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Lopes, Paul. *Art Rebels: Race, Class and Gender in the Art of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2019. (£24.00 Hd.). Pp 235. ISBN 9780691159492.

Prior to the commodification of culture, the notions of art and rebellion rang almost like a tautological formula, all art being presumed intrinsically visionary and revolutionary, in intent at least. In the socio-economic order of consumerism, 'infotainment' and planned obsolescence, the low mimetic modes of expression and subversion removed the conventional notion of *auteurs* from the artistic scene.

Paul Lopes' quest for 'narratives of rebellion,' his pursuit of the avant-garde spirit of post-war America, of the 'one man – one voice' creative horizon of expectation, bring into focus two artists that made history: a middle-class African-American musician and a working-class Italian-American filmmaker. Performing in, indeed engendering what Lopes identifies as the "heroic age of American art" (1), Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese enable Lopes to develop his thesis according to which, in the mid-twentieth century American film and music underwent a distinct process of autonomisation and legitimation, not unlike the French avant-gardes of the nineteenth century. As well as an appraisal of the legendary figures of Davis and Scorsese, the study under review observes the articulations of art, race, class and gender and their manifestation in the white/black ethnic American landscape with particular emphasis on cultural domination and resistance against ghettoization.

Writing from a sociologist's point of view, Lopes addresses the complexities at work in the cultural production and reception of immigrant American art, illustrating the importance of jazz in popular culture imagination. Lopes dwells on iconic representatives of African American art and their role in symbolising post-war rebellion. Exploring their emblematic and explicitly political compositions, the statement these make on the condition of 'blackness,' together with the reverberations of racial formation and ethnicity on musical identity, Lopes addresses the ideologies comprising 'Afro-centrism,' touching upon

creativity as the pinnacle of freedom of expression. Tracing the rise of black consciousness and racial imagination underlying the new black aesthetic from the 1930's through to the 1990's, the author defines the new wave against the conventions and received ideas in the age, observing the manner in which the conflicting views on the African-American artist's mission gave rise to radical black cultural and political agendas:

Race music has always been part of the agenda of black professional musicians in the twentieth century. What Guthrie P. Ramsay Jr. calls the 'Afro-modernism' of postwar urban black musicians – these musicians' refashioning of vernacular or popular idioms into 'modern' race music – had its roots in earlier urban black musicians and their cultivation of vernacular jazz into swing music. (40)

Whereas embarking upon a holistic approach to the development of an organic black music identity, Lopes is intent on taking stock of the processes of assimilation and appropriation the phenomenon underwent. Setting out to gauge the imbricated equation between race consciousness and colour-blind ideology, black music and the response of popular audiences, Lopes posits that racialised emotion is an expression of liberation, inspiring the black community in valorising the avant-garde ethos toward a nascent, modern jazz:

The foundations of the jazz artworld were built on the cultural appropriation of this race music by white musicians, critics, and fans. And while jazz criticism by the 1940s had recognized that the foundations of jazz were built on race music, these initial seeds of the jazz art world set up an inescapable conflict between those who pursued a race-conscious black music and resented the white appropriation, co-optation, and defining admiration, emulation, and critical appropriation of black music informed by a liberal colour-blind ideology. Such a conflict also was exacerbated by how black musicians as *black organic intellectuals* during the avant-garde era of modern jazz continually responded to events and transformations in the African American community that evolved toward a more radical black political and cultural agenda in this community. (40)

In profiling Martin Scorsese, Lopes touches upon the director's creative make-up as a New Hollywood *auteur* filmmaker, his trials and tribulations in the long day's journey liaising artistic autonomy and commercial demand. In his view, that which gives Scorsese his distinctiveness is the

“narrative tradition” constitutive of his quest, the consistence that characterises his “public story” rather than the drive toward experimentation for experimentation’s sake. The kind of *auteurship* Scorsese embodies, according to Lopes, is private, inconspicuous and unconventional, in this lying the difference between the hard-core art for art’s sake experimental film and the intrinsically non-demonstrative, independent film. Achieving a happy marriage between a personal, artistically powerful vision and the mass Hollywood audiences, Scorsese joins the ranks of Jean Renoir, Jean-Luc Goddard, Akira Kurasawa in that, like these avant-garde figures, he owns his space in popular culture history, owing little to trend, class, or gender, and a great deal to race, an inspiration and a great divider.

Sifting through a remarkable welder of public stories and biographical legends, Lopes offers refined distillations of the indefinable ingredients of ethnicity, black and white masculinity, artistry, old and new American immigrant heritages, and their role in shaping American art. By virtue of the rare mix of pursuits it combines, *Art Rebels* is a study unique in both scope and method, doubtless, a commendable, genuinely profound, and utterly appealing exegetic work.

Mass production and consumption are values that never sat well with personality, positioning and creativity, Lopes indicates; indeed they threaten to undermine the very universality of art. By examining the ineffable area linking individualism and commercialism, civic and racial consciousness, Lopes contributes a nuanced and timely account of the unlikely mix of ‘tradition and the individual talent,’ providing, among others, an impressive, indeed extensive literature review of interpretations and perceptions of his artists of choice, sifting through a welter of art reviews, interviews, and testimonials from numerous pop culture, jazz and film magazines, the likes of *Down Beat*, *Coda*, *New York Magazine*, to paint a vivid, well-researched and vibrant picture of artistic identity, ethnicity and rebellion.

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