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The other cinema, the cinema of the other

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Edited by Lidia Curti, Marta Cariello and Serena Guarracino

Lidia Curti

Speaking of Cinema Speaking with Cinema - *Editorial*

Cinema allows us to consider the limits of contemporary critical languages. Child of the centrality of the eye in the western episteme, cinema is part of the privileged frame shaping modernity. It is precisely this occidental formation that makes it important to consider the cultural production of the South of the world as it intercedes with the West. Cinematic, photographic and digital works here draw us into exploring links between ethics and aesthetics, identity and difference, hybridity and displacement. Located on a planetary plane, migration, cultural translation and historical complexity invariably come to the fore as themes that direct these conceptual couplings.

The essays presented in this double issue of *Anglistica*, based on papers given during a seminar on *The other cinema, the cinema of the other*, held in 2005 in the context of the PhD programme in "Letterature, culture e storie dei paesi anglofoni", seek to respond to such a critical landscape. The cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini, David Lynch, Kim Ki-Duk, Amir Naderi, Abbas Kiarostami, as well as examples of visual and digital artworks, are examined and linked to cultural and philosophical constellations. Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker, Kaja Silverman and Elizabeth Grosz, Gilles Deleuze and Roland Barthes, not to speak of Freud and Lacan, constantly disturb the distinction between theory and practice and provoke theoretical settings for the analyses. In this manner, the essays seek to respond to the overall intent of the seminar: that of speaking of cinema by speaking with and through cinema.

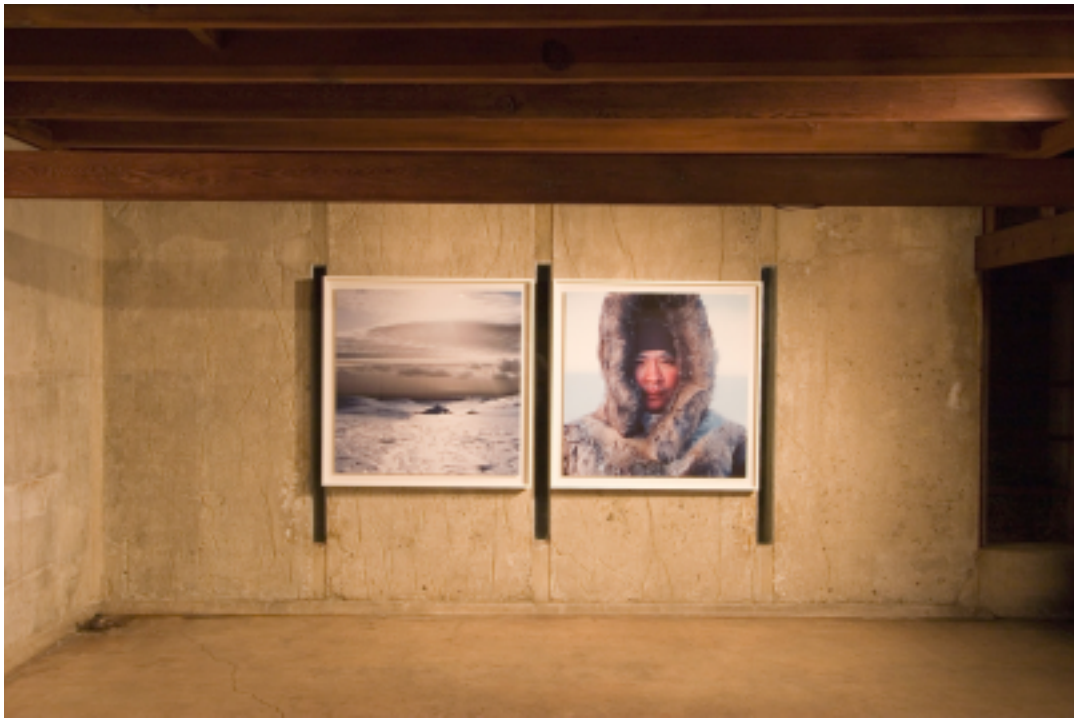
Given the background of a visual landscape proposing a syntax of interruption, a decentred narration made of intervals, it was fitting, for the concluding event of the seminar, to show Isaac Julien's works *Baltimore* (2003) and *True North* (2004), and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Night Passage* (2004, co-produced with Jean-Paul Bourdier). The two artists came to Naples for the occasion and their introductions to the films stressed the links to the ongoing discourse.

Their cinema deals with politics of identity which might seem antithetical, in one case black and homosexual, in the other female and Oriental, but always transcending the limits of an identitarian discourse, in the search for a poetics erasing the relation between history and fiction and contesting the conventional modes of representing the other. For both artists the films they showed mark their passage to digital technology as clearly indicated by the title of their talks: Julien's "The digital unconscious" and Trinh's "Transcultural D-passage". These two papers appear in the central

section of this issue of *Anglistica*, introduced by Marta Cariello's essay to which I do not have much to add. However, a general presentation of their work and career might be useful and allow me to return indirectly to most of the issues raised in the following essays.

The Anglo-Caribbean artist Isaac Julien is one of the most important representative of black art in Europe, co-founder in the 80s of the Sanfoka Film and Video Collective, and a finalist at the Turner Prize in 2001. He has produced films, videos and installations for film festivals and art events at the ICA and the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, at Documenta 2002 in Kassel and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, in 2005; his works have been shown in museums and exhibitions all over the world.

His production moves between the world of cinema and art: his videos on multiple and circular screens may turn into performances. They are used as a way of interrupting narrative linearity and blurring the distinctions between avant-garde mode and documentary practice as well as proposing a non-hierarchical and fragmentary vision of spaces and social geographies. Though touching on questions of black and homosexual identity in many of his works – from the oneiric *Looking for Langston* (1989) on the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes to *Paradise Omeros* (2002) based on Derek Walcott's text, passing through the BBC film on *Frantz Fanon* (1995-6, with Mark Nash) – Julien filters both his theoretical sensibility and his political goals, what I would call a 'Brechtian approach', through a formal aesthetics inspired by baroque imagery. He went from films and documentaries produced for the conventional spaces of cinema and television to video exhibits placed in art galleries and museums, or even in the open space of the city. He himself speaks of the 'cinematization of video art', a reconfiguration and mutation 'from one technology to another, from celluloid to digital'.



True North Series 2004, installation view, Schlinder House, LA 2005, photo: J. White. Courtesy of I. Julien

True North, billboard installation 2005, Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, CA. Photo: J. White. Courtesy of I. Julien.

True North, the video shown in Naples, is a meditative work inspired by the true story of the black American traveller Matthew Henson (1866-1955), who accompanied the explorer Robert Peary, the first to have reached the North Pole. The official account of the expedition did not contain any mention of his companion, who from being a servant became part of the surveying crew, also due to his success in dealing with the natives. He was the only one to accompany Peary in the last effort, when they 'discovered' the North Pole. Julien follows this shadow claiming her (in the end we will discover Henson is represented by a woman) from obscurity in a reflection on hierarchy and counter-histories: the video contests the notes on the expedition, replacing the rationale of order, stability and achievement with an irrational meandering through symbolic gestures, inspired by shamanic tropes and the inertia of ice. The whiteness of the ice dominates the video as the blueness of the Caribbean Sea did in *Paradise Omeros*, and has the same strength in contrasting the black bodies of the protagonists.

He has since produced an audiovisual installation *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007) that looks at the traces left on Lampedusa by the thousands who have drowned attempting the crossing; some of its images appear in Marta Cariello's essay. An important inspiration came to him from Derek Jarman's work, of whom he writes with emotion in the piece appearing in this issue. (While I write he is presenting his latest film *Derek*, directed with Tilda Swinton's collaboration, at the 2008 Berlin film festival).

T. Minh-ha, filmmaker, anthropologist and feminist writer of Vietnamese origin, has directed seven films (some of them co-produced with Jean-Paul Bourdier) that have received awards and acknowledgments in various festivals, including the Sundance, and thirty retrospectives, one of them at Documenta 11. Her art crosses different languages and media; her scripts are an encounter of poetry, anthropological analysis and narration and occupy the space between writing and visuality, cinema and music, documentarism and fiction. The films she directed in Senegal (*Reassemblage*, 1982; *Naked Spaces*, 1985), in Vietnam (*Surname Viet*: *Given Name Nam*, 1989) and China (*Shoot for The Contents*, 1991) are on the threshold between images

from *Reassemblage*. Courtesy of Women Make Movies, www.wmm.com.

and writing, avant-garde languages and anticolonial denunciation; her own books are invaded by still from her films, and the films by her writing. In *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, a film describing female subjection in Vietnamese society, the faces of the women she is interviewing are written over. For her women's writing is linguistic flesh, organic matter, 'nurturing writing' (*nourricriture*), and draws its corporeal fluidity from images of water and other female fluids, 'a flow of life, of words running over or slowly dripping down the pages'. She insists on the necessity of speaking 'close by' the observed object, she herself becoming an object, a sign among others, without ever presuming to speak for the others. This position, recalled both by Iain Chambers and Marina Vitale in their essays, is in antithesis with the presumed 'neutral' observer of classical anthropology. Not by chance the book containing her interviews and film is called *Framer Framed*: the observer is observed, puts into focus and is herself focussed.

from *Surname Viet*. Courtesy of Women Make Movies .

From a cinema in black and white, closer to documentary, though even there she would insist on the unstable border between what is real and what is not, Trinh turned to narrative more decidedly, a move marked by colour as in *A Tale of Love* (1995), *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), and *Night Passage* (2004); the latter is the history of a voyage in time interrupted by many stops and encounters; every encounter opens on an intercultural space, offering an experience of a spatial-temporal dimension as seen fleeting from a train window, making the desire for narrative linearity problematic and transforming the audio-visual space into a series of interrogations, interruptions…

Her most recent films are *Bodies of the Desert* (2007) and *Colorlust: The Other's Bones, Flesh and Blood* (2008).

* * *

All the issues and problematics mentioned so far are proposed in Iain Chambers's introductory essay to the issue. He raises the question of the ethics of looking and listening as crucially connected to the ethics of speaking with the other. Cinema follows the itinerary of memory, a state of becoming both in its subjective look and in the nature of its own language. His insistence on the fleetingness of the image, "a cinema of the interval", on the (in)visible, the (in)audible, the (un)seeable leads to a poetics that is also a politics of the image. Chambers speaks for another cinema that goes beyond the screen/ projector/ audience as fixed and

breaks the boundaries of narration and space as elaborated by Godard and other filmmakers. He introduces the theme of the mobility of cinematic language as indivisible from the modern-day media, and of its move into the gallery space, anticipated by Chris Marker, and extended in the contemporary works of Chantal Ackerman, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Isaac Julien – a theme further elaborated in some of the following essays.

Rey Chow, in her essay on the contentious relationship between film and cultural identity, gives an overview of philosophical thought and cinema, from Wenders and Benjamin to psychoanalytic interpretations of its fantasies and unconscious memories. She makes reference to the immense visual archive moving between past and present, involving the revisioning of indigenous cultural traditions in the 'other' cinemas; in disagreement with Kaja Silverman's notion of suture, Chow insists on the active rather than passive role of the recipient who, potentially, turns into a producer. She specifically opposes the filmic significations of identities who have a transcultural appeal to the constructions of fixed national, sexual, cultural identities.

The 'documentary turn' is discussed in the two essays by Mark Nash and Marina Vitale, who both write, in different ways, about documentaries where truth is not dependent on 'realistic language'. Vitale refers to 1930s documentary cinema in England, placing it in dialogue with the recent ethnographic films by Trinh T. Minh-ha and Harun Farocki, who both oppose the classical anthropological tradition of film based on the 'dream of a total and objective representation'. Nash connects the development of documentary forms, starting again from the 1930s, to contemporary moving image art, particularly in a gallery context. He makes reference to the conference 'Experiments with Truth', held in New Delhi in 2002, showing that most of the artists in the ensuing exhibition wish to avoid any connotations of the documentary as it is normally experienced, by denying the hierarchy between truth and artistic forms, ethics and aesthetics. In agreement with Julien's positions, both these essays tend to show that the construction of the image is never, as Godard underlined, an innocent, transparent reflection of truth.

In the section 'Beyond the Visual', both Silvana Carotenuto and Fiorenzo Juliano analyse the space between poetry and cinema respectively in Abbas Kiarostami and Pier Paolo Pasolini, who in their different ways produce a 'cinema of poetry'. Carotenuto examines Kiarostami's poetical works and his activity as a photographer alongside his abstract, intense cinema, and links these three aspects of his art in her imaginative discourse. As to Iuliano, he sees in Pasolini's film *Medea*, and in his vision of the Mediterranean as a space for a new geopolitics, a reference to the relationship between tradition and modernity, a theme ever-present in his cinema, locked as they are in 'an open mutual interrogation'. The primitive,

as for Rey Chow, is for Pasolini a space where the symbolical is political. Medea's power of magic represents a radical otherness, an archaism in which symbol and ideology cannot be separated. The article pays attention to the complex relationship that developed between Pasolini and Maria Callas during their work together, and to the autobiographical aspects of the dyad Medea-Maria, where the personal is linked to the comprehension of the culture of the other.

Serena Guarracino, in her essay on "The Frenzy of the Audible", goes back to the fundamental issue of the audible and the inaudible in cinema, by discussing the function of voice and sound both in documentary and experimental cinema and by tracking the importance of the cinematic 'sonorial' in its narrative and technical function. In partial antithesis to the concept of the primacy of the visual over the verbal, Guarracino attempts to construct a poetics of 'listening' to cinema, giving space to its phantasmatic voice.

The four last essays in the issue analyse films by well-known film makers such as David Lynch and Kim Ki-Duk, alongside less well-known examples of collateral activities marking the move of cinematic language to the open space of the art gallery or to more diffused cultural planes. Bianca Del Villano focuses on the analysis of Lynch's enigmatic *Mulholland Drive*, a tale playing on the theme of split female identities, constantly moving back and forward in the uncertain area between dream and reality. The paper gives a psychoanalytic reading of the film, connecting the theme of subjectivity to a reflection on cinematic narration. Stamatia Portanova's article analyses two films by Korean director Kim Ki-Duk, linking them to an idea of time as 'becoming' from a Deleuzian perspective. Celeste Ianniciello, in her *Filmscapes of Antagonism*, outlines the complex transformation that cinema undergoes in its interrelation with the cultural hybridization and contaminations of the modern multidiasporic world; she first follows the 'voyage' of Bollywood movies to Northern Nigeria through the Hausa culture video productions, and then refers to the films of the Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi.

Finally, Cristina Nisco examines Ingrid Mwangi's visual works (photos, videos, installations, and live performances). As an African/European woman artist, Mwangi interrogates and intervenes on the structures of subjectivity through body performance, in response to normative discourses enframing her African and European identity in institutional and official portraits. This essay, in a way, closes the circle on the recurrent theme of the mobility of cinema. Giuliana Bruno in her *Atlas of Emotion* (2002) aptly reminds us that the Greek word *kinema* connotes both the motion and e-motion of the cinematic journey, such as, among others, the one that has removed cinematic language from its closed domain via art and the architectures of sound and vision. One of the examples of this move, in my opinion, is given by Julien's 'cinematization of video art'.

I remember the emotional jolt I experienced in the African pavilion of the Venice Biennale 2007, when, in the open well-lit space of the gallery, I saw one of Mwangi's videos, *Masked* (2000). The face of the woman on the screen was totally covered by her black thick hair constantly changing shape and texture without ever revealing what was underneath – the video was, without beginning or end, running on in a circular way, the face never showing itself, the mask never taken off, unresponding to the spectator's desire. On the same occasion, I was drawn from the open space of another pavilion to an enclosed, dark alcove to watch a filmic installation by the African American artist Kara Walker: her silhouetted images representing the cruel and violent history of slavery and of its emancipatory process in North America were moving from one end of the room to another, and on to the ceilings and the doors, taking in – object among objects? subject among subjects? – the shadow of the spectator.

Back to cinema, back to a different cinema.

Ingrid Mwangi, *Cutting the Mask* 2003. Courtesy of the author.

Kara Walker, *8 Possible Beginnings* 2003. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co Gallery.

Iain Chambers

Scratching the Lens: Media, Memory and Mimesis

Memory is not the opposite of forgetting, but its lining.
(Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*)

…cinema can be a critical tool and can be used as an effective means for recirculating memory.
(Isaac Julien, "Creolising Vision")[1]

The blip-blip of electronic gates opening and shutting in the tropical night; the red cranes drifting lazily over Ipanema, competing with the hand-gliders for the hot air currents: all of this suspended in what Dionne Brand refers to as the "damp and hungry interstices" of the world, where at the edges – of the city, the nation, the favela, the rutted country road, the jungle clearing or the coastal mangrove – the "rooted and the uprooted nourish each other" as they brush up against, mark and dirty the smooth surfaces of the rationalized stronghold of the north (of the world).[2]

It is at this point that we stumble over the uncomfortable recognition of criticism as colonisation. Evoking the other's voice, position and poetics, is also a modality for avoiding a critical relationship with one's own voice, position and power. If, as Assia Djebar and Trinh Minh-ha urge, we are not to speak for, or in the name of, but close by, the other, perhaps a further twist and discomfort needs to be laced into the argument. My uncertain voice in the company of histories that shadow and interrogate mine, undoing its premises and promises, its languages and conclusions, proposes an (im)possibility to be registered, recorded and inscribed in the very language that announces both my presence and the subaltern who are translated, survive, and live on. To receive and acknowledge such a state is already to adopt a diverse critical 'map'. Here I no longer seek to represent the other, the subaltern, the excluded, as though I could totally exhibit and catalogue their differences in the fullness of my explanation, but rather respond to her, him, and, ultimately my self, exposed in a language and a locality that is no longer, and probably never was, mine (Jacques Derrida).[3] This is to register the full etymological reach of criticism as precisely the interruption of my time, language, memory and thought by the ontological insistence of a world that simultaneously sustains and exceeds my representation.

If fundamentalism is the refusal of a poetics that draws us towards the infinite truth of ambiguity and delivers us over to the uncertainties of a disquieting elsewhere, then the ubiquitous hegemony of realism betrays the fundamentalism of vision for which the truth is believed to be transparent, immediate, graspable, conclusive.

[1] Isaac Julien, "Creolizing Vision" in Okwui Enwezor, et. al., *Creolite and Creolization*, Documenta11_Platform 3 (Hatje-Cantz: Ostfildern-Ruit, 2003), 150.

[2] Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, (London: Granta Books, 1999), 167.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 13.

The contemporary presence of other views, other perspectives, other maps, not only suggests that history is plural and multi-directional, but also, to follow Walter Benjamin's suggestion, that it is the site of perpetual translation and interpretation. History is neither implacable destiny nor law; it is a worldly becoming. It is in the transit of its translations that it becomes possible to trace the slide from History *per se* to the language of history, to history as language.

Now the language of history, history as language, as ethics and aesthetics, secures the relationship between each of us and the media. As Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (1982) most powerfully suggests, memories are indivisible from the media that record them. It is the modern-day media, in the form of photographs, film, print archives, television, newspapers and digital memories, that collates and conserves collective and individual memory for those able to access them. If the very concept of 'citizenship', 'identity' and 'belonging' requires an affective and shared sense of the past then it is the media as memory that has become central for the articulation of modern political and cultural recognition. If languages render the world a 'world', transforming space into the familiar place of 'home', then it is those very same languages that also expose its reasoning. History is not out there; it is in here, inscribed on our tongues, articulated through our bodies, spoken by our lives, inscribed on the screens that simultaneously separate and unite us.

History is therefore not only present, it is also invisible and resides in a language that is never mine. Here on the threshold of vision that is marked by the elsewhere and its transitory exposure, the image comes undone, stutters, and for an instant is traversed by an oblique glance able to catch something in its unfolding. There exists the possibility to multiply on the image a multitude of senses, of directions, to rob it of unilateral intent in order to free it for a further movement. Here emerges a cinema of the 'gap', of the 'interval'. This is a cinemato-grafia in which the wound of memory remains open, suspended as a disembodied fragment in the spiral of time, sustained in the custody of language: a writing of the world in the world. This is not about a state of being – hence no just, perfect or truthful image – but is the image movement of a state of becoming. There is not merely a simulacra of life lived elsewhere, nor an endless play of the sign substituting the 'truth', but rather a language event, a speech act, in which consensual views and habitual understanding are set adrift in the very instance of language itself. In this exploration, ultimately explosion, of narrative convention, time creeps up on and overcomes the character, transforming the organic and 'complete' subject he or she represents into a temporal image. Where the body irrupts in the frame, where the skin – as the surface of the body and the surface of film – intercede each other's intentions, critical distance is annulled in the ontological challenge of film

as the memory of language, and the language of memory. Beyond mere understanding and the (im)possibility of fully representing history, images are suspended on the screen, as the reel spills across the editing floor, resonant with re-membering.

When Jacques Lacan returns to Freud's commentary of Hoffman's "The Sand Man", the potential loss of the eyes signals the loss of the privileged perspective of the subject. It discloses that the visible does not commence from the subject but, on the contrary, it is the subject that inhabits the visible, suggesting that the cinema is not the mirror of the subject, but rather the mirror of the visible – something that is potentially altogether more disquieting, for it announces a state of *unheimlich*. Here, not only does there emerge some 'thing' that exceeds the capacity of the eye to construct the world according to its own perspective, but also promotes the fear of no longer finding itself at the centre of things. This is a prospect that announces the very undoing of a subject-centred occidental humanism.

To speak with the cinema implies to speak of the world, not to represent it but rather to receive in the image its intensification; that is, to look again and drain language of the habitual. This is to learn the fundamental lesson of Jean-Luc Godard's cinema practice: we are not concerned here with a theory or philosophy of cinema, but rather drawn towards the understanding of cinema as theory, as philosophy. We are not so much thinking of cinema, as thinking with cinema. As Gilles Deleuze puts it: "we must no longer ask ourselves, 'What is cinema?' but 'What is philosophy?".[4]

Such a criticism of representation, and with it of the critical apparatus that has historically proposed the centrality of mimesis to the understanding of truth, permits us to return to the *avoided encounter with the unhomely quality of the world that reside in language itself.* The politics of the grammar of representation gives way to the poetics of the image (verbal, visual, sonorial), and directs us towards a post-metaphysical aesthetics that registers the radical impossibility, incommensurability, of a full or complete 'realism' sustained by representation.

A cinema of the interruption, an interrupting cinema, a broken narrative, a fragmented, disturbed image frustrates coherence and disseminates another sense, an unsuspected direction...

Here, in a porosity sustained by the ambivalence of language, emerge the interrogations and interruptions that interpellate existing authorities and their regimes of truth. They inevitably force a reassessment of language and the right to narrate. Here the very nature of language – preceding and exceeding a pre-established semantics – becomes political in the insistence of its passage out beyond authorial intention and institutional design. For it reveals a charged poetics that transposes existing political arrangements into regions in which it is lost for words. Here language discovers the

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 280. Needless to say, this deliberate refusal of mimesis and of the hegemony of 'realism' is to be applied to all the means of representation – from photography and sound to the written word – in a radical revaluation of a post-metaphysical appreciation of language.

freedom to explore dimensions that query the premises that cite and site the (im)possible.

The present shift in subjectivity induced by digital dialects also promotes the recovery and reworking of the Benjaminian idea of the 'optical unconscious'. Amongst its consequences is a deterritorialised cinema that moves between the screen of the cinema proper to the creolising vision afforded by fine art and the gallery space. It leads to another cinema that interrupts the inherited understanding of narration, disturbing the hierarchy of the spectacle, rewriting the conditions of the archive and its custody of 'truth'. It is for that reason that I would contest the idea that the 'visible' is merely the visual. There is something about the appropriation of appearances that exceeds an ocular logic. Visual 'recognition' draws deeply on an economy of sense deposited in the memory of the viewing body; a memory certainly sustained by images but by no means exhausted by them. This overspill of cinematic traces and fragments out of the immediacy of the visual into the space of the art gallery was most certainly anticipated by Chris Marker, and has consistently been extended in the contemporary works of Chantal Ackerman, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Isaac Julien.

Yet, this other, unconscious and unfathomable side of language, is there in appearances, deposited and distributed in the visual plane. It is in this sense that language - whether the language of film, literature, music or the body - goes beyond signification in order to 'show' some other 'thing'. It is here, confronting what exceeds the domestic vision, that we experience anxiety and the disquiet of homelessness. It is here that we are thrown out of our selves and are drawn into an *ek-static* (Heidegger) relationship with the languages in which we habitually move. This potentially introduces us to a new relationship to the world in which we succumb to what both worlds us in our everyday concerns and yet simultaneously sends us on ur way, elsewhere, beyond our selves.

It is in this sense that a caring for the past in terms of an unguaranteed openess to its languages (rather than to the domesticating solipsism of nostalgia) permits us to configure the present and the future in a manner that exceeds and interrogates their 'customary' framings. Bearing witness to what is irreducible to the pragmatic terms offered by linguistic or visual codification is perhaps the absolute, Edenic, purity of language to which Walter Benjamin referred. To 'repeat' the past in this light – after all, reading a novel, watching a film, listening to music is precisely this type of repetition – is to elaborate a freedom that the implacable semantics of the present deny. This is what Kaja Silverman calls an "ethics of desire".[5] Of course, this is not to master the past for the benefit of the present, rather to install a relationship with alterity. It is not to fill up time with meaning, but is rather to be interpellated by what meaning fails to reveal. One is "thereby released from the paralysis of being into the mobility of becoming".[6]

[5] Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 62.

[6] Ibid., 6.

From here it becomes possible to explore the image not as the representation of reality or history (with all the attendant questions of being 'true' to life, 'faithful' to the facts) but rather as the inauguration of a poetics: an inscription, a 'sculpture in time' as Andrei Tarkovsky put it. This propels us towards considering that more-than-us which the image announces but can never fully show or codify; a visible inscription of the world in the world that explodes its immediacy, not to destroy it but to render it and ourselves anew.

Rey Chow

Filmic Visuality, Cultural Identity

A film about how film was first invented in Germany, Wim Wenders's *Die Brüder Skladanowsky* (*The Brothers Skladanowsky*) (Part I) (1994) offers important clues to the contentious relationship between film and cultural identity. Using the shooting and editing skills, and style of the silent era, and filming with an antique hand-crank camera, Wenders and students from the Munich Academy for Television and Film recast this originary moment in cinematic history as the tale of a loved one lost and found: disturbed by her Uncle Eugen's imminent departure on a long journey, Max Skladanowsky's five-year-old daughter implores the adults – her father and his other brother, Emil – to bring Eugen back into her life. She gets her wish. As she waves goodbye to Uncle Eugen, the little girl is told that he is still with them, inside the box containing the film they had made of him before he departed. And soon, lo and behold, she is overjoyed by what she sees through the 'Bioscop' invented by her father: a life-size Uncle Eugen flickering on the screen, making funny expressions and performing acrobatic feats just as when he was still with them. Uncle Eugen has disappeared in person but has reappeared on film – and, we may add, he will be there forever.

In an elegant and moving manner, Wenders's film about the beginning of film reminds us of the key features of the medium of signification that was novel in the 1890s. First, film (and here I intend photography as well as cinema) is, structurally, a story about the relationship between absence and presence, between disappearance and reappearance. Filmic representation reproduces the world with a resemblance unknown to artists before its arrival. Be the object captured a human face, a body, a thing, or a place, the illusion of presence generated is such that a new kind of realism, one that vies with life itself, aggressively asserts itself. If cultural identity is something that always finds anchoring in specific media of representation (such as print, music, art, and now, increasingly, digital media), it is easy to see why, in modernity, the modes of illusory presence made possible by film would become such strong contenders in the competitive negotiations of cultural identity. Second, in a manner that summarises the essence of many early, silent films, Wenders's work draws attention to the agile movements of the human body as they are captured by the equipment built by Max Skladanowsky. Because sound and dialogue were not yet available, the filmmaker had to turn the ingredients he had into so many spatial inscriptions on the screen. What could have better conveyed the liveliness of this new illusory world than the exaggerated,

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hieroglyphic motions of the human body, coming across as a series of moving images? The compelling sense of photographic realism in film is thus punctuated with an equally compelling sense of melodrama – of technologically magnified and exaggerated movements that highlight the presences unfolding on the screen as artificial and constructed experiments. Melodrama here is not so much the result of sentimental narration as it is the effect of a caricatured defamiliarization of a familiar form (the human body and its recognizable gestures). Made possible by the innovative maneuvers of light and temporality, of exposure and speed, such defamiliarization has direct bearings on the new manners of seeing and showing.

The co-existence of an unprecedented realism and a novel melodramatization means that, from the very earliest moments, the modes of identity construction offered by film were modes of *relativity* and *relations* rather than essences and fixities. Well-known film techniques used around the world, such as montage, close-ups, panoramic shots, long shots, jump cuts, slow motion, flashback, and so forth, which result in processes of introjection, projection, or rejection that take place between the images and narratives shown on the screen, on the one hand, and audiences' sense of self, place, history, collective belonging, and pleasure, on the other, confirm the predominance of such modes of relativity and relations. With film, people's identification of who they are can no longer be regarded as a mere ontological or phenomenological event. Such identification is now profoundly enmeshed with technological intervention, which ensures that even (and especially) when the camera seems the least intrusive, the permeation of the filmic spectacle by the apparatus is complete and unquestionable. And, it is the completeness of the effect of illusion that makes the interpretation of filmic visuality controversial to this day.

It was the understanding of this fundamentally manipulable constitution of film – this open-ended relation between spectacle and audience due, paradoxically, to the completeness of technological permeation – which led Walter Benjamin to associate film with revolutionary production and with political change.[1] For, as Benjamin speculated in the 1930s, film's thoroughly *mediated* nature makes it a cultural opportunity to be seized for political purposes. Just as for the film actor, performing in front of the camera is a kind of exile from his own body because it demands the simulation of emotional continuity in what is technically a disjointed process of production, so for the audience, Benjamin writes, the new attitude of reception is distraction and manipulation. As opposed to the absorption and concentration required by the traditional novel, which has to be read in solitude and in private, film requires a mode of interaction that is public and collective, and that allows audiences to take control of their situation

[1] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217-51; and "The Author as Producer", in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), 220-38.

by adopting changing, rather than stable, positions. Film, in other words, turns the recipient potentially into a producer, who plays an active rather than passive role in the shaping of his/her cultural environment.

Whereas Benjamin in his Marxist, Brechtian moments was willing to grant to a movie audience the significance of an organized mob, later generations of film critics, notably feminist critics with a training in psychoanalysis, would elaborate the agency of the viewer with much greater complexity by way of processes of subjectivity formation. Such critics would argue that fantasies, memories, and other unconscious experiences, as well as the gender roles imposed by the dominant culture at large, play important roles in mediating the impact of the spectacle.

The crucial theoretical concept informing psychoanalytic interpretations of identity is 'suture'. In the context of cinema, 'suture' refers to the interactions between the enunciation of the filmic apparatus, the spectacle, and the viewing subject – interactions which, by soliciting or 'interpellating' the viewing subject in a series of shifting positions, allow it to gain access to coherent meaning.[2] As Kaja Silverman writes, "The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, 'Yes, that's me', or 'That's what I see'".[3] As expressed through suture – literally a 'sewing up' or a 'stitching together' of gaps – cinematic identification is an eminently ideological process: subjectivity is imagined primarily as a lack, which is then exploited, through its desire to know, by the visual field enunciated by the omnipotent filmic apparatus, which withholds more than it reveals. In order to have access to the plenitude that is the basis for identity, the subject must give up something of its own in order to be 'hooked up' with the Other, the visual field, which is, nonetheless, forever beyond its grasp. No matter how successful, therefore, the subject's possession of meaning is by definition compensatory and incomplete. (This process of subject formation through suture is comparable to an individual's attempt to acquire identity in certain social situations. For instance, in order to gain acceptance into a particular social group, an individual must be willing to sacrifice, to part with certain things to which s/he feels personally attached but which are not socially acceptable; such personal sacrifices, however, are not guarantees that the social identity acquired is complete or permanent because, as is often the case, the social group is capricious and arbitrary in its demands.)

Because it foregrounds processes of identification through relations of visuality, cinema is one of the most explicit systems of suturing, the operations of which can be explained effectively through the simple acts of seeing. Meanwhile, cinema also offers a homology with the dominant culture at large, in that the latter, too, may be seen as a repressive system in which individual subjects gain access to their identities only by forsaking parts of themselves, parts that are, moreover, never fully found again.

[2] For the concept of "interpellation" see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideology State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-86; see also Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

[3] Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 205.

(The work of Freud and Lacan have definitely left their imprints on this way of understanding identity.)

Using suture, ideology, and other related psychoanalytic concepts, Anglo-American feminist critics concerned with identitarian politics have, since Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work in 1970s, been steadily exposing the masculinism of mainstream cinema as well as of the dominant, heterosexist culture of the West.[4] As a means of countering the repressive effects of dominant modes of visuality and identification, some go on to analyse in detail the ambiguities of the visual representations of women,[5] while others make use of the problematic of spectatorship, notably the spectatorship of women audiences, to theorise alternative ways of seeing, of constructing subjectivities and identities.

Once identity is linked to spectatorship, a new spectrum of theoretical possibilities opens up. For instance, critics who have been influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* can now make the connection that orientalism, as the system of signification that represents non-Western cultures to Western recipients in the course of Western imperialism, operates visually as well as narratologically to subject 'the orient' to ideological manipulation. They point out that, much like representations of women in classical narrative cinema, representations of 'the orient' are often fetishized objects manufactured for the satiation of the masculinist gaze of the West. As a means to expose the culturally imperialist assumptions behind European and American cinemas, the spectatorship of non-Western audiences thus also takes on vital significance.[6]

Because it conceptualises identity non-negotiably as the effect of a repressive but necessary closure, suture has by and large been theoretically preemptive – that is, it has been explicitly or implicitly accepted as the unquestionable path to identity formation. This can be seen in the two major ways in which the relationship between film and identity is usually investigated. For both, an acceptance of suture is indispensable.

This acceptance may function negatively, when the understanding of suture is used as a way to debunk and criticise certain kinds of identity – as ideologically conditioned by patriarchy and imperialism, for instance. Or, this acceptance may function positively and *implicitly*, in the counter critical practice of demonstrating that some types of films may serve as places for the construction of other (usually marginalized) types of identities. It is important to remember, however, that even when critics who are intent on subverting mainstream culture assert that 'alternative' cinemas give rise to 'alternative' identities, as long as they imagine identities exclusively by way of the classic 'interpellation' of subjectivities, they are not departing theoretically from the fundamental operations of suture. In fact, one may go as far as saying that it is when critics attempt to idealise the 'other' identities claimed for 'other' cinemas, that they tend to run the

[4] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge; London: BFI Publishing, 1989), 57-68.

[5] See, for instance, Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989); and essays included in Mary Ann Doane et al., eds., *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1984), and in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory*, and Penley and Sharon Willis, eds., *Male Trouble* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[6] See for example Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3-33.

greatest risk of reinscribing the ideologically coercive processes of identification through suturing.

For these reasons, I would propose that any attempt to theorise filmic visuality and cultural identity should try to move beyond both the criticism and the implicit reinscription of the effects of suture. In this light, it might be productive to return to aspects of film which may not immediately seem to be concerned with identity as such but which, arguably, offer alternatives to the impasses created by suture.

Let us think more closely about the implications of the modes of visuality unleashed by film. To go back to the story of the Skladanowsky brothers, what does it mean for Uncle Eugen to 'appear' when he is physically absent? From an anthropocentric perspective, we would probably say that 'the person' Eugen was the 'origin', the 'reality' that gave rise to the film which then became a document, a record of him. From the perspective of the filmic images, however, this assumption of 'origin' is no longer essential, for Eugen is now a movie, which has taken on an independent, mechanically reproducible existence of its own. With the passage of time, more and more reprints can be made and every one of them will be the same. The 'original' Uncle Eugen will no longer be of relevance.

Film, precisely because it signifies the thorough permeation of reality by the mechanical apparatus and thus the production of a seamless resemblance to reality itself, displaces once and for all the sovereignty of the so called 'original', which is now often an imperfect and less long-lasting copy of 'itself': Uncle Eugen's image remains long after he was dead. This obvious aspect of filmic reproduction is what underlies Benjamin's argument about the decline of the 'aura', the term he uses to describe the irreplaceable sense of 'presence' that was unique to traditional works of art when such works of art were rooted in specific times and spaces.[7] What was alarming about the arrival of film (as it was for many poets and artists) was precisely the destruction of the 'aura', a destruction that is programmed into film's mode of reproduction and that is part of film's 'nature' as a medium. This essential *iconoclasm* of filmic reproduction is encapsulated in Wenders's story by the phantasmagorically alive and replay-able image of Uncle Eugen *in his own absence*. This image signifies the end of the aura and the sacredness that used to be attached to the 'original' human figure, to the human figure as the 'original'. It also signifies a change in terms of the agency of seeing: the realist accuracy of the image announces that a mechanical eye, the eye of the camera, has replaced the human eye altogether in its capacity to capture and reproduce the world with precision.[8] As the effects of mechanicity, filmic images carry with them an inhuman quality even as they are filled with human contents. This is the reason why film has been compared to a process of embalming, to fossilization, and to death.[9]

[7] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

[8] See Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visibile" in Teresa de Lauretis e Stephen Heath. eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: MacMillan, 1978), 121-42.

[9] André Bazin, *What is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971), 9-16.

But what film destroys in terms of the aura, it gains in portability and transmissibility. With 'death' come new, previously undreamt of possibilities of experimentation, as the mechanically reproduced images become sites of the elaboration of what Benedict Anderson, in a study of the emergence of nationalism in modern history, calls "imagined communities".[10] We see this, for instance, in the mundane, anonymous sights of the big city that are typical of early silent films such as Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: The Symphony of the Big City*) (1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Scenes of workers going to work, housewives shopping, schoolchildren assembling for school, passengers traveling by train; scenes of carriages, engines, automobiles, train stations, typewriters, phones, gutters, street lamps, shop fronts – all such scenes testify to a certain fascination with the potentialities of seeing, of what can be made visible. The mechanically reproduced image has brought about a perception of the world as an infinite collection of objects and people permanently on display in their humdrum existence. At the same time, because film is not only reproducible but also transportable, it can be shown in different places, usually remote from the ones where they are originally made. Coinciding with upheavals of traditional populations bound to the land and with massive migrations from the countryside to metropolitan areas around the world, film ubiquitously assumes the significance of the monumental: the cinema auditorium, as Paul Virilio writes, puts order into visual chaos like a cenotaph. As the activity of movie-going gratifies "the wish of migrant workers for a lasting and even eternal homeland", cinema becomes the site of "a new aboriginality in the midst of demographic anarchy".[11]

The iconoclastic, portable imprints of filmic images and the metropolitan, migratory constitution of their audiences mean that film is always a rich means of exploring cultural crisis – of exploring culture itself as a crisis. We have seen many examples of such uses of film in various cinemas of the post-Second World War period: the existentialist portrayals of the difficulty and breakdown of human communication in Italian neo-realist and French avant-garde films; the sentimental middle-class family melodramas of Hollywood; the aesthetic experiments with vision and narration in Japanese cinema; the self-conscious parodies of fascism in the New German Cinema; the explosive renderings of diaspora and 'otherness' in what is called "third cinema".[12] By the 1980s and early 1990s, with the films of the mainland Chinese Fifth Generation directors, it becomes clear that film can be used for the exploration of crises especially in cultures whose experience of modernity is marked, as it were, by conflicts between an indigenous tradition and foreign influences, between the demands of nationalism and the demands of Westernization.

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[11] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989).

[12] Si veda Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222-237; see also essays in Jim Pines e Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).

For mainland Chinese directors such as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Zhang Nuanxin, reflecting on 'culture' inevitably involves the rethinking of origins – the 'pasts' that give rise to the present moment; the narratives, myths, rituals, customs, and practices that account for how a people becomes what it is. Because such rethinking plays on the historical relation between what is absent and what is present, film becomes, for these directors and their counterparts elsewhere in Asia, an ideal medium:[13] its projectional mechanism means that the elaboration of the past – as what is bygone, what is behind us – can simultaneously take the form of images moving, in their vivid luminosity, in front of us. The simple, dialectical relationship between visual absence and visual presence that was dramatized by film from the very first thus lends itself appropriately to an articulation of the dilemmas and contradictions, the nostalgias and hopes, that characterise struggles toward modernity. In such struggles, as we see in films such as *Yellow Earth*, *Sacrifice Youth*, *Judou*, or *Raise the Red Lantern*, the definitively modernist effort to reconceptualise 'origins' typically attributes to indigenous traditions the significance of a 'primitive' past in all the ambiguous senses of 'primitivism'. This special intersection between film and primitivism has been described in terms of "primitive passions".[14] Even closer to our time, the visually spectacular films by directors such as Taiwan's Tsai Ming-liang (e.g., *Vive l'amour*, *The River*, *What Time Is It There?*) and Hong Kong's Wong Kar-wai (e.g., *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*) continue to foreground filmic visuality as the medium, the surface on which the banal yet persistent psychodramas of modernity are played out in fragmented forms.

As the viewing of film does not require literacy in the traditional sense of knowing how to read and write, film signals the transformation of word-based cultures into cultures that are increasingly dominated by the visual image, a transformation that may be understood as a special kind of translation in the postmodern, postcolonial world. Intersemiotic in nature, film-as-translation involves histories and populations hitherto excluded by the restricted sense of literacy, and challenges the class hierarchies long established by such literacy in societies West and East.[15] And, insofar as its images are permanently inscribed, film also functions as an immense visual archive, assimilating literature, popular culture, architecture, fashion, memorabilia, and the contents of junk shops, waiting to be properly inspected for its meanings and uses.[16]

Any attempt to discuss film and cultural identity would therefore need to take into account the multiple significations of filmic visuality in modernity. This is especially so when modernity is part of postcoloniality, as in the case of many non-Western cultures, in which to become 'modern' signifies an ongoing re-visioning of indigenous cultural traditions alongside the obligatory turns toward the West or 'the world at large'. In this light, it

[13] See essays in Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections on Films from Japan, India, and China* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1988).

[14] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[15] See ibid.

[16] Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 322-323.

is worth remembering that film has always been, since its inception, a *transcultural* phenomenon, having as it does the capacity to transcend 'culture' – to create modes of fascination which are readily accessible and which engage audiences in ways independent of their linguistic and cultural specificities. Consider, for instance, the greatly popular versions of fairy tale romance, sex, kitsch, science fiction, and violence from Hollywood; alternatively, consider the greatly popular slapstick humor and action films of Jackie Chan from Hong Kong. To be sure, such popular films can inevitably be read as so many constructions of national, sexual, cultural identities; as so many impositions of Western, American, or other types of ideologies upon the rest of the world. While I would not for a moment deny that to be the case, it seems to me equally noteworthy that the world-wide appeal of many such films has something to do, rather, with their *not* being bound by well-defined identities, so that it is their specifically *filmic*, indeed phantasmagoric, significations of masculinism, moral righteousness, love, loyalty, family, and horror that speak to audiences across the globe, regardless of their own languages and cultures. (Hitchcock is reputed to have commented while making *Psycho* that he wanted Japanese audiences to scream at the same places as Hollywood audiences.)

The phantasmagoric effects of illusion on the movie screen are reminders once again of the iconoclasm, the fundamental replacement of human perception by the machine that is film's very constitution. This originary iconoclasm, this power of the technologized visual image to communicate beyond verbal language, should perhaps be beheld as a useful enigma, one that serves to unsettle any easy assumption we may have of the processes of identification generated by film as a medium, be such identification in relation to subjectivity or to differing cultural contexts. In a theoretical climate in which identities tend to be imagined – a bit too hastily I think – as being 'sutured' with specific times, places, pratices, groups, and cultures, thinking through this problematic of film's transcultural appeal should prove to be an instructive and productive exercise.

Rey Chow

Visualità filmica e identità culturale

Un film su come il film è stato inventato in Germania, *Die Brüder Skladanowsky* (*I fratelli Skladanowsky,* Parte I, 1994) di Wim Wenders, offre indicazioni importanti sul controverso rapporto tra mezzo filmico e identità culturale. Utilizzando le metodologie di sceneggiatura, montaggio e stile del cinema muto, e girando le scene con un'antica cinepresa con manovella a mano, Wenders e gli studenti dell'Istituto Superiore per la Televisione e il Cinema di Monaco di Baviera hanno riscritto questo momento originario della storia del cinema come racconto di una persona cara, perduta e poi ritrovata. Angosciata dall'imminente partenza dello zio Eugen per un lungo viaggio, la figlia di cinque anni di Max Skladanowsky implora gli adulti, suo padre e l'altro suo fratello Emil, di restituirle lo zio. E riesce ad avere ciò che desidera. Mentre lo saluta, alla bambina viene detto che zio Eugen è ancora tra loro, all'interno di una scatola che contiene il film girato su di lui prima della sua partenza. Ed ecco, qualcosa di entusiasmante appare nel 'Bioscopio' inventato dal padre: uno zio Eugen a grandezza naturale che si agita sullo schermo facendo espressioni buffe e compiendo gesti acrobatici proprio come faceva quando era ancora con loro. Lo zio Eugen non è più presente di persona ma è ricomparso nel film, e possiamo aggiungere che vi resterà per sempre.

In modo elegante e commovente la pellicola di Wenders sull'origine del cinema ci ricorda le caratteristiche principali di questo mezzo di significazione, che era una novità negli ultimi anni del diciannovesimo secolo. In primo luogo, il film (e con questo termine intendo sia fotografia che cinema) è sempre, nella sua struttura, una storia sul rapporto tra assenza e presenza, scomparsa e ricomparsa. La rappresentazione filmica riproduce il mondo con una verosimiglianza fino ad allora sconosciuta agli artisti. Che l'oggetto catturato sia un oggetto, un volto umano, un corpo, una cosa o un luogo, l'illusione di presenza è tale da imporre in modo forte un nuovo tipo di realismo, tale da mettersi in competizione con la vita stessa. Se per identità culturale si intende qualcosa che trova sempre ancoraggio in specifici mezzi di rappresentazione (come la stampa, la musica, l'arte e ora sempre di più i *media* digitali), è facile constatare perché nella modernità le modalità di presenza illusoria rese possibili dal film diventino dei temibili avversari nelle diverse negoziazioni possibili dell'identità culturale. In secondo luogo, in un modo che riassume l'essenza dei primi film muti, l'opera di Wenders richiama l'attenzione su quei rapidi movimenti del corpo umano così come vengono catturati dall'apparecchio costruito da Max Skladanowsky. Poiché il sonoro e il dialogo non erano

ancora disponibili, il regista doveva convertire gli elementi a sua disposizione in altrettante iscrizioni spaziali sullo schermo. Cos'altro avrebbe potuto comunicare meglio la vivacità di questo nuovo mondo di illusioni, di quei geroglifici disegnati del corpo umano, che appaiono come una serie di immagini in movimento? L'innegabile sensazione di realismo fotografico del film viene allora interrotta dal senso altrettanto affascinante del melodramma – dei movimenti esagerati e accentuati dalla tecnologia che fanno di quelle strane presenze, che si dispiegano sullo schermo, esperimenti artificiali e costruiti. Il melodramma in questo caso non è tanto da intendersi come risultato di una narrazione sentimentale, quanto come effetto di uno straniamento caricaturale, di una forma familiare (il corpo umano e i suoi gesti riconoscibili). Reso possibile da innovative tecniche di luce e temporalità, di esposizione e velocità, tale straniamento ha influenze dirette sulle nuove modalità di vedere e rappresentare.

La coesistenza di un realismo senza precedenti con una resa melodrammatica altrettanto nuova significa che, sin dall'inizio, le modalità di costruzione dell'identità offerte dal film erano forme di *relatività* e di *relazioni* piuttosto che di essenzialità stabili. La predominanza di tali modalità di relatività e relazioni è confermata dalle tecniche cinematografiche usate in tutto il mondo, come il montaggio, i primi piani, le riprese panoramiche, i campi lunghi, i tagli, i *ralenti*, il flashback e così via, che portano a quei processi di introiezione, proiezione o reiezione che hanno luogo, da una parte, tra le immagini e le narrazioni mostrate sullo schermo, e dall'altra tra il senso del sé, del luogo, della storia, dell'appartenenza collettiva e del piacere da parte degli spettatori. Con il cinema, l'identificazione delle persone con ciò che sono non può essere più considerata come un semplice evento ontologico e fenomenologico. Un'identificazione di questo genere è così profondamente influenzata dall'intervento tecnico, da far sì che persino (e soprattutto) quando la cinepresa sembra meno invadente, la scena filmica è completamente e indiscutibilmente permeata dall'apparato. Ed è proprio la completezza dell'effetto di illusione che ancora oggi rende controversa l'interpretazione della visualità filmica.

Fu proprio la comprensione della struttura fondamentalmente manipolabile del cinema – questa relazione aperta tra spettacolo e pubblico dovuta, paradossalmente, alla completezza dell'influsso tecnologico – che portò Walter Benjamin ad associare il film alla produzione rivoluzionaria e al cambiamento politico.[1] Come egli teorizzò infatti negli anni trenta, la natura completamente *mediata* del film lo fa diventare un'opportunità culturale di cui impadronirsi per scopi politici. Come per un attore cinematografico recitare di fronte alla cinepresa è una sorta di esilio dal suo corpo, poiché richiede la simulazione di una continuità emotiva in ciò che tecnicamente è un processo di produzione frammentato, così è

[1] Cfr. ad esempio Walter Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966); e "L'autore come produttore" in *Avanguardia e rivoluzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), 199-217.

per il pubblico, scrive Benjamin, per il quale la nuova modalità di ricezione implica la distrazione e la manipolazione. In opposizione all'impegno e alla concentrazione richiesti dal romanzo tradizionale, che deve essere letto in solitudine e in privato, il film esige un tipo di interazione pubblica e collettiva, che permette al pubblico di avere sotto controllo la propria situazione adottando posizioni instabili piuttosto che fisse. Il film, in altre parole, muta potenzialmente il ricevente in un produttore di significati, che gioca un ruolo attivo e non passivo nel dar forma al proprio contesto culturale.

Mentre Benjamin, nei suoi periodi marxisti e brechtiani, era fermamente convinto di poter riconoscere al pubblico cinematografico la stessa importanza di una folla organizzata, le successive generazioni di critici cinematografici, in particolare la critica femminista di formazione psicoanalitica, elaboravano l'agentività dell'osservatore in modo molto più complesso, passando attraverso i processi di formazione della soggettività. Questa critica sosterrà che le fantasie, le memorie e le altre esperienze dell'inconscio, così come le politiche di genere imposte dalla cultura dominante in generale, giocano un ruolo fondamentale nel mediare l'impatto dello scena.

Il concetto teorico cruciale che pervade le interpretazioni psicoanalitiche dell'identità è il concetto di 'sutura'. Nel contesto cinematografico, la 'sutura' indica le interazioni tra l'enunciazione dell'apparato filmico, la rappresentazione e il soggetto che osserva. Si tratta di interazioni che, sollecitando o 'interpellando' il soggetto che osserva in una serie di posizioni mutevoli, gli permettono di avere accesso ad un significato coerente.[2] Come scrive Kaja Silverman, "l'operazione di sutura ha successo nel momento in cui il soggetto che osserva dice, 'Si, sono io', o ' E' ciò che vedo'".[3] In quanto espressa attraverso la sutura – letteralmente 'cucitura' o 'rammendo' – di intervalli, l'identificazione cinematografica è un processo fortemente ideologico: la soggettività viene immaginata principalmente come mancanza, che attraverso il proprio desiderio di conoscenza viene poi utilizzata dal campo visivo enunciato dall'onnipotente apparato filmico, che cela più di quel che svela. Per avere accesso alla completezza che è alla base dell'identità, il soggetto deve rinunciare a qualcosa di proprio per essere 'collegato' all'Altro, al campo visivo, che resta tuttavia per sempre fuori dalla sua portata. Non importa, quindi, quanto il possesso del significato da parte del soggetto riesca ad essere per definizione compensativo e incompleto. (Questo processo di formazione del soggetto attraverso la sutura è paragonabile al tentativo compiuto da un individuo di acquisire un'identità in particolari situazioni sociali. Per esempio, per essere accettato in un dato gruppo sociale, un individuo deve essere disposto a sacrificare, a separarsi da certe cose a cui è legato ma che non sono socialmente accettabili; tali sacrifici personali comunque non sono

[2] Si veda Louis Althusser, "Ideologia e apparati ideologici di Stato. Note per una ricerca", in *Freud e Lacan* (Roma: Ed. Riuniti, 1977), 65-123; e Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

[3] Si veda Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 205 [trad. mia, n.d.t.].

una garanzia che l'identità sociale acquisita sia completa o permanente, poiché, come spesso accade, il gruppo sociale è mutevole e arbitrario nelle sue richieste).

Poiché ciò mette in primo piano processi di identificazione attuabili attraverso relazioni di visualità, il cinema diventa uno dei sistemi più espliciti di sutura, le cui operazioni possono essere rappresentate dal semplice atto del vedere. Inoltre, il cinema presenta un'omologia con la cultura dominante in generale, in quanto anche quest'ultima può essere considerata come un sistema repressivo nel quale dei soggetti individuali hanno accesso alle loro identità solo rinunciando a quelle parti di loro stessi che, per giunta, non saranno mai del tutto recuperate. (Le opere di Freud e Lacan hanno lasciato certamente la loro traccia su questo modo di comprendere l'identità).

Usando nozioni come sutura, ideologia e altri concetti psicoanalitici ad esse connessi, la critica femminista anglo-americana interessata alle politiche identitarie ha denunciato, sin dall'opera pionieristica di Laura Mulvey degli anni '70, il maschilismo del cinema tradizionale, così come la cultura eterosessuale dominante nell'Occidente. Come mezzo per contrastare gli effetti repressivi delle modalità dominanti della visualità e dell'identificazione, alcuni continuano ad analizzare nel dettaglio le ambiguità presenti nelle rappresentazioni visive delle donne, mentre altri si sono soffermati sulla problematica della condizione dello spettatore, ed in particolar modo del pubblico femminile, per teorizzare dei modi alternativi di osservare, di costruire soggettività e identità.[4]

Una volta che l'identità è collegata alla condizione dello spettatore, si apre un nuova gamma di possibilità teoriche. Ad esempio, i critici che sono stati influenzati da *Orientalismo* di Edward Said possono collegare l'orientalismo inteso come sistema di significazione che rappresenta le culture non occidentali per i destinatari occidentali durante l'imperialismo, con il fatto che esso operi secondo una modalità visiva e narratologica al fine di sottomettere 'l'oriente' ad una manipolazione ideologica. Questi critici fanno notare che, come accadeva per le rappresentazioni delle donne nel cinema narrativo classico, le rappresentazioni dell''Oriente' sono spesso rappresentazioni di oggetti-feticcio prodotti per l'appagamento dello sguardo maschilista dell'Occidente. In quanto mezzo per denunciare i presupposti culturalmente imperialisti che si celano dietro il cinema europeo e americano, il pubblico non occidentale assume dunque un'importanza vitale.[5]

Dal momento che l'identità si concettualizza in modo non negoziabile come l'effetto di una chiusura repressiva ma necessaria, la sutura è stata nel complesso uno strumento teorico preventivo; ossia, la sutura è stata accettata in modo esplicito o implicito come il percorso indiscutibile per la formazione dell'identità. Ciò si può constatare nelle due principali

[4] Si vedano per esempio Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1989) e i saggi contenuti in Mary Ann Doane et al., eds., *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1984), e in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge; London: BFI Publishing, 1989) e Penley Constance e Sharon Willis, eds., *Male Trouble* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[5] Si veda, per esempio, Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3-33.

modalità con cui si investiga solitamente il rapporto tra film e identità, per entrambe le quali è indispensabile accettare la sutura.

Una tale adesione può funzionare in modo negativo, ad esempio quando questo concetto di sutura viene usato come mezzo per ridicolizzare e criticare certe tipologie di identità, come quelle condizionate ideologicamente dal patriarcato e dall'imperialismo. D'altro canto, tale adesione può funzionare in maniera positiva e *implicita*, come accade in quella pratica di contro-critica che dimostra come alcuni tipi di film possano servire come luoghi per la costruzione di altri tipi di identità (di solito 'al margine'). È importante, comunque, ricordare che persino quando i critici decisi a sovvertire la cultura dominante sostengono che la cinematografia 'alternativa' dia origine a identità 'alternative', non si separano teoricamente dalle essenziali operazioni di sutura finché immaginano le identità esclusivamente attraverso la classica 'interpellazione' delle soggettività. Infatti, si può arrivare a sostenere che è proprio quando i critici cercano di idealizzare le identità 'altre' rivendicate come cinema 'altro' che corrono il più grande rischio di reinscrivere quei processi ideologicamente coercitivi di identificazione proprio attraverso l'operazione di sutura.

Per queste ragioni, proporrei che ogni tentativo di teorizzare la visualità filmica e l'identità culturale debba cercare di andare oltre sia la critica, sia l'implicita riscrittura degli effetti di sutura. Alla luce di ciò potrebbe essere produttivo ritornare a quegli aspetti del film che non sembrano concernere immediatamente l'identità in quanto tale ma che offrono, si potrebbe dire, alternative alle impasse create dalla sutura.

Consideriamo più attentamente le implicazioni delle modalità della visualità liberate dal film. Ritornando alla storia dei fratelli Skladanowsky, cosa significa per lo zio Eugen 'apparire' quando è fisicamente assente? Secondo una prospettiva antropocentrica diremmo, probabilmente, che la 'persona' Eugen sia 'l'origine', la 'realtà' che dà origine al film, e che il film sia diventato pertanto un documento, una registrazione di Eugen stesso. Dalla prospettiva delle immagini filmiche, comunque, questa ipotesi di 'origine' non è più indispensabile, in quanto Eugen ora è diventato un film che ha assunto una sua propria esistenza meccanicamente riproducibile. Con il passare del tempo si potranno fare sempre più copie ed ognuna di loro sarà identica. L''originale' zio Eugen non sarà più rilevante.

