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New Waves



The issue celebrates 50 years since the beginning of the French New Wave and 20 years since the beginning of a new Eastern European filmmaking. It takes a look at “new waves” of image making both as a legacy of the New Wave and as a phenomenon that can be placed in the context of recent tendencies in world cinema.

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New and Novelty in Contemporary Media Cultures

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Abstract: The author is pointing out strategies of artistic-aesthetic and more widely applicable creative practices, which she thinks can be used as interesting examples of critical interventions into contemporary media landscapes. To introduce this topic, she is briefly highlighting a few aspects of the present situation – with some reference to the past – and follows this with a discussion of aesthetic strategies in radical arts.

When we discuss new and novel media developments, confusion naturally arises in the debate because media are new to contemporary cultures by definition. The wording ‘new media’ may indicate an evolutionary perspective which spans, for example, from the analogue such as photography and film, to the more recent digital that emerges with the incorporation of digital computers. Nevertheless, in some instances it may be useful to more closely distinguish historical developments of initially distinct media such as film, performance, music and so on from their recent mergers that produce ‘new’ and ‘different’ media forms, for instance audiovisual media, electronic film, digital film and photography, to name the most prominent appearances of novelty in contemporaneity. In this respect, it will also be necessary to highlight evolutionary steps in the progress of technologies because the novelty does not arrive out of the blue. But it is building up from a variety of interrelated, parallel and also unconnected technical developments that become the building blocks for the arrival of a ‘new’ medium that progresses dynamically and not statically. Thereby, newness and novelty become shifting categories by themselves, and can serve to conceptualize recent and contemporary media phenomena in relation to previous media forms.

With the advent of digital technologies there is less interest in discussing the novelty as such, but it is more important to identify how emerging technologies are incorporated into the already existing media setting. With the digital and the

extended possibilities to merge and fuse all kinds of technologies and aesthetic concepts, it is now more interesting to regard practices of reworking and remediation of previously conceived media forms in the computers and their networks. The picture of newness has dramatically enlarged with the technical connections that produce globally networked communication and provoke questions of inter- and transcultural influences and convergences. In result, the preoccupation for research into new tendencies has changed the focus from identifying media specific developments to considering as equally important the scrutiny of cultural factors and in particular differences between the West and the East.

In the following, I will outline contemporary tendencies in these complex media cultures with the focus on transgressions and crossings of media borders. This will involve questions of the media and cultural contexts with regard to artists' practices of expanding and exhausting the media technologies of their time. In particular, I look at the time span from the seventies to the present when experiments between arts, science and technology were conceived and carried out in a spirit of exploration and examination of properties that film, video and early computers have in common or not. One target of experimentation is to understand what these media conceptually or technically share and how they are otherwise related to each other. Another aim is to identify their structural differences and present the characteristics of each medium by driving it to its limits. In this respect, I discuss strategies of artistic-aesthetic and more widely applicable creative practices, which I think can be used as interesting examples of critical interventions into contemporary media landscapes. To introduce this topic, let me highlight a few aspects of the present situation – with some reference to the past – and follow this with a discussion of artists' practices.

First of all, I consider artists' practices as aesthetic interventions where the target is to unveil or reveal, and make us think about processes in the media that we usually take for granted and only question when there is failure and malfunction. In contrast to these failures, aesthetic interventions can be effective instruments in a critical discourse about dominant media cultures, where the arts dissolve and disrupt and rearrange meaningful contexts of normative media presentations. The aesthetic means can be subtle, ironic or violent, and they can forcefully dismantle the raw materials of our highly mediated environments. Second, among present creative practices, I feel two important criteria stand out: one is the crossover of different cultural and media elements in dialogical contexts; the other is the interaction of different views, attitudes and realities in open-ended processes wherein we experience variety and diversity beyond and

across the dominant modes of homogenizing difference. I will return to these criteria later.

Looking generally at the present situation, it is widely agreed that we have reached a level of mediation that has entered many – maybe too many – areas of our daily lives and activities, so much so that it might sound odd or outdated to seek for a critical position in the arts. Innovation and experiment in the western context is traditionally placed within the history of European avant-garde movements which predicted a technological future, but nowadays technology is available to everyone almost from childhood. We have reached a level of technological application, available to teenagers in their bedrooms, where production, distribution and consumption seem to fuse. Further, we have developed technical tools for the re-mediation of all previous media arts which we can present almost globally. As media critic Marshall McLuhan predicted decades ago, media technologies now seem to have become the natural prosthesis of humans and prolong our bodily and sensorial perception, from the real to the virtual.

Today, most of us are happy to employ these novel technologies, devices and gadgets without much reflection. We do not (usually) refuse to carry all kinds of mini computers around all day long, we do not protest (much) about the talking machines and all the noisy sounds and images that we encounter in almost every public space and place. They come to us without choice or request: we cannot control or stop them in the same way that we can switch off a television. At the same time, we take advantage of all sorts of new applications that demand our ability to constantly adapt to ever-increasingly complex and interconnected operations, while the amount of time and space available to us proportionally decreases. Mobility, flexibility, immediate and permanent accessibility and contactability around the clock are the main characteristics of a situation that extends across the globe, and is greeted by some of us with deep relief, while others suffer from exhaustion.

This state of affairs is also characterized by contradiction. On the one hand, complex technology has become a smart part of quotidian life, while on the other, large sections of our society struggle to cope with the demands of science and technology which force us to adjust constantly to the growing capacity of networked communication. Computers were introduced to enhance humankind's intellectual capacity; now it's the other way round and we need to catch up with the machines. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that the imbalance between the happy few inside, who have hands on, access to, and eventual control of these new technologies, and the many outside, who are excluded and represent the

other, is growing. Dataspace, for example, is not an open or free territory somewhere that we can all enter but another place in extension to the real, with culturally, commercially and politically regulated borders that can be opened or sealed. Moreover, this imbalance is reinforced in critical discourses when debates about media landscapes merely reproduce polarized positions, in particular when they develop viewpoints about the “before and after, “the “here and there“ and so forth, prolonging the assumptions of the cultural industries without examination of the underlying attitudes they produce.

As it stands, even critical debate now seems to have changed profession and to a large extent occupies itself with catching up with the latest technological novelties in a manner that differs sharply from distanced analysis. Because the understanding of the present requires very specific expert knowledge, we are surrounded by a plenitude of expert debates which in different tongues and with a growing labyrinth of technical terms and abbreviations disseminate the order of the new world. For the most part, these voices manifest hierarchies and differences by discussing, for example, almost exclusively Western media as the standard that represents “us“ – thereby deliberately attributing non-Western media to ‘them,’ the ‘other’ without much explanation of the positioning of this discourse. There seems to be an unspoken unwillingness to engage in a real dialogue that would regard it as a matter of course to challenge and rework presumptions of critique. On the contrary, we face an almost jubilant welcoming of the latest consumable tools and the fresh goods of today’s cultural industries, which are creating the rules of networked data communication and information as well as regulation and restriction on a global scale. It has become difficult to determine any critical discourse and argue aesthetically for interventions into complex and diverse media realities. Perhaps the whole project of doing so has become obsolete?

But there are other voices that call for investigations into the roots of these issues, and for increasing awareness of the contexts of media and cultural specificities. Another goal is to dismantle the supposed neutrality of technological developments. These voices are mostly heard from the past and the earlier days of cultural critique, when the digital age and economic globalization were young and embryonic. Prominently in the early nineties, cultural critic Stuart Hall, who had migrated from Jamaica to England, sharply recognized the simplifying and standardizing mechanisms at work in cultural globalization and the world-system. He observed that while we live with difference and by the same token enjoy pluralism, we also absorb highly concentrated, corporate, and indeed over-

corporate, over-concentrated forms of economic power, power which culturally lives and manifests itself through the same difference and finds pleasure in the incorporation of otherness as the demonstration of its strength.

Unsurprisingly, it almost goes without saying that the other and the outside were largely determined as the non-Western, which means something special and exotic, but also lesser, relatively unimportant. One voice in particular can be singled out in providing the answer to the question about where to locate culture between the polarities of self and other, East and West, inside and outside, in the contemporary situation of crossing, mixing, blending, blurring and other hybridizing combinations. Cultural critic Homi K. Bhabha (1994) pointed out that critical engagement beyond such polarities keeps cultural dialogue alive and inhabits the in-between zones with dynamic interaction and open-ended processes. In this respect, radical artists' practices will manifest themselves as creative interventions. The artists' intervention is seen as the instrument of interrupting the performances of present media cultures, and the means of fostering multi-perspectival views in a variety of combinations and intercultural voices which express lively dialogue, and not dead-end polarities.

To explain this further, I'd like to discuss some examples of aesthetic—artistic practices that are situated in the Western and the Eastern contexts and may serve as effective approaches to readdress such one-sided discourses that look from here to there, inside to outside, West to East. In contrast to these limited perspectives, I wish to suggest cross directions and regard it as a matter of course to discuss practices which are relevant to the topic of intervention and emerge in different cultural contexts. It is necessary to consider both media and cultural specificities where the parameters of these worlds are relevant to understanding the impact of the practices and their targets. The aesthetic practices under discussion are those which contribute to the overall level of technological media and highlight strategies of intervention. I do not intend to talk about cultural or media specificities and differences as such.

I propose to look in particular at aesthetic practices within Europe and Japan where I find cross-relations regarding the innovative and radical use and application of electronic, computational, interactive, and representational modes of presentation. The task is to widen the horizon of discussion and to argue for overcoming some of the still existing barriers between media and cultural discourses and also between arts and media. It is not about identifying peculiar Japanese and European, respectively Euroamerican media arts: the notion of art is also not of interest here. The more interesting question is: What are the

overriding, effective and suitable strategies for processes of intervention, dialogue and violation that can cope with standard media tools and technologies which spread out everywhere? By and large, I also think media debates need to be more culturally informed and cultural debates need to develop their expertise on mediation processes. Both need to be able to cope with complex contexts: both need to become sensitive to the articulation of difference without pushing its operations to the fore. In the following, I discuss examples of artist interventions based in Western and also in Asian cultural contexts with the aim to make evident different but related strategies to remediate aesthetic modes of intervention into the media cultures at the time, thereby revealing the potentials of innovative use of novel technologies and demonstrating ways of critique into the emerging and surrounding media cultures.

In a historical view, in 1971, when electronic media were young, a British video pioneer David Hall made a series of remarkable “TV Interruptions“ which were commissioned by Scottish Television and were meant, unannounced, to interrupt the programme flow. Hall provoked dialogue inside television by talking back to the medium with its own means. In a similar way, his self-explanatory videotape *This is a Television Receiver* (UK, 1976) enforced remediation of television through rewinding and re-recording the same videotape three times in a row until the material on screen became a hopelessly jumbled series of ghost-images – until it destroyed both the meaning and the material of the video while still being projected. The loss of sound and vision from generation to generation of videotape exhausted the capacities of the analogue medium of the time. The video work, through demonstrated timeshifting, technically deconstructed the essential characteristics of a live medium as it was dismantled at the core of a decaying videotape. This disappearance of understandable sounds and recognizable images finally produces the electronic snow that truly constitutes the raw material of any electronic medium. Hall’s installation tape, which needs to be shown on a monitor, merges video and television on the same technical basis, both visually and aurally, and uses video as an intervention into television.

In a related spirit or exploring the language of a newly developed technology that step by step turns into a medium, Steina Vasulka in experimental video performances provoked disturbances like the maladjustment of the video signal, feedback effects and processing of scan lines. The video performances were meant to dismantle the structural capacities of a new medium in ways that unfold a) its close connection to computer processes and b) its fundamental audio-visual interchangeability. In a series of performances, Steina plays video and violin

thereby demonstrating the visibility of audio in video and the audibility of video as two possible ways to simultaneously present audio and/or video information that is encoded in the video signal. In these processes the true nature of video as an audiovisual medium becomes evident and furthermore the structural interchangeability of audio and video demonstrates its familiarity with the processual nature of digital images. In the performances of *Violin Power* between 1970 and 1978, Steina analyzes the modes of expression of video from the perspective of an audio artist trained in music. Thereby the intermedial capacities of video apparently help to characterize the new medium as audiovisual. In this circuit structure we hear what we see and we see what we hear. Steina is playing a violin and the video at the same time, and both media intersect in their performative, open-ended capacities.

Violin Power is a presentation of various video processes in which the violinist Steina Vasulka demonstrates live how she plays video with the violin. The artist comes from Iceland, had moved to New York and became attracted to video because it allowed new ways of composition and a development away from pinhole perspective toward machine vision and a type of frame-unbound imagery that would free and exceed the limitations of film and cinematic presentation. The violin becomes an instrument for the simultaneous generation of image and sound, as the sound of the violin playing, which was recorded using a microphone, is connected to video devices, scan processors, and multikeyers. This happens in real time processing resulting in a visual manifestation of the artist's performance, which was recorded simultaneously with two video cameras. The movements of the bow on the violin's strings in these video/violin performances generate immediate deviations on the image position of this movement. Thus, Vasulka plays violin and video at the same time. As the audience can see and hear, by exposing the specific properties of the medium, David Hall and Steina Vasulka clearly hurt and disrupt the viewer's expectations that were being shaped so powerfully in the seventies by television broadcast throughout audiences in Europe and the US..

Twenty years later, the Austrian artistic duo Granular Synthesis (this is Kurt Hentschläger and Ulf Langheinrich) – in another approach to using media behaviour against the grain – dismantled the raw material from inside. For the live performances of the audio/video installation *Model 5* (1994–1996) [Fig. 1], they allowed digitally processed images and sounds from four video output channels and eight audio outputs to interact. This produced a multi-sensual perceptual experience. The duo's name says it all; the granular synthesis separates

a videographic recording into units of information and subsequently samples and resynthesizes them.

In *Model 5*, the previously recorded image/sound material of the Japanese performer Akemi Takeya is broken down into its smallest processable elements in an analytical process, and then, in a process of reconstruction, reassembled in another frequency, so that the image and sound fragments produced by this recombination deviate from the continuity of the original in a clearly audible and visible way. The synchronicity and stability of the image and the sound are dissolved. The electronic course of the image and sound is no longer synchronized conventionally: image and sound are separated, blurred, and perceived erratically as flickers. Furthermore, the newly produced frequencies are modulated live.

In *Model 5*, the audience perceives this intervention into the audiovisual material by means of granular synthesis as violent and painful, because the artists dissect the voice and the portrait of Takeya. Her natural rhythm is eliminated and replaced by a mechanical rhythm in the sequence which violently interferes with her voice. In effect, she can no longer communicate with the audience and becomes a kind of building block for machine systems – and this can be read as a metaphor standing in for all the anthropomorphic computer designed hybrids in science fiction. It is a mathematical operation of digital analysis that is applied to a video recording of Takeya's performance. Where the base video material stands for continuity in the performance (which in the electronic medium is not mandatory), the digital editing of the live presentation is used to make us aware of the media level.

In the work of Granular Synthesis, the audience perceives the presentation as disruptive, because synchronicity has been removed. In a technically different but conceptually related approach, Dutch video installation artist Aernout Mik also causes disorientation and rupture. The work achieves confusion not by violating the material, but by presenting violent scenes of group action that never show the violent event. Locations are unclear: all we know is that the events are taking place somewhere in Europe, as the uniforms, vehicles, clothing and open spaces indicate. Fiction and reality are inseparably blurred. We cannot tell what is real and what is staged. Intense scenes of humiliation, tinged with a flavour of uncertainty, tension and violence, unfold in front of the camera and us. Opposing sides are not clearly marked or identifiable, the whole situation is unstable: even the order of events and sides is constantly changing. There is no narrative beginning or end, no inside and outside, no clear borders or rules: everything is somehow merged, confused, everything is possible and imposed power-relations

can suddenly reverse. The situation is one of ever-growing alertness, an excess of constant tension. The question arises: is this real or staged? And does the difference matter?

What kind of reality is Aernout Mik showing in his video installations? There are training camps, police, military, protesters demonstrations, groups of displaced people, evacuation and other emergencies, searches, raids and security zones, warlike scenarios and warfare: in short, a cross-section of daily television news around the world. And yet this uncanny state of emergency and terror somehow gains our contemporary consent when we assume it is real, when we watch the news. What matters in Mik's media world is the presentation format which renders the materials strange and induces us to interrogate the contexts. The formal strategies are reserved, not competing with the shocking content: he uses dual projections to stress the continuation of such scenes: they are not single events. The editing creates visible blanks and inserts lack – meaningless space that interrupts our viewing for long moments in such a way that we reflect on our interest in viewing such materials. The sound is absent; our full concentration can only be on the visual and we are kept aware of the artist's position between the presentation and the presented. In the video installation *Training Ground* (NL, 2006) a refugee-, war- or prison camp-like field in the open air is inhabited by different groups, armed and unarmed, who – although there is no direct violence – cannot leave, but are exchanging power positions.

In another, topicwise related video installation, *Raw Footage* marks an exception in Aernout Mik's work, in that it is real material with real sound where nothing has been staged. The footage comes from journalists filming the Yugoslavian wars in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia. Mik bought the footage from Reuters: it was never broadcast. As you will see and hear, there is not much difference between this and the enactment in the first video. The effect is disorienting and shocking – especially when we see the teams filming each other in the midst of war. By juxtaposing fiction and reality we may also get a feeling of how realities converge for those inside the camp. Another uncomfortable result of these works may be that taken together they highlight the necessity of verifying the sources and contexts of materials that are unknowable.

Leaving this cultural context and turning to another, I'd like to present works by Japanese media artists Seiko Mikami and architect Sota Ichikawa. In their collaborative interactive installation *Gravicells* (Japan, 2004) [Fig. 2] they develop and construct technical tools as models to revitalize the dialogue between the media and human perception in similar ways to the examples discussed so far.

When entering the floor space of the interactive installation *Gravicells* we are invited to experience our position/location data through collected and projected GPS data. The GPS data are visualized on the floor and the viewer/user interacts with the projected data of one's own physical behaviour and gravity. Thereby we experience our relation to earth gravity and to other persons sharing the same space. The work visualizes and materializes non-visual senses and creates an open, flexible and transforming kind of imagery that gives a wider perceptual experience. The movements and changes made by the participant are transformed and displayed as movements of sound, light and geometrical images through the sensors. In result, the complete space transforms in this interactive installation. Because the position of the actual exhibition space is determined by GPS through antennas on the rooftop and this measured data are included in the projection, the participant can experience his/her locality in relation to the gravity of earth while walking on the floor that has wired tubes filled with liquid and is equipped with sensors that detect position, weight and speed. Based on the proximity and distances between the moving participants, their GPS data and the GPS data of the installation site create another space by light, sound and images. The visualization is based on the dynamics of the participants and displayed onto the floor and also projected in 3d on the walls in realtime. The installation space is mediating between personal, physical behaviour and the outside environment.

Finally, I would like to introduce another endeavour of Japan media arts to exhausting and inventing technical tools in a dialogical intervention that addresses the media and the cultural spaces of encounter. In a series of "field-works", Masaki Fujihata uses mobile technologies and mixes real and virtual spaces for the purpose of interpersonal and intercultural dialogue. In the project *Landing Home in Geneva* (Japan/Switzerland, 2005) [Figs. 3–4], Fujihata gives an example of how to represent transcultural experiences with digital technologies in spatial relations that merge real and virtual data. The intercultural understanding of the concept of 'home' is investigated when Fujihata uses a complex recording system (video camera with parabolic mirror lens, GPS, Personal Data Systems and positioning data of the camera angle) to interview other foreigners who live and work in and around the Swiss city of Geneva as professional interpreters.

