two new friends, Tikara and Keika, who are Japanese Brazilians. In this chapter, King argues that the figure of the otaku in *Turma de Mônica Jovem* represents "a hesitation between hyper-connectivity and disconnection" which can be found in *Turma's* "network aesthetics" (50-51). In addition, King's exploration of this genre concludes in discussion of the use of images to create "a fantasy of postmodern Japan" (51). As someone in the field of Japanese Studies, I appreciated King's description and analysis of the otaku figure using theories of immaterial labor that conclude that the otaku is an unstable figure, finding it quite fascinating. However, I do not feel that this is accessible for someone in Latin American who does not have a basic background of the role of the otaku in Japanese society and how that role changes overseas with foreign otaku. Similarly, King's discussion of postmodern Japan is reminiscent of Yoshikuni Igarashi's *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture* and influenced heavily by Anne Allison's research. This, however, would not be apparent to someone who is not a scholar in Japanese Studies and would, therefore, make the chapter almost inaccessible.

Indeed, it is only in the latter part of the book, when King moves away from graphic fiction and comics that his contribution to the field of Latin American Studies becomes stronger. In Chapter 3, "Ekphrastic Anxiety in Virtual Brazil: Photographing Japan in the Fiction of Alberto Renault," the author analyzes Alberto Renault's novels, *A Foto* [The Photo, 2003] and *Moko no Brasil* [Moko in Brazil, 2008], in order to understand how the ekphrastic anxiety "reinstall orientalist markers of difference in digital culture and celebrat[e] their obliteration" (74). King uses W. J. T. Mitchell's framework of "ekphrastic anxiety" alongside Régis Debray and Jean Baudrillard's theories

on the spectacle to argue that “the tensions between text and image...are symptomatic of a hesitation between an attempt to assert a temporal and spatial distance between self and Other and an ecstatic celebration of the dissolution of this distance or boundary” (76). In other words, King moves past simplistic representations of orientalism to understand how this discourse opens up the space for modernity in Brazilian literature. Although this particular argument is familiar to scholars in the field of Asians in the Americas, King’s evidence is not the commonly discussed modernity found in the short form of the haiku but two novels that foreground photographs, one which does not include photographic images in the text and one which does. Here, the photographic image, whether or not produced, “insert[s] a break or distance into the immediacy of the image world” which allows the characters to engage in self-reflexivity in a way that ultimately abandons the self to the image (86). It is this visuality that gives the reader access to the Renault’s concept of modernity and makes this chapter a fascinating addition to Latin American Studies. What is interesting, though, is that, although present, this chapter does not make overt references to orientalism, exchanging this instead for a lens of exoticism. This shift allows the reader to engage more thoughtfully with the theories and examples that King provides in this chapter.

Chapter 4, “Paranoid Orientalist in Bernardo Carvalho’s *O Sol Se Põe em São Paulo*” introduces another example of Brazilian fiction that both engages an orientalist discourse and dismantles it through the characters’ self-conscious exploration of identity. King examines Carvalho’s orientalist tropes in two novels, *Mórgolia* [2003] and *O Sol se Põe em São Paulo* [The Sun Sets in São Paulo, 2007]. Moving from the exposure of “universal whiteness” in *Mórgolia*, he concludes the chapter by aligning the Tanizaki Junichiro character in *O Sol se Põe em São Paulo* to Carvalho himself, emphasizing both of their anxieties over modernity. In his discussion of this anxiety, King focuses the chapter on the term *autoficção*, or auto-fiction, argued by Michel Laub to go beyond the confessional mode typically found in social media. King compares this genre of *autoficção* to the Japanese I-novel, emphasizing the “crisis of subjectivity, a subjectivity torn between increasing deterritorialization and modes of subjectivity rooted in the fictions of the nation” (116).