Il film, proprio perché significa penetrare completamente la realtà attraverso un apparato meccanico e comporta quindi la produzione di una somiglianza impenetrabile alla stessa realtà, disloca una volta per tutte la sovranità del cosi detto 'originale', che ora è spesso una copia imperfetta e meno durevole di 'sé stesso'. L'immagine di zio Eugen rimarrà a lungo dopo la sua morte. Questo aspetto ovvio della riproduzione filmica è ciò che viene sottolineato dalla tesi di Benjamin sulla scomparsa dell''aura', termine usato per descrivere il senso insostituibile di quella 'presenza'

unica per le tradizionali opere d'arte quando queste erano radicate in determinati momenti e spazi.[6] Ciò che all'arrivo del cinema risultò allarmante (come anche per molti poeti e artisti) fu precisamente la distruzione dell''aura', una distruzione programmata all'interno della modalità di riproduzione del film e che fa parte della sua 'natura' di medium. Questa fondamentale *iconoclastia* della riproduzione filmica è racchiusa nella storia di Wenders dall'immagine dello zio Eugen, resa, in modo fantasmagorico, viva e replicabile nella *sua stessa assenza*. Questa immagine significa la fine dell'aura e di quella sacralità che era solitamente assegnata all'originale figura umana, a quella figura umana intesa proprio come 'originale'. Tutto ciò esprime anche un cambiamento nei termini di agentività della vista: l'accuratezza realista dell'immagine rivela che un occhio meccanico, quello della cinepresa, ha completamente sostituito l'occhio umano nella sua capacità di catturare e riprodurre il mondo con precisione.[7] Come effetti della meccanicità, le immagini filmiche portano con sé una qualità non umana proprio quando sono ricolme di contenuti umani. Questo è il motivo per cui il film è stato paragonato ad un processo di imbalsamazione, di fossilizzazione e di morte.[8]

Ma ciò che il film distrugge in termini di aura lo riguadagna in portabilità e trasmissibilità. Possibilità di sperimentazioni fino ad allora impensabili si rigenerano con la 'morte', poiché le immagini riprodotte meccanicamente diventano luoghi di elaborazione di ciò che Benedict Anderson chiama, in uno studio sull'emergere del nazionalismo nella storia moderna, "comunità immaginate".[9] Lo vediamo, per esempio, nei luoghi comuni e anonimi della grande città, tipici dei primi film muti come *Berlin –Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlino, sinfonia di una grande città*) di Walther Ruttmann (1927) e *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Uomo con la macchina da presa*) (1929) di Dziga Vertov. Scene di lavoratori che vanno a lavorare, di casalinghe che fanno la spesa, di scolari che si radunano per la scuola, di viaggiatori che prendono il treno; scene di carrozze, locomotive, automobili, stazioni ferroviarie, macchine da scrivere, telefoni, grondaie, lampioni, facciate di negozi, sono tutte la prova di un certo fascino per le potenzialità dello sguardo, di ciò che si può rendere visibile. L'immagine riprodotta meccanicamente ha determinato una percezione del mondo come collezione infinita di oggetti e persone continuamente in mostra nella loro banale esistenza. Allo stesso tempo, dal momento che il film non è solo riproducibile ma anche trasportabile, lo si può mostrare in luoghi diversi, solitamente distanti da quelli d'origine. Il cinema, che nasce insieme a mutamenti radicali nelle popolazioni tradizionali legate alla terra e alle massicce migrazioni dalle campagne alle aree metropolitane in tutto il mondo, assume dovunque e in modo onnipresente la significazione del monumentale: la sala cinematografica, come scrive Paul Virilio, mette ordine nel caos visivo come un cenotafio. Poiché l'andare al cinema gratifica "il

[6] Si veda Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte*.

[7] Si veda Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visibile" in Teresa de Lauretis e Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London: MacMillan, 1978), 121-42.

[8] André Bazin, *Che cosa è il cinema* (Milano: Garzanti, 1973), 9-16.

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Comunità immaginate. Origini e fortuna dei nazionalismi* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1966; nuova ed. 2005).

desiderio dei lavoratori emigranti di una patria permanente e persino eterna", il cinema diventa il luogo di "un nuovo essere aborigeno nel mezzo dell'anarchia demografica".[10]

Le impronte iconoclastiche e portatili delle immagini filmiche e la costituzione migratoria e metropolitana degli spettatori significano che il film è sempre un prezioso mezzo per indagare la crisi culturale, e per esaminare la cultura stessa in quanto crisi. Abbiamo visto diversi esempi di tali modi di usare il film nei vari cinema del periodo successivo alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale: le descrizioni esistenziali della difficoltà e del crollo della comunicazione umana nei film italiani del neorealismo e in quelli francesi di avanguardia; i melodrammi sentimentali della famiglia borghese hollywoodiani; gli esperimenti estetici di visione e narrazione nel cinema giapponese; le imbarazzate parodie del fascismo nel Nuovo Cinema Tedesco; le versioni esplosive della diaspora e dell''alterità' in quello che viene chiamato il "terzo cinema".[11] Negli anni '80 e primi anni '90 del Novecento, con i film dei registi continentali della Quinta Generazione Cinese, diventa chiaro che il film può essere usato per esplorare le crisi di quelle culture, in particolare, la cui esperienza della modernità è marcata, per così dire, da conflitti tra tradizione locale e influenze straniere, tra le richieste di nazionalismo e quelle di occidentalizzazione.

Per i registi cinesi del continente come Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang e Zhang Nuanxin, la riflessione sulla 'cultura' coinvolge inevitabilmente il ripensamento delle origini, di quei 'passati' che danno origine al momento presente, narrazioni, miti, rituali, usanze e pratiche che incidono sul modo in cui un popolo è diventato ciò che è. Poiché un tale ripensamento fa leva sulla relazione storica tra ciò che è assente e ciò che è presente il film diventa, per questi registi e per i loro omologhi in altre parti dell'Asia, un medium ideale: il suo meccanismo di proiezione significa che l'elaborazione del passato – inteso come ciò che è remoto, alle nostre spalle – può prendere simultaneamente la forma di immagini che, nella loro vivida luminosità, si muovono dinnanzi a noi.[12] Quel rapporto semplice e dialettico tra assenza e presenza visiva, che viene drammatizzata dal cinema sin dall'inizio, si presta in modo appropriato ad una articolazione dei dilemma e delle contraddizioni, delle nostalgie e delle speranze, che caratterizzano le lotte in direzione della modernità. In queste lotte, come possiamo vedere in film quali *Terra Gialla, Sacrificio della gioventù, Judou* o *Lanterne Rosse*, il tentativo del tutto modernista di riconcettualizzare le 'origini' attribuisce, in modo prevedibile, alle tradizioni locali il significato di un passato 'primitivo', con tutti quei significati ambigui del termine 'primitivismo'. Questa particolare connessione tra film e primitivismo è stato descritto nei termini di "passioni primitive".[13] Anche in tempi a noi più vicini, i film visivamente spettacolari di registi come

[10] Paul Virilio, *Guerra e cinema: logistica della percezione* (Torino: Lindau, 2002), 39.

[11] Si veda Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 222-237; si vedano anche i saggi in Jim Pines e Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).

[12] Si vedano i saggi in Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections on Films from Japan, India, and China* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1988).

[13] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

Tsai Ming-liang di Taiwan (ad esempio *Vive l'amour*, *Il fiume*, *Che ora è laggiù?*) e Wong Kar-wai di Hong Kong (per esempio *Hong Kong Express* e *In the Mood for Love*) continuano a mettere in primo piano la visualità filmica come medium sulla cui superficie i banali ma persistenti psicodrammi della modernità vengono rappresentati in forme frammentate.

Poiché la visione di un film non richiede l'alfabetismo nel senso tradizionale del termine, esso segnala la trasformazione da culture fondate sulla parola in culture che sono sempre più dominate dall'immagine visiva, una trasformazione che può essere intesa come una sorta di particolare traduzione in un mondo postmoderno e post-coloniale. Intersemiotico per natura, il cinema come traduzione coinvolge storie e popoli finora esclusi da un ristretto senso di alfabetismo, e sfida quelle gerarchie classiste a lungo fissate da tale alfabetismo nelle società occidentali e orientali.[14] Inoltre, per quanto le sue immagini siano iscritte in modo permanente, il film funziona anche come un immenso archivio visivo, che assimila la letteratura, la cultura popolare, l'architettura, la moda, cimeli e oggetti da rigattiere, aspettando d'essere esaminati opportunamente per i loro significati e usi.[15]

[14] Ibid.

[15] Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 322-323.

Qualsiasi tentativo di discutere su cinema e identità culturale, pertanto, dovrebbe necessariamente tenere in considerazione le molteplici significazioni della visualità filmica nella modernità. È così specialmente quando la modernità diventa parte del post-coloniale, come accade nel caso di molte culture non occidentali, per le quali diventare 'moderno' significa re-visionare continuamente le tradizioni culturali indigene accanto ai continui e obbligatori cambiamenti in direzione dell'Occidente o 'del mondo in generale'. Alla luce di ciò vale la pena ricordare che il cinema è sempre stato, sin dai suoi esordi, un fenomeno *transculturale*, avendo, come in effetti ha, la capacità di trascendere la 'cultura', di creare modalità di seduzioni che sono facilmente accessibili e che impegnano il pubblico indipendentemente dalla propria specificità linguistica e culturale. Si considerino, ad esempio, le versioni estremamente popolari degli amori da favola, del sesso, del kitsch, della fantascienza e della violenza di Hollywood; in alternativa si veda, ad esempio, l'umorismo grossolano e popolare e i film d'azione di Jackie Chan da Hong Kong. A dire il vero, questi film popolari possono di certo essere letti come altrettante costruzioni di identità nazionali, sessuali e culturali; così come altrettante imposizioni delle ideologie occidentali, americane o di altre sul resto del mondo. Sebbene non neghi che le cose stiano veramente così, mi sembra ugualmente notevole il fatto che il fascino mondiale di molti di questi film abbia a che fare, piuttosto, con il loro *non* essere legati da identità ben definite. Sono, quindi, le loro significazioni specificatamente *filmiche*, persino fantasmagoriche, del maschilismo, della virtù morale, dell'amore, della lealtà, della famiglia, e dell'orrore che parlano agli spettatori dall'altra

parte del globo, senza considerare il loro linguaggio e le loro culture. (Si racconta che Hitchcock, mentre girava *Psycho*, abbia dichiarato di volere che il pubblico giapponese urlasse in quegli stessi momenti del film in cui urlavano gli spettatori di Hollywood).

Gli effetti fantasmagorici di illusione sullo schermo cinematografico ricordano ancora una volta l'iconoclastia, quella fondamentale sostituzione della percezione umana con la macchina che è la vera essenza del film. Questa iconoclastia originaria, questo potere, attribuito all'immagine visiva tecnologizzata, di comunicare al di là del linguaggio verbale, dovrebbe essere vista come un fruttuoso enigma, un enigma che serva a sconvolgere qualsiasi facile presunzione possiamo avere dei processi di identificazione generati dal film come medium – sia che questa identificazione sia in rapporto con la soggettività o con la differenziazione di contesti culturali. In un clima teorico nel quale le identità tendono ad essere immaginate – credo un po' troppo frettolosamente – come 'suturate' con particolari tempi, luoghi, pratiche, gruppi e culture, riflettere attentamente su questa problematica dell'interesse transculturale del film si dimostrerebbe un esercizio formativo e produttivo.

Traduzione italiana di **Maria Rosaria D'agostino**

Mark Nash

Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn

"Your Satyagraha doctrine, Mr Gandhi, as far as I understand it, involves the pursuit of truth and in that pursuit you invite suffering on yourself and do not cause violence to anybody else?"
"Yes, sir."
"But however honestly a man may strive in his search for truth, his notions of truth may be different from the notions of others. Who then is to determine the truth?'
"The individual himself will determine that, sir. Different individuals will have different views as to the truth."
"Would that not lead to confusion?"
"I do not think so, sir. But honestly striving after truth will differ in every case. That is why, sir, the non-violence path was a necessary corollary. Without that there would be confusion and much worse".[1]

[1] From *Report of the committee appointed by the Government of India to investigate the disturbances in the Punjab, etc* (London: HMSO, 1920); quoted in Amar Kanwar's film *A Season Outside* (1998). The president of the inquiry, Lord Hunter, is interrogating Mr Gandhi.

Experiments with Truth takes its title from the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi.[2] It also references the Documenta11_Platform2 conference: *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation*, held in New Delhi, India, in 2002,[3] followed by the related exhibition curated by me in Philadelphia in 2004-5. In this *Experiments with Truth*, however, I am interested in exploring a range of approaches to notions of the documentary and of the indexical in the practice of contemporary moving image art. The issue of transitional justice, which the 2002 conference addressed, emerges clearly in this exhibition only in the contribution of British artists Langlands and Bell, although it can be traced as an undercurrent in several other works.

[2] M.K.Gandhi, *An Autobiography: or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1927 - 1929; English translation Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1982).

[3] Enwezor et al, eds., *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Kantz, 2002).

Documenta11_Platform5, the exhibition portion of the 2002 exhibition conference that took place in Kassel, Germany, was noteworthy for its wide-ranging presentation of works using film and video, confronting viewers with a wide range of documentary strategies that posed aesthetic and political challenges. *Experiments with Truth* is clearly indebted to Documenta11 and the work of my fellow co-curators, and attempts to develop one element of that project by following some of the artists involved into newer (or in some cases, older) works that raise a host of issues that this essay will attempt in part to unpack.

Documentary, however loosely we understand the word, has become almost a privileged form of communication in recent years, providing a meta-discourse that questions or guarantees the truth of our political, social,

and cultural life. This is not the place for a film history lesson, although it is worth pointing out two formative but politically opposed notions that have informed key debates and practices since the 1930s. On the one hand is the use of film to educate and inform a mass audience on the duties, responsibilities, and occasional pleasures of citizenship. This model was developed by John Grierson and embodied in John Reith's founding charter for the BBC. On the other hand it is the model, inspired by the political avant-garde in Soviet Russia, that sought to use images as a vehicle for social and political change – e.g., the imagistic factography of a Dziga Vertov or the more traditional humanist challenge of a Joris Ivens. In the post-WW2 period, British television developed a pre-eminent position in the production of television documentary, one that is all but eclipsed at the present time. Indeed, one might speculate that the interest in documentary in an art context sprung in part from the failures of broadcast media over the last decade, and that artists took up the challenge of earlier generations of video makers to make alternatives to television.

However, there is a paradoxical underside to this 21st century return to documentary, if such it is, namely that of the evacuation of signification from the signifieds of documentary practice so that it becomes, in the words of more than one artist practitioner, 'simply' art.[4] Whereas in earlier political modernism there was an argument that the activity of art was engaged in ideological critique, with understanding and in some way changing reality, now it can be argued the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme, in what Hal Foster, drawing on the work of Peter Sloterdijk, has termed "the art of cynical reason":

> The aesthetic of cynical reason emerged not only as a reaction against the presumptive truth claims of ideology critique but also as an exaggeration of the epistemological scepticism of deconstruction.[5]

This approach, as it were, literally drains the social and political connotations away in an action of which the term 'vampiric' might be appropriate.[6] In this perspective it is no longer possible to distinguish between 'reality' and "its" representation:

> Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It becomes *reality for its own sake*, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.[7]

Much writing on film and video and on moving image media – my own included[8] – has focussed on issues of duration and mobility, on the

[4] While many observers commented on the dominance of the documentary mode in Documenta11, less attention has been given to its subsequent adoption by biennials and commercial galleries. It could be argued that the post-minimal return to figuration has only now reached its apotheosis with the reintroduction of a (quasi-) realist documentary image.

[5] Hal Foster, "'The Art of Cynical Reason", *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass., London, England: MIT Press, 1996), 119.

[6] Indeed, first nations groups confronted with photography for the first time presciently thought as much.

[7] Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Sage: London, 1993), 70-71.

[8] Mark Nash, "Art and Cinema: Some Critical Reflection", in *Documenta11_Platform5: Exhibition Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Kantz, 2002), 128-136.

challenge to spectators posed by the presence of moving images in a gallery context.[9] While it is increasingly argued that contemporary audiences for art exhibitions (in the over-developed world, at least) are time poor and that artists and curators need to accommodate this audience, in a recent essay I argue that we should resist such an easy accommodation:

> Duration is an essential part of contemporary cinematic if not fine art moving image practices. This is partially because many of the most interesting developments in cinema continue to use a combination of duration and theatrical minimalism or naturalism e.g. Iranian art house cinema. Often these films come from time-rich but resource-poor countries and one has to make a deliberate decision to adapt to the demands of the work in question or risk being cut off from important developments in contemporary artistic production.[10]

If issues of time and duration constitute a formal challenge to the spectator's position, documentary cuts through this by combining duration with narration, thereby forcing the viewer to engage with a range of contents which appear to be located in the real world, rather than that of fiction or fantasy. I say 'appear', because in recent years I believe we have been witnessing a break in the indexical bond between image and referent.

This is also the topic of an important essay by Irit Rogoff.[11] "When", Rogoff asks, "did we begin to assume a fluidity of circulating meanings in which not only is the signifier detached from the signified, but in which the *enunciative* had also taken over from the *interpretative*?".[12] My concern in *Experiments with Truth* is exactly this: to explore work where the enunciative has not (yet) taken over from the interpretative and where the artists struggle against immersion in the Baudrillardian hyper-real.

Andre Bazin's 1946 essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" also locates the desire for realism in the struggle against death.[13] The image, for Bazin, becomes a death mask for a reality that, because of the passage of time, is always in the process of being superseded by its photographic image. This applies to both fiction and documentary images – both register a pro-filmic reality, whether a staged fictional narrative or a 'documentary' recording.[14] Both are documents in Bazin's sense.[15] The development of digital effects technology creates a problem for this model: in particular, it poses the question of how does virtual reality impact on one's notion of the indexical. At first sight, at least, *Experiments with Truth* is firmly located in the indexical not least because all of the works involved have some political, social, cultural, or historical referent.

[9] This is indeed the focus of an impeccably installed exhibition *Time Zones* at the Tate Modern, London. Though conceived completely independently from that at the Tate, I see our exhibition as having a dialogue with it; although they proceed from radically different critical and philosophical perspectives, both exhibitions achieve a quality of installation which hopefully will set standards for future exhibitions.

[10] Mark Nash, "Short Cuts", *3'* (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2004), 207-208.

[11] Irit Rogoff, "The Where of Now", in Jessica Morgan and Gregor Muir, eds., *Time Zones* (London: Tate Modern, 2004), 84-97.

[12] Ibid., 84. Rogoff's nuanced account is more generous than mine toward this tendency of artists to de-locate their work and attempts to mediate between positions that I would argue need to be clearly opposed.

[13] Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[14] Avant-garde cinema, however, is not a document in this sense. See Mark Nash, "Art and Cinema", 129.

[15] As part of an argument that the apparently anti-realist work of Jean- Luc Godard has a foundation in

This goes against the thrust of much contemporary artists' work that attempts to avoid or at least minimise narrative expectations of the viewer. Some artists wish to avoid any connotations of the 'documentary' as they have experienced it, most likely on television, and are not particularly informed as to the cinematic history of experimental and poetic use of this form. They are doubtlessly trying to avoid the excesses of the meta-discursive documentary using voice-over that presents a perspective for the viewer to identify with, "finding something that is not related to answers you have already given yourself".

Those who subscribed to notions of documentary as a mode of education, information, and possible agent of social change have to accept that while this still represents a critical historical legacy it is nevertheless now regarded as outmoded by many contemporary artists. There are many artists working today with and against documentary genres, making an intervention in its various forms and with audiences' expectations. Much of this work however gets trapped in a binary opposition to or slavish imitation of what it perceives as the dominant ideological mass media form.

The artists presented in *Experiments with Truth* however address these questions with considerable sophistication and by and large do not participate in the solipsistic approach to documentary that I refer to above. Rather, almost all the works participate in an ethics of engagement and presentation, whether it is Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi meditating on the social and political reality of images from post-war Italy or French colonial Vietnam or New Caledonia, or Isaac Julien rearticulating the elegance of the prose through which Frantz Fanon's explored his revolutionary ideas as also involving an aesthetic re-articulation.

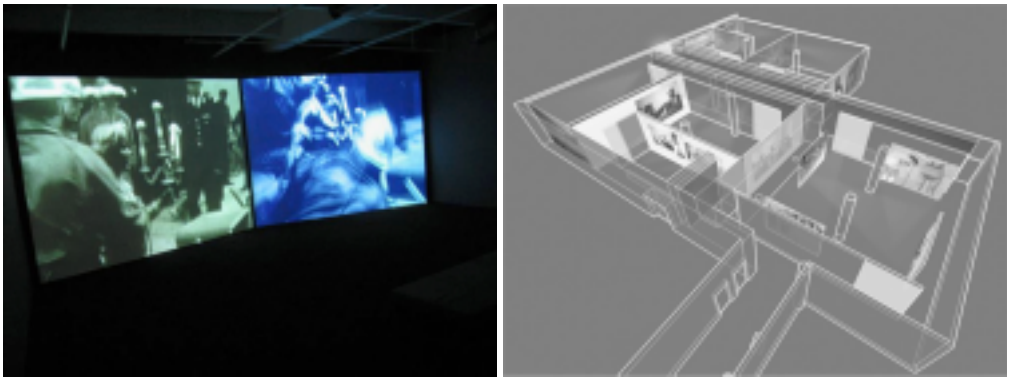
There is no single set of aesthetic preoccupations that connect the works in the exhibition. Take the three works we are showing off-site in a cinema context: Pere Portabella's lyrical structuralism through which he filters Spain's transition to democracy, Igloolik Isuma's embrace of historical realist narrative in the name of Inuit cultural autonomy, and Liisa Roberts's play with vérité documentary and notions of Finnish, Soviet, and Russian identity are all radically different from each other. Issues of desire and sexual difference, and questions of subjective truth and the truth of the subject hover around a number of works, particularly the cinephilic palimpsest of Francesco Vezzoli's *The End of the Human Voice* and Glenn Ligon's more conceptual investigation. Kanwar and Bhimji explore political violence through absence and silence. Langlands and Bell and Ottinger in different ways explore a lexicon of approaches to documentary and documentation: Ottinger deftly interweaves documents from her narrative fictional and documentary journeys, while Langlands & Bell present a range of documentary modalities – apparently vérité documentary, via

Bazinian realism, Colin MacCabe puts this issue succinctly: "This is not an argument about whether Laurence Olivier's Henry V is realistic, rather it is an argument that cinema inevitably presents the reality of Laurence Olivier playing Henry V before the camera." Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at 70* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 63.

photographic documentation to fictional recreation. The Multiplicity group conducts a simple sociological observation, comparing itineraries open to Israeli and Palestinian travellers in the same territories.

These artists are involved in negotiating and indeed constructing the perception of otherness both in and about their work. As a Cuban artist, Ezequiel Suarez is a member of a community of artists that is relatively isolated from the international art world and its market. But he chooses to make a document about another Cuban minority – a black engineer, who might have been a popular singer in another place and time. Tempting though it might be for some, the works in this exhibition cannot be incorporated into arguments for an accented, exilic, or migratory aesthetics.[16]

[16] e.g., Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).



Isaac Julien, *Experiments with Truth*. Courtesy of M. Nash.

Architectural renderings of FWM Sixth Floor galleries, Experiments with Truth, 2004. Courtesy Lyn Rice of OpenOffice.

Indeed the artists presented in *Documenta 11* have been chosen to make such a reading difficult if not impossible. The works presented there deal with issues of context, location, and displacement worked through artistic, social, and political filters and are presented in an international art arena. It is not useful to talk about the nationality or ethnic origin of individual artists as providing any necessary truths about their work. In an important sense the work of art operates to complicate such designations. While Zarina Bhimji, for instance, was born in Uganda, the location and to some extent the subject of her work in *Experiments with Truth*, her art practice has been developed in the United Kingdom with an aesthetic that draws as much from the language of contemporary art, film, and photography as any other. Langlands and Bell hail from a former colonial power in Afghanistan (Great Britain) from where their current project draws its imagery, but its staging and articulation is equally addressed to an international art audience and in a formal language that they have successfully made their own.

These issues are perhaps more usefully glossed in terms of re<local>isation,[17] a rearticulation of the local, of the artist returning to the specificities of place, culture, context, and history not necessarily their own. As Geeta Kapur puts it in her essay in this catalogue:

> As art gains ever-higher visibility through the economy and ideology of globalization, the politics of place – community, country, region, nation, even the margin or exile – tends to lose the privilege of direct address. I want to suggest that we investigate the interstices of urban archipelagos to obtain . . . suppressed, subversive, punctual signs of place and belonging in and through the practice of art.[18]

Indeed signs of place and belonging are key to many of the works in this exhibition. In Kapur's version, the role of the artist is to reclaim memory and history – the memories of/from exile (e.g., Bhimji); memories and histories un- or underwritten (e.g., Roberts).

In his contribution to the catalogue Okwui Enwezor explores the rich semantic ground which notions of documentary provide, and teases out both aesthetic and ethical issues that urgently need addressing. In his provocative analysis he proposes that the term(s) if not the practices may already be in the process of becoming redundant, and that in our 'news-saturated, mediatized world' it is all too easy for images to lose their 'conscience, their aesthetic and ethical identity'. The work of the best contemporary artists confounds the role of the documentary in establishing a hierarchy between images and artistic forms, between ethics and aesthetics, politics and poetics, truth and fiction. What truths, Enwezor asks, can images tell us when they are drowning in the continental drift set up by modern media industries?

Ezequiel Suarez, *Experiments with Truth*. Courtesy of M. Nash

[17] See Lars Henrik Gass, Bady Minck, and Katrin Mundt, "re<local>ization", in *49 International Kutzfilmtage Oberhausen, Festival Katalog 2003* (Oberhausen Film Festival: Oberhausen, 2003), 77—78; and my contribution to the catalogue, Mark Nash, *Experiments with Truth*, 100–101.

[18] Greta Kapur, "Tracking", in *Experiments with Truth*, 105.

His list of Documenta11 artists – and I would add those of *Experiments with Truth* – makes clear that the role of this revitalized engagement with the documentary form is indeed an attempt to explore the possibility of regimes of truth which bypass the modern media industries. If the answer is no, it is because I find these arguments easily drift into an essentialism, often an essentialism of the underdeveloped world as victim. In fact the artists have been chosen to make such a reading difficult if not impossible. The range of work exceeds such paradigms. As a curator my concern is to allow work to be shown in the specified medium, hence film works are shown as film in a cinema with the difference of location, audience, and address that this implies and, through collaboration with community partners, that engages in a social practice of cinema.

Film is characterized by a means of production that necessitates forms of cooperation and collaboration. A sharing of these means characterises many of the works in *Experiments with Truth*: 'Multiplicity' is a loosely knit group of architects and urban planners making an intervention in spaces of art exhibition; Langlands and Bell, and Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi are both artist duos who produce work collaboratively, and so on.

Equally, the work of individual artists such as Bhimji or Ligon necessitates collaboration and participation in the production of their projects. I would not want to be seen as privileging one over the other. The development of single-camera video production and computer editing has radically changed the economy of moving image production. The author can still be a producer, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, but advances in technology mean that the productive and progressive tendencies, which he and Bertolt Brecht thought inherent in the medium, are clearly no longer there (and they were probably never there in the simplistic way that I am articulating it here). More than ever, in other words, it is important to insist on a plurality of ways in which moving image work can be and is being produced.

The introduction to the Whitney Biennial 2004 Catalogue proposes that "today's artists relate to recent history through a kind of self-aware nostalgia".[19] *Experiments with Truth* quite deliberately brackets off this relativism and insists, on the contrary, on continuing possibilities for artistic practices of engagement even if the notion of the political might be understood differently in 2004 than in 1968. Such 'self-aware nostalgia' could instead be regarded if not as a symptom of the decadence of contemporary American art then as a sign of its failure to come to terms with the political defeat which that moment in fact represents, rather than a golden age of self-organised political activism as it is too often re-membered (i.e. nostalgia).

In a recent book Paolo Virno analyses the experience of the Autonomista movements in Italy as a prelude to this defeat:[20] "During the 1960s and

[19] *Whitney Biennial 2004* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004), 16.

[20] This analysis also forms the basis of Hardt and Negri's recent publications, *Empire* and *Multitudes*, but with very different conclusions.

1970s there was, in the West, a defeated revolution – the first revolution aimed not against poverty and backwardness, but specifically against the means of capitalist production, thus, against wage labor". Post-Fordism, Virno argues, did lead to a revolution, but not one that the left was arguing for but rather one of capital. As he provocatively puts it, "Post-Fordism is the communism of capital".[21]

It is surprising, so many years after Adorno and Horkheimer wrote their indictment of certain forms of popular culture,[22] and indeed after the theoretical and cultural revolution spearheaded by the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, to find oneself questioning the role and value of popular cultural forms as mediated by the cultural industries in 2005. The arguments of that time – deciphering modes of resistance through popular cultural forms – were in tune with, indeed influenced by waves of Italian Marxism, the latter with their insistence on what was later to be called biopolitical resistance. If we are to revisit these discussions today (and which I hope to do on another occasion) we could argue the case for art rather than popular culture as a form of general intellect, "as the communication, abstraction [and] self-reflection of living subjects";[23] for art as embodying modes of cognition and indeed of potential empowerment, articulating, as it can do, the dilemmas of subordination to post-Fordist, imperial capital.

At a time when some countries in the West are involved in a crusade to establish their notions of independence, liberty, and democracy while at the same time advancing their global economic and political interests, it is perhaps timely to insist on Gandhi's belief in the power of reason, non-violence, and respect for political and cultural difference and the possible contributions art and artists can make to that.

[21] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotexte, 2004), 111.

[22] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993). Originally published as *Dialektik der Aufkläarung*, 1944.

[23] Virno, *A Grammar*, 65.

Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, *Experiments with Truth*. Courtesy of M. Nash.

Marina Vitale

Who is speaking, of whom, to whom? The Case of Documentary Film

What I see is life looking at me
I am looking through a circle in a circle of looks.
(Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*)

"Who is speaking?"

"I do not intend to speak about/ Just speak near by". At the outset of *Reassemblage*, an extremely poetic film produced in 1982 by Vietnamese American director Trinh T. Minh-ha, a whispering voice-over makes this statement of intents, which has become a sort of ethical as well as aesthetical imperative for everybody wanting to engage with the representation of 'the Other', either in film, literature or criticism. Later in the film, this statement comes up again in a fragmented and re-assembled form, like an echo, a trace, a blurred memory: "Speak about/ K-about".[1] Even if the film were tempted into speaking 'about', it could not. Its voice falters, breaks, stops.

Reassemblage is a superb example of 'speaking near by' a living community without trying to give it a voice. It is also a sophisticated piece of film criticism, which questions documentary form and its devices, especially those evidently in tension with techniques of observation originated in ethnographic milieus (such as questionnaires, interviews and participant observation). Filmed in Senegal ("A film about what? My friends ask,/ A film about Senegal; but what in Senegal?", the voice-over keeps asking), it juxtaposes discrete moments of everyday life in a local village and segments of encounters between western observers and local people: a Peace-Corps Volunteer, a woman gynaecologist, a well intentioned ethnologist who "defines himself as a person who stays long, long enough, in a village to study the culture of an ethnic group". The ethnologist tries to make his presence as unobtrusive as possible, in order not to modify the authenticity of the reality he wants to study. But the voice-over comments are ironical: "What can we expect from ethnology?", or "He thinks he excludes personal values. He tries or believes so but how can he be a Fulani? That's objectivity".[2] The rhythm of the film is punctuated with pauses and silences, which structure with their breathing pulse the re-assemblage of segments of 'authentic' conversations and performances by the local people, comments and reflections by the voice-over, repetitions, suspensions, variations and resonances, to use a term and a notion which is central to Trinh T. Minh-ha's effort "to resist diverse forms of centralisation – the indulgence in a unitary self, in a locus of authority".[3]

[1] From the script of *Reassemblage*, in Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 96 and 103.

[2] Ibid., 98 and 103.

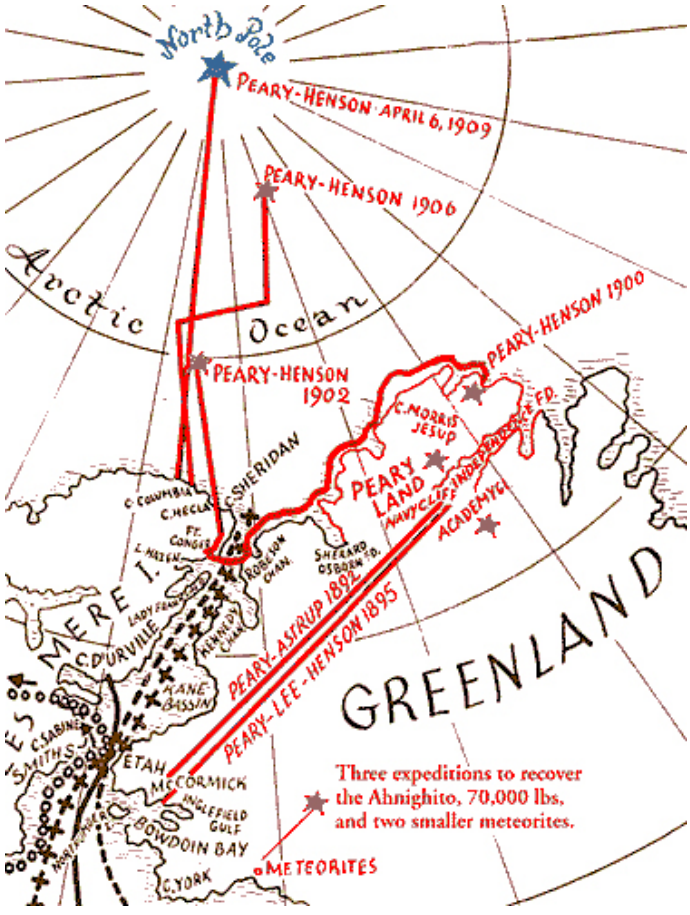
[3] Trinh T. Minh-ha in conversation with Annamaria Morelli, "The Undone Interval", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 3-16.

Like *Reassemblage*, a number of other films by the same director can be regarded as essay-films, which revisit the ethnographically inspired documentary film form, unsettling the question of ethnographic representation. In conversation with her, in 1989, British black director Isaac Julien commented on her challenging way of positioning her subjects in the fictionalized interviews, which constitute *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*:

> Then there is ... what I would call the burden of representation – making films about subjects that have not been given voice – that you face in relationship to trying to give that subject in some way its own voice without it being the "authentic" voice. In your film I felt these tensions. I avoided it because I didn't interview anybody, really. That was my way of dealing with it. But I know that to a certain extent that didn't work as well. I thought that your attempt was a brave one.[4]

Julien was obviously referring to the highly sophisticated technique used by Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* where the experiences and feelings of the women represented as voiceless are rendered by means of interviews, which are far from being simply 'authentical', since they are rehearsed by actresses who follow a script derived from 'true' interviews. In his own films, Julien entertains critical dialogue with the classic documentary form and often plays a sort of hide-and-seek game with the subject matter and intentions of the genre. In so doing, he explodes any pretence of 'scientific' objectivity and any aspiration to speak from an impersonal, central (implicitly Eurocentric) view-point. He offers instead what he would, and has, in fact, defined "experiments with truth".[5] A case in point is his 2005 *True North*, a filmic rewriting of pioneering North Pole exploration narratives. The title gestures playfully towards the cartographical polemics about the identification of the 'true' magnetic North Pole, which accompanied the twentieth century's rival expeditions.

It also challenges the official representation of the Man vs Nature fight in prohibitive conditions from the very choice of its title, with its ironic play on scientific terminology and its canonical reference to a classic of documentarism: Robert

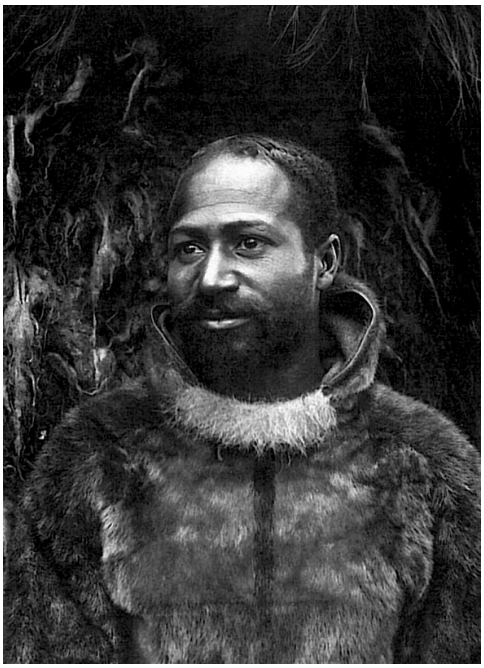


Towards the making of *True North*: Mapping the 'true' conquest of the North Pole. Courtesy of Isaac Julien.

[4] Trinh T. Minh-ha , "'Who Is Speaking?' Of Nation, Community and First Person Interviews", an interview with Isaac Julien and Laura Mulvey, in *Framer Framed*, 193.

[5] See, among other texts, Mark Nash and Isaac Julien, "Experiments with Truth", in Anna Maria Cimitile, Serena Guarracino and Marina Vitale, eds., *Sfida e Passione. Dagli studi culturali agli studi delle donne. Dedicato a Lidia Curti*, DVD for private circulation (Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", 2007).

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*.[6] Julien's film also displaces the Western-European celebration of discovery and heroism, by reintroducing the complexities of gender and ethnicity. In particular, by introducing a female black protagonist, the film reinstates, with a strong note of gender criticism, the fundamental contribution of both the Inuits and African-American explorer Matthew Henson to Peary's expedition to the North Pole; a contribution systematically obscured by official records.



Matthew Henson at the time of his expedition with Peary to the North Pole. Courtesy of Isaac Julien.

Redressing ethnic and gender clichés: Vanessa Myrie as Henson in *True North*. Courtesy of Isaac Julien.

Similarly critical appropriations of the classic documentary-ethnographic style of representation can be found in Laleen Jayamanne's films: she aptly titled *A Song of Ceylon* her 1985 film, which reappropriated, with a difference, Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*.[7] She herself half-jokingly calls her film "a postcolonial dance film", or "an ethnographic film of the body".[8] Her work, like those of Isaac Julien and Trinh T. Min-ha, poses questions which are left open. No definitive answers are offered. No truths are achieved or looked for. The only thing one is assured of is that these films do not give voice to the Other, but lend their ears to others. Their dialogue is not only with women, men and children engaged in a complex play of resonances with the film-makers, who are themselves always in an in-side/out-side position, framers/framed.[9] Their dialogue is also with the epistemological tenets of anthropology and ethnology, with their methods of documentation, classification and archiving, as well as with the technical devices and aesthetics of documentary film as a genre.

[6] For a very interesting discussion of the aesthetics of the film with its double-edged appropriation of such categories as the Sublime, see Lisa Bloom, "*True North*. Isaac Julien's Aesthetic Wager", in the critically illuminating Catalogue of one of Julien's exhibitions held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami and Mak Center for Art and Architecture (Los Angeles: *Isaac Julien/True North*, 2005-2006).

[7] For an important discussion of her post-colonial revisitations of western cinema, see her conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Framer Framed*, 243-247.

[8] Ibid., 245.

[9] I'm borrowing the hendiadys from the title of Trinh T. Minh-ha's 1992 book quoted above.

In order better to understand this ongoing dialogue, this paper will discuss some of the features of the classic documentary cinema of the early twentieth century.

"By the people, for the people, and about the people"

The 1930s were the heyday of realism as an aesthetic value both in literature and in the visual arts, in Great Britain as much as elsewhere. It was a period of sharp political polarization in the artistic domain, no less than in society at large. Progressive intellectuals put a high prize on the ideological and political aspects of aesthetical production and sometimes went so far as to hypostasize the instrumentality of art to the reasons of politics, and to proclaim the pre-eminency of social ends upon artistic means. Especially in Marxist and pro-proletarian milieus, art was charged with the moral imperative to hold a mirror up to Reality (almost invariably thought of with a capital R) and catch therein the unbiased reflection of Truth (again, with a capital T). It was assumed that, in order to pursue this goal, authors had to obliterate their own presence as much as possible from the scene of representation, and act as a sort of recording apparatus, as a camera 'objective'. "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking", was the incipit of Christopher Isherwood's Berlin diary *Goodbye to Berlin*, and an accurate description of the creative practice which was most appreciated in those circles.[10] From the pages of a special issue of *Fact* devoted to "Writing in Revolt. Theory and Practice", Storm Jameson used a similar photographic metaphor, possibly unaware of the inner contradiction she was highlighting between the impersonality of the camera eye taking a picture, and the intentionality of the photographer choosing its angle:

> No commentary – the document is a comment. No aesthetic, moral, or philosophical enquiry – that is none which is not implicit [...] our criticism of values is implied in the angle from which we take our pictures. By choosing this detail, this word, rather than another from the mass offered to us, we make our criticism, our moral judgements.[11]

The aesthetics of the 'Real', which Isherwood and the other practitioners and theorists of the 1930s documentary movement had come to elaborate, was in full agreement with the principles of Socialist Realism. Documentarists were convinced that it was necessary to give visibility to the dramatic social problems of their times and believed that nobody could express such problems better than the people who actually 'experienced' them. Uppermost among their aims was the effort to give the so far economically and culturally deprived classes a chance to find their own voice. Documentary art – which was seen at the time as coextensive with 'proletarian' art – was purported to

[10] Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Hogarth, 1939), 7. Bob Fosses' 1972 film *Cabaret* was based on Isherwood's book, via Henry Cornelius' 1955 half-ironically titled film *I am a Camera*.

[11] Storm Jameson, "Documents", *Fact*, IV (July 1937), 16.

be "By the people, for the people and about the people", as was notoriously stated by William Empson.[12]

But, as Empson himself and the other pro-proletarian intellectuals of the time knew very well, what they could actually hope for was to speak 'about' and 'for' the people, while the remaining condition they expected of a proletarian art – to be 'by' the people – was very hard to be brought into existence before the advent of the much fantasized revolution, and the constitution of a classless society.[13] What actually happened, therefore, was that they strove to produce a sort of 'pastoral' (again in Empson's terms) exhibiting an effect of 'proletarian'. One of the main devices to reach this illusionist aim was to conceal the origin of representation as much as possible, by acting as if the documentarist's eye were not there at all, and implying that the subject under observation was in a position to produce its own representation by itself, through the sheer strength of its palpable presence.

A great influence on the shaping of this self-effacing obligation on the part of the observer was played by the rules of non-intrusive behaviour elaborated by ethnographers and anthropologists in order to carry out participant observation in pre-industrial societies without allowing their own presence to alter the 'real' conditions of the phenomenon being looked at. The methodologies followed by these scientists in their face-to-face observations of far away and 'primitive' societies had now to be transplanted into metropolitan and industrial England and were in fact borrowed by such participant observers as George Orwell – and Jack London three decades before him.[14] These documentary writers and the social enquiries they carried out became notorious for the field operation techniques and even the 'field wardrobes' they used in order to pass unobserved while surveying the most deprived and distressed areas of London and the industrial districts, with a view to understand and document the conditions of living of large sections of the British people who were as much unknown to the well-to-do minority as were the populations of the Trobriand Islands to the average European.

Though cinema was one of the main fields where documentary art thrived, no medium can show the fallacy of the Socialist Realist aesthetic formula better than film, as I will argue in the following pages.

Reinstating the sublime into documentary film (from Isaac Julien's *True North*)

[12] William Empson, "Proletarian Literature", *Scrutiny*, III, 4 (March 1935), 333-338. The question has been recently revisited by the exhibition devoted to *Making History: Art and Documentary in Britain from 1929 to Now*, held at the Tate Liverpool – 3 February-23 April 2006 – and presented by Tanya Barson, Lynda Morris, Mark Nash and David Campany in the catalogue of the same title (London: Tate, 2006).

[13] An embattled debate was waged on this issue among politically engaged intellectuals especially on the pages of such militant reviews as *The Left Review* and *Scrutiny*. I have discussed these matters in *Le voci di Calibano. Documentarismo e letteratura proletaria nell'Inghilterra degli anni Trenta* (Napoli: I.U.O, 1988) and *L'altra Inghilterra. Luoghi e stili della scrittura proletaria inglese degli anni Trenta* (Napoli: ESI, 1993).

[14] London described the disguises he chose for the eighty five days he lived in the East End of London while preparing *The People of the Abyss* (New York: Macmillan, 1903); Orwell adopted similar devices while collecting documentary material for his *In and Out in Paris and London* (London: Gollancz, 1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Gollancz, 1937).

A panoptic eye

At the basis of the 1930s documentary movement there was no doubt a 'scientific' urge to diagnose the ailments of society in order to eliminate them with a fit political cure. It was considered morally imperative to examine in full detail the 'condition of Britain' – as it was often referred to – by applying the most unfailing and 'impersonal' methodological instruments to it. Such vast sociological projects as those launched by the Mass Observation movement aimed at leaving no unsearched-into corner in the body of society, by creating a mass body of observers who might reach unbiased understanding of reality by the sheer multiplication of their angles of observation.[15] The utopian dream of a panoptic view seemed to come true thanks to the institution of an army of semi-skilled, or semi-amateurish, observers scattered all over the country, busy capturing their individually biased impressions of their surroundings.[16] Each report would be partial and personal, but would acquire objectivity when poised against the other ones. Hopes were also cherished that this kind of mass observation might offer both the subject matter and the techniques for really objective documentary writing. Though the movement and its methods attracted some fierce criticism and dismissals, even by sociologically minded authors like Orwell, the proportions of the phenomenon were really impressive.[17] More than five thousand people were involved one way or other in the gathering of observations, and they belonged to all social conditions and professions, including some outstanding intellectuals and artists – such as Dorothy Richardson and H.D. – whose poetics and sympathies were totally at variance with realism.[18]

The ambitious dream of getting a thorough knowledge of the 'condition of Britain' was pursued by a number of other movements and organisations as well. Prominent among them was the Left Book Club, whose members described themselves as "the new encyclopaedists", i.e. "a great body of learners", who had also to be "teachers and missionaries on a grand scale".[19] As a matter of fact the left wing intellectuals and artists of the time felt very strongly the pedagogic urge to reveal and explain to the unconverted the wrongs and horrors of social inequality. Quasi-photographic realism suggesting impersonal objectivity was considered the most appropriate style to spread humanitarian awareness. Naturally enough documentary film became a very successful genre in the 1930s and offered itself as the privileged testing ground for realism.

In Great Britain the genre was greatly enhanced by the economic support offered by the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit – later to become the General Post Office Film Unit – within the frame of a larger imperial project. Documentary film makers were implicitly encouraged to help create an 'imagined community' held together by links of mutual

[15] The movement constituted "both a form of self-ethnography and an examination of social alterity", as stated by Tanya Barson in her "Time present and time past" (in *Making History*, 9-25). Their early results and difficulties were discussed in Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass Observation. First Year's Work* (London: Drummond, 1938).

[16] "We must know what *all* men and women are and can be and want to be", one of its founders, Harrisson, wrote on the *Left News*, 15 (July 1937), 446.

[17] Orwell wrote that "The typical Mass-Observer would have elephant ears, a loping walk and a permanent sore eye for looking through keyholes". His article, originally published in the 28 May 1947 issue of *The Tribune*, is now in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. by S. Orwell and I. Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), Vol. IV, 309.

[18] See Georgina Taylor, *H. D. and the Public Sphere of Modernist Women Writers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 150.

[19] Cf. Victor Gollancz's editorials for the *Left Book News*, nn.1 (May 1936), 6, and 24 (April 1938), 752. The Club produced an impressive number of books – 252 titles between 1936 and 1948 – contributing to create the overall documentarist atmosphere of the decade.

recognition of the vital role each local community or social section played inside the overall body of the Nation and the Empire, however obscure and subaltern they might be – or, perhaps, the more obscure and subaltern they were. It is by no chance that the preferred areas surveyed by the panoptic and hidden eye of these documentary films were literally underground – like the coal mines penetrated by Alberto Cavalcanti's searching camera in *Coal Face* (1935) – or located at the extreme borders of the Nation where conditions of life were economically and climatically very hard – like the North Sea coastal villages of Scotland whose herring fleet is the subject of John Grierson's documentary epic *Drifters* (1929). It is not surprising that among the films sponsored by these official bodies there was a little masterpiece like *Night Mail*, which celebrated the unifying function of the GPO itself, symbolized by its night mail special train.[20] In spite of its low-tone, almost gritty, technology and outlook, the train (and its staff) could boast chronometrically exact efficiency in weaving a web of interlocking links between a scattered community, by bringing "Letters of thanks, letters from banks,/ Letters of joy from girl and boy,/ Receipted bills and invitations/ To inspect new stock or to visit relations,/ And applications for situations/ [...]/ Clever, stupid, short and long,/ The typed and printed and spelt all wrong.", in the words of the half-joking voice-over comment written by W. H. Auden.[21] Nor is it surprising that some of these films offered a celebration of colonial modernity, like Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934), which was jointly sponsored by the GPO Film Unit, the Empire Tea Marketing Board and the Ceylon Tea Board.

The style had been set by Robert Flaherty's pioneering *Nanook of the North*, produced as a documentary story in 1922, after some twenty years of intermittent participant observation and experimental recording of the prohibitive everyday experiences of the Inuit communities living in the Canadian Hudson Bay stretching towards the Arctic frontier.

[20] *Night Mail* was produced in 1936 by Basil Wright, in collaboration with Cavalcanti. Auden's homonymous poem was musically woven into Benjamin Britten's stringent sound track, together with scanty, extremely factual conversation, resonant of the different accents of the regions through which the postal train races on its way from London to Edinburgh.

[21] Auden's lyric can be found in his *Collected Shorter Poems. 1927-1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 83-84.

Filming *Nanook of the North.* Courtesy of Isaac Julien.

Nanook of the North. Backstage photograph.

There was no proper voice-over, because the film still belonged to the silent cinema era. But omniscient comment was provided by the captions illustrating the scenes. The imperative of the film-makers' impersonality was so strongly endorsed by Flaherty that he and the other members of the filming troupe did not intervene – or at least this was the legend circulated at the time – to help the Inuit community at a very critical moment of their walrus hunt. The pretence of non-interference is as absolute as the invisibility of the camera eye. The audience stares at the scenes of bare survival of Nanook and his family, caught in the grips of extreme situations among ice fields in the middle of the Arctic sublime, as if no technical or human intermediary were there at all. And the reality effect is strengthened, no doubt, by the extra filmic knowledge that a few years later Nanook was actually killed in circumstances very similar to those shown in the film. The rhythm and pathos of the film are such that one tends not to remember other extra filmic circumstances like the fact that Nanook's family was not a family in the first place, but a group of photogenic Inuit hired by the production, and that the clothes, technical tools and procedures they were made to use were generally old-fashioned at the time, and even the masterful and cinematically arresting process of the igloo construction followed a technique already obsolete in the Twenties and was yet another symptom of the film's nostalgic yearning for intact and genuine anthropological authenticity.[22]

By artificially reconstructing a lost authenticity, these documentary films partake with a vengeance in the melancholy attitude often imputed to classical anthropology because of its effort to preserve the last gasps of dying cultures, and to endow them with posthumous life.

[22] Flaherty rehearsed a similar feat when he filmed the hardships of life in the small island of Aran off the Irish bay of Galway. His *Man of Aran* (1934) features breath arresting scenes of giant sharks being fished by harpoon, according to a practice which had been abandoned almost a century before.

Miners eating their lunch underground (from *Coal Face*).

Conditions of work in the mines (from *Coal Face*).

Re-assembling truth

If some of the most overtly realist documentaries produced by the founders of the genre reveal only inadvertently how 'Truth' was grossly fabricated,

the reverse is also true. Quite often their style is deeply influenced by the experimental languages of the avant-garde movements and their films do not try to conceal their nature of artistic artefacts, though maintaining their intention to investigate chosen aspects of social reality. Their principal aim remained to get as honestly as possible at some obscured social truth and make it understood by as large audiences as possible. But they were also artists, and worked in collaboration with well-known poets and musicians belonging to the experimental avant-garde.

Let us look for example at *Coal Face*, a 12 minute film produced in 1935 by John Grierson and directed by Alberto Cavalcanti. It is one of the 'classics' of this momentous genre of films, which attempt to probe into British culture by means of quasi-anthropological investigations carried out at home. It is an exploration of the Other inside western civilization; the Other at Home, invisible to the eye of people living in the cities brightly lit thanks to the obscure underground work of the miners; an Other whose life takes place far from the urban centres, far from the Centre, in the shadow of huge, black piles of slag. The immersion into the mine itself, its revelation, is embedded in the middle of the film, which is constituted as a sort of triptych. The aspiration to offer an objective documentary presentation of the conditions of living and working in the mining counties is plainly evident in the two short sections – less then five minutes each – placed at the beginning and at the end. These two end-sections are like two short essays, full of factual information and scientific data, such as the chemical composition of coal, the geographical dislocation of the mines, the quantities extracted, consumed at home or exported, the fields of activity where coal is employed, and so on. The voice-over is impassive, impersonal, professional. It is the voice of science. It knows the truth, all the Truth.

With its expressionistic musical score – composed by Benjamin Britten – and camera work – provided by Basil Wright and Stuart Legg – the central section of the film partly belies this aspiration to factual exposition. The descent into the bowels of the mine is a sort of descent into hell, rendered in a very dramatic way by the upward angle of the shooting and lighting, which projects the miners into an epic dimension by magnifying their bodies and the shadows they cast on the rocky wall of the tunnel, while Britten's evidently non-naturalistic musical comment provides an expressionist interpretation of the agonizing hardships and fatigue of underground work, the strident clash between man and his working environment. When we see the interior of the mine we do not know how the camera penetrated into it. The enormous difficulties of shooting in such a limited space – which obliges the miners to work in a crouching position – are carefully obliterated. The camera gaze seems omnipotent, like the voice-over, which comments in a grave, uniform, impersonal tone.

But pathos is provided by the music accompaniment, with its choral – rigorously male – inserts; while relief for the end of the shift and the coming back into the open is expressed by argentine sounds and mixed choirs.[23] In its mixture of verbal and musical components, the comment is emphatically non-emphatic. For example the statistical listing of casualties is pronounced in a totally flat tone, which is in Brechtian 'epic' contrast with the harsh shrieks from the choir.

Of the three questions in my title ("Who is speaking, of whom, to whom?") the film answers unequivocally only the second one. It certainly speaks about the miners and their work; but, in spite of its open political and ideological interpellation, both the origin and destination of the speaking voice remain anonymous and intentionally obliterated.

Even more important than music for recreating and re-assembling reality, was the impact of montage. Sometimes montage intervened very decisively, juxtaposing fragments of reality in such a way that the presence of a gaze behind the camera stood inevitably revealed. Even more so when montage was applied also to the sound track, creating a clash between sound and image, as Mark Nash remarks of Jennings' *Listen to Britain* (1942).[24] In Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934) the track was even more experimental, with its montage of constructed 'exotic' and 'industrial' sound.[25]

In the field of cinema, the very use of montage, by stressing the artificiality and arbitrariness of the resulting images, shows that the faith of the documentarists in the possibility of catching reality 'as it really was' was not as absolute and acritical as some of their own slogans suggested. Also in the field of literary documentary, authors were often aware of the fallacy implied in photographic or cinematic metaphors like Isherwood's quite passive, not thinking "camera with its shutter open". In *The Road to Wigan Pier* – his much discussed documentary survey of one of the most distressed areas of the mining counties, published in 1937 under the auspices of the Left Book Club – George Orwell had provided sharp self-criticism of his own efforts to carry out 'objective' observation. He had observed himself in the act of observing. He had registered his impossibility to overcome the barrier which separated him from the observed reality, in spite of the material and cultural camouflage techniques borrowed from ethnographers and anthropologists; and, notoriously, he had described his helpless attempts to suppress his feeling of otherness, and even of disgust, when confronted with the lived culture he was supposed to be sharing from the inside.[26] Once again, the hypostatized neutrality of the observer was disproved, and the discursive nature of truth was highlighted by contrast. Once again, the aspiration to produce a document classifiable as "by, for, and about the people" was baffled.

[23] The film does not show a single woman nor a child, not even on the background of the derelict terraced houses, whose squalor had been masterly portrayed by D. H. Lawrence. The washing hung up to dry only indirectly implies the feminine presence.

[24] In his "Un-making history: thoughts on the re-turn to documentary" (in Tanya Barson et al., *Making History*, 41, 42 and 46) Nash comments on the assemblage of sound and images of everyday life in wartime, created by Jennings.

[25] Nash compares this technique with the symphonic structure of Vertov's *Enthusiasm*, and stresses the disjuncture between sound and image the film operates by the use of a 1680 commentary by Robert Knox as a narrative voice-over (ibid.).

[26] The outcry his critical stance caused at the time among the intellectual left was in fact comparable to the shock, which would be produced some decades later by the posthumous publication of Bronislaw K. Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1967).

"Looking through a circle in a circle of looks"

The anthropologically induced dream of total and objective representation of a genuine, though dying, culture has been cultivated for a long time. Endless examples come to mind of anthropologists, ethnologists and ethnomusicologists who have endeavoured to capture the dying breath of cultures threatened with extinction. They obeyed the 'scientific' urge to classify rationally, label and archive the entire humanity, in all its manifestations of thought and feeling. Only recently their totalizing aspiration has been interrogated and challenged. As Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* aptly states, "Reality is delicate/ My irreality and imagination are otherwise dull/ The habit of imposing a meaning to every single sign".[27]

[27] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, 96.

The current revival of documentary cinema has inherited the rich critical debate, which has dominated the field of humanist studies in the last few decades, problematizing the whole question of scientific and representational truth. It is by no chance that Isaac Julien and Mark Nash speak of "experiments with truth". Neither is it by chance that Lars Von Trier and the "Dogumentarism" movement, for all (or perhaps because of) its severe Decalogue of rules amounting to the so called "Vow of Chastity", tend to bring to the fore the process of 'construction' of the image, and to remind – unremittingly – their audience that what they are presented with is a technically contrived representation of truth, and not a simple, innocent, transparent reflection of Truth; that what they see "is not a just image, it is just an image", as was declared many decades ago by Jean-Luc Godard.[28] The well-timed asynchronies, the black frames interrupting the 'natural' flow of scenes, the slightly trembling shots, which occasionally reveal the instability of the hand-held camera, are programmatically introduced by the new "Dogumentarists" to recall the absence of any authoritative source of truth behind the camera, since truth has been relativized once and for all by philosophers, historians and social scientists alike, and is felt to be the product of discursive practices.

[28] See Iain Chambers in this issue.

A similar deflation of the notion of objectivity is pursued by those artists who make use of a variety of 'real' newsreels, documentaries, and other 'objective' texts, playing them one against the other. Harun Farocki's cinema offers many examples of this technique. His (and Andrei Ujica's) 1992 *Videograms of a Revolution*, is a complex montage of official Romanian TV broadcasts (both those released by Ceaucesku's regime and those produced by the new government immediately after the 1989 *coup*), amateur short films and videos, and recordings of common people watching those 'documents' during and after the events leading to Ceaçesku's fall. Through this montage the film shows that the representation of political reality is always produced at the intersection of contrasting discourses of power, and its reception takes place within an ideological field structured

in struggle. Its understanding, therefore, is always 'counter punctual', in Edward Said's sense of the word, not only because it must be compared with competing representations, but also because it can and will always be used against the grain. As the voice-over comments in *Before Your Eyes*, Farocki's 1982 film about representations of the Vietnam War,

> Photographs often simultaneously say too much because of their iconic density, and too little, because political reality is too complex to be re-presented as an arrangement of visual phenomena.