In the computer, this visual data are transformed into a specific kind of panorama which is interfaced so that each scene has an inside and an outside view. The panoramas are connected in the virtual space in terms of the location and the moving activity of the actual interviews. And the user/viewer of this

interactive installation can manoeuvre between the different sides of the dialogue during the interviews but also experience different views for him/herself: both distanced viewing and being immersed inside the situation at the same time. Fujihata's participating investigation attempts to communicate views and attitudes in the translation of cultures across languages and borders.

Extending this observation of borders, differences and translations from multiple viewpoints, the artist is also the interviewer, and this too is audio-visually integrated within the recorded scene. So this intervention within the processes of field research is further highlighted when we, the viewers and users, see and hear the artist immersed into a real scene at the time as he records it, and when we can access the scene through the visible timeline from various arbitrary viewpoints in the virtual. By gaining control of the field and being part of its unfolding vividness, the subject and object positions are shown to be flexible and interchangeable.

To come back to the beginning and to conclude: what is the role of the arts in the overall situation once the virtual media have become real extensions and communicating partners and we have learnt to use media individually as creative tools? In response, one could answer that these days, after almost endless and more tiring than insightful interrogations of modernist and postmodernist conditions of media, arts and technology, everything has been said before and there is nothing new on the horizon. We face a highly saturated tradition of media arts before and after the frenetically debated analogue-digital divide, which when viewed retrospectively does not really help the discussion of cultural and media specific approaches in creative practices. But there is an alternative point of view. In fact, I think now might be the right time to reconsider some concepts of innovation and experiment. And, also aesthetic intervention into the media landscapes that are evolving on a global scale.

In this more positive view, we can envision aesthetic practices leading a discourse of dialogue and encounter beyond borderlines and differences. They also demonstrate that we do not need to understand and explain all the wonderful new possibilities that emerge in proportion to the growing corporate-commercial global media landscape. They reveal precisely the opposite: that we can regard creative practices as a fascinating field of production that bypasses all the heated debates on Western-Eastern interactions in the fields of cultural studies and those on the analogue-digital divide in the fields of media studies. Departing from normal practices in these fields, appreciating technological cultures in new ways is possible when we turn our attention to subversive, ironic, and paradoxical

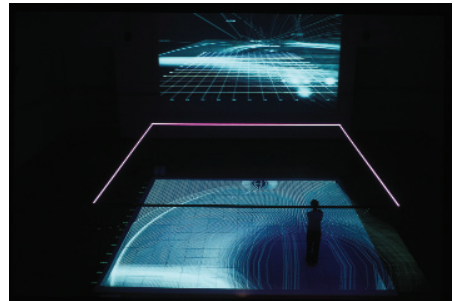
processes in media arts. Artists' practices can be characterized as interventions when they encourage us to reflect our uncertainty while acting and interacting in passages between fixed realities where difference can be enjoyed in the present. And the present is the right time for intervention.

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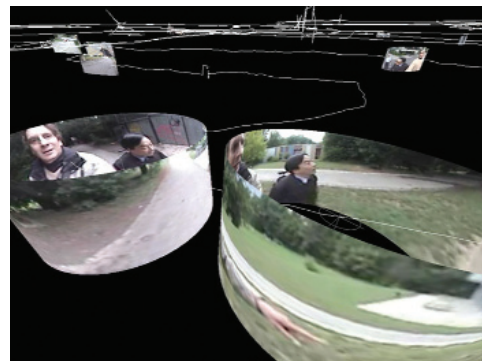
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Figs. 1–2. Granular Synthesis: *Model 5* (1994–1996), Seiko Mikami and Sota Ichikawa: *Gravicells* (Japan, 2004).



Figs. 3–4. Masaki Fujihata: *Landing Home in Geneva* (Japan/Switzerland, 2005).





The Grammar of the New Romanian Cinema

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Abstract. In order to identify a common language of the new wave of Romanian directors and to find a definition of a “grammar” for the new Romanian moviemaking, we need to look for the paradigmatic codes of this type of cinema. Discussing the definitions given to this cinematographic phenomenon, remarkable by the multiple awards received in the last decade on film festivals, this paper identifies several traits which make the “new wave” in the Romanian cinema fundamentally a European Wave. If there is a new-new-wave in the Romanian cinema, this has a common style and aesthetics. The author is looking for the “grammatical” characteristics of several contemporary Romanian authors, offering a general description of its commonalities.

In the last decade the Romanian Cinema has become one of the most important movements in European moviemaking, its international success and its recognition by the media and by several festival juries was considered somewhat of a revelation. Increasingly, Romanian cinema studios offered a place for cheap moviemaking for both consecrated Romanian directors established in the West (like Lucian Pintilie, Radu Gabrea or Florin Mihăileanu) to make their movies here, with the technical support of local production teams, and for some of the most important directors in the West (and from the US), like Francis Ford Coppola, Anthony Minghella, Costa Gavras or even Sacha Baron Cohen, who filmed their movies on location in Romania. More recently the Romanian cinematographic infrastructure is providing resources for other European moviemakers to develop their own productions (as was the case with the movie made by the German director, Didi Danquart, whose story was written by Cristi Puiu, or in the case of Tudor Giurgiu, who has produced Peter Strickland’s movie, *Katalin Varga* (2009). Some Romanian moviemakers, like Nae Caranfil, were already working and living in the West for some years now – for example Caranfil was directing *Dolce far niente* (1998), a European collaborative project (financed by production companies like Sintra, K2, France 2 Cinéma, CNC,

Eurimages). In the case of Caranfil, he somehow claimed that his movie *Sundays on Leave* (*É pericoloso sporgersi*, 1993) was a prototype for Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which made the Romanian cinema even more influential.

Considering all these changes and contexts, it is obvious that we are witnessing an important development, the question is if this is a part of a new cinematography, or is this only a generational reaction, or maybe it is only a result of the European funds coming into the Romanian cinema? Simultaneously, the main question of this paper is if this large group of directors shares anything in common, if there is a "code," or a language, or a syntax, or maybe a common ground on which this success can be explained in terms of movie criticism?

1. Is it or is it not a "New Wave"?

Romanian cinema criticism has been debating for almost a decade the existence of a new wave of directors and the definition of this "new" Romanian moviemaking. This debate was transmitted to the foreign cinema critics. Is there or is there not a new wave, this is the question (following the pun from "was there or was there not?") *A fost sau n-a fost*, the exact translation of the Romanian title for the *12:08 East of Bucharest*, 2006, director Corneliu Porumboiu) (cf. Scott, 2008).

The problem with the definition comes from the fact that the concept itself of a "new wave" was rejected by some of the directors themselves. In a purely chronological sense, we cannot speak about a new wave, because the new wave in the Romanian cinema was already occupied by authors like Lucian Pintilie, Liviu Ciulei and Mircea Daneliuc, who in the 60s and late 70s won some? or rather: considerable European recognition for their movies. Unfortunately all the examples of previous successes are rare and incoherent; in 1957 Ion Popescu Gopo got for his short animation *Short History* (*Scurta istorie*, 1957) the Palme d'Or for short film, in 1965, Liviu Ciulei was awarded the prize for best director in Cannes for his historical movie *The Forrest of the Hanged* (*Pădurea Spânzuraților*, 1965) and in 1966, *The Revolt* (*Răscoala*, 1965) made by Mircea Mureșan was awarded for the best debut movie. It is regrettable that, also due to the installing of the new Ceaușescu directives, similar to those in North Coreea and China, turned the Romanian cinema towards a new socialist realism. The only significant award was won in 1985 by Dan Pița, who received the Silberner Bär Honorable Mention in Berlin for *Passo Doble* (*Pas în doi*, 1985).

So although there is only a faint sign of an "old wave," their accomplishments were always a guideline for the "new" generations, as well as sources for theoretical

controversy. For example Cristi Puiu, one of the forerunners of the so called new-wave denies both the existence of the “old wave,” represented by Liviu Ciulei or later Mircea Daneliuc, and the existence of the new wave. For Puiu this term (Romanian new wave) is only a piggybacking of the Nouvelle Vague, conceived for the use of the Western media. “The old wave was a happy accident as we are today happy accidents,” says Puiu (interviewed by Fulger, 2006).

On the other hand, for some of the critics, Nae Caranfil, the author of *Filantropica* (2001), is considered to be the first “new waver.” Mihai Fulger (2006) describes Caranfil as a director who has anticipated the “new wave,” yet among the 12 contemporary directors interviewed for his book on the “new wave,” there are none who would agree that there is a new wave, and the most important new-wave movie maker, that is Caranfil himself, is also against the concept, saying that the critics like to invent “waves,” “generations” and other formulas only to fit their intentions. Actually Caranfil rejects the mere possibility of a new wave, he himself declaring that he does not belong to such a group. Caranfil considers that a “new Dogma” is catastrophic for the young generation of directors, to whom he feels close, but he declares not to be a part of.

While Cristi Puiu (cited by A. O Scott in New York Times) and others of his colleagues are vituperative contestants of the existence of the new wave in the Romanian cinema, some Romanian critics seem to have an “all inclusive” view of the concept. At the other end of this perspective is Grig Modorcea (2006), one of the old guard movie critics in Romania, who claims that there is a new wave starting with January 1990. For this kind of an approach there is a chronological and quantitative side of the new-wave. Modorcea overviews 54 movies made by 43 directors, belonging to the “new wave,” even if some of the movies quoted as “new” were developed during the communist period. This generous (yet absurd) view of the new wave, which is more chronological than conceptual, includes all the fiction movies viewed in the post-communist period – there is no genre distinction between authors like Mircea Plângău (the teen movie spoof *High School Alert [Liceenii în alertă]*, 1993) and Nae Caranfil’s *É pericoloso sporgersi*, no difference between the pseudo-horror *Nekro* (1997) directed by Viorel Mihalcea and Cristian Mungiu’s *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days (4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile)*, 2007), between the *Train of Life (Train de vie)*, 1998) by Radu Mihăileanu and *Garcea and the Oltenians (Garcea și oltenii)*, 2001) by Sam Irvin or between *The Paper Will Be Blue (Hârtia va fi albastră)*, 2006) de Radu Muntean and the soap-opera *Tears of Love (Lacrimi de iubire)*, 2005) by Iura Luncașu. The only criterion suggested by Modorcea is the concept of a “generation without complexes,” which

means for Modorcea the total lack of limits in the subjects tackled. In terms of chronological evolution, the new “new wave” could be described as including the contemporary, that is post-communist (post 1989), screenplays and movies. But even for Caranfil, some of the screenplays he made into films (even the most recent film, *The Rest is Silence* [*Restul e tăcere*, 2007]) are developed before 1989, which makes them non-“new-wave.”

Another plausible definition of the “new wave” could be the success of the movies on the market – but in this contest the winners are not the “new wave” directors (the only one who reached the highest margin of viewers was Mungiu with *Tales from the Golden Age* [*Amintiri din epoca de aur*, 2009]), for example a so called comedy like *Garcea and the Oltanians*, using the mere criterion of viewership, is more entitled to be a part of the “new wave,” while movies like *12:08 East of Bucharest* (with 15.000 viewers) become irrelevant in a marketing context.

I think we should reject all of these criteria: post-communist debutants in cinema are not automatically identifiable with the “new wave;” chronological appearance of the movies and the sheer belonging to a certain generation does not qualify a director for the “new wave;” and viewership references are not valid in describing the quality of the movies.

2. Is it a New, or is it a Post (New) Wave?

In order to escape this logic of contradictions I propose another term, and the terminological shift can be extremely useful in the context of the conceptual definition of the new generation of Romanian directors. One possible term was conceived for the Eastern European cinema after communism, the notion of a “post new wave” suggested by Daniel J. Goulding (1989) is one option. Another option could be the concept of a “new-new wave,” proposed by Peter Hames (1985), which adds to the chronological separation between the several generations of directors.

For the use of this paper I will go with the term “new-new wave,” for one main reason, I believe that this “post new wave” is strongly tied with the “new wave” definition of the French New Wave, which can be easily applied to the new Romanian directors. The (new) “new wave” is an aesthetic adventure and is based on the emergence of new talents (Ruscart, 1986). Another tie with the *Nouvelle Vague* is that suggested by Noel Burch (Burch, 1959), who defined the “nouvelle vague” according not only to a generational standard – they were all young directors around 32 years old – but also with an artistic solidarity, they all belonged to an aesthetics coagulated into a “school of film.” A third reason is that

the cultural atmosphere, pervasive to film production and film making in France (de Baecque, 1998), is similar to the stream of young directors flooding the Romanian film industry in the last decades, all emulating each other in a competition meant to change the “atmosphere” in the moviemaking industry. Also, the debates in *Cahiers du Cinema*, which has generated the Nouvelle Vague in France are to be found at the individual level with each and every one of the new Romanian directors – this will be developed later.

So what is this “new-new wave,” and since there is a constant addition to these waves, how many waves are there? Or is there any wave left, since these young directors keep coming back?

3. A “New-New Wave” Striking Repeatedly on the Shores of Cannes

This “new-new wave” can be characterized by its international recognition, most of these films were first viewed abroad and their value was determined more by festival juries and movie critics in the West, and less by the Romanian viewership and critics – sometimes the recognition of European festivals and Western movie critics was followed by a dismissal at home.

The “birth” of the “new-new wave” was heralded by a golden streak of prizes, that ended up into another wave of rewards and international recognitions – so we can say that, if there is a “new-new wave,” it is first a wave of prizes, before being a conceptual framework. In terms of chronological order, everything started with Cristi Puiu, and his short movie, *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa și banii*, 2001), selected for the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* in Cannes, in 2001. Although *Stuff and Dough* did not get any prize, this “renewal” of the Romanian cinema was soon followed by *West* (*Occident*, 2002), made by Mungiu, and *The Fury* (*Furia*, 2002), by Radu Muntean. The first visible sign was in 2004, when Cristi Puiu (the same director who started it all) was awarded the Golden Bear in Berlin for another short film, *Cigarettes and Coffee* (*Un cartuș de Kent și un pachet de cafea*, 2004), and the next year, in 2005, his fiction movie *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, 2005), was awarded at Cannes Film Festival’s “Un Certain Regard” section. This rhythm of winnings, fueled by a positive competition among the young directors, continued and the lucky streak included *Traffic* (*Trafic*, 2004), by Cătălin Mitulescu, who won Palme d’Or for Best Short in Cannes in 2004, Corneliu Porumboiu’s *Police, Adjective* (*Polițist, adjectiv*, 2008) got the FIPRESCI Prize (Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique) and the prize of

the Jury “Un Certain Regard“ in Cannes, 2009, while his debut movie, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, got Camera d’Or, in Cannes, 2006.

What began with a short film (*Stuff and Dough* by Cristi Puiu), without prizes, but with a great press, ended with Cristian Mungiu’s *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, getting the Great Prize of the European Film Academy, Berlin in 2007, Palme d’Or and FIPRESCI, at Cannes. As Alex Leo Șerban has eloquently described it, “Puiu planted the seed, Porumboiu wetted the plant and Mungiu got to pick up the fruits” (2009).

Later Mungiu made some fruits of his own, and obtained for *Tales from the Golden Age* the prize for the Best Film at the Stockholm Film Festival, while Radu Muntean made *Summer Holiday (Boogie, 2008)*, winning the prize of the Jury, Essone Film Festival, France while his *The Paper Will Be Blue* was awarded special prize of the Jury, Namur Film Festival, Belgium.

These remarkable prizes compose the short list of the “new-new wave” of Romanian directors: Puiu, Muntean, Porumboiu, Mungiu, Mitulescu. They are the main object of my interpretation of the new Romanian cinematographic grammar.

4. So, Is There Any Explanation for This Wave of Prizes?

In order to describe a “grammar,” or a “language” of cinema, there has to be a material support and a rational (albeit theoretical) reasoning for the cinematic structure. One plausible explanation is that all of these directors worked with only one camera. So, if their link is a single camera – that one “magic” camera has provided all the prizes, thus it is a technological explanation and there is a technological determinism to this success. Following a declaration Cristian Mungiu made at the presentation of his most recent movie, *Tales from the Golden Age* at TIFF (Transylvania Film Festival) 2009, there is a certain legend among the Romanian directors, that one camera has it all, so they try to rent the same camera over and over again.

Of course, this movie folklore covers more than a simple joke, it is a superstition that gives us an insight into what most of the “new wave” directors have in common: certain camera techniques that are common to all of these directors. It becomes obvious that the new Romanian filmmakers have in common the same group of actors (for example Dragoș Bucur played in the majority of the “new-newwave” movies) and a small group of technical crew which is sometimes the same for various directors. These commonalities bring up some stylistic common elements: long takes, fixed camera, Dogma 95 style of lighting, urban settings and

minimalism of the storytelling. All these are techniques that can be described as fundamentals of a common “grammatical” approach to the Romanian new cinema.

This argument is based on some interviews in which the most representative directors of the new generation have presented their view on cinematic language. While Cristi Puiu remains one of the most aggressive deniers of the common denominator as a “new wave,” he agrees that there is a certain “style” his colleagues might have taken from him, which is the predisposition for realism (quoted in Raluca Ion and Diana Marcu 2010). The same is suggested by Corneliu Porumboiu, who at the same time concedes that there is a certain “aesthetic of the long takes” and that most of the movies he and his colleagues have made are based on a certain unity of time and space, namely that they happen within a single day (quoted in Raluca Ion and Diana Marcu 2010).

Style, aesthetics, time and space unity... these are all elements of a common grammar of cinema, whether they like it or not.

5. The “New Wave” and the “New Europe”?

Before discussing the elements of aesthetics and of cinematic grammar, I need to make an argument in favour of the fact that there is a “new wave” in the Romanian cinema simply because it is fundamentally a European Wave, one that partakes in the invention of the “new Europe” with cinematic mechanisms. These new directors obviously respond and react to the concept in the Maastricht Treaty, defined as the creation of “a common European character.” The desire to create a common European cinema market of a productions and distribution system that could compete with the American conglomerates has long been a topic for theoretical and practical construction of the European cinema. An unclear concept in itself, the British Film Institute dedicated a session of discussions on the topic of the European cinema in 1990, and the participants in the “Screening Europe” conference could not identify a single trait for such a concept.

First of all this is due to the fact that the European cinema is searching for its inspiration (and its global breadth) since WWI, when the French cinema industry lost pace to the American studio system. For a while the German expressionism seemed to provide the resources for such an inspiration (and they were exiled by the Nazi regime), then the Russian cinema was hailed as a beacon of light and, subsequently, the Italian neo-realism or the British moviemakers of the 60’s, the so called neo-gaudy of the Spanish cinema in the late 70’s and 80’s, or the rediscovery of the Central European directors after the fall of the Berlin Wall –

they all seemed as a good reference to what European cinema meant and was supposed to be.

