

The Crossing: Reflections on Content, Form and the Representation of Lived Experiences

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The Crossing (2016, Patel) is a multi-screen story that follows the process of the grooming, trafficking and sexual enslavement of girls and women and the devastating impact on the victims physically, emotionally, and psychologically. This clinical description belies the profoundly intense and seductive nature of the film, that immediately draws you into a dreamlike state, which is seamlessly juxtaposed by the stark clarity and simplicity of the narrated first-hand account.

It is a film in which form and content blend with precision, without unnecessary gimmicks or sensationalism, thus successfully prioritises the actual lived experience in all its raw uncensored pain and horror.

By capitalising on a multi-media approach, (visually, aurally and kinaesthetically) the design naturally taps into the older reptilian part of the brain, the seat of instinct and emotion, flight, fight, or paralysis. It is truly experiential and mirrors the original installation piece.

In this respect the film anticipates and creatively approaches the question of how to represent the human experience in a manner that is original and impactful, with the power to engage the audience. Work like this is an important counterpoint to the tsunami of information, sensationalism and hyperbole. There is a danger that significant events are reduced to another form of entertainment. Serious issues, nationally and globally, are in danger of being senselessly commodified and, as consumers we become commodified senseless. The constant repetition of the same information (no longer “news”) creates the illusion of an ongoing, continual catastrophe, and therefore obscuring the reality that it is the same event being described over and over again. Interconnectivity through advanced communication and developments in technology are of themselves neither a good or bad thing. Yet I caution to the fact that the human brain can only process so much information.

So how does *The Crossing* counteract the above, to create a memorable authentic representation of something so horrific and incomprehensible, yet transfixes rather than repels? The sound track of the breath is a simple yet extraordinarily effective tool to draw us in, (complemented by the wind rustling the leaves). I found myself synchronising with the breath, this rapport inducing behaviour elicits and maintains a sense of shared humanity, the breath of life. The last breath (last rites) at the end of the film either real death or symbolic, reaches into our own sense of mortality. It was profoundly moving. The death, in this case, of the human spirit, broken bodies, ruptured lives, degraded. I would have preferred a longer pause after the phrase “and then he raped me”. The weight of silence, after all the surround soundscapes, would force the audience to sit with this sordid and violent act, to feel the impact of its brutality.

The overall hypnotic and seductive nature of the soundtrack consequently mirrored the grooming; a process designed to subvert and corrupt natural hope, promise and ambition. The centrality of the woman's figure, visually and to the story, again maximises simplicity over show and stereotypes. She stands quiet and dignified, challenging us not to look away to see and hear. Aesthetically beautiful, gentle almost, the shattered glass visuals, signifying the ending of her incarceration, and/or the splintering of the self, body and soul rendered apart by the abuse and torture. Recounting her escape to freedom and safety physically, she remains imprisoned internally, branded by internalised shame.

The systematic and intentional degradation, torture, violence and threats to the individuals and their families, begs the question of who are these men and some women that orchestrate these criminal networks? The men who choose to pay for the power to rape; it is disturbing to know they are walking around our streets, not sign posted as monsters, but fathers, brothers, sons, husbands.

The news reportage of the facts at the end, the sheer industrial level of the estimated 21 million trafficked and enslaved humans is shocking. The disgraceful lack of accountability and conviction rates globally contaminates us all. I am unable to comprehend why such crimes against humanity remain as hidden as the victims themselves.

I watched the film as part of an online interactive forum hosted by *hubub* for StoryLab. The premise being that participants would watch, comment and respond during the screening in real time. My caveat is the difficulty humans have in effectively multitasking. It is a myth that it is an innate or aspirational ability. Thus, to absorb and fully engage in the film, whilst commenting, reading other's impressions and responding is a tall order. I suspect a shared screening and then time to engage with a series of prompts and questions if necessary as well as seeing how the dialogue proceeds organically.

That aside due to technical difficulties I was unable to fully take part. I was able to post, yet these comments were not always visible and I was unable to respond to comments made by contributors. It did become frustrating. However, as I know my bias is to engage, absorb and observe. It is only later that ideas will bubble up in conjunction with a "butterfly net" collecting ideas and associations. I have great admiration for those who naturally have that skill to respond clearly in the moment. Both "styles" as such add different and valuable contributions. In this respect it is a welcome opportunity to see how and if the technology could embrace both.

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