The image in question is a well known photo of two American soldiers in Vietnam: one is listening to the ground with a stethoscope, in order to detect the underground movements of the Vietcong digging tunnels for the guerrilla; the other is ready to combat, a rifle with fixed bayonet in his hands. The man with the stethoscope looks like a physician. He may be read as a physician who wants to cure Vietman. But, as Farocki himself explained in an interview, there are two possible readings of the same image: either "The Vietcong are an illness that is afflicting Vietnam", or "The Vietcong are the blood which flows through the veins of Vietnam. Its heartbeat and pulse".[29] Whichever the photographer's preferred meaning, once the photograph has entered the field of vision of an audience, it will be exposed to a plurality of readings.

As Lacan rightly said of the subject, there is always a field of vision pre-existing before any gaze: while I have only one point of view from which to look, I am constantly looked at from a plurality of points of view. The panoptical relation must be reversed and a much more complicated constellation of relations comes into play when I see that besides observing the other I am constantly observed by the other, and that both observer and observed modify each other, by returning the gaze and observing themselves not only in the act of observing but also of being observed. Paul Valéry's Jeune Parque looking at herself looking at herself rightly fascinated Lacan.[30]

Although Lacan did not envisage this further development, the decentring of the panoptic eye under the effect of the rebounding and reciprocal modification of gazes gathers special momentum when the other becomes an ethnical Other and what comes to be decentred and refracted is the Eurocentric eye/I. Fanon's famous description of the identity of the colonized being constituted as the Other under the abjectifying gaze of the white subject has been greatly complicated by post-colonial theorists, writers and film-makers who have put in motion an ongoing mise-en-abyme of that primal scene of othering. A declared line of filiation from Fanon's seminal theory is to be found in Homi Bhabha's loving re-readings, re-writings and re-visions, which retrace the zigzagging interplay of gazes

[29] "Dog from the Freeway", in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 109 and 110.

[30] Cf. Paul Valéry, *La Jeune Parque*, quoted more than once in Jacques Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

between colonizer and colonized, the west and the rest; an interplay which is vertiginously whirled up by the various shades of hybridity now complicating the scene.[31] In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, such profound writer as French Algerian Assia Djebar describes the myriad of gazes crossing each other in the primal encounter between colonizer-to-be and colonized which preceded the French storming and occupation of Algiers in June 1830.[32] Thousands of eyes spy the unknown city from the French ships anchored in the bay, while thousands of eyes spy the enemy from behind shutters, lattices and jealousies in Algiers. A myriad of descriptions written, drawn and painted by eyewitnesses of the event are also appropriated by the author, who constructs a multiaccented and counter-pointed narration, interrogating the master-texts of Imperial History and making them resonate with other voices and stories.[33]

The list of post-colonial theorists and artists who have become aware of this interplay, while trying to answer the question famously posed by Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak in her 1985 pamphlet *Can the Subaltern speak*?, is immense and it would be impossible to recall them here. I will therefore leave the last word to the voice-over in Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage*, that I quoted in my exergo:

> What I see is life looking at me
> I am looking through a circle in a circle of looks.

[31] An exemplary instance of Bhabah's constant up-dating of post-colonial discourse and Fanon's in particular, is his "Foreword: Framing Fanon", to the new translation of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

[32] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1985). As happens in the above-mentioned essay-films, the narration is based on a variety of eyewitnesses' reports re-visited by the author and poised one against the other together with the narrator's own reconstruction.

[33] The expedition was fully documented by official reports of all kinds, including the work of four painters, five drawers, and ten engravers (see Djebar, *L'Amour*, 17).

Marta Cariello

Movement in Between: The Difference this Time

> We celebrate the achievements of global technology and the way in which information flows around the world, but when it comes to the movement of people we don't look at that in the same celebratory way.
> (Isaac Julien)[1]

[1] Debra Craine, "A marriage of jigs and reels. The experimental film-maker Isaac Julien on why his latest work ventures back into the world of dance", *The Times*, September 24, 2007.

Bodies in between

This essay assembles two apparently very different cinematic spaces: the digital interval between life and death, framed by Trinh T. Min-ha and Jean Paul Bourdier inside the train windows of their digital film *Night Passage* (2004), and the 'geography between' portrayed by Isaac Julien: that space across continents that settles only in the director's sublime aesthetics of a traumatic sea journey (*Paradise Omeros*), of a re-inscribed art gallery space (*Baltimore*) or of unwanted shorings in the Mediterranean (*Small Boats*).

Trinh's and Julien's aesthetics both locate their vision inside a passage, a crossing of borders, a movement through space. Such movement produces and at the same time is produced by the materiality of difference, describing that space between life and death, between North and South, East and West; a space that unlocks geography, where the (Western, humanistic) subject is always de-centred, undone.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Women Make Movies, www.wmm.com.

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Moving across always involves bodies walking, going, embarking boats, trains: 'bodies in between – in between life and death, as the two butoh dancers that appear in Trinh's film; in between cultures, in the "interaction of passages", the transition at the core of both artists' works; in between continents, shores and normative narrative paradigms in Julien's art: the same actress/model appears over and over in his films, walking though his three-fold screens, travelling through his aesthetics, creating a poetics of "the space between".[2]

[2] For a further discussion of the use of the same actress/model as a "trascendental space" that connects one filmic space to another, see Martina Kudlàcek, "Isaac Julien", *BOMB*, Issue 101 Fall 2007.

Isaac Julien, *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats*. Courtesy of I. Julien.

Both artists' visions locate difference: they *place, displace and replace* it in the unbound, the perpetual, the journey with no landing; in a way, what Jacques Derrida calls "only events without arrival", with particular reference, in his words, to the linguistic displacement of identities.[3] They work, through movement, with spatialized identities; space is fleshed out in the movement of bodies and *in movement* itself.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prothesis of Origin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 60-61.

Following Deleuze's reading of Bergson, we can indeed think of movement as a "mobile section" of an "open whole" – "open" meaning not fixed, always changing because always "in relation". Deleuze writes:

> Many philosophers had already said that the whole was neither given nor giveable: they simply concluded from this that the whole was a meaningless notion. Bergson's conclusion is very different: if the whole is not givable, it is because it is Open, and because its nature is to change constantly, or to give rise to something new, in short, to endure. 'The duration of the universe must therefore be one with the latitude of creation which can find place in it'. So that each time we find ourselves confronted with a duration, or in a duration,

> we may conclude that there exists somewhere a whole which is changing, and which is open somewhere.[4]

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The movement-image* (1983) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 9.

Deleuze explains that "the whole" can be defined by Relation, through which it is transformed and changed qualitatively, constituting what we call duration, or time. He further elaborates:

> Movement relates the objects between which it is established to the changing whole which it expresses, and vice versa. Through movement the whole is divided up into objects, and objects are re-united in the whole, and indeed between the two 'the whole' changes. We can consider the objects or parts of a set as *immobile sections*; but movement is established between these sections, and relates the objects or parts to the duration of a whole which changes, and thus expresses the changing of the whole in relation to the objects and is itself a *mobile section* of duration.[5]

[5] Ibid., 10.

Responding to the urgency of Bergson's time to refuse the concept of a closed, immobile Whole to which all movement (all changes, frames, representations) should refer to, this concept of movement – though appearing quite mechanical in Deleuze's words – may well describe the 'mobile sections' created by both Trinh and Julien, in which the changes, the transformations that take place within the constructed movement contribute their own, individual modification of a new, open 'Whole'. We might, perhaps, think of this "open Whole" as a globalized set of relations in which the movement of single bodies, ideas, cultural constructions and representations changes the entire common ground.

Every step taken by Julien's model through the territory of his films produces a difference in signification, the "Whole" in which the steps are taken is transformed; so, too, each train stop in Trinh's *Night Passage* marks the making of a new set of Relations which constantly re-design the lines of difference, of the transcultural, of trespassing. Re-routing and performing new movements produces unending re-assemblages along renewed lines of difference.

Difference, this time, is fleshed out in yet a newer language: that of digital technology.

Between screens: common frames, wandering languages

Trinh and Bourdier's *Night Passage* is an adaptation of Miyazawa Kenji's classic novel, *Night Train to the Stars*.[6] In it, the language of travel weaves the most classic trope for movement – the train journey – with two fragmented and deconstructive narrative strategies: the single episodes – almost individual scenes inside a fairytalish account – that interrupt the entire train ride, and the medium itself that the authors have chosen, i.e. digital technology.

[6] *Night Train to the Stars* or *Fantasy Railroad In The Stars* or *Night of the Milky Way Railway* is a classic Japanese children's novel by Kenji Miyazawa written around 1927; it was posthumously published in 1934 as part of *Complete Works of Kenji Miyazawa*. In it, a boy and his friend who is dead from drowning travel on a celestial railway carrying souls to the afterlife.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Women Make Movies, www.wmm.com.

The technology of digital video, working with single pixels, grouped into several levels to eventually form an image frame, allows for at least the possibility of intervening within the image, transforming it from its inside, over and over, continuously. Time, then, is not a linear sequence waiting to be filled, but an unfixable event constantly produced. In other words, digital images produce their transformation – and thus their temporality.

The individual episodes that the three protagonists act out during train ride in *Night Passage* function as interruptions in the journey: train stops without set stations, lapses of suspension inside the pre-ordained continuum of the train tracks. The viewer looks into such interruptions, peering into the interval; it is the same effect that digital technology unleashes – the uncovering of that space/time between, the "digital sublime" that allows for the emergence of an excess of meaning, beyond linear time, and beyond sequential image-frames.[7]

It is precisely *outside* frames that the audience is taken by Trinh's journey and by Julien's visual constructions. Surprisingly, both artists work on the emergence of the *space between*, through the very creation of multiple and strongly outlined frames. Julien works with triptychal screen installations, alternating visions of single, double or triple frames that confound linear order and sequential reasoning, building a vision of the excess: the black space before, after and between frames is never empty; it is always a charged, signifying sign, a "saturation", as Deleuze would call it.[8] Just as the silence in Julien's work is never quiet, but always a loud interval of meaning, so the darkness of the silhouetting black speaks as much – if not even more so at times – as the images portrayed inside the screens.

[7] On the concept of "digital sublime", see Vincent Mosco, *The digital sublime: myth, power and cyberspace* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2004).

[8] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 12-13.

Surprisingly, Trinh and Bourdier's *Night Passage* opens with a similar image to Julien's three screens: the very first scene, preceding even the film title, shows the train from the outside: its interior is thus sectioned into individual scenes, alternately sequential and non-sequential, composing, here too, the emergence of the "negative space" of narration: that blackness that tells stories, contains meaning and recalls a screaming silence.

Isaac Julien, *Baltimore*. Courtesy of I. Julien.

Nomad in between: the gender shift and the 'minorities of Modernity'

Vanessa Myrie – the actress/model in Isaac Julien's work – strides through the saturated negative space-between; not only does she walk through the frames, but by cutting across scenes and films, she steps beyond the cinematic screen, opening the space of cinema, and inscribing herself – her body – as a "sign of difference". Indeed, each "step beyond" marks the inscription of a sign of difference: the "whole" changes because the object moves. Homi Bhabha articulates a reading of movement – to Bhabha, movement is always migration – that, disengaging from the speculative mechanics of Bergson/Deleuze, grounds that same theory of relations and "open whole" to the soil of contemporary cultural formations. For Bhabha,

> 'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary - the very act of going *beyond* - are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. The imaginary of spatial distance - to live somehow beyond the border of our times - throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities.[9]

[9] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

Narrating a sign of our presence, of what Bhabha refers to as "our proximate self-presence", cinema always dwells inside the relationship

between time and space: it cannot happen without time and it reproduces time inside a space of discontinuity, by re-presenting, re-telling a story, performing a repetition and a time-lag: its movement is always a performance, a re-production of time. Certain cinematic articulations perform the difference of signs that are 'minorities', the discontinuities of our very proximate self-presence: Trinh T. Min-ha chooses to film a story of trespass, in an unsettling language, and through the eyes of a woman, operating a gender-shift from the original novel that ispired her film, in which the main characters were male. She declares that the gender shift has made all the difference, allowing for a performance that signifies crossing and trespassing in a completely different way, as *Lotus Eye* well shows. Julien's signification is incarnated by a woman, whose body bears all the weight of the journey through the non-representable, through the saturation of negative space. Here, the time-lag of Modernity can be signified by the interval staged over and over by Julien's erring woman, and by Trinh's female characters trespassing the boundaries between cultures, and between life and death. This cinema can be read as producing the enunciatory present of modernity as disjunctive, opening up what Bhabha calls "another time, another space", outside the imprisoning teleology of origins and dualities, a space for "a time-lag at the point at which we speak of humanity through its differentiations - gender, race, class - that mark an excessive marginality of modernity".[10]

[10] Ibid., 236.

The erring woman of Isaac Julien's films writes difference in her steps; she draws the lines that perpetuate *différance*, along which significance emerges as always-in-transition, always re-articulated in a new combination, a new route of meaning. Here, another connection can be drawn between Trinh's use of butoh dance and Julien's woman-walker. One of the founders of butoh dance, Tatsumi Hijikata, has stated that the basic form of dance is the walk of death convicts. *Night Passage* is a journey to death and re-birth, a sort of rhythmic dance towards the place where life ends; in Julien's film, the woman who walks does not walk towards death, but crosses several forms of it: the trauma migration and uprootedness in *Paradise Omeros*, the death of migrants in the bottom of the blackest Mediterranean in *Small Boats*, even the silence of a petrifying landscape in *True North*.

There is a dance performed by the flowing movements opened up in the intervals of Western humanism, a dance that recalls the steps of the death convicts, treading outside the enounciation of a possible plot, in a place between, where no "common sense" is still claimable.

This experiment in movement and transformation is articulated further by Isaac Julien, in his physical transportation of cinema outside cinema halls, and inside museums. *Baltimore*, for example, was shot at the museums of Walters Art Gallery, a Renaissance art museum, and at the

Great Blacks in Wax Museum, both in Baltimore. This spatial transition, along with the one from celluloid to digital, deterritorializes the cinema, interpellating and being interpellated by a new, displaced audience. Borders are thus breached in more than one way: possibly in an inevitable gesture of "writing cultural difference", erasing linear "common sense", as Bhabha puts it:

> [The attempt] to provide a form of the writing of cultural difference in the midst of modernity that is inimical to binary boundaries: whether these be between past and present, inside and outside, subject and object, signifier and signified. This spatial-time of cultural difference - with its postcolonial genealogy - erases the Occidental 'culture of common sense' that Derrida aptly describes as 'ontologizing the limit between outside and inside, between the biophysical and the psychic'.[11]

[11] Ibid., 251.

The physics of celluloid and the mathematics of digital pixels are not limited "outside" the psychic life of a culture. Thus, the image scratching at the screen and interrogating our gaze can set a culture erring through frames, train windows or death row dances. The interval, this time, exposes all the difference.

Isaac Julien

Cinematic Rearticulations

I was in Philadelphia last week installing a double-screen film and video installation called *Frantz Fanon S. A.*, which was first shown at the Johannesburg Biennial in 1997. In the installation I abstracted a series of images from my feature film documentary *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* (1996) that corresponded to a lyrical register in psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon's writing. The vibrancy and sensuality of the images abstracted from my earlier film are represented in a condensed form – presenting a spin or ironic quotation on Fanon's piece "There is no colour prejudice here", as the Fanon character in the film waves a South African ANC flag. The exhibition, curated by Mark Nash (my partner), is called "Experiments with Truth", a display of contemporary moving images intended to reassess the influence of cinema and documentary practice within contemporary visual art. In an increasingly troubled time of emergencies, war and dis-information, the work represents an alternative view – one in which images can play a critical role in shaping our understanding of the world rather then merely being used as a tool for propaganda.

The gallery, rather than the cinema, is becoming an important space for making interventions to re-view the differing cultural and political perspectives that make up 'moving image' culture from around the world. This shift brings with it a growing set of questions, including: how are we to consider the phenomena of contemporary artists working with film and video? How did a version of cinema become an increasingly common presence within the art gallery context?

This growing trend is marked in my own career as an artist and film-maker who, after Derek Jarman's death, witnessed the end of an Independent (queer) film culture in the U.K. Regrettably, what Ruby Rich once rightly crowned "New Queer Cinema", was lost. It can be argued that elements from the genre have reappeared, here and there, in advertising, in mainstream television, and in galleries. Through experimentations with film and video, the distinctions between narrative avant-garde and documentary practice have become blurred, along with shifts in viewer's experiences – whose viewing habits and subjectivities are influenced by new digital technologies. Distinctive experimental approaches to visual imagery, once the aesthetic hallmarks of the New Queer Cinema, have transcended into the space of the contemporary gallery.

The documentary turn into video art was perhaps hinted at a decade ago in Derek Jarman "imageless" feature film *Blue* (1994). With an anti-

Anglistica 11. 1-2 (2007), 63-71 ISSN: 2035-8504

representational strategy, Jarman presented a blank screen of Yves Klein blue, which stood as a testament to a time now lost, by creating a blue frame where the spectator loses her or his sight into a sea of blue haze. The non-representational image retained poetic and factual information which Jarman sonically produced with precision - documenting his eventual blindness during his battle against AIDS. *Blue* premièred at the Venice Art biennial as a video installation portraying the truth of his condition and indeed a part of our queer history.

Looking for Langston

Thinking about the representation of truth in the space of the city and notions of spatial temporality brings to mind my early research for *Looking for Langston*, which also led me to Philadelphia, the very place of the "Experiments with Truth" exhibition. A connection between the past and the present is clearly evident, haunting my every step. This city was home to two of the perhaps most important voices which created an impetus and interpolated my own art practice. I am, of course, referring to Joseph Beam, an activist and writer of the black gay anthologies *Brother to Brother,* and to the poet Essex Hemphill. Indeed, Hemphill's poetic truth struck me again, as it did when I first read his poem in homage to Joseph Beam after his death, 20 years ago:

> When I stand in the front lines now
> Cussing the lack of truth,
> the absence of willful change
> and strategic coalitions,
> I realise sewing quilts
> Will not bring you back
> Nor save us.
> It's too soon
> To make monuments
> For all we are losing,
> For the lack of truth…[1]

[1] Essex Hemphill, "When My Brother Fell (For Joseph Beam)", in *Ceremonies* (San Francisco, Ca: Cleis Press, 2001).

It was for the "lack of truth" that Bush recently won the American election – as millions of voters lined up to vote against queer marriages it seems. But it was only 10 years ago that I first lived in New York to work on a four part television series titled *Question of Equality*, a history of the Lesbian and Gay movement in the States, which chronicled the rise of the religious-right fundamentalism. This project was commissioned by Channel Four and ITVS for a program *Culture Wars* and in 2004 we are still deep in it.

In 1985 I first visited Joseph Beam in Philadelphia and it was in the same city where, in 1994, I last saw Essex Hemphill alive. Next year will

mark a decade since his death and it will also be the year *Looking for Langston* is re-released on DVD. The updated DVD will contain many surprises to celebrate Hemphill's work. Looking back on the making of *Looking for Langston* (1989) and *The Attendant* (1993), I can see the creation of a discursive space for re-articulating the politics of queer difference. This was a response to early developments in furthering what has now become known as 'Queer Studies' in the States, and in Britain 'Cultural Studies' (an already named and established discipline). I saw myself as a 'cultural worker' who made visual imagery that translated theoretical concerns – either through the language of the cinema, or via progressive television programming, where the cultural and media revolution was taking place through Channel Four Television. Indeed it was Channel Four's lesbian and gay series *Out on Tuesday*, in 1989, that commissioned and broadcast *Looking for Langston*. The legacy of that intervention is a British version of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy!* – although I think that the American original is much better, but that's where queer innovation has left us.

It is now left to artists and filmmakers to make utopic interventions into spaces that seem to be more open and receptive to thematic and visual experimentation. Contemporary museums and galleries are certainly creative spaces where a queer legacy of innovation continues and aesthetics interventions are not only possible, but also recognised. I don't want to claim it is a triumph, but it is a site where 'moving images' can explore 'queer aesthetics' receptively. Several projects, which have successfully used the space of the gallery, come to mind, including *The Orange and Blue Feelings* (2003), a double-screen video piece by Glenn Ligon who grapples with artistic creativity, growing up black and queer. The work invites the

Rewriting the museum space in Isaac Julien's *Baltimore*. Courtesy of I. Julien.

audience to explore the multiple significances of a 'lost queer painting' of Malcolm X. Francesco Vezzoli's *The End of the Human Voice* is haunted by cinephilia, re-enacting key moments in art cinema through the camp performances of Bianca Jagger. The piece references Cocteau as Vezzoli casts himself, with iconic paper 'eye-lids', on one side of a bed and Bianca Jagger on the other. Both pieces can be seen in the "Experiments of Truth" exhibition at the Fabric workshop museum in Philly not in cinema proper.

The politics of the Museum were ambivalently signalled in *Looking for Langston* and *The Attendant*. Both films explored spatial temporalities, queering history, transgressing racial boundaries and the space of the Museum. In *Looking for Langston*, for example, sections of the black and white film show an art opening in New York from the 1930's. We see African American artists and their white patrons, while Stuart Hall reads a verse from Chaucer: "History, the smiler with the knife hidden under the cloak" (*The Knight's Tale*). Here I was alluding to my suspicion of the art world and the possible dangers of patronage for black and for queer artists. In *The Attendant* a story of (imagined) interracial transgression occurs between a 'closeted' middle aged black guard, who works in a museum and after closing hours, and a younger white visitor.

Indeed the museum or gallery has become the site for my own re-articulations – an ironic relocation, I admit. Essex Hemphill was well aware of the contradictory nature of high cultural spaces, seeing them as sites for class and race wars ("Visiting Hours"):

> The government pays me
> Nine thousand dollars a year
> To protect the East Wing
> So I haunt it.
>
> Visiting hours are over.
> The silent sentry is on duty
> An electric eye patrols the premises
> I'm just here
> Putting
> mouth on the place.
>
> Modigliani whispers to Matisse
> Matisse whispers to Picasso.
> I kiss the Rose in my pocket
> And tip through this tomb of thieves.
>
> I'm weighted down with keys,
> Flashlight, walkie-talkie, a gun
> I'm expected to die, if necessary,
> Protecting European artwork
> That robbed color and movement
> From my life
>
> I'm a ghost in the Capitol.
> I did Vietnam.
> My head is rigged with land mines

But I keep my cool,
Waiting every other Friday,
Kissing the rose
Catching some trim.

I'm not protecting any more Europeans
With my life.
I'll give this shit in here away
before I die for it
Fuck a Remb-randt!

And if I go off,
you'd better look out, Mona Lisa
I'll run through this gallery
with a can of red enamel paint
and spray everything in sight
like a cat on heat.

This notion of treason and revenge of the multitude, hinted at by Hemphill, is a theme at work in *Paradise Omeros* (made for Documenta 11, 2002) and *Baltimore* (2003). The latter was a multi-screen video installation that developed from a documentary called *Baadasssss Cinema* (made in 2002). *Baltimore* deals with the cinematization of video art, on the one hand, and a 'queering' and 'racing' of the museum, on the other. I saw these video installations as interventions that attempted to address the 'creolising vision' in the space of the gallery.

Baltimore

The aim of *Baltimore*, a large-scale three screen video projection, was to try and create a re-reading across three distinct archives including that of Black action films from the 1970's. The installation aims to create a reflective 'third space' using both 'high' and 'popular' cultural motifs such as black science fiction and Afro-futurism. The triptych component explores the aesthetics of the blaxploitation cinema genre and its contemporary references through a series of light-hearted citations from a number of movies. The work was shot in Baltimore – a city with a long history of black migration and settlement. Baltimore is also the home base of the NAACP in the States.

The Wax Museum in *Baltimore*. Courtesy of I. Julien.

The prime locations of *Baltimore* are the museums of Walters Art Gallery, an

important Renaissance art museum in downtown Baltimore, and the Great Blacks in Wax Museum (the equivalent of a Madame Tussauds gone wrong or a black Thomas Hirsh installation – and one of America's African American top ten history attractions). This is due to my own interest in archival spaces – including notions of power and memory and memorialization.

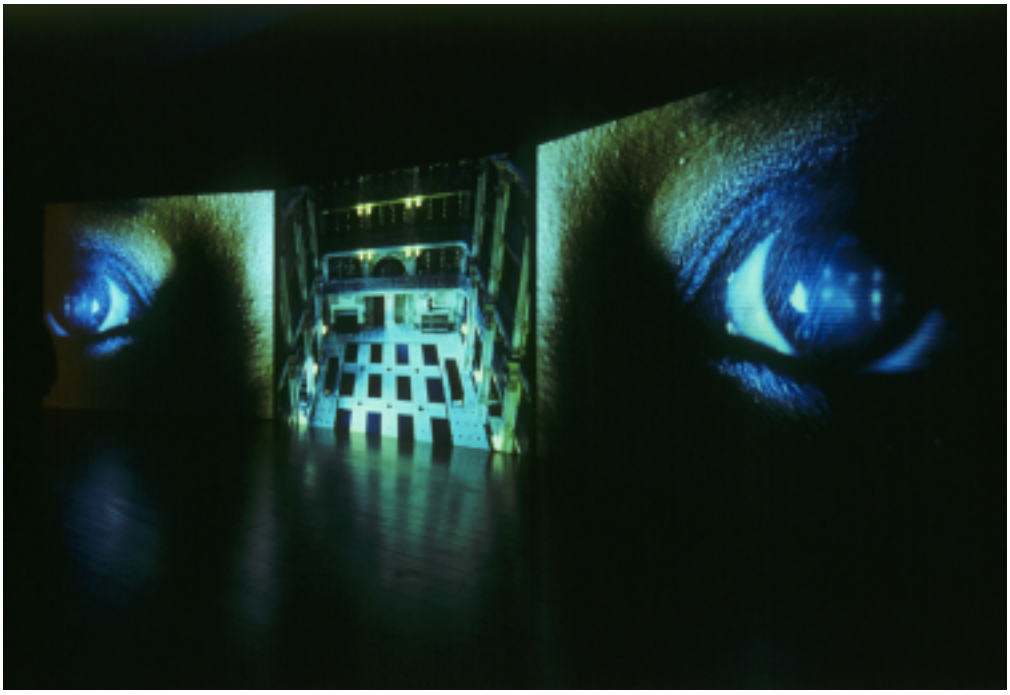
The Blaxsploitation genres are profoundly imperfect, contaminated culturally, sexist yet queer. Certainly not everyone would call these films art, nor are many of them that compelling. I would argue this is irrelevant. The films are valuable and provide a rich starting point for my own imagery. They are involved with the aesthetics of the vulgar. Video projection can draw attention to visual identifiers and codes, which I rework to produce a creolised vision of the museum. I hope the piece is received as a provocative and satirical intervention within the art world, critically re-arranging and un-tidying its curatorial endeavours.

The idea behind this first part of the Baadasssss project was to place the documentary in a pedagogical relationship to the spectator. I wanted to show the archival process and the power of visual iconography in relation to the after effects of the Black power movement, to people's lives – to their very representation. This attempt at queering Blaxsploitation imagery is an acknowledgment of its ability to influence other genres such as Hip-Hop, Independent Film and so on. I also wanted to consider the misunderstandings and complexities of the genre through interviews with black queer icons, such as Pam Grier engaged in debate and dissension. *Baadasssss Cinema* will merely enable the spectator to fully appreciate the spatio-temporality of Baltimore's multiple screens and sonic sound projections, allowing for a criticality that tackles the representational strategies inherent in blaxploitation films themselves and approximates these aesthetics for the space of video art.

The scenes in Baltimore are shot with deliberate diegetic effects that work to disrupt the narrative telos. The camera, tracking movements within the frame, makes use of the sculptural potential of cinematic space. In the triptych format the images are not merely representations of certain people but representations of 'the spaces of representations'. Here identities are spatialised by collocated images across all 3 screens. The highway scene, for example, mirrors the visual ideas on perspectivism from the school of Piero della Francesca's *An Ideal City*. This is achieved through pictorial montages in order to emphasize the politics of space.

The "Sweet sweet back Baadasssss song" is unique in allowing for a black fairy queen to skip along to it. And although Melvin Van Peebles did not intend to make a queer black film, it is indeed a very queer and strange black experimental art film. It was for this element of the unexpected that he was chosen to play the protagonist, along with Vanessa Myrie who plays the black femme fatale - part Angela Davis part Foxy Brown, and

part cyborg. Her character remains out of reach for Melvin – her sexuality is an enigma for some, but not for all. These characters are indeed haunted by the history of the spaces of the museum and their own filmic iconography.



Isaac Julien, *Baltimore*. Courtesy of I. Julien.

At the end of "Heavy Breathing", Essex Hemphil writes:

> At the end of heavy breathing
> The dream deferred
> Is in a museum
> Under glass and guard.
> It costs five dollars
> To see it on display
> We spend the day
> Viewing artifacts,
> Breathing heavy
> On glass
> To see
> The skeletal remains
> Of black panthers,
> Pictures of bushes,
> Canisters of tears.

I imagine if he might have dreamt of a few frames of *Baltimore* or prophetically dreamt of my future.

Paradise Omeros

In this piece, a homage to Derek Walcott, I explore an adolescent's perspective on the mixture of English and St. Lucian cultures within both countries. A young man prepares to come to terms with a loss of innocence and at the same time there is an Oedipal reading of postcolonial and intra-ethnic relations enacted between the protagonist and the tourist/rasta male character. In England, the young man and his family experience both happiness and racial tension – which is shown through scenes of enjoyment, juxtaposed to ones of anguish. Other sections of the film are set in St. Lucia, where the rasta character quotes Robert Mitchum's performance in *The Night of the Hunter* (directed by Charles Laughton in 1955) to the adolescent. Here the dynamics of love and hate are explored – Mitchum's tattoo replaced by gold rings worn by the rasta.

I wanted to consider the representation of the Caribbean as a site of mythic cultural fantasy. One of the principal scenes, for example, is the submersion of the boy in the sea, intercut with historical images of riots and immigration in the UK. On his journey through the sea and the archive, our protagonist encounters traumatic images. Memories, both personal and public, lead him to the metropolis, London. Yet he returns to St. Lucia, and then back to London again, through the visual looping of the film, which is projected on the gallery wall. The effect is one of oscillation – as though the character continually travels back and forth in time. He refuses to be located, preferring to occupy an/other space – somewhere between the sea, the city and the gallery wall. Indeed, it is within the very walls of the contemporary gallery that artists remain free to explore such themes (which often sit outside mainstream interests). And, it is in this way that galleries are becoming an increasingly important critical and cultural site.

My emerging displacement of cinema, in an art context, can be seen as a continuation of some of my earlier independent cinema concerns. It could be seen as a reconfiguration of sorts – this mutation, from one technology to another, from celluloid to digital, makes new interventions possible. Along with this are changes in the nature of spectatorship and subjectivity. Deterritorialization of the cinema into the gallery means that spectators who come to these spaces may have a different set of expectations, beyond the normative expectations of a general cinema audience. But, of course, that could be seen as a class difference as well, and that's why I like the idea of creating works that have an interdisciplinary approach. For example, *Baadassss Cinema*, the documentary I made for the Independent Film Channel, was shown on Cable TV, but *Baltimore*, its sister project was shown at Metro Pictures Gallery in New York.

These changes can also be viewed as a sign of the displacement of political demands, which once took centre stage in the cinema proper,

but are now relegated to a "fine art" space. It is worth noting that many voices have been made absent in the cinema. It has been over ten years since Derek Jarman's death. His life is the subject of my next documentary – a project that is proving to be very difficult to raise funds for. To date, not one television station has agreed to support the documentary financially and I wonder, were Jarman alive, would he join me in the call for a re-articulated cinema? Or, for that matter, would the political video work of Marlon Riggs be shown in a gallery as video art?

Isaac Julien

Ri-articolazioni cinematiche

Mi trovavo a Philadelphia, la scorsa settimana, per preparare una video-installazione su doppio schermo, *Franz Fanon S. A.*, presentata per la prima volta alla Biennale di Johannesburg nel 1997. Si tratta di un rifacimento del mio film-documentario *Franz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* (1996), rielaborazione in termini poetici dei testi dello psichiatra e rivoluzionario Franz Fanon. Le immagini del film, così vibranti e cariche di sensualità, vengono riprese in maniera più essenziale – quasi una chiosa o una rievocazione ironica del brano di Fanon "There is no colour prejudice here", nella quale il personaggio di Fanon sventola una bandiera dello African National Congress. La mostra, curata dal mio partner Mark Nash, si chiama "Experiments with Truth", e raccoglie una serie di recenti 'immagini in movimento', con lo scopo di ribadire l'importanza del cinema e in particolare del documentario nell'ambito delle arti visive. In un'epoca segnata da continue emergenze, prime tra tutte la guerra e l'assenza di informazione, questo tipo di lavoro vuole porsi come prospettiva alternativa, nella quale le immagini non sono ridotte a meri strumenti di propaganda, ma assumono una specifica funzione critica con lo scopo di riconfigurare e comprendere la realtà.

La galleria d'arte sta prendendo il posto del cinema, e diventando il nuovo spazio nel quale trovano modo di articolarsi prospettive politiche e culturali offerte dalle 'immagini in movimento' provenienti da ogni parte del mondo. Questo cambiamento pone una serie di domande: che valore bisogna dare agli artisti contemporanei che lavorano con i video? e in che modo il cinema è diventato una componente essenziale della galleria d'arte?

Questa nuova tendenza è stata fondamentale per la mia carriera di artista e cineasta che, dopo la morte di Derek Jarman, ha assistito al declino della cinematografia indipendente e *queer* nel Regno Unito. L'esperienza del *New Queer Cinema*, secondo la definizione data da Ruby Rich, si è purtroppo conclusa, per quanto singole componenti del genere abbiano trovato un loro spazio in contesti diversi, come la pubblicità, la televisione commerciale, e le gallerie d'arte. Grazie ai video e ai film sperimentali la distinzione tra cinematografia d'avanguardia e documentario è diventata sempre meno netta, e così pure l'esperienza che ne fa lo spettatore: le nuove tecnologie digitali influenzano profondamente la sua posizione di soggetto osservante e la sua effettiva esperienza visiva. La complessità delle sperimentazioni d'approccio all'immagine, prerogativa saliente del *New Queer Cinema*, ha trovato un nuovo spazio di articolazione nella galleria d'arte.

Anglistica 11. 1-2 (2007), 73-82 ISSN: 2035-8504

Un significativo caso *ante-litteram* di passaggio dal documentario all'arte è *Blue* (1994), lungometraggio privo di immagini realizzato da Derek Jarman. Attraverso una strategia che elimina radicalmente ogni forma di rappresentazione, Jarman ha concepito uno schermo vuoto, interamente colorato di azzurro, una sorta di testamento, una presa d'atto del tempo trascorso, un oceano di colore nel quale lo spettatore o la spettatrice potesse annullare il proprio punto di osservazione. Questa immagine priva di ogni rappresentazione dà luogo a una testimonianza poetica e biografica molto forte, che viene rielaborata nella componente sonora, nella quale Jarman, con rigorosa precisione, rende conto della propria esperienza della cecità nel doloroso decorso dell'AIDS. *Blue* è stato presentato alla biennale di Venezia; esso è, al tempo stesso, un resoconto diretto e personale della malattia, e un segmento della nostra storia di soggetti *queer*.

Looking for Langston

La rappresentazione del reale nello spazio urbano e il concetto di temporalità spazializzata mi riportano alle ricerche fatte in passato per il mio *Looking for Langston*, anch'esse condotte a Philadelphia, come la mostra "Experiments with Truth". Muovendomi nella città non potevo fare a meno di verificare continuamente un legame tra passato e presente, anche perché in questa città sono vissuti due tra i personaggi che hanno avuto per me una grande importanza, in grado di turbarmi profondamente e diventare parte della mia pratica artistica. Mi riferisco a Joseph Beam, militante politico e autore delle antologie di autori gay di colore *Brother to Brother*, e al poeta Essex Hemphill. La verità poetica di Hemphill riesce ancora a scuotermi, come quando, vent'anni fa, lessi per la prima volta una sua poesia, scritta dopo la morte di Joseph Beam:

> Fermo
> In prima fila, ora,
> maledicendo la scomparsa della verità,
> la mancanza della volontà di cambiare,
> la mancanza di coalizioni strategiche.
> Mi rendo conto
> che cucire trapunte
> non serve a riaverti
> né a salvarci.
>
> È troppo presto, ancora,
> per fare monumenti
> a tutto ciò che perdiamo
> alla scomparsa della verità…

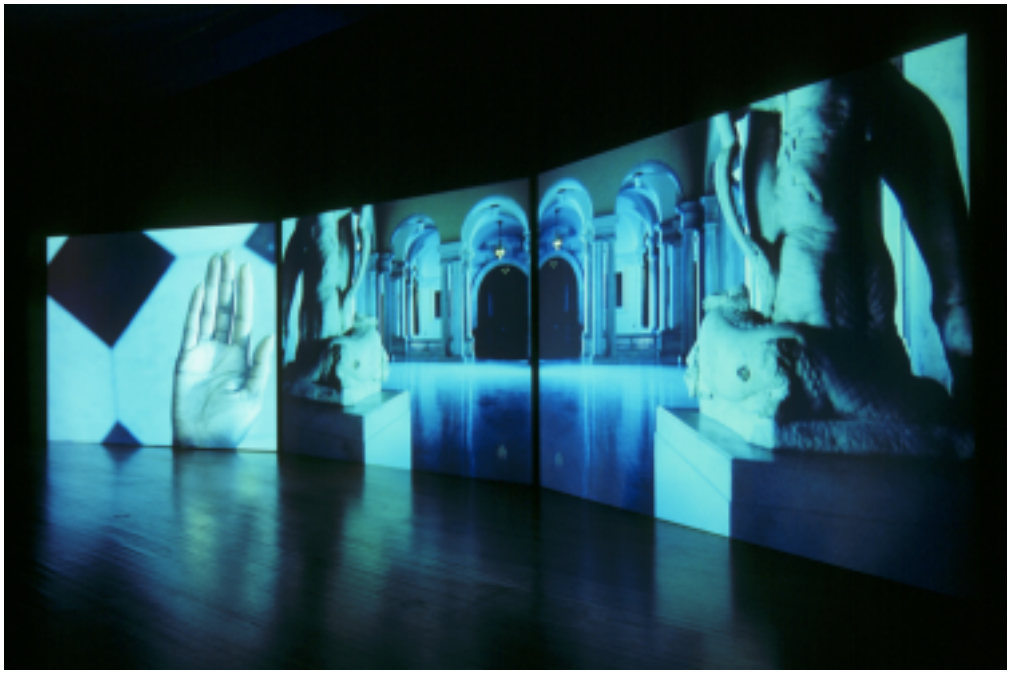
È stato grazie a questa 'scomparsa della verità' che Bush ha vinto le elezioni presidenziali, facendo leva, a quanto pare, sull'ostilità di milioni di elettori alla questione dei matrimoni gay. Soltanto dieci anni fa, quando mi ero trasferito per la prima volta a New York, lavoravo su una serie televisiva in quattro parti chiamata *Questions of Equality*, che raccontava la storia del movimento gay e lesbico negli Stati Uniti e l'affermazione del fondamentalismo religioso della destra. Questo progetto era finanziato da Channel Four e da ITVS per il programma "Culture Wars", e nel 2004 è ancora in svolgimento.

A Philadelphia, nel 1985 ho incontrato per la prima volta Joseph Beam, e sempre a Philadelphia, nel 1994, ho visto per l'ultima volta Essex Hemphill. Il prossimo anno saranno passati dieci anni dalla sua morte, e uscirà l'edizione in DVD di *Looking for Langston*, in una versione aggiornata che rende omaggio alla sua opera. *Looking for Langston* (1989) e *The Attendant* (1993), a distanza di anni, mi appaiono come il tentativo di creare uno spazio discorsivo nel quale le politiche della differenza *queer* possano essere riarticolate, una prima risposta all'esperienza di ciò che sarebbero stati, negli Stati Uniti, i *queer studies*, e in Inghilterra gli studi culturali (disciplina ormai ampiamente stabilizzata nel contesto accademico). Vedevo me stesso come 'operatore culturale' che traduceva costrutti teorici in immagini visive, usando il linguaggio del cinema o della televisione, in un periodo in cui Channel Four stava realizzando una vera rivoluzione culturale oltre che mediatica. Proprio la serie gay-lesbo di Channel Four "Out on Tuesday" nel 1989 commissionò e trasmise *Looking for Langston*. L'esito di quest'esperienza è stata la versione inglese di *Queer Eye for a Straight Guy!*, per quanto io resti convinto del fatto che l'originale americano sia molto migliore. Questo è tutto ciò che è rimasto delle innovazioni introdotte dalla sperimentazione *queer*.

Ora tocca agli artisti e ai cineasti confrontarsi, non senza una certa tensione utopica, con spazi più ricettivi e più aperti a nuove sperimentazioni visive e tematiche; in questo senso, i musei e le gallerie rappresentano luoghi significativi per consentire a ciò che resta delle innovazioni apportate dall'estetica *queer* di continuare a essere visibili, visto che interventi di questo tipo ricevono anche il dovuto riconoscimento. Non dico che si sia raggiunto un traguardo, ma quanto meno in questi contesti le 'immagini in movimento' riescono a esplorare l'estetica *queer* in maniera fruttuosa.

Mi vengono in mente diversi progetti ospitati negli spazi dalle gallerie d'arte, e con ottimi riscontri. Uno di questi è *The Orange and Blue Feelings* (2003), un video su doppio schermo di Glenn Ligon, che affronta il tema della creatività artistica e dell'esperienza nera e *queer*, invitando gli spettatori a indagare i diversi significati di un 'dipinto queer perduto' di Malcom X. *The End of the Human Voice* di Francesco Vezzoli è invece un tributo al cinema, realizzato attraverso il recupero di momenti importanti del cinema

d'arte attraverso le performance *camp* di Bianca Jagger. In particolare, c'è un esplicito riferimento a Cocteau quando lo stesso Vezzoli, con gli occhi disegnati sulle palpebre chiuse, si colloca a un lato di un letto, mentre Bianca Jagger sta dall'altra parte. Entrambi i lavori possono essere visti nella mostra "Experiments of Truth" al Fabric workshop del museo di Philadelphia, e non al cinema.



Baltimore: riscrivere lo spazio museale

In maniera indiretta, *Looking for Langston* e *The Attendant* fanno riferimento alle politiche condotte nello spazio museale. Entrambi i film si concentrano sui temi della spazializzazione del tempo, sulla storia *queer*, sulla possibilità di oltrepassare i confini dell'appartenenza razziale, e sulla spazialità del museo. Alcuni passaggi di *Looking for Langston*, ad esempio, ritraggono l'inaugurazione di una mostra d'arte a New York negli anni '30. Ci sono gli artisti afroamericani e i loro mecenati, tutti bianchi, e contemporaneamente la voce di Stuart Hall che legge un verso di Chaucer: "La storia, che sorride con un coltello celato sotto il mantello" ("Il racconto del cavaliere"). È evidente la mia diffidenza verso il mondo dell'arte, e il timore del pericolo rappresentato da simili forme di patrocinio per gli artisti *queer* e di colore. In *The Attendant* è invece accennata la storia di una immaginaria commistione razziale tra un custode nero di mezza età, velatamente gay, e un giovane visitatore bianco.

Il museo e la galleria sono diventati luoghi importantissimi per le mie ri-articolazioni: si tratta di una ricollocazione alquanto ironica, devo riconoscere. Essex Hemphill era ben consapevole di tutte le contraddizioni

espresse dai luoghi dell'alta cultura, nei quali i conflitti di razza e di classe diventavano visibili ("Visiting Hours")

> Sono pagato dal governo
> Novemila dollari l'anno
> Per proteggere l'Ala Est.
> E me ne sono impossessato.
>
> Fine dell'orario di visita.
> Comincia il lavoro silenzioso del guardiano
> L'occhio elettrico controlla l'edificio
> E io sono qui
> A dar
> voce al luogo
>
> Modigliani sussurra a Matisse
> Matisse a Picasso
> Bacio la Rosa che ho in tasca
> E cammino in punta di piedi in questo mausoleo di ladri.
> Mi hanno dato un mazzo di chiavi
> Una torcia, una radio, una pistola.
> Dovrei perfino essere pronto a morire, se occorre.
> Per proteggere i capolavori dell'Europa
> Che hanno spogliato la mia vita
> Di colore, e di movimento.
>
> Sono un fantasma nel Campidoglio
> Sono stato in Vietnam
> La mia testa ancora risuona del rumore delle mine
> Eppure mantengo la mia freddezza
> E aspetto il prossimo venerdì
> Baciando la Rosa dei venti
> E cercando una rotta.
>
> Non proteggo altri europei
> Con la mia vita.
> E prenderò a calci anche questa merda
> Prima di lasciarci la pelle.
> Per un cazzo di Remb-randt!
>
> E se dovessi scattare
> Allora stai attenta, Monna Lisa
> Comincerei a correre lungo la galleria
> Con un barattolo di vernice rossa
> Da schizzare su tutto ciò che mi capita
> Come un gatto in calore.

L'idea del tradimento e della vendetta della folla, suggerita da Hemphill, è un tema ripreso nel mio *Paradise Omeros* (realizzato per Documenta 11, 2002) e in *Baltimore* (2003). Quest'ultimo lavoro è una video-installazione realizzata su più schermi, basata su un documentario chiamato B*aadasssss Cinema* (2002). *Baltimore* affronta il tema della resa

cinematografica delle arti visive e della politica di 'razzializzazione' e 'queerizzazione' dello spazio museale, nel tentativo di articolare una prospettiva di creolizzazione della galleria d'arte.

Baltimore

Baltimore è una videoproiezione realizzata su tre schermi di grandi dimensioni, tentativo di lettura trasversale rispetto a tre archivi ben distinti, tra i quali quello del cinema d'azione nero degli anni '70. Lo scopo dell'installazione è creare un 'terzo spazio' attraverso l'uso di temi della cultura alta e bassa, come la fantascienza nera e il futurismo afroamericano. Le componenti del trittico sono un'esplorazione di quel genere cinematografico detto Blaxploitation e i suoi vari rimandi attraverso una serie di libere citazioni da film diversi. Il video è stato realizzato a Baltimora, città storica per l'immigrazione nera, e sede della National Association for the Advancement of Colored People degli Stati Uniti.

Baltimore è ambientato nella Walters Art Gallery, un importante museo rinascimentale che si trova nel centro di Baltimora, e nel Museo delle Cere dei Grandi Personaggi Neri (una specie di Madame Tussauds riuscito male, o una installazione alla Thomas Hirsh in versione nera, e una delle dieci maggiori attrazioni storiche afroamericane di tutti gli Stati Uniti). Traspare chiaramente tutto il mio interesse per gli spazi d'archivio, e per i loro rapporti con i temi del potere, della memoria e della conservazione del passato.

Baltimore: il museo delle cere

I generi denominati Blaxploitation sono tutt'altro che perfetti, ricchi di contaminazioni culturali, sessisti pur nel loro essere *queer*. Nessuno li definirebbe mai opere d'arte, e molti di essi sono effettivamente privi di ogni interesse. E tuttavia non è questo che conta. Si tratta di opere che hanno un grande valore, e che hanno rappresentato un punto di partenza importante per la mia immaginazione. Hanno a che fare con l'estetica del volgare. La videoproiezione si sofferma su quei codici che producono i meccanismi di identificazione e che ho rielaborato in modo da produrre una visione creolizzata del museo. Mi auguro che siano stati colti i tratti satirici di questo lavoro, che si pone in maniera provocatoria rispetto al mondo dell'arte, rielaborando criticamente gli sforzi curatoriali, e allo stesso tempo sconvolgendoli.

L'idea di fondo della prima parte del progetto *Baadasssss* era quella di stabilire una relazione di tipo pedagogico tra il documentario e lo spettatore. Era mia intenzione rendere visibili i processi dell'archivio e il potere dell'iconografia visiva in rapporto agli effetti che il movimento nero aveva avuto sulla vita comune, e sulle modalità attraverso cui essa era rappresentata. Il tentativo di 'rendere queer' l'immaginario della Blaxploitation implica anche il riconoscimento della sua capacità di influenzare altri generi, come l'Hip-Hop, la cinematografia indipendente, e così via. Inoltre, pensavo anche di mettere in luce i malintesi e la complessità del genere, intervistando esponenti di spicco del movimento *queer* di colore, come Pam Grier, che difatti prende una posizione dissenziente. Attraverso *Baadasssss Cinema* gli spettatori saranno probabilmente in grado di apprezzare a pieno il carattere spazio-temporale di *Baltimore*, dei suoi schermi multipli e dei suoi esperimenti sonori, facendo così emergere uno spirito critico che metta in discussione le strategie di rappresentazione dei film della blaxploitation, e si avvicini alla loro estetica, nei limiti dello spazio offerto dalle arti visive.

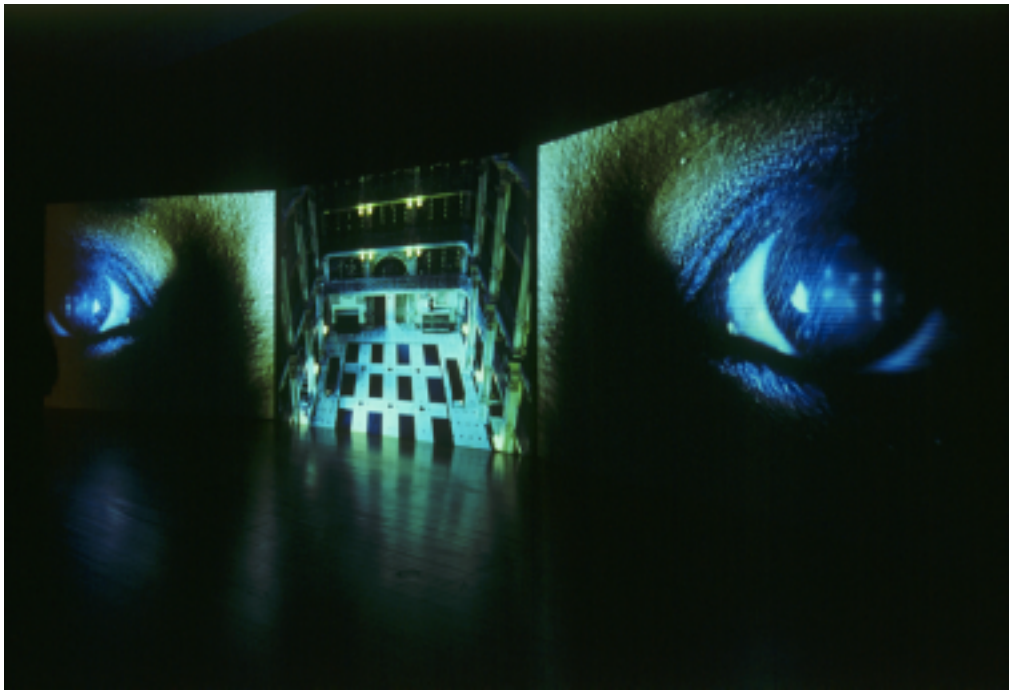
Le scene di *Baltimore* sono girate in modo da realizzare volutamente un effetto diegetico che interrompe di continuo lo sviluppo narrativo. La videocamera, seguendo i movimenti nell'inquadratura, fa uso delle potenzialità scultoree dello spazio cinematico. Le immagini all'interno del trittico non sono semplici rappresentazioni di singoli individui, ma piuttosto di 'spazi della rappresentazione'. Le identità sono spazializzate e collocate trasversalmente rispetto ai tre schermi. La scena dell'autostrada, ad esempio, rispecchia l'idea della visione prospettica così come è visibile nel dipinto *Una città ideale*, della scuola di Piero della Francesca. Questo risultato è stato ottenuto attraverso un montaggio pittorico che enfatizza le politiche dello spazio.

La canzone "Sweet sweet back Baadasssss" è unica nel permettere a una 'regina' gay nera di muoversi al suo ritmo. E anche se Melvin Van Peebles non voleva realizzare un film *queer* e di colore, esso è di fatto un

interessante lavoro sperimentale nell'ambito delle arti visive a tematica nera e *queer*. E proprio perché nessuno poteva prevedere quale fosse il risultato finale, la parte del protagonista è stata affidata a lui, insieme a Vanessa Myrie, che interpreta la *femme fatale* di colore, un po' Angela Davis e un po' Foxy Brown, e in parte un cyborg, completamente al di fuori della portata di Melvin (la sua sessualità è un enigma per qualcuno, ma non per tutti). Su questi personaggi incombe lo spettro della storia, evocato dagli spazi del museo, e la loro resa filmica. Alla fine di "Heavy Breathing", Essex Hemphill scrive:

> Dopo un profondo respiro
> Il sogno è spostato
> E ora è in un museo
> Sotto vetro, sotto sorveglianza.
> Cinque dollari è il prezzo
> Per osservarlo
> Tutto il giorno
> Guardiamo opere d'arte.
> Alitando sui vetri
> Per vedere
> Gli scheletri
> Delle pantere nere
> Immagini di foreste
> Barattoli/bossoli di lacrime.

È quasi come se Hemphill avesse sognato qualche scena di *Baltimore*, e sognato, profeticamente, il mio futuro.



Baltimore

Paradise Omeros

In quest'opera, omaggio a Derek Walcott, l'intreccio tra la cultura inglese e quella di St. Lucia diventano oggetto dell'esplorazione di un adolescente che vive la perdita dell'innocenza; allo stesso tempo, le relazioni postcoloniali e interetniche tra il protagonista e l'altro personaggio maschile, il turista/rasta, sono rilette in chiave edipica. In Inghilterra il ragazzo sperimenta insieme alla sua famiglia tanto il benessere quanto le tensioni dei conflitti razziali, una opposizione resa nell'alternanza tra scene felici e immagini angosciose. Le altre scene del film sono ambientate a St. Lucia, dove il 'rasta' ricorda al ragazzo la performance di Robert Mitchum in *The Night of the Hunter* (diretto da Charles Laughton nel 1955), in un'esplorazione delle dinamiche di amore e odio nelle quali gli anelli d'oro del 'rasta' hanno preso il posto del tatuaggio di Mitchum.

Era mia intenzione rendere la rappresentazione dei Caraibi nei termini di una mitologia culturale fantastica. Una delle scene principali, ad esempio, alterna le immagini del ragazzo che si immerge nel mare a scene di immigrazione e rivolta nel Regno Unito. Viaggiando, allo stesso tempo, nel mare e nell'archivio della memoria, il protagonista si confronta con immagini traumatiche: memorie personali e collettive lo portano alla dimensione metropolitana di Londra. Tuttavia fa ritorno a St. Lucia, poi di nuovo a Londra, in un circuito continuo che viene proiettato sulle pareti della galleria. Il risultato finale è una continua oscillazione, come se il protagonista viaggiasse continuamente avanti e indietro nel tempo. Al rifiuto di ogni localizzazione stabile si affianca l'occupazione dello spazio 'altro', in qualche modo collocato tra il mare, la città e la parete della galleria. Ed è proprio tra le mura della galleria d'arte contemporanea che gli artisti possono esplorare liberamente queste tematiche, che spesso non trovano spazio nei dibattiti pubblici. Questa è la ragione per cui l'importanza delle gallerie d'arte come spazio critico del confronto culturale è in continua crescita.

La mia attuale prospettiva sul cinema, dislocato nella galleria d'arte, è nient'altro che l'esito della mia precedente attività di cineasta indipendente, o una sua riconfigurazione. Questa trasformazione da una tecnologia all'altra, dalla pellicola al digitale, apre lo spazio a nuovi possibili interventi. E parallelamente, anche la funzione e la natura dello spettatore cambiano. La dislocazione del cinema nella galleria implica anche, da parte dello spettatore, un diverso orizzonte di aspettative, differente da quello che può avere il comune spettatore al cinema. Si tratta anche, naturalmente, di una differenza di classe, e per questo motivo sono convinto della necessità di realizzare film che abbiano un approccio interdisciplinare. Ad esempio, *Baadassss Cinema*, il documentario che ho realizzato per Independent Film Channel, è stato trasmesso dalla televisione via cavo, mentre *Baltimore*,

lavoro ad esso strettamente connesso, è stato presentato alla Metro Pictures Gallery di New York.

Questi cambiamenti sono significativi anche in termini di dislocazione delle questioni politiche, che, se prima trovavano nel cinema il loro luogo naturale di destinazione, ora sono confinati nello spazio delle 'belle arti'. Purtroppo sono scomparse molte voci del cinema: a dieci anni dalla morte di Derek Jarman, la storia della sua vita sarà il tema del mio prossimo documentario. È questo un progetto per il quale la ricerca di finanziamenti si sta rivelando particolarmente difficile. Fino ad ora, infatti, nessun canale televisivo ha accettato di finanziarlo, tanto che mi chiedo: se Jarman fosse ancora vivo, chiederebbe anche lui con me una ri-articolazione dei meccanismi del cinema? Oppure, per le stesse ragioni, i video di carattere politico di Marlon Riggs sarebbero considerati opere di arte visiva, e proiettati in una galleria?

Traduzione di **Fiorenzo Iuliano**

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Lotus Eye
Reading Miyazawa Kenji and Making *Night Passage*

D-Story, D-Film

The name calls for mourning, sowing fear and panic in the hearts of mortals. It begins with a D in English and in its realm, time makes no sense. What is it that we call Death? Heavily lugged around, it is a name we need when the urge to draw a limit to the unknown arises. *Die, Disappear, Dissolve: the three D's.*[1] D changes its face, passing from metamorphosis to metamorphosis, almost never failing to surprise the one who dies. We tell stories in the dark to avert it, and we do everything else we can to forget, ignore, or deny it. Whether we hide it from sight or we provocatively display it for view, D remains elusively at once invisible and all-too-visible. No amount of corpses, spilled blood, or skulls and skeletons can represent the everyday death that accompanies a life from crib to grave. By trying to show it and solve this problem of the end, we end up arresting the infinitely Al-ready-, Al-ways-There – the immortal in the mortal.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Trinh T. Minh-ha.

Night Passage (98 minutes, color, 2004, directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha and Jean-Paul Bourdier) is a D-film on friendship and death. Made in homage to Miyazawa Kenji's classic novel, *Night Train to the Stars*[2], the story evolves around the spiritual journey of a young woman (Kyra), in the company of her best friend (Nabi) and a little boy (Shin), into a world of rich in-between realities. Their journey into and out of the land of 'awakened dream' is experienced as a passage of appearances, from a death to a return in life that occurs during a long ride on a night train. At each stop of the train, the travelers set out in the dark and come across an inner space of longing, in which their ears and eyes meet with people and events at once too familiar and oddly strange. Every encounter opens a door into the transcultural, and every intervention offers an experience of non-illusory, two-dimensional time-space spectacles. The film itself unfolds in the sequential rhythm of a train of window images. With magnetic intensity, each place features a gesture of the sensual world, or a means of reception and communication of our times.