The new generation of Romanian moviemakers follow this logic – their films were made and intended for transnational audiences, and less for the Romanian (ever declining) public of moviegoers. As Mungiu said about his movie based on the urban legends of communism, *Tales from the Golden Age*, the movie, even before it was made, had the potential for film festivals, it “seemed it will be well received in Cannes,” so the director quit making the movie that the national board for cinema financed at the time, and decided instead to pursue the project entitled *The Golden Age*. This desire to blend into the European “common market of ideas” and to react to the needs of this pan-European framework is fundamental to understanding the “new-newwave” of Romanian directors.

Another problem of integrating national movie productions into a European-wide, common cultural market has led to the proliferation of co-productions throughout Europe. The co-productions system is in Romania mostly a post-1989 phenomenon, which makes it coincidental with the growing of the “new-new wave.” These “new” European directors are integrated into the “old” European cinema by a common language, that of “Europeanness” (be it the new directors in Central and Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Republics). They are slowly growing and integrated within the great discourse of the European cinema.

Dominated by the European Union philosophies of pan-European productions and modelled by the necessity of creating European-wide understandable products, the new Romanian cinema should be considered a “purely” European cinema, and thus the first level of grammatical coherence at the cinematic level is this common language.

Using Thomas Elsaesser’s (2005) concepts, there are 3 fundamental (and cinematographic) reasons (not taking into account the geographical reason) for this axiom (although, in this context, it is relevant that Elsaesser does not give a single example from the Romanian cinema, old or new). One key characteristic of the Romanian new cinema is that it is an “author centred” cinema – the director as author imprint being a specific trait to European cinema. Most (if not all) of the “new-new wave” directors are writers, directors and, in some cases, producers of their own movies. This is one of the main characteristics that bring them closer to the Nouvelle Vague, since, as shown below, the French directors of the 50’s and 60’s took pride in their authorship autonomy.

Another characteristic that is fundamentally tied to the tradition of the European cinema, from the Czech(o)(slovak) moviemakers to the Spanish ones, is that it has

a thematic development focused on national self-image, centred on recovering recent memory and providing a historical recording or recounting of contemporary historical events. The haunt of history and of the effects of history on individuals – this is a deep conceptual river running through European cinema.

Thirdly, it is a cinema oriented towards political significance and the aesthetic renewal. This renewal, again, needs to be understood within the European Union “directives” – in this respect they clearly indicate that art films, with “innovative” potential and with pan-European audience implied, are preferred to any other cultural attempts. In this logic “European” means “culture”, while at the other end is the “American” cinema, meaning “popular.” This opposition between American and European cinema is perpetuated by the Romanian “new-new wave” directors. The rejection of the Hollywood influence, and the rejection of the “Hollywood offers” are to be interpreted as expressions of the desire to join the efforts for an alternative to the standardized Hollywood-like narrativity, thus the new moviemakers in Romania are developing anarrativity that influences their “grammar.” This conscious rejection of the Hollywood influence, followed by his self-definition as a European is overtly affirmed by Mungiu. “I am not in Hollywood, instead I work in Romania, because this is the world that I know” – this quote of Cristian Mungiu speaking at a masterclass at the International Film Festival in Istanbul is a conceptual explanation for why he chose NOT to move to Hollywood. “It is easier to make accessible movies, and the Americans are good at this, but the idea is to make an uncomfortable movie for yourself,” said Mungiu (quoted by Hurriyet 2009).

Another characteristic of the new generation of filmmakers is that it is a “festival grown” generation. As Elsaesser suggested, the European film festivals are constructed as symbolic spaces, where a “new” European identity is developed. In order to have a better picture of this, we can use an example provided by Rivi (2007), who provides a list of the Best European Films awards attributed by the European Film Academy. This short list is a potpourri of national directors, comprising names from Kieslowski to Mihalkovski, and from Almodóvar to Becker or Haneke. A true European topology of directors now includes the Romanian names such as Puiu or Mungiu.

6. Low Budgets and Independent Production Companies

The young Romanian filmmakers share a common trait, they are low-budget producers for their own movies; Corneliu Porumboiu’s case is relevant in this

discussion. Relying heavily on the financial support of his father – a rich local businessman – Cornel Porumboiu makes movies that are literally “home grown,” his last two productions were filmed in his hometown, Vaslui. (One funny fact is that Vaslui has no cinemas today).

Although Mungiu has publicly expressed his pessimistic and individualistic view of the young generation of filmmakers, he claimed that there is no Romanian cinema, there are only directors, and that the local moviemakers are not comparable with the Czech, another shared trait is that most of these young directors (Nemescu, Mungiu, Muntean, Porumboiu) are graduates of the National University of Drama and Film (U.N.A.T.C.), the traditional film school in Romania – while Cristi Puiu is an arts major – and their means of production are determined by their fund raising skills developed during school, that is, creating “great dramas” with small-time financial resources.

Another important characteristic that most of the young directors share is the fact that they want to build their own production companies, to become not only financially independent, but also to keep their creative autonomy intact. For example Thomas Ciulei has created Europolis (founded 1999), Caranfil has created Independența Film, Cristi Puiu is co-founder of Mandragora production house (since 2004), while Cristian Mungiu, Hanno Hofer and Oleg Mutu created Mobra Films (in 2003). All these efforts indicate a strong desire for independently producing movies and rejecting any studio conglomerates involvement.

7. No “Master’s” Voice

Unlike the Nouvelle Vague, the Romanian new generation had no “Master,” no theoretical guide in their search for a new cinematographic language. Cristian Mungiu is deploring this lack of a “Mentor” (in *Fulger*, 2006), saying that he “did not have Nae Caranfil’s father, one of the most active movie critics before and after Communism, who could have provided the same resource for the new generation as, let’s say, André Bazin for the French New Wave, or the chance of meeting a director who could influence his development as a filmmaker.” Singular figures or solitary encounters were made, but no significant connection with a theoretical or technical “Master” figure. Nae Caranfil’s father, Tudor Caranfil, could have played the role of a mentor, but it is a relevant fact that the “new-new wave” is a wave without a “father figure.”

It is obvious then why the young Romanian directors, like their Central-European predecessors, have huge issues with authority and authority figures.

One level of this conflicting view with authoritative figures is, in the most Foucaultian way, the representation of conflicts with power institutions and the representatives of power. The preoccupation to represent policemen and police force in a depreciative way can be compared, for example, with Wladyslaw Pasikowski's movie *Psy* (1992) where Franz Mauer (Boguslaw Linda) plays the hero of Pigs, a policeman without morals. In the early, post-1989 movies, this ironic transformation of the authority figures is used in a similar way to Milos Forman's movies in the Czech period, where portraying ridiculous and ineffectual authority figures was a reaction to the political system.

Later, in the young Romanian directors' productions appear several defective authority figures, lacking power, and being merely simulacra of their authority. Corneliu Porumboiu's movies illustrate this dynamic; father figures, policemen and managers appear in circumstances that void them of relevance and representativeness. This "emptiness of authority" (A.O Scott, 2008) is less and less political or with social relevance and becomes an ironic treatment of reality with universal value (with less local/ national relevance). This is the case of the doctors who neglect Mr. Lăzărescu, they are a social critique of medical systems everywhere; or the parodic depiction of the local TV station in Vaslui, in Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest*, where the manager-anchor is as void of power and relevance as the entire business, or in the case of the small time authorities in *California Dreamin'* (*California Dreamin'* [*Nesfârșit*,] 2007, director Cristian Nemescu), assuming stances that make them ridiculous. This treatment is to be understood as a grammatical element in the contemporary Romanian cinema.

8. A Common Aesthetics and a Shared "Art Cinema"

It is obvious that the young directors of the new Romanian cinema perceive themselves as belonging to "art cinema," in the very sense used by the directors during the 60s and the 70s by the French directors. Also, we need to see the shared aesthetic of the "new-new wave" in connection with the discussions around the concept of "film d'art," term first coined as a reaction to the "popular cinema" of the early years. All of the young Romanian directors have clearly stated that their movies do not address the general public and that they are conceiving their works mostly for festival (that is artistic) purposes.

Following the arguments of François Truffaut's essay *Une certaine tendance du cinéma*, dated 1954, there is a *politique des auteurs* in the new Romanian cinema. The *politique* is based on the application in cinema of that what is acceptable in

all the other visual arts (Bazin, 1985), the end product is the expression of the author, and not the simple manifestation of the work itself.

In the same way as the *auteur* theory was built around the idea that studio productions, following the establishment rules, have a negative impact on cinema, and that the individual authors have to become the centre of their own productions, the Romanian directors support the same artistic philosophy. As Cristi Puiu has put it, “a movie is the vision of an author about the world” (quoted in Fulger, 2006), and this view is a clear and straight paraphrase of what Truffaut said a decade ago, that the author and cinema are reflected by the director’s work, against the “entertainment” cinema, defined in its pejorative dimension, merely diverting attention from what is important.

Another aesthetic characteristic of the movies made by the young Romanian directors is their reaction against the “old cinema.” One of the few contemporary critics writing extensively on the subject, Alex Leo Șerban (2009), suggests that this “generation” has no theoretical background, as the French Nouvelle Vague, but it is motivated by the same revolt against the clichés of the old cinema. Here the key discontent of the new generation of directors is against the “metaphorical” cinema of their predecessors, but also of the edulcorated realism of Communism. Cristian Mungiu confirms this reading: “Those movies (*in the old Romanian cinema*, note added) were badly acted, completely unbelievable, with stupid situations, lots of metaphors. It was a time when, you know, saying something about the system was more important than telling a story.” (Quoted by A. O Scott, 2008). Like the French Nouvelle Vague, building up cinema practices against the sclerotic nature of the previously made cinema and against the Hollywood practices, the Romanian new cinema is oriented against what is perceived as a consequence of the previously mainstream Romanian cinema, founded on a false realism and an edulcorated view of the world. This is a stance, comparable again with the French directors, lashing out against the lack of realism and of social relevance of the French “old” cinema. This is now to be found in the criticisms of the young Romanian vanguard and they are all following the same path, that of separating from the traditional (albeit recent) cinema of their predecessors, or dinosaurs as Mungiu calls them (here one example could be Sergiu Nicolaescu with his historical re-enactments designed to support ideologically the Communist regime).

So what is the “grammar” of this “new-new wave” of directors, and how can we describe it?

9. What Kind of Grammar of the Cinema?

This is a long asked question in film studies: does cinema hold a “language” of its own, and if it does, what is the essence of the “grammar” that keeps together this cinematic language? A couple of negative answers would be in order here. First, my understanding of the “grammar” is not semiologic by nature, neither is it a linguistic expression, in the sense that we can analyze it in a sequencing of frames, nor is it a form of literary criticism, expanded in the cinematic universe, interpretable as a “coherent text” (Ballour 2000). If I reject the linguistic approach to cinematographic language it is because I think it is impossible to have a normative dimension for several movies. Neither can a semiotic perspective, in the traditional sense expressed by Umberto Eco, as a general theory of signs, serve the purpose of understanding how the art of several directors is connected. These highly formal approaches to the movie grammar – as is, for example the one proposed by Aron Ping D’Souza, following Mitry’s suggestions, that a cinematographic grammar is formalized in a mathematical structure – are over complicated and end up explaining only the surface and not the deep content.

As for the positive definitions, in order to have a grammar of the cinema, we need to elaborate a code with univocal significance, a code based on the acceptance of a fundamental unit. But what is the fundamental unit? Is it the shot, as was for the early Russian formalists, and thus, by simply combining shots together we obtain a cinematographic “sentence”? Or is it by analyzing larger units, the sequences (a series of shots united in time and space), that we can interpret them as phrases? Or is it those rules or cinematic conventions that form a film grammar that can evolve over time and are in permanent change (Villarejo, 2007)? Other works, like the writings of Marie-Thérèse Journot (2006), try to generate “vocabularies” of cinema, thus giving this “new language” a metalanguage of its own.

I would rather accept the Deleuzian notion that cinema is a “language without a language” (1985), so I would propose a narrative interpretation of cinematic “grammar,” where an interpretation of narrativity specific to the young Romanian moviemakers can show both their appetite for storytelling innovations, for certain camera movements specific to a given aesthetics of cinema and their predisposition for composition. A grammar is, in this respect, a formal recognition of combinations, of rules that make a single significance for a commonly accepted meaning, thus making it a paradigmatic understanding of grammar. In this context, a frame by frame analysis would not provide a grammatical reading, but more of an external depiction of image-facts. I would approach the reading of the new

Romanian directors along the line of reasoning of Alexandre Astruc, whose 1948 article “Camera Stylo” provides the resource for the French New Wave cinema as a language, that is “a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in a contemporary essay or novel. (Quoted in Monaco 1976.)

Thus the first articulation of this kind of “grammar” is not the shot (or the “image-movement”), but it is composed of identifying forms and techniques as they are manifested in the content, and not the other way around.

Another element of identifying the characteristics of this grammar is to be looking for visual structuring; a *cinematic* approach to grammar is fundamentally a depiction of visual organization of the time and the space. For example one major “grammatical” characteristic, common to all the “new-new wave” productions in Romanian contemporary cinema is the preference for verism, the closeness of cinema to realism, that is the importing of documentary style filming, as it happens in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* or *12:08 East of Bucharest*, where the preference for steady camera techniques give the story a strong determination in the objectivity. This predisposition is to be seen in the preference for the long shot as the key method to create intervals for narrativity. “Le plan sequence” is used by the young directors as an instrument for generating a reality that comes out of the visual field and influences the story itself. This again, is followed by a construction of the space in terms of a realist order (following the definition of Bazin), which allows the director to avoid editing and to represent actions as continuous in a continuous space. This long shot disposition coupled with the accentuation of depth of field – used as a punctuation form – generates one of the most important tropes in the structuring of the “new-new wave” grammar.

As was the case of the Italian neo-realism, this new realism of the Romanian young cinema comes against the fictional-propaganda style of the “old” Romanian cinema, founded in a certain symbolic stage, where signification is generated by hidden meaning and collateral or subtle references. This is a direct cinema, in the very sense of addressing direct and abrupt issues, some of them ignored for decades. This is the case not only of Mungiu’s movie (*4 Months...*), who was built around one aspect of social life during communism (illegal abortions), it is a common denominator for most of the young generation – for example Florin Iepan, one of the most significant documentary makers in contemporary Romania, developed several years before Mungiu a nonfiction film around “the generation of the decree,” *Children of the Decree (Decrețcii, 2005*, an entire generation of children born in Romania because of a decree given by Ceaușescu forbidding abortions).

Here the importance of the narrative time has to be stressed, again a grammatical characteristic, since the “new-new wave” of Romanian directors tend to recount their stories in the present time, not just in terms of their contemporary stories, but in terms of a narrativity that is personally lived, even if it is happening in the past (as is the case for *Tales from the Golden Age*).

10. Location, Location, Location

Another key element of this grammatical description of the Romanian contemporary cinematography must include the *mise-en-scène* as interpretative method as being more than the shot composition and the positioning of the camera. Simply put, the staging, the shot is about making content decisions within the whole of the movie. Without ignoring the basic elements of cinematographic language used in the construction of the context (angle distribution, camera’s depth of field, camera movement, shot duration) the grammar of the new Romanian cinema can be described as being based on depicting an universe of the urban proletarians, in the descent of one of the most important European directors, Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose characters are a part of this backdrop not only because of its social significance, but also because of the narrative relevance.

All the directors mentioned here have this one common element, which is the development of the narrative in everyday spaces. The blocks of flats (be it the communist dark vision in *4 months...* and *12:08 East of Bucharest*; or the gloomy apartments in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* or the backyards in *Marilena from P7* (*Marilena de la P7*, 2006, made by Nemescu) are one common denominator for the construction of the story. This desolate urban context and the decrepitude of the space are in radical contradiction with the fantastic and beautiful spaces in spectacular cinema. Using apparently dull environments to contextualize the story development, the young Romanian directors are making not just an aesthetic statement, but also use it as a storytelling device.

Representing space in its disenfranchised aspects, with a close attention to the negative effects of industrialism and the profound alienating nature of the relationship between humans in this kind of world is fundamental, for all the young directors. Porumboiu, for example, both in *12:08 East of Bucharest* and in *Police, Adjective* depicts the moral dilemma of his main character in a background of urban space where people have no connections, where the passers-by are strangers, isolated beings in a world void of content (and ethics). And, at the end of the movie (in *Police, Adjective*), when the main character’s moral degradation

is complete, he draws a stake-out that takes place in a space surrounded by blocks of flats, a symbolic reference to the no-escape situation he (and his victim) is caught into.

Using set design for the development of *mise-en-scène* which, in its turn, is used as a narrative incentive, is a deliberate storytelling decision, based both on the preference for documentary style and on the rejection of built up settings considered to be artificial. In these movies, location shooting and exaggerated forms of authenticity favour genuine spaces as they are considered in a reversed relationship with the interest for intimate construction of character (discussed below). Common places, blocks of flats, streets and non-relevant corners of the urban space are only means of accentuating realism by means of hyperbolic realistic devices.

Why do the new-new directors use this method of authenticating their story? I would suggest that this comes from Andre Bazin's definition of realist cinema. One, there is a desire for continuity and the directors set their images before the spectator by using the long take (most of these films begin with a shot of a relatively long duration, with little or no action going on) and by preferring deep space (by using deep focus) in an effort to give the viewer "reality" itself, and not just a "representation" of reality.

Most of the "new-new wave" movies are based on this logic of continuous reality, and this is not a simple method, a technological expansion of significance, but the profound meaning of the directors' view of the world. Presenting "the real" is a grammatical function for the young Romanian filmmakers.

11. Telling "Our Stories" in "Our Own Way" – For a "Grammar" of Story Development

As suggested above, the existence of a "new-new wave" of directors is dependent on the development of another narrativity, a narrativity that is European in its foundation because it is rejecting action movie, the spectacle oriented productions and a form of epic based on a very strict causality. Here we can find one major difference of storytelling between the two forms of cinema (European and American), suggested by David Bordwell and other formalist critics of cinema (Bordwell, 2005). The influential work of Bordwell, dealing with narration in the fiction film, describes Hollywood cinema as dominated by character-centred causality, founded on a question-and-answer logic, on problem solving routines, deadline structures for the plot, and a mutual cueing system of word, sound and image are seen as typical for Hollywood films. Against this conceptual framework

the European cinema is described as being founded on de-centred plots, having indirect and psychological motivation and “parametric” forms of narration.

These characteristics are easily identifiable in the types of narratives put into action by the young Romanian directors. The way they tell their stories is so much similar to each other in their dissimilitude toward “American” cinema that the theoretical connections are almost inevitable.

Cristian Nemescu, considered by some the most vibrant director of the “new-new wave” (he regrettably died in a car accident caused, the irony of fate, by an off duty American soldier), has built his unfinished movie, *California Dreamin’* (2007) around the opposition between these two world views. On the one hand we have the Romanians in the remote village, who encounter a NATO train loaded with American soldiers (Armand Assante being Captain Jones, the leading officer of the group). On the other hand we have the constant references to the “Americans” as cultural icons, and the local reality which is totally remote from any mythological consistence.

In this approach to narrative, meaning is not determined by action, as is the case in the classical (read American) cinema, instead it is based on the construction of the character’s psychological convolution. As it is the case in *Police, Adjective*, the main hero is described in the actions of an anti-heroic figure. Although he is a policeman, his police work ethics and practices are based on procrastination (while he is a constant reversed figure of an action hero policeman) and on delaying decision making or action taking.