In the fifth chapter, “Paulo Leminski’s Haiku and the Disavowed Orientalism of the *Poesia Concreta* Project,” King examines the poetry of Haroldo de Campos and Paulo Leminski, tracing back their genealogies of modernity to Ezra Pound, Jack Kerouac, and Matsuo Basho. He argues that Leminski’s return to race in his haiku poetry is an expression of Leminski’s posthumanist subjectivity. The appearance of haiku in Brazil was by way of European and U.S. American authors rather than the Japanese immigrants already living in Brazil. Because of that, “[f]ar from a rejection

of the technologized society, here, the haiku is reimagined as a communication technology of the information age” (131). Moreover, the Brazilian poets sometimes focused not only on the form of haiku but also on the concrete linguistic forms of ideograms, or *kanji*, the Chinese characters that appear in written Japanese language. The orientalist discourse, then is that “the analogical ‘Oriental’ languages are more adequate to the job of forming a language capable of communicating in the coming age of interconnectivity between humans and machines dominated by the technologies of the image” (136). King argues that in the 1980s, when Leminski began identifying as a mixed Black-Polish poet, he layered this identitarian position on top of his immersion in Japanese culture. This allowed him to critique the identity politics that were prevalent at the end of the Brazilian dictatorship. Articulating this with a close reading of Leminski’s joke poem “Kami quase,” he captivates his reader into understanding Leminski’s logic of posthuman subjectivity.

Finally, in the sixth chapter, “Moving Images of Japanese Immigration: The Photography of Haruo Ohara,” King returns to Japanese Brazilians as the original entry point into Brazil’s orientalism with which he began his book. Here, he considers Rodrigo Grotta’s documentary, *Haruo Ohara* [2010], Haruo Ohara’s photography, and Vicente Amorim’s film *Corações Sujos* [Dirty Hearts, 2011] to explore the “the ironic staging of an absence of an ethnographic distance through [Ohara’s] images of work; the blurring of the boundary between nature and culture; and, finally, the simultaneous evocation and subversion of the temporality of orientalism” (146-147). In this chapter, King finally offers the readers what they have wanted throughout the course of the book: concrete visual examples early in the chapters so that they can follow along with his argument. While the textual analysis is strong, the inclusion of images in this chapter allows the reader to access it more immediately. For example, when King discusses the “avoidance of stillness” in Ohara’s photography, the reader follows along by conferring with Figure 6.2, “A still from the film *Haruo Ohara* in which Ohara’s famous image of his daughter leaping off a stepladder is infused with movement” (152). This blurred image of a child and an umbrella becomes a concrete example of the juxtaposition between stillness and movement, avoidance and mobilization, as King argues, that centrally places photography in the discourse of visual orientalism.

Per the title, the content of King’s book focuses on orientalism. And yet, this does not allow him to further explore the recurring tropes that occur in representations of Japanese Brazilian narratives that result in an autoexoticism, such as that of the Japanese tea ceremony and the Shindo Renmei. Moreover, while he introduces and briefly considers racial discourses that allowed and hindered Asian immigration to Brazil, this could be a stronger thread. Instead, the reader is left

wondering how and why these stereotypes, that are unfamiliar in some countries, are perpetuated in Brazil. Finally, while he also briefly mentions the Brazilian dictatorship in most of the chapters, he does not delve in to explore the socio-historic impact that the dictatorship had on recurring orientalist discourses in Brazil. These ideas, however, do not run central to his argument and, therefore, are not a necessary inclusion.

Despite the rich research included in this book, King's rhetorical argument could be stronger at some points in the book. His use of complex theoretical arguments would be better conveyed to the reader if he were to provide examples from the primary texts earlier. In addition, including sections with section titles would better guide the reader through his argument. These suggestions, however minor, would have made the book more accessible to a wider range of audience. Despite this, *Virtual Orientalism in Brazilian Culture* by Edward King remains an exciting contribution to the fields of Asians in the Americas, Asian Studies, and Latin American Studies. I would highly recommend this book to graduate students and colleagues because of its new intervention in the field: considering the paradox of orientalism as a way of accessing modern Brazilian cultural productions.