[1] Quoted from the script of the film *Night Passage*.

[2] Also translated as *Milky Way Railroad*; *The Night of the Milky Way Train;* or *The Night when the Galaxy Train Leaves*. The version used here for all quotes is *Night Train to the Stars and Other Stories*, translated by John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987). The original Japanese text, *Ginga Tetsudo no Yoru*, was published in 1927.

Miyazawa's spirit

"Off you go now, birds of passage! Now's the time to go," says a character in Miyazawa's *Night Train to the Stars*. During the railroad trip to the Milky Way, characters appear and disappear. They move in seemingly precise time: they want to get off the train but can't because "it's too late" and they leave the locations of their visits to get back on the train when "it's time". Some must part midway with their train companions, because "this is where you get off to go to heaven."

Hopping onto Miyazawa's night train is to step into a universe of sentient cyborgs in which the mineral, the vegetal, the animal and the human worlds happily mingle. As the journey into the fourth dimension expands in time and space, earthly and celestial beings, the living and the departed, the easterner and the westerner, the poet and the scientist, the child and the adult, are brought together in a quasi hallucinatory vision. Although driven at its core by the dark boundaries of life and death, such a vision offers neither somber picture nor mere drama. On the contrary, the glowing images strewn on the Milky Way are presented in light, subtle touches on the shimmering surface of the sky canvas. Although the sense of loss poignantly runs through the entire story like an underlining thread, tears and laughter are fluidly woven into the scenes of magical encounters, and only now and then does an alarming note of sadness erupt into the space of narration.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Trinh T. Minh-ha.

In conceiving *Night Passage*, there was no desire to imitate or to illustrate Miyazawa's tale. As with my previous films, I prefer to work with transformation in encounters, retaining what I see as the spirit of Miyazawa's narrative while riding a night train of my own. I stumbled onto his stark and intense poetry (*A Future of Ice* is an example) well before I read his stories and became acquainted with the man's personal tale.[3] Death always seems near and can be felt lurking in every spring of joy or innocent youth that gives his writing its magical freshness. What strikes me the most, like a lingering fragrance, is the 'blue illumination' (a term he uses to define 'I') that his sister's death left as a gift on every page. The eye that weeps while laughing speaks through the haunting, absent presence of Toshiko, the young woman who died at the age of 25, while in her springtime.

[3] Translated by Hiroaki Sato (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989).

Night Train to the Star reminds me in many ways of Antoine Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* – although, for reasons likely to reflect the power imbalance between East and West, the latter is far more universally known than the former. The two so-called 'children's tales' offer a luminous tapestry of poetic, scientific and spiritual imagery capable of speaking to an unusual readership that spans from the very young to the very old, not excluding the majority of impatient 'grown-ups'. Saint-Exupéry and Miyazawa are both consummate stargazers and adventurous sky-divers, the first being literally an aviator by profession. That said, their novels differ markedly in the location of their voice. Of significance here is to recall that Miyazawa, who also died at the untimely age of 37, having ruined his health with an ascetic food regime, is a man of many selves and many talents – an aspect that accounts for the sheer expansive quality of his work.

Poet, novelist, farmer-agronomist, amateur astronomer, geologist, teacher, musician and composer, he was a most misunderstood literary figure in Japan until the media decided to deify him 63 years after his death. A dilettante at heart, he loved Western classical music and had a strong fascination for foreign languages such as English, German, Esperanto. Relevantly, aside from the gift of speaking from an experience of death and dying, what appeals to me as unique to Miyazawa are the quirky elements of transculturalism that traverse his novel and the social consciousness that grounds his spiritual practice. While freely crossing borders and pushing boundaries, Miyazawa's voice is firmly rooted in local realities and the Buddhist sutras. The vividly depicted backdrop of his creative work is generally that of his own town and region, Iwate – known for its exceedingly harsh climate and soil, and regarded as the 'Tibet of Japan'. His hardship in volunteer work, his personal commitment to the discriminated minorities, and his self-sacrificing struggle for the welfare of the regional peasants who survive on the fringes of subsistence have all been well documented and repeatedly praised as a model to emulate in Japanese media and literary circles.

In the first version I read of his novel, *Milky Way Railroad,*[4] the translators had taken the liberty of changing the characters' names into Japanese names, under the pretext that it would "eliminate any confusion caused by Japanese characters in a Japanese setting having European names." Since I usually prefer to enter a text directly and to follow the writer's thought process afresh, without the mediation of an "Introduction," at the end of the book, I was deceptively left with a feeling of wonder for what I considered to be a harmlessly charming story of coming to term with death; a story 'typically Japanese', as my prejudices dictate. It was only a year later, when a Japanese friend offered me another translated version of the novel, *Night Train to the Stars*, that I realized with awe and utter

[4] Translated and adapted by J. Sigrist and D.M. Stroud (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).

excitement the scope of Miyazawa's experimental and cosmopolitan mind. In this translation, not only the main characters' names, Giovanni (Jovanni) and Campanella (Kanpanera), are kept as originally intended, but a whole complex tapestry of foreign-sounding names of people and places emerges from the story, as if by magic. Suppressed in the first adapted version I read, these Italian, French, English and American names, in co-existence with Japanese names, make all the difference. Here, the politics of naming takes on an inventive role of its own.

Politics of Form

The Transcultural

Toshiko was the name I first gave to the young woman who dies in *Night Passage*. But as the script I wrote evolved with the actors and artists who participated in the film, Toshiko disappeared to leave room for Nabi (or "butterfly" in Korean), a name chosen by the actress herself, Denice Lee. Shin was, however, the one Japanese name I had decided to keep for the little boy, despite the fact that the actor for that role is not Japanese. (This small detail had not failed to disturb some discerning viewers when the film was released). On my night train, rather than focusing on the two boys, it is the journey of two young women accompanied by a little boy that I set out to explore. With this shift of gender, everything changes. Miyazawa's original story recedes, leaving here and there a few pertinent traces in its inspirational role. For me, in order to remain loyal to his spirit, only the glow and the bare minimum of the narrative are kept: the beginning, the ending, and a couple of small core incidences on the train.

As with Miyazawa's stories which, to his credit, had continually raised questions concerning its true nature (Is it a novel? A children's story? A poem in prose? A Dharma lesson?), *Night Passage* offers a journey that cuts across cinema, painting and theater. Spectators coming into the film with expectations of what a narrative on screen should be have been disquieted by what they have seen. The comments they made evolved consciously or unconsciously around the boundaries they'd set up for cinema. As it is known from analyses of the film world, there are

Trinh T. Minh-ha, Denice Lee in *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Trinh T. Minh-ha.

two distinct Western avant-gardes: one based on the tradition of the visual arts, and the other, on the tradition of theatre and literature. Working at hiding the stage, mainstream narratives are all theatre; and it is with money power (in buying locations and expertise) that they naturalize their artifices. (It suffices to listen to these narratives without looking at the pictures to realize how much they remain entrenched in 'acting' and theatrical delivery). Whereas experimental films borrow so heavily from painting and plastic arts that they're often conceived in negative reaction, against anything considered to be impure to their vision – such as the verbal dimension and other non-visual concerns. As with my previous films, *Night Passage* continues to raise questions about the politics of form (which includes, but is not reduced to the politics of representation). Not only it is at odds with classifications such as documentary and fiction, it also explicitly plays with both traditions of the avant-garde.

I've often been asked whether my making feature narratives is a shift in my itinerary as a filmmaker, but the one luxury that independent filmmaking offers is precisely the ability to shuttle – not necessarily from one category to another, but *between categories*. Created with a mood, rhythm, structure and poetry that are at once light and intensive, *Night Passage* stays away from heavy drama and from the action-driven scenario. It invites the viewers to experience the magic of film and video anew, to enter and exit the screen by the door of their own mediation, sensually or spiritually, or both, according to their own realities and background. At the first screening of *Night Passage* in Berkeley (California), a viewer (the poet and painter Etel Adnan) described the film to me as a "journey across appearances" and "a story of humanity with all five races". She went on to specify that yes, she agrees, "the world today is not occidental". Other viewers noted that the film is "vast in its subject, but very local in the coloring"; and made remarks on how distinctly Californian the film's backdrop is in its landscape and art activities. As one of them put it, "I have been there and I know the place, and yet…. I don't quite recognize it. It looks gorgeous, but it's as if I've never seen it before".

Certainly, it is not by mere accident that the cast is highly diverse. The actors selected to play the roles of the main characters are: Chinese American for Kyra (Yuan Li-chi); Korean American for Nabi (Denice Lee); Jewish American for Shin (Joshua Miller); Irish for one of the storytellers on the train (Howard Dillon); African American for the other storyteller on the train (Vernon Bush), as well as for the drummers and Black scientists (Sherman Kennedy and Yesufu Shangoshola); Chicano for the man of wisdom in the street (Luis Saguar); French for his companion, the flutist (Viviane Lemaigre Dubreuil); Japanese for Nabi's father (Atsushi Kanbayashi, who is actually the art director Brent Kanbayashi's father); and the list goes on. However, in the process of building cast and crew, as well as of

visualizing the film, if diversity was an important part of the criteria for selection, it was obviously not upheld for its own sake. Although gender, sexual and racial diversities are easily recognizable by the eye and ear, their visibility is often used to tame all disturbing differences, to give these a fixed, familiar face, and hence to turn them into consumable commodities.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, Denice Lee in *Night Passage*. Courtesy of Trinh T. Minh-ha.

What I find infinitely more challenging is to work on and from multiplicity. The term, as used here, should be neither equated with liberal pluralism nor confused with multiculturalism as taunted by the mainstream media. In normalizing diversity, multiculturalism remains deceptively color-blind and utterly divisive. Its bland melting-pot logic denies the racism and sexism that lies at the core of biopower and biopolitics. Since the film features a transition from one state to another, the focus is on the interaction of passages. Rather than having difference treated as mere conflict, in *Night Passage*, difference comes with the art of spacing and is creatively trans-cultural. Here trans- is not merely a movement across separate entities and rigid boundaries, but one in which the travelling is the very place of dwelling (and vice versa), and leaving is a way of returning home – to one's most intimate self. Cultural difference is not a matter of accumulating or juxtaposing several cultures whose boundaries remain intact. The crossing required in the transcultural undermines fixed notions of identity and border, and questions 'culture' in its specificity and its very formation.

As a character in the film said: *"Life's a net, made up of so many roads. Dirt roads, asphalt roads, virtual roads. Sometimes you go in a straight line; sometimes you just go round and around in circles… Drives us crazy but there's nothing to do about it. And, sometimes you find yourself at the crossroads. Then what?"* Well,… you get stuck; or else, take the risk and "*go with the wind—where the road is alive*,"[5] as Nabi urged Kyra in following her inner voice. The crossroads are where the dynamics of the film lies. They are empty centres thanks to which an indefinite number of paths can converge and part in a new direction. Inter-, multi-, post- and trans-: these are the pre-fixes of our times. They define the before, after,

[5] From the script of *Night Passage*.

during and between of social and ethical consciousness. Each has a history and a seemingly precise moment of appearance, dis-appearance and re-appearance. Although bound to specifics, they are, in fact, all related as trans-events.

Time Passage

At twelve, I found myself in sinister water: I drowned. Not in the sea, but in the chlorine depth of a fire station's swimming pool. My brother pulled me out in time. Since then, I have had to live with the ordeal of the liquid descent. Every now and then, the experience of drowning arises again from nowhere, and the encounter with death in water returns with ever-changing faces. Never twice the same, and yet always *It*. From one nightmare to another, I slowly learn to pull myself out in time, to wake up just as I am being swallowed in a wall of water – usually, a tidal wave. Now, as if by magic, sometimes I die not, and emerge laughing in the fall, letting the drowning settle. Like vapor on seawater, the fear vanishes. I awake, feeling light in radiant darkness. The nightmare has turned into a dream.

A passage involves both time and timing. For me, the advent of digital cinema or D-cinema, as the tech-community calls it, is a timely event. Its technology seems most compatible with Miyazawa's inventive spirit, and is very apt to capture his poetic world of beings and events – at once eccentric and oh, so boringly ordinary. In view of the potentials and unparalleled impact of this new technology on the film culture, the elusive story of Death can also take on a new lease of life. The unknown, like the fantastic, is never merely out there; it is always already in here, there (in the ordinary, legible image) where one neglects to look with *eyes wide shut*.

Already, in our previous feature, *A Tale of Love* (35mm, 108 mins, 1996, directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha and Jean-Paul Bourdier), a character notes that in the realm of photography and representation, the two impossibles are: Love and Death. Love stories are often stories made without love, and showing an image of death is primarily showing time passing. No matter how imaginative one is, capturing these two on screen is literally impossible. All that one can do best is to circle around them without falling into the clichés abundantly supplied by the media and its repertoire of ready-made images. To question our consumption of these images is to touch the core of a whole system of narrative cinema that determines the way we sell and buy love-and-death stories.

As in Miyazawa's novel, the voyage portrayed in *Night Passage* happens in a framework that is at once timed and timeless. When the call is made, the "birds of passage" that we are would have to go because "it's time to go". Time prevails as a crucial element in filmmaking and film exhibiting.

But if a film always ends at a definite time, its unfolding can stretch our sense of time indefinitely. Its closure, rather than merely closing off, can lead to a new opening. Thus, in *Night Passage*, the passing of time is made tangible in the viewer's experience of film; comings and goings go hand in hand; death happens with a return in life; and stillness can be found in every movement. There's no opposition between time and timelessness. For me, the night train ride, the last trip taken together by the two friends raises the following question: what happens in this moment between life and death? How would one spend this time-span with one's best friend – that two-hour flash just before she disappears from one's life?

Ship and Train of Death

The Last Act is here a creative act for, as a character in the film said: *"Everyone is Nabi. Everyone you meet, they're all people you've danced with or ridden on trains with so many times before. Where the path ends, the novel begins"*.[6] Struck by the spiritual process and by the extensive work of colors and light in the film, some perceptive viewers have given a name to this Passage, by linking it to the *bardo* or the 'between-state' in the Tibetan art of dying. As it is well known among Tibetans practitioners, the time of the between, the transition from death to new rebirth is the best time to affect the karmic evolution for the better. In its inevitability, death makes everything in our tightest grasp dissolve – especially what we hold on to as solid matter in the waking world of the five senses. What remains and can live on is what we can't put our hand on. So it goes also for cinema and the work of composing with light in creating images. Screen life, like body life, has no solid reference, no enduring substance, no binding essence, and it can be exposed as such in the very course of the film.

[6] From the script of *Night Passage*.

Night Passage begins with what may first appear to the viewer as a shot of a passing train, in which passengers appear, disappear and re-appear with no apparent continuity, except for the continuity of the movement of the images themselves. As the camera slowly zooms in, what may become more apparent to the viewer is the fact that what they see are not 'natural' images of a passing train, but the collage of a repeated series of window images taken from outside a train and re-animated so as to reproduce the movement of a train passing across the screen. Right from the outset, the film displays its aesthetic and structural constitution. The opening sequence not only encapsulates the spirit and rhythm of the digital journey, it also plays on the movement *both* of the train outside and inside, and *between* train rider and video viewer. Thereby, a reflexive and performative relation is maintained between the images of the train within the story space and the train of images that moves linearly in finite sequences across the

screen. What is set forth is the zone of infinite shades onto which the double train opens.

In this D-passage unwinding at the speed of light, death is not only part of life, it is the constant zero ground from which life emerges. The mortal and the immortal meet on the light canvas as realities contain one another ad infinitum. "You appeared from nowhere…. Who are you?" "Where are we now?" "Where have you come from?" "Where are we going?" "Do you know where this leads us?" These are some of the recurring questions that persistently punctuate the story space in *Night Passage*. And these are also the questions that may be expected, as the film unfolds, from viewers for whom "just going" makes no sense. Being attuned to the normative concept of cinema in which all actions serve a central story, some of us easily get stuck unless we know ahead of time where to go, and what that means….

In the process of going, one is constantly in a state of transition. Similarly, the digital video image is an image constantly in formation. Emerging and vanishing via a scanning mechanism, it continually morphs into another image. In the editing of my previous films, the *cut* is always a straight cut; one that assumes unashamedly its nature as a cut and may sometimes even jar the viewer in its radical rupture (as with the many jump-cuts in the films *Reassemblage* and *Naked Spaces*). In *Night Passage*, however, the choices and constraints in the creative process differ markedly. As digital technology made it possible, the image is worked on accordingly so as to assume a double look: the film look for the scenes and the video look for the transitions. Since the journey is visualized primarily as passage, great attention is given to "the time of the between" and the "crossroads"—that is, to transformation and transition as time-spaces of their own. Thus, rather than the cut, it was the *dissolve* (and the *cross dissolve*) that I chose as an aesthetic principle for the transitions. It is here, in the very intervals that link the scenes, the places and the encounters that the magic of video technology prevails.

The time implied in the experience of the film is at once explicitly linear in the frontal sequencing of two-dimensional images; and non-linear in the multiplicity of ordering of events and performance spaces. If in Miyazawa's novel, the train trip leads to Heaven and its Silver River (the Japanese term for the Milky Way), in *Night Passage*, rather than ascending to the sky, the two young women enter the night to meet their own earthly dreams. The focus is primarily on the river below and on the witnessing of one's own voyage in the dying process – here Nabi's death in drowning. When the two young women get off the train to walk out into darkness, the other vehicles of the between they embark on are the ship and the boat. Again it is inside the ship, in the folds of water, or else, outside, by the side of the river that the young women enter the world of the eccentric, and the departed.

There, they watch as observer-observed, spectator-witnesses, the mysterious dances of water and fire – the dance of Nabi's death.

In their conception and choreography, the dances form another instance of the transcultural. The singular image that emerges from the passage between Eastern and Western traditions is a trajectory of fire that turns into light calligraphy. With the light writing on the night sky, I see, near and far and in between, Miyazawa's blue illumination. For him, death is a passing from one state to another. To come to terms with his sister's death, he followed her in her passage. He crossed land/water borders and took a ship to Sakhalin a year after she had left. Viewers paddle up the river of *Night Passage*, not knowing where exactly it may lead, and find the lit energy of bodies in performance. The fire, the light. The song of the flame tells us that when extinguished, the flame does not die out; instead, it enters another state and goes on burning. Among the story-sources that fire Miyazawa's imagination are stories set in India, in the very birthplace of Shakyamuni, the Buddha. For example, a story titled "A Stem of Lilies" opens with lines best read while in the vast, with eyes *wide* shut: "'At seven tomorrow morning, they say, the Lord Buddha will cross the Himukya River and enter the town.' What would the Buddha's countenance be like, they wondered, and what color were his eyes? Would he have the dark blue eyes like lotus petals, as it was rumored?"[7]

"The world today is not occidental" (E. Adnan). The painter-poet's statement still rings on with acuity. For as the birds of passage that we are, it is still difficult to accept when it's time to go and when it's not. We can't seem to be able to resolve the problem of the end, or what we see as Death's un-timeliness, with our eyes wide open. We yearn for immortality and resurrection with no spiritual investment. With new technology's assistance, we want both a timely ending and an immediate attainment of immortality. The question that remains, however, is whether for our bodies to resuscitate with our old defective eye, though it leads us, makers, to fear to create anything that no one can see, just as it limits what we create to everything that everyone can see.

In film, this means abiding by the normative system of "predatory cinema" (Raoul Ruiz), in which not only all stories are action-and-conflict-driven, but all conflicts are also reduced to one enslaving central conflict. Such a practice of cinema sees the world as a grand war zone. The relationships between people are no more than a sum of constant hostilities that require all participants to take sides ("You're either for us or against us"). Differing views of the world are filtered through the eye of central conflict and all conflicts are subsumed under the one spectacular conflict that matters to the most powerful nation of the West. The globalization of this system, both in its economical and political connotations, makes it all the more necessary for us to continue to ask the question: Which eye?

[7] In Kenji Miyazawa, *Once and Forever*, trans. J. Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1993, rpt. 1997), 109.

What gives life to the image dies in the image. If death is untimely, then it seems that one can't help but be untimely. It may be said thereby that in living the present, one is always slightly ahead or slightly behind. In today's world of terror against terror in which globalization fights globalization, it may be particularly relevant that D-cinema be a way of intimately addressing our mortality, with filmmaking as a way of assuming our in-secure path of freedom.

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Occhio di Loto
(leggere Miyazawa Kenji e filmare *Night Passage*)

D-story, D-Film

Il nome evoca il lutto, semina paura e panico nel cuore dei mortali. In inglese inizia con D e nel suo regno il tempo non ha alcun significato. Che cos'è ciò che chiamiamo Morte? Lo pronunciamo a fatica, ma è un nome di cui abbiamo bisogno quando affiora l'urgenza di delimitare l'ignoto. *Die, disappear, dissolve*: le tre D.[1] D cambia faccia, passando di metamorfosi in metamorfosi, e quasi sempre riesce a sorprendere chi muore. Raccontiamo storie nel buio per ricordarla e, per il resto, facciamo tutto il possibile per dimenticarla, ignorarla o negarla. Che la nascondiamo oppure provocatoriamente l'offriamo alla vista, D resta ambiguamente invisibile e troppo visibile. Nessuna quantità di cadaveri, sangue versato, teschi e scheletri può rappresentare la morte quotidiana che accompagna la vita dalla culla alla tomba. Provando a mostrarla, e a risolvere questo problema della fine, si finisce per arrestare ciò che è infinitamente ora-mai e per sempre lì – l'immortale nel mortale.

Night Passage. Courtesy of the author.

Night Passage (98 minuti, col., 2004, diretto da Trinh T. Minh-ha e Jean-Paul Bourdier) è un film digitale sull'amicizia e l'amore. La storia, che rende omaggio al romanzo classico di Miyazawa Kenji *Una notte sul treno della Via Lattea*,[2] si svolge intorno al viaggio spirituale di una giovane donna (Kyra), in compagnia della sua migliore amica (Nabi) e di un ragazzino (Shin), in un mondo di ricche realtà interstiziali. Il loro viaggio dentro e fuori (da) uno spazio di semi-coscienza è vissuto come un passaggio tra visioni, da una morte a un ritorno in vita, che avviene durante un lungo percorso su un treno notturno. A ogni fermata del treno i viaggiatori si muovono nel buio e attraversano uno spazio interiore di nostalgia, in cui gli occhi e le orecchie si imbattono in persone ed eventi allo stesso tempo familiari e stranamente bizzarri. Ogni incontro apre una porta verso il transculturale e ogni apparizione permette di vivere spettacoli dallo spazio-tempo non illusorio e bi-dimensionale. Tutto il film si svolge secondo il ritmo sequenziale di immagini catturate dal treno in viaggio. Con intensità magnetica, ogni luogo rivela un gesto del mondo sensibile o un mezzo di ricezione e comunicazione dei nostri tempi.

[1] Dalla sceneggiatura di *Night Passage* [Viene lasciato qui l'originale inglese per mantenere il gioco di parole sull'iniziale D, che richiama la parola Death 'morte', e l'eufonia della battuta del film N.d.T.]

[2] Tradotto anche come *Milky Way Railroad*; *The Night of the Milky Way Train;* o *The Night when the Galaxy Train Leaves*. La versione utilizzata qui per tutte le citazioni è *Night Train to the Stars and Other Stories*, tradotta da John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987). Il testo originale giapponese, *Ginga Tetsudo no Yoru*, fu pubblicato nel 1927. [Per la traduzione è stata considerata l'edizione italiana tradotta da Giorgio Amitrano *Una notte sul treno della Via Lattea,* Venezia, Marsilio, 1994. N.d.T.]

Lo spirito di Miyazawa

"Via libera uccelli migratori! Via libera uccelli migratori!", dice un personaggio in *Una notte sul treno della Via Lattea*.[3] Durante il viaggio in treno verso la Via Lattea, i personaggi appaiono e scompaiono. Si muovono in un tempo apparentemente preciso: vogliono scendere dal treno, ma non possono perché "è troppo tardi" e lasciano i luoghi delle loro visite per tornare sul treno quando "è il momento". Alcuni devono separarsi a metà strada dai compagni di viaggio perché si deve "proprio scendere. È questa la fermata per il cielo".[4]

[3] [Ibid., p. 82. N.d.T.]

[4] [Ibid., p. 92. N.d.T.]

Salire sul treno notturno di Miyazawa vuol dire entrare in un universo di cyborg senzienti in cui mondo minerale, animale e umano si fondono in modo armonico. Poiché il viaggio nella quarta dimensione si espande nel tempo e nello spazio, esseri terreni e celesti, vivi e morti, orientali e occidentali, così come il poeta e lo scienziato, il bambino e l'adulto sono uniti in una visione quasi allucinatoria. Questa visione, nonostante conduca fino al suo nucleo profondo dagli oscuri confini di vita e morte, non mostra un cupo dipinto, né un semplice dramma. Al contrario, le immagini splendenti disseminate sulla Via Lattea sono presentate con tocchi gentili e luminosi sulla superficie brillante della tela celeste. Nonostante il senso di perdita sottolinei l'intero racconto dipanandosi attraverso le varie scene di incontri magici, lacrime e risate si intrecciano fluidamente e solo poche volte un'inquietante nota di tristezza irrompe nello spazio della narrazione.

Nel realizzare *Night Passage*, non intendevo imitare né illustrare il racconto di Miyazawa. Come nei miei film precedenti, ho preferito lavorare sulle trasformazioni nate dall'incontro e mantenere lo spirito della narrativa di Miyazawa mentre io stessa guidavo un mio treno notturno. Ho scoperto la sua poesia aspra e intensa (ne è un esempio *A future of Ice*)[5] ben prima di leggere i racconti e conoscere la sua storia personale. La morte sembra sempre vicina e si percepisce, in agguato, in ogni slancio di gioia o nella innocenza giovanile che dà alla sua scrittura una magica freschezza. Ciò che più mi colpisce, come una fragranza persistente, è la 'luminosità blu' (un termine che egli usa per definire l'io) lasciata dalla morte di sua sorella come un dono su ogni pagina. L'occhio che piange mentre ride parla attraverso la presenza assente e fantasmatica di Toshiko, la giovane donna che morì a 25 anni nel pieno della sua giovinezza.

Night Passage. Courtesy of the author.

[5] Tradotto da Hiroaki Sato (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989).

Una notte sul treno della Via Lattea mi ricorda per molti aspetti *Il piccolo principe* di Antoine Saint-Exupéry, benché quest'ultimo, probabilmente per ragioni che riflettono lo squilibrio di potere tra Est e Ovest, goda di una notorietà universale. I due cosiddetti "racconti per bambini" offrono un luminoso intreccio tra immaginario poetico, scientifico e spirituale, capace di parlare a un insolito pubblico di lettori, dai più giovani ai più anziani, senza escludere la maggioranza degli "adulti" impazienti. Miyazawa e Saint-Exupéry sono stati entrambi abili astronomi e avventurosi paracadutisti, il primo è un pilota professionista. Ciò nonostante, i romanzi differiscono nettamente per il posizionamento della loro voce. E' significativo ricordare qui che Miyazawa, morto anch'egli alla prematura età di 37 anni dopo aver rovinato la propria salute con un regime alimentare ascetico, è un uomo dai molti sé e dai tanti talenti – aspetto che chiarisce la natura poliedrica del suo lavoro.

Poeta, romanziere, fattore-agronomo, astronomo dilettante, geologo, insegnante, musicista e compositore, è stato un intellettuale non del tutto compreso in Giappone, finché i media decisero di deificarlo 63 anni dopo la sua morte. *Dilettante* nel cuore, amava la musica classica occidentale e era fortemente affascinato dalle lingue straniere come inglese, tedesco e esperanto. In tal senso, oltre il dono di potersi esprimere a partire da un'esperienza di morte e pre-morte, ciò che trovo unico in Miyazawa è il gran numero di imprevisti elementi di transculturalismo che attraversano il romanzo e la coscienza sociale su cui egli basa la propria pratica spirituale. La voce di Miyazawa, mentre attraversa liberamente e sposta i confini, è fermamente radicata nelle realtà locali e nei sutra buddisti. Lo scenario vivacemente dipinto del suo lavoro creativo è, di solito, quello della sua città e regione: Iwate – nota per clima e suolo estremamente duri e considerata il 'Tibet del Giappone'. L'energia riposta nelle attività di volontariato, l'impegno personale per le minoranze discriminate e la battaglia in cui si è sacrificato per il benessere dei contadini della regione, che vivono ai limiti della sussistenza, sono stati tutti ben documentati e lodati come un modello da emulare sia dai media giapponesi che dai circoli letterari.

Nella prima versione che ho letto del romanzo, *Milky Way Railroad,*[6] i traduttori si erano presi la libertà di rendere in giapponese i nomi dei personaggi, con il pretesto di "eliminare la confusione prodotta dalla presenza di personaggi giapponesi dai nomi europei in un'ambientazione giapponese". Poiché di solito preferisco entrare in un testo in maniera diretta e seguire il filo del pensiero dell'autore da subito, senza la mediazione dell'"Introduzione", alla fine del libro mi era rimasta una sensazione ingannevole di meraviglia per quella che consideravo un'innocua e affascinante storia sul venire a patti con la morte; una storia "tipicamente giapponese", come mi suggerivano i miei pregiudizi. Fu soltanto un anno

[6] Tradotto e adattato da J. Sigrist e D.M. Stroud (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).

dopo, quando un mio amico giapponese mi regalò un'altra traduzione del romanzo, *Night Train to the Stars*, che capii con stupore e assoluta ammirazione la portata della mente sperimentale e cosmopolita di Miyazawa. In questa traduzione non solo sono mantenuti i nomi dei personaggi principali, Giovanni (Jovanni) e Campanella (Kanpanera), come era nelle intenzioni originali, ma affiora, come per magia, un elaborato ricamo di nomi di persone e luoghi dai suoni stranieri. Eliminati nel primo adattamento che avevo letto, questi nomi italiani, francesi, inglesi e americani, affiancati ai nomi giapponesi, fanno una grande differenza. Qui la politica del nominare acquista un proprio ruolo inventivo.

Politiche di forma

Il transculturale

Toshiko era il nome che avevo scelto in un primo momento per la giovane donna che muore in *Night Passage*, ma in seguito ai cambiamenti che subiva la sceneggiatura ad opera degli attori e artisti che partecipavano al film, Toshiko sparì per fare posto a Nabi ("farfalla" in coreano), nome scelto dalla stessa attrice, Denice Lee. Shin, per il ragazzino, era comunque il solo nome giapponese che avevo deciso di mantenere; nonostante l'attore scelto per quel ruolo non fosse giapponese. (Questo piccolo dettaglio ha causato delle perplessità in alcuni spettatori attenti quando il film è stato proiettato). Sul mio treno notturno, piuttosto che concentrarmi sui due ragazzi, ho deciso di esplorare il viaggio di due giovani donne accompagnate da un ragazzino. Tutto cambia con questo cambiamento di genere. Il racconto originale di Miyazawa passa sullo sfondo, lasciando qui e lì alcune tracce del suo ruolo ispiratore. Per restare fedele al suo spirito, ho mantenuto soltanto la lucentezza e un minimo accenno alla narrazione: l'inizio, il finale e un paio di piccoli, significativi avvenimenti occorsi sul treno.

Night Passage, Denice Lee

Come i racconti di Miyazawa che hanno legittimamente provocato numerose domande sulla loro vera natura (si tratta di un romanzo? Una storia per bambini? Una poesia in prosa? Una lezione dharmica?), *Night Passage* presenta un viaggio attraverso il cinema, la pittura e il teatro. Gli spettatori arrivati alla proiezione con delle aspettative su come una

narrazione cinematografica dovrebbe essere sono stati turbati da ciò che hanno visto. I commenti fatti si sono concentrati, più o meno consapevolmente, sui confini che essi avevano stabilito per il cinema. Come emerge da alcuni studi sul mondo cinematografico, in occidente esistono due diversi tipi di avanguardie: una basata sulla tradizione delle arti visive, e l'altra sulla tradizione di teatro e letteratura. Le narrazioni tradizionali, che tentano di nascondere il palcoscenico, sono teatro in tutto e per tutto e riescono a rendere naturali i loro artifici grazie al potere del denaro (comprando edifici e professionisti). (E' sufficiente ascoltare queste narrazioni senza guardare le immagini per capire quanto restino trincerate nella 'recit-azione' e nella dizione teatrale.) D'altra parte i film sperimentali attingono così tanto dalla pittura e dalle arti plastiche che sono spesso concepiti come reazioni negative, verso qualsiasi cosa sia considerata impura alla vista – come la dimensione verbale e altri aspetti non-visuali. Come i miei film precedenti, *Night Passage* continua a sollevare interrogativi sulle politiche di forma (che includono, ma non si riducono, alle politiche di rappresentazione), poiché non solo dissente da classificazioni rigide come documentario e finzione, ma gioca apertamente con entrambe le tradizioni d'avanguardia.

Mi si è spesso domandato se fare lungometraggi narrativi costituisca un cambiamento nel mio percorso di regista, ma l'unico lusso nella realizzazione di film indipendenti è proprio la possibilità di muoversi continuamente non da una categoria all'altra, ma tra le categorie. Creato con un'atmosfera, un ritmo e una struttura allo stesso tempo leggeri e intensi, *Night Passage* resta lontano dalla pesante recitazione teatrale e dallo scenario definito dall'azione. Invita gli spettatori a vivere la magia di video e film in modo nuovo, a entrare e uscire dallo schermo attraverso la porta della propria meditazione, in maniera sensuale o spirituale, o in entrambi i modi, secondo la propria realtà e la propria storia. Alla prima proiezione di *Night Passage* a Berkeley (California), una spettatrice (la poeta e pittrice Etel Adnan) mi descrisse il film come un "viaggio tra visioni" e "una storia dell'umanità con tutte e cinque le razze". Poi specificò che sì, anche lei era d'accordo che "il mondo oggi non è occidentale". Altri spettatori notarono che il film ha "un soggetto senza confini, ma è particolarmente situato nel colore", e fecero delle osservazioni su quanto fosse riconoscibile lo sfondo californiano del film, per il paesaggio e le attività artistiche. Come disse uno di loro, "sono stato lì e conosco il posto, e tuttavia…quasi non lo riconosco. Sembra bellissimo, ma è come se non l'avessi mai visto prima."

Di sicuro non è semplicemente un caso che gli interpreti siano così diversi. Gli attori selezionati per interpretare i personaggi principali sono: una cinese americana per Kyra (Yuan Li-chi); una coreana americana per Nabi (Denice Lee); un'ebrea americana per Shin (Joshua Miller); un irlandese

per uno dei cantastorie sul treno (Howard Dillon); un africano americano per l'altro cantastorie (Vernon Bush), così come per il tamburino e lo scienziato nero (Sherman Kennedy e Yesufu Shangoshola); un chicano per il saggio di strada (Luis Saguar); un francese per il flautista suo compagno (Viviane Lemaigre Dubreuil); un giapponese per il padre di Nabi (Atsushi Kanbayashi, che è il padre del direttore artistico Brent Kanbayashi); e l'elenco continua. Nel mettere insieme gli interpreti e la squadra, così come nel realizzare il film, la diversità è stata certamente un importante criterio di selezione, ma non era fine a se stessa. Sebbene le differenze di genere, sesso e razza siano facilmente riconoscibili a occhi e orecchie, la loro visibilità viene spesso utilizzata per eliminare tutte le differenze disturbanti; così dar loro un volto fisso e familiare vuol dire trasformarle in beni di consumo.

Denice Lee in *Night Passage.* Courtesy of the author.

Trovo infinitamente più stimolante lavorare sulla molteplicità, partire da essa. Non utilizzo qui questo termine come equivalente di pluralismo liberale, né voglio che venga confuso con il multiculturalismo deriso dai principali media. Nel normalizzare la diversità, il multiculturalismo finge di non vedere le differenze di colore e, allo stesso tempo, crea divisioni nette. La sua blanda logica di mescolamento razziale nega il razzismo e il sessismo che, invece, restano essenziali per il biopotere e la biopolitica. Poiché il film si caratterizza per le transizioni da uno stato all'altro, il nucleo centrale d'interesse si situa nell'interazione tra gli attraversamenti. Invece di essere trattata semplicemente come conflitto, in *Night Passage* la diversità deriva dall'arte di creare spazi ed è creativamente trans-culturale. *Trans-* non rappresenta solo un movimento tra entità separate e frontiere immobili, ma il viaggio come luogo reale di residenza (e viceversa), e la partenza come un modo di tornare a casa – verso il proprio io più intimo. La diversità culturale non è solo un'accumulazione o una giustapposizione di varie culture che mantengono fissi i propri confini. Gli attraversamenti richiesti nel transculturale minano le idee rigide di identità e confine, mettendo in questione la 'cultura' nella sua specifica costruzione e forma.

Come dice un personaggio del film: "*La vita è una rete, fatta di molte strade. Strade di terra, strade asfaltate, strade virtuali. A volte procedi diritto; altre volte giri e rigiri in tondo… è da pazzi ma non c'è niente da fare. Qualche volta ci si trova ad un incrocio. E poi?"* Bene, o ti blocchi o rischi e *"vai con il vento – dove la strada è viva"*, dice Nabi a Kyra, raccomandandole di seguire la propria voce interiore.[7] Gli incroci sono i luoghi in cui si situano le dinamiche del film. Sono centri vuoti dove un numero infinito di strade può convergere e ripartire verso nuove direzioni. Inter-, multi-, post- e trans-: prefissi che caratterizzano i nostri tempi. Definiscono il prima, il poi, il mentre e il 'tra' della coscienza etica e sociale. Ognuno ha una storia e un momento preciso di apparizione, s-parizione e ri-apparizione. Anche se hanno le proprie specificità, sono tutti legati come trans-eventi.

[7] Dalla sceneggiatura di *Night Passage*

Attraversare il tempo

Alle 12 mi ritrovai in acque minacciose: affogavo. Non in mare, ma nelle profondità cloriche della piscina di una caserma dei pompieri. Mio fratello mi tirò fuori giusto in tempo. Da allora ho dovuto convivere con il trauma di una discesa liquida. A volte l'esperienza di affogare riaffiora dal nulla e l'incontro con la morte in acqua si ripete con fattezze diverse. Mai per due volte la stessa, eppure sempre *Lei*. Passando da un incubo all'altro, imparo pian piano a tirami fuori in tempo, a svegliarmi proprio quando sto per essere ingoiata da un muro d'acqua – di solito un'onda enorme. Come per magia, a volte non muoio, ma mi rialzo ridendo nella cascata e aspetto che l'inondazione si stabilizzi. Come vapore sull'acqua del mare, la paura svanisce. Mi sveglio e, nell'oscurità luminosa, mi sento leggera.[8] L'incubo è diventato un sogno.

[8] [Si gioca qui sulla polisemia della parola *light*, che significa sia 'luce' che 'leggera'; l'originale *feeling light* potrebbe dunque essere tradotto anche con 'sento la luce', che si inserisce coerentemente nel campo semantico dell'intera frase. N.d.T.]

Un passaggio coinvolge sia il tempo che la temporalità. Il cinema digitale o *D-cinema*, come è chiamato dalla comunità *hi-tech*, è arrivato proprio al momento giusto. Questa tecnologia sembra molto compatibile con lo spirito creativo di Miyazawa: è capace di catturare il suo mondo poetico di creature e eventi, allo stesso tempo eccentrico, eppure così noioso e ordinario. A causa delle potenzialità e dell'impatto senza precedenti di questa nuova tecnologia sulla cultura cinematografica, il racconto sfuggente della morte può tradursi in una nuova prospettiva di vita. L'ignoto, come il fantastico, non è mai semplicemente lì fuori; è sempre già qui, lì (nell'immagine ordinaria e leggibile) dove non si vuol guardare con "gli occhi ben chiusi".[9]

[9] [Il corsivo presente nell'originale eyes *wide* shut suggerisce un riferimento all'omonima opera di Stanley Kubrick del 1999. N.d.T.]

Già nel nostro film precedente, *A Tale of Love* (35 mm, 108 min., 1996, diretto da Trinh T. Minh-ha e Jean-Paul Bourdier), un personaggio nota che, nel regno della fotografia e della rappresentazione, è impossibile rendere l'*Amore* e la *Morte*. Le storie d'amore sono spesso realizzate senza amore, e mostrare un'immagine della morte vuol dire mostrare il tempo

che passa. Non importa quanto si possa essere creativi, catturare ambedue sullo schermo è assolutamente impossibile. Il meglio che si può fare è girarci intorno senza cadere nei cliché offerti in abbondanza dai media, con il loro repertorio di immagini preconfezionate. Mettere in discussione il nostro consumo di tali immagini vuol dire toccare il nucleo dell'intero sistema del cinema narrativo, che determina la vendita e l'acquisto di storie di vita e di morte.

Come nel racconto di Miyazawa, il viaggio ritratto in *Night Passage* avviene in una cornice che è insieme temporale e a-temporale. Una volta chiamati, gli "uccelli migratori", che siamo noi, dovrebbero andare perché "è via libera". Il tempo si afferma come un elemento cruciale sia nella realizzazione che nella visione del film. Ma se un film finisce sempre in un tempo determinato, il suo svolgersi può estendere in modo indefinito il nostro senso del tempo. Il finale, invece di essere una chiusura netta, può portare a una nuova apertura. Così in *Night Passage* il passare del tempo si manifesta in maniera concreta nell'esperienza dello spettatore; andate e ritorni si intrecciano tra loro, l'avvento della morte implica un ritorno in vita e l'immobilità si ritrova in ogni movimento. Non c'è opposizione tra tempo e atemporalità. Il viaggio notturno in treno, l'ultimo viaggio intrapreso insieme dalle due amiche, apre per me il seguente interrogativo: cosa accade nel momento tra la vita e la morte? Come si trascorrerebbe questo intervallo di tempo con la propria migliore amica – quel *flash* di due ore appena prima che una sparisca dalla vita dell'altra?

La nave e il treno della morte

L'ultimo atto è un atto creativo, poiché come dice un personaggio del film: "*Ognuno di noi è Nabi. Tutti quelli che incontri sono persone con cui hai danzato o viaggiato in treno diverse volte. Dove termina il percorso, inizia il romanzo*".[10] Colpiti dal processo spirituale e dal gioco complesso di luci e colori nel film, alcuni spettatori attenti hanno dato un nome a questo passaggio, legandolo al *bardo* o all'essere 'tra' nell'arte tibetana di morire.[11] Come ben sanno i tibetani praticanti, il tempo dell'intervallo, cioè la transizione dalla morte alla rinascita, è il momento giusto per influenzare positivamente l'evoluzione del karma. In modo ineluttabile, la morte fa sparire ogni cosa nella sua forte stretta – soprattutto ciò che tratteniamo come materia solida da svegli, nel mondo dei cinque sensi. Resta, e può sopravvivere, ciò che non possiamo toccare. Accade lo stesso anche per il cinema e l'arte di creare immagini con la luce. La vita sullo schermo, come la vita nel corpo, non ha alcun referente concreto, né sostanza durevole o essenza fissa, e pertanto può essere esposta per come è nel corso del film.

Night Passage inizia con quella che, a prima vista, può sembrare al pubblico la ripresa del passaggio di un treno, in cui i viaggiatori appaiono,

[10] Dalla sceneggiatura di *Night Passage*

[11] [Il bardo, meglio conosciuto come *Bardo Thodol*, è il libro tibetano dell'*ars moriendi*. N.d.T.]

scompaiono e ri-appaiono senza alcuna apparente continuità, tranne quella delle immagini stesse. Il lento avvicinamento della telecamera rende più chiaro agli spettatori che non si tratta di immagini "naturali" del passaggio di un treno, ma del collage di una serie ripetuta di immagini sui finestrini, riprese dall'esterno e ri-animate per produrre il movimento di un treno che attraversa lo schermo. Sin dal principio il film non nasconde la propria costruzione estetica e strutturale. La sequenza iniziale non solo contiene l'essenza e il ritmo del viaggio digitale, ma si riferisce anche al movimento dentro e fuori dal treno e *tra* il viaggiatore e lo spettatore. Esiste comunque una relazione riflessiva e performativa tra le immagini del treno all'interno dello spazio della storia e il treno di immagini, che si muovono attraverso lo schermo in modo lineare e in sequenze finite. Viene quindi evidenziata l'infinita zona d'ombra in cui il doppio treno si apre.

In questo passaggio digitale che si svolge alla velocità della luce, la morte non è solo parte della vita ma è sempre il punto zero dal quale emerge la vita. Il mortale e l'immortale si incontrano sulla tela lucente e le realtà si fondono tra loro all'infinito. "Sei apparso dal nulla…Chi sei?" "Dove siamo?" "Da dove sei arrivato?" "Dove andiamo?" "Sai dove ci stanno portando?" Queste sono alcune domande ricorrenti che scandiscono lo spazio della narrazione in *Night Passage*. Sono le stesse domande che, durante lo svolgimento del film, ci si può aspettare dagli spettatori, per i quali "il semplice andare" non ha senso. Conformemente alla concezione normativa del cinema in cui tutte le azioni convergono su una storia centrale, alcuni di noi si bloccano facilmente se non sanno prima dove si va e perché…

Nel muoversi ci si trova costantemente in uno stato di transizione. Allo stesso modo, l'immagine del video digitale è un'immagine in formazione costante. Mentre affiora e svanisce in un meccanismo di scansione, si trasforma in un'immagine sempre diversa. Nel montaggio dei miei film precedenti, il taglio è sempre netto; si manifesta chiaramente nella propria natura di interruzione e può anche urtare gli spettatori per la rottura radicale che porta (come accade per i numerosi salti temporali derivanti dai tagli in *Reassemblage* e *Naked Spaces*). In *Night Passage* le scelte e i vincoli del processo creativo sono estremamente diversi. Poiché la tecnologia digitale lo permette, l'immagine è modificata in modo da esprimere uno sguardo doppio: lo sguardo filmico per le scene e quello del video per i momenti di transizione. Il viaggio emerge soprattutto come l'esperienza di un passaggio; pertanto grande attenzione è data al 'tempo del tra' e agli 'incroci' – cioè alle trasformazioni e alle transizioni come dimensioni spazio-temporali indipendenti. Così invece del taglio, ho scelto le *dissolvenze* (e le *dissolvenze incrociate*) come principio estetico per le transizioni. Proprio negli intervalli che uniscono le scene, i luoghi e gli incontri prevale la magia tecnologica del video.

Il tempo dell'esperienza filmica è allo stesso tempo esplicitamente lineare nella successione frontale di immagini bidimensionali, e non lineare nella disposizione eterogenea di eventi e spazi dell'azione. Mentre nel racconto di Miyazawa il viaggio in treno porta al Paradiso e al suo Fiume d'Argento (termine giapponese per la Via Lattea), in *Night Passage* le due giovani donne non salgono al cielo, ma si addentrano nella notte e incontrano i propri sogni terreni. L'interesse si concentra di più sul fiume e sulla testimonianza del viaggio verso la morte – in questo caso la morte di Nabi per annegamento. Quando le due giovani donne scendono dal treno per incamminarsi nell'oscurità, gli altri mezzi di transito su cui salgono sono una barca e la nave. Proprio all'interno della barca, nelle pieghe d'acqua, oppure fuori, accanto al fiume, le donne entrano nel mondo della follia e della morte. Lì guardano come osservatrici-osservate, o spettatrici-testimoni, la danza misteriosa dell'acqua e del fuoco – la danza della morte di Nabi.

Nell'esecuzione e nella coreografia, la danza costituisce un ulteriore esempio di transculturale. L'immagine singolare che emerge dal passaggio tra le tradizioni orientali e occidentali è una linea di fuoco che diventa una lucente calligrafia. Nelle scritte di luce nel cielo notturno, riesco a vedere, vicino, lontano e tra loro, la luminosità blu di Miyazawa. Per lui la morte è un passaggio da uno stato a un altro. Per venire a patti con la morte della sorella, l'ha seguita in questo passaggio. Ha attraversato il confine tra terra e acqua e, un anno dopo che lei era andata via, si è imbarcato per Sakhalin. Gli spettatori procedono lungo il fiume di *Night Passage* senza sapere esattamente dove conduca e trovano l'energia luminosa di corpi in *performance*. Il fuoco, la luce. La canzone dice che, anche una volta estinto, il fuoco non muore completamente, ma entra in un altro stato e continua a bruciare. Tra le fonti del racconto che hanno infiammato l'immaginazione di Miyazawa ci sono storie ambientate in India, nel luogo di nascita del Buddha Shakyamuni. Per esempio, un racconto intitolato *A Stem of Lilies* comincia con righe da leggere in luoghi sconfinati, con gli occhi *ben* chiusi: " 'Dicono che domattina alle sette il Buddha attraverserà il fiume Himukya e entrerà in città.' Come sarà il volto del Buddha – si chiedevano – e di quale colore saranno i suoi occhi? Avrà, così come si dice, gli occhi blu, scuri come i petali di loto?"[12]

"Il mondo oggi non è occidentale" (E. Adnan). L'affermazione della poeta-pittrice continua a risuonare con forza. Poiché per gli uccelli migratori, quali siamo, è difficile accettare quando è o non è il momento di andare, non sembra che siamo capaci di risolvere il problema della fine, di ciò che consideriamo, con occhi *ben* aperti, il tempismo sbagliato della morte. Desideriamo l'immortalità e la resurrezione senza alcun impegno spirituale. Con l'assistenza della tecnologia recente, vogliamo decidere quale sia il momento opportuno per la fine e raggiungere immediatamente l'immortalità. L'interrogativo che resta, tuttavia, è se i nostri corpi debbano

[12] In Kenji Miyazawa, *Once and Forever*, tradotto da J. Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1993, ristampa 1997), p. 109. [Trad. mia, N.d.T.]

resuscitare con il vecchio occhio imperfetto, anche se questo porta noi creatori alla paura di realizzare qualcosa che nessuno riesce a vedere, così come limita ciò che creiamo a quello che tutti possono vedere.

Nel cinema, questo significa attenersi al sistema normativo del "cinema predatore" (Raoul Ruiz) in cui non solo tutte le storie si muovono attraverso azioni e conflitti, ma tutti i conflitti vengono ridotti e assoggettati a un unico conflitto centrale. La pratica cinematografica vede il mondo come un'enorme zona di guerra. I rapporti personali non sono altro che la somma di continue ostilità che richiedono a tutti i partecipanti di prendere posizione ("O sei con noi o contro di noi"). Nell'ottica del conflitto principale vengono elaborate visioni del mondo discordanti, e i vari conflitti vengono inglobati nello scontro spettacolare che interessa la nazione occidentale più potente. La globalizzazione del sistema, nelle sue connotazioni economiche e politiche, rende ancora più essenziale la domanda: quale occhio?[13]

Ciò che dà vita all'immagine muore nell'immagine. Se la morte è inopportuna, allora sembra che si possa solo essere inopportuni e fuori tempo. Si potrebbe dire che, nel vivere il presente, si è sempre un po' più avanti o un po' indietro. Nel mondo contemporaneo in cui il terrore si scontra con il terrore e la globalizzazione combatte la globalizzazione, è importante rilevare che il cinema digitale può rivelarsi come un modo intimo di rivolgerci alla nostra mortalità, e i film come una possibilità di intraprendere l'in-certa strada della libertà.

Traduzione di **Alessandra Marino**

[13] [In inglese la parola 'occhio' *eye* è omofona del pronome personale 'io' *I*. La domanda dell'autrice, così formulata, interroga il lettore allo stesso tempo su quale sia il punto di vista dello sguardo cinematografico e il soggetto *I* del mondo globalizzato. N.d.T.]

Serena Guarracino

The Frenzy of the Audible: Voice, Image, and the Quest for Representation

Silence here resonates differently.
(Trinh T. Minh-ha)

A mouth opens, a voice flows out to embrace the audience – inside and outside the screen, this sound both effaces and supports the image, seducing the spectator to the realm of the aural while giving consistency and texture to the cinematic, two-dimensional image. But where does this voice come from? Does it come from the open mouth I see on the screen? And what if I see no mouth at all? Indeed, the loudspeakers give away the illusion that this voice may be bound to the body on the screen without any residue, any trace left by the machine creating the cinematic illusion of unity between image and sound. And still this technology guarantees an 'authentic' representation of reality through the 'suture' of sight and sound, achieving what Kaja Silverman calls the "representation of a homogeneous thinking subject whose exteriority is congruent with its interiority".[1]

Yet Del Villano, who quotes Silverman in relation to the scene at the Club Silencio from David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, underlines how cinema may make use of this device to undermine the very technology of identity it is supposed to guarantee. Following this and other cues coming from contributions in this volume, this essay pursues the voice of cinema, a voice that may authorize as well as question accepted notions of identity and authenticity. Cinema technology allows for a complete separation of the voice from the body that originates it, with both disruptive and creative consequences. Yet, while feature films suture image and voice to create a unitary body for its characters and stories, in documentary film the audience is led by a voice apparently coming from outside the frame, sutured to no body at all. Paradoxically, though, this disembodied voice-over also works as narrative device to give continuity and consequence to the 'documenting' image, supporting its reality effect through a strictly unrealistic apparatus – a bodiless voice, both literally and metaphorically 'giving voice' to the Other, the foreign, non-Western subject of documentary filmmaking.

This essay takes heed of different voices from film criticism (considered as criticism of mainly Western feature cinema) and documentary filmmaking, where the voice is discussed in its narrative and technical function. Following their trail, it endeavours to listen to cinema, rather than watch it, straining to hear the mechanism that makes this social and cultural technology work. It strives to hear the machine that gives voice and texture to the *emotion* of motion pictures, seeping from the screen through the

[1] Kaja Silverman, "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice", *Re-Vision. Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 132-133 (see Del Villano's essay, this issue, 155).

sound system right into the audience's ears.[2] At the same time this voice can taint the representation of the 'real' with the uncanny voice of the machine, as in the work of experimental film- and documentary-makers from Lynch to David Cronenberg, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Chris Marker, plunging deeper and deeper into the displacing qualities of the voice of cinema.

The acousmatic voice

In his seminal essay "Machines of the Visible", Jean-Louis Comolli identified the 'frenzy of the visible' as a fundamental feature of cinematic societies. Here he conflates social with film technology, relating these representations of 'the real' to the constant need of a society to represent itself. Hence the 'cinema machine' is not only the technology that makes it possible to realize the moving image; in order to perform its emotional impact, it has to be supplemented by a cultural *dispositif* that allows the technological product to acquire social and cultural relevance.[3] Comolli also conflates 'visible' with 'appropriatable', as the nineteenth century frenzy of the visible partakes of the social technology of colonization, shaping the world outside into an object that can, with some effort, be made transparent, known and hence possessed. Since Comolli, this stress on the act of looking and its ethical implications has become part of Western cinema criticism, especially through a psychoanalytic approach that makes use of Lacanian notions of 'look' and 'gaze'.[4] The eye/I that cinema borrowed from Renaissance perspective supports the central role of the image in filmic representations, eclipsing the role of sound in filmic representations of reality.

Sound here is inextricably bound to the moving image because of course, as the entry "Soundtrack" in Routledge's Key Concept series on cinema studies reads, "we pretend, accept that [sound] comes straight from the screen; if it is not in synch we notice it and do not particularly like this instance of sound drawing attention to itself and pointing to the fact that what we are seeing up on screen is an illusion".[5] Still, what we see on the screen *is* an illusion – a representation of reality through technological means. Cinema, in this sense, is a speaking machine much as eighteenth-century automata, of which Mladen Dolar writes that "there is an uncanniness in the gap which enables a machine, by purely mechanical means, to produce something so uniquely human as voice and speech".[6] Cinematic sound then, and the human voice in particular, shows a sort of uncanniness: as with Hoffmann's singing doll Olympia, to discover that the source of the voice is not a human body but a technological apparatus, a machine, may have disastrous consequences.

[2] See Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), on "*E*motion picture". Although Bruno's work, with its focus on cinema and mapping, is almost exclusively concerned with the visual dimension, her interdisciplinary terminology and methodology may be usefully applied to other ways of watching/listening to/feeling cinema, including my own.

[3] See Jean-Louis Comolli "Machines of the Visible", in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1980), 121 and ff.

[4] For an example on the use of these categories also outside feature film criticism, see Nisco's essay, this issue.

[5] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts (Routledge Key Guides)* (London: Routledge, 2006), 361.

[6] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2006,), 7-8.

Actually, Freud's reading of Hoffmann's tale "The Sandman" (in his well-known essay on "The Uncanny"), devotes little attention to the automaton doll, dismissing the hypothesis that she/it may be the primary source of the uncanniness of the tale itself, and centring his reading on the three male characters.[7] On the contrary, and rather interestingly for the centrality of the voice in my argument, it is Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881) that exploits Olympia's uncanny rendition of femininity as "phantasmatic technology", as Nadia Setti recently argued.[8] The problem with Olympia's voice is that one cannot trace it back to a human body (let alone a *female* body), while at the same time it is impossible to reduce her voice to the realm of the non-human. Olympia's voice *is* a voice in the emotional effect it has on Nathaniel, who falls in love with it; on the other side, it is the *representation* of a voice is the sense that it *reproduces* a human voice, but does not find its origin in a body of flesh and blood. This being on the borderline between human and machine, reality and representation, marks the uncanniness that Michel Chion, in his *La voix au cinema*, attributes to the "acousmatic voice". Technically, the acousmatic voice is the voice whose source remains hidden to the spectator; psychoanalytically, in Chion's reading, it represents the mother's voice, the voice whose body is forever out of reach.[9]

In much the same way, Guy Rosolato speaks about the maternal voice as "the first model of auditory pleasure", that of being enveloped in "a sonorous womb, a murmuring house" – a sort of ancestral cinema.[10] Silverman, who refers to both Rosolato and Chion in her *Acoustic Mirror*, best explores the implications of this relationship between the voice and the mother's body for cinematic representations:

> in its phantasmatic guise as "pure" sonorousness, the maternal voice oscillates between two poles; it is either cherished as an *objet (a)* – as what can make good all lacks – or despised and jettisoned as what is most abject, most culturally intolerable – as the forced representative of everything within male subjectivity which is incompatible with the phallic function, and which threatens to expose discursive mastery as an impossible ideal.[11]

The exposure of the master discourse of cinema as ideal or, worse (as in Olympia's case) simply as 'not real', is embodied in the very disjunction between voice and image. In this dichotomic imagery, the voice inevitably conjures up the feminine as what counters phallogocentric strategies of representation. Cinema fascination with the visual aspect of performance may be associated, as Luce Irigaray insists, with phallogocentric culture: here, as she puts it, "the privilege of unity, form of the self, of the visible, of the spectacularisable, of the erection" has a pervasive influence.[12] On the other hand, the centrality of feminist theory for any discussion of voice and cinema is so explicitly made by Silverman that there is no point

[7] See Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

[8] "Writing the Body", lecture held at the University "Roma Tre" during the conference *corpo/grafie* (December 14, 2007; unpublished paper).