The diegesis of the perspective is important for the young Romanian directors, since the point of view and the changes (or lack of change) become elements of narrative. One of the most important methods used is a non diegetic introduction, one that delays the introduction of any form of action, and this postponement of the climax – which comes against the “classical” narrativity in Hollywood screenwriting – makes way for the involvement of the viewer into the psyche of the character.

Again, in *Police, Adjective*, there is a police story which is told in a clear negative reference to American police movies, where the investigation, the collection of evidence and the development of the case are retold in a non-traditional manner. Focusing on the drama of the character and not on his actions, most of the actions of the key character are trivial, like, for example, in the climactic moment of his police work, the officer eats a bowl of soup all by himself, in a frame that takes a long time, allowing the viewer to enter into the inner world of the character. Halting action in favour of internal resolution and deconstructing

diegetic dynamics for emotions and psychological build up of tension, without dramatical interventions.

This places the Romanian cinema within the boundaries of mock-realism tropes of the Eastern-Europe cinema (Eidsvik 1991), with roots in Chekhov's literature, and in Caragiale's theatre, where everyday life becomes a source for comedy.

12. Theatrical Displays and the Crossing of the “Fourth Wall”

Keeping the unity of time and space and breaking the “fourth wall” is a constant interest for the “new-new wave” directors. Most of the films that belong to the new generation of directors take place during one day and one night, and the unity of time and space is similar in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, and *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*. Not only do all these movies take place within a very narrow margin of time, but they have a built-in conflict and contradiction between realism and theatrical representation and this is suggestively expressed by the ending in *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*, where the main characters (Otilia and Găbița), after their ordeal, are having a meal in a restaurant (with its symbolic relevance attached – since meat eating and abortion are connected in their gruesome reality). This is the moment when Otilia turns towards the camera and stares directly into the eyes of the viewers, establishing an emotional link that crosses the screen.

Another common method used in several of these movies is the theatrical display of the characters in front of the camera. This is the case with the dinner table in *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*, where the presentation of the main character, as a solitary member at the table, while everybody around her is talking about trivial things builds up tension and the connection between the character and the spectator. Much more, the setting is a reference to the *Last Supper* of da Vinci, the suffering figure in the centre being replaced by the feminine character tormented by a difficult moral decision.

This iconographic reference is a constant trait for the “new-new wave” directors. One of the most explicit use of this method of imaginary symbolism, where the link between theatrical development and religious imaginary re-enactment is straight, we can find in Porumboiu's movies. Both *12:08 East of Bucharest* and *Police, Adjective* used the triptych as a cinematographic device. Porumboiu is building his final frames with a direct reference to Andrei Rublev's triptych. Both movies (*12:08 East of Bucharest* and *Police, Adjective*) are centred

on key scenes which are built around three characters, in an obvious transformation of the religious Trinity in a reversed, mundane “trinity.” The referencing to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of icon painting and its following imaginary structures, founded in a European Christian context, makes the Romanian cinema a particular voice in the series of new waves. Three figures (be it at the television debate or in the office of the police head), are frontally looking at the viewer, with their physical disposition similar to a deeply Orthodox tradition of image construction, while their behaviour in critical reverse. The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit are represented in degraded values, in order to make the debasement of humanity even more abrupt.

13. The Individual at the Centre of the Narrative

Starting with Elsasesser’s (2005) remark that in the European cinema the personal space is cultivated as a narrative, we can observe that the characters and their moral dilemmas, elements on which Bordwell also founded his description of the modern cinema, are fundamental to the new Romanian cinema. The concentration on the character’s evolution or even more specifically on the effort to develop the character’s “human condition” is the key to understanding the grammar of European film and, by consequence, of the new Romanian directors.

If within the European cinema there are waves of new-waves, the Romanian young directors obviously form another “new-new wave,” maybe the last of the new-waves. While these waves can be defined by their festival success (as was for most of the Central European films, like the Oscar-winning *Kolya* by Jan Svěrák, Czech Republic, 1996), by their relevance in the European cultural dialogue (as was the case of Almodóvar’s early productions), or by their shared language and cinematic methods (as it is for the new Romanian directors), the recent developments in contemporary cinema are strongly connected both to the European cultural background and to national identity.

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Hélas pour Nouvelle Vague

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Abstract. Nouvelle Vague has always been aware of its place in movie History. *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963) already shows the complex relationship between classical cinema and modern cinema in the guise of Myth. In 1990 Godard makes a film called *Nouvelle Vague*, a film declaredly about Myth and Resurrection. The *politique des auteurs*'s myth of the author consisted (as myths usually do) in a dichotomy: the intentional author seen as the holder of a personal view and style *and* the author as its own nemesis, being present only insofar as it is invisible, reduced to some sort of zero degree. According to Godard the historical role of Nouvelle Vague is no more to carry on the classical cinema with different means and under the aegis of myth (like in *Contempt*): it is instead to let Nouvelle Vague/*politique des auteurs* authorial dichotomy die and resurrect in the “twisted” form of nowadays' paradoxical importance of the Author, being nowhere and everywhere at the same time. The paper is a close reading of *Nouvelle Vague*, as a kind of strange prophecy on nowadays' mediascape situation, and as an example of how Nouvelle Vague (Godard, in this case) conceptualizes its own importance and place in media history.

1. The Author as a Myth

*“L’objective livre au cinéaste une matière brute [...] et le rôle de la mise en scène, de la réalisation, sera de donner l’impression que ce n’est pas mis en scène.”*¹

(Leenhardt 1936)

Why should a paper about the latest films by Nouvelle Vague master Jean-Luc Godard begin with a 1936 quotation of Roger Leenhardt? It is very well known that the root of the French New Wave lies in the *politique des auteurs* critical movement inside the *Cahiers du Cinéma* review. The origin of this movement, some way or another, is chiefly André Bazin's thought. Among Bazin's major influences, Leenhardt's was probably the strongest.

¹ “The camera lens delivers to the film-maker a piece of brute reality [...] the task of the *mise en scène* [staging], of directing, will be to render the impression that it was not staged” (my translation, M. G.).

A myth is about an origin (of a community, of a religion, or whatever). So the myth itself, the myth of the Author in this case, as a myth, needs an origin. It would not be wrong to fix a mythical origin of the myth of the author in this very Leenhardt's sentence: the *mise en scène*, the quintessential mark of the Author, is there only insofar as it cancels itself. The author is a myth. The *politique des auteurs* used to be the clerical élite celebrating this myth. But what is a myth? Of course it is unthinkable to get into the infinite anthropological question "what is a myth?" here – but one of the possible, and less disputable, definitions of myth is "an imaginary solution for a real contradiction." So, a contradiction is at stake inside the Author myth. The Author myth brought along by the *politique des auteurs* is ambivalent: the real, actual author is the author that fades out, that gives up his own existence as a "creator", or an "artist", for the impersonal power of cinema's sake and/or of reality's sake. From this nemesis, and only from it, a new form of creative, paradoxical subjectivity would come across. Namely Hawks's, Hitchcock's, Renoir's, Ray's, Rossellini's and so on. It is a double movement, personal and impersonal at the same time.

This simple truth is often forgotten, or neglected. The standard opinion of the *politique des auteurs* as a neo-romantic exaltation of the artistic creation is basically wrong. And yet, this radical ambivalence cannot really come unexpected. The original, truly romantic idea of genius was of course already an ambivalent one: the real romantic genius is the one who obliterates himself in the impersonal substance of genius. So *politique des auteurs* is actually romantic, not really in the naïve sense of merely exalting the individual genius, but rather because it perfectly embodies the stern ambivalence of that concept.²

Among the ones who were not duped by that common opinion, there is Serge Daney. His articles principally dealing with the French New Wave (Daney 1988 and 2001) are among the most lucid statements of that structural ambivalence. "En lançant la 'politique des auteurs,' la Nouvelle Vague balise bien évidemment un terrain sur lequel elle escompte plus tard évoluer et il est clair qu'elle est prête à en récolter les bénéfiques. Mais par 'auteur,' jamais elle n'entend le démiurge responsable du moindre détail de son film, maniaque jusqu'à l'obsession, maître après Dieu sur son plateau. Sinon elle aurait admiré davantage Carné, Clement ou Clouzot. Par 'auteur' elle entend l'homme qui répond *personnellement* à des contraintes et à des commandes réelles, l'homme qui tire avec un style à lui son épingle d'un jeu qu'il ne domine pas. Renoir est cet homme et c'est la liberté de

² Back then, the critical movement that used to be particularly inclined to exalt the personal side of the authorial figures it worshipped was rather a different one: the "Mac Mahon" (Mourlet 1959). Such a movement, along with the particular cult of the author it supported, used to be quite close to the *politique des auteurs* sphere, but it was also nonetheless firmly distinct from it – also as based on a journal of its own (*Présence de cinéma*).

l'homme qui fait toujours 'ce qu'il peut' qui est admirable chez lui et non pas la servitude égoïste de celui qui ne fait que 'ce qu'il veut'"³ (Daney 1988, 72). Suffice it to mention Eric Rohmer's love for classicism, the Hollywood-like transparency of the directorial style of Claude Chabrol, the subtle and passionate play with "conformist" cinematic forms by François Truffaut. As far as Nouvelle Vague directors are concerned, at least the ones descending from the *politique des auteurs*, the personal and the impersonal strictly go together.

Jean-Luc Godard himself has always been quite careful to make this subject clear for those patient enough to listen to him all along. *Breathless (A bout de souffle, 1959)* is already highly exemplary of a new conception of authorship, which is radically distinct from Bergman's or Fellini's individual craftsmanship or genius, but rather grounds itself on the self-oblivion, so to speak, in a huge pre-existing cinematic universe, as Dudley Andrew has pointed out (Andrew 1986, 19). His second one, *The Little Soldier (Le petit soldat, 1963)*, is about the very existentialist denial of the self in order to act in and for the world – something eventually enacted by Godard himself in his own very politically-oriented "Dziga Vertov Group" period at the end of the Sixties, when he explicitly theorized and performed the total dissolution of authorship into a collective namelessness. But here again duality was majorly at stake. This is what the historian René Prédal tells us about that period. "La difficulté a tenir les paris de 1968 est particulièrement évidente chez Jean-Luc Godard, dont le cas est exemplaire des conflits entre volonté de témoignage anonyme et tentation d'expression personnelle. En effet, d'abord sincèrement désireux de privilégier un travail commun, Godard en vient vite à un simple dualisme (partage et non plus dissolution du travail créatif) pour arriver trois ans après à réaffirmer son moi à travers un regard purement subjectif. Le groupe Dziga Vertov se soumet en effet presque immédiatement aux décisions conjuguées de Godard et Gorin."⁴ (Prédal 1991, 254.)

³ "By launching the *Politique des auteurs*, French New Wave prepared the field onto which it would have trodden a few years later, and of which it was ready enough to reap the harvest. But 'author' here never means the demiurge who is responsible for each and every detail in the film, an obsessive maniac of precision, a master of his set as only God can be. Otherwise, Carné, Clément or Clouzot would have been admired from the beginning. For the *Politique des auteurs*, the 'author' is the man *personally* answering for real orders and constraints, the man who, thanks to a style of his own, finds a way out of what he cannot control. Renoir is this man, and what is most admirable in him is the freedom of the man who always does 'what he can', rather than the selfish slavishness of the one who only does 'what he wants.'" (My translation, M. G.)

⁴ "The difficulty to accept the challenges coming from 1968 is particularly evident in Godard's case, which is exemplary of the conflicts between the will to testify anonymously and the tendency to express his own personality. Actually, while at first sincerely willing to opt for a common job, Godard ends up with a simple dualism (creative power was now to be shared rather than destroyed), and three years later with a full restoration of his self through a purely subjective look. Dziga Vertov Group submits itself almost immediately to Godard's and Gorin's decisions." (My translation, M. G.)

Just one year before 1968, Godard signed his *La chinoise* placing a big white cross onto his name, and released interviews in which a supposed “self-criticism” about the notion of author revealed now more clearly what the *politique des auteurs* had been really about from the beginning. “De même je dirai qu’il n’y a pas d’auteur. Mais pour que les gens comprennent dans quel sens on peut dire cela, il faut d’abord leur dire pendant cent ans qu’il y a des auteurs. Car la manière dont ils pensaient qu’il n’y avait pas d’auteur n’était pas la bonne. C’était une question de tactique.”⁵ (Godard 1967, 67.) But even after the Dziga Vertov Group years, Godard’s film work has always kept on being crammed with references to this ambivalent authorial status, self-affirmation and self-dissolution. For instance in *Slow Motion (Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, 1980), in which a sadistic demiurge organizing all the prostituted bodies he can buy, in a grotesque parody of *mise en scène*, is himself significantly called “Messieurs Personne” (“Mr. Nobody”). This goes also for the melancholic death of the author staged in *Grandeur et décadence d’un petit commerce de cinéma* (1986), or for *Keep Your Right Up (Soigne ta droite*, 1987)’s “enough of this fucking first person” stated by a character called none other than “the Individual,” with a capital “I.”

2. Contempt

Such examples could go on much further. But perhaps it would be better to stick to the film that, as early as 1963, already was a perfect meta-commentary on the new status of the author brought along by the *politique des auteurs* and by the French New Wave. The film in which, as explicitly as never before nor after, the ambivalence at the core of the author notion is regulated by what regulates by definition what is contradictory: i.e., by myth. This film is *Contempt (Le mépris)*. Not only a film about myth, but also a film about the myth of the author. A film starring not only Jack Palance, Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli, but also starring the myth of the myths, the myth that is supposed to achieve and overcome all myths: incarnation. Modern times begin with Christianity, i.e. when the classical myths make way for the ultimate myth: resurrection. We have here a myth, none other than *The Odyssey*. This myth cannot be represented nor filmed anymore: it can only be lived. Michel Piccoli (the screenwriter in charge to adapt *The Odyssey* for the screen)

⁵ “In the same way, I’ll say too that there is no such thing as an ‘author’. But to get people to understand in what sense you can say that, you have to tell them over and over again, first, that there’s such a thing as an “author.” Because their reason for thinking there wasn’t one were not the right ones. It’s a question of tactics...” (Godard 1968, 31). Anyway, Godard was not the only one among the Nouvelle Vague members to try to make things clear about what *politique des auteurs* was really supposed to stand for. See also De Baeque 1991 (2), 146–150.

is the opposite of Ulysses as much as his wife Brigitte Bardot is the opposite of Penelope: her betrayal with the modern God, i.e. money (that is, a film producer, Jack Palance), comes from Piccoli's total reluctance to go beyond the ordinary path. The ultimate opposite of Ulysses' tale. The classic gives way to modernity. Or, as Godard had written years before in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, "Tell me whether the destiny of the modern cinema does not take the same form as it did for the belated partisans of romanticism. Yes, *with new thoughts let us make old verses.*" (Godard 1972, 28.) Classical myth does not merely die nor disappears: it resurrects in a different form. The verb is now flesh. The classical and mythical connection between nature and culture (as well as the male-female one) breaks loose, and nature can shine in its own light⁶ as Brigitte Bardot does.⁷ And so do the ruins of language, those enacted so evidently by Godard's fragmented style.⁸ The verb is now flesh, so Fritz Lang himself cannot direct a movie anymore; all he can do is embody Fritz Lang himself. So classicism must be substituted by modernism. So, *Contempt* takes the place left empty by classical Hollywood by showing classical Hollywood rather than telling tales like it used to (again: the verb becomes flesh). And thus Godard takes Fritz Lang's place. Godard in person plays here the role of the assistant director of *The Odyssey*, the film-within-a-film directed by Fritz Lang. So here is the point: the assistant director takes the place of the director. A classical, full, potent, authoritarian, demiurgic authorial presence (i.e. Fritz Lang) makes way for a modern authorial form, which is as present as it is essentially passive⁹ (i.e. Godard, admitting here to be a mere follower of the classical masters, a mere assistant). With modernity, the author becomes ambivalent, personal AND impersonal: that's what the *politique des auteurs* has always been about. The dichotomies that the myth managed to keep together in the classical era, now, in the modernity, fall apart. But myth is still there – only in an incarnated form, the myth made flesh and not represented. Which is

⁶ Basically all of the critical commentators point out how the three primary colors (yellow, red and blue) are by far prevailing in the film's palette. The sublimely stylized visual of the classical movie era turns now into a modern phase of neo-primitivism, of coming back to the origins even on a chromatic level.

⁷ Michel Marie (Marie 2006, 209–214) has pointed out how Bardot's character here represents the splendor of nature, opposed to the impotence of culture represented by her husband (Piccoli's character). In other words, the "mythological" link between nature and culture breaks loose.

⁸ Marie again notices how the passage from cinematic classicism to modernism, with all its linguistic disruption, does not erase the myth: it just changes its ways. "Le dialogue multiplie les chevilles narratives, liant logiquement les transitions spatio-temporelles, cependant qu'au niveau rythmique et descriptif le montage détruit ces relations causales pour y substituer une pure consécution tragique, métaphorisée par les figures de Neptune et de Minerve." (Marie 2006, 190.) ("The dialogue multiplies the narrative pivots, connecting logically space-time transitions, while on a rhythmic and descriptive level the montage destroys these causal relations and replaces them with a pure tragic consequentiality, represented by the figures of Neptune and Athena." My translation, M. G.)

⁹ On this topic, cf. also the first pages of Rancière 2006.

why the French New Wave can be seen as the classical cinema (Hollywood's, notably) with different means: the same old stories do not take place anymore according to the traditional deal between language and reality granted by myth, but in the fissure between language and reality, granted by another myth – a myth which is itself irretrievably split, that is the myth of the author. A myth that is here made flesh through the direct presence of Godard and Lang, who significantly comments a Hoelderlin poem during the film, saying that no longer is man reassured by the presence of gods, but by their absence. The living presence, i.e. the resurrected body in standard Christian mythology, as the only myth left after the end of all myths: the only possible suture for the contradictions now left loose, those same contradictions that once the myth used to solve and regulate: Reality and Language, Male and Female, Nature and Culture.

3. *Nouvelle Vague*

Those very couples return 27 years later with a film called none other than *Nouvelle Vague* (1990). A film starring Alain Delon and Domiziana Giordano, but way more than them, starring Nature in person. Throughout the Eighties, Godard has filled his films with countless static shots of nature, almost postcard-like. But nowhere as much as in *Nouvelle Vague*. Here, nature is unquestionably the main character. Nonetheless, culture is hugely present. *Nouvelle Vague* is a constant flow of literary, pictorial, cinematic quotation, as overwhelming as never before (and probably even afterwards, with the exception of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* [1988-1998]). Now the quotations form a real stream of consciousness: culture flows like a river would, and nature is filmed like an over-skilled painter would. Nature and culture are always already inside each other without any mediation – and of course the quintessential mediation between nature and culture is myth. Only one character significantly sticks out the juxtaposition of capitalistic high society and humble servants inside the villa the film is set into: a gardener. The recurring, key character of the movie. And who else than a gardener could be better placed right at the crossing point of nature and culture?

In fact, the film is all about how to intertwine dual oppositions beyond myth. *Contempt*, the other great Godardian film on myth, ended with a car accident. Another car accident opens *Nouvelle Vague*, but no one dies this time. Countess Torlato-Favrini runs over a borderline guy, Richard Lennox. He carries an Ankh, the Egyptian symbol of life as the harmonious unity between two opposite principles, active and passive. She manages to save him, and then she falls in love with him.

But he is really hopeless, so she makes him drown in a lake. But suddenly, he comes back mysteriously. Not to revenge, but to save her when she eventually falls into the same deep lake waters. And again, she is assured that he is the actual Richard Lennox only by recognizing the same Ankh on him. The symbol of duality.¹⁰

Duality is at stake then. But whereas the dual element used to be the one fit into shape by myth, now the dual element means repetition. Which of course means resurrection.¹¹ Much more overtly than in *Contempt*, here we have a film split in two by Richard's death. In the second part, he literally resurrects. The impossible couple, the proletarian and the countess, finds its own salvation thanks to repetition. No wonder that in the second half of the movie quotations and situations are often repeated for a second time. No wonder as well that the film follows the repetitive rhythm *par excellence*: spring, summer, autumn, winter, all emphatically stressed by the changing shape of nature.

Quite an unexpected and Arcadia-like vision for Godard. This time, nature and culture seem to go each its own way, and yet they seem to find a strange and magical balance. We are not into the lacerations of modernism anymore. Lennox and the countess are not only the male and female: they also embody modernity and its own overcoming. According to Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* (Jameson 2002), a solid and reliable synthesis of how modernity has globally been conceived, modernity is quite universally considered as determined by the split between the economic and the aesthetic.¹² The aesthetic stands before the

¹⁰ Frank Curot has carefully analyzed how the dual structure comes into question in this film (Curot 2003). Curot focuses particularly on how the conflict is visually illustrated rather than directly represented. For instance, the car accident is not showed, but only alluded through a highly colliding way of editing. Once again: the myth (i.e. contradiction as such) dies as *logos* (i.e. as representation) to resurrect as image, as pure visuality. This goes also for the moment in the film when an oscillatory camera movement goes right and left from outside the villa while the woman is turning the lights off one by one: again a binary couple (right/left, or even on/off) made into visual.

¹¹ In Godard's synopsis of the film, the second part (where Lennox returns after death) is referred to as being the "New testament" after the "Old testament" of the first part, still fully dominated by myth. "Mais la femme découvre que l'autre homme est le même homme que le premier, que le deuxième est (encore et toujours) le même que le premier." (Godard 1998, 189.) ("but the woman finds out that the other man is still the first one, that the second one is (again and always) the same one as the first." My translation, M. G.) Myth is overcome by resurrection – but, once again like in *Contempt*, myth outlives its own death and transformation.

¹² According to Jameson, modernity is defined principally by a tendency to trace a periodization, a line between "before" and "after." This is precisely what *Contempt does* (stating as it were, "we are the modern, they used to be the classic") and *Nouvelle vague does not*. It is true that the turning point at the middle of the film starts a different phase from the former (the postmodern after the modern), but this does not at all affect the film's temporality, whereas the entire style of *Contempt* lies in the illustration of how modernity consists in a kind of temporality which is no longer the classical one. *Nouvelle Vague's* "eternal present" goes on unchanged after the split, the difference separating the second part from the first one being only the minimal, although substantial, difference springing from repetition, and not a radical break like the one separating one historical phase from another.

economic as semi-autonomous, and in a conflicting asset. The countess is a big industry boss, Lennox is a loser, a parasite. They are the most improbable couple ever, their relationship is in a constant tension, and yet they love each other. After his death and resurrection, Lennox becomes the big boss. He runs the business and reduces her basically to silence, and yet they still love each other. And, most importantly, he also gets into art commerce. What happens after the resurrection resembles very much the standard definition of our postmodern times: the opposite poles collapse on each other (and that is Lennox: an artist and an industrial), leaving out only an indeterminate leftover (which is the now silent countess). In postmodernism, capitalism erases the semi-autonomous field of culture, but the very de-materialization of capital that permits this, leads also to an “over-culturalization” of capital. As capital is being more and more virtual (or, as Lennox repeatedly says, business is now reduced to charity), the cultural element is potentially all over (Jameson 1991). And yet it is basically vanished – art has triumphed and dissolved at the same time. “Eins Zwei Drei die Kunst ist frei,” “one two three the art is free,” as stated by a written sign during the film – a concept that Godard’s *The Old Place* (1998) (Ishaghpour 2004) and *Origins of the 21st Century* (*L’Origine du XXI siècle*, 2000) express with particular clarity. So culture itself is the only horizon left – the true nature then, according to Jameson among others. We have no longer modernity’s split totality, we now have a single and full totality, in which the cultural and the natural are not opposed anymore, but they coincide somehow thanks to the vanishing mediation of the capital, making both nature and culture dissolve and spread all over.

The duality is then basically defused. The art commerce started by Lennox does not trade just any picture, it trades Goya’s *La maya desnuda*, being, as stated in the film, “nudity without sensuality.” Throughout the film, the sexual difference strives to be defused; the main characters try to be no more “real characters” but rather two characters from some novel. And, as stated in the film, “Let people in books invent us and read our own history. The Parkers, Favrinis, Dorfman’s... male and female, but minus pricks and pussies.” Love is an angelic matter now: no wonder that Dante Alighieri is repeatedly quoted. And the other major binary difference to be defused is sound and vision: never as much as in *Nouvelle Vague* Godard has played with the stratification of the sound and the stratification of the image. Both image and sound taken separately are made of a series of layers overlapping with each other (in volume, depth of field, tones, luminosity, colour and so on), so that the very difference between sound and image seems like fading away: sound seems such an unstable and discontinuous matter that it does not

seem to have any sort of consistence or determination indeed – and so does the image, in an equivalent manner. Both seeing and hearing as a matter of gradualness and silence¹³.

So what about the myth of the author? It has to be framed according to the relationship between the modern and the postmodern set up by the film's structure. In the film we have first a modernly-oriented section, dominated by the tension between the opposites, the countess and Lennox. Then Lennox dies, and the crucial gardener says immediately thereafter: "Cécile, what are those images? Sometimes free, sometimes confined. This vast thought where shapes pass while colours shine?" And Cécile answers: "It's space." Now the second half can begin: it is the postmodernly-oriented one, since postmodernism is typically defined as the absolute triumph of space, whereas modernity was more on the side of the structural antagonism between space and time. So this section is going to be dominated by Lennox "postmodernly" swallowing both opposite terms, both an artist and an industry boss. And here comes Godard's point: even more than what concerned the classical and the modern times, what connects the modern and the postmodern is that the second is a sort of repetition of the first. Of course a crucial topic in late Godard is the present as a repetition of the past: suffice it to mention the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *Forever Mozart* (1996). And right after *Nouvelle Vague's* finale, a voice over states what follows: "It was as if they had already lived all this. Their words seemed frozen, in the traces of other words from other times. They paid no heed to what they did, but to the division which set today's actions in the present and parallel actions in the past. They felt tall, motionless, above them past and present: identical waves in the same ocean."

Among these waves, no doubt, the *French New Wave* that gives Godard's film its title. Like Richard Lennox, the *Nouvelle Vague* movement has died, but death and tragedy is no more the last word as it was in *Contempt*. *Nouvelle Vague* modernism has died with modernity, but it has resurrected in the contemporary mediascape. No proper traces of the *Nouvelle Vague* movement in itself of course, but the tension between personal and impersonal that used to be the original core of the *politique des auteurs* has now somehow reincarnated in a situation in which the author is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. No wonder that, for the first time in many years, Jean-Luc Godard's name does not appear in the

¹³ As for the *mise en scène*, there is a very interesting indication in Godard's own *Nouvelle Vague* script, outlining a new form of visual plenitude out of the very fragmentation of the filmic texture. Literally, visual fullness *resurrects* from its own disruption, as for a singular stylistic *Aufhebung* (Godard 1998, 189–196, especially 191–193). This explains also why Godard's way of framing emphasizes so much on the empty spaces left aside from the dissonant (camera's and characters') trajectories intersecting all the time.

starting credits of this film, whereas the actors and the crew members do. And no wonder as well that Godard has declared that in *Nouvelle Vague* (the film) there was not even one spoken line to be originally written: all of them were quotations.¹⁴ As for today, we have the Internet, Youtube, the fan fictions, the interactivity phenomena, the fluid authorial status of the new TV series, the increasing presence of the audience itself in the creative process, and so on. The prestige of the genius and of the author as we knew it has basically disappeared, or perhaps transformed into a supplementary commercial value – but precisely at this point the notion of author explodes uncontrollably and spreads everywhere¹⁵. The tension between personal and impersonal has not been erased by the pervasive triumph of media power, it has only changed skin. Now that the personal and the impersonal have overlapped on each other and the dichotomies are defused, we only have a totality (the convergence of all media into a huge globalized and capitalized audiovisual world) and a leftover. The inevitable leftover, unpredictable and indeterminate as it is, is the living proof that the total closure is not accomplished: and that is precisely what is to be looked for, and what must be pushed further. And when the two lovers of the film escape the Torlato-Favrini mansion at the very end, the countess, i.e. the leftover since Lennox has become both art and industry, states “C’est moi qui conduis.” “I’ll drive.” Jameson’s recent stance on Utopia (Jameson 2005, 211–233) is exactly on the same line: today’s utopia is not to achieve the closure as it used to be in the

¹⁴ One of those occasions occurred during his press conference at 1990 Cannes Film Festival (where *Nouvelle Vague* was presented). “Avec mon assistant on s’est dit: on ne sait pas quoi faire, on a signé le contrat, on a un titre, un scénario et une histoire qui pour une fois avait emballé un acteur et un producteur. Mais simplement l’histoire durait deux minutes, et un long metrage doit faire une heure trente. Donc, avec mon assistant, on s’est dit: ‘Prends tous les romans que tu aimes, je te donne les miens; il m’en reste une vingtaine, va chez Hemingway, Faulkner, Gide et prend des phrases.’ Et aujourd’hui, pour les trois quarts, on ne sait absolument plus de qui elles sont. Surtout qu’à certains moments, on les a un peu modifiées. C’est dans ce sens là que je ne me mets pas au générique. Ce n’est pas moi qui ai fait le film. Je n’en suis que l’organisateur conscient.” (Godard 1998, 201.) “I told my assistant: we don’t know what to do, we signed a contract, we have a title, a script, a story having enthralled an actor and a producer for a change. But the thing is that the story lasts just two minutes and a long feature film has to be one hour thirty minutes. So, I told my assistant: ‘Go take all the novels you like, I’ll give you mine, I have twenty left, go find Hemingway, Faulkner, Gide and take some sentences’. And now, as for 75% of all that, we have no idea anymore about what belongs to whom. Also because we modified them a little bit here and there. That’s why I didn’t include myself in the credits. I didn’t make the film. I only am its conscious organizer.” (My translation, M. G.)

¹⁵ The declarations made by JLG during the aforementioned press conference mostly deal with that very subject. “Je m’aperçois aujourd’hui que quand nous, la Nouvelle Vague, et Truffaut d’abord le premier, avons défendu la notion d’auteur, c’était simplement pour dire: il n’est pas juste que Hitchcock, Howard Hawks ou Serguei Eisenstein soient moins considérés qu’André Gide ou Dostoievski. Eisenstein est plus important que la Mosfilm, et Howard Hawks est plus important que la Paramount, en tout cas aussi important. C’était tout. Et puis ça nous a dépassés. Quand vous me photographiez, j’ai une honte absolue, cela me fait pleurer. On dit: il faut bien qu’ils gagnent leur vie en prenant une photo, mais pas comme ça. On a dévoyé cette notion d’auteur.” (Godard 1998, 200.)

modern times, but it rather consists in breaking the closure, pushing forth what escapes the closure. Very first words of the film: “But I wanted this to be a narrative. I still do. Nothing from outside to distract memory. I barely hear, from time to time, the earthly softly creaking, one ripple breaking the surface.” So we have no more the narrative opposed to some external impediment, say nature vs. language, we have a one and only totality, and something shaking it from within, a structural leftover as it were. This sort of “shaking” is the tiny difference inside the identical, that only repetition lets us perceive. So that is why the film emphasizes on repetition so much.¹⁶ Each and every instant, the image makes us perceive the tiny difference separating the present from the past, the very moment it repeats the past. At one point, a character tells another a wonderful definition of the image: snow on water, silence over silence. Snow of course IS water, but at the same time it is different. And the moment we see Lennox resurrected, i.e. when repetition comes across, we see him as a reflection on water while it is snowing. The *politique des auteurs* is of no use nowadays, and the guy saying to the countess “Joseph Mankiewicz, what a man: he didn’t make scenes like the others, just did his job” is explicitly depicted as ridiculous. No more antagonism between personal and impersonal. But that very potentiality disclosing from that gap is still here in our very different present: it is the gap that repetition can open up, regardless of the question of the author. “How wonderful to be able to give what you don’t have. Miracle of our empty hands,” say the two lovers when they first meet. It is always the same void, yet differently shaped, like snow and water, silence over silence: so, especially in today’s mediascape so filled with serial forms of all kinds, sticking to repetition and to the limitless potential it brings about is something like the Nouvelle Vague with different means.

In 2001, an Italian review, *Filmcritica*, collected a stance from an anonymous director who can be recognized very easily. “In the era of the virtual, one is interested more in the name than in the work. The work does not exist anymore but as a representative of the name. We came to this thanks to the *Politique des Auteurs*, and that is why I have not signed my films anymore for a long time

“I now realize that when we, the French New Wave, and first of all Truffaut, used to defend the notion of Author, it was just to say: it’s not right that Hitchcock, Howard Hawks or Sergei Eisenstein are less considered than André Gide or Dostoyevsky. Eisenstein is more important than Mosfilm, and Howard Hawks more than Paramount – or, at least, equally important. That was all. And then, it all went beyond us. When you take a picture from me, I feel horribly, it really makes me cry. One is like: they sure have to make their living, but not like that. The notion of author has gone completely astray.” (My translation, M. G.)

¹⁶ Jean-Louis Leurat and Suzanne Liandrat Guigues state explicitly that Nouvelle Vague could really be considered an illustration of Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* (Leurat and Liandrat-Guigues 2004, 168).

myself. And when something under my copyright is requested by someone else, I say ‘it is not only within your rights, but also out of duty on your part’. And if, by any chance, you want to use some text of mine in a theatre, do not even mention my name. My text is yours because it interests you. This is what I did myself with the *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. I wish that a case law can be established for cinema, so that the free right to quote without being compelled to mention the names of the authors can be granted.” (Quoted in Bruno 2001, my translation, M. G.)

All in all, it is the usual Godardian squinty attitude towards History. One eye glancing the past, one eye glancing the present. We are inside our contemporary times only insofar as we perceive them as a different repetition of the past, of modernity. We can really understand the contemporary mediascape only insofar as we are able to see it as the resurrection of Nouvelle Vague – that is, the contradiction that once grounded the French New Wave (and the *politique des auteurs*) as differently articulated.

In spite of her death, what used to be the New Wave is still among us – but now through some kind of a twisted actualization making it unrecognizable. Or perhaps like a spectral presence. That is why the historical need to trace a continuity with the past, and to know it, is more urgent than ever, and that is why Godard has been obsessed with History, and first of all movie History, throughout the last decades. So perhaps the best way to sum up this path from *Contempt* to *Nouvelle Vague*, from classic to modern and from modern to beyond, consists in leaving the last word to the brief legend opening *Hélas pour moi* (1993), shot by Godard right after *Nouvelle Vague*.

“When my father’s father’s father had a difficult task to accomplish, he went to a certain place in the forest, lit a fire, and immersed himself in a silent prayer. And what he had to do was done. When my father’s father was confronted with the same task, he went to the same place in the forest and said: ‘We no longer know how to light fire, but we still know the prayer.’ And what he had to do was done. Later, when my father had the same task to accomplish, he too went into the forest and said ‘We no longer know how to light the fire, we no longer know the mysteries of the prayer, but we still know the exact place in the forest where it occurred, and that should do.’ And that did do. But when I was faced with the same task, I stayed at home and said: ‘We no longer know how to light the fire, we no longer know the prayers, we don’t even know the place in the forest, but we do know how to tell the story.’”

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Birth (of the Image) of a Nation: Jean-Luc Godard in Mozambique

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Abstract. While Jean-Luc Godard's life and work has received a plethora of critical attention, a relatively uncharted episode occurred in 1977–1978, when, at the behest of the Samora Machel government, the filmmaker worked in Mozambique to assist in the establishment of the country's first television station. Having newly acquired its independence from Portugal, the avowedly Marxist government of Machel embarked on a cultural policy emphasizing the country's autonomy and intending to avoid simply replicating the media landscape of First World countries. Godard, meanwhile, had recently come out of an intense period of militant film practice in the post-1968 period, and was at the time ensconced in producing video and television works, many of which can be seen as models for what a revolutionary television in Mozambique could have looked like. Godard's hiring by the Mozambican government resulted in an extraordinary situation: a radical filmmaker is given responsibility by an anti-colonial regime to construct what Godard had earlier dubbed, with Althusserian overtones, a "televisual state apparatus." The mission also put him into contact and collaboration with Ruy Guerra, a Mozambique-born director who had worked in Brazil's Cinema Novo tradition, and Jean Rouch, whose ethnographic films Godard had greatly admired when a critic, and who was continuing his work in Mozambique at the same time. The fact that he was working with a tabula rasa, in the sense that the vast majority of Mozambique's population had never been exposed to film images before, catalyzed a process of frenetic theoretical exploration by Godard, continuing the work on the nature of the image he had done since the unfilmed *Moi Je* script of 1973. Ultimately, however, the project failed. Godard's contract was terminated and he left the country dissatisfied with the images he had produced. No footage remains of Godard's work in the country, but photographs of the country are utilized in a photo-montage essay included in *Cahiers du cinéma's* issue #300 and recollections of the project can be found in the documentary *Kuxa Kanema* and interviews with scholar and video artist Manthia Diawara. The article utilizes these resources in conjunction with archival research to present an overview of this extraordinary yet rarely analyzed experience.

While Godard may rank as one of the most written about filmmakers in the history of the cinema, for a long time there existed a relative paucity of critical attention focussing on his video work of the 1970s, in essence the period between *Here and Elsewhere* (*Ici et Ailleurs*, 1974), his first post-militant work, and his return to commercial outlets of distribution with *Slow Motion* (*Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, 1980), and made with Anne-Marie Mièville under the name of their production company Sonimage.

To a certain extent, this is understandable: moving to Grenoble in 1973 precipitated a prolonged period of virtual isolation, in which Godard was cut off from both the mainstream and radical left cinematic milieux. But he was by no means unproductive, with the period 1974–1979 yielding three feature films and two lengthy television series totalling 15 hours of screen time: *Six fois deux: sur et sous la communication* (1976) and *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1978). Thankfully, these works have recently garnered the critical and theoretical attention they merit; and yet there is an aspect of this period which still remains largely unknown, even to avid Godardians, and which is probably one of the least documented experiences in the filmmaker's entire career.