[9] Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1982); for this and further references see Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 61-71.

[10] Guy Rosolato, "La voix: entre corps et langage", *Revue française de psychanalyse* 37.1 (1974), 8; English trans. in Kaja Silvermann, *The Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 84-85.

[11] Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 86.

[12] Luce Irigaray, "Woman's Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray", trans. Couze Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 (1977), 64. For a discussion of phallologocentrism in Irigaray's sense as used in cinema see Silvermann, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 141 ff.

in further repeating it here. Dolar also devotes many pages to the disruptive qualities of the feminine voice whose main goal is not language, but rather "the voice beyond sense".[13]

It must be clear, at this point, that any discourse about the voice in cinema must necessarily be a *gendered* discourse; still, this does not mean that any discourse about the voice in cinema has to be a discourse *about gender*, in the sense of a discourse that puts a gendered body at its missing centre. In cinema gender attributions may be troubled by the absence of the body, by the cuts that paste any voice over any body, sometimes in blatant contradiction with the gendered body we see. If, as Dolar writes about Chion's argument, "the acousmatic voice proper is the one which we cannot locate, and its paradigm is the mother's voice in *Psycho*",[14] it must be noted that neither Dolar nor Silverman, whose reading of Chion I am following here, note that the mother's voice in *Psycho* is actually a man's voice – i.e., although it clearly *sounds* like a woman's voice, the disembodied voice of the mother is visually sutured to Norman Bates' body as well as, more generally, referring back to Hitchcock's own voice as dystopian director and *deus ex machina*. The 'gender trouble' here is due not necessarily to the Butlerian 'drag' that this voice performs: there is another body that comes into play in cinema – the body of the machine, biologically ungendered but not exempt from gender attributions.[15]

As Barbara Engh notes in relation to another *dispositif* for vocal reproduction, the gramophone, "feminist psychoanalytic criticism is itself ill-equipped to encounter this other reproductive body – not of the mother but of the phonograph, productive of another uncanniness – without subsuming it into the binary paradigm of gender".[16] Again as with Olympia, femininity here works as one signifier among others, capitalizing cultural investment on Woman as Other to project it onto other bodies – fleshy or otherwise. In this process, the ethical responsibility of cinematic representations of reality suddenly emerge; in their overview of the intersections between cinema and deconstruction, Brunette and Wills write:

> …one can no longer doubt that at least partly because of the work of 'realistic' Hollywood films, which inculcate a certain predetermined reality in the spectator and which create that spectator as subject, the world is seen as natural rather than constructed and therefore as beyond the reach of political change.[17]

Not all directors mentioned in this volume take an avowedly political stance; nonetheless, their work actively undermines the reality effect of cinematic representation, hence rewriting the staple material of filmmaking to make the audience face the constructed quality of what we are watching. The presenter's claim at David Lynch's Club Silencio that the performance of 'La Llorona del Los Angeles' is "all a tape-recording", unveiling the suture between 'female' body image and voice, echoes the end of David

[13] Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 43.

[14] Ibid., 66.

[15] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

[16] Barbara Engh, "Adorno and the Sirens: Tele-phonographic Bodies" in Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices. Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), 130.

[17] Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play. Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 17.

Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* (1994), where the tape-recording of an aria from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* pastes the myth of the 'Oriental woman' from John Lone's *en travesti* performance over to Jeremy Iron's ostensibly white male body.[18]

De-lubricating the fit

Both Lynch's *latina* and Cronenberg's Oriental woman mark the place where femininity overlaps with ethnic and cultural difference in its role as constructed 'others' to the Western cinematic gaze. Both expose the self-conscious artificiality of public fantasies of identity and otherness of such a popular cultural form as cinema. The bodiless voice of cinema may disrupt the filmic reality-effect, revealing the constructed nature of its narratives; it shows the breaks in the visual, in the montage of images that make up the story, and so in the story itself. At the same time, though, these voices seduce the audience into the film's narrative through the power of these stories which, in Teresa de Lauretis's words, are "*deeply felt and experienced*, and yet they are *fictional* representations".[19] The voice lubricates the suture between reality and representation, making them fit.

At least, this is the role of the acousmatic voice of the mother in Silverman's reading of Rosolato's theory of the 'acoustic mirror'. Rosolato argues that, in opposition to the eye/I articulating the identity of body and mirror image in Lacan's mirror stage, "the voice [has the property] of being at the same time emitted and heard, sent and received, and by the subject himself, as if, in comparison with the look, an 'acoustic' mirror were always in effect".[20] The voice, both inside and outside the body, puts into operation dynamics of identification that differ from and supplement those of the Lacanian gaze. Yet, according to Silverman, this voice works in concert with patriarchy, compensating for the fragmentation of the mirror image by the eye: "within the traditional familial paradigm, the maternal voice introduces the child to its mirror reflection, 'lubricating', as it were, 'the fit'".[21] So the mother's voice speaks for the still voiceless subject, 'subjecting' it to socially acceptable ways to identity.

The limits of such psychoanalytic criticism may easily be perceived in its own appeal to universality, where 'mother' and 'child' are universal categories with no need for contextualization. Yet, these self-same categories may migrate to an elsewhere of cinema and criticism, exposing the strategies that authorize the representation of the real in another, maybe not so different context, that of documentary filmmaking. Here too, as Trinh Minh-ha writes, "to many scientifically oriented film-makers, seeing ironically continues to be believing";[22] yet, Trinh also underlines how, to

[18] Rey Chow underlines how, in this scene, "played on a cassette, music has … become a portable object": "The Dream of A Butterfly", in *Ethics after Idealism. Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 91. For an in-depth analysis of this point in Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* see my "Sonic Drags: Fe-Male Impersonators in *Farinelli* and *M. Butterfly*", *ecloga* n. 6.2007, http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/englishstudies/ecloga.

[19] Teresa de Lauretis, "Popular Culture: Public and Private Fantasies: Femininity and Fetishism in David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly*", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24.2 (1999), 304.

[20] Rosolato, "La voix", 79; Engl. trans. in Silvermann, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 80.

[21] Silvermann, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 80.

[22] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Outside In Inside Out", in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI, [1989] 1991), 134.

make seeing and believing 'fit', a voice must necessarily come into play, both technically and metaphorically:

> Factual authenticity relies heavily on the Other's words and testimony…. [H]ence, for example, the prominence of the string-of-interviews style and the talking-heads, oral-witnessing strategy in documentary film practice. This is often called 'giving voice', even though these 'given' voices never truly form the Voice of the film.[23]

[23] Ibid.

Trinh here makes a subtle but radical distinction between the 'voices' of native informants that punctuate documentary filmmaking, and the Voice – the continuous voice-over that makes sense of documentary montage. Writing about Cavalcanti's documentary *Coal Face* (1935), Marina Vitale pairs eye and voice in the representation of what she defines "an 'imagined community' held together by links of mutual recognition of the vital role each local community or social section played inside the overall body of the Nation and the Empire".[24] While the all-seeing eye pretended invisibility and non-interference, the voice guarantees the reality of what is shown, of the tale that is told, and the consequent dynamics of identity: "the voice-over is impassive, impersonal, professional. It is the voice of science. It knows the truth, all the Truth". It is an acousmatic voice that requires identification, a sort of collective acoustic mirror leading the audience to accept the truth of what is 'documented'.

[24] See Vitale's essay, this issue, 46-47.

This acousmatic voice may remind one of another voice, the one Dolar defines as the "voice of the Father accompanying the Law".[25] In discussing this 'other' voice, counterpart of the uncanny mother's voice, Dolar mentions the HMV label known as "His Master's Voice", where the power of the mechanical voice is expressed in the attitude of unconditioned obedience expressed by the dog. Here Dolar, bypassing Chion's and Rosolato's arguments on the acousmatic voice as maternal voice, comments that "in an embryonic way one always listens to one's master's voice, no matter how much one opposes it afterward. There is something in the very nature of the voice which endows it with master-like authority…".[26] This voice exploits its bodiless power to invest itself with unchallengeable authority: it is the Voice called into question by Trinh, the voice that 'knows the Truth' and conveys it to the audience, smoothing the fit between documentary image and reality. Yet, what happens when cinema makes this voice undergo what Chion calls a process of 'disacousmatization', the revelation of its source or what may be otherwise call its positionality? What happens when cinema goes astray of accepted notions of representing reality, severing the suture between image and voice?

[25] Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 55

[26] Ibid., 76.

I have already mentioned some instances in which feature film directors, such as Lynch or Cronenberg, have played with the artificial nature of the voice of cinema; here, though, the suspension of disbelief shapes a narration

that, however 'realistic', does not aspire to the status of Truth (with the capital T). Documentary filmmaking, from this point of hearing (if not of view), makes a more complex case, with its investment in the truth of its representation of the 'Other'. Of course, this distinction between feature and documentary film may in the end prove somewhat preposterous; yet it is useful for the ends of this argument, as it marks the difference between Western filmmaking as a sort of acoustic mirror for the audience, and documentary as an act of negative identification through the representation of an object self-consciously represented as 'Other'. This is the place where the uncanny voice of the 'mother' and the all-powerful voice of the 'father' overlap, opening cinematic narration to the uncanny power of an-other voice. Here a different power of the voice comes to the fore, that Dolar (following Lacan) defines as "the fact that it is so hard to keep it at bay – it hits us from the inside, it pours directly into the interior, without protection. The ears have no lids, as Lacan never tires of repeating".[27]

[27] Ibid., 78.

Seeing silence

Because in the end, if the ear has no lids, neither has the mouth (even the invisible one). The vulnerability of the audience is mirrored by that of the performer who opens him/herself to the scrutiny of the audience's ears; opening up, as it were, the boundaries between external and internal, outside and inside. In these terms, as Dolar writes, the voice cannot but sound uncanny: "the call, the cry, the voice, the appeal – their proper location is *unheimlich*, with all the ambiguity that Freud has given this word: the internal externality, the expropriated intimacy, the *extimacy* – the excellent Lacanian word for the uncanny".[28] This intimacy echoes the one discussed by Trinh in the relationship between the 'outside in' and the 'inside out' of documentary filmmaking, regulated by "a form of (neo-) colonial interdependency".[29] This power relationship may be problematized by cinema technology in the exposure of the silence behind the voice.

[28] Ibid., 96.

[29] Trinh, "Outside in Inside out", 135.

There are different ways to voice this need to perform a disacousmatization of the voice of cinema. In her essay Marina Vitale notes the "whispering voice-over" that delivers the by now well-known appeal in Trinh's *Reassemblage* "not to speak about/ just speak nearby".[30] Admitting a plurality of voices in one's own discourse is imperative for postcolonial artists, and charges the voice of cinema with a different ethical responsibility. The suture cannot be definitely severed, as language itself (human language as well as the technological language of cinema) cannot be abolished; still, the suture can be exposed, manipulated, and made to weave other narratives. The voice may refuse to 'lubricate the fit' between representation and reality, making 'reality' itself a porous and unstable

[30] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Reassemblage", in *Framer Framed* (New York and London: Routledge , 1992), 96.

category. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam suggest: "the concept of voice suggests a metaphor of seepage across boundaries that, like sound in the cinema, remodels spatiality itself".[31]

A dialectic between image and sound may imply, as Isaac Julien suggests, a 're-articulation' of cinematic language, as in Derek Jarman's last, 'imageless' film *Blue* (1994), where "the non-representational image retained poetic and factual information which Jarman sonically produced with precision – documenting his eventual blindness during his battle against AIDS …, portraying the truth of his condition and indeed a part of our queer history".[32] In this rearticulated language, truth loses the capital T and gains a deeper ethical resonance. Voice can still shape the narrative of film, but its non-diegetic referentiality is exposed and made to uphold multiple significations: as in Werner Herzog's *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), where Henry Kieser's footage from beneath the Antarctic Ocean is presented by the voice-over as documenting the voyage of two astronauts exploring a foreign planet, called "the wild blue yonder". Here, though, the audience can easily recognize the 'truth' of the images, and hence give the lie to the voice telling a rather incredible story about human exploration of other planets and the consequent attempt by dispossessed aliens to silently colonize the earth. Still, the voice in the end seduces the audience into a narrative that slowly acquires its own consistency and truth – a poetic truth traceable in the resonances between this tale and the stories of colonization and dispossession that Herzog, without any explicit mention, echoes through his narration. The voice still authorises the images and the story they tell, but the story is more of a unfolding telling, and less of a stable history.

If, again, the ears have no lids, then it is not possible for history to "plug[…] its memory as one plugs one's ears", as the narrator of Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982) says.[33] Its multiple voice-over is maybe the best embodiment of Chion's deacousmatization, where the end of the process is not the pinning down of the voice to its own body (or any other, for that matter), but the multiplication of bodies and voices. Relying from the beginning on more than one means of technological reproduction, the bodiless narrator in *Sans Soleil* reads the letters of director Sandor Krasna, whose words overlap, and tries to make sense of the assorted footage the films shows. The voice has been cast as a woman's in order not to be mistaken for that of the director himself, and the relationship between the two voices, masculine and feminine, heard and not heard, is not to be known. What irremediably unsettles the narrative is the silence haunting both voices: of the masculine under the feminine we hear, of the feminine under the masculine who (supposedly) wrote the words we hear.

These silences expose the suture that makes narration possible without bridging it, so that the narration itself is broken, fragmentary, and does

[31] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism, Multiculturalism and the Media* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 214.

[32] See this issue, 64.

[33] For this and further reference to the English script of the film see Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil / Sunless*, http://www.markertext.com/sans_soleil.htm.

not 'document' anything consistent about anything, including Japan and Guinea-Bissau, the two 'other' places from which the footages are taken. This allows for the images to gain an evidence of their own, without the pressure to 'signify', while the voice weaves tale after tale, interlaced by many reciprocal echoes but refusing any definitive version of the 'truth' of what is said. In this way the seemingly exotic setting of the clips is not allowed to stay at a distance, in the safe 'elsewhere' of documentary filmmaking. On the contrary, it requires a sharing of horizons, of emotions, of affects, of memory.

The continuity of the filmic image is broken up by the insertion of sequences manipulated by digital artist Hayao Yamaneko, where a wide repertoire of images, from clashes between police and activists in 60s Japan to Krasna's own material, enters "The Zone", a place where the distortion of sound and image makes the machine visible and audible. This process exposes how, in Iain Chambers' words, "memories are indivisible from the media that record them"; the machine makes itself visible, and the voice makes it audible. So we are told that "at least they [the images] proclaim themselves to be what they are: images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality".[34]

[34] This issue, 10.

We are told these words as commentary and interpretation of the images processed through "the Zone" by Krasna himself, or better by the narrator quoting Krasna quoting Yamaneko (echoing Tarkovsky). It is this sort of endless deferral that embodies the effort not to "give voice to the Other, but lend their ears to others", as Vitale writes in this issue. The refusal to exploit the power of the acousmatic voice in order to guarantee the authenticity of representation does not deprive the voice itself of its power to weave narratives, to tell tales: on the contrary, tales multiply and interlace, words are pronounced and repeated, and in the repetition the audience is made aware of their changing meaning. This silence, "resonat[ing] differently" as Trinh writes elsewhere,[36] also leaves its mark on the film, in the black leader accompanying the opening clip, the three blonde children that according to the voice-over should be "the image of happiness". Still, Krasna writes, the voice says, I hear, "he had tried several times to link it to other images, but it never worked. He wrote me: one day I'll have to put it all alone at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader; if they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black". But what will the woman, what will the audience, what will I see? Once silence is there, once the black leader is there, I cannot but hear the black, see the silence.

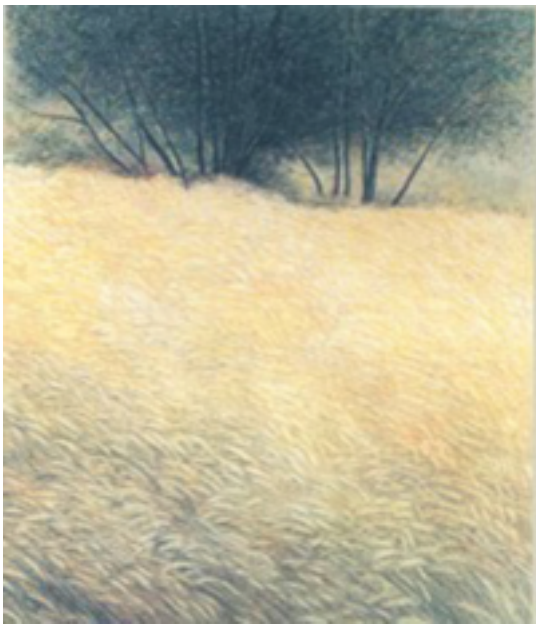
[36] Trinh T. Minh-ha (in conversation with Annamaria Morelli) "The Undone Interval", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Postcolonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizon* (London: Routledge, 1995), 8.

Silvana Carotenuto

'Absolute Mobility' in Abbas Kiarostami: From Nature to Cinema*

* All images are courtesy of Museo Nazionale del Cinema (Torino).

> … any art is a totality opened onto others, and configured with them, so to touch them.
> (Jean-Luc Nancy)



Abbas Kiarostami, oil on canvas

The Poetic 'Veil'

> I am talking about the cinema being like poetry, possessing the complicated qualities of poetry, and also having the vast potential of poetry.
> To have the capabilities of a prism.
> (Abbas Kiarostami)

The splendid haikus, written by Abbas Kiarostami as the core of his 'total art', are simple, concrete and earthly, yet able to evoke awe and wonder. Their inside is touched by a question that spares nobody, neither the poetic self nor the reader, the former constantly prone on something s/he does not comprehend, the latter exposed to the always-open-chance of 'belief':

> The more I think
> The less I understand
> The reason for all the whiteness of the snow.[1]

[1] *Walking with the Wind. Poems by Abbas Kiarostami* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 150.

I got drunk
With a drop of wine
Believe it or not.[2]

In the indefinite origin of an insecure knowledge (Kiarostami speaks of 'inadequacy' at the origin of the work of art, but also of 'tension' and 'attention'), and in view of future testimony (the necessary 'fulfilment' of creation), poetic attention turns to its only possible subject: "Because the only love that increases every day in intensity, while the others lose strength, is love for nature".[3] Natural love touches the page of poems with the everyday intensity of the animal world, woven with (images of) roosters, grasshoppers, rooks, honeybees, doves, wild geese, dogs, caws, old turtles and little birds, lizards, flies, dragonflies, worms, swallows, serpents, trouts, fire flies, jackals, eagles, owls, mosquitoes – 'thousand insects', 'thousand bats', 'thousand thoughts'.[4] Love for the vegetal world is, in its turn, knitted with (images of) falling apples, blooming gems, rhubarbs and clovers, nameless and unfamiliar flowers, and, *encore*, sunflowers, cherry blossoms, persimmons, callas, chrysanthemums, violets, jasmines. And, yet, there are the trees, so many trees: planes, pines, oaks, willows, cypresses, elms, sycamores… The colours of the flowers and the majestic stature of the trees draw signs across the sky: "Light, air, breath… an ambience of passage, the crossing and the refraction through which the image makes itself."[5] Their figures emerge through the mist, are covered in snow, dissolve among the clouds. They disappear and reappear; their un-making leaves space for a poetic 'contact' knitted by the work of an incessant spider:

Before sunrise –/ the spider/ already gone to work.
The spider/ stops/ and takes a moment's break/ to watch the sun rise.
This time/ the spider/ brings together/ the branches of the cherry and the mulberry.
The spider/ eyes its handiwork with satisfaction/ between the cherry and the mulberry tree.
The sun beams/ its first golden rays/ on the majestic mantle that is the spider's web.
Gently/ the spider/ is shooed away/ from the old nun's hat.
The spider's harvest/ of two days/ is left in ruins/ by the old housekeeper's broom.
This time/ the spider/ begins/ to weave/ on the silk drape.[6]
At the end/ the syndicate/ has not recognized/ the work of the spider.[7]

The geometrical, friable and illusory precision of the weaving of the 'objective-animal'[8] is marked, since its very beginning, by interruptions and unions, by the glory of the workers' pride, by breakings and disavowals. What thread will the tapestry of 'the singing/in the heart' be knitted of?[9] Could it be that the *veil* – the spider's 'majestic mantle'– inscribes such signs of the world (testimonial 'wounds', they are called) so as to translate

[2] Abbas Kiarostami, *Un lupo in agguato. Poesie* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 186 (my translations). Kiarostami is a 'total' artist, being involved in poetry, photography, filmmaking, painting, carpentry, children's book illustration, credit design for feature films, commercials, and many other artistic expressions.

[3] Abbas Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti, a cura di, *Kiarostami* (Milano: Electa, 2003), 58 (quotations from this text, which collages different interviews to Kiarostami in one long 'retrospective', are my trans.).

[4] Kiarostami, *Walking*, 99; 215.

[5] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami. L'evidenza del film* (Roma: Donzelli, 2004), 33 (my trans.). In the "Introduction" to their translation of *Walking with the Wind*, 6, Ahmad Karimi and Michael Beard write that Kiarostami's poetry can be compared to "flashes of lightening between stretches of darkness. We like the image … for its speed. The illumination cast by these poems manifests itself suddenly, and the subjects are in constant motion".

[6] Kiarostami, *Walking*, 42, 46, 90, 96, 97, 101, 129, 130.

[7] Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 98.

[8] Marco Vallora, "Guardare lo sguardo", in Barbera and Resegotti, 89.

[9] Kiarostami, *Walking*, 200.

its weaving into the airy indication of something else, for instance, a flight, a *vol*.[10]

> The nun/ caresses the silk fabric: would it do/ for a gown?[11]
>
> Flight/ is the prize of the silkworm/ who has woven around itself/ a silk fence.
> The wounds of thousand needles/ on a silk drape.
> On Monday morning/ the wind carries/ the veil of a student/ away from the line.[12]

A caress and a questioning, the silkworm turned into a butterfly, the diligent work of weaving, a dispersive trajectory – what matters is that the veil *volé* surfaces a geography without oppositions or dialectics: "Not east/ not west/ not north/ not south/ only this spot I am standing on now".[13] 'Here and now': could it be the insurgence of an identitary position? In truth, Kiarostami's poetic veil modulates a fragile sense of existence, the birth of an experience made of randomness, arbitrariness, unpredictability, and uncertainty. On the page, the poems inscribe the hesitancy of steps on difficult paths, the necessity of echoes, the company of shadows, the (weightless) pauses and the (aimless) journeys opening the eyes and tuning the ears into an acute attention to the surroundings. It is the random 'chance' of what they see and hear that creates the poetic strength of the space, the place where poetry can register Life (already, and always, the emergence of a 'kinetic' vision) in its mirages, its tears, the words left halfway, the appeals and the excesses:

> Forgive my sins./ Forget them - / but not so much/ that I forget them completely.[14]
>
> From my tongue/ has come/ what needn't be said/ my feet dared where they should have not gone.[15]

Photo-graphy

> "… a solitary tree is more of a tree than many trees"
> (Abbas Kiarostami)

'What needn't be said – where they should not have gone': for the poet-photographer Kiarostami, (excess of) language signifies (excess of) 'movement'. Poetry approaches the natural universe, establishes a contact, surveys Life's randomness; the image needs to absorb this poetic landscape, aiming at creating 'movement' out of the static lines of representation. It is what Kiarostami's 'graphy' does: his extraordinary photos, never taken from rigid, localizable or fixed viewpoints, are the persistent products of

[10] The 'veil' affected the destiny of Kiarostami's *Tribute to Teachers* (1977), submitted to the then education minister Ganji to be shown in the presence of the Shah on Teachers' Day. The short film was censored because of the presence of too many veiled women, provoking Kiarostami's comment: "This is the problem of our country. There was a period when the chador was forbidden by force, there was a period when it was reinforced. And nobody understands that there is a group that can do without, and a group that can do with. It is the meaning of freedom". Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 133.

[11] Kiarostami, *Walking*, 108.

[12] Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 78, 80, 102.

[13] Kiarostami, *Walking*, 227.

[14] Ibid., 237.

[15] Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 184. It is his 'pedagogical' desire: "I don't approve that the spectator is undervalued or exited. I don't want to provoke consciousness or create guilty feelings. At least, I believe that one should tell a story in such a way that he or she does not feel guilty". "Due o tre cose", in Barbera and Resegotti, 54.

the fruitful plant of his ramified imagination.[16] They originate, as before, in the desire for union with nature: "It is nature that leads me" – Kiarostami confesses – "It is nature that decides, it is nature that prepares the scene".[17] Offering their gaze to nature, the photos exist in the basic prodigy of black and white (the first experiments were colourful, framing summer fields and isolated oaks on hill slopes),[18] exposing – as if on a loom, a tambour, a frame, a canvas – the silent traces of gravity, the grace of an uncertain world, the imprint of repeated visions: scriptural images in their primal burst, 'still life' written with a vegetable alphabet, pre-historic graffiti where time is spacialised, lost, uncalculated.

The recent corpus of Kiarostami's photos can be divided into a bifocality of disjointed presences, linked by 'oneiric' condensation' or 'musical' counterpoint: "A small gem/ shouts its existence/ inside the wooden rind of a cherry".[19] There are (the photos of) the 'Trees' on the ridges of silent mountains – should we listen to the critic's uneasiness: "those trunks are too lonely … planted like dispersed cartridge in planes of snow"? It would be better to share the 'spleen' of the poet-photographer: "It is like a window that opens onto a landscape, a moment of melancholy, a lonely tree fixed through what it is in front. That tree functions as a person. You think you would never change it for all the other trees in the world. This tree promises constancy. You have a rendezvous with it. You go and the tree is there".[20]

Dispersion and constancy: just the blink of an eye, and the landscape opens onto (the photos of) the 'Roads' written on autumn scenes, followed by telegraph poles (always, the question of 'communication'!), surmounted by cloudy skies. You rarely see passers-by; the roads simply traverse barren landscapes, zigzag on the earth, draw their infinite directions – literally, with no beginning and no end. Shot from above, from below, from aside, they go up and down, sometimes parallel, other times crossing, always inscribing virtuality and potentiality: "… a road extending towards a place you don't see can open onto an unknown world".[21]

[16] Photography, considered by Kiarostami as a purer art than cinema, being relieved from the burden of narrative, originated out of the uneasiness felt at the time of his attendance of the Academy of Fine Arts, when studying painting: "I felt hopeless in front of the canvas and that hopelessness motivated me to paint even more. Maybe the discovery of the camera substituted the therapy of painting". "Al lavoro", 57.

[17] Ibid., 56.

[18] 'Snow White' and 'Roads and Trees' (both 1978-2003). See also the colour series 'Rain' (2006) and 'Trees and Crows' (2006). In the documentary 'Roads of Kiarostami' (2005), the artist notes that, both in Persian poetry and in Japanese Haiku, 'roads' serve as a metaphor to signify 'life'. See Robert Avila, "*Experience III.* Abbas Kiarostami: Image Maker", www.sf360.org (n.p.).

[19] Kiarostami, *Un lupo*, 86. In the opening of the "Conversazione tra Abbas Kiarostami e Jean-Luc Nancy", in Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 57, Persian miniature is said to often represent 'trees and sinuous paths.'

[20] Respectively, in Vallora, 92, and Nancy, 64-65.

[21] Kiarostami, "Due o tre cose", 56.

This world is mysterious, with no sound, 'without history', and, thus, on perennial 'transformation'. Its only vocation is to touch the spectator's eye with the writing of its border, the frame of single moments of passion and pain, the inscription of grace and wonder, the absolute emergence of the 'image': "The important thing is how you frame it. Everything. When I take a picture, I ask myself if I will print it or not. I usually hesitate, but I end up doing it, anyway. In the precise instant I place an instantaneous inside a frame like a pass-partout, all of a sudden it becomes more attractive, and when I look at it through the mirror frame it seems completely plausible to me. That is why I believe that the idea of framing a subject in an image is as important as the content".[22]

[22] Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 66.

Absolute Mobility

> … to *diminish*. It was not to undo, certainly, but to diminish, that is, at the time I understood nothing of this word, even more I was intrigued by it, if not in love with it, to proceed to the *diminution* of points or to reduce the stitches of a work in progress. In order to *diminish,* needles and hands had to work two stitches at once, to play more than one anyway.
> (Jacques Derrida, "A silkworm. Points of view quilted on the other veil")

> My films have been progressing towards a certain kind of minimalism, even though it was never intended. Elements which can be eliminated have been eliminated… some elements are highlighted while others are obscured or even pushed back into the dark. And it's something that we do - we bring out elements that we want to emphasise. I'm not claiming or denying that I have done such a thing but I do believe in [Robert] Bresson's method of creation through omission, not through addition.
> (Abbas Kiarostami)

The poem, the image: it is time for the gaze to be touched by Kiarostami's 'intensified cinema' - "pushed from its inside towards an essence that takes it away from representation to turn it towards presence".[23] Knitting and evidence: if the poetic veil inscribes the graphic frames of movement, it can also provide the 'screen' for the 'putting-into-motion'. From within an art Kiarostami still cannot define – if not as what appeals to the spectators, according to their singularity –, his 'abstract films' bear the signature of 'absolute mobility'. It is an indefinable cinema; still, it keeps knitting the contemporaneity of its subjects (a piece of news, the event of an earthquake, the construction of a city, a funeral) to the desire for an ethics of pedagogy, thanks to the ethical investigation of its nature as 'skin', 'pellicle', and 'illumination'.

Here and now, on the general tambour of Kiarostami's cinema, the poetic spider weaves the single fragments of a vision with those preceding and following it.[24] It is the moment when the photographic frame animates with the infinite (im)pressions exercised by the cinematic gaze on the spectator's eye (windows, mirrors, colours, volumes, views…) – what emerges is the deep and delicate justice of the image made of approach and distance, attraction and release, traction and displacement…[25]

Passion starts…

The love of facing a camera…
being in a negative way is better than not being.
(Abbas Kiarostami)

Close up is a theoretical and radical film, made 'on-the-spot' in 1989.[26] "*It is not a work of mine… It made itself, it was born by itself*"[27]: the neutrality of its making, by questioning the relationship between documentary and fiction, consists of the re-enactment of the real story of somebody who

[23] Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami,* 20.

[24] Kiarostami received international acclaim with *Close-up* (1989); he created *And Life Goes On* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1993)'; he paused on *Taste of Cherry* (1997); he seemed to leave cinema with *The Wind will Take Us Away* (2000). Among these films, from the closest to the farthest, the threads of internal connection are tight: *Close-up*, from near, and *The Wind will Take Us Away*, from the distant and forgotten Kurdistan; *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* knitted to the preceding *Where is the House of My Friend* (1987) as to create the 'Koker' trilogy, Kiarostami's majestic investigation of law and infancy. See Laura Mulvey, "Repetition and Return: the Spectator's Memory in Abbas Kiarostami's Koker Trilogy", *Third Text*, 84, vol. 21 issue 1 January 2007.

[25] "Probably in this way, Kiarostami's image is extended between the two poles of tradition in his country… the more properly Persian pole of a major figurative art, one of the most ancient in the history of Mediterranean art, and the Islamic pole where abstention from figuration is brought to a climax by its monotheistic tradition. ". Nancy, 23.

[26] It is an expression used for *Close-up* and *Homework*, Kiarostami's two films based on real events.

[27] Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 141.

cheats a Teheran family by pretending to be the famous filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The man promises them participation in a film, he is then discovered and sent to prison – his desperation, quoted in a newspaper, touches Kiarostami's attention: "'From now on I will be a piece of meat of an animal with no head, and you can make of me whatever you want'… I thought he was speaking to me, it was me the public he was referring to, and I needed to do something for him".[28] Indeed, what the director can do for the 'criminal' is to connect the judicial aspects of the Law to the 'art' of cinema, its absolute safety, the power of its desire, the transcription of its passion. From 'close up' – the instance of Law is documented in the scenes of the court and the trial; on its *côté*, the cinematic 'dispositif' focuses on the man's unconscious by investigating his motivations and pains:

[28] Ibid.

> It is the task and the responsibility of art to look at things from close-up, paying attention to humanity and learning not to judge too quickly. In this occasion ethics determines aesthetics: the law looks in the large field, while art uses the close-up. That's the reason why I entitled the film *Close-up*.[29]

[29] Ibid., 176.

In the prison, the hidden camera frames Sabstian's love for cinema, his dream of becoming a director, the hope that his suffering will turn into a 'film'.[30] The film that '*Close-up*' is: the court, the trial, the hall, the judge, the different versions of the crime, the fake project of the film, forgiveness, liberation… at the end of the 'film', a motorcycle carries the criminal and his idol, the real Mohsen Makhmalbaf, away from the scene. You don't hear what they say; the sound band is damaged; what you see is that, on the door of the cheated family, peace is re-established...

[30] The filmmaker confesses that "In *Close-up*, I am the impostor". "Al lavoro", 129.

Continuation/Concentration

> When the earth will have experienced a violent trembling;
> when it will have expelled its burdens from its bosom,
> man will say: "What may this mean?"
> On that day, earth will tell what it knows.
> (*Evidence* and *The Earthquake*
> Suras 98 and 99 of the Qur'an)

It is a very fragile peace, that which gives way to the catastrophic event par excellence: the earthquake, which destroyed Northern Iran in 1990, the same area where *Where Is the Friend's House?* was shot.[31] 'Have the two children playing in the earlier film, survived?' is the question that echoes throughout *And Life Goes On* (or *Life and Nothing More*), the film-reportage, the fiction of a documentary (filmed six months after the disaster) which proves to be a faithful testimony by refusing to let us know if,

[31] *Where is the Friend's House* (1986) is the first work by Kiarostami to receive international acclaim, awarded with the Bronze Leopard at Locarno Film Festival in 1989.

among the twenty thousand children who died, there are also the two little actors – no 'sentimentalism' or 'happy ending'. What we know, instead, is that the earthquake has made tabula rasa of a world: from its emptiness, another world starts to gaze around, touched by the need for survival offered by reality: "the desire of the inhabitants to survive… an extraordinary instinct for life, their enthusiasm to carry on living."[32]

Kiarostami witnesses the instinct for the 'continuation' of life by means of the 'continuation' of his cinematographic pellicle. His camera is strapped onto a car, one among the many – the film opens with a myriad of emergency cars blocked at busy junctions.[33] The camera glues, through its eye, our gaze to the movements of the figures inside the car: a father-driver, in search of the two little actors, and his son who, thanks to the openness constituted by childhood, is able to survey the absolute transformation of the world around him: "In a more rational way compared to the father, he accepted the illogicality and instability of the earthquake, he played with a grasshopper, he was thirsty for life."[34] Life-thirst is not given as a story; it is differently shown in the very action of opening up lines of escape out of the ruins, in the return of vital effort, in the dignity of the survivors, the sun that warms the skin, the natural presence of the mountains opposing the human disaster, the instinct for life.

Outside the tunnel, that opens up the vastness of the catastrophe before our eyes, in a world populated by walkers desperately searching for a path among the ruins, the father and his son, not wanting to obstruct the emergency work, take a side alley. Along the drive, they stop to inquire about the little actors. The memories of the earlier film come back through the voices of its actors: still, nobody knows what the fate of the two children has been. Indeed, knowledge is provided by its reflection in the frame of the car-mirror, in the square of its window, Kiarostami's invitation to the concentration of the gaze: "The fact of delimiting an object, by excluding everything else, emphasizes its beauty".[35]

[32] Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 129.

[33] "My car's my best friend. My office. My home. My location. I have a very intimate sense when I am in a car with someone next to me. We are in the most comfortable position because we don't face each other, but sit side by side. We don't look at each other; we do so only when we want to. We are allowed to look around without being rude. There is a big screen in front of us, and the side views.... the most important thing is that the car transports us from one place to another." Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 184.

[34] Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 180.

[35] Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 67.

Concentration, movement, and future: the car reaches a tent camp where the child, impatient to leave the 'ball-car', decides to stay, while his father continues for Koker. On the way, his car breaks down; by a miracle, it

starts again; it overcomes a bend, goes through a second one; it stops again to give a ride to the man who has helped to restart it: "... the face of this man is covered by a gas cylinder. It is a way to bring the abstraction of the character to the extreme. By not showing his face, I have shown not only a character but a whole population, not a single destiny but the destiny of all."[36]

The 'Mystery' of Life

The destiny of all, the destiny of two, more than two – *Through the Olive Trees* is a simple, complex and beautiful film, that brings three directors to the screen: Kiarostami behind the camera; the actor who played the director in *And Life Goes On*; the director of *Through the Olive Trees*. In this 'film within a film within a film', the plot is extraordinary: once again, the scene opens with a car, this time driven by a woman, the production secretary.[37] She is going to the cinematographic set, built as a stage and clearly defined by ropes, where the shootings prove difficult and long: the amateur actor is shy and embarrassed by the presence of the young Taherè; Hossein, who substitutes him, asked the girl in marriage to her parents who refused their permission; they died during the earthquake, and it is now her grandmother, the interpreter of a strict Law of the Dead, who impedes their union. The result is that Taherè refuses to speak to Hossein. The director-*documenter* might replace them both;[38] instead, by acting as a putative father or a demoniac demiurge, he wants to see what happens, how the situation will evolve. In fact, he is intrigued by Hussein who, against all odds, relentlessly pursues his love: "In Iran resources are very scarce. Persistence becomes a trait".[39] He talks to him, urges him to try again, tacitly supports him up to the last attempt when the boy follows Taherè 'through the olive trees.' What happens there? The gaze concentrates on reality, nothing more nothing less. The real has already intruded in the filmmaking by means of the rain stopping the shooting: "… twenty days spent contemplating that wonderful landscape made me enter a state of meditation… I told myself that I could… give space to the dream, I could at the end suggest a positive reply from the girl".[40] Hussein and Taherè now leave the scene, walking in a distance that turns them into little geometrical points lost in the landscape. What is taking place between them? Distance, remoteness, the gaze glued to the vanishing signs… and the attention can only further concentrate: Hussein runs back to the set, maybe with Taherè's positive answer? It is not to be known: 'through the olive trees', "the secret takes all its consistence of the real, without disappearing or transpiring."[41]

[36] Ibid., 156. Kiarostami thinks that, even if the father and his son cannot find the two little actors, they discover the important truth that 'life goes on'.

[37] When asked of the female roles in his films, Kiarostami replies that "I don't like the role of women as mothers, women simply as lovers. Or women as victims, beaten, long-suffering. That's not my experience. Or women as exceptional. I don't like showing exceptions. Or women as heroes, it doesn't correspond to the real situation. And there's another role, women as decorative objects – not only in Iranian but in world cinema." See Walsh, "The compassionate gaze".

[38] Acquarello, "Through the Olive Trees: Life as Art, As Life", 2000 Sept-Oct, 9, www.sensesofcinema.com.

[39] For Alain Bergala, "Il bambino, la legge e la concatenazione", in Barbera –Resegotti, 78, the need that "reality testifies something in order to film it" is an aspect used by Rossellini that proves Kiarostami's interest in Italian Neorealism: his use of non-professional actors, the location shootings, the naturalistic settings. In 1992, he was awarded the Rossellini Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

[40] According to Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 182, it is the poetics of the 'dream' to become central: "… the ending of the film is more

dreamlike rather than something that is possible in reality. Because those two people have become very close to nature. And they've metamorphosed into small white flowers. And they grow slowly closer together and they almost become one. As Shakespeare says, we're more like our dreams than we are our real lives".

[41] Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami*, 22-23.

'Unveiling'…

> Cinema keeps going on its own, indefinitely, as if it were a virtually indefinite unveiling of itself: on the one hand, each new unveiling may conceal another artifice, and it conceals it by necessity; and on the other, what is to be unveiled is nothing "in itself."
> (Jean-Luc Nancy)

Love for cinema, love for life, love among humans: the cinematic gaze can now turn into the most intense hymn to the mystery of 'Death'. In Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, poetic echoes of Emile Cioran ("Without the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself long ago") weave into a famous Iranian lyric: "The butterfly flies round a candle, and slowly, to see it better, it gets so close to the flame as to burn itself, inevitably."[42] In the film, the curious butterfly translates into an intellectual wrestling with the thought of suicide: a middle-aged man appears in his Range Rover, driving along a dusty landscape – the industrial suburb of Teheran – heading towards an unknown destination: "I soon thought that a film that spoke of death, had to have more movement than the previous ones, because the theme required more action, just to contrast death." In its incessant 'touring', the car stops three times, encountering a young soldier, a seminarist and a taxidermist; the driver confesses to them the 'negative capability' (Keats) of what he is looking for: somebody who will help him cover his suicidal corpse the following day.

In Kiarostami's tactful cinema, the camera viewpoint enriches and pluralizes by contracting and extending: the intellectual quest links with the seminarist's juvenile fear, the authority of religion, the wisdom of the taxidermist – "a philosopher who has acquired the awareness of true values by means of experience, simply through life", "somebody who kills life in order to learn how to live. He kills birds to embalm them, to preserve them, and in a certain sense, to conserve their life, offering them

[42] When not otherwise indicated, the quotations for *Taste of Cherry* are in Kiarostami, "Al lavoro", 183.

a form of eternity". It is the man who accepts the terrible task proposed by the driver, after confessing that he, too, touched by the suffering of existence, has thought of suicide, but then realized that, in so doing, he would lose the 'taste of cherry'… Is it a metaphor for Life itself, and its sensuous pleasures? In the austere journey of this film (along the abstract borderline between life and death), experience and acceptance mark a crucial moment of change: the intellectual observes the sun setting; he goes home, takes a taxi, reaches the rendezvous. Here, sitting under a tree, he looks at the landscape (according to Kiarostami, the construction of a city, Teheran or any other city, has a strong kinship with 'the acceptance of responsibility'). The man lies in his burial hole, impassively observing the moon above him. All of a sudden, the sky gets dark, the screen turns black: "Life – as cinema – comes from light, and, in the meanwhile, life and cinema are one thing… 'non existence' which, in my view, leads directly to death".[43]

[43] "I don't leave the blank spaces just so people have something to finish… I leave them blank so people can fill them according to how they think and want". David Sterrit, "A Taste of Kiarostami", *Senses of Cinema* 9 (Sept-Oct, 2000), www.sensesofcinema.com.

As light returns, the last image of *Taste of Cherry* reveals a sense of open air, of human activity, the reality of the world as a series of pictures to be discovered: soldiers marching up the hill, the area survey by a cinematographic crew, the cameramen preparing the scene, Kiarostami giving the start to his next shooting…

… the 'Talisman'!

> The wind will carry us away
> The wind will carry us away
> (Forough Farrokhzad)

The Wind Will Take Us Away is the next 'gusset' of Kiarostami's vision: by envisioning the waiting, the empty space, the nothing, the film opens with unidentified voices coming from the inside of a car, uncertain on the road that will bring them to Sha Dareh, in Kurdistan.[44] Before entering the village – a little town with white walls and steep winding pathways built into the mountains – a child proposes to guide, through its labyrinth of caves, the 'engineer', as everybody calls him, who is in reality a reporter (Behzad Dourani, the only professional actor in the film) sent to the village to document the primordial funeral rites of the area. The child's grandmother is dying, but she never dies. While waiting, the journalist speaks to Teheran with his mobile telephone, functioning only on top of a hill. The camera accompanies him from close-up, in his continuous and nervous trajectories up to the location for the cellular phone signal, its 'mobile' communication. Here the unexpected happens: somebody is digging a ditch in the ground; you cannot see him, but you hear him explaining to the journalist that his work will bring electricity to the village, the 'transit' of modernized civilization. Unexpectedly, a landslide covers the man; the journalist lends his car to bring him to hospital. It is the turning point of the film: in the enforced pause, he starts noticing the intense beauty of the natural world around him. Night falls, and the old woman dies; the morning after, the 'ethnographic' project does not proceed: the reporter is only able to 'steal' a photo from the rite. It might seem a failure; in fact, it signs the translation of the poetic 'veil' into the photo-filmic *vol*:

> Photo *prise au vol* in the two senses of the word; instantaneous photo stolen, as all photos are, all the images of a film: is a certain 'vol' the condition for the gift of a gaze? Do you need to subtract the real in order to realize it? must a photographer be a thief?[45]

An instant more, a click, and the cinematographic vision opens, in its absolute and tactful attention, to the mystery of the 'image'. It is the most intense and enigmatic synthesis of life, love, death, passion, continuation, crossing, the construction of the self, and the gaze on the world: the reporter drops the 'talisman' given to him by the digger, a human 'bone', into the river. Silent and attentive, the camera follows its aquatic path, its floating downstream; the lasting cartilage runs on Kiarostami's film, keeping its secret, carrying it 'elsewhere', in other poetic writings, on other photographic landscapes, towards other visions still unexplored, still to be thought of…

[44] In this film, eleven characters are 'veiled': "We don't see some characters, but we do feel them. This shows there is a possibility of being without being. That's the main theme of the movies… At the end you know you haven't seen them, but you feel you know who they were and what they were about…This is actually an invitation for the spectators to participate in the creation of a work." Shahin Parhami, "A Talk with the Artist" (14 june 2004) www.synotpique.ca.

[45] Nancy, *Abbas Kiarostami,* 22.

Fiorenzo Iuliano

Burning Memories to Retrieve the Past. Contaminations of Bodies and Histories in Pasolini's *Medea*

> Ella oppone l'impeto con cui il mare
> davanti alla stupida e pericolosa Atene
> erge come cazzi azzurri i suoi Dei.
> (Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Coda alle cose successe ecc.")

This essay will question some issues related to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Medea*, trying in particular to address the themes of encounter and contamination as they are raised and substantiated in the movie. However, I will start by referring to Pasolini's poetry and to two short poems included in his 1971 collection *Trasumanar e organizzar* devoted to the political situation in Greece in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 *coup d'état*. In these poems, titled "Cose successe forse nel '20" and "Coda alle cose successe ecc." respectively, Pasolini passionately interrogates the current political events opposing an open, dialogic idea of history and tradition, filtered through the evocative and opaque language of poetry, to the fascistic propaganda expressed by Greek military junta of 1967-1974, whose blatant summoning of tradition was a brutal attempt at conveying a Greek (and, to some extent, also European) layered and heterogeneous past into a univocal trajectory, strongly marked in terms of nationalistic identity.

If, on the one hand, Pasolini is seduced by the archaism envisaged in Grecian legacy, and its controversial relation with a mythic past embodied in the East, where Medea's origins can be traced, on the other hand, it is contemporary Greece that represents an urgent challenge.

Medea originates in poetry – it is clearly indebted to the dramatic language of Euripides – but at the same time entwines the strenuous search for a poetical cinematic language with a complex and unceasing questioning of historical reality, and the extent to which reality can be grasped and portrayed. Pasolini found a possible escape from the ongoing debate on the opposition between formalism and realism by referring to the Third World realities as places in which a new 'geography' of knowledge and a new articulation of language and languages could be possible. In his essay on Pasolini's "third world cinema", referring to Pasolini's choice of portraying the subaltern reality of the Third World in most of his movies, Luca Caminati states:

> According to Pasolini, Gramsci's ashes, by now useless among the proletarian and sub-proletarian in Europe, are still alive in the Third World's revolutions.[1]

Nevertheless, Pasolini's interest in Greek culture, and the choice of Maria Callas for the role of Medea, are no less significant, from a political

[1] Luca Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico. Pier Paolo Pasolini e il cinema del Terzo Mondo* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 47, my translation.

perspective, than his concern for the revolutionary character of certain Asian or African regions. Greece represents a crucial 'contact zone', in which east and west, present and past, history and poetry confront each other, in mutual interrogation.

The poem "Coda alle cose successe ecc.", whose final verses I have quoted in the exergue, plays upon a strict opposition between 'voi' (you) and 'ella' (she). No clear explanation is given of the actual meaning of these two pronouns, and, nonetheless, it does not seem difficult to infer that the myths of Greece, or Greece as a myth, is referred to by Pasolini, and is paralleled by an analysis of the current political condition of Greece, which was experiencing the ferocity of military dictatorship at that time.[2] Pasolini's attitude is a provocative one: in *Medea* he demonstrates that tradition as such (as well as "nature" as such) has never existed, since it is but a sum of different and contradictory elements and fragments layered over the centuries. The poem insists on the contrast between the fascist ideology of tradition and what the mysterious and emblematic "Ella" mentioned in the poem embodies. Nationalism offers a conservative, museumized idea of tradition and an obtuse celebration of the past, as if it were possible to summarize history in a monological and sequential line of events aimed at constructing a closed and defined identity. On the contrary, Greece for Pasolini displays the countless nuances expressed by Medea, her tragic and suggestive mutability, but also the complicated net of contaminations and crossing-routes from which the very character of Medea (and the possibility of conceiving her tragedy as well) springs.

Past and present merge in Pasolini's construction of Greece as a space where politics and aesthetics can be configured. The only possible tradition consists of contaminations, and the rhetorical (and cultural) stance from which *Medea* can be read and understood is the 'tropos' of contamination: Medea contaminates and is contaminated, Greece itself contaminates while being contaminated. *Medea* epitomizes the relationship between Pasolini and the tradition/modernity dyad: they are not simply set one against the other, but stay in an open, mutual interrogation – archaism interrogates modernity and compels it to reflect upon itself.

Medea between nature and reality

With *Medea* Pasolini confronts his spectatorship with a series of contradictions and oppositions difficult to grasp completely: European (and, in a broader sense, western) tradition and its legacy, as epitomized by the character of Jason and his rational and authoritative attitude, is opposed to the barbarian and primitive world where Medea belongs, dominated by magic and by mysterious forces hidden in nature, impossible

[2] In the same collection there is a poem dedicated to Alexandros Panagulis, the Greek anarchist who organized the assassination attempt against general Georgios Papadopoulos.

to control according to given epistemic and logical grids. This primitive world is emblematically designed as the Other of western civilization, a place whose value, according to Pasolini, was not only symbolical but actual and political, since, as I have hinted before, in those very years he was devoting his attention to the third world as the only possible alternative – cultural, political and, to some extent, even linguistic – to a western reality increasingly dominated by the brutal laws of capitalism and consumerism.

The movie is an almost faithful transposition of the Greek tragedy. Medea is a priestess and a magician, daughter of Eeta, king of Colchis, and granddaughter of the Sun; she falls in love with Jason when he arrives in her kingdom in order to steal a golden fleece and, after helping him in his attempt, decides to follow him to Greece. Once in Corinth, she is repudiated by Jason, to whom she has born two sons; he has decided in the meanwhile to marry Glauce, daughter of the king of Corinth. Medea takes her revenge by killing her own sons and Glauce, thus leaving Jason alone and completely powerless, deprived of his former (male) roles of courageous warrior and authoritative husband.[3]

The episodes related to Medea, to the tragedy she lives and that will drive her to desperation and to her dramatic resolution, start one hour after the beginning of the movie; the first part is devoted to Jason and his ventures, and enucleates the main themes around which the remainder of the story revolves.

The first thematic question we are confronted with is the opposition between reality and non-reality, which is an open reference to the aesthetical problems raised by Pasolini concerning the poetics of cinema and cinema as poetry. In a famous essay, Pasolini discusses the "cinema of poetry"; according to this perspective, the relation between cinema and reality is problematized by the use of formalistic strategies necessary to shoot movies that will be articulated as "poetical prose":

> The establishment of a "language of cinematic poetry" offers the opportunity to create pseudo-novels, written in a poetical language; the opportunity, I mean, to conceive something like a poetical prose, lyrical pages that make use of free indirect subjectivity, in order to preserve their subjective character. It would be a kind of writing strongly focused on stylistic aspects.[4]

Furthermore, the opposition between what can be termed as real and what cannot is also an anticipation and a problematic counterpart of a long series of oppositions – history and myth, rationalism and the power of irrationality, logos and the pre-verbal (and pre-symbolic) dimension – that mark the story of Medea.

When Jason is still a child, completely unaware of the heroic enterprises he will attempt, the Centaur who educates him declares:

[3] In her recent book *Orrorismo, ovvero della violenza sull'inerme* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007), Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero broadly discusses Medea as an archetypal myth, relating her story to the ethical and biopolitical questions of violence and vulnerability.

[4] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico* (Milano: Garzanti, 1972, 2000), 185, my translation. See also Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), for an in-depth analysis of the *soggettiva* (point of view shot) in Pasolini's movies.

Everything's sacred,
everything's sacred.
Remember, my boy:
there's nothing natural in nature.
When it seems natural to you,
it'll be the end.[5]

[5] For dialogues from *Medea* I have used the English subtitles of the DVD edition.

Natural, real, and sacred: these are the chief polarities continually assembled and interrogated, connected and interrupted, joined and fractured throughout the movie, and that radically question both the supposedly 'neutral', idyllic settings in which the facts take place, and the equally supposedly neutral gaze of the spectator, as it is controversially filtered through and replicated by the cinematic eye and the movie camera.

There is nothing natural in nature – Pasolini's words are aptly ventriloquized by the Centaur – and there is nothing natural in the gaze that observes nature and asserts its own objectivity and impartiality. This is why the Centaur goes on saying "Maybe you think that besides being a liar, I'm also too poetic": poetry seems the only way available to the sacred in order to upset the alleged naturalness of nature, allowing what is uncontrollable (and, as such, impossible to manage and fully envisage) to emerge. Here, the Centaur traces the first, significant divide between archaism and modernity, crucial to understand the subtle contradictions that characterise *Medea*:

But for ancient man, myths and rituals
are concrete experiences,
which are even included
in his daily existence.
For him, reality
is a totally perfect unit.

Medea embodies the power of magic, an archaic and primitive dimension in which myth and reality were almost identical and overlapping conceptual categories, as the Centaur suggests – and nevertheless, he clearly speaks of "man", leaving the space of femininity completely untouched and threateningly off-screen and off-narration.

Let us consider, once again, Pasolini's poems, so precious to an in-depth reading of the movie and its slightest nuances. In the poem I quoted in the exergue, he attacks the Greek regime by opposing to it a primitive and seductive female figure, which represents the emergence of a disturbing and unmanageable force capable of disrupting the authoritative power of nationalism and its continuous and ideological references to an alleged monological tradition. He writes:

Ella oppone a tutto questo
La completezza inaccessibile di una vita

> Ch'è una lotta interrotta dagli stupori
> Per la sua quotidianità.[6]

[6] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Trasumanar e organizzar* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976), 195. ("She opposes to all that / The unattainable integrity of a life / That, in its daily routine, / Is a perennial fight of wonders", my translation)

Back to *Medea*: the uncanny power of femininity, obscurely addressed in Pasolini's verses, seems to display its strength. The ambiguity of his words is disclosed, and, to some extent, made clear or at least decipherable: "she" could be Greece, the ferocious beauty of its mythical past and its controversial and articulated history, but "she" is, at the same time, Medea herself, the stranger, the radically Other of the European and male epistemic subject; the disturbing aspect of femininity that is charged, during the movie, with an increasing and threatening power impossible to manage. As Borgerson points out:

> Medea serves as an allegory of a linguistic community in which an individual makes an attempt, a heretical attempt, to mean something beyond what the archetype or paradigm makes available to her.[7]

[7] Janet L. Borgerson, "Managing Desire: Heretical Transformation in Pasolini's *Medea*", *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 5.1 (2002), 61.

The first part of the movie, as stated, depicts the idyllic life of Jason when he is still a child and is educated by the Centaur in a close relationship with nature. Nature does not propose a metaphysical *locus* made tangible, nor is it the symbolic place of a primeval and untouched dimension destined to be lost in Jason's adulthood. It is rather the critical (and, in Pasolini's perspective, political) configuration of archaism, a dimension in which symbol and ideology cannot be separated, and are meant as a compact, though controversial, unity. Reality is the term preferred by Pasolini to name this kind of unity, which, rather than being a simple instance of a nostalgic 'golden age' represented by primitivism, stands as a problematic interrogation addressed to the normative power of logos. In this sense, the doubts raised by Pasolini seem to anticipate a critique of rationalism that was to common in later postmodern philosophical speculation. When, after framing the limpid sky and sea in which Jason's infancy is absorbed and fused, Pasolini goes on to portray the early life of Medea, priestess in Colchis, with its barbarian and cruel habits, the ideological contradictions on which the movie hinges are fully displayed. Enzo Siciliano argues:

> Pasolini, through Medea's desperation, represented his own cultural desperation. A myth was chosen to instance this desperation, which was also characterized by that particular outdatedness typical of any decadent representation. All the more, Pasolini's interest in bricolage is plainly visible in his choice of landscapes: Turkey and the island of Grado; ancient Christian cells with their Byzantine frescoes, and then Pisa. Besides this: cannibalistic rites or Hellenic usages that he totally invented. And, finally, the visage and the magnetic presence of Maria Callas.[8]

[8] Enzo Siciliano, *Vita di Pasolini* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005, 1st edition 1978), 379, my translation.

Pasolini is urged by the necessity of giving a body and a voice to the Other, to what menaces, disturbs and contaminates the perfect, Apollonian unity of Jason's world.

Nevertheless, the disturbing power of this 'other', paradoxically, lies in its substantial and uncanny symmetry with the dispossessed self: the radical otherness instanced by Medea, achieved also through deliberate, blatant infractions of historical facts, shows an unexpected and, to some extent, disquieting analogy between Jason and Medea, who have always been configured as diverse and opposed characters. They both experience the passage from a mythical reality to a rationalistic and logic one – Jason in his adulthood, Medea through marriage. The paradigm of otherness traditionally ascribed to Medea seems to be questioned, since her existential trajectory does not seem so different from Jason's. The narrative and aesthetic choices made by Pasolini reinforce this troubled sameness; cannibalism stands for the utmost experience of barbarian primitivism, exemplarily opposed to the quiet and serene peacefulness of Jason's infantile world, but, on the other hand, both the pastoral scenes portrayed by Pasolini and the rural world, which Medea inhabited before her departure, present striking similarities with a more familiar and proximate reality, namely the rural dimension of southern Italy, often chosen by Pasolini as a setting for his movies (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, for instance, was shot in Basilicata).[9]

The boundaries between the familiar and the foreign, which Pasolini had never considered as stable and definite, are continually undermined through an unceasing and subtle play with anachronisms and crossed references to domestic scenes portrayed as foreign, and vice-versa.

There is one more opposition essential to understanding the movie, the one played on the realism-naturalism dyad. The questions raised about the 'natural' as an epistemic category, strongly criticized because of its neutral and positivistic meaning, is shifted by Pasolini onto the plane of aesthetic and linguistic choices. According to him, cinema cannot be 'naturalistic', nor it can lay any claim to an objective and true-to-life depiction of reality, thus moving counter to what was implicit in the mainstream Italian cinematography of the immediate postwar period.