But the trip Godard and Mièville made to Mozambique in 1978 was a fascinating episode. At the behest of the government of the newly independent republic, they sought both to participate in the theoretical grounding behind the establishment of the country's new television service, and to use the experience as raw material from which to produce a video project which could have taken the shape, as we will see, of a five-hour television series, or a feature-length work intended for theatrical distribution, and which was to be named either *Nord contre sud* (*North Against South*) or *Naissance (de l'image) d'une nation* (*Birth [of the Image] of a Nation*). Unfortunately, the collaboration with the Mozambican government was terminated, and the resultant video work, which could foreseeably have taken its place in Godard's œuvre on an equal footing to *Six fois deux* or *France/détour*, was never completed.

To the best of my knowledge, no footage exists from Godard's time in Mozambique, or from the projected work, which had reached a relatively advanced stage of development before being abandoned. Similarly, the experience is only cursorily discussed by Godard in subsequent interviews, although he makes mention of it several times in the 1979 Montreal lecture series *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, and a theoretical document made in conjunction with the series has been reproduced in MacCabe's *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*. Our main source for what this work could have looked like is, however, a special

edition of *Cahiers du cinéma*, celebrating their 300th issue in May 1979, for which the editorial staff, following an earlier interview with Godard, decided to hand him complete editorial control. The result was a visual essay combining excerpts from texts and photographic montage, and the last half of it (around 60 pages) was taken up by a report-back from the trip (entitled *Le dernier rêve d'un producteur* [*Last Dream of a Producer*]), which combined Godard's own (ostensible) diary notes from his time in Mozambique, accompanied by photographs of the country, its inhabitants, and those who were assigned to the television project.

At the time that the edition of *Cahiers* was released, Godard still fully envisaged making the TV series, and the photo-montage was thus intended as a form of preview or teaser of the upcoming work. It now exists for us, however, as a trace, or phantomic presence, of a work that never was to be, and yet, as I will examine later, the work as it exists at this stage not only contains valuable insight into what the completed video could have been, but also merits being considered in its own right as a kind of film, but made with the tools of photographs and texts. As Godard says in a much earlier interview, from 1962: "I consider myself as an essayist, I make essays in the form of novels or novels in the form of essays: only I film them instead of writing them. If the cinema were to disappear I would move on to television, and if television were to disappear, I would go back to using pencil and paper." (Milne 1986, 171.)

If *Birth of (an Image of) a Nation*, as it exists in its *Cahiers* incarnation, has any precedent in film history, then it would probably be the restoration of Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow* (1937) – which consists entirely of stills and the story outline. Their genealogies are very different, with Eisenstein's film having already been completed before being destroyed by Soviet authorities and later recuperated on the basis of production stills, but the relationship between the version we now have access to, and the completed version as it could have existed, is the same: that of the trace.

Before entering a more extensive discussion of Godard's Mozambique adventure, it may be worthwhile to divulge some background information on the country itself. The area's domination by Portugal dates back to the early 16th century, and by the late 20th century approximately 300,000 Portuguese settlers lived in the country, although very little miscegenation between the populations took place. By the 1960s, however, maintenance of a colonial presence was taking a major financial toll on the metropole, then under the military dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* regime, and more than 30% of Portugal's budget was spent on maintaining order in its colonies in Africa and East Timor. In Mozambique the independence group *Frente Libération de Moçambique* (Frelimo) had begun guerrilla fighting, taking

inspiration from the successful anti-colonial revolutions elsewhere in Africa. With the overthrow of the *Estado Novo* in Portugal's "Carnation Revolution" in 1975, independence was granted to its colonies, and by this time Frelimo had not only hegemonized the independence movement, but had also taken a much more radical turn under its leader Samora Machel, who was to become the inaugural president. Explicitly identifying itself as a Marxist government, the People's Republic of Mozambique was declared and allied itself with the Soviet Union, with the Portuguese settlers returning *en masse* to the metropole.

It should be stressed that though the Mozambique government identified itself as Marxist, there was no pretence that they could undertake the construction of socialism in the country, which at that stage in its development would have been utopian. As Portuguese settlers had occupied virtually all of the technical and organizational posts in the country, a gaping hole was left which was unable to be filled by Mozambique's indigenous population, until then largely kept in a state of poverty and under-education. To compound matters, in 1977 a civil war began with the South African/Rhodesian organized group Renamo, plunging the country into renewed chaos. Machel's government therefore made the cultural education of the Mozambican population a central priority, although a generalized lack of expertise and resources engendered major limitations to the scope of the scheme. In addition to schooling and literacy programmes, the project of establishing the nation's first television station was made a key goal – and this is where Godard enters the stage.

The government viewed it as desirable for the models of Western television to be avoided. While the mooted television station was to be a centralized, state-controlled apparatus, much like the European model up until the liberalization/privatization of the 1970s–1980s, it was envisaged to have a primarily pedagogical purpose and encourage active popular involvement in production. In 1977, the government thus turned to a number of well-known leftist filmmakers for technical and theoretical collaboration. In addition to Godard, ethnological filmmaker Jean Rouch came to the country, to continue his work in Africa on such films as *Moi, un noir* (1959), as did Ruy Guerra, a major figure in the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* who was actually born in Mozambique. Guerra saw returning to the newly-independent country as a patriotic duty, and became director of the country's *National Film Institute*, a body established along the lines of revolutionary Cuba's film industry. All three were, of course, very different types of filmmakers, and had differing concepts of what the project should entail, which was to lead to a significant amount of friction.

What attracted Godard to the concept was his notion of Mozambique as a country which, when it came to images, was “virgin territory” – film and television were unknown, and photography was extremely rare, so most of the population had simply never seen a mechanically reproduced image. Indeed, one can see echoes of projects such as Medvedkin’s “cine-train” in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, filming remote villages and immediately projecting the resultant films to the intrigued peasants. This was not, however, Godard’s first venture to the Third World: in 1968 he visited Cuba, and proposed a project there which was turned down by the Cuban government, while in 1970 he and Jean-Pierre Gorin spent extensive periods of time in Jordan with the Palestinian revolutionary movement in order to make a pro-Fatah film called *Jusqu’à la victoire (Until Victory)*, also left unfinished, with footage later used for *Here and Elsewhere*.

Interestingly, at the time of his Mozambique contract, the other main project Godard was working on, which also failed to reach fruition, was a Hollywood studio movie called *The Story*, centring on the Mafia origins of the Las Vegas gambling industry, to be produced by Francis Ford Coppola and, as Godard had hoped, starring Robert de Niro and Diane Keaton. Godard was manifestly aware of the irony of having two contemporaneous projects at diametrically opposite ends of the cultural power spectrum, remarking in an interview: “In California, you have so many images, and in Mozambique, there are none. 80 percent of the population has never seen an image – only nature. It’s like a child opening his eyes and there’s no code, no sense; he’s just looking. In Mozambique, the image is the raw material. But in Hollywood, the images are so sophisticated you can’t even read them anymore. I live in the middle: I’m more influenced by California, but I have a need to go in the other direction because I want to make my own finished products, not someone else’s.” (Sterritt 1998, 94.)

The meagreness of Mozambique’s resources for the task was also perceptible to Godard. Cameraman Carlos Gambo owned the country’s only film camera, and Godard noted that the total equipment available in the country (in terms of recording and editing facilities) was roughly equivalent to what his Sonimage company (essentially himself and Mièville) possessed: “In other words: just over a couple of people for the little Franco-Swiss company, and just under 13 million people for the big Mozambican society. Two or three people on the margins of television, in order to think television together with 13 million people still on the margins of the world.” (Godard 1979, 76.)

A contract between Sonimage and Mozambique was thus signed, to last two years and involve six or seven voyages by Godard to the country. He saw this

project as an opportunity to: “Profit from the audio-visual situation of the country to study television before it exists, before it inundates [...] the entire social and geographic Mozambican corpus. Study the image, the desire for images (the wish to remember, the wish to show this memory, to make a mark on it) [...] Study the production of these desires for images and their distribution via the airwaves (oh sirens!) or cables. Study, for once, production, before distribution comes into the mix. Study the programmes before making a grid out of them, behind which the spectators will be plonked, who will no longer know that that they are behind the television set [...] and not in front of it as they believe.” (Godard 1979, 73–74.)

Gambo, meanwhile, interviewed in the documentary *Kuxa Kanema*, described the essence of the project as: “We filmed and captured the image of a countrywoman, then we showed her the image to see the reaction of this person who couldn’t read or write. This way, we saw who we needed to make television for. For the peasant or for the intellectual? And if it was to be for everyone, how would we do it?” (Brody 2008, 414.)

In the end, by the middle of the first year of the contract, Godard and Mièville already began to have problems with the project, out of the six to seven trips envisaged, only two were made before they renounced returning to the country.

In a lecture reprinted in *The TVideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard*, African filmmaker and academic Manitha Diawara has given a valuable analysis of the reasons for the project’s failure, and, considering his intimate knowledge of the issues surrounding such a situation, it’s worth quoting him at length: “Many people see Godard as a hero of the liberation of the image and as a creator, an icon of cinema. Initially Guerra welcomed Godard, said ‘this is great let’s work together’ and it started out very well. Later on, however, Guerra felt that Godard was spending too much money on producing and theorising, not actually making his films. [...] With Godard there was too much *mise en scène*, theorising how to position an image in front of a camera, which camera to use, how to do it, etc. It never ended. So again, they were impatient with Godard. Ultimately, the contract was dissolved by the end of the year. There was no bitterness. Godard learned more about cinema: he came to his realisation that in a republic, you can’t make a film. He filmed some of Rouch’s super 8 films, left the equipment in Mozambique and went away.” (Diawara 2003, 105–107.)

And further: “Maybe Godard was not even interested in producing the images as much as he was in trying to define these images, trying to lay the groundwork, preparing the kind of television they should construct given the world situation. This is what he was doing, but what people were expecting (including Godard

himself) was at least some examples of these images: the images we want and need. In some ways for materialists like myself, one can describe this project as a failure because he broke with Guerra and the Mozambican people. In that sense, there was an idea of failure, but for Godard in a way, the project was to provoke thinking about the image and to make people ask themselves, ‘what do we want when we have television?’” (Diawara 2003, 111.)

More broadly, Diawara sees an inherent contradiction between government and creativity: an aesthetically radical filmmaker such as Godard simply could not “function” in an effective manner when tied to a government apparatus, even when run by an avowedly revolutionary regime with which he sympathized. Another likely cause of the project’s failure lay in Godard’s near total unfamiliarity with the country, its history or culture. He could not speak Portuguese, let alone any of Mozambique’s native languages, and simply had no way to interact with the local people in the profound way that his plans required.

Godard did not, however, see there being a particular impediment to the completion of his mooted television series *Birth (of the image) of a Nation*. In *Cahiers* he gave a fascinating précis of the format of the series. Following a “little television team” composed of a producer (a cipher for Godard himself), a television host/photographer (Mièville), a technician and a businessman, the five part series would have the following structure: “Films #1 and #5 will be focussed more particularly on the producer/television host couple, on their reflections far from their home (Film #1) during the shooting [in Mozambique], and then on their feelings upon returning to Europe (Film #5). The producer and the television host will be played by an actor and an actress. Films #2, #3 and #4 will be sketches, travelling diaries, thoughts, drawings, impressions, which express, in Film #2, the perspective of the producer, in Film #3 that of the businessman, and in Film #4 that of the television host/photographer. Film #2 (producer) will essentially be made of video interviews with those who still have never seen any images (the majority of the Mozambican population). Film #3 will be made of documents in Super 8 and 16mm, often projected analytically, like an amateur film made by a businessman for his family. Film #4 will above all be made of photos, mainly black and white ones, expressing the perspective of the photographer.” (Godard 1979, 77.)

Probably the most interesting aspects of this scheme are the inventiveness involved in attempting to salvage a project which had yielded only a small proportion of the images that had been initially foreseen, and the range of image formats envisaged by Godard: video, Super 8 and 16mm film, stills, drawings and documents are all proposed to be utilized.

Godard also proposed a range of distribution formats, with the five television episodes accompanied by cinema screenings showing episodes #1 and #5 back-to-back, which, given projected episode lengths of 50 minutes to an hour, would have made for a feature length release. Delivery of the series was expected by December 1979. However, along with the Hollywood project (which unsurprisingly was unable to attract the participation of De Niro and Keaton), it was abandoned in favour of a comeback in the French cinema with *Slow Motion*, which precipitated the end of Sonimage's television work.

The rest of this paper will be devoted to looking at the "Report on Voyage No. 2A of the Sonimage Company in Mozambique," an "Annex" of *Last Dream of a Producer* which comprises the last 50 of its 60 pages, and relates, in the form of a diary/photo-essay, Godard's impressions of the trip he and Mièville made between August 24 and September 4, 1978.

The first important thing to note is the form, and in particular the combination of text and image. This particular form of juxtaposing the written word with images has been a hallmark of Godard's œuvre since at least *Le Gai Savoir* (1969), and has been central to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98) among other later works. In particular, a hierarchy elevating either text or image to an authoritative status is absent in Godard's practice. The image does not serve to illustrate what the text is saying, nor does the text function as a caption, elucidating the context of what the image is presenting, but rather, text and image exist in constant tension to each other, in what Jacques Rancière has called a "sentence-image." (Rancière 2007, 45.) The images themselves have been criticized by Richard Brody for being "no more revealing than souvenir snapshots," (Brody 2008, 414) but I personally found them to have a strong resonance, with some attaining a rare lyrical power.

Secondly, the diary form of the texts lends the work a very confessional tone, and Godard often conveys a distinctly self-critical attitude to his involvement in the project, highlighting his self-perceived inadequacy in dealing with potential collaborators, let alone subjects. For instance, in a taut, telegraphic style, he writes: "Wednesday, August 30, 1978: Attempt to shoot video at the market. Not very productive. Material not sophisticated enough to record the beauty of the colours. Too cumbersome to film 'on the run'. And this young girl probably finds the so-called white 'sorcerer' ridiculous as he pointlessly gets himself worked up." (Godard 1979, 103.) [Fig. 1.]

In the end, three themes come out clearly from the diary, which manifest themselves at different points in the work.

The first is Godard's idea that the practical questions surrounding the establishment of an audio-visual culture had immediate theoretical and political ramifications. Mozambicans are shown peering at or fiddling with the various pieces of equipment required to run a television station, and fundamental problems such as training people to fix the equipment when it breaks down are raised. For Godard, the very fact that, for instance, the sound recording equipment is manufactured by Sony means that imperialist dominance over Mozambique's image production is already implanted – true independence is still a long way off, even, or especially, on a cultural level. Such choices have deep ramifications, as Godard later states: "Pal or Secam. France or Germany. Senegal or South Africa. Production first or broadcasting first. An image of me for others, or an image of others for me." (Godard 1979, 105.)

This associative thought process continues throughout the piece, as another extract demonstrates: "The signal. Traces. Illness, health, beauty. Formation, creation of forms, information. Memories. What goes well and what goes bad. How it goes well. How it goes bad. Inspection and diagnosis. Vague thoughts and clear images." (Godard 1979, 85.) [Fig. 2.]

An additional theme is demonstrated with the above image, accompanied by the caption "Always 2 for 1 image." The concept of "One dividing into two" was a Maoist precept positing the infinite process of division within the dialectical conception of the universe (and was thus counter-posed to "Two goes into one" which saw the universe as undergoing a process of unification). It was taken up with gusto by Godard during his Maoist period, but even after his militancy waned, the notion still left numerous fertile traces in his later video work. In episode 5B of *Six fois deux*, for example, he objects to the mathematician René Thom in an interview for adhering to a version of the "Two goes into one" theory. Here it is clear that the "Two" that are required to make an image are the European, endowed with technical knowledge (i.e. cultural capital), and the African, who is to be instilled with this knowledge. Even with the best intentions, therefore, the cultural hegemony of the European cannot simply be wished away, as is shown by the following photo of a project meeting at the Electronic Centre, attended by "everyone", and exclusively composed of Europeans. [Fig. 3.]

Indeed, Godard himself acknowledged this fact with this photo of the shooting of an athletics event, accompanied by the text: "An image not to be seen any more. The white 'Bwana.' The specialist." (Godard 1979, 95.) [Fig. 4.]

The concept of an image made by two is shared by his collaboration efforts through the 1970s, first with Jean-Pierre Gorin, and subsequently with Mièville,

and his summation of the experience is: “Power of images. Abuse of power, Always be two to watch an image, and split the difference between the two. Image as proof. Image as justice, as the result of an accord.” (Godard 1979, 125.)

The third “theme” dominates the end of the sequence and concerns the children of Mozambique. Godard’s interest in children and their relationship with the image was already central to his work *France/détour*, and here the images of Mozambican children encountered by chance constitute one of the highlights of the work. Godard describes his experience thus: “En route to the village where the comrades with the Super 8 stock are going to project their film. Stop on the banks of the Limpopo River. Children. A Polaroid colour instamatic. The first image. Of men. And of women.” (Godard 1979, 119.)

We then are shown a young Mozambican being schooled in the techniques of camera operation and TV presentation, as clear parallels are made between the youthfulness of the Mozambican population, and its “newborn” status as a nation, having only just won independence. One image in particular strongly recalls the opening credits of *France/détour*. [Figs. 5–6.]

Last Dream of a Producer ends with the following catechism: “Who is responsible for oppression remaining? We are. Who is responsible for oppression disappearing? We are.” (Godard 1979, 127.) This is juxtaposed with perhaps the most enigmatic yet strangely moving image of the entire work: a young Mozambican child, cast half in shadow, looks, entranced, towards his right. [Fig. 7.]

That this project has left a profound mark on Godard’s subsequent work, despite the failure of both the contract to be fulfilled and the television series to be completed, can be shown by the way Godard later utilized the material in a montage sequence lasting roughly two minutes, beginning 26 minutes into Episode 2A (*Une histoire seule*) of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which incorporated the following images taken from his time in Mozambique: see Figs. 8–10.

The planned work’s long-term value can also be testified by the theoretical document drawn up by Godard in response to the situation in which he found himself. Partly reprinted in translated form in MacCabe’s 1980 monograph, and described by him as “one of the clearest statements of Godard’s thinking on television,” (MacCabe 1980, 138) the statement contained a section entitled “Principles of reflection,” which we reproduce here. [Fig. 11.]

When asked by MacCabe, in the same book, as to the prospects of founding a radical alternative to the dominant practice of television networks in Third World countries such as Mozambique, Godard taciturnly responded: “There was a chance. A chance. It’s over.” (1979, 156.) By that point the project’s failure had

evidently become apparent to him. And yet we hope to have shown that the experience in Mozambique not only left behind a number of fascinating trace documents – worthy of analysis in their own right – but that it has also informed much of Godard’s subsequent work in video and in the cinema.

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Figures 7–8. Image in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 300 and in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Episode 2A

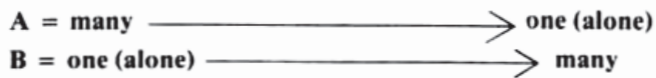


Figures 9–10. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Episode 2A



Figure 11. Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics

that's to say:

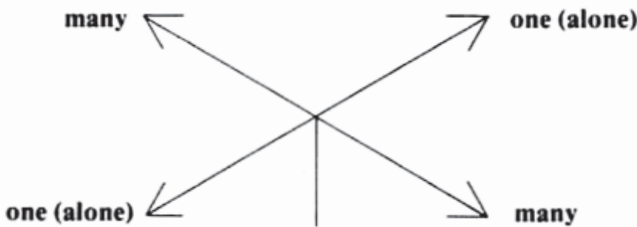


that's to say:

journey out (aller) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from cinema} \\ \text{to TV} \end{array} \right\}$ or $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from A} \\ \text{to B} \end{array} \right\}$ or $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from many} \\ \text{to one (alone)} \end{array} \right\}$

return (retour) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from TV} \\ \text{to cinema} \end{array} \right\}$ or $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from B} \\ \text{to A} \end{array} \right\}$ or $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{from one (alone)} \\ \text{to many} \end{array} \right\}$

thus the following schema:



Sonimage is situated at the crossing between the departure and the arrival of information.

Sonimage is a manufacturer of light in the sense of throwing light on a situation to see it clearly or, on the contrary, to draw the veil.



Intermediality as Metalepsis in the “Cinéécriture” of Agnès Varda

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Abstract. In this article I propose to examine the different ways in which Varda’s films accomplish a kind of metaleptic leap between levels of “fiction” and “reality,” of hypermediacy and immediacy, and to present this as an alternative to the techniques involving metalepsis used by the most famous representative of the generation of French New Wave filmmakers, Jean-Luc Godard. I have found that, most of the times, for Varda cinema is defined as an “artifice” between two layers of the “real:” the reality of herself, the personal world of the author-narrator and the reality captured by *cinéma vérité* style cinematography. Intermediality in these films serves as a “figuration” that on the one hand performs these metaleptic leaps from immediacy to stylized representation/hypermediacy, and on the other hand “figures” the impossibility of such a leap. Among the films referred to in the analysis are *L’opéra-mouffe* (an effective collage of photographic *flânerie* and concept-art), *Ulysse* (a narrative-dramatic ekphrasis of a photograph), *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir* (inspired by an exhibition entitled *The Living and The Artificial*), *Histoire d’une vieille dame* (a sort of cinematic *objet-trouvé* recovered from the shooting of *Sans toit ni loi*), *Daguerréotypes* (a controversial documentary), *Happiness* (a fiction film that shocked its contemporary audience with its unusual approach to adultery), *The Beaches of Agnes* (an autobiographical essay film), etc.

1. New Wave Cinema and Metalepsis

Agnès Varda, who was first referred to as “the grandmother of the New Wave” when she was merely 30 years old, turned 81 in 2009, and has finally lived up to her reputation of being the “grandmother” of the famous French New Wave, perhaps not so much in the sense of being the ancestor of the “New Wave” as it was once suggested, but in the sense of becoming one of the most creative and uncompromising surviving members of the legendary generation of filmmakers. Her recent film, *The Beaches of Agnes* (*Les Plages d’Agnes*, 2008), is not only a

playful and ironic re-evaluation of her life, but also, inevitably, a remembrance of the New Wave. The success of this film renewed the critical interest in her own artistic work, and in a way also launched a challenge for a wider re-evaluation of what New Wave filmmakers were all about, what their real legacy consists of. In setting myself the task of such a re-evaluation, I have found that Varda's films are thought-provoking not only because she herself became almost obsessed with conceiving filmmaking as a kind of ritual act of remembrance, but also from another, more theoretical viewpoint: that of re-evaluating our concepts about *intermediality*, *hypermediacy* and their correlations with *immediacy*, or what we perceive as *reality*.

Post-structuralist literary and cultural theories often emphasize the *constructed* and *mediated* nature of all our experiences and the short circuiting of "texts" into "texts." New Wave films, mostly those of Godard have frequently been quoted as examples for such a hypermediated experience in which the viewer is forced to navigate through an almost inscrutable maze of images and texts. The famous *cinéphilie* of the French New Wave directors resulted in their films being packed with quotations and references to all kinds of films, while at the same time – being extremely well read authors as well – their films also abound in literary quotations. Characters move in rooms with reproductions of famous paintings, listen to classical music or jazz, drop hints at different contemporary cultural or political events, and so on. In one word, these films present an intricate web of references and a multiple layering of significations, being perfect examples of a world constructed of "signs" and "texts." But at the same time, we must also acknowledge that the New Wave's other trademark techniques – the preference for natural lighting, for shooting with hand-held camera on authentic locations (streets, pubs, public places) providing the viewer a sense of "naturalness" in contrast with the Hollywood tradition of glamorous lighting effects and artificial studio sets – acted exactly the opposite way, counterbalancing the effect of these multilayered "textual" environments. New Wave cinema's famous *cinéma vérité* technique itself combined the spontaneity of filming things "as they are found" with a self-reflexive element of recognizing the medium's (the camera's, the crew's) intrusion into the "natural" world, of the coexistence of the medium's artifice with the "reality" it captured (and created).

In fact, what we see in French New Wave cinema seems to confirm some of the ideas that surfaced in more recent studies on the nature of mediation in general and which insist on the real, (inter)active presence of media in our contemporary lives and on the experience that links "reality" to media. In this respect, I think

that the films of both Godard and Varda offer ample material for such a reassessment of our general ideas on hypermediacy, and more importantly, for a closer research into those *figurations of intermediality*¹ that combine hypermediacy with effects of immediacy. And from this perspective I have found that the seesaw experience, alternating the illusions of the “real” (the seemingly unmediated) and the “represented” (i.e. framed, constructed media “texts”) that has been a trademark of both Jean-Luc Godard’s and Varda’s New Wave films can remind us of the technique called *metalepsis*.²

Metalepsis, as we know, can be considered either a rhetorical figure or a narrative device. As a rhetorical figure it refers to various kinds of complex figures or tropes that are figurative to the second or third degree: meaning that they involve a figure that either refers us to yet another figure or requires a further imaginative leap to establish its reference (this “leap” can also be to a literary reference, resulting in a sophisticated form of allusion).³ In more recent interpretations, those of John Hollander and Harold Bloom, for example, metalepsis appears as a figure of literary influence or legacy. In Paul De Man’s theory of figuration it is one of the key models, a sort of figure of figuration itself.⁴ When Gérard Genette⁵ extended the use of the rhetorical term metalepsis and transformed it into a narratological concept (that is: transposed the notion “from figure to fiction”), he started from the idea that fiction itself is an extension of the logic of the trope (the figure of speech) that always relies on our capacity to imagine something “as if it were real.” In his view, the main feature of metalepsis is that it performs a paradoxical loop between the ontological levels of the “real” and the “fictional,” and as Genette emphasized, this feature is often highlighted in metafictional works by the introduction of a fantastic element (for example: the screen actor stepping out of the projected film in Woody Allen’s film, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, 1985). As a narrative device, therefore, following Genette’s arguments, it is most commonly understood as a means of “breaking the frame” that separates distinct ‘levels’ of a narrative, usually between an embedded tale and primary story, or as a way in which an author transgresses into the narrative.

¹ For we have to bear in mind that according to Joachim Paech (2002), intermediality, as such, always manifests itself as a kind of “*figuration*,” a figuration that inscribes or re-inscribes medial difference.

² I have already discussed some of the aspects regarding such figurations in a previous article entitled *(Re)Mediating the Real. Paradoxes of an Intermedial Cinema of Immediacy* (2009).

³ For a comprehensive definition of the term metalepsis (*μετάληψις*, *transsumptio*) see Baldick (2001, 152/3).

⁴ See a current evaluation of these theories by Brian Cummings (2007).

⁵ Cf. Gérard Genette: *Métalepse: De la figure à la fiction* (2004).

Genette's narrative reinterpretation of the classical trope has inspired extensive researches into identifying a great variety of other forms of metaleptic leaps in literature, in film (cf. Campora 2009), in diverse forms of popular culture,⁶ and even in video games (cf. Harpold 2007).⁷ Although research articles analyzing specific metaleptic instances that we see in films are not as numerous as the ones referring to literature, we can say that in the last decade the term "metalepsis" has been widely used by film criticism, albeit mainly with a somewhat simplified meaning referring to a structure of "world within a world" and any kind of jump between diegetic and non-diegetic worlds.

What I would like to examine in this article is the way in which the intermedialization of the cinematic discourse can also act as a metaleptic force within a film *both* as a *figure* and as a *narrative device*. What is more, I have found that this angle seems extremely fruitful in approaching the "cinematic writing" ("*cinécriture*")⁸ of the films of Agnès Varda. So, in what follows, I will examine some of the techniques that can be interpreted as *metaleptic occurrences involving intermediality* used by Varda and compare them to the perhaps the better known model of Jean-Luc Godard.

2. Intermediality as Metalepsis: Leaps between Immediacy and Hypermediacy

2.1. A collage of the "real/immediate" and of the "(hyper)mediated"

In Godard's films very often we have street images or domestic scenes in which "life" is shown against a backdrop of a visible text (a collage of texts) or a fixed image: life appears as framed by artifice, characters moving in a context populated by different media images and texts. In this we can see a thematization not only

⁶ See in this respect the conference on the topic of "Metalepsis in Popular Culture" at Neuchâtel held between 25. 06. 2009–27. 06. 2009, which provided a platform for discussions about metalepsis observed in cartoons, TV shows or popular comedy films.

⁷ See a theoretical assessment of the possibilities of using metalepsis as a transgeneric and trans-medial concept also by Werner Wolf (2005).

⁸ "Cinécriture" is a complex word coined by Varda herself. It is in fact a kind of intermedial notion combining the idea of cinematic authorship (comparable to that of literary authorship) with the use of specific cinematic techniques rendering a distinct cinematic style. As Varda herself and her interpreters have stressed many times, it relies on the basic ideas that: "A well-written film is also well filmed, the actors are well chosen, and so are the locations. The cutting, the movement, the points of view, the rhythm of filming, and editing have been felt and considered in a way a writer chooses the depth of meaning of sentences, the type of words, number of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or break the flow, etc." (Cf. Smith 1998, 14, and also Hurd 2007, 131.)

of the since well exploited topic that consumerism and media shape our daily activities, but also a presentation of how the metalepsis of “artifice” and “life” is in fact becoming part of the real, the everyday experience in our lives. Early Godard films, like *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960), *A Married Woman* (*Une femme mariée*, 1964), *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à part*, 1962), etc. are full of such images. Just consider the well-known scene from the 1962 film *My Life to Live* (*Vivre sa vie*) [Figs. 1–2.] where we see Nana, the young prostitute, standing in the street in front of a collage of posters. The frame consisting of the posters in the background with the fragmented sentences and jumbled up words emphasizes artifice, a world constructed by visible signs that need deciphering.⁹ As a result, Nana is also collaged into the posters, her figure projected onto this background is partly reduced to a mere visible sign (an image of a prostitute), however, the composition also highlights the “ontological” collage between the real life figure and the inanimate composition of signs in the background. In the filmic sequence the shot is followed by the countershot of the image of the passing cars in the street (that Nana is looking at), the incessant and spontaneous stream of traffic captured in *cinéma vérité* style cinematography. Godard stages a fine “dialogue” through Nana between the cluster of disjointed, artificial signs on the one side (the abstract collage of the posters), and the continuous flow of images of “life” contrasting with this on the other side. Something similar is achieved in the composition that we see in *A Married Woman* [Figs. 3–4] in which Macha Méril appears in front of a giant poster. In this case the “real life” figure is again framed by an artificial representation. The uncanny effect on the viewer is the result of the differences in the scale of the images of the two women (the huge poster towering over the “real” figure), as well as the perceived ontological difference between them (“life” and “representation”). In both cases Godard not only contrasts the “real” with the “mediated” but also plays with their paradoxes: the “real” Nana can be perceived as a mere representation of a prostitute, and Charlotte, the married woman is shown in earlier frames just like the poster girl advertising women’s underwear, while the posters, the collages of street life are shown as not only highly realistic, but integral parts of “life” itself.

The same collage-effect is used by Varda in many of her films, but with different emphasis. Whereas with Godard such a metalepsis can be perceived as basic figure within the sequence of images (initiating a metafictional level of

⁹ It has also often been interpreted as a puzzle: analyses of the scene often derive meaning from the significations that can be attributed to the possible intertextual references hidden in these fragments (i.e. the reference to the Paul Newman film with the French title *L'arnaqueur*, etc.)

interpretation about reality and representation), Varda uses it in an astonishing variety of ways. Already in Varda's first feature film we have a narrative extension of this technique: the use of parallel story lines of "fiction" and "reality" rendered in the double intermedial transgression into literature and still photography. *The Pointe Courte* (*La Pointe Courte*), made in 1954, consists of the intertwining of two distinct story lines and stylistic worlds: a realistic, *cinéma vérité* portrayal of the fishermen (real life people captured in their own authentic environment who consciously act out their own lives in front of the camera) plus the fictional story of a couple on the verge of breaking up, presented in a stylized manner, the whole script being written under the influence of Faulkner's double narrative structure of the *Wild Palms*. The stylization of the fictional story line lies actually in both the audio and the visual rendering of the story. The actors were instructed to deliver the finely elaborated dialogues without any psychological realism, and the artificiality of this "recital" of lines by the actors was also underscored by the rift between sound and image: the dialogues can be heard just like a voice over narration, with a total lack of sound perspective. The visual compositions in which the couple appears are again constructed without following the conventional dramatic purposes. This stylized manner of presentation, however, achieves a level of "directness" in rendering a feeling of alienation and unease that dominates the couple's relationship. The images rendering the "real" story line are also paradoxically, highly artistic: the fishermen's life appears in carefully constructed imagery in which almost every frame could be taken in itself as a powerful photographic representation of the world of the village of Pointe Courte. Thus the "realistic" images open up the medium of moving images towards the art of still photography, while the "fictional" story (through the Faulknerian undertones and the literary sounding dialogues) breaks the cinematic frame towards literature. The double leap into intermediality expresses both the distance of Varda herself from the world portrayed (the view of an outsider who has a basic training in photography) and her empathy (or nostalgia for "immediacy") with a world she tries to reach through the means she is most familiar with: literature and the finest art of photography, the detachment we feel in the stylizations is balanced by the passion of the filmmaker for her art and her subject that is "palpable" throughout the film.

Her short film entitled *Opera Mouffe* (*L'opéra-mouffe*, 1958) combines the levels of the "real" and of the "mediated" in an even more radical way. The film is an effective collage of genuine photographic *flânerie*, *cinéma vérité* on the one hand, and *concept-art* on the other. Varda, who was pregnant at the time of making

the film,¹⁰ alternates street images taken of the Rue Mouffetard in the course of several months in a *cinéma vérité* manner with clearly “fictitious” visual compositions, carefully staged imagery expressing her own feelings towards love and pregnancy. The flow of images captured in the course of several walks taken in the neighbourhood of Rue Mouffetard is centred around the motif of the gaze: the gaze of the camera that records the images of the street and singles out the faces and other details in its own “mechanical ballet” and the gaze of the passers by who acknowledge the presence of the camera by staring into the lens and thus making eye contact with us, the spectators of the spectacle of the street. [Figs. 9–10.] The images of the people populating the Rue Mouffetard are, however, not randomly presented, they are edited in specific pace and musical rhythm (hence the reference to the musical structure in the title: “l’opéra”), and also around some repetitive visual motifs (movements and gestures of the passers-by) that confer the whole sequence an air of buffoonery of grotesque charm parading an impressive variety of faces (hence the allusion to “opéra bouffe”¹¹), and that ultimately stage what we could see as a modernist cinematic “comédie humaine,” a study of human condition from the subjective perspective of a woman filmmaker (with emphasis on both terms).

The “artistic” compositions on the other hand, were considered unusually bold at the time with associations that shocked contemporary viewers (the belly of the pregnant woman compared in subsequent shots to a pumpkin that was sliced open, the nude bodies and the “love scene”). [Figs. 11–12.] The complex feelings of Varda towards the idea of pregnancy and towards her own body, towards a sensation of the body in general and the complex relationship binding sensual, bodily experiences with the spiritual are rendered in an imagery constructed of dreamlike sequences, painterly compositions and conceptual installations of visual art transferred to film. [Figs. 13–16.]

This “personal touch” or “idiosyncratic subjectivity” seen here will become one of the defining features of Varda’s art: this is only one of the first examples in which Varda starts from her own deepest personal experiences but reworks them in a unique, stylized manner that nevertheless retains both the qualities of subjectivity along with a sense of conceptual detachment resulting from the techniques of abstraction.

As a true-blood *flâneuse*, Varda repeatedly records her walks in Paris, incorporating extensive walking sequences not only into her well-known fictional

¹⁰ The film is also known with the English title: *Diary of a Pregnant Woman*.

¹¹ “Opéra bouffe” can be described as a short amusing piece of opera, a genre of late 19th century French operetta known for its elements of comedy, satire, and farce.

feature film, *Cleo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*, 1962), but into several other films that she made along the years. Rue Daguerre, the street that she has lived in ever since the 1950s has become a recurring “muse” for her artistic mix of *flânerie* and abstraction. In one of her major works, made in the seventies, explicitly intended to chronicle her experiences linked to this street, Varda also betrays an increased interest in an already dated form of photography, the *daguerreotype*. In fact, we can say that here, in this controversially received documentary entitled *Daguerreotypes* (1976), the *daguerreotype* emerges as a key model for the kind of *personalized, fetishistic and artistic* cinema that she practices.

The documentary records the lives of the inhabitants of the Rue Daguerre, as Varda strolls along the street with her camera, accompanies her daughter visiting the shops, engages in everyday conversation with the shop-owners, and observes minute details about the locations, the activities, the faces, the hairdos, the peculiarities of her own neighbourhood. This “first person approach” and realistic representation is, however, once more combined with meticulously elaborated artifice. Varda alternates the spontaneous, *cinéma vérité* style cinematography with a visibly staged performance (scenes envisaged as if conjured up by a magician), and compositional structures reminding us of the framing techniques of still photography made within a studio, and in the early years of the photographic techniques when the taking of each picture still constituted a sophisticated social event. We see people posing for the camera in motionless postures in front of their shops or counters, with the emblems of their profession as if posing for a *daguerreotype*. [Figs. 17–20.] At the same time these real life (moving) images – that often acquire a quality of stillness as a result of the poses for the camera – get to be mixed with actual still images that also “populate” the world of these people (the advertisements, labels and all the other kinds of pictures that are “consumed” and used for decoration and self-identification by these people and that Varda visibly enjoys to photograph together with her subjects). [Figs. 21–22.] The shots in which people are portrayed in the same frame with these commercial representations are playful and funny, and the vision offered of Rue Daguerre becomes in this way generously all inclusive: people are pictured in symbiosis with the images of their times, the faces and postures are compared, life seems to imitate “art,” the awareness of the “image” quality of these visual representations appears as integral part of the complexity of sensuous experiences that emerge from Varda’s cinema, along with the references to various scents (that we almost feel in the small perfumery shop), or the haptic qualities of the image resulting from a sense of texture and touch (most evident in the images of the beauty shop).

In principle, the technique of combining still photography and moving pictures resembles that of Godard's, nevertheless the use is different. Varda's whole “cinéécriture” in this work seems to be conceived in the spirit of the *daguerreotype*: the film is meant to document the spirit of a place captured as intact as possible but also framed. As we know, the daguerreotype was an unusually lifelike representation with its hologram-like features, but at the same time it was also a highly constructed image that required a lot of patience from the part of both the photographer and the model. Moreover, it was a unique image and not a mechanical reproduction. Its long exposure time made it an imprint not merely of reality but also of an elevated moment in time, something that resulted in an object to be treasured. Unlike a snapshot that captures a fleeting moment, a daguerreotype had to be planned and composed, like a painter composes a picture on the canvas. Varda, who even declares herself at one point “la daguerreotypesse,” has found that this kind of paradoxical “painting of reality” represents the indexicality of cinematography in a pure form with a fascinating fusion of the “real” and the “artificial.”

In her short film, *Seven Rooms, Kitchen and Bath (7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir*, 1984) the collage effect of the artificial, the documentary and the personal is even more extreme. This time Varda is inspired by an exhibition entitled *The Living and the Artificial* created by Louis Bec¹² in 1984. She uses the location and the bizarre collection of puppets, sculptures and paintings on display as her setting and as her props for filming a series of free associative images and dreamlike dramatic scenes of a family life loosely based on her own personal memories related to her parental home. [Figs. 23–28.] The “living” can thus be interpreted as both the fiction brought to life by her film (she feels free to imagine all kinds of “slices of life” associated to the lifeless but extremely lifelike puppets of the exhibition) and her personal “reality” behind the surrealistic imagery. And despite the fact that she appropriates props from another artist's exhibition and wraps the whole film into a fictitious frame of an apartment being put on sale and shown to the visitors (the spectators of the film) by an invisible narrator, the film becomes one of Varda's most spontaneous works, as she herself declared in many interviews, a product of uninhibited subjective imagination.

The film highlights in this way how the metalepsis between “reality” and “fiction,” hypermediacy and immediacy has always had a double fold in Varda's cinema. It seems that, for Varda, cinema is defined as an “artifice” between two layers

¹² Louis Bec, born in Algeria and living in France, a lifelong friend of the philosopher Vilém Flusser, is an artist, a curator and a scientist working in the fields of biology and artificial life. Not surprisingly, Varda who is herself interested in techniques of mixing the real with the artificial, finds his ideas of merging the biological with the technological captivating.

of the “real:” the reality of herself, the individual world of the first person author and the reality captured – most of the times – by *cinéma vérité* style cinematography. The credit sequence of *Daguerreotypes*, which can also be interpreted as an effective cinematic paraphrase of *Las Meninas*, is an emblematic image in this respect that sums up the essence of this type of metalepsis in her films [Fig. 29].¹³ The image presents the screen as a semi-transparent veil (or glass pane) – a “film” that is in fact both a transparent and a reflective surface – placed between the filmmakers’ team and the reality that is the object of their movie, and also, implicitly, between the filmmakers and spectators who share their voyeuristic positions as if in a mirror. Varda captures in this way not only the two “real” sides of cinema in a single image (a self portrait of herself and the other filmmakers who gaze into the camera and at the world that the camera records, the world that is reflected in the transparent “film” image) but also the artificial nature of the “veil” that displays the movie itself, both through the analogy of the sheet of paper on which the credits are inscribed and where a visual word play can also be made, and also through the artifice of the whole composition itself that condenses elements from Varda’s own backyard (i.e. the pot of geranium) and the cans of the film stock piled up in front of the crew. Thus ultimately all of the above amounts to a sophisticated installation that combines “the living with the artificial,” and mixes the “immediate,” highly personal, subjective gaze with “hypermediated,” constructed forms of representations in a self-reflexive image that folds onto one another multiple layers of reality and fiction.¹⁴

¹³ *Las Meninas*, a 1656 painting by Diego Velázquez is considered a complex and enigmatic composition that raises questions about the nature of representation itself. The interpretations focus on the self-reflexive aspects of the painting in which the painter paints his own act of painting and also on the different points of focalization that the picture offers to the viewer. The object of the represented painter’s gaze (the subject of his painting) is invisible; however, we can catch a glimpse of it in the mirror placed behind the painter on the wall. In Foucault’s analysis (1970), what lies outside the painting gives meaning to what we see inside the frame. The king and queen reflected in the mirror and standing outside the space of the painting constitute in fact the centre of the depicted scene. They “create this spectacle-as-observation” by providing the “centre around which the entire representation is ordered” (Foucault 1970, 14). Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen (1980) have challenged Foucault’s interpretation by analyzing the spatial structure of the painting, and arriving at the conclusion that the image seen in the mirror is not a direct reflection of the real figures of the royal couple (the models of the painting), but a reflection of the painting lying on the canvas in front of the painter. In such an interpretation the painting is no longer a representation of classical representation as Foucault claimed, but is more like a “hall of mirrors” in which the role of the painter emerges as a controlling authority (instead of the authority of the king), and representations mirror each other within the representation. Varda’s shot has several parallels with Velázquez’s painting: the self-reflecting image of Varda and her crew in the process of making the film (thus becoming models themselves), the “outside” of picture reflected in the “inside,” the plane of the “canvas” lying in between Varda’s crew and the “outside” world. However, the fact that the “canvas” in this case occupies the whole frame, and is actually like a windowpane (that is both see-through and mirror-like), makes it an adequate representation of the paradox of filmic representation itself: both of its transparent and of its non-transparent nature (that makes it analogous to a painting or to a sheet of paper).

¹⁴ This conscious combination of documentary style and artifice is acknowledged by the word play in the title of her lesser known fiction film, *Documenteur* made by Varda in 1981. The pun mixes the

2.2. Intermediality as a Metaleptic Leap into the Domain of the “Figural”

Henk Oosterling (2003) claims, under the strong direct influence of Lyotard’s idea of the *figural* and of the *sublime*, that intermedial occurrences belong to the domain of the “figural” and also, that they can in fact “figure” something infigurable, “incommensurable.” In fact, we can observe ourselves that Lyotard’s argument around the notion of the figural has certain key notions that make it easily connectable to the discourse on intermediality. First of all there is the idea that the figural challenges the order of discourse but is not simply opposed to the discursive. It can be seen – to quote the interpretation offered by Readings (1991, xxiv) – as an action that “opens up” discursive works to “a radical heterogeneity or singularity,” a singularity that is “excess of any meanings we may assign to it” (Readings 1991, 4), or as other interpreters have put it: the figural “injects opacity into the discursive realm,” working against “the self-sufficiency of discursive meaning, introducing an unassimilable heterogeneity into putatively homogenous discourse” (Jay 2006, 142). Lyotard formulates his ideas “in defence of the eye” and in defence of the non-discursive and sensual domains of human communication, yet finds that it is manifest on both sides of the word and image (figure) dichotomy, where it acts like a chiasmus,¹⁵ so ultimately discourse and figure are mutually implicated. The figural in this way resonates well with the basic assumptions of intermediality claiming that all communication is multimedial and challenging the idea of monomedial texts. Moreover, the key notions of “opening up,”¹⁶ “transgression” or “disruption” that describe the action of the figural over discourse are also applicable to the way intermediality is supposed to “work” within a text: intermedial occurrences can be perceived as metaleptic figures that are meant to perform exactly such “disruptions” of the logic of discourse and “transgressions” into the domain of the figural. Studying the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda, I have found that the “figural” can function in more than one fashion within a cinema relying on techniques of

paradoxical meanings of the French words “documentaire” (meaning: “documentary”) and “menteur” (meaning: “liar”). In this film, made by Varda while temporarily staying in the US with her husband, Jacques Demy, she explores within a fictional story the experiences of a French woman in Los Angeles (an autobiographical character) who lives with her son (played in the movie by her own real life son, Mathieu).

¹⁵ See Rodowick’s ideas (2001) elaborating on the nature of the chiasmus involved in the figural, or see Lyotard’s own famous example of the figural acting as a “force that erodes the distinction between letter and line.”

¹⁶ Cf. Joki van de Poel’s hypothesis about intermedial processes in a 2005 thesis written at the University of Utrecht with the title: *Opening up Worlds: Intermediality Reinterpreted*, and posted online (<http://www.ethesis.net/worlds/worlds.htm>, last date of access: 25 April, 2010.)

intermediality. In what follows, I will discuss three ways in which intermediality achieves such a metaleptic leap into the “figural.”

a) Discourse disrupted by the figural

This is the case in which we have a metaleptic sequence of images in which the “real” cinematic image is associated for instance with a painting, conveying in this way a less than clear (“opaque”) meaning, a feeling of being propelled onto a more surreal level where it is impossible to formulate an exact, discursive meaning. This is mainly how the famous inserts of paintings work in Godard’s movies. The unusually fragmented narrative of *Pierrot Gone Mad* (*Pierrot le fou*, 1965) is full of such unexpected inserts of paintings, for example, that pop up without any dramatic or contextual motivation. [Figs. 30–33.] If we contrast these examples for instance with Varda’s famous simile from *L’opéra mouffe* of a pregnant woman’s belly resembling a pumpkin [see Figs. 11–12.] we see that Varda’s is a shocking pair of images, but a rather straight-forward metaphor, while Godard’s associations of paintings are clearly visual metalepses. In other cases, however, Varda uses similarly metaleptic images that operate with the same effect of “opacity” within the cinematic discourse (like the ones with the conceptual “installations” – see Figs. 13–16).

In Varda’s latest autobiographical essay film, *The Beaches of Agnes*, for instance, we find not only one, but three variations of this metaleptic structure. The first type resembles the most the example taken from Godard’s *Pierrot Gone Mad*, and can be seen in the scene in which Varda recalls her love for her husband, Jacques Demy. The scene begins as a free association starting from some old film cards about French film directors (among them Varda and Demy) found at the flea market and continues with series of shots paraphrasing Magritte’s famous painting of the lovers with their faces covered with a white cloth. [Figs. 34–35.] However, this sequence is more than a simple association of ideas that result in a metaleptic leap from representation to memory, and from memory to life (the cardboard heads of Varda and Demy contrasted with the naked body of the lovers, implicitly: schematic representation opposed to flesh), it is also an intermedial play with the moving image and the moving bodies that she shows first in a travelling shot seen in naturalistic colour, then in a painterly artificial coloration, and finally freezing the frame into a still, black and white composition. The outcome – in contrast to Magritte’s panting – is a sequence full of movement in all senses of the word (movement of the camera, of the bodies, the changes in the quality of the image), and that manages to convey something that cannot be easily expressed in words

or even in just one image, may that be as complex as Magritte’s enigmatic painting.

Then there are the images of the elaborate installations that Varda repeatedly includes in the film [Figs. 36–37] and that she repeatedly includes herself in, both as an artist and as a model.¹⁷ These “constructions” that she makes and that she films in the making are meant to serve the same purpose: by way of these images of sophisticated structures being put together by Varda on the beach – using mirrors, found objects and colourful veils and frames – discursive remembering lapses into the domain of the figural, or – in a self-reflexive way – the workings of memory itself are figured.

Finally, in the images in which Varda tries to capture the complexity of emotions she feels for her children and grandchildren, she again resorts to intermedial imagery. The “infigurable” quality of the subject is also stressed by the fact that Varda is not satisfied with only one version; she offers us two alternative renderings of the same “idea.” In each case instead of a traditional family portrait she constructs an artificial collage of cinema, photography and painting, clearly indicating the “singularity” of this figuration. In the first version she stages a photo shoot of her children and grandchildren using a large tree as a background (as if to suggest the image of the “family tree”), but also places different paintings between the branches disrupting the natural scenery with refined artifice, and continues these images with a scene of moving images placed as if on the tree top. [Figs. 38–39.] The people in the image step lightly as if on a cloud, dancing away in a setting that combines the visual elements of trees, grass and painted background. In the second version the image of the family appears as a vision projected within the frame of an abstract painting on the wall of Varda’s study. Here the dancing figures have the sea as the background and the dancing waves. The whole scene performs a chiasmus: first we have the realistic film image with the abstract painting on the wall, and then the abstract painting becomes filled with “realistic” movement inside the multiple frames remaining of the original texture emphasizing a heterotopic spatiality. [Figs. 40–41.]

In both cases Varda starts with a conventional film scene that she then “disrupts” by way of intermedial techniques and that in this way becomes less “readable” and more open towards the synesthetic qualities of the image (the “traditional” family portrait gets disseminated into an amalgam of movements, colours, sounds, textures). The images acquire at the same time, a more eerie atmosphere and a spiritual charge, in the end the figures of Varda herself and her

¹⁷ This is not the first example of Varda’s newfound interest in installations; since *The Gleaners and I* she has repeatedly used this form of expression (which prompted critics to speak even of a new career for her).

children, grandchildren appear just like in a dream (as if supporting Lyotard's argument that the figural works on the logic of the dream and of the subconscious).

b) Discourse masked by the figural

In some scenes in Godard's films we find characters totally immersed into a stylized world, in such cases what should be perceived as "reality" appears as fiction, as artifice, as a construction of images and texts. Godard's *Made in USA* (1966), *The Chinese Girl* (*La chinoise*,¹⁸ 1967), *Joy of Learning* (*Le gai savoir*, 1969) are perhaps well-known examples. Varda's best known film in this respect is the highly controversial *Happiness* (*La bonheur*, 1965). Here the story of a happy family being disrupted by the love affair of the husband is presented with unusual, even uncanny "naturalness." A "naturalness" that paradoxically oozes out of complete artifice, out of a stylized form that envelops the story: the images are gorgeously coloured in a way so as to resemble beautiful impressionist paintings, and instead of using fade to black or white, Varda marks the transition between the scenes by fading to blue, red or autumnal gold. [Figs. 42–43.] The story unfolds but we gain no psychological insight into the motivation of the characters, there is no explanation for things that "just happen." And while Godard usually emphasizes with similar techniques of stylization a conceptual framework, the primacy of a meta-narrative level (a defiant gesture of pulling a "screen" over conventional narrative), and the emphasis on an ideological discourse (see for example the bold colour scheme used in *The Chinese Girl*), here the lack of "lifelike" melodrama *and* the lack of a philosophical meta-level gives rise to a uniquely uneasy feeling.¹⁹ In this case the "figural" continually frustrates the viewer as an impenetrable shield. The idyllic imagery, the enthralling music (Mozart) obscures for us the "real issues" that we continually suspect that lurk in the background and that Varda apparently refuses to address head on: the shocking story of betrayal, adultery, lust, self-centredness, etc. Instead of all these, what we get is the "surface" of the world, the impenetrable images of happiness.²⁰

¹⁸ Full original title: *La chinoise, ou plutôt à la chinoise. Un film en train de se faire.*

¹⁹ The fact that the characters in the film are embodied by a real life family (Jean-Claude Drouot's wife and two children) adds an unusual personal dimension to the fictional characters. This background knowledge about the husband, wife and the children seen in the film could have increased the melodramatic aspect had Varda chosen this approach for her story, but instead it merely contributes to the disconcerting effect of the stylized representation.

²⁰ The same stratagem is repeated to a lesser degree in *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985) that makes use of a narrative rewriting of the flash-back technique of *Citizen Kane's* (1941) multiple narrators. The film begins with an enigmatic image that looks like a painting and introduces us to the story of a young homeless girl, but instead of getting to know her, the subject becomes even lesser understood as the narrative progresses: the character of Mona, the "vagabond," gains no psychological depth, while others keep weaving their own texts and memory images around her figure.

However, even this technique has a unique feedback to reality: complete artistic control in the design of the images appears as an astounding contrast to no control whatsoever over life’s occurrences as they are presented in the film.

In another puzzling example, a short film entitled *The Story of an Old Lady* (*Histoire d’une vieille dame*, 1985) Varda presents a documentary style sketch of an old lady, Marthe Jarnias, who played a small role in *Seven Rooms, Kitchen and Bath* and in *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985). Varda in fact re-uses, re-frames as an individual work of art an old piece of celluloid that lay forgotten for some time, and the idea is that she presents not just the film stock, but also the real life person captured on film as a *found object* (an *objet trouvé*) whose idiosyncratic laughter is preserved by the 16 mm film that was partially decomposed by mould. [Figs. 44–45.] In this short film the images are hardly visible because of the spots and scratches on the surface of the film, but somehow it does not become frustrating to the viewer, as there is no story behind the shroud of grainy film that we could follow; nevertheless, we feel that there is a life, there is a personality in its complexity and singularity. Here the decaying film stock is used as the almost corporeal figuration of the aging lady. This example can furthermore lead us to another type of metalepsis in Varda’s work.

c) Leaps from figural into the “corporeal”

Perhaps one of the most debated type of intermedial images is the “*tableau vivant*,” a site where painting and cinema can interact and also a site where “the figural” gives way to the “corporeal.”²¹ Jean-Luc Godard’s well-known *Passion* (1982) revealed multiple facets of this technique, and it certainly seems to be of Varda’s favourite devices as well. What is characteristic for her is that beside “classic” *tableaux vivants*, that she extensively used for instance in her film *Jane B. by Agnès V.* (*Jane B. par Agnès V.*, 1988, see Figs. 46–47) she tends to *animate* almost everything, taking visible pleasure in staging live situations, accentuating the bodily sensation of the products of her artistic imagination over and over again. If the “figural” serves as a possibility of stepping beyond the discursive realm, the leap from the “figural” into “corporeal” manages to perform another loop, this time, into the empirical domains of “life,” infusing it with the aura of uniqueness, of figural “singularity.”

This is how she renews a classical trope of *ekphrasis* in her documentary-essay, *Ulysse* (1982), for example. Interpreting a photograph she took years ago on the

²¹ As Brigitte Peucker claims in her book (*The Material Image. Art and the Real in Film*, 2007) the *tableau vivant* can be seen “an extremely charged instance of intermediality” exactly because it animates an abstract image and brings forth a more direct sensual and emotional response from the viewer.

beach [Fig. 48] she takes each element of the photo (the naked man staring at the sea, the boy sitting on the ground, the dead goat lying in the foreground) and expands on them by way of a series of associations. In the course of these digressions she also creates a series of real life, interpersonal situations through which the world of the picture becomes “tangible:” she interviews the protagonists of the painting (the young man and the boy), the one time models for an enigmatic photographic composition, and she fleshes out the abstract, allegorical image with real life stories. She places the photo in the hand of children who are invited to comment upon it, and to recreate the image with “fresh,” “innocent” eyes in drawings of their own, devoid of preconceptions. Other representations are shown in comparison to the picture, and so on. It is as if each component of the image would come alive and gain a corporeal dimension in not merely one, but several possible “alternate” realities. The play with the same photograph is continued in *The Beaches of Agnes* in a scene in which she herself recreates the scene composition of the image with the naked young man, only this time she includes herself – as she earlier informs us – “playing the part of a little old lady” running towards the man with a towel so as to cover him up in a protective gesture that pokes fun at contemporary prudery. [Fig. 49.]

Throughout the *Beaches of Agnes* memories are not only represented by photographs and film clips or installations, they are also playfully (and personally) *re-enacted*, animated,²² each significant stage of her life is introduced with the present day Varda dressed up in clothes or using props that recreate the segment of life she is speaking about. The strange new way of making a kind of playful “first person installation” using her own body “collaged” into part real life setting and part painted scenery [Figs. 50–51.] achieves a figuration that mixes imagination, memory, reality and corporeality viewed with both emotion and ironic reflexivity.

As a conclusion we can say that for Varda cinema is *an artefact* in its highest degree: *craftsmanship*, *handiwork* and *ritual* involving bodily presence and interpersonal relations. Intermediality in these films serves as a “figuration” that on