The supposed objectivity of naturalism risks amounting to a kind of sociologism, which implies a de-historicized and universal narrative of events, captured and envisaged through the impossible perspective of a panoptical and detached gaze. Marxism represents, for Pasolini, a major hindrance to this attitude toward cinema. In his aesthetical and semiotic reflections on cinema, which form a large part of his critical writings and reflections, he argues against the very possibility of conceiving and representing something like reality "as such". This is the reason why the problem of reality is, for Pasolini, strictly connected with an apparently

[9] Enzo Siciliano, *Campo de' Fiori* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1993), 94-104.

distant notion, that of sacredness, a crucial category that Pasolini opposes to the 'natural'. It, notably, implies a process of historical and metahistorical decoding of events.

As Luca Caminati states in his recent book on Pasolini's cinema:

> Reality is produced and codified by a complex layering of cultures and differentiated perspectives on the world. … Pasolini has no doubt … that the filmmaker must show this fragmentation through images, using the movie camera and the editing as means to sound reality.[10]

[10] Caminati, *Orientalismo*, 37.

In *Empirismo eretico* Pasolini widely discusses technical aspects of cinematic language, insisting particularly on his aversion to the fixed shot as a stylistic device largely used by Neorealistic filmmakers. The idea that the long take is the aptest way to portray reality is firmly disapproved by Pasolini, who prefers in its place an articulate and refined technique of editing; this purely stylistic controversy clearly overlaps with the wider question of the commitment to the real as the chief aim of cinema. Pasolini writes:

> … the long take … is a naturalistic technique. That is the reason why I do not like it: it is naturalistic, and, definitely, natural. But because of my fetishistic love for the "worldy things", I cannot see them as natural. I can only consecrate or violently desecrate them. I cannot accept the quiet fluidity proper to the long take, since I need to isolate things in order to worship them, more or less intensely, one by one.[11]

[11] Pasolini, *Empirismo*, 231.

These words echo the apodictic sentences uttered by the Centaur on the notions of nature and sacredness quoted above, and foreshadowed in this 1966 essay.

In *Medea*, Pasolini often lingers, as he does in most other of his movies, on static images and close-ups, extensively used to focus on immobile landscapes or sleeping bodies (usually male ones, such as Jason's), so as to detach them from any actual and immediate context, restoring them to unexpected and uncanny frames. This is a mechanism that, to some extent, properly renders Pasolini's idea of sacredness and of poetry, and their capacity of envisaging *another* reality besides and beyond the most cogent and tangible one. The cinematic eye, for these reasons, is the most appropriate way to render the theme of contamination, central in *Medea*, narratable, precisely because of its unstable and vacillating viewpoint – a perspective that is continually undone and decentered, that continually slips, characterized as it is by unceasing movement.

The rapidity of some passages (as in the first part of the movie, when a human sacrifice is represented and rendered with a pressing speediness) elicits a clear contrast with the search for the absolute pureness of the image, which, in some scenes, is isolated by its framework and rendered

self-eloquent. The immobility of certain scenes in *Medea* is the necessary reverse of the instability that characterizes the whole movie, in both a stylistic and thematic sense. The eye that captures images is continually moving, and its gaze arrests single instants that are immediately turned into static images. The quasi-iconographical representation of the faces of his characters, extremely common in Pasolini's other movies (for instance in *Uccellacci e uccellini*) is less evident in *Medea*; however, the importance ascribed to the iconic rendering of the faces in *Medea* acquires a different, and probably more complex meaning. The fixity of Medea's or Glauce's close-ups, for instance, expresses the process of radical and traumatic collapse of identity they both undergo, the former when becoming aware of her loss, the latter on realizing that she has monstrously turned into a replication of her enemy. The final scene, a violent and exacerbated dialogue between Jason and Medea once she has achieved her revenge, is perfectly rendered in its furious hastiness through the mechanism of shot-reverse shot, which is used as a cinematic version of *stichomythia*, a technique employed in Greek classical dramaturgy to render a dialog between two people, in which each sentence runs for the length of a single verse.

Medea and Maria: facing the other, voicing the otherness

It is undisputable that with *Medea* Pasolini himself is confronted with another kind of problematic 'otherness', instanced by his tormented descent to the depths of femininity through both the archetypal construction of the female (as the) other, as it is epitomized in Euripides' tragedy, and, on the other hand, his personal, and controversial, relationship with Maria Callas.[12]

Euripides questions, through Medea, the problematic role of the stranger who, after abandoning her native land, sacrifices everything to her love for Jason. As Julia Kristeva reminds us, the experience of foreignness was, in ancient Greece, first of all a female experience: "It is noteworthy that the first foreigners to emerge at the dawn of our civilization are foreign women – the Danaïdes."[13] Later on, arguing about the relationship between foreignness and violence, Kristeva insists on the question of sexual difference, and on the role it played in the definition of kinship:

> Strangeness (or foreignness) – the political facet of violence – would underlie elementary civilization, be its necessary lining, perhaps even its font, which no household cistern – not even, to start with, that of the Danaïdes – could permanently harness. Even more so, the foreign aspect of the Danaïdes also raises the problem of antagonism between the sexes in their extramarital alliance, in the amatory and sexual "relation".[14]

[12] This theme is discussed in Colleen Marie Ryan, "Salvaging the Sacred: Female Subjectivity in Pasolini's *Medea*", *Italica* 76.2 (Summer 1999).

[13] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 42.

[14] Ibid., 46.

Medea jealously preserves her foreignness, but, at the same time, the value she ascribes to it is ambivalent: she is fully aware of being a stranger when, after her flight from Colchis, she realizes that the earth and the sun are, now, dumb to her. Her desperation explodes, and she shouts aloud:

> Earth, talk to me!
> Let me hear your voice!
> I no longer recall your voice.
> Sun, talk to me!
> Where is the place
> in which I can hear your voice ?
> Earth, talk to me! Sun, talk to me!
> Perhaps you're disappearing!
> I no longer hear what you say!

Finally, she recognizes the drama of her condition: she is "a vessel full of knowledge that is not mine", both as a woman and as a stranger. The encounter with Greek/European rationalism is the most immediate corollary of her marriage; she accepts the power of male supremacy over her body and her life but, at the same time, she loses her magic powers and enters the rational realm of civilization, experiencing the reality of a world definitely subtracted from the power of magic and dominated by rules and norms created by men.[15]

[15] In Euripides' tragedy the husband is clearly defined by Medea as the master and the owner of the body (δεσπότην σόματων) of his wife.

But the disquieting power of femininity was, for Pasolini, a personal as well as an intellectual experience, since he was intimately involved in a problematic relationship with Maria Callas: as Enzo Siciliano reminds us, their relationship was something more than a friendship: "Maria Callas revealed to Pier Paolo what the fear of femininity actually was",[16] a circumstance in which Pasolini experienced the descent to the "chthonian depths" of femininity.

[16] Siciliano, *Vita*, 383.

> The mysterious character of her simplicity fascinated Pier Paolo – the fascination of femininity, in which the echo of the symbolic Mother could be heard, of the repressed woman, kept at the margin of civil and urban life.[17]

[17] Ibid., 380.

Private motives intersect with aesthetical and ideological ones. Maria Callas embodies the uncanny realm of femininity, capable of threatening the consolidated structures of Pasolini's homosexual desire and exposing them to an unexpected and overwhelming power – and, on the other hand, Medea's strength lies in the same unpredicted and ungovernable force.

Over the whole movie, Medea and Maria continuously overlap and exchange their roles. Medea's frailty, her complete abandonment to her passions and to her love for Jason, seems to foreshadow Maria's complex and shady temper. It is Pasolini himself who declares the contradictory

aspects of the passion shared with Maria in his poems, written before the shootings of *Medea*. Both Medea and Maria – in similar, parallel contexts (both filmic and autobiographical) – "know something" that other people do not know, as he suggests in the poem "Il sovrano che non vuole avere compagno":

> La Significazione è in quello sguardo o mormorio;
> ed è ricordo di una storia vera –
> Ma tu, cantando contro i fastigi coperti di nebbia buia,
> tu sai qualcos'altro, ed è una pazzia non capire
> che, qualcun altro, ciò che tu sai non sa;
> c'è una Storia di Donne.[18]

Medea's and Maria's power lies in their capability of going beyond the rigid mechanisms of signification, and, in this respect, the value ascribed to Callas, to her voice and to her body, her very actual, physical (maybe sexual or sexualized) presence, is equated by Pasolini to the magic embodied by Medea, and charged with the same problematic, mysterious "de-signifying significance".

But Maria Callas represented for Pasolini, besides an unexpected experience of femininity, a new approach to melodrama as well. In a beautiful poem, "Timor di me", he writes

> La lietezza esplode
> Contro quei vetri sul buio
> Ma tale lietezza, che ti fa cantare *in voce*
> È un ritorno alla morte.[19]

It is noteworthy that Pasolini had despised melodrama until a few years previously, as noted by Enzo Siciliano:

> Pier Paolo's passion for melodrama increased in the last years, as had happened before with Pound. Maria was the protagonist of that passion. Years before Pier Paolo used to say, to Bertolucci, to Bernardo, to me, even to Moravia: "Only fags like Verdi and melodrama".[20]

His relationship with Maria Callas, thus, is not a mere piece of biographical information, since it represented a turning point in his intellectual *Bildung*, all the more significant if we consider Pasolini's commitment to Gramsci, whose reflections upon the 'popular' character of melodrama seem to be broadened and extended to aesthetical and ideological implications that are totally new and unknown.

Let us return to the construction of Medea as a filmic character. Sexuality and gender, which, as I have shown, acquired the utmost value for Pasolini because of his problematic relationship with Maria Callas, are confirmed in their importance by *Medea*'s symbolical texture. Jason and Medea had

[18] Pasolini, *Trasumanar*, 171. ("Signification is in that gaze, in that whisper / It is the recollection of a true story. /But you that sing against the *fastigia*, covered in a dark mist, / You know something more, and it's foolishness / Not to understand /That someone doesn't know what you do know: /It is a Story of Women.", my translation)

[19] Pasolini, *Trasumanar*, 167. ("The joy explodes / Against those panes, in the dark / But this very joy that makes you sing *in voce* / Is a return to death", my translation)

[20] Siciliano, *Campo*, 143, my translation.

shared, as I have suggested before, the same personal experience of a "mythical" past. What makes a radical difference is their reaction to the encounter with a reality by now completely deprived of any magical and mythical accent. Jason is perfectly at ease in this 'brand new' world; on the contrary, the experience of a world in which magic plays no role at all, and the lucid stance of rationalism is the only perspective from which reality can be envisaged, is traumatic for Medea. This difference, pivotal to the understanding of the movie, can be interpreted in terms of gender: the entrance to the (Lacanian) symbolic, a dimension in which language is neatly compartmentalized in terms of signifier and signified, amounts to the entrance into the "law of the father", and the abandonment of the semiotic/symbiotic dimension of complete osmosis with the maternal body. Medea is *the* mother essentially for this reason: she instances perfect union with the whole body of nature, and, when she is compelled to face Jason's rationalism and the rigidity of its rules (including the rules of kinship and inheritance, which both have a central position), she realizes that she cannot cope with them, giving herself over to desperation.

It is only at the end of the movie that Medea acquires her power again. She decides to take her revenge on Glauce, and gives her own wedding dress to her as a present. Glauce wears Medea's clothing; then, she looks at her own image reflected in a mirror and starts screaming, without any apparent reason. Driven crazy, she runs away form her palace, and takes her life by leaping from the peak where the royal palace is built. This is the most noticeable difference from Euripide's tragedy, in which Glauce is killed by wearing Medea's wedding dress, previously poisoned by Medea herself; in the movie, this passage is a mere reverie of Medea, when she tries to figure out the death of her rival. Pasolini's choice is significant inasmuch as the power of Medea is entirely conveyed through the symbolical strength of her own person and the astonishing force of her image. When Glauce looks in the mirror, it is actually Medea that she sees; she is literally transformed into Medea. This considerable divergence from Euripide's text reinforces the role ascribed to Medea and to her power, which lies in her capability of annihilating existing boundaries of identity; Glauce goes crazy when she realizes she is not herself anymore, and when the reassuring certainties provided by the dogma of identity, strongly supported by the logical norms that reinforce the very definition of identity, appear no longer to be working.

Domestic lands and foreign maps

Reflecting upon the 'use' Pasolini makes of Greece and Grecian mythical and symbolic legacy means to question the role he ascribes to classical

culture, and its position in the fragmented and discontinuous trajectory of a hypothetic western and European tradition. The history that Pasolini traces, through his patient as much as anarchic assembling of episodes, landscapes and characters belonging to mythical narratives, is composed of swarming and chaotic multitudes, from which contaminated bodies are singled out. From the very beginning of *Medea*, nothing is nor has ever been 'pure', nothing can be grasped in its essentiality or in its reconfigured identity, since the very notion of identity is a metaleptic (or, in a jargon more familiar to Pasolini, ideological) construction that unavoidably fails to notice the complex process of stratification lying at its own bases. Classical Greece plays a pivotal role in his attempt – which is a difficult, to some extent a dramatic one – to deconstruct the alleged homogeneity of a received tradition. What kind of Greece was Pasolini thinking of? What kind of relation can be traced between Greece and the 'quest for otherness', which was of the utmost importance for Pasolini in the last years of his life?[21]

Greece is a place charged with multiple significances. It is the land in which East and West meet, but it is also, in Pasolini's perspective, the 'gateway' to the third world, to a rural and archaic dimension still untouched by western capitalism and consumerism. Pasolini's interest in Asian and African countries, particularly vivid in those years, started from Greece.[22] It is through the evocation of a mythical past, embodied but at the same time critically reviewed and reconsidered, that Pasolini tries to reconfigure the maps of knowledge of western tradition, and to subvert the traditional and conventional ideas about tradition, and their authoritative and fascistic ideological counterparts.

In a poem of 1965, *Alì dagli occhi azzurri*, Pasolini suggests a possible, personal geography of the Mediterranean, in which peoples coming from northern Africa and from the south of Italy are evoked in a quasi-mythical encounter, described in a way that recalls some scenes of *Medea*:

> Alì dagli Occhi Azzurri
> uno dei tanti figli di figli,
> scenderà da Algeri, su navi
> a vela e a remi. Saranno
> con lui migliaia di uomini
> coi corpicini e gli occhi
> di poveri cani dei padri
> sulle barche varate nei Regni della Fame. Porteranno con sé i bambini, e il pane e il formaggio, nelle carte gialle del Lunedì di Pasqua.
> Porteranno le nonne e gli asini, sulle triremi rubate ai porti coloniali.[23]

And, in the end, Pasolini stresses the revolutionary turn that such a vision can acquire, capable of assaulting the solid and threatening edifices of both the existing political power and historical tradition:

[21] See Borgerson, "Managing Desire": "Geographical specificity in this film establishes a cultural specificity providing the viewer with a lexicon to understand Pasolini's elaborately filmed rituals" (57).

[22] "… his films in this period were generally more involved with non-Christian mythological materials, as … his two adaptations of classical plays attest. Yet there is another contrast: his *Oedipus* and *Medea* are passionate, even overwrought works while *Teorema* has most often been seen as cold, harsh, theoretical, and even mathematical": Bart Testa, "To Film a Gospel … and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger", in P. Rumble and B. Testa, eds., *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 198.

[23] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Alì dagli occhi azzurri* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1965), 490. "Blue eyed Alì, / One of the countless sons of sons, / Will arrive from Algiers, / on rowing and sailing boats. / With him, thousands skinny men, / their eyes like dogs' eyes – like their fathers' eyes, / on the boats launched in the Kingdoms of Hunger. / They will take their children with them, and some bread and cheese wrapped in the yellow paper of Easter Monday. / They will take their grandmas, and the donkeys, on triremes stolen in colonial harbors.", my translation.

distruggeranno Roma
e sulle sue rovine
deporranno il germe
della Storia Antica.
Poi col Papa e ogni sacramento
andranno su come zingari
verso nord-ovest
con le bandiere rosse
di Trotzky al vento...[24]

[24] Ibid., 492. ("They will destroy Rome / and on its ruins they will deposit the seed / of Ancient History. / Then, with the Pope and his sacraments, / They will go to the north, like gypsies, / With Trotzky red flags waving in the wind." – my translation.)

The Mediterranean as the place of the encounter plays an important role in Pasolini's new mapping of peoples and places, and reinforces the idea that civilizations cannot be subsumed under the perspective of an uninterrupted and linear continuity, but, on the contrary, are the offshoot of intersecting, often traumatic and violent, processes.

Similarly, interesting suggestions about the possibility of reconfiguring the space of the Mediterranean as the starting point for a new geopolitics are delineated by Iain Chambers:

> The Mediterranean is set adrift to float towards a vulnerability attendant on encounters with other voices, bodies, histories. This is to slow down and deviate the tempo of modernity, its neurotic anxiety for linearity, causality, and 'progress', by folding it into other times, other textures, other ways of being in a multiple modernity.[25]

[25] Iain Chambers, "The Mediterranean. A Postcolonial Sea", *Third Text* 18-5 (2004), 428.

Chambers stresses the importance of 'vulnerability' in his discourse upon the possibility of a geographical (and cultural) route alternative to the one provided by tradition. Medea's vulnerability, too, is an unforeseen aspect of the power of the encounter. Being vulnerable represents for her the most intimate way through which the uncanny power of femininity is revealed; it is, at the same time, her capacity to renounce her very self and her knowledges in order to plunge into new ones. This is opposed to Jason's need for the definition of a role and a position in the social and political system. The idea of 'folding', suggested by Chambers, is, in this sense, emblematic; a convincing way to describe, at the same time, Medea as a dramatic character – her psychic fragility, but also the baroque attire in which she is dressed, the 'foldings' of the clothes that will be the very cause of Glauce's death – and the tormented detours she follows in order to reach Corinth, only encouraged by her love for Jason. She is completely 'adrift' – as Chambers says – and, nevertheless, animated by a tender but strenuous passion, which turns out to be completely self-destroying in the end.

But the encounter realized through, and displayed by, the very actuality of Medea's body is also an encounter with the past, with a primeval force that her new status seems to have totally subdued, and which, on the contrary, reemerges in its terrible and destructive aspect.

Chambers again:

> The post-colonial theme of re-writing and re-presenting the past in order to re-configure the present is threatening to become a fashionable orthodoxy, yet in revealing the disquieting stubbornness of a yesterday that refuses to disappear into the stillness of the ordered archive it remains imperative.
> Such a return of the repressed clearly offers far more than a series of additions to fill in the gaps in the already established historical mosaic. The forgotten do not complete the picture, rather they query the frame, the pattern, the construction, and advance what the previous representation failed to register. For this is not simply to propose the heroic space of the counter-narrative that offers the promised homecoming of an alternative history, identity and autonomous sense.[26]

[26] Id., "Off the Map: A Mediterranean Journey", *Comparative Literature Studies* 42-4 (2005), 318.

Medea gives a body and a voice to "the forgotten [that] do not complete the picture", since her function in the narrative and symbolical economy of the movie is to swerve the authoritative force of logocentric utterance, as it is expressed by Jason, towards unexpected and threatening directions, marked by the archaic and unpredictable force of nature and magic.

Her power to resort to the forces of nature, and to an obscure strength that annihilates everything, stands for the return of the repressed as it has been theorized by psychoanalysis, and which Chambers highlights as one of the crucial traits of postcolonial strategy and poetics. Once again, the very idea of a tradition inherited and epitomized by the authoritative word of institutionalized power is interrupted and problematized, and what was initially conceived as a neutral merging of a (presumed) barbarian and primitive voice into the powerful and authoritative one, now turns out to be a point of crisis, the moment in which the structure and the meaning of the encounter are rendered unstable and traumatic, and the encounter itself acquires unpredicted, unsettling nuances.

Shifting from the quasi non-historical past evoked by Pasolini to the present, in a recent book Antonio Negri comments on a possible new configuration of Mediterranean geography:

> The Mediterranean represents a gateway towards the East and the Middle East, but it is a contradictory one, since Middle East is a place characterized at the same time by political instability and by the exportation of labor.[27]

[27] Antonio Negri, *Goodbye Mr Socialism* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2006), 85, my translation.

The act of crossing the sea is now resignified by different, but not less problematic, questions. The routes followed by migrants nowadays, to some extent, replicate Jason and Medea's journey, and disclose the same, unsolved, problems. What is interesting in Pasolini's work is the importance given to the migratory theme as a central one in the process of defining territories and belongings, a political and ethical avowal that leads us to consider migration as a question crucial to the definition of geopolitical territories and socio-economic relations, and not merely accidental circumstances. As

Negri argues: "Migration fluxes bring about the crisis of traditional institutions [i.e. Nation-State, organized unions], showing their reactionary nature".[28]

[28] Ibid., 95.

Pasolini resorts to Medea and to the mythical story of the Argonauts in another significant moment of his artistic production. *Petrolio*, the posthumous novel published in 1992, dedicates thirteen of his 133 drafts ("appunti") to Jason and the ventures he and his companions were involved in while searching for the golden fleece. But in these circumstances, his voyage towards the east acquires at least two noteworthy significances. On the one hand, it envisages the Mediterranean geography in a totally new way, since the Mediterranean becomes, in Pasolini's spectral evocation, the postcolonial sea described by Iain Chambers: a new map of power and knowledge that appears to be crossed by multiple routes and differentiated trajectories. It is, at once, the sea where new and unexpected encounters take place, and, for that reason, Pasolini broadens its geographical and geopolitical spectrum to involve the extreme limits of Eastern Africa (the former Italian colonies) and Iran, crucial to understand the complexity of Jason's travel and his routes.

On the other hand, all the Mediterranean portrayed by Pasolini in *Petrolio* is the 'petroleum sea', the territorial and political space that needs to be crossed in order to reach the Near East, where petroleum is produced and sold to Western countries: an ideal ending of the imaginary travel of the Italian bourgeoisie in the 1960s. Another passage from one of Chambers's essay on the Mediterranean is useful in understanding this question:

> The overall project of *Solid Sea* considers how the Mediterranean basin is rapidly being transformed and "solidified" through the impositions of frontiers, controls and the increasing rigidity of identities tied to specific forms of passage: touristic, mercantile, military. Off the map, hidden from the cartography of permissible routes are the unauthorized itineraries of illicit passage. These invariably turn up under the heading of illegal migration and the rarely reported tragedies that accompany their movement across the Mediterranean.[29]

[29] Chambers, "Off the Map", 324.

Pasolini criticizes the Italian regime of the postwar period in his terrible and disquieting 'novel of petroleum': the very same bourgeoisie that had supported fascism was by then deeply absorbed in a neo-capitalistic project aimed at the reinforcement of its financial power. The axes along which power seems to display its strength – industrial economy, political authoritarianism, sexual repression – are configured anew in Jason's mythical enterprise towards East.

At the beginning of "Appunto 36", Pasolini writes: "Mythical journey to the East, rewriting of Apollonius of Rhode", and then states "to be entirely written in Greek".[30] He was thinking of interpolating passages from *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes in his novel, juxtaposing them to his writing. The digressions from the Greek text are noteworthy: among

[30] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Petrolio* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 139, my translation.

the places visited by Jason and his comrades Pasolini lists Isfahan (151), Dubai (144), Basra (145), Damascus (148), Asmara (151), Tel Aviv, Cairo, Nicosia, Jerusalem, (153). Parallel to his journey, the quest for oil marks the routes followed by Jason: "Meeting with Ethiopian authorities – Object: oil search along the coast".[31] Medea makes her appearance in the Appunto 36c: "… diplomats' wives boast about their familiarity with Medea".[32] Once again, Pasolini entwines mythical narrations with the story outlined in the plot of the novel. Once articulated through the filter of neo-capitalistic power, the Mediterranean acquires the sinister aspect of a net or a trap, capable of catching the bodies that are crossing it and, at the same time, evokes the fluency of the narrative evoked and traced.

[31] Ibid., 151.

[32] Ibid., 143. Another similarity between *Medea* and *Petrolio* can be found in the Appunto 103c, titled "Il prato sotto la torre di Pisa", a brief paragraph in which Carlo observes young students lying on the lawn. The same setting is chosen by Pasolini for Corinth in *Medea*.

Burning paper

What is left of Medea after her tragic destiny has been accomplished? After killing her children and Glauce, she is aware that she will leave Corinth, and be a stranger again. Her past is definitely lost, and is now something that she will probably attempt to retrieve for the remainder of her life as an exile.[33] At the end of the movie, Medea sets on fire the royal palace where she lives. Against the backdrop of the burning palace, she addresses Jason:

> Why do you try
> to pass through the fire?
> You can't do it!
> It's useless to try!

and then, after he pleads with her to be allowed to bury his children, she harshly answers:

> Don't keep insisting! It's useless!
> Nothing is possible any more!

[33] "Medea tracks movement from the communal to an individual attempt to break out – the poetic, heretical act – and, ultimately under Pasolini's direction, back to the communal. The poetic act inspired by sexual desire brings about a transformation that marks the end of one era and brings forth a new age." (Borgerson, "Managing Desire", 61).

While arguing about 'nature' and 'naturalism' in cinema, Pasolini writes:

> … the fear of naturalism is … the fear of the Being, or, to put it differently, the fear of the lack of naturalness, proper of Being. This is one of the terrible ambiguities that characterize reality. It has nothing to do with naturalism: to make cinema is like writing on burning paper.[34]

[34] Pasolini, *Empirismo*, 245.

Memory is no longer possible, nature is no longer conceivable. For Pasolini, cinema is the attempt to defy the flames lit by history and reality, the ultimate effort of a desperate challenge against destruction. Through Medea, and through Maria Callas, he decided to give a body and a voice to this challenge.

Bianca Del Villano

Cinema and Identity in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*

Mulholland Drive appears as a puzzling film, in which the characters' identities remain mysterious and incomprehensible until the end and the succession of events is confused through a peculiar cinematic editing and the fact that actors play more than one role. The film is divided into two parts: one is constructed around the story of talented actress Betty Elms and her fatal encounter with the amnesiac Rita, whom Betty falls in love with. This part is characterised by a realistic narration in which events are narrated according to their temporal development, while in the other part, characterised by flashbacks and shifts in time, Betty returns as Diane Selwyn, a depressed, psychotic former actress, lost between her hallucinations and memories.

This paper tries to trace a link between the two sections composing *Mulholland Drive*, considering the first as a dream, and the second as the consequent psychotic state of mind of the protagonist Betty/Diane. Simultaneously, it will focus on the way *Mulholland Drive* connects issues related to subjectivity with a general reflection on cinema, so that while revealing the most common tricks of cinematic narration, it also unveils the protagonist's unspeakable secret.

The Dream

When released, *Mulholland Drive* aroused a variety of contrasting critical comments. At length recognised as a high-quality 'product' and awarded with prestigious prises (Cannes Film Festival and National Society of Film Critic 2001), the film was also criticised for its complicated plot.[1] According to James Berardinelli, for instance, "Lynch cheats his audience […] he throws everything into the mix with the lone goal of confusing us. Nothing makes any sense because it's not supposed to make any sense. There's no purpose or logic to events".[2] In my view, on the contrary, the obscure construction of the film, with its structure of dreams, responds to a precise logic and intent, as suggested in many reviews and articles.[3]

The first part of *Mulholland Drive* basically develops around the love affair between the two protagonists: a mysterious dark-haired woman (Laura Harring) – who escapes a murder attempt and not remembering her true identity names herself Rita, after a picture of Rita Hayworth – and the blonde Betty (Naomi Watts), who arrives at Hollywood to find success as an actress. The following events suggest that Rita is probably an actress

[1] Lynch's production has always raised critiques and attacks for the non-conventional style and content of his movies. From *Eraserhead* (1977) to *Inland Empire* (2006), the red line connecting Lynch's films is his capacity to investigate the American 'heart of darkness', aesthetically and ethically deconstructing the traditional Hollywood conception of cinema as well as the values of the white, middle-class, Puritan America. Released in 2001, *Mulholland Drive* follows *Lost Highway* (1996) and *The Straight Story* (1999), and the three movies have in common references to roads, symbols of the interior path or detour fatally affecting the characters' destiny. At the same time, together with *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, it suggests a reflection on the relationship between dream/illusion and reality, which in all these cases involve cinematic language.

[2] James Berardinelli, "Mulholland Drive. A Film Review" http://www.reelviews.net/movies/m/mulholland_drive.html.

[3] See, for example, Claude Lalumière, "Mulholland Drive" http://www.locusmag.com/2001/Reviews/Lalumiere11_MDrive.html.

too and that her life is threatened by an awkward hit man and a criminal organisation. While the hit man's motives remain unknown, the criminal organisation, led by the sinister "Cowboy", seems to be interested in replacing Rita with an unknown girl, Camilla Rhodes, in a movie directed by a talented film director, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux).

Rita and Betty come to a turning point when, in search of traces of the brunette's past, they discover the corpse of a woman, Diane Selwyn, a supposed friend of Rita's. This tragic discovery represents a negative climax which leads to two important scenes – that of the wig and of the Club Silencio – which disclose and prepare the deconstruction of identity and cinema that characterises the second part of the story. In fact, in order to avoid possible aggressions to Rita – who feels in danger after the discovery of her friend Diane's death – Betty suggests the use of a blonde wig as a camouflage, a device which makes Rita the double of Betty and unfolds a variety of reflections on the real relationship occurring between the two women, emphasising their vicinity as well as a possible confusion of their identity.

The first section ends with the scene set at the Club Silencio, a cabaret theatre, where Rita and Betty watch an uncanny show, in which a host on stage repeats: "No hay banda. There is no band! … This is all … a tape-recording. No hay banda! And yet we hear a band. … It's all recorded … It's all a tape … It is an … illusion".[4] In the meantime, a musician appears on stage playing a trumpet, but when he stops playing (or pretending to do so) the music goes on, revealing that, as the presenter says, everything is recorded. The climax of this revelatory spectacle is however represented by "la Llorona de Los Angeles Rebeka del Rio" who sings a yearning version of Roy Orbison's "Crying". While performing, she falls dead on the floor (or pretends to), but yet her voice is still resonating in the air, making clear that what the audience is looking at is just an illusion.

Rita and Betty's astonished reaction to this uncanny show resembles that of *Mulholland Drive* spectators when, just after the Club Silencio scene, the two women disappear; dissolving and confusing images follow and the camera, snaking from Betty and Rita's place to Diane's apartment, finally stops over the corpse, which turns into an awakening girl (Naomi Watts again). Thus the second part of the movie begins, suggesting that the first part is a dream.

[4] All the quotations referring to *Mulholland Drive* are taken directly from the film script.

The Awakening

Though much shorter than the first one, this part is more intense and pressing. Diane appears to be a disappointed woman on the edge of a psychic collapse. Fragmented memories and images of her past reveal that she was in love with Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harrings), and that they

were both actresses in Hollywood. Thus, this part presents a very different reality, in which the same persons return with a different name. Rita is now Camilla Rhodes while Betty is Diane Selwyn.

Their love affair ends when Camilla meets director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), who not only chooses Camilla as the protagonist of his film, but also falls in love with her. Abandoned by her lover and envious of her talent and success, Diane gets more and more depressed. Her sadness grows into aggressive hatred when, at a party at Adam's house in Mulholland Drive, she comes face to face with Camilla's triumphs and her own failure, while remembering her origins and dismal success in Hollywood:

> I'm from Deep River, Ontario, a small town. … I've always wanted to come here. I won this ballet Jitterbug contest … that sort of led to acting … you know, wanting to act. When my aunt died … anyway, she left me some money … she worked here [in the movies].

When Diane is questioned about her encounter with Camilla she answers: "On a *Sylvia North Story* [set] … I wanted the lead so bad. Anyway, Camilla got the part. The director … hadn't so much of me … anyway, that's when we became friends. She helped me getting some parts in some of her films". At the same time, Diane is informed of Camilla and Adam's wedding plans, which however do not prevent Camilla from having another lover, a blonde girl she openly kisses in Diane's presence (and who in the dream 'plays' Camilla Rhodes).

Hence, rage and thirst of vengeance drive Diane to desire Camilla's death. In fact, another flashback shows Diane and a hit man – the same who appeared in the dream – at a diner called Winkie's, arranging Camilla's murder:

> Diane: This is the girl.
> Hit man: Don't show me this photo thing here.
> Diane: It's just an actress's photo, everybody's got one.
> Hit man: You got the money.
> Diane: Sure do.
> Hit man: Ok, once you hand that over to me, it's a done deal. Are you sure you want this?
> Diane: More than anything in this world.
> Hit man: When it's finished, you'll find this [a blue key] where I told you.
> Diane: What's it open?

The hit man answers with a ghastly laugh, when Diane notices the key on her table. This is the proof that the murder has taken place, reminding Diane of her guilt which she can no longer bear. In fact, chased by two mysterious ghosts towards her bedroom, she finally shoots herself on the bed. The last scene goes back to the Club Silencio, where an enigmatic blue-haired woman, completely alone in the dark, desolate theatre, pronounces the last cue: "Silencio".

Freudian Displacements

The presence of uncanny characters and Diane's tragic end render *Mulholland Drive* a psychological thriller, which offers no solution to the audience. Indeed, everybody is left to wonder about Betty/Diane's identity and the unexplained relations between the first and the second part. What has probably proved confusing for detractors of *Mulholland Drive* is the displacement of the characters' identities. The film proposes a sort of uncanny repetition as, in the second part, Betty and Rita are still the protagonists but with different stories and personalities; similarly, other characters too reappear in different roles.[5]

These repetitions are not unusual in Lynch's cinema, but in *Mulholland Drive* they acquire a special meaning when related to the articulation of the movie into dream and after-dream. In this respect, it is useful to underline that to consider the first part of *Mulholland Drive* as Diane's dream and the second part as the hours following her awakening is the most common interpretation of the film though not the only possible one. Many critics, such as Gabriele Biotti for instance, insist on the instability of sense in a film not meant to tell a 'story' with a comprehensible plot.[6] This is undeniably true, as its complexity and richness not only inspire a variety of possible interpretations, but also paradoxically induce the audience to suspend any attempt at deciphering the meaning of what is narrated. Yet, this is the point; a narration *exists* in this film and the accuracy in presenting repetitions and projections reveals a precise design, which in my view is fully expressed by what may be by now called 'the dream/awakening interpretation'. In fact, the sense of suspension between the two parts is not denied but even intensified by opposing dream to reality. The dream/reality opposition does not obliterate the richness of the movie; on the contrary, it increases its ambiguity. The dream serves to explore the inner state of mind of the protagonist, but it also encourages the spectator's identification with Betty and Rita, which is however shattered in the second part. Furthermore, the dream offers interesting references and considerations on Hollywood (the dream-factory par excellence), which are completed in the second part, in which Lynch explores a different cinematic language from the one used in the dream. To read *Mulholland Drive* as composed of Diane's dream and of her tragic awakening is functional to the kind of deconstruction Lynch applies to identity (of the character and the spectator) and to cinema.

Part of the meaning of the repetitions, projections and displacements can be read through a psychoanalytic analysis of the two sections, considering the film as inspired (whether consciously or not) by Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). In this work, Freud interprets the dream as a significant expression of the unconscious and its repressed

[5] Diane takes her dream-name from a waitress at Winkie's where she plans Camilla's murder, while Camilla is associated with Rita Hayworth (*Gilda*). Simultaneously, the name of Camilla Rhodes is projected onto the young blonde actress, linked to the criminal system, and looks like the girl who, in the second part of the movie, is seen by Diane while kissing Camilla. Only Adam Kesher keeps his name, but he too is 'displaced', as in the dream he never meets Rita but only her blonde alter ego, the 'girl' Camilla Rhodes.

[6] See Gabriele Biotti, "L'indicibile e l'immaginario", *Pensieri del cinema* (Milano, Mimesis, 2006), 89-90.

desires: "The dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish".[7] The dream cannot openly express those wishes which could prove too disturbing and which therefore come to be censored by conscience. Consequently, Freud distinguishes a manifest dream (distorted by censorship) and a latent dream:

> We should then assume that in every human being there exist, as the primary cause of dream formation, two psychic forces (tendencies or systems), one of which forms the wish expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship over this dream-wish, thereby enforcing on it a distortion.[8]

Later, in the chapter entitled "The Dream-Work", Freud singles out two common distortions enacted on the latent dream: condensation, which is the compression of several unconscious thoughts into a single one, so as to make it unrecognisable, and displacement, by which a situation directly connected with the repressed wish is 'placed' into a different context.

These two operations are evidently implied in the way *Mulholland Drive* is constructed. Indeed, as all the characters appearing in the dream are also present in Diane's memories, it is possible to conjecture that Diane's dream-work has shifted them in different contexts in order to hide the latent dream meaning. These shifts are the strongest proof that the first part of the movie is actually a dream; furthermore, through the comparison between the dream and the hours following Diane's awakening, and by analysing the dream according to Freud's theories, it is possible to trace back to the desires behind the dream and so to reveal its hidden meaning.

The starting point can be a comparison between the characters of Betty and Diane. Taking for granted that Diane is feeling guilty for Camilla's death, her self-projection on Betty appears very clear: Betty is strong, talented, well-mannered and her feelings for Camilla's *alter ego*, Rita, are of friendship, love and above all protection. Indeed, she helps Rita and defends her from a plot which she has actually arranged. In this respect, by displacing the real motives for the murder onto two different subplots (those related respectively to the Cowboy and to the hit man), the dreamer denies her own responsibility for the murder. The words "This is the girl", which Diane says to the hit man at Winkie's, showing a photo of Camilla, are repeated in the dream by a man, Castiglione, who belongs to the Cowboy's organisation, when he recommends the 'other' Camilla Rhodes to Adam. Displacement also involves objects, like the money paid for the murder, and the blue key signalling that the murder has taken place, which in the dream are both contained in Rita's bag, and therefore indicate that the murder has been neither arranged, nor put into practice.[9] Interestingly, Camilla is transformed into Rita, a weak, vulnerable woman, deprived of the dangerous erotic power characterising Camilla in the second part. At the same time, Camilla is also doubled into the young blond

[7] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition, 1997), 68.

[8] Ibid., 53.

[9] In fact, after the murder attempt, Rita finds a great amount of money and a mysterious blue key in her bag.

actress who is at the centre of the Cowboy's plot. This means that Camilla is displaced in two figures: one (Rita) is 'saved' by Diane and accepted because no longer dangerous; the other (the 'girl' Camilla Rhodes) is condemned through the allusion that she earns her fame through a criminal 'male' system, an oneiric 'translation' of Camilla's sexual power. From Diane's memories, indeed, we learn that Adam and Camilla had fallen in love on the set of a film, where they blatantly showed their physical attraction before Diane's eyes. In the dream, Diane punishes Camilla, representing her sex appeal as a subterranean criminal organisation, insinuating that this, and not her talent, is the authentic source of her success. The sensuality that had wounded Diane with Adam's complicity, then, in the dream becomes a threat to Adam too.

It is also important to notice that Freud is very explicit in highlighting that "dreams are quite incapable of expressing the alternative 'either-or'; it is their custom to take both members of this alternative into the same context, as though they had an equal right to be there".[10] Consequently, the coexistence of alternatives about Camilla's identities means that the dreamer expresses a variety of contrasting feelings towards her but also towards herself. In particular, if on the one hand Diane creates her idealised version through Betty, on the other she also appears as a corpse, manifesting the desire to suppress the guilty part of herself, or to be punished for her crime.

[10] Ibid., 200.

Furthermore, the dream interestingly starts and ends with two impressive scenes. The first one is directly connected with the act of dreaming and its main characters are two figures not belonging to Diane's everyday life, nor to Camilla and Adam's entourage. The two men are presumably a psychoanalyst and his patient, Dan, talking in the same Winkie's, which is the scene of Camilla's murder arrangement:

> Dan: I just wanted to come here …
> Dr: Why this Winkie's? …
> Dan: I had a dream about this place … Well…it's the second one I've had … but they are both the same … they start out that I'm in here but … it's not day or night. It's kinda half night, you know? … but it looks like just like this … except for the light. And I'm scared like I can't tell you. Of all people, you're standing right over there … by that counter. You're in both dreams and you're scared. I get even more frightened when I see how afraid you are and … then I realise what it is. There's a man … in the back of this place. He's the one who's doing it. I can see him through the wall. I can see his face … I hope that I never see that face ever … outside of my dream.
> Dr: So, you came to see if it's out there
> Dan: To get rid of this god-awful feeling.

The two men at this point walk towards the wall, behind which the terrible face is supposed to hide. The face, scarred and uncannily 'painted' in black, appears and soon vanishes, causing such a strong shock in the

dreamer, that he falls dead on the floor, probably killed by a heart attack. This episode shows a fundamental relevance for the following events. It provides a key to interpret the film, opening a door between dream and reality and introducing an element of absolute mystery.

The dreamer and the awful man in black also return in the second part of *Mulholland Drive*. The dreamer appears at Winkie's when Diane is talking with the hit man, and it is evident that he stares at Diane, as if understanding her words to the hit man. Hence, she may imagine her guilt mirrored in the eyes of that stranger: the dream transposes this episode as Diane has unconsciously registered it; the dreamer is frightened because he has seen a horrible creature, Diane, who turns into the man in black, "the one who's doing it", the only responsible for the murder. At the same time, Dan's death, consequent to the monster's appearance, is a way of eliminating the only witness of Diane's involvement in the murder. Needless to say, Diane identifies with Dan too, when he says he wants "to get rid of this god-awful feeling". So, the encounter between dreamer and 'monster' stages the encounter between Diane and her unconscious, which is now speaking for her ("He's the one who's doing it"). Indeed, despite the oneiric work on the latent dream-content, Diane is fixed on the traumatic events surrounding Camilla's murder, and the fear of meeting the awful face outside the dream – which is made explicit by Dan's words – testifies Diane's fear of revealing her secret and facing her guilt. Significantly, in the second part, what Diane had feared most is finally realised: the monster, who appears *outside* Diane's dream, sets her ghosts free, leading her to suicide. So, like Dan, Diane cannot survive her encounter with horror.

If this episode reveals the protagonist's most hidden state of mind about herself and the murder, the scene at the Club Silencio shows how, at a certain point, the illusion of the dream is disturbed by another strange figure, the presenter/magician. The revelation that everything is an illusion interrupts the oneiric stream, avoiding the repression enacted by the censorship of the dream. Betty begins to tremble and a few moments later Diane wakes up. Thus, if altogether coherent, protected by the powerful mechanism of repression, the dream nonetheless presents obscure points and interruptions which break the cohesiveness of the narration and open the door onto another secret reality, another level of signification unfolding in the second part and breaking the thick net of expectations cherished by the audience.

Hollywood (De)Constructions

The use of the dream in *Mulholland Drive* allows for a connection between an investigation into the protagonist's identity and into cinematic

mechanisms. Hollywood, in particular, is called into question by the numerous quotes and references to famous films.

Apart from those which are explicitly recalled, such as Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946), *Mulholland Drive* presents characters and situations which ironically reinterpret, for instance, 1940s noirs, or Quentin Tarantino's films. One of the most striking cinematic elements, however, is the blonde/brunette binary, which, on the one hand, serves the purpose of symbolising identity condensations and displacements, underlining antagonism or vicinity between Diane and Camilla's several projections; on the other hand, it evokes two typical female constructions framed in two classic Hollywood genres and often present in Lynch's films too. The brunette recalls the *femme fatale* the 1940-50s noirs, connected with icons such as Rita Hayworth, while the blonde is reminiscent of the teenager of the1950s romance, often interpreted by Sandra Dee. As Le Cain writes,

> The dream factory atmosphere of *Mulholland Drive* is compounded by an element common to all Lynch's neo-*noirs* but never more appropriate than here: the retro '50s imagery. While not quoting any particular film, Lynch uses this look to evoke media-memories of an 'innocent' America. It is the ideal pop culture iconography for his characters' dreams of purity and fulfilment, and thus equally ideal for subversion. This is definitely the case in *Mulholland Drive* – Betty/Diane was brought to Hollywood after winning a jitterbug contest and, from what we see of the film she wants to star in, it appears to be a '50s set romance with musical scenes. But the '50s was also the classic decade of *film noir*, which like Lynch, embraced such themes as paranoia and conspiracy, the constant questioning and subversion of accepted identity…. [11]

[11] Maximilian Le Cain, "In Dreams: A Review of *Mulholland Drive*", *Senses of Cinema* 19 (March-April 2002), http:www.senseofcinema.com/contents/01/19/mulholland_dreams.html

If, as Le Cain points out, the blonde and the brunette evoke the two sides of American society as registered and filtered by 1950s cinema, the continuous blurring of their opposition in *Mulholland Drive* shortens the distance between innocence and perversion, entailing a more controversial cinematic language, in which "the questioning and subversion of accepted identity" are transversal to genre and become a way to criticise cinema itself from within, by reinterpreting cinematic *clichés*.

The blonde/brunette opposition acquires another meaning in *Mulholland Drive*, then, when referring to Alfred Hitchcock's cinema, specifically considering the moment in which Rita is driven by Betty to become from dark- to blonde-haired, by wearing a wig. Hitchcock's movies are often marked by the presence of opposite female characters, whose differences are signalled by hair colour. At the same time, there are female characters whose transformations are analogously rendered by their hair colour changes, as happens in *Marnie* (1964) or in *Vertigo* (1958). In particular, *Vertigo* seems to present a slight analogy with *Mulholland Drive*, though with a different aim. In *Vertigo*, Scottie (James Stuart) manipulates Judy (Kim Novak), in order to turn her into the

revenant of his dead beloved Madeleine, and the first step of this fatal transformation is hair colour change. In *Mulholland Drive*, Betty too induces Rita to change her hair colour by wearing a blonde wig, which, unlike what happens to Judy, makes her different from the original. The scene in which Betty attracts Rita (with the blonde wig on) to the mirror, in order to look at their reflected image, is highly significant; complacently smiling at their resemblance, she says with satisfaction: "You look like someone else". In other words, instead of evoking the image of the dead, whom she had killed, Diane wants to remark that Rita is different from Camilla and controlled by Betty. Hence, both movies enact an identity construction on Judy/Madeleine and Camilla/Rita, but with different purposes.

In analysing *Vertigo* in respect to the mechanism of repetition, Elisabeth Bronfen points out: "repetition articulates loss not only by virtue of enacting a lost object in the midst of difference, but also in the sense that the first repeated term refers to something that is not only a presence but also an absence".[12] The absence refers not simply to the fact that a copy is *not* the original, but to the fact that, in *Vertigo* as well as in *Mulholland Drive*, the original female figure inspiring the repetition/construction is itself a replica, so that the authentic model is not recoverable. In *Vertigo*, indeed, Scottie imposes a change on Judy, in order to resuscitate Madeleine, in a cruel game of identity projection, in which the original model has been absent the whole time, since Judy *is* also the Madeleine Scottie had known; besides, Madeleine's 'imitation' interpreted by Judy is further constructed on her being possessed by her great-grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, appearing only in a painting. In the same way, *Mulholland Drive* offers Diane's subjective vision of the facts in which Camilla comes to be filtered through dream and psychosis, so that the original Camilla remains absent, behind a construction originated by the picture of Rita Hayworth and remarked by the blonde wig; she is identified with the cruel dark lady also in the second part, where she is seen through Diane's rage and instable personality.[13]

The identity construction enacted upon Camilla is further emphasised by her association to Rita Hayworth. Before becoming a movie star, Rita, who had Spanish origins and looks, with her thick black hair and low forehead, was forced by her studio head Harry Cohn to raise her hairline through electrolysis, in order to Americanise her image.[14] Therefore, the fact that Rita/Camilla is associated to Rita Hayworth/Gilda, on the one hand entraps her within a fixed 'negative' role; on the other, by recalling a famous *femme fatale* who had been notably manipulated by the Hollywood system, it also signals how the *femme fatale* was exploited inside and outside the set (and in Rita/Camilla's case, inside and outside the dream).

[12] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 326.

[13] The *femme fatale* or dark lady is represented in classical noirs as a mysterious beauty manipulating and leading male characters into trouble. At the same time, the *femme fatale* is recognised by now as the scapegoat of the male conservative system of classical Hollywood cinema, in which she functioned as 'female other', marking the limits of morality with her final death. Camilla embodies both aspects, figuring in any case as the *object* (of desire) in Diane/Betty's hands.

[14] William Anthony Nericcio and Guillermo Nericcio Garcia, "When Electrolysis Proxies for the Existential", in Arturo J. Aldama, ed., *Violence and the Body* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 266-274.

Dis/solutions

The deconstruction of Hollywood *clichés* is not the only way *Mulholland Drive* questions cinema mechanisms. The way the first part is harshly interrupted displaces the spectator; the discovery that what has been narrated until this point is the relative vision of one character, demands a revision of the audience's viewpoint. What is even more displacing is the fact that while underlining a *subjective* vision of facts, *Mulholland Drive* simultaneously deconstructs the subject. According to Gabriele Biotti, *Mulholland Drive* is marked by a continuous search and loss of identity on the part of Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla. For both, Hollywood is, in the beginning, the place where they can have the chance to become different people: Betty looks for the opportunity to become a star, Rita acquires a new identity (related to *Gilda*) after having lost her memory.[15] In my view, however, as discussed in the previous section, identities are actually influenced and fixed by cinematic stereotypes, with a considerable difference between the two women's positions: it is Diane who 'speaks', and while she finds the chance to become someone else in her Hollywood dream through Betty – a change which she deeply desires in order to avoid her sense of guilt – Rita/Camilla cannot choose her role. Her identity is denied both in the dream and in the second part, where she is still remembered (and thus filtered) by Diane.

[15] Biotti, "L'indicibile e l'immaginario", 92-93.

But what about Diane? She is the subject who speaks, but at the same time, her subjectivity is attacked from within her own mind. She appears as multiple and extremely multifaceted: she is Diane but also Betty, and all the characters of her dream are somehow expressions of her personality, which contradicts the possibility of a unitary subject with a unitary viewpoint. This is further underlined by the fact that she is an actress. Besides, her final suicide tragically dramatises the dissolution of identity, which seems to be one of the main focuses of the film.

Parallel to Diane's identity dissolution, the movie also insists on the dissolution of that kind of cinema, which tends to construct an illusion and create characters, with whom the audience easily identifies – and this is initially presented in *Mulholland Drive* through Diane's dream. Christian Metz has pointed out that cinema is a 'strange mirror', where the spectator somehow repeats the Lacanian mirror stage:

> A strange mirror, then, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like … because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are pray to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it.[16]

[16] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1977), 49.

Though the onlooker does not perceive his/her own image in the cinematic screen, the film reinforces his/her sense of being a unitary subject. For Lacan, then, the subject's illusion of being unitary and coherent is maintained by a series of sutures, keeping together the different components of subjectivity. Kaja Silverman calls 'suturing' a cinematic process, which produces the illusion of coherence through cinematic devices. In "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice", Silverman refers to 'synchronisation' as one such suturing device:

> Synchronization functions as a virtual imperative within fiction film. … Since within dominant cinema the image track is cut to the measure of the human form, and the sound track to the measure of human voice, the rule of synchronization must be understood as referring both above all to the smooth alignment of the human form with the human voice – i.e., to the representation of a homogeneous thinking subject whose exteriority is congruent with its interiority. The 'marriage' of sound and image is thus performed in the name of homo-centricity, and under Cartesian auspices. … By deepening the diegesis and concealing the apparatus, synchronization also maintains the viewing/listening subject in a protective darkness and silence.[17]

[17] Kaja Silverman, "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice", *Re-Vision. Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 132-133.

Silverman suggests that the subject emerging from this kind of cinema is "a homogeneous thinking subject" whose exteriority and interiority are perfectly balanced. The cinematic tricks, the sutures, producing this effect, then, are accurately hidden, allowing the audience to be completely absorbed in the illusion.

Mulholland Drive, instead, functions through an opposite mechanism, that is the de-suturation of narrative elements and of the film devices. This does not mean that Lynch eliminates the sutures, but that he makes them visible. Instead of creating the illusion of something real, he insists that everything is fiction, or, as the presenter/magician says, "it's all recorded".

The fictitious nature of cinema is in this sentence clearly revealed, but the reflection on cinema starts with the two auditions proposed in the first part. The first is Betty's audition for Bob Brooker, in which she shows her talent and charisma as an actress, by playing a sensual scene whose effect is strikingly realistic. This proves to be surprising because Betty's rehearsal with Rita had not been so accurate and Betty's comment on the script – "Such a lame scene" – did not prelude to such a magnetic moment. This audition, however, though revealing Betty's high quality and ability, is an example of how some cinematic device can produce a realistic effect. When the audition begins, in fact, the camera focuses only on the two actors, cutting the staff out of the shot, and this device – more than the actors' ability – is what gives us the illusion that what we are seeing is 'real'. The director's advice, "don't play it for real, until it gets real" and his later comment "it was forced maybe … but still humanistic", may refer to the necessity for this kind of cinema of projecting the illusion of realism,

centred on the subject; Bob Brooker gives altogether a positive opinion of the audition not thanks to the actors' ability, but just because the scene was "still *humanistic*". The choice of this word is too peculiar not to allude to the centricity of a human subject "under Cartesian auspices", as Silverman ironically writes.

The second audition shown in the movie is for a film directed by Adam Kesher, who, instead, has a different vision of cinema: he is probably going to direct a musical, and his recasting implies the use of playback. This is a step towards the complete fracture between voice and image, which is central at the Club Silencio and which deconstruct 'humanistic' acting in favour of a different idea of spectacle, aiming at exploring the potential of cinema, rather than offering something which seems to be real. In this respect, the show at the Club Silencio is highly evocative of George Méliès's experimentalism at the dawning of cinema, and the passage from realistic performances to the 'magic' of the Club Silencio recalls the difference between the Lumière brothers' and Méliès's ways of conceiving cinema. Indeed, while the former intended cinema as a source of representation of reality, the latter experimented a more creative cinematic language.[18]

In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch too experiments the potential of cinema, interrupting the linear narration of the first part and with it also the audience's expectations. The fracture between sound and image reverberates itself on the fracture between the first and the second section of the movie, which proves shocking because it is enacted before giving satisfying solutions to the mysteries (Rita's identity, the identity of the corpse) and before answering to the expectations towards the characters' destinies. Suddenly, other characters and other stories are presented and this induces spectators to assume a more critical attitude towards what they are seeing and listening to. In the scenes which follows, Lynch's experimentalism is extreme. Diane's descent into hell is depicted with a cinematic language that confuses the audience: past memories and hallucinations suddenly intrude in the present, in a puzzling continuity. The use of point-of-view shots relativises also this part of the movie, even in the few scenes set in the present, where it is evident that Diane is no longer the speaking subject, but is narrated through and by the camera. In declining any pretense of objectivity, *Mulholland Drive* also directly questions the audience, by presenting two characters who directly look into the camera: the 'creature' in black and the enigmatic blue-haired woman at the Club Silencio. Their gaze opens a breach in the cinematic screen, in order to reach *us*, so that the sutures of narration, so astutely emerging from Lynch's language, also function as a bridge uniting spectacle and spectators. Significantly, the last cue – "Silencio" – clearly addressed to the audience, is pronounced by a woman who is a spectator herself.

[18] For a further discussion on this topic see Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, trans. Lorraine Mortimer (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1978).

In conclusion, if the first part of *Mulholland Drive* resembled the Lacanian mirror in which Diane could silence her anguish and dream of a new identity, from the scene at the Club Silencio on, the mirror is broken. Sutures, as the rifts produced by the mirror rupture, emerge, interrupting the continuity with the expected world, and inaugurating a continuity with an unexpected elsewhere. This 'detour' lets Diane's secret about the murder come out. But, playing with words, it is possible to say that, rather than appearing as the solution of the mystery, it appears as a dis/solution of ('humanist') identity and (classic) cinema.

Stamatia Portanova

A bit of Spring everywhere: subjectivity as an effect of time in Kim Ki-Duk's films

> *Aeon*: the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides that which transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet-here, a simultaneous too-late and too-early, a something that is both going to happen and has just happened. *Chronos*: The time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject …. In short, the difference is not at all between the ephemeral and the durable, nor even between the regular and the irregular, but between two modes of individuation, two modes of temporality.
> (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*)

Nothing happens, as if time were at a standstill. A man lives without the company of human beings, only sharing his days and nights with a child, a little creature we would not dare to include in the human sphere. As we will discover, children have something divine in them, and can enter our mundane condition only at the price of losing (at least) part of their divinity. The man is a Buddhist monk living on a mobile platform which floats like an island on the waters of a lake, and the child is his disciple Sisal. In their little house/temple, time flows slowly and life seems eternal. This temporal immobility is interrupted only by the chronological rhythm of day and night and of the four seasons, and by the continuous crossings of the lake with a little boat. Individuated by a few traits outlining the quietness of their gestures and the stillness of the landscape which surrounds them, the two figures are the main characters of *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring* (2003), a film by Korean director Kim Ki-Duk.

With a quick spatio-temporal jump, we land on a different scenario, a contemporary Seoul which is the set of Kim Ki-Duk's last film, *Time* (2006). In apparent contrast with the quiet initial description of the two monks' life in *Spring…*, *Time* starts with an abrupt episode: Seh-Hee, a young and beautiful woman, bumps into another masked woman who is coming out of a plastic surgery clinic. The latter has just undergone an irreversible transformation, an event that will return again and again in the two women's lives. In this case, transition does not coincide with the chronological passage of time, but with a violent artificial transformation of the face. Two lives are condensed in a few, decisive instants: a woman tries to stop time by repeating the same 'surgical ritual' again and again, another woman meets her, always at the same moment, at the clinic exit, when her face is still covered by a mask. The metamorphosis of a face

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transforms the clinic into a theatre, or a temple, where the same technical/aesthetic procedure and the same encounter are endlessly performed…

For Sisal and his master monk, for Seh-Hee and the mysterious masked woman, time flows as a rigid chronological oscillation made of immutable cycles and of endless returns. A continuous return of episodes and scenes (the four seasons and their periodicity, the surgical operation as a recurring obsession, but also the re-occurrence of situations, faces, places, climatic conditions and lights) characterises the original montage adopted by Kim Ki-Duk. The returning theme of time and its regular cycles gives to the films the flavour of a reflection on repetition and difference. In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze argues that "repetition at the level of external conduct echoes, for its own part, a more secret vibration which animates it".[1] Time is not immobile or cyclical but flows at different speeds, revealing every enduring presence in life to be an illusion. The seasons of *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring* and the faces of *Time*, and also all the rituals and operations, things and persons, forms and subjects appearing and disappearing together with them, are caught in the temporal flow, becoming the ungraspable and extemporary effects of time. In Henri Bergson's words, subjectivity itself is only a temporary stoppage in a continuous process of inter-change (of bodies that always change while ex-changing something).[2]

In Kim Ki-Duk's cinematic poetics, even the apparent certainty of cultural belonging and subjectivity, at times seem only to appear as flickering illusions. In both the mainstream cinema and the more 'avant-garde' tradition of South-Korea, his films represent a cinema of the interval, of the in-between where subjectivity is cinematically and philosophically viewed as nothing more than a condensation in the continuous flow of time, and time as nothing less than the mode in which subjective individuation takes place. A perspective that, in Iain Chambers' words, "announces the very undoing of a subject-centred occidental humanism."[3] Rather than a representation of the world and of its (dominant or subaltern) subjects, cinema appears as a means of reflection endowed with all the creative and destructive force of philosophy.[4]

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari and on Bergson's conceptualisations, this article analyses the way in which both *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring* and *Time* compose and, simultaneously, destroy the subjectivities of their main characters. Among the most visually and thematically suggestive of Kim Ki-Duk's works, the two films appear as the cinematic realisations of an idea of time actualised by both repetition and 'becoming'. At the same time, subjectivity appears in the films as an effect of time, the residue of a repeated process of subjectification rather than a pre-given and stable formation.

An 'indefinite time of events' disperses the characters' personalities and lives into an intensive dimension of affects and gestures, beyond the

[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 1.

[2] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

[3] See Iain Chambers, this issue.

[4] Kim Ki-Duk's cinema has conquered the favour of Occidental audiences, particularly for its original visual style and its mixture of 'Oriental' and 'Occidental' aspects. After a debut in 1996 with the film *Crocodile*, he reveals his talent thanks to a personal aesthetic view of cinema and a knowledge of the classics of international cinema, in significant opposition to both mainstream culture and historical heritage. For a more detailed account of South-Korean cinematographic tradition, see Huh Moon-yung, "Il cinema coreano degli anni novanta", in Luca Mosso and Lorenza Pignatti (eds), *Il volto e l'anima*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007).

chronological order 'that clearly situates things and persons'. Along this volatile temporality, *Spring* and *Time* weave their multi-dimensional woofs of untimely stories and fleeting images, of universal themes and instantaneous impressions: the divinity of Sisal's childhood and his fall into human adulthood, the sudden destruction and re-appearance of a woman's face as a marker of her precarious 'human' identity, the destructive force of a young monk's love as a 'hole' in his repetitive life and its recuperation into the linearity of monogamy, the geometric and linear stratifications of a park as the landscape of Seh-Hee's love story and its capture by her omnipresent camera, the 'Oriental' quality of calligraphy and its capture by the linearity of writing as an 'Occidental' technique, the stratified chronology of photographs and their precipitation into the 'phantasmatic' dimension of the image as a 'double', the virtuality and actuality of cinematic images and events as the two faces of a unique crystal of time…

Events and faces: the human and the divine

Two different temporalities, or modes of individuation, respectively link cinema to the positioning of identities, subjects or things on one side (a chronological order obtained for example through montage), and to the occurring of events on the other (an indefinite time of events rendered through the qualitative modifications of light and sound).[5] These two temporalities represent the coexistence of repetition and difference in Kim Ki-Duk's films. In the concept of the eternal return introduced by Nietzsche, re-conceptualised by Bergson and re-written by Deleuze's philosophical analyses of film, eternity is not the perennial nature of what returns, but only indicates the return of the different.[6] Cinematic chronology is characterised by repetition: the metric repetition of frames, the sequenced repetition of scenes edited one after another. On the other side, Aeon, the time of the event, discloses the appearance of novelty and difference, for example through the creation of pure optical and sonic modifications. Without being limited to its chronological extension, the singularity of an event is given by its intensities (or 'degrees'). The intensity of a luminosity or a shade (such as the green and yellow gradations colouring Sisal's Spring) can make a moment last for ever, the intensity of a passion or an obsession (for example Seh-Hee's self-destructive passion) can sweep away a whole life in an instant. A moment, but also a season or a whole life, acquire the same force and fugacity of events.

The most significant effect of this double temporal conceptualisation is not the variation of subjective identities, but the revelation of the redundant and illusory nature of identity itself. The subject is de-composed, scattered into a myriad of singular moments, into hours, days, seasons whose coming

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 261.

[6] See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche e la filosofia*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 36. English edition: Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London, The Athlone Press: 1983).

and going makes identity (every identity, even that of a child) emerge on the surface as only a returning residue or side-effect. The same conception visualised in our two films animates the Bergsonian philosophy of 'duration', a mutable temporality constituting, in the philosopher's words, the 'spiritual' side of life. For Bergson, the potential differentiation sensed in the duration of one moment, independently from its extension (minute, hour or day), is opposed to the chronological measure by intelligence.[7] Having this intuitive perception of time, feeling time as the return of an infinity of differences in every moment, gives to human perception a sort of 'divine' capacity. Lingering on the qualitative duration of events, on the colour and sound of every moment and on their different intensities, the subtle sensitivity of the camera in the two films immerses them into a sort of 'divine' time.

[7] Bergson, *Matter and memory*, 207.

Spring

The metamorphosis of things and subjects along the variations of luminous and acoustic intensities gives us the most profound sense of time and its visualisation in *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring*. As the director himself points out, at a first glance, the feelings of yesterday, those we are experiencing now, and those of tomorrow are not so different among themselves, in the same way as the four seasons seem to repeat themselves with a conservative cyclicity. From a closer look (a cinematographic close-up?), however, a season or a life become, with their intensive qualities, the durations of more 'divine' metamorphoses.

In the first of the four episodes of the film, dedicated to "Spring", the child-monk Sisal appears endowed with the 'divine' capacity to establish a connection with nature and the elements: land and water, plants and animals, all become part of a microscopic world of sensations and discoveries beyond the spatial and temporal barriers of everyday life. Living in an ecstatic condition of forgetfulness out of time and beyond subjective consciousness, he is caught by the vernal force, careless about human preoccupations of moral causality or temporal consequentiality.[8] His whole life has the intensity of a season, a Spring, a moment which is followed by the camera through an infinity of light and colour gradations: the yellow light of the sun, the green brightness of trees, the crystalline sound of flowing water. One day, an event occurs: the energetic *puissance* of Spring pushes the child to act in a cruel, inhuman way, torturing a fish, a frog and a snake to death. At this point, the fast montage of the episode, full of rapid cuts and of close-ups, is followed by the sudden appearance of music and becomes 'tonal', colouring the event with a strong emotional significance.[9]

[8] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "La visione dionisiaca del mondo", in *Verita' e menzogna* (Milano: BUR, 2006).

[9] In his book *Cinema 2*, Deleuze summarises Eisenstein's classification of four main types of montage: metrical, rhythmic, tonal and harmonic, of which the 'tonal' corresponds to 'intensive movements' in the shot (like movements of light or heat) that appeal to a tonality. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Continuum, 2005).

The event is full of consequences. Depriving the child of his divinity, the master's punishment that follows brings about the capacity to share pain or feel guilt and to perceive time humanly, by teaching that actions

have a before and an after. From that moment, the child becomes a conscious subject. The episode is part of a process of growth that strings all the events of his childhood along the thread of a linear subjectification, transforming the seasons of life into subjective stages. Representing the flow of life as an innocent, divine game that can only be perceived in its 'aesthetic' force rather than in its moral sense, the episode illustrates an Eraclitean conception of time.[10] Still, in the last day of Spring, Sisal's cry announces an imminent future of guilt and redemption, the formation of a mature subject and his insertion into a linear time. This imminent destiny is now drawn on his tearful face, which has now become human to the point of 'inhumanity'.

[10] See Deleuze, *Nietzsche e la filosofia*, 36.

The face

> The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start. It is by nature a close-up, with its … emptiness and boredom …. To the point that if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, … by strange true becomings that … make *faciality traits* themselves finally elude the organization of the face - …. Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled.[11]

[11] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 171.

At the beginning of *Time*, a sudden event marks the destiny of the main character: Seh-Hee bumps into a masked woman who is coming out of a plastic surgery clinic, and whose face we cannot see. The successive scenes show Seh-Hee as a jealous and neurotic character obsessed by one thought: feeling tired of having the same boring aspect, and fearing to lose her boyfriend Ji-Woo, she wants a new face. In her delirious love, the woman comes to a self-destructive decision: destructing her face (and identity), or making it disappear, by replacing it with a new one.

According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'faciality', the codification of the body through its identifiable features, is a particular mechanism which allows the production of identity and signification, a mechanism which guarantees the recognisability of a subject and the production of meaning as the 'conditions of possibility' for human life to acquire a sense.[12] Through faciality, the authority acquired by the subject can in its turn ensure the power of the signifier, simultaneously sacrificing corporeal expressivity and its semiotics of gestures and perceptions, in favour of verbal language: the face as the flat surface of a speaking mouth.[13] Particularly in cinema, with its immobility and sameness, the face neutralises the 'divine' capacity of the body to surrender to the flow of time. On the screen, it constitutes the flat, too human support for an equally flat metaphysics of time as a sum of frozen moments: "by nature a close-up, with its inanimate white surfaces, its shining black holes, its emptiness

[12] Ibid., 167.

[13] Ibid., 168.

and boredom."[14] Even the affectivity of the close-up, despite its microscopic nervous twitches, is overcome by the immobility of the face; even the plasticity of its wrinkles freezes into the unavoidable significance of the face.

[14] Ibid., 171.

One day, while she is in bed with Ji-Woo, Seh-Hee disappears under the sheet, as if the white fabric had become a mask to hide her face. As argued by Deleuze and Guattari, in no case does the mask serve to dissimulate, to hide, even while showing or revealing …. "[Rather], the mask assures the head's belonging to the body".[15] From this function comes the difference between the face as a surface with its identifiable human features and traits, and the head, a multidimensional and impersonal entity, whose volumes and cavities are filled with the spirituality of tribal shamanistic rites. When Seh-Hee's eyes, but also nose, mouth, cheeks, disappear, what is left is her head: the face returns to the multidimensionality of the body as a head, a sort of 'flesh piece' wrapping an emotional turmoil and giving it a plastic, or volumetric, consistency and a spiritual, sacred value. An intensive temporality animates this scene, where the masked face becomes inseparable from the atmosphere of the moment: Seh-Hee feels oppressed, almost suffocated, by her own face. For a moment, time flows intensely rather than being mechanically beaten by words, Seh-Hee and Ji-Woo cease to be two isolated speaking subjects and are taken into a sensuous spiritual connection. A luscious chromatism (white sheets, black eyes and hair, red lips and pillow) and a 'material' sonority (noises of love and cry) intensely replace words, marking the scene with a palpable quality. Covered by the sheet, Seh-Hee's head becomes a voluminous surface to the touch of Ji-Woo's (and our own) eyes. Ceasing to be a silent and flat expressive surface for a myriad of affective impulses (as in all the film's close-ups), and breaking its link with verbal language and speech, it becomes the fleshy object of a voluptuous haptic vision. An intense gap is suddenly opened that plunges the linear development of their love story into a 'divine' dimension out of chronological time but full of sensations and affects.

[15] Ibid., 176.

Affects and landscapes: holes and lines

Distinguishing two levels of reception of cinematographic images and identifying them respectively with meaning and affect, Brian Massumi defines 'qualification' as the signifying content of a visual or audiovisual image (usually conveyed by the verbal expressions of a face), and 'intensity', or 'affectivity', as the strength and duration of its effect (usually passing through the sensations of the body). These two levels are also temporally different: "Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is

static – temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It is like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it."[16] With its strong affective force, Kim Ki-Duk's cinema is full of scenes which develop beyond the linearity of culturally defined meaning, opening measureless gaps in and between qualified bodies and things, intervals of pure change and virtuality. The paradoxical relation of affect to the body (as being 'of' it but always escaping 'outside' of it, in its past or in its future, always felt as a memory or a potential) unfolds as a vibratory event, an intensive state of the body exceeding itself and its own subjective confines or positions.[17] The temporal dimension when flesh vibrates is a moment of inability to act or reflect, a 'spasmodic passivity', a total receptivity that paralyzes the body in what we, in a Spinozian way, might call a passion. The intensity of the cinematic image strikes us with the force of a 'passion', the in-between of activity and passivity, of body and screen. On the screen, the close-up can thus be rendered as a 'reincorporation' of the face into an affective, bodily dimension. Intensive (im)mobility, the affective temporality of the body, is different from linear action and speaking, the stratified temporality of the face.

In Kim Ki-Duk's films, the difference between meaning and affect is also coupled to a parallel, fundamental distinction between the meaningful, socially qualified nature of love and the intensive, unqualified force of affect. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish the linearity of love from affect and its de-subjectifying force, where the identity of the beloved object of desire is much less important than the strength of the affect felt. In this sense, love is associated to a form of re-subjectification, a relationship where one's body is captured by the image of the lover's face: "The most loyal and tender, or intense, love assigns a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement that constantly switch places, wrapped in the sweetness of being a naked statement in the other's mouth, and of the other's being a naked enunciation in my own mouth."[18] In its cinematographic version, love appears as a means of qualifying and subjectifying affectivity between two bodies, submitting it to a chronological narrative that gives it the meaning and the sense of an eternal duration: 'Till death…'

Summer

When, in "Summer", the young boy Sisal passionately falls in love with a girl, his feeling acquires the force of an affect that involves his whole body into a further 'becoming'. The metamorphosis of the character is transposed into a conventional narrative technique almost without duration and limited to a series of short, incomplete shots. It is the agitated sphere of adolescent love, an adolescent desire which sweeps subjectivity away in an instant, giving the lethargic body an energy, a velocity and a capacity to transmit and receive affect.

[16] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 26.

[17] In Spinoza's theory, affection is the state of the affected body and implies the presence and image of the affected body (idea, representation). But the nature of affect is transitive and non-representational, experienced in a duration which includes a difference between states. See Spinoza, *Etica* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2000).

[18] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 131.

A woman, or rather an adolescent, draws Sisal into an affective vortex of transformations. The girl appears in the film not as a particular 'stage' towards the maturity of the woman-subject, but as the embodiment of the feminine metamorphic capacity to avoid enclosure into one age group, sex, or kingdom.[19] The 'girl' that is in both woman and man gives the linear process of subjective development and growth an instant of reverse direction: as if possessed, contaminated at the sight of her image, Sisal blushes, laughs, trembles and jumps around, being moved by an intensity, a spasmodic activity/receptivity that takes him and his whole life out of their path. The camera follows him while he becomes a child again, and also an animal and a girl, dismantling all behavioural references and all social conventions of age, sex or humanity, crossing a threshold…

Although the rooms of his house/temple are divided by a door, the other side is always visible because there is no wall.[20] The door is a symbol of social conventions: when he crosses the invisible wall to follow the girl to the city, he breaks the social rule, while passing to a different condition, falling into a hole, becoming someone else… Making a hole in the straight line that is his life, love is the only force which can distract Sisal's face from the fixity of its human, male identity, and from its reflection in the repetitiveness of its habitual landscape.[21]

The landscape

The young Seh-Hee is crossing an irreversible threshold too. After the operation has cut and re-assembled her face, she must wait, before becoming 'someone else', for six months. This interval constitutes a virtual zone of non-existence, a hole in the film's narrative, a gap where she has been introduced by plastic surgery, and where she seems to disappear. Immediately before the operation, the image of her face reflected in a mirror made her sink into the simultaneous virtuality of her past and future, a suspended zone suggested by the intense, almost blinding, lighting of the scene. And when, during a six month recovery, Ji-Woo once meets her, her face is covered with a mask, a sign of her imminent re-identification. Rather than hiding or dissolving it, this time "the mask assures the erection, the construction of the face, the facialization of the head and the body: the mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face."[22]

The masked Seh-Hee appears to Ji-Woo in Baemigumi Park, the same place where the two lovers took pictures of themselves in the past, and which is full of sculptures shaped with giant bodies and faces. In its subjectifying role, the masked face of the woman finds an important correlate in the natural or architectural features of the environment. For Deleuze and Guattari, face-landscape combinations are related to the connection of 'faciality' with 'landscapity', the positioning of subjects/

[19] On the concept of the 'girl' as the in-between of sexes and ages, see "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…" in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[20] Federica Aliano, "Feriti dalla vita. Conversazione con Kim Ki-Duk", in Mosso and Pignatti (eds), *Il volto e l'anima*.

[21] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 277.

[22] Ibid., 181.

objects in space.[23] Face and landscape, the face as landscape, the face of a landscape: the redundancy of the combination is reinforced by a play of repetitions and variations, a repeated visit to the same place which creates the persistence of the characters and the exact temporal location of their love. Cinematographically treated with a series of close-ups, the park is thus 'facialised', and becomes a flat, mono-dimensional and stratified surface of expression.

After six months, a woman with a new face and a new name appears. It is See-Hee (not Seh-Hee) with whom Ji-Woo goes now to the park, and the new pictures they take in the familiar landscape form another temporal stratum superimposed on their past. Photographs become another instrument of capture, reinforcing the power of the lover's face, while also working as expressive supports for the faciality/landscapity and the subjective love/frozen temporality circuits. With its capacity to freeze time, photography distributes the affects of a life into quantifiable and qualifiable strata, filling its temporal holes with precise dates and names.[24]

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka. Per una letteratura minore* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1996).

Gestures and pictures: the Oriental and the Occidental

'Faciality' and 'landscapity' are not a universal semiotics but, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a code belonging to the normative identity of White, Occidental Man, whose biunivocal relationships and binary choices (black/white etc.) are reflected in the necessity to always distinguish and identify faces and places.[25] Being simultaneously influenced by Korean tradition (see, for example, the Buddhist characters and setting of *Spring*) and by Western culture (the bourgeois characters and the urban setting of *Time*), Kim Ki-Duk's cinema entertains a complex and somehow conflictual relation with the Oriental/Occidental separation. This relation is cinematographically rendered through the interwoven temporalities of his works, suggestively affected by the alternating presence of Chronos and Aeon. Under the influence of Chronos, the founder of Occidental time, a chronological tendency seems to prevail in the two films, in the ordered ritual and seasonal cycles of *Spring*, as well as in the repeated attempts to 'surgically' defeat and immobilise time, in *Time*. At the same time, the cosmic totality of Aeon, a god of a more Dyonisian essence, overcomes the identity of the Buddhist monk and the meaning of his actions, also corresponding to the sense of continuous mutation that emerges from repeated plastic surgery. Drawing on Gregory Bateson's analysis, Deleuze and Guattari define the 'plateau' as a tendency to continuous intensity and mutation which is proper to the 'Orient', as opposed to the Western 'orgasmic orientation' (i.e. a tendency to discontinuity, climax and repetitiveness): an Occident and an Orient which are both condensed in Kim Ki-Duk's cinema.

[25] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Apparently reinforcing 'orientalist' oversimplifications, the difference between (Oriental) climax and (Western) plateau defined by Deleuze and Guattari as two styles of moving, thinking, conceiving life and time, is not simply related to two geographical, historical or cultural entities.[26] For the two philosophers, the Orient is a concept, the definition of a quality, a trait or a gesture which is predominant in certain cultures, but which can be found or translated elsewhere.[27] A culture appears as an ecology of bodily rhythms that cannot be enclosed into any particular confine, and are endowed with a viral capacity to pass between different sites and times: culture as a function of variation, rather than the essence of an identity or a population. A 'qualitative' analysis of movements and gestures, actions and thoughts, reveals thus in the two films a transversal map of similar cultural tendencies crossing different times and places.

Fall

In order to cure Sisal from the excessive passion that finally led him to kill his unfaithful lover, in "Fall" the master paints a Buddhist *sutra* on the floor, and tells him to carve it with the same knife he used to kill, slowly and painfully, letter after letter. Transforming the rhythm of natural or bodily cycles (annual, diurnal, affective) into written lines and columns, the calligraphic gesture partakes of the divine, affective capacity to immerse man into the world, therefore appearing as a practice with a typically 'Oriental' rhythmicity. At the same time, writing is also always a striation of space, because it introduces in it a spatial and temporal orientation: "as if ineluctantly, inscription tends to striation – whence the mythic status of writing as a bearer of order".[28]

Taking calligraphy out of the realm of body and heart, the sutra scene shows it in its more disciplined, 'Occidental' aspect and in its metrical value, as a means of temporal stabilisation and spatial striation. Through a broken series of takes with different durations, angles and perspectives, calligraphy is represented in its 'rigidity', so that "the idea of calligraphic balance conjures up an almost Cartesian grid: one often learns … to produce the outlines of a square bisected horizontally and vertically, and the character is to be centred around the centre of this square".[29] The gesture of Oriental calligraphy is thus 'Occidentalized', while the subject is given his proper path and learns how to repent. Only after, when each letter is covered by the master and by two policemen with green, purple, orange and blue paint, Sisal's gestures reacquire the fullness of their sensorial, qualitative dimension.

On the bi-dimensional surface of a sheet of paper (for us, a carved wooden floor), writing is always able to show, according to Jacques Derrida, a complex simultaneity, the synchronicity of many directions that will never belong to the same chronological line.[30] For the philosopher, a

[26] Thomas Lamarre, "Diagram, Inscription, Sensation", in Brian Massumi, ed., *A Shock to Thought. Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

[27] This definition dissolves the rigidity of categories such as 'the Occident' and 'the Orient', in the delineation of two different ways to think, move and create, which can transversally cross different regions, and which are linguistically defined as West and East only to make them unrecognisable as definite geo-cultural entities: a style, a velocity, a plateau, are not cultural stereotypes but intensities that can be attributed to different individuals or group cultures.

[28] Ibid., 155.

[29] Ibid., 161.

[30] Jacques Derrida, "Scrivere sulla carta", *Aut Aut* 291-292 (1999), 15-39.

cluster of lines and trajectories can thus inhabit the same written surface, simultaneously given to the eye in a temporal dimension different from the visual linearity of lines and columns. To the reading eye, Sisal's ideograms filled with colour seem to visualise a multidimensionality of many senses crossing the same surface at once, constructing a *trompe l'oeuil* that is only equal to the immediacy of a painting or a photograph.

The picture

From the multi-dimensionality of writing and calligraphy to a chronological technique such as photography - which, for its 'linear' relation with time, could also be defined, according to Deleuze and Guattari, as 'Occidental'.[31] At a first glance, before the appropriation of the picture into the personal meaning of a recollection and into a linear subjective story, a perception of many elements at once nevertheless seems to emerge, establishing an immediate 'haptic' contact with the photographic print. In *Time*, this material quality of the photographic image seems to affect the whole film, not only in the extreme attention for the photographic composition and chromatism of every single frame, but also for the continuous appearance of pictures which, passing from hand to hand and from scene to scene, beat the time of the entire story.

When See-Hee is back with a new face, her past reappears with her. She goes to a date with Ji-Woo with an old photograph of herself covering her new face, showing her old self as a recollection, a fantastic image. Superficially, the photo-mask seems to indicate a stereotypically Occidental world where even the change of a face becomes a simple formality. At a deeper perceptual level, everything - the face and its illusory nature, the woman and her image, present and past - is given, simultaneously, in a *trompe l'oeuil* scene. The 'image', defined by Maurice Blanchot as the 'genetic doubling of the thing' (or of the face), and as a 'more' than it, is brought to surface.[32] The paradoxical nature of Seh-Hee's photo-mask is reflected into an immobilised dimension, the impossible moment when the image, rather than disappearing into the 'dim evanescence of time', appears together with the real body of its own 'possessor'. Paralysed by the appearance and unable to recognise his girlfriend, Ji-Woo remains incapable not only to remember, but also to think and act, captured by the magnetic light lines that draw a phantasmatic, virtual presence on Seh-Hee's paper-face.

For Blanchot, the image is related to 'nothing', recalling an emptiness where it immediately disappears, erasing reality and reducing the whole world to an indifference where nothing can really be affirmed or can affirm itself. This 'emptiness' is shared by all phantasmatic images, such as ghosts, dreams or artistic images. Being always present behind everything, dis/incarnating the dissolution of every thing and its simultaneous

[31] On photography as a technology of Western mass culture, see Walter Benjamin, "Piccola storia della fotografia", in *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilita' tecnica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), and Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000).

[32] Maurice Blanchot, *Lo spazio letterario* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975).

persistence, the image forces us to abandon ourselves, depriving us of all our subjective power and will. It is for this reason that the appearance of Seh-Hee's phantasmatic image provokes in Ji-Woo a state very similar to that of Zen *satori*: a revelation that precipitates him into an abyss. We can therefore echo Roland Barthes's conceptualisation of a close relation between photography and the 'Oriental' calligraphy of *haiku* poetry, where "everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion. In both cases we might (we must) speak of an *intense immobility*". Immobility as the affective capture of movement and gesture by the face and its image, or its virtual double.[33]

[33] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 49.

Films and the crystal of time

> The crystal-image may well have many distinct elements, but its irreducibility consists in the indivisible unity of an actual image and 'its' virtual image. But what is this virtual image in coalescence with the actual one? What is a mutual image? … Contracting the image instead of dilating it. Searching for the smallest circuit that functions as internal limit for all the others and that puts the actual image beside a kind of immediate, symmetrical, consecutive or even simultaneous double …. There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual *and* virtual. [34]

[34] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 66-76.

In cinema, the relation between Chronos and Aeon is reflected in two ways of conceiving the image: a dilatation which puts us directly in contact with narrative development and with the creation of a story; and a contraction which, in Deleuze's words, makes us see the smallest temporal unit. Rather than the atomic unit-frame, the smallest element of this contracted cinematic time is the relation of the actual image with its virtual double, not the shortest unit but the smallest circle, the image with two coexisting sides.[35] It is the image in a mirror:

[35] Ibid., 67.

> The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror .... Our actual existence, then, whilst it is unrolled in time, duplicates itself along with a virtual existence, a mirror-image. Every moment of our life presents the two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and recollection on the other…[36]

[36] Ibid., 76-77.

The virtuality of time and its represented images seems to be one of the main technical and thematic traits of Kim Ki-Duk's cinema. The virtual image is defined by Bergson as 'pure recollection' and does not coincide with mental images (such as subjective recollections or dreams), because the latter are actualised images that are already part of conscious or unconscious psychological states. In contrast, in both *Spring...* and *Time* the actual-virtual circuit is a crystal-image, a temporal hole outside chronological order.

Winter

In a luminous white "Winter" Sisal, now an adult, comes back to the temple and finds his dead master's clothes waiting for him to be worn. The lake has frozen, solidifying its waters into a crystalline mass full of reflections and refractions, where Sisal's life seems 'virtually' contained. The lake does not have to be traversed anymore, but he can walk on its surface: land and water, the world and its transient course, have now become one and the same thing. At this point the film realizes its crystalline consistency and makes it visible. A woman with a little baby walks on the frozen lake, hands her son over to Sisal and leaves in the night, falling and dying in the cold waters. The cycle is apparently closed; the film ends with a crack in the ice that absorbs the corpse as a bearer of painful recollections, while announcing the coming of another Spring. The story repeats itself, but with a difference: a new Spring, a new disciple living his childhood, a new life actualising the same seasons again and again…

Death

After Seh-Hee's re-appearance behind See-Hee's new face, Ji-Woo decides to undergo plastic surgery and change his own features. Six months after the operation, he is knocked down by a car and dies, his face totally disfigured, made unrecognisable by the incident. Death appears as the furthest stage of a becoming which takes the body to the unrecognisability it had aspired to. Breaking the relation of the subject with its self, death is, as Deleuze and Guattari and also Blanchot define it, the un-reality of the indefinite, not an irreversible passage but a movement which is never completed, an infinite, interminable process where "Everything becomes imperceptible, everything is becoming-imperceptible."[37]

[37] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 252.

Following the incident, See-Hee decides to become unrecognisable again. After a new operation, at the clinic's doors a woman bumps into her. It is a repetition of the initial scene: the woman she meets coming out of the clinic is the old Seh-Hee. After one year (the same chronological period described in *Spring…*), the film ends at the same point where it started, with an apparently closed cyclical structure: the future has come, but it is a future that was already past in the first scene, where the same event had already happened, and is now about to happen again and again… A present image simultaneously appearing as a renewed past and a renewable future, the present and its virtual side.

In *Spring…* and *Time*, a whole year, a whole life, a whole film are condensed in one final moment, a crystal of time. By showing how perceptions are always doubled by memory, Kim Ki-Duk's films make us perceive, as if reflected into a crystal, the event of subjectivity in its own process of formation, because "the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal

to time, nor the other way round".[38] Sisal's, Seh-Hee's, Ji-Woo's subjectivities are exposed through a doubled temporality, involving our own subjectivities as well. When subjectivity is shown as non pre-existent but as an emerging effect of time's split between past and future, feelings and emotions can also be perceived as non-subjective forces, affects or tendencies without phenomenological and social qualifications, to be grasped in their intensities. The heavy affect, or sensation, of time and its indecipherable passage, becomes thus a force taking the body and giving it a speed, a velocity of change, a capacity to pass from sudden spasms to catatonic plunges. In both Sisal's and Seh-Hee's metamorphoses,

> feelings become uprooted from the interiority of a "subject," to be projected violently outward into a milieu of pure exteriority that lends them an incredible velocity, a catapulting force: love or hate, they are no longer feelings but affects .... so that the Self (*Moi*) is now nothing more than a character whose actions and emotions are desubjectified, perhaps even to the point of death.[39]

Through this common de-subjectification, *Spring...* and *Time* actualise two different stories and times, exemplifications of the forces of Chronos and Aeon simultaneously at work in cinema. This double temporality is conveyed for example by the conventional, almost conservative, montage-cut of the two films, with its insistence on a narrative punctuation made of detailed shots and close-ups. Simultaeously, this narrative logic coexists with the qualitative, haptic treatment of photography and its a-temporal expressive chromatism. In this double crystalline temporality, the director manages to condense the intensive style of an Orient and an Occident which are not situated in any particular geographical or temporal location, but are dissolved across the world. It is like catching everywhere a bit of an Oriental Spring, the silence of a lake's cold waters, a face and its exotic gaze, in the remotest corner as well as in the biggest metropolis of the planet.

[38] Ibid., 80.

[39] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 356.

Celeste Ianniciello

Filmscapes of Antagonism: from Hausa Videos to Amir Naderi's Visions.

> When visual culture tells stories, they are about ghosts. They are not about the "spirit" but about spectres; they refuse ontology in order to evoke *hauntology*.
> (Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Ghost Writing: Working Out Visual Culture")

This article explores the relation between the filmic representations of alternative subjectivities and the experience of migration concerning both movies and filmmakers. I will first analyse the videos produced in Hausa society, in Northern Nigeria, as a hybrid cultural product emerging from the "migration" of Indian movies to Nigeria; then I will examine the transformations of the migrant self in the films of the Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi based on his personal experience of migration to New York city. I would suggest that, although ontologically and geographically distant, the two examples of filmic production are *hauntologically* close. As hybrid, marginal products, they haunt and unsettle both the hegemonic landscape of Hollywood and the Western ontological paradigms about cultural identity and national belonging.

When representations of cultural identity are related to diasporas, they problematize and even disrupt the presumed indissolubility between identity and nation, because, as Stuart Hall argues: "identity is rather produced within not outside representation."[1] Diasporas eradicate any easy continuity between cultural identity and belonging, which is now "partly, in the imaginary and therefore always partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a phantasmatic field."[2] The diasporic identity "belongs" to the field of representation, to a volatile space beyond the culturally homogeneous nation(alist) boundaries, in accordance with its multiple, hybrid, splitting nature. It is in the transnational landscape of images that cultural identities are now situated.

If the relation between diasporas and visuality can be considered a significant example in the questioning of assumed notions of cultural identity and national belonging, it is important to underline the fundamental role that the diaspora of images, or the global circuits of distribution and consumption, play in the process. The concept of mediascapes coined by Arjun Appadurai is very illuminating. According to the Indian anthropologist, a mediascape is made up by the heterogeneous and uncontrollable global fluxes of images created by media (newspapers, magazines, television, Internet, films) which provide alternative narratives of life to viewers throughout the world:

[1] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

[2] Ibid.

> What [*mediascapes*] offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live as they help to constitute … fantasies that could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement.[3]

[3] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1996]), 35.

Mediascapes provide, therefore, the transnational ground upon which people construct their lives, produce their desires of migration, and eventually create new works of art that can be considered counter-narratives of the nation and national identity. A new, multicultural space of living and working unfolds between the fissures of national order. In the light of the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization caused by these fluxes, Appadurai describes the configuration of cultural forms as substantially fractal, suggesting, through the use of this particular term, that the polymorphism of postmodernity is adequately rendered through metaphors of a kind that relies on images of mutability, mobility, and flexibility: "flow and uncertainty, hence *chaos*, rather than… the older images of order, stability, and systematicness."[4]

[4] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 47.

Fractal geometry offers a way to describe irregular shapes that are self-similar, that is, shaped identically at their macro and micro levels. In this sense, I consider Hausa videos and Naderi's films as fractal metaphors of the postmodern condition because they share a migrant biography and present, at the macro and micro level, all the antagonistic aspects inscribed in the process of cultural hybridization. They show how cinema is both the product and the producing agent of otherness or of identities "altered" by the cultural contaminations, intrusions and intermissions stemming from the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization inscribed in modern diasporas.

Reflecting upon the relation between cultural identity and diaspora, Rey Chow suggests that film is a means through which culture can be explored as crisis, "especially in cultures whose experience of modernity is marked by conflicts between an indigenous tradition and foreign influences."[5] She argues that film is an ideal medium for rethinking culture by virtue of its technology that reproduces the past in the present, thus rendering "the dilemmas and contradictions, nostalgia and hopes, that characterize struggles toward modernity."[6] The filmic representations I refer to not only register, as Chow suggests, the crises of a changing culture, but they also reproduce new "critical" identities in the presumably homogeneous quality of national tissue and in the visual hegemony of Western media, as well.

[5] Rey Chow, "Filmic Visuality, Cultural Identity", in John Hill and Pamela Gibson, eds., *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173.

[6] Ibid.

Such visuality exceeds any power to control, eludes all rapacious expectations of totalizing and hegemonic perception, and opens itself to what Mirzoeff has described as 'phantasmagoria'.[7] The authors and even

[7] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Ghost Writing: Working out Visual Culture", in Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, eds., *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies* (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, 2002), 189.

the viewers of the films produced in diasporic contexts and interstitial conditions themselves become interstitial and elusive, 'haunting' the Western hegemonic visibility with their alternative realities:

> The ghost … is not everywhere. It is in-between – between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, the palpable and the impalpable, the voice and the phenomenon. The ghost is the place from which we should invoke the structures of visibility that have constructed, destroyed, and deconstructed the modern visual subject.[8]

[8] Ibid.

The spectres of visual culture are 'in-between' cultures, languages and identities; their permanent impermanence forces us to question the solidity and unity of our geographical and mental confines. Being transnational and transcultural, they are continually repositioning themselves, becoming open and subjected to the play of *différance*. In this sense, I consider "phantasmatic" the identities which the films and the filmmaker I refer to produce both outside and inside themselves. These "filmic" phantoms are lives deferred or, as Roland Barthes would say, " the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance", something that presents itself in the absence of a proper constitution, a proper land, a proper home; something that shows its identity without a proper name, and irreverently covers the authoritative clarity of well-established perspectives on cultural identity with a thick shadow of uncertainty.[9]

[9] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

I consider Hausa videos and Naderi's films as phantasmatic precisely by virtue of their multiform and powerfully elusive nature, and as antagonistic because their hauntology brings them into conflict with "tradition" and "origin". As regards Hausa videos, the phantasmatic otherness appears outside, in the alterations of the geographic and cultural identity of a community caused by the migration of Indian movies. Naderi's films show, instead, the phantasmatic otherness appearing inside the subject, in the transformations of the (auto)biographical identity as the effect of the author's personal experience of migration.

"Filmic" Communities and Love

> Do cultures actually exist as separate, pure, defensible entities? Is not mélange, adulteration, impurity, pick'n'mix at the heart of the idea of the modern, and hasn't it been that way for most of this all-shook-up century?
>
> (Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*)

We can see how, through the unpredictable transnational migration of movies, the Indian presence surprisingly creeps into many aspects of everyday Hausa life.[10] In Kano, the major city of Northern Nigeria, stickers of Indian films and stars decorate buses and taxis; posters of Indian films

[10] See Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media", in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media,* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003)

adorn the walls of tailors' shops and garages, and religious singers sing praises to the Prophet Mohammed by borrowing and modifying love songs from Indian films. Disrupting the dominance of Hollywood films, Indian romance, shown five nights a week, is incorporated in the local Hausa reality, thereby offering alternative worlds out of which women and men can imagine different forms of life.

What Hausa viewers recognize in Indian movies, despite the linguistic and religious differences, are the strong visual and social similarities to their own culture, especially when compared with American and English movies. The global trajectory of Bollywood conflates with the local reality, thus producing new hybrid formations in which we can hardly distinguish the Nigerian from the Indian traits.

Hybridity also concerns Hausa film production. This has become part of a wider and older national cinematic tradition, which some critics call *Nollywood* for it is the world's third biggest film industry. It develops in Southern Nigeria and is strongly influenced by Western movies. Yet we should speak of *Kannywood* as regards Hausa production since its growth follows a distinct trajectory developing around the city of Kano and carving its own identity by drawing from Bollywood. Hausa videos revolve around the theme of love and sequences based on singing and dancing which draw their motives and features both from the Hausa literary tradition of *littatafan soyayya* (love stories) and from the style of Indian romance.[11] Significantly, the strategies of cultural appropriation do not supplant cultural differences.

In the Hausa video *The Soul of my Heart* (*In da So Da K'auna*), written, produced and directed by Ado Ahmad, the protagonist, Sumayya, sits in her bedroom as a boy brings her a tape from her lover. She turns on the tape recorder and hears her lover announce he will sing her *Lambun Soyayya* (the garden of love). Acceptance of love occurs in the intimacy of a bedroom; lovers share the same space but only by virtue of song – so central to Indian films.[12] The Indian element, then, allows unusual proximity between lovers, while preserving the sexual segregation necessary to Hausa Islamic values. There is a "virtual" intimacy in this new way of loving which consists of something that mingles Bollywood with Hausa tradition but is irreducible to either. The anthropologist Brian Larkin maintains in fact that Indian films work for Hausa society "because they rest on a dialectic presence and absence culturally similar to Hausa society but at the same time reassuringly distant."[13] These films function for Hausa spectators as a "third space" which, as Homi Bhabha argues, "puts together the traces of other meanings or discourses, … [and] gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation", a new hybrid space between the poles of Islamic Hausa traditions and modern cultural production.[14] They also

[11] For the differences between *Nollywood* and *Kannywood* see Abdalla Uba Adamu et al, eds, *Hausa Home vodeos: Technology, Economy, and Society* (Kano: Center for Hausa Cultural Studies, 2004). With regards to the development of Nigerian film production, see the documentary film *This is Nollywood* by Franco Sacchi and Robert Caputo.

[12] For the importance of song in Bollywood love stories, see S. Prakash, "Music, Dance, and Popular Films: Indian Fantasies, Indian Repressions", in Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet, *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983).

[13] Brian Larkin, "Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood, and Global Media", in Shohat and Stam, 181.

[14] Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 210.

constitute a means through which Hausa society affirms its identity in opposition to the neighbouring Westernized ethnicities. All this makes clear that, as Rey Chow suggests, we don't simply have to deconstruct the West as origin but, rather, to "dismantle both the notion of origin and the notion of alterity as we know them today".[15]

The migration of Bollywood movies to the Hausa community shows what happens when national films (produced in one nation and characterized by national traditional traits) become transnational mediascapes. They produce "translated" forms of cultures: something that is beyond the nation *and* beyond the idea of the nation as a space of original pureness. Culture – and love in this case - is thus constructed through a process of material and ideological transition. Through the consumption and creation of transnational films, Hausa society is itself deterritorialized, and acquires an intertextual, phantasmatic visuality. *Kannywood* is present but almost invisible in the hegemonic landscape of filmic industry; it creeps into the interstices of both national and Hollywood film production and represents alternative ways of being and loving. These new forms of re-presentation emerge in what Gianni Vattimo calls "the phantasmagorical world of mass media" with its liberating and emancipatory significance.[16] This world is then the place where identity leaves room for multiple identifications, where, in the tensions between homogenization and heterogenization, tradition fades into translation, the constant negotiation between the local and the global produces unpredictable effects, the 'origin' is substituted by 'construction' in representation.

This analysis focuses on collective and social phenomena; what then is at stake when migration involves not films but a filmmaker? What happens when transnational visuality concerns a single person? What are its effects on subjectivity? In the light of what Hausa videos exemplify, I will try to answer these questions by concentrating on the works of the Iranian-born, New York-based filmmaker Amir Naderi, where phantasmagoria is inscribed at a deeper personal level.

[15] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 194.

[16] Quoted by Rey Chow in "Film as Ethnography, or Translation between Cultures in the Postcolonial World", in *Primitive Passions*, 175-202, 238-243. See Gianni Vattimo Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

(Auto)biographic Exiles

> What is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both. Regard experiences as if they were to disappear. What is it that anchors them in reality? What would you save of them? What would you give up?
>
> (Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*).

Interstitial existence characterizes Naderi's deterritorialized ethnoscape. As Hamid Naficy remarks, artists like Naderi exist in the field of what Derrida calls undecidability: like the hymen, the supplement, the mark,

the *pharmakon* they indicate one thing and its opposite at the same time.[17] Phantasmatic presences, "at once partial and plural" which, although at the margins of cultures, produce ambiguity about essentialist values concerning both their homelands and their host societies.[18] As part of a mediascape, their films poetically codify the tensions deriving from their own liminal position, exile, transculturation and integration. That is why Naficy considers them as transnational 'biographies':

> As authors of their texts (and to some extent of their lives) their biography is not just implicitly closed in their films. Often autobiography and self-reflexivity are the forces that drive the narratives and the tropes through which the films are conceived and structured. Any cultural space such as the translational liminality is capable of generating films that inscribe at a fundamental level their makers' station in life and their location in culture, marking their films with narrative and iconographic hybridities, doublings, and splittings.[19]

The Runner and *Manhattan by Numbers*, written and directed by Amir Naderi, can be intended as a single frame representing his transnational autobiography.[20] *The Runner* (1985) shows the approximate life of Amiro, one of the many (ghostly) children who inhabit the geography of exclusion. Amiro, orphaned in the war, lives in a rusty ship on the shore. He makes a living by selling bottles found by the sea, humble objects picked up from the scrap, and by working as a shoeshine boy for the sailors sitting at the café in the harbour. Amiro's reality is made of deprivation, precariousness and misery; his places are non-places, their vastness and desolation emphasized by the interminable shots over vast and deserted landscapes. Naderi's tendency to indulge in drawing scenes of solitude returns significantly in two sequences: in the first, an old lady, bent by pain, tries to proceed with much difficulty; in the second, an invalid walks on his encumbering crutches. The two characters 'emblematically' represent what Amiro is escaping from: the impossibility of escape. While the camera insists on the old lady and the invalid's slow and precarious movements, we have time enough to feel their pain and to be growingly invaded by a sense of frustration, immediately followed by an urgent desire for rebellion. It is for this reason that Amiro's main activity is racing: he races to learn the alphabet, he races against friends, trains, and classmates. By marking Naderi's narration with an original spatio-temporal rhythm, his proudly tenacious and strenuous run exorcizes the risk of remaining trapped in the stifling desolation of his homeland. It also expresses a strong lust for escape: Amiro dreams of sailing from Abadar on one of the many tankers crossing the gulf. Every day he shouts his despair at them, or else he dreams of flying away on one of the many military airplanes he contemplates from the fence that delimits the base. The film ends by leaving Amiro's desire suspended, but by following the autobiographical

[17] Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Luminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre", in Shoat and Stam, eds., *Multiculturalism*, 203-226.

[18] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 15.

[19] Naficy, "Phobic Spaces", 213.

[20] For a general overview on Iranian cinema and Naderi's production see, among others, Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (New York: Verso, 2001); as regards the characteristics of Naderi's films see Massimo Causo e Grazia Paganelli, *Il vento e la città. Il cinema di Amir Naderi* (Milano: Il Castoro, 2006).

traces of Naderi's works from *The Runner* to *Manhattan by Numbers*, we may nevertheless imagine that his run will finally lead him beyond the barriers of his nation to New York, with unpredictable results.

Manhattan by Numbers depicts the growing uncertainty and intense sensations of homelessness experienced by George Murphy, an unemployed journalist who lives in New York. Fired from his job, abandoned by his wife and son, who never appear in the film, he is deterritorialized in his own town. He starts desperately searching for his friend Tom Ryan, who could give him a job. His search turns into a hallucinatory, frantic voyage that brings him to a ghostly building where none of the flats has a name or number, then through Manhattan, among the stifling crowds, down into the underground and from the decrepitude of Harlem to the cold brightness of Wall Street. This endless itinerary makes Tom Ryan, and George himself, distant; they end up as two impersonal entities, in what seems to be a dehumanizing alienation. The scenes transform large urban spaces into compressed visualities, showing a distorted reality that mirrors the protagonist's feeling of displacement.

The Runner and *Manhattan by Numbers* may be defined as transnational autobiographies in that they refer to periods of Naderi's own life, respectively his childhood in Iran, at Abadan, and his experience of migration to New York. In the confrontation between the two films, an evident difference, or rather an opposition, can be noted in their representation of exile. In *The Runner* exile is described in utopian and euphoric terms and is present only in the form of desire; we can argue that this film does not properly deal with exile as it is entirely based on the lust for escape. Actually, Amiro runs to escape but he never crosses the frontier of his nation; he runs inflexibly but never achieves his goal; exile exists only in his dreams. In *Manhattan by Numbers*, Naderi allegorizes his actual experience of migration almost entirely in dystopic and dysphoric terms. George Murphy's feeling of displacement symbolizes the trauma which marks the passage of Naderi from his place, home, culture and tongue to a foreign one, and to a confrontation with newness. A sense of restlessness stemming from the questioning of his previous certainties about his origin and belonging marks the transition from old to new. Murphy's abandonment by his wife and child, his dismissal, the imminent eviction from his flat, the awareness that his elusive friend, Tom Ryan, has fallen on hard times and will be in no position to help him: what if not Naderi's fear of solitude and homelessness does all this reproduce? The fear of being "estranged" from his certainties? What I suggest is that Murphy's despair and his frantic search for his friend stand for the danger we run of being dramatically dependent on our certainties in order to survive.

In this sense, Said's observation that "borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons" can be

applied to both Amiro and Murphy.[21] Even though Murphy may represent in some way the accomplishment of Amiro's desire to escape from his homeland, he paradoxically ends up sharing Amiro's claustrophobic feeling of being trapped in a dead end. Their condition represents what happens when existence is too firmly fixed on stable points. The safety of familiar territory becomes a prison that gives rise to a burning *wanderlust* (as in the case of Amiro), but it can also turn to haunt our life when our desire of migration comes true (as in the case of Murphy).

Actually, Naderi's imaginary experience of migration, represented by Amiro's wanderlust, seems unexpectedly to be even more problematic when it comes true. Amiro's tenacious run in the wide Iranian landscape is in fact supplanted by George's hallucinatory wandering in the urban scenarios of New York and no "Iranian" trace of Naderi's identity is preserved in *Manhattan by Numbers*, as is made clear by the distance between the two main characters. While Amiro refers back directly to the author, the white American George Murphy makes the association more problematic. Yet, it seems that the complete absence of "Iranian-ness" has precisely the function of exasperating the effect of cultural erasure that exile brings with it: the invisibility of the "origin". The tension between the relation with something old and recognisable and the relation with something new and unrecognisable, or between tradition and translation, which marks every experience of exile, is resolved here in a radical turning away from the origin. A turning away that dramatizes the traumatic consequences of charging "the origin" with inalienable significance. It is significant to note that *The Runner* was one of the last films Naderi produced in Iran before his voluntary migration to the United States in the mid-1980s. In one of his interviews, he declares: "I want to make a complete break, destroy all the bridges. I want to have nothing to do with Iran, my family, Iranian cinema, or being an Iranian exile filmmaker. I want to be a great filmmaker".[22] Unlike many diasporic groups, Naderi expresses a decisive desire for a total break with his homeland, and a destruction of "all the bridges", thus dismantling the myth of a sacred origin to return to. Although, as Stuart Hall observes, the identity of many diasporic groups or persons is nurtured solely by the persistent desire to go home, the experience of diaspora is not defined by essence and pureness but, rather, by a necessary heterogeneity and diversity. Identity lives in and through difference, and is defined by hybridity.[23] Thus, we could say that Naderi exorcises, through disavowal, the risk of considering original belonging and identity as something pure, stable and unitary, irremediably lost in the process of migration. For this reason he seems to polarize, in his works, self and other, here and there, before and after. Clearly, there is something more lurking beneath these easy polarizations.

[21] Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 185.

[22] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema. Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 245.

[23] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

> In poetical language, there is no "I" that just stands for *myself*. The "I" is there; it has to be there, but it is there as the site of all other "I's" can enter and cut across one another.
>
> (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *FramerFramed*)

> "Entering into the only reality of signs where I myself am a sign … am looking through a circle in a circle of looks"
>
> (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Reassemblage*)

Naderi recognises migration as that which exposes identity to multiple identifications, and accepts that otherness is, in this process, a constitutive presence in the construction of the self. The director does not simply celebrate the resourceful, phantasmatic status of being in between different cultures because he wants first of all to underline that the experience of migration and the process of translation can be difficult. *Manhattan by Numbers* is a story of displacement (and of the search for money) that clearly allegorizes both the general condition of exile and Naderi's own experience as a transnational filmmaker with the fund-raising problems inherent in his independent mode of production. Emblematically, only at the end do we have a surprising turn from a dysphoric register to a euphoric one. The last scene shows the homeless Murphy dancing in the street and breaking into foolish laughter, no longer anxious about his precarious condition.

Actually, if we look beyond the oppositions evident on the surface of the films, we can see subtle and significant similarities stemming from the characters. Two sequences in particular trace an ontological continuity. The final sequence of *The Runner* shows Amiro in his last race, in what seems to be the decisive and more difficult challenge against his friends, the race that will finally see an absolute winner. The boys compete to see who will arrive at a distant oil well before an ice-block in front of the fire coming from the well melts down. This time Amiro has to compete not so much against his friends as against the fire. This is his most important competition because the fire symbolizes the origin of his condition of misery: oil and the war for its possession. The symbolical and physical gravity of this decisive race is emphasized through the slow motion of the images contrasted to the amplification of the noise produced by the well. But the most suggestive and significant effect is that produced by the scenes where the fire occupies the entire screen overshadowing the images of Amiro and his friends. We can hardly see them as they advance slowly beyond the fire as the distorting effect of the heat makes them undistinguishable, abstract figures, shadows without identity, like phantoms.

In *Manhattan by Numbers* Murphy faces a similar elusiveness about his "status" (in the double sense of identity and location). This is evident in the sequences where he walks through the streets enquiring about his friend

Ryan, speaking with mutual friends, or with people who had some contact with him, in order to have some clue as to Ryan's whereabouts. The film shows a long fast series of scenes where Murphy's image and voice never appear and the different people interviewed speak directly to the camera. In this way, the scenes produce a conflation between Murphy and those who are thought to be behind the camera: Naderi filming his work, and the spectator watching the film. Moreover, the ambiguity of Murphy's identity and the instability of his positioning increase as he gradually realizes that Ryan will not be able to help him. The sequence ends with Murphy appearing in the street only to disappear immediately afterwards as he abandons the scene, walking in the opposite direction to the camera. He crosses the scene while the camera stops with a close-shot on a graffiti showing a grotesque figure that resembles a clown, a fictional creature, a phantom; it is the iconographic representation of both Ryan and Murphy's elusiveness.

I consider Amiro and Murphy's fading presences as the symbol of Naderi's own sense of displacement and even the actual "alterations" that depend on his experience of migration. What do those disturbing shadows and graffiti on the screen indicate if not Naderi's own hauntology emerging from his subjective deferral? Moreover, it is important to ask where or when this movement towards an ontological disappearance takes place. Does it originate exclusively within the process of migration or is it not rather anterior to it? I am referring to the role played by the mediascapes in the constitution of the multiform identity of a migrant subjectivity.

Still, by taking into account Appadurai's observations about the constant interaction of global and local cultural practice, we can, in fact, appreciate the continuity between Naderi's pre-exilic childhood and his exilic adult life. Liminality and transnationality inform his life as well as his filmic autobiography from the very beginning. Appadurai's analysis of the modern relationship between individual imagination and the global circulation of media, along with its effects on agency, identity and homeland, illustrate how the phenomenon of migration, even in its imaginative dimension, is informed by transnational elements:

> There is a peculiar new force to the imagination of social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives. ... One of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and video technology, has to do with the role of imagination in social life. ... In general, imagination and fantasy were the antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practise.[24]

[24] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 53-54.

If we apply these observations to Amiro's pre-exilic childhood, we can say that although the child's longing for exile is produced by his condition of misery and his dwelling on the liminal spaces of seaports and airports resonating with imaginative possibilities, it is his consumption of foreign magazines that fires his imagination and enhances his desire to escape from his homeland. Naderi himself remembers how his fascination for foreign magazines as well as his consumption of English films provoked his longing for a life in a distant country:

> at age twelve, I became aware of periodicals. It was in the cargo ships anchored in the Abadan port that for the first time I encountered film periodicals, and at that very time I decided that I would go to the United States. Most of the films that I used to see in Abadan in those days were in English, and this attracted me to English-speaking people.[25]

[25] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 246.

Thus, if the many borders of Amiro's life envisage the possibility of exile, the presence of foreign magazines coming daily from an apparently more and more reachable elsewhere fires his imagination and also invests him with a new power of action. Although Iran, Amiro's homeland, with its poverty and repression, is depicted as a *terra nullius* or empty space, nevertheless it is inexorably caught in the web of global fluxes, with unpredictable and imperceptible effects. Far from representing uncontaminated and isolated 'origins', both his nation and his identity are already influenced and constructed by transnational elements and subjected to the changes of the modern diasporic context. Naderi does not underestimate the fact that the constant presence of some discontinuous intersections in his life contaminates his identity and dismantles any identification with the nation. His experience of mobility contributes, through a process of cultural translation, to re-defining the transnational aspects of his identity which already exist, however marginal and in a process of becoming they may be. Migration amplifies Naderi's displacement, thus fracturing and multiplying his identity to the point of making it insubstantial, groundless, powerfully resistant to any radical sedimentation.

If Naderi seems to establish a dichotomy between past and present, he shows at the same time that difference and transformation, through which diasporic identities are produced and reproduced, constitute a process of hybridization involving the culture of both self and other. Naturally, in this complex process, there is a high potential for conflict.

Hauntology & Antagonism

Homi Bhabha maintains that the process of negotiation between tradition and translation is inconclusive, antagonistic, and enmeshed with ambiguity, sometimes producing traumatic effects:

> [Hybridity] is not simply appropriation or adaptation, it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own system of reference, norms and values by departing from their habitual or 'inbred' rules of transformation. Ambivalence and antagonism accompany any act of cultural translation because negotiating with the 'difference of the other' reveals the radical insufficiency of our own systems of meaning and signification.[26]

[26] Homi Bhabha cited by Stuart Hall, "The Multi-cultural Question", in Barnor Hesse, *Un-Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions"* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 226.

We could argue that Naderi's preoccupation with his origins is a consequence of the conflictual aspects produced by his American re-positioning: his refusal to be considered as an Iranian exile filmmaker reflects his fear of being ghettoized as an "ethnic artist" and associated with his homeland, which Western media sometimes label as a Third World or "pariah" nation. This fear acts as an obstacle against an unproblematic negotiation between the old and the new, yet it does not prevent Naderi from reconceptualizing his origin in the light of his experience of migration, transculturation and in-betweenness. The danger of ethnic labels does not compromise the possibility of enjoying the most exalting aspects of his actual phantasmatic and interstitial identity by welcoming a third space of being and working.

Contrasts between ghettoizing and stereotyping, universalism and ethnic sacredness, tradition and modernity, hegemonic representations and subaltern intertextual visuality or, to use Appadurai's words, the disjunction between homogenization and heterogenization, are all inscribed in the modern antagonistic process of cultural translation. What this process highlights, as Bhabha suggests, is "the dissonances that have to be crossed despite the proximate relations; the disjunctions of power position that have to be contested; the values, ethical and aesthetic, that have to be 'translated' but will not seamlessly transcend the process of transfer."[27] Attempts to discuss the relation between modernity and the visual representation of cultural identity need to consider the multiple contradictions, dissonances, disjunctions and discontinuities, as well as the mediations, conjunctures and continuities created by diasporas.

[27] Ibid.

The success of Bollywood in Hausa society mirrors, for instance, that kind of conflation between the alternatives of cultural collusions and antagonisms. If Bollywood helps Hausa society to redefine its cultural specificity in opposition to Southern Nigerian societies, it simultaneously works against Hollywood hegemony and national homogeneity. Moreover, the growing production of Hausa videos, enhanced by Indian romance, ends by undermining Bollywood's very undisputed success. By linking Mirzoeff's insights to Bhabha's concept of cultural antagonism, I suggest that hauntology is inscribed in these antagonistic processes of cultural contamination. The hybridity that characterizes Hausa videos is phantasmatic because it emerges in between the interstices of multiple global *filmscapes* and threatens the ontology of the dominant film production.

Similarly, Naderi's transnational biography is embedded in the tension between the collusions and antagonisms stemming from cultural translation, and his personal filmscape reproduces the hauntology which is inherent in the process. Then, I would turn once again to Chow's observations about cinema as the ideal means through which cultural crisis can be explored and apply them to subjectivity rather than to culture at large. It is possible to say that any reflection on the filmic representation of diasporic subjectivity needs to take into account that filmic visuality is a means through which it is also possible to explore the subject's conflicting relation between past and present involved in the experience of diaspora, while rethinking the past, the origins that gave rise to the present moment. The film's projectional mechanism renders what is left behind instantaneous, thus re-producing the cultural fractures and crises which mark the diasporic experience of the self in new, different forms. As regards Naderi, for whom the experiences of exile and filming are strictly interrelated at the level of subjectivity, those fractures and crises of the self are perpetually projected and differently reproduced. The subject is continually deferred: by his desire of exile, produced by media images coming from elsewhere, by his actual movement between different nations and cultures, by filmic transposition that re-creates a hauntological identity. Naderi consigns himself to the phantasmagoria of the filmic medium. In the passage from *The Runner* to *Manhattan by Numbers,* the autobiographical mark disappears; the fractures and crises of the experience of diaspora become pure, autonomous images erasing the persistence of the original self. As with Hausa videos, it is precisely in the disappearance of the "origin" that is inscribed the possibility of openness to hybridity. If Amiro's persistent run towards an elsewhere makes room for George's uncertain and rhapsodic wandering, displacement envisages the possibility of constructing a polymorphous identity. Both society and subjectivity are crossed by the *spectrum* of differences that cinema helps to develop through its deferring frames.

Maria Cristina Nisco

Ingrid Mwangi: performing body, projecting screen

Among the many languages – whether verbal, literary, musical or visual – in which individual identities are constituted, this essay will concentrate on a particular kind of artistic practice: body performance.

Since the 1960s, body performance has increasingly become a way to interrogate and intervene on the structures defining subjectivity as, in the act of self-display, artists enact their individuality. Women artists, in particular, have struggled to articulate themselves as subjects and as authors, rather than as objects of artistic creation. Art enables them to move towards self-narrative, in response to normative discourses enframing identity in institutional and official portraits; art is their way to resist "*provided subjectivities* in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatuses".[1] Body performance offers a different kind of self-portraiture, a visual autobiography, speaking or staging what is silenced and unauthorized. If, in the past, autobiography was mainly constituted by the canonical forms of memoirs, diaries, and journals, nowadays contemporary artists work on other visual modes or technologies; as Sidonie Smith remarks, they work at the interface of several autobiographical modes, including video, installation, photography as well as performance art and Web sites. These modes, though often unrecognized, mark the artists' engagement with their ethical practice of creation.

Multimedia artist Ingrid Mwangi participates in this active production of visual texts, employing a wide range of languages and modes, such as live performance, video, installation, and photography; she also produces dvds collecting her works and has a personal and updated web site.[2] She transcribes her history, memories, experiences as well as her expectations and hopes in her art works, thus staging a practice that closely recalls autobiography, or what Sidonie Smith calls 'enacted life narrations': "the life narrator selectively engages aspects of her lived experience through modes of personal 'storytelling' – narratively, imagistically, in performance".[3] All the images Mwangi creates are deployed on two levels, personal and public; if too often autobiography has been assumed as a mirror – an unproblematic rendering of the artist's life as all emphasis is on *bios*, the artist's biographical history – Mwangi works intersubjectively shifting all emphasis from her own to her viewers' biographies. Her works are centered on how spectators perceive and interact with alterity; the subject she performs thus receives the unavoidable contribution of all the other surrounding subjects, the spectators. In fact, far from being a transparent practice, textual or visual autobiography is a cultural practice reflecting on

[1] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 4.

[2] Ingrid Mwangi was born in 1970 in Nairobi, Kenya, where she lived until the age of fifteen (her father was Kenyan, her mother German); she currently lives in Germany where she works with her partner Robert Hutter.

[3] Sidonie Smith, *Interfaces. Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 2002), 9. Smith argues that the term "autobiography", long used with reference to the lives of "great men", has often obscured the ways in which women have narrated themselves and their stories.

identities and requiring a constant dialogue with multiple audiences. Smith stresses that "the autobiographical subject is ... inescapably in dialogue with the culturally marked differences that inflect models of identity and underwrite the formation of autobiographical subjectivity". As such, she continues, "autobiographical telling is performative".[4]

[4] Ibid.

In (re)presenting herself through different media, Mwangi questions Western representations and at the same time constructs her own oppositional aesthetics. By deploying photography, video-installation, live performance, she stages the productive vision of the world that Kaja Silverman suggests: a vision that obliges viewers to recognize themselves "precisely within those others to whom [they] could otherwise respond with revulsion and avoidance".[5] In doing so, Mwangi acknowledges the distorted patterns of visual appropriation, while opening up an ethical practice of viewing, uncovering the many possibilities to radically undermine the structures of normative subjectivity prescribed and imposed by Western patriarchy. Her performances destabilize dominant discourses and solicit the audience to see differently: her viewers are incessantly involved in an intense re-negotiation of identity politics.

[5] Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 170.

Moving between Kenya and Germany, Ingrid Mwangi explores her African and European roots. As the body is the place where these worlds converge, she places it – or parts of it: her hair, skin, and voice – at the very core of her art. Her desire is to become her own experimental subject-object; the alteration of her body provides her with the means to question the oversimplified and stereotyped ways in which race, gender and sexuality are usually visualized.

This essay will discuss such visualizations in relation to Silverman's reading of the three Lacanian concepts constituting the field of vision: gaze, look, and screen. I will associate each term to a particular phase in Mwangi's artistic production. The gaze will be my starting point in the first paragraph, focused as it is on the freezing and exoticising effects of a visual practice that cages the Other (whether labelled as female and/or exotic), by constructing it as a passive spectacle. I will then suggest the look is marking another moment of the artist's production, when she turns the gaze back by addressing her look, her productive look, questioning all preassigned viewing positions and expressing – staging – her own visions, her own practices of representation and narration. The third term is the screen, intended both as the projecting surface displaying Mwangi's art works and as the "cultural image-repertoire" that, according to Lacan, provides the visual coordinates allowing every individual to produce and apprehend others. I will thus present Mwangi's screens as offering new coordinates and perspectives for a productive re-presentation, in an act of mutual involvement and exchange between artist and viewers.

Dark wilderness

> What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects.
> (Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*)

Ingrid Mwangi's *My Heart of Darkness* (2001), a dvd documenting her works from 1996 to 2001, uncovers the focus of her interest in the visual by referring, already in its title, to the metaphor of the "heart of darkness", as well as to the widespread stereotypes concerning black people created by the imperial and colonial rhetoric. The metaphor dates back to the novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad, where it describes the encounter, based on exploitation and subjugation, between the white colonialists and the colonized people in the 'heart of darkness', Africa. The image substantiates the rhetoric that European colonizers created in order to conceptually articulate Africa as an empty and primitive continent to explore, conquer and civilize. *My Heart of Darkness* re-appropriates the myth of the 'dark continent' since its very beginning, when the artist's voice opens the scene by asking: "what is it that you see when you look at me? Do you see the jungle? And wild animals?". This question, related to the dominant experience of the visual, the quality of the 'beastly' images that we normally associated with discrimination and exclusion, is only the starting point of Mwangi's experiment; still, it comes back in two of her works collected in the dvd, *Wild at Heart* (1998) and *Wild Life* (1999), where Mwangi turns into the very 'beast' she imagines her public would see by looking at her.

Wild at Heart 1998. Courtesy of I. Mwangi.

In her live performance *Wild at Heart*, she exposes her audience to her own darkness and wildness; the spectators are gathered in a room, in a semicircle, while the artist stands in the middle, her eyes covered, her dreadlocks attached to the ceiling by nylon threads. Metaphorically it is as if she was chained; she moves, shakes, tries to reach her audience, inevitably falling back on her knees, restrained by the threads keeping her in an invisible cage with no walls. She screams and fights, apparently frightened like the trapped animal the spectators see on the two monitors projecting a video, which will become a separate work called *Wild Life* one year later.

This video, which has a blurred quality as if presenting images out of focus, shows a wild animal, a lion or a black panther, struggling behind the bars. In fact, behind those bars, there is the artist, moving frantically in her cage and simulating savage roars with her voice. The video effect is to force the spectators to face (the view of) a creature imprisoned behind bars, a 'wild being' that they cannot fully identify and recognize. The image is a very complex one: presenting herself on the stage and, at the same time, recording her own wildness in the video, it is as though the artist started the journey into her own 'heart of darkness' (a cage imprisoning both her 'wild heart' and her 'wild life'), while reproducing the experience she had when, as a teenager, she left Kenya for Germany. This was a time when she felt that the Europeans looking at her were confronted with a sort of threat – maybe the confrontation with the *unheimlich*, the proximity with animality. The same feeling is expressed in *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad:

Wild Life 1999. Courtesy of the author.

> ... you could look at a thing monstrous and free .... The men were – no, they were not – inhuman. Well, ... that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. ... what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.[6]

[6] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Torino: Einaudi-Serie bilingue, 1999), 110.

Conrad's fictitious explorers and Mwangi's spectators share the experience of a 'displacement' deriving from an invisible and ambivalent barrier, which should, at the same time, protect them from all contact and also expose them to the contact itself.

By showing her 'heart of darkness', Mwangi reproposes the impossible distinction – or the disturbing similarity – between human and inhuman. She fully recreates a condition which is familiar to Western audiences: the tendency to imprison and keep at a distance what is labelled as 'exotic'. For centuries, Europeans have been fascinated by the charismatic power of exotic beings (animals and human beings, with no distinction), hence the will to possess them; nonetheless, they have also been frightened by their wild and unknowable nature, hence the necessity to cage and tame them. There is an infinite list of ethnographic exhibitions of human beings, usually from Africa, but also from the Americas and Asia, in zoos, circuses, and freak shows. Artist and writer Coco Fusco has long worked on the several encounters that led European explorers to return from their voyages with 'indigenous specimens' for scientific analysis and entertainment:

"'Ethnological' displays of non-whites – which were orchestrated by impresarios but endorsed by anthropologists – confirmed popular racial stereotypes and built support for domestic and foreign policies".[7] In the five centuries since the discovery of Colombus, from 1492 to 1992, dozens of shows and exhibitions 'helped' white audiences to 'discover' "the non-Western sector of humanity".[8] According to Fusco, these are the origins of intercultural performance in the West; what is relevant here is that, if, at the time, the exhibited people did not choose to be on display, nowadays black diasporic artists choose to be on stage, forcing their white audience to deal with their own cultural identity, and to face the limits of a 'happy multiculturalism' which is today widely proclaimed by institutions and governments.

In this context, Ingrid Mwangi puts herself on display in order to question her viewers' position. Her (ethnographic) exhibition is focused precisely on white subjects rather than on a non-white object. If she recreates the traditional conditions for human display, it is because she aims at subverting its very principle: during the show, the audience is on display as the focus of the spectacle is shifted; it is the artist who observes her viewers while they suddenly discover it is they who are on display.

In *Wild at Heart* and in *Wild Life,* Mwangi apparently receives the exoticising gaze of her spectators. This gaze recalls the one she received – as a woman and a black person – from Western imperial and colonial history: the position of the Other, frozen by a normative gaze that, according to Jacques Lacan, determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, constituting me as the "subject-as-spectacle" (or also as the object-as-spectacle).[9] Focusing on its mortifying effects, Lacan remarks:

> The gaze in itself not only terminates the movement, it freezes it .... At the moment the subject stops, suspending his gesture, he is mortified. This anti-life, anti-movement function ... is the *fascinum*, and it is precisely one of the dimensions in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly.[10]

Ingrid Mwangi presents herself as a female subject who does not stop or suspend her gesture; she recreates the 'fascinum' Lacan refers to for her own purposes: to solicit a reciprocal relationship with her spectators, and, at the same time, to disrupt their gaze. Even if, during *Wild at Heart*, her eyes are covered, or totally undistinguishable as in *Wild Life*, she can nonetheless turn that gaze back in an unconventional manner. She becomes the metaphorical mirror held up to the viewers, obliging them to see something different from their self-image, something other than the re-assuring double – identical to the self – which should re-affirm their identitarian certainties. Lacan claims that the mirror-image is the threshold of the visible world, suggesting that identification is deeply rooted in the image – so that, by facing his/her mirror-reflection, the subject can idealize

[7] Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" in *English is Broken Here. Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 41. This tradition began with Cristopher Columbus who returned in 1493 with some Arawaks, one of whom was displayed at the Spanish Court for two years. On the subject, see also Marina De Chiara, *Oltre la gabbia. Ordine coloniale e arte di confine* (Roma: Meltemi, 2005).

[8] Ibid., 44.

[9] Silverman, *Threshold*, 198.

[10] Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1992), 117, 118.

and perform an identity based on the exclusion of what cannot be accepted, what is denied as alien. On her part, Mwangi stages a reconfigured mirror phase, which involves a different identification process meant as a dialogic engagement between the spectators and the work of art (be it a live performance or a video). Once the 'new mirror stage' has taken place, the viewers may be able to think in a critical fashion about what they do and how they perceive and apprehend others, by re-negotiating their positions.

Sidonie Smith suggests that redefining narcissistic identification processes can become "a political and performative mechanism for intervening in patriarchal social arrangements".[11] This redefinition is supposed to make women aware of the visual regime encoding and disciplining them, while subverting meanings and representations by reactivating them. Mwangi's art is not a repetition of cruel and useless stereotypes; it is her way of re-presenting herself, articulating a subjectivity that does not exist as an independent entity, but is shaped in the interplay of experience, memory, and agency. As a woman artist, she controls the display of herself, intervening in the practice that makes her an object of speculation/specularization, thus questioning and re-discussing the totalizing colonial 'gaze'.

[11] Smith, *Interfaces*, 13. Smith also refers to Kaja Silverman's use of female narcissim for a feminist project.

Bright-dark continents

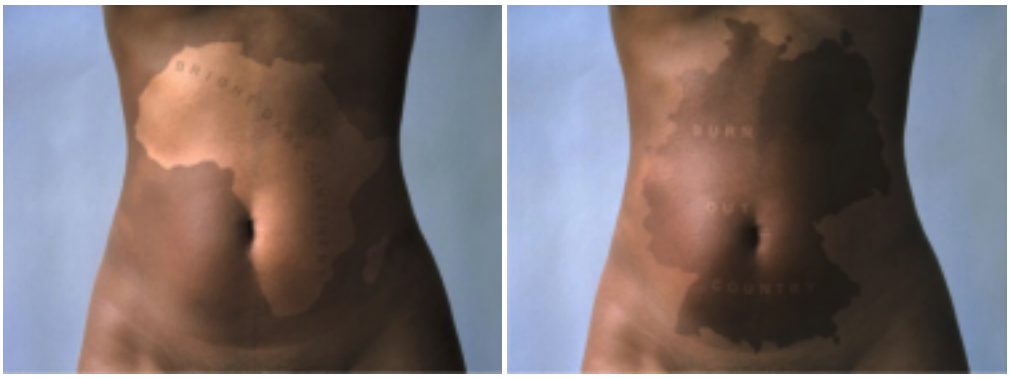
> The look has never coincided with the gaze ... [it] has never possessed the mastering and constitutive functions that have traditionally been attributed to it .... The look has ... possessed the capacity to see otherwise from and even in contradiction to the gaze.
> (Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*)

Ingrid Mwangi casts a new light on the questions of identity and ibridity as they emerge from her body. While previously paralyzed, frozen, and caged by the Western gaze confining her to a specific set of images and representations, she manages now to free herself from that gaze and to address her look to a white audience, making it what Kaja Silverman would call a "productive look". Silverman starts from her understanding of the look as the capacity to see things that the gaze cannot see, still maintaining that the look is under two kinds of pressures: the cultural pressure to apprehend the world from a preassigned viewing position, and the psychic pressure to see the world in ways that protect the ego. She thus suggests a productive look as something that "requires a constant conscious reworking of the terms under which we unconsciously look at the objects that people our visual landscape".[12] A productive vision of the world, like the one staged by Mwangi, would thus be a means to undo

[12] Silverman, *Threshold*, 184.

the normative constructions of gender, race, or other forms of difference. Her visual texts, whether photos, videos, or live performances, are the privileged field for a displacement of the self and a re-negotiation of the relations between divergent subjects.[13] By conjuring something new into existence, by struggling "to see the otherness of the desired self, and the familiarity of the despised other,"[14] the productive look allows the artist to produce and perform her heart of darkness.

Mwangi's choice to proceed with the exploration of her heart of darkness also takes place through photography; in fact, her further journey into the 'dark continent' is narrated by the photo series *Static Drift* (2001), which are still part of the dvd *My Heart of Darkness*, but with a specific focus.



Static Drift. 2001. Courtesy of the author.

In one photo, she traces the borders of Africa on her stomach, re-writing its traditional definition that now reads: "bright dark continent". In the other photo, she delineates the borders of Germany – always on her stomach – over which she writes "burn out country". This time, it is a European country that represents darkness, providing the spectators with a "different readability of the world".[15] Nonetheless, this darkness is special: Germany is 'burnt-out', devastated, destroyed, a bleak and desolate waste land, at the mercy of a 'static drift', leading nowhere and turning it into a hollow and dying space.[16] The maps of the two countries are then drawn on Mwangi's body, like two birthmarks impressed on her skin, two blobs of colour; the artist plays with an alternation between shadow and light, brightness and darkness, manipulating the colour of her skin by applying different (darker or lighter) shades on her body. In doing so, she recalls the metaphor of the blank space, the white page waiting to be written on, in order to rewrite, in her turn, Africa as well as Germany as two territories provided with unexpected features. In particular, the 'Africa' mapped on Mwangi's stomach disrupts existing geographical narrations and cultural representations with a new writing: what was once a blank space waiting to be conquered and coloured on the European maps, is now rewritten

[13] Silverman stresses the importance of such visual texts to activate in us the capacity to idealize bodies as divergent as possible from ourselves.

[14] Ibid., 170.

[15] Jürgen Habermas quoted in Horst Gerhard Haberl, "Art is the Message", in Berthold Schmitt and Bernd Schulz, eds., *Your Own Soul. Ingrid Mwangi*, (Saarbrücken: Kehrer, 2003), 35.

[16] Similarly, Conrad's novel seems to suggest that Western civilization is, indeed, the heart of darkness, that gradually obscures Africa. The novel's initial and ending scenes are significantly staged in the heart of (Western) civilization, London, spreading and exporting its darkness, which stands for emptiness and wasteland. Images of death and destruction also recur in relation to Brussels, the head-quarter of Belgian colonialism, which is defined as "a whited sepulchre" (Conrad, 24).

by Mwangi with new colours inscribed in her genetic heritage.[17] If the 'chromo-soma' etymologically stands for the 'colour' of the 'body', this inscription and re-colouring re-appropriates the 'dark continent' through the female body, which has so often and so violently been associated with a territory to be discovered and occupied. In the early decades of the XXth century, Freud borrowed the expression "dark continent" from the explorer John Rowlands Stanley's description of the dark African forests – virgin, hostile and impenetrable. The psychoanalist used the metaphor to indicate the 'enigma' constituted by female sexuality which caused his curiosity but also his slight (denied) embarrassment over his incomplete clinical knowledge. In *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926), Freud writes: "We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology".[18]

Moving away from these places of darkness, these 'blank' spaces, Mwangi's photos work on subverting pre-defined categories, thus becoming the locus of resistence and transformation. She can see both inside and outside African and European cultures; her perspective reveals a deterritorializing and deterritorialized vision. Her body shows permeable boundaries: the two photos, placed as if in a mirror position showing the same parts of the body, with similar lines and trajectories, suggest that canonical statuses have collapsed, all anchorage – to the notions of subject and object, or to geographical boundaries – has been dislodged. In the attempt to unchain a subject in chains, Mwangi escapes the constraints of identity, travelling out of it, far from the totalizing Western eye ceaselessly proclaiming itself as the powerful "I".

Sidonie Smith elaborates her critique of a unitary and unique self, condemned to the narrow boundaries of individuality, "the prisonhouse of singular identity".[19] She contests the metaphysical notion of the self, incapable of recognizing that "hard-edged boundaries between the self and the other are illegitimate borders of self-containment to be resisted in favor of a soaring, or floating transindividualism".[20] Her concept of "transindividualism" is based on a subject that has expanded beyond the unitary core of selfhood, beyond the traditional frames imposing an essentialist and consolidated individuality. The impossibility to fix identity in the traditional categories of subject and object, self and other – the latter constituting the necessary and specular reflection of the former – implies a subverting of the practices of representation and narration.

Through art, Mwangi can enter the site of self-narratives, escaping the official frames restraining the notions of subject and identity. Her *Static Drift* photos are her scenes of writing, combining the visual and the textual, registering her personal 'storytelling'. Her body carries her story up to a

[17] Each colour marks the colonies of every European nation: red stands for UK, blue for France, green for Italy, orange represents Portugal, yellow Belgium, and purple stands for Germany.

[18] "Dark Continent" in Alain de Mijolla and Thomson Gale, eds., *Int. Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 2005. <http://soc.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/dark-continent>

[19] Smith, *Subjectivity*, 98.

[20] Ibid.

visual textuality that emerges and deploys itself as a subjectivity now presented as discursive and communicative. In the constant dialogue with her past (Africa) and her present (Germany), and, by travelling all around the world, thus meeting different audiences, Mwangi realizes what Smith calls "the discursive staging of identity",[21] a performative practice that, far from affirming a 'true self' or a stable identity, invites different subjects (artists and spectators, writers and readers) to intersect and interface one another.

[21] Ibid, p.51.

The performing dark Medusa

> Images are meant to render the world accessible and imaginable to man. But, even as they do so, they interpose themselves between man and the world... they become screens.
> (Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*)

At the beginning of *My Heart of Darkness*, Mwangi appears wearing a mask constituted by her own dreadlocks knotted and braided over her face. Thus masked, she says, with a firm voice: "Ok everybody, attention please, this is a robbery, everybody please remain calm and nothing will happen to you, lay down on the floor ...". Then a woman is heard screaming, there is a gun-shot, and it is Mwangi shooting, not with a gun but with a remote control. If images (whether in the form of photographs, videos, installations or live performances) can create a crisis in representation by questioning the way we apprehend alterity, then probably what happens when we look at them is (or should be) a robbery: we are robbed and deprived of some of our cultural and identitarian certainties, those reassuring certainties transmitted by an imposed order and working against an ethics of visuality.

Mwangi's experimentations with visuality proceed with her second dvd *Within the Light*, documenting her works from 2002 to 2003. Here light takes the place previously occupied by darkness; the change is important: if in *My Heart of Darkness* Mwangi concentrates on the subject trapped by – but also resisting – the penetrating effects of the one-way gaze framing her as the 'other', in *Within the Light* she positions herself, with no hesitation, within her own blackness, that 'bright dark continent' chosen and reclaimed by her art. Moreover, her images are no longer blurred: beyond trying to be acknowledged, this time she is there, totally visible and exposed.

Her video-installation *Dressed like Queens* (2003) recovers and presents an image from African mythology. It consists of three naked female figures displayed on three colourful hand-dyed fabrics that function like screens

upon which the video is projected: the central fabric/screen shows a pregnant woman, while the two side images are projections of the artist herself telling the stories of "metaphorical queens". The narration – a text written by Mwangi – describes the rising of these queens, moving "mighty steps into insecure future". They have been deprived of the clothes they reclaim as their rightful property. The importance of their claim lies in the awareness that, in order to be recognized as subjects, dressing is a necessary element for performing identity. Clothes embody the codes associated with a certain definition of subjectivity and, as such, they reveal their fundamental function, contributing to the socio-cultural regulation of the body, and representing the location assigned to subjects – in this case, to Mwangi's queens.

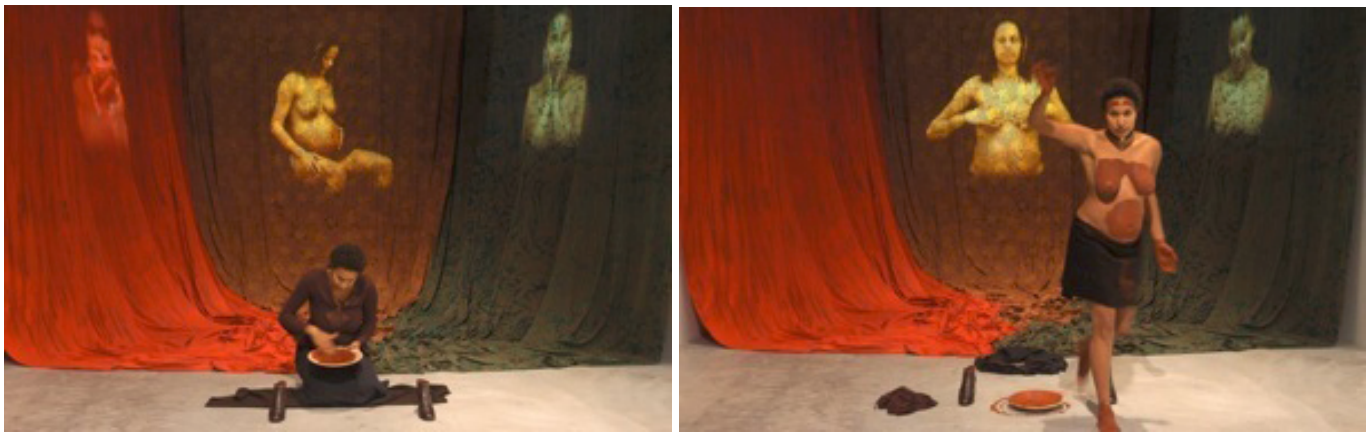
Virginia Woolf claimed that "clothes have ... more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us".[22] Clothes deeply influence and model subjects, confining them to the standards and norms prescribed by society in its attempt to normalize and conform.[23] Through clothes, a strong normativity imposes its own representations of both female and male identity, establishing boundaries which contain bodies and subjects. Mwangi's queens are deprived of their native clothes and obliged to assume Western and patriarchal habits: they now show the 'habit' of nakedness – 'habit' in the sense both of 'dress' and 'custom', or a habit they have got used to – following the widespread practice of presenting female nudes to the male spectatorial gaze and consumption. If clothes can shape and enclose a woman, "literally and figuratively within a particular representation of female identity",[24] to use Smith's words, then nakedness too is one of the normative representations produced for her. Perhaps the clothes Mwangi's queens reclaim are different ones, new 'habits' which could free them from the imposed (clothing of) oppression, from the constraints of pre-defined forms.

Mwangi's live performance, *Reclaimed* (2003), further stresses this point, in dialogue and interaction with the video-installation *Dressed like Queens*.

[22] Virginia Woolf quoted in Smith, *Subjectivity*, 93.

[23] On this subject, see Marina De Chiara, *La traccia dell'altra. Scrittura, identità e miti del femminile* (Napoli: Liguori, 2001), to which I refer for the following discussion.

[24] Smith, *Subjectivity*, 92-93.



Reclaimed 2003. Courtesy of the author.

During the performance, the video is projected behind the artist, while she slowly frees herself from her clothes, standing in front of her audience mixing red Kenyan earth with water. She undresses, showing herself completely naked, like her queens. She then goes on drawing and painting some parts of her body (her breast, stomach, face) with the red earth mixture she has prepared. By staging this kind of ritual, she offers an alternative view: nakedness – her previous dress – gives way to another dress, constituted by the red-coloured Kenyan earth, at the same time revealing and shielding her body. To a certain extent, Mwangi is wearing clothes from Africa, new 'habits' allowing her to question and overcome the boundaries and conventions imposed by her old ones (again in the sense of clothes and cultural patterns/customs). It is as if the ritual performed with the Kenyan powder could help her to proceed with her journey: she is "within the light" now, she has achieved the transition to her homeland, or perhaps she has just begun a journey configured as an unending transition between two homes, Germany and Africa. Art is a means to create a link with (a new-found) environment and culture, a way to reconcile herself with them.

The new clothes reaffirm Mwangi's space, the space of her performance, conferring it a significant power over the audience: by totally undressing, the artist hypnotizes the spectators and metaphorically petrifies them by exposing them to her body. Viewers look at her face, eyes and sex, and experience the sight of a 'Medusa image'. Within the space of the performance, they have no shield to cover their eyes and save them from the intense effects of the spectacle – in this case, of the live performance.[25] By showing herself naked, Mwangi identifies with Medusa in that she offers her body as something that questions the spectators' familiar visual perceptions: a disturbing black female body refusing all stereotypes and dominant forms of representation, a body that not only turns the (totalizing) gaze back, but also uses it to freeze and petrify in its turn. The story of Medusa characterizes what has been identified as the monstrously female, the symbol of power and danger and of threats to the male, patriarchal order. A horrible monster, with sparkling eyes and a gaze that petrifies those who look at her, Medusa is one of the three Gorgons, the mortal one. According to mythology, Athena orders Perseus to kill her by cutting off her head, after using his shield as a mirror to avoid her gaze: if Medusa's gaze kills, the reflection of that gaze kills Medusa.

Among the psychoanalytic accounts of the myth, Julia Kristeva underlines the ambivalence and the ambiguity of the story of Medusa: "vulva et vultus, vulva and face, two equivalent terms that the myth of Medusa joins together after thousands of years.[26] Kristeva is clearly referring to Freud's essay, "Medusa's Head", written in 1922, and published posthumously in 1940. Here the father of psychoanalysis states that the image of Medusa's head,

[25] Silverman discusses a somehow similar identification relation between the male eye/gaze and the uncanny female body/genitals in Marcel Duchamp's diorama *Etant donnés*, in which a naked female body, its legs spread and one hand holding a lamp, lies diagonally in a field; the woman's head and feet are not visibile as they are beyond the edges of a large opening in a brick wall through which spectators see the rest of her body. Silverman refers to Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of the diorama as realizing a mirror relation between the spectators' eyes and the female genitals, through an alignment between eye and vulva. See Silverman, *Threshold*, 172.

[26] Julia Kristeva, *Visions Capitales* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1998), 39; my translation.

surrounded by snaky hair, evokes the female sexual organ, which is the very origin of fascination and horror. The serpents surrounding the Gorgon's head signify the absence of the penis and thus the fearful and alarming threat of castration. Here the power of horror is connected to the horror of the feminine: the woman and her sexual organ have nothing to offer a male phallic vision; she exposes a "nothing-to-be-seen" – at least nothing in the form of the male sexual organ – and this is defined by Freud as deeply uncanny.[27]

The story of Medusa plays a fundamental role in the discussion of representation in the field of vision, as it is entirely centred around the question of seeing and being-seen. Kristeva insists on the power of the eye and gaze of Medusa to petrify, paralyse and kill: she even wonders whether the monster's gaze might be an inversion of the human – phallic and male – gaze that wants to capture the horror of the other in order to fix it and eliminate it.[28] In fact, Medusa is able to address the murderous gaze that is usually a male – and Western – privilege.

Focusing on the story of the Gorgon, the dangerous female monster killed by Perseus who re-establishes the (patriarchal/male) order, what emerges, on a general level, is the story of a woman whose power has been neutralized by a man who puts an end to the threat she poses. Such a visual representation is applied, every day, to the woman who, like a contemporary Gorgon, is imprisoned in this pattern, in all the images produced to define her. In this sense, 'Medusa representations' can be seen as social frames containing women within pre-established boundaries. If images do not simply represent the world, but create it and shape it, rendering it accessible to man – as Lacan suggests – it is because "instead of presenting the world to man, they re-present it, put themselves in place of the world, to the extent that man lives as a function of the images he has produced".[29] In doing so, Lacan notes, images interpose themselves between man and the world, thus becoming screens, the third term Lacan uses to articulate his field of vision. Screens can be configured as what creates and projects images to which individuals conform, including all the 'Medusa images' to which women have to submit, conforming to hegemonic visual models.

Reading Lacan's account, Silverman remarks that the screen plays a fundamental role in the way individuals experience their specularity and in the way they are seen by others. In fact, screens are associated with a range of representational coordinates available at a particular historical moment and in a specific culture, coordinates appearing as the most appropriate frames through which the world can be apprehended. In Silverman's words:

> the screen or cultural image-repertoire inhabits each of us .... What this means is that when we apprehend another person or an object, we necessarily do so

[27] On this subject see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum. L'altra donna*, ed. by Luisa Muraro (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1989), 42. See also Lidia Curti, "Dietro lo schermo della rappresentazione" and "Madri e figlie" in *La voce dell'altra: scritture ibride tra femminismo e postcolonialismo* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006), 39-82.

[28] Kristeva, *Visions*, 36.

[29] Lacan quoted in Silverman, *Threshold*, 196,197.

> via the large, diverse, but ultimately finite range of representational coordinates which determine what and how the members of our culture see – how they process visual detail, and what meaning they give it.[30]

[30] Silverman, *Threshold*, 221.

To the extent that the screen (or "cultural image-repertoire") inhabits everyone and determines the way in which everyone is apprehended by others, it is positioned not only between man and the world, but more significantly "inside" every person; it is the prevailing "representational grid" that determines specific viewing positions.[31] The image of Medusa – decapitated and killed by Perseus – seems to function as a representational grid 'dictating' and spreading visual perceptions that are associated, almost automatically, to normative meanings. These normative meanings unconsciously lead individuals to perceive black skin or the female sex according to a specific 'cultural image-repertoire' or screen.

[31] Ibid., 221-222.

While stressing the fundamental function of the screen in shaping individual perceptions, Silverman nonetheless distances herself from such a totalizing account of the screen and thus also focuses on another aspect of Lacan's theorization: the "human subject's capacity ... for 'playing' with the screen".[32] What appears relevant here is that, following this observation, the subject does not necessarily need to have a passive relation to the screen, as a certain degree of intervention is now possible. This paves the way to an ethical practice of viewing, encouraging spectators to recognize the performative character of their very subjectivities and identities. By watching live performances like Mwangi's, viewers have the chance to realize how they are constituted and shaped by a series of performative acts staging cultural discourses and regimes: they see someone else staging – and questioning – what they usually stage in everyday life, through the (performative) construction of their own identities and those of others'. Faced with such visions, they are invited to collaborate in the articulation of meaning and images and are offered alternative discursive and representational practices.

[32] Ibid., 174.

Ingrid Mwangi produces her self and her body as a screen that reflects collective and individual desires and anxieties. Throughout the works of art discussed in this article, even as she stages dominant representations, she is playing with the screen, providing counter-strategies for a productive re-presentation and re-cognition. The screens projecting her videos and performances can be associated to the Lacanian screens, the cultural image-repertoires, but with a difference: they offer new and alternative representational coordinates that differ from the prevailing ones. Through her performances Mwangi suggests critical perspectives. By challenging dominant discourses, she enters the visual space of self-narrative, "investigat[ing] – invest[ing herself] in – alternative technologies of autobiography", in Sidonie Smith's words.[33] These new forms or technologies of autobiography involve an intersubjective exchange between

[33] Smith, *Subjectivity*, 63.

artist and viewers, writer and readers, both engaged in a re-visioning process, a re-negotiation of their positions. In this regard, works of art are mirrors/screens that do not simply reflect but unfold; they break through the mechanism of specularity – incessantly repeating the image of the same – and they manage to produce and spread multiple and disturbing images which are, themselves, *other*. The representation of the self seems to coincide with the representation of the other, in that they intersect and become almost indistinguishable in the representation of a shared visual narrative. By participating in this visual narrative, subjects perform their identities while inscribing them – both textually and visually – in their creations, in their selves. Artist and viewers are thus linked by the simultaneous performance of their subjectivities. This is a practice that goes beyond the specific performance or video-installation, as it realizes a wide network in which several subjects meet, are involved and – uncomfortably – questioned. In this perspective of performative interaction, Ingrid Mwangi's works of art are "as much about *me* as they are about her. And ... my readings as you receive them are as much about *you* as about me".[34]

Apart from the language in which this performative interaction develops, everyone should be aware of the unavoidable dialogue and exchange occurring between individuals and the images circulating around them. Mwangi's works play a crucial role not only in the performance of her individual identity, but more significantly in that of her viewers who will write, read and discuss her art, in an infinite series of interactive relationships between different subjects performing their identities.

[34] Amelia Jones "Performing the Other as Self. Cindy Sherman and Laura Aguilar Pose the Subject" in Smith, *Interfaces*, 83.

Iain Chambers, ed., *Esercizi di potere. Gramsci, Said e il postcoloniale* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006), 140 pp.

Reviewed by **Fiorenzo Iuliano**

The essays collected in this volume are an attempt at tracing an interaction between Antonio Gramsci's and Edward Said's thought, trying to relate the different issues addressed by both of them to themes characterizing our present time. As Iain Chambers declares in the preface, the book aims at challenging the tradition of historicism and at questioning its limits; the effort to reconfigure a new perception of history, based on the opposition between hegemonic and subaltern agents operating in the field of politics and culture, corresponds to the need for a radical disputing of our certainties, be they political, cultural or merely disciplinary. Gramsci's theory of subalternity meets the recent problems raised by postcolonial and cultural studies, and finds an interesting concretion in the folds of marginal and peripheral discourses, capable of disclosing an intricate net of relationships among texts, narratives, voices and bodies belonging to the southern part of the present world.

Radically questioning the traditional and established Marxist perspective, grounded on a rigid division between economic structure and socio-cultural superstructure, the book witnesses the definition of a layered texture of emerging subject-positions, capable of cutting across the lines that mark the divide between the realm of politics and its alleged aesthetic counterpart. The distinction between northern and southern Italy, pointed at by Gramsci in his analysis of the condition of southern farmhands, acquires a double and interesting significance: on the one hand, its significance is broadened up to enclose the southern part of the globalized world, thanks to the contributions of postcolonial studies and their closest forerunners (like Franz Fanon); on the other, the contributors remarkably stress their own subject and political position, their role as scholars working in the south of Italy and addressing the disciplinary fields they are engaged in from a partial, and often marginalized and decentralized, perspective.

The Gramsci-Said dialogue is given a multifaceted substantiation in this interesting respect: reflecting on subalternity leads us to reconsider the epistemic frames on which our vision of world and history depends, and to replace the role played by an omniscient "global agent" with a "planetary subject with his/her naked and exposed life, who cannot find a home in the available maps" (13).

The essays included in the volume cannot be read without bearing this contextual frame in mind; they constitute a heterogeneous but at the same time coherent constellation of themes and references, which reread the questions of subaltern and counter-hegemonic agencies in an articulate spectrum. Literature plays a fundamental role in this discussion: the opening essay by Lidia Curti insists on the importance of writing, a militant gesture that has represented, for both Gramsci and Said, an act of political resistance, besides being an indispensable means for theorization and criticism. The passionate words with which Curti starts her essay (which I would prefer not to translate into English) "scrivere, ostinatamente scrivere contro le difficoltà della solitudine, della prigionia, della cattiva salute, di un corpo diverso da quello degli altri…" (18), introduce us to a critical and responsible understanding of the problems and the themes that characterize the whole book. And, if literature is central to the essay by Marta Cariello, which creates an evocative net of intersections between migrancy, writing and corporeality, in her reading of the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* by the Egyptian writer Ahdad Soueif, music, too, has great importance in Gramsci's and Said's speculation on culture and political subaltern positions. Serena Guarracino invites us to reconsider the 'elaborations' on the theme of popular culture and its relationship with the dynamics of power and history in the light of a critical (and musical) entwining of voices, a gesture that reshapes the very means of critical analysis through its problematic and uncanny intersection with music. Silvana Carotenuto and Marie-Hélène Laforest, in turn, stress the role played by the autobiographical work of memory that, in Said's case, means a complex and radical rethinking of his own family and personal position as an Arab, a Christian and, especially, as a migrant – as the title of Laforest's essay, "Sempre di passaggio" (Always in transit), with its reference to Said's autobiography *Out of Place*, recalls. Carotenuto's reading of three texts, by Toni Morrison, Edward Said (the Freud Museum lecture *Freud and the Non-European*) and Virginia Woolf, interweaves the different voices interpellated in a complex play of mutual references, from the Freudian implicit self positioning as a non-European, to the critique of Africanism as displayed in the pages of Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, to the question of female agency**,** which, already stressed by Lidia Curti in a section of her essay devoted to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in this case is related to Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*.

Marina De Chiara reflects on the uncomfortable position occupied by both Gramsci and Said in their respective intellectual contexts: the request for a 'new culture', based on a principle of ethical responsibility that creates the opportunity for a problematic and often misunderstood (or, in a certain sense, 'over-understood', epitomized and reduced to misleading stereotypes) Other to find his/her own voice, put forward by Gramsci, is connected with the emergence of diasporic voices in the field of cultural

and academic debate. De Chiara reminds us of the names of Derrida, Žižek, Kristeva, Bhabha, Spivak, and the profound interconnection existing between their condition as migrants and the weight and complexity of their theoretical and philosophical speculation.

The question of humanism is of the utmost importance, as Giorgio Baratta's and Pasquale Voza's essays stress: humanism means, in the Gramscian sense, the rise of a democratic and international space for dialogue, which does not overlook conflicts and contradictions, but strives to restore a common, shared and secular field of debate and dialectical confrontation. On his part, Voza connects the issue of the primacy of politics to the questions of violence and the new redefinition of democracy and power. Violence represents the dangerous but, to some extent, inevitable limit, which the transformations undergone by politics and democracy in the age of late capitalism seem destined to reach; in this respect, the active role of a political and democratic agency is hinted at as the aptest reconfiguration of the Gramscian thematization of 'hegemony' in the dramatic context of present international conflicts. Domenico Jervolino traces an interesting comparison between the thought of Said and Paul Ricoeur, investigating the notions of 'ontology' and 'epistemology' and arguing for the impossible purity of culture and its complete independence from the mechanisms of historical configuration: this trait, proper to Ricoeur's reflection and its hermeneutical insight, becomes crucial to the Saidian (and Gramscian) understanding of cultural processes, in what Jervolino strikingly defines as the "necessary and irreducible interweaving of *logos* and *praxis*" (65).

Lea Durante and Sandra Ponzanesi address the question of 'cosmopolitism': as Durante underscores, Gramsci thought of cosmopolitism as a risk represented by the replication of existing power structures disguised in a quasi-metaphysical 'a-topic' dimension; on the other hand, Sandra Ponzanesi argues that the generic claims of cosmopolitism, which betray their complicity with power apparatuses, must be reconceived according to the trajectories traced by the "traveling theories" she refers to (this is also the title of a 1982 Said essay), and to the configuration of a nomadic reshaping of subjectivity, capable of disrupting the epistemic framing of the world and its traditional center-periphery structure.

At the end of the volume, the report of a moving personal experience: the beautiful pages written by Sara Marinelli, "Dentro i covili del verme", deal with the condition of jail and imprisonment, as experienced by Antonio Gramsci, and as observed by the author in her teaching activity in a penitentiary in Naples. This unsettling familiarity represents the first step toward a tense and dramatic journey that Marinelli traces among different places and nations: Secondigliano and its present, degraded reality, the South of the world and its subaltern voices, the imaginary map represented

by Naples and Baku, Azerbaigian, as evoked by the names of Neapolitan streets, and, in the background, a disquieting and poetical voice that, along the trajectories opened up by Gramsci and Said, tries to reconfigure our location and (political) position in the present time.

Brad Butler and Keren Mizra, eds., *Cinema of Prayoga. Indian Experimental Film and Video 1913-2006* (London: no.w.here, 2006), 144 pp.

Reviewed by **Alessandra Marino**

Since 2002, "Experimenta" film festival in Bombay has witnessed a new movement in Indian cinema that cannot be ignored. The city, mainly known for the glossy and high-budget Bollywood movies, is in fact the cradle of another kind of production: experimental film, which, born out of Indian parallel cinema, combines new modes of representation with a socio-political content.

Cinema of Prayoga tells the story of this alternative production, that has developed out of the mainstream since 1913, the very beginning of filmmaking in India. *Prayoga* means 'experimental' and the long essay by art historian Amrit Gangar at the beginning of the book analyzes the implications this word carries. Coming from a polisemic sanskrit word, *prayoga* possesses the sense of 'practice' and 'innovation' and avoids the military echoes inscribed in the more common term 'avant-garde'.

The book contains essays and conversations with experimental filmmakers, together with four more general articles concerning Indian cinema and new artistic productions, written by art critic Johan Pijnappel as well as Amrit Gangar, Elena Bernardini and Shai Heredia, who also play the role of interviewers. The emergence of the artists' personality and the description of the situations in which the interviews took place make the book lively and, at the same time, help the readers in moving closer to the ideas laying behind the works presented. As the editors stress in the preface, the very act of creating a poliphony of voices in the book reveals the intention of challenging the dominant histories circulating in the West, focusing on issues of location, memory, and gender.

In a globalized context, the idea of being 'from' one place is a very difficult issue. On the one hand, these experimental narratives stress the importance of being positioned; while on the other, the condition of being caught in the ongoing global movement of ideas, goods and people implies complex negotiations of identity. In this context, identity cannot be considered as a monolithic construction: the sense of belonging to the mother country gives rise to contradictory feelings that deeply question the individual plane. Art historian Elena Bernardini points out that "collectively the works suggest to rethink the relations between places and subjects. They insist on the presence of positioned subjectivities without,

however, inscribing those subjects within a discourse around a national cultural essence" (33).

Criticism against the concept of national belonging, considered as fictional and non-natural, is thus mixed with the awareness of the importance of being 'situated'. Places give birth to certain artistic expressions which are culturally specific, and the act of looking itself emerges as a culturally influenced practice. Poverty and cosmopolitanism for example are everyday experiences in Bombay, where people from different regions and ethnic groups share the same metropolitan urban spaces. As Shai Heredia underlines: "Dealing with the co-existence of cosmopolitanism with extreme poverty, migrant identities and the trauma of displacement are daily visual experiences for a Bombayite. The consciousness created by engaging daily with such harsh disparities is what distinguishes a Bombay soul from that of any other urban inhabitant" (44).

Places can shape subjectivities and create a commonly shared knowledge. In her monologue-like interview, Navjot Altaf underlines that, paradoxically, *Bombay Meri Jaan* (2004) narrates loneliness and invisibility as choral experiences: "A lot of people migrate from different parts of the country to the city (Bombay). The video looks at how migration takes place at different levels. At one level, it takes place out of desire ..., but at another level it results from compulsion and desperation, urgency, poverty and ultimately isolation. That's what I dealt with" (120). Following the children living in Bombay streets, the artist casts a light on the feelings of solitude and displacement imprisoning their existence.

In *The World* (2004), video artist Sonia Khurana explores the meaning of migrancy and re-settling for Indians. Starting from evoking her grandmother's souvenirs of forced relocation after the Partition, Khurana connects them with images of her own free migration. She questions the ideas of 'house' and 'nation' as stable and comforting refuges by focusing on destructed homes and domestic spaces, but also describing all the houses she has lived in. As Elena Bernardini highlights: "'Indian identity' meant also Partition with the re-location of millions and incredible violence. The event in itself serves as a major criticism of the idea of a nation as a natural concept rather than a construct" (36).

In order to unveil the contradictions hidden in the idea of 'nation', *Unity in Diversity* (2003) by Nalini Malani exposes ethnic differences among the Indian populations. For this purpose she has re-worked a picture by the famous painter Raja Ravi Varma called *The Galaxy of Musicians* (1893), in which eleven women of different Indian origins are portrayed as an allegory of the nation. Details of Varma's picture re-appear in the video and are juxtaposed with images of the religious riots that took place in 2002 in Gujarat between hindus and muslims. Ethnic eterogeneity characterizes a nation in which, despite the disparities of religion, language

and origin, citizens share a terrible past of violence. In the collective memory emerging from Malani's video, the public is strongly reminded of the trauma of Partition, the cause of both violence and migration.

Struggles between past and present or private and public memory spaces appear in different forms: as a discourse on the possibility of true knowledge in Amit Dutta's 'dia-monologue' or as a family story in Ashish Avikunthak's interview. As tradition and modernity have a complex relationship of opposition and contiguity with each other, this collective and acquired memory is opposed and weaved together with a personal one, coming from directly lived experiences. Filmmaker Amit Dutta affirms: "For me there are two kinds of memory: personal and the acquired. There are memories that I have been exposed to since my childhood and there are memories from my personal experience. Together they become subjective" (50). Similarly Navjot Altaf, in the aforementioned video *Bombay Meri Jaan*, mingles her own personal memories with fragments of her grandmother's life to represent her self-conscious modern subjectivity.

Mothers, grandmothers and the nation often appear, in the book and in the videos, as overlapping images. In the works by women filmmakers, gender issues are contextualized in relation to society and questions of origin. Artist Shumona Goel, having grown up in a small community of Indian immigrants living in Pennsylvania, considers her being of Indian descent the reason of the distance of her art from American trends: "I like the forms that American artists have developed. Their tradition allows for personal filmmaking. But I also wanted to express the aspirations and sorrow of my family, and on one level, our stories relate back to India" (p. 98). For this reason, as Shumona says, her works always try to go beyond singularity and establish a connection between her own personal experience and the Punjabi community she comes from. Like herself, the protagonist of her diary-style *Atreyee* (2004) is a migrant woman, moving from Bengal to Bombay. Atreyee's everyday life as a PhD student displays the difficulties of being a woman in a patriarchal society. In the interview, the artist significantly underlines that, with this video, she has intended to intervene in the debates among Indian feminists on female subjugation, arguing that it is not only poor women who suffer from patriarchy, as being a woman in India is like a caste itself.

And yet, as so far explained, women in particular are protagonists in contemporary Indian video art: the productions by Nalini Malani, Navjot Altaf and Sonia Khurana, on the border between video art and installations, force and expand the given canons of visual disciplines.

Edited by Brad Butler and Keren Mizra, *Cinema of Prayoga* is published by no.w.here, an association that promotes courses on film techniques as well as art events. The aim of the workshops, held in London, is to help young filmmakers in their formation.

Couze Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge. Towards Alternative Worlds* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 219+viii pp.

Reviewed by **Enrica Picarelli**

What is postcolonialism today? How is emancipation to become operational in a world suffering from acute forms of violence and dispossession? These are some of the questions posed by Couze Venn in *The Postcolonial Challenge* in the light of an analysis of the state of the world today. Coming from a background in cultural studies, Venn has written extensively on the non-phenomenological character of identity, as evidenced in the post-psychoanalytic perspective informing his contribution to the volume entitled *De-Centering the Subject*.

In *The Postcolonial Challenge* he identifies new hegemonic "forms of colonization" in the mechanisms of economical and cultural productions. Global relations of power appear as visual representations making use of "tele-technologies" to shape identities according to a universal concept of being. This lays the ground for a postcolonial struggle over aesthetics demanding a new hermeneutics of the visual that engages with a politicized definition of identities. Through a 'situated' use of the arts, Venn employs a theory of creolization to advocate a change in the regime of visibility and identification characterizing Western representations of alterity.

The book is based on the assumption that globalization works to conform subjectivities to a universal *idea* of rationality and a fixed identity. Such is the theorization of a *subject* founded by modern Western thought as the "(ideally), rational, autonomous, self-sufficient, masculine and European agent of the history of humanity" (9). Colonialism has been the manifestation of this subject embodying universal rationality and temporality and conceived as the "privileged model", against which other beings are declared lacking, ontologically hampered by the seeds of their own subjugation. Venn also underlines how this rationalist approach has leaked in later readings of identity-formation, as with Althusser's concept of ideology and interpellation or Lacan's mirror stage.

Both accounts are read by the author as still trapped within the limits of a mechanicistic and rationalist vision of the subject as well as within the illusion of objectivity informing scientific discourse; Lacan's mirror phase, for instance, suggests that subjectivity derives from a split within the subject that replicates the "I-versus-the-world" approach of colonialism. Rationalism locates subject formation in an imagined and symbolic dimension that

fails to take into account what Venn calls the "processual" and "indeterminate" dimensions of life deriving from situated positions. Contrary to phenomenology, Venn theorises instead a *philosophy of the lived* and a *political hermeneutics* that acknowledge the historically fraught character of life and knowledge, taking leave from traditional accounts of identity based on dualism.

Making rich use of a variety of studies from Silvermann to Vološinov, identity is defined by Venn as a *node* or *assemblage*: a space that is where body and society intermingle in a play of constant shiftings and re-adjustments that enact a "choreography" of symbiotic dependence – Merleau-Ponty's "state of compossibility". This "subject-in-process" is thus bound to the world as the world unfolds within his/herself; a space of open interaction – a layer – that equates existence to experience. Recalling Foucault, Venn points to the formative role of language in creating a space of sociality where identity is formed in discourse. Here self-consciousness emerges as narrative within the apprehension of time-as-process, defining a heterogeneous and discontinuous ontology of becoming.

This differential aspect of identity problematises traditional issues of belonging that in fact Venn reads as "strategies" rather than claims to absolute categories of existence. Hybridity, here the core feature of identity, destabilises notions of purity and integrity that rely on the concept of origin and stresses the formative function of displacement in the birth of cultures. Individual as well as collective or national identities are thus formed *in transfer,* in a play of uninterrupted recombinations. Such a varied critical overview offers a standpoint to the enactment of polyglot, subjective differentiation in the form of embodied and politicized art, offering new and alternative narrations of identity or counter-hegemonic readings of traditional "grand narratives" following in the path traced by Morrison's new "politics of rememoration". Venn is especially interested in the disrupting potentiality of tele-technologies in giving a situated account of how different "imagined blocks" of existence define new spaces of signification.

By acknowledging the relationship between corporate media and induced desires, the author advocates the elaboration of new narratives of being in visual arts that account for the unstable character of subjectivity and "reorganize the gaze in relation to the *desirable*". This new "aesthetic dimension" of identity, built around propositions rather than pre-packaged ideas, becomes an "imaginative space … able to keep as a trace the memory of other ways of being or transmit a history of resistance" (118), implicating the emancipatory thrust towards "justice and goodness" in contemporary aesthetics. Thus coupled, aesthetics and ethics become two sides of the political resistance to hegemonic representations of being, manufactured by Western "globalization from above".

In elaborating concrete instances rather than referring to existing theoretical debates, Venn defines the embodied approach of his postcolonial project, a project that is in fact ultimately effective only when enacted through individual bodies and across the bulk of society. His main reference is to the best suited and most attractive medium of all – the arts of the visible – in a ceaseless and erratic encounter of differences and similarities.

A.A.V.V., *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, edited by Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London-New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 224 pp.

Shohini Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema : Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 200 pp.

Reviewed by **Annalisa Spedaliere**

Remapping World Cinema and *Contemporary World Cinema* are two books that analyse, through very different approaches, several aspects of World Cinema. In the former, Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim have chosen a selection of sixteen essays by leading international film scholars that investigate theoretical debates and critical approaches to this complex field of study. Shohini Chauduri's work, on the other hand, has a schematic structure, planned first of all for students and cinema courses. Both volumes start with an interesting introduction that prepares readers – even those who are not experts in the field – by explaining the purposes of the work and giving some basic information about the subject.

Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim first of all explain how difficult is to answer the question "What is World Cinema?", since this involves different theoretical contexts, contradictory discourses and political tensions. They begin their study by trying to situate the subject making useful analogies with World Music and World Literature. Thus they can affirm that "World" generally stands for non-Western cultural products viewed from a Western perspective. The introduction provides interesting insights into international distribution, explaining the differences between World Cinema and Third Cinema.

The editors of *Remapping World Cinema* disagree with theories that define World Cinema only as the antithesis of Hollywood cinema or as a "national" cinema, because these theories deny the potential of World Cinema to perceive the world in a different way, not defined by geopolitical boundaries, race and ethnicity. For this reason, Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim propose to rethink it in three ways: as a discipline, a methodology and a perspective. This is not to define a "correct" point of view but to stress the complexities of the subject.

The essays collected in *Remapping World Cinema* are divided into six sections. The first, "Remapping World Cinema in a Post-World Order", includes essays by Dudley Andrew, Lucia Nagib and Michael Chanan:

Andrew composes an "Atlas of World Cinema" that shows how World Cinema's main characteristic is displacement; Lucia Nagib talks about the flexibility and hybridity of this field in opposition to more restrictive definitions of this cinema; in a similar perspective, Michael Chanan shows the differences of this kind of cinema within such an apparently homogeneous continent, such as Latin America.

"Crossing Boundaries" is the title of the second part of *Contemporary World Cinema*; the focus, here, is the politics of representation in a post-colonial world. Keith Richard, Rob Stone and Rosanna Maule respectively analyse films by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Dennis Hopper e Werner Herzog. Maule also discusses propaganda movies from Cuba and Francoist Spain, focussing in particular on hybrid and transnational identities in a post-colonial world.

Part three ("Carnival and Transgression") of the volume is dedicated to popular cinema. The authors of the essays, David Robb, Evelyn Preuss and Mark Goodall, analyse movies from four parts of the world, using "carnival aesthetics to engage with issues relating to modernity". Part four, "Performing stardom and race", is about actors and actresses that are not American but that have international success, thus becoming absorbed by the American star system. Stephanie Dennison and Guy Austin focus on the mechanism of the Western star system, and its imposition of race stereotypes on foreign stars. "Interrogating Gender" is the title of the fifth part of *Remapping World Cinema* and echoes the previous section. Hideaki Fujiki and Louise Williams talk about gender and sexuality in Japanese and Chinese cinema.

The last part, "Hollywood's 'others'", is about the two nations that are the largest movie producers outside Hollywood: Japan and India. Rachel Hutchinson considers Kurosawa both a universal and an essentially Japanese director, whose style breaks binarisms and the "Orientalism vs Occidentalism" dynamic. In the same way Khaushik Bhaumik talks about the characteristics of Bollywood cinema, claiming that it is not a poor copy of Hollywood but a film industry with its own ideas and nationalistic stance.

Shohini Chauduri's introduction to *Contemporary World Cinema* also gives basic information about World Cinema and its purposes, indirectly showing that the importance of Hollywood movies in the world is relative. Its cultural global monopoly is due in part to the politics of production and distribution, which tends to leave out most of non-Western movies. Chauduri also describes these strategies but also how some "globalising processes", such as the spread of new technologies, have increased social exchange between different parts of the world and accelerated "the flow of films to diverse audiences internationally". International co-productions are also important because they allow the distribution of movies in several countries.

Of particular interest is the author's analysis of multiplexes outside the USA and their contribution to control distribution networks. However, in this case, too, there is a "resistance" articulated through the use of VRCs, DVDs, satellite TV, independent distributors and independent theatre, that allow viewers to have a wider choice. Like Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim, Chauduri explains differences between World Cinema and Third Cinema but also refers to similarities. Moreover, she stresses the importance of post-modernism and post-colonialism in the development of both Third Cinema and World Cinema.

In contrast with *Remapping World Cinema*, *Contemporary World Cinema* is written expressly for cinema courses so the author's approach is more technical and less theoretical. Providing a considerable quantity of information about World Cinema, it amounts to a mini encyclopaedia on the subject. In four of the books eight chapters Chauduri provides a wide-ranging discussion of the cinema of four big geographical areas of the world. In the others she analyses the characteristics of a particular zone, in each of the major areas.

The first chapter is about European cinema, with an initial cultural and historical background, moving on to more specific analyses of Brtish cinema, French cinema, "Post-Wall" German cinema, "Post-Franco" Spanish cinema, Polish cinema, Czech cinema, and films on the Yugoslav war. The second chapter of the book is an interesting analysis of Scandinavian cinema with particular reference to Lars von Trier, Aki Kaurismäki, and Swedish cinema after Ingmar Bergman.

In the third chapter, "Middle Eastern Cinema", Chaudhuri observes Egyptian and Lebanese cinema, New Tunisian cinema, New Turkish cinema and Middle East films about Palestinian-Israeli situation, followed by Iranian cinema in chapter four. "East Asian Cinema" occupies chapter four. The author gives an overview of Chinese cinema (with particular reference to the so-called "fifth generation" and "sixth generation"), Taiwanese New Wave, Thai cinema, South Korean cinema and Japanese Live Action and "Anime". Chapter six is devoted more specifically to Hong Kong cinema.

The last big geographical area selected by the author is South Asia. In the seventh chapter she talks about Popular Indian cinema, New Indian cinema, cinema of South Asia and Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh cinema. The book concludes with an interesting analysis of Indian cinema, referring in particular to Bollywood and Indian expatriate filmmakers.

Premises and purposes in *Remapping World Cinema* and *Contemporary World Cinema* are respected, and the analysis in these two books provides a significant background to the difficult and interesting field of World Cinema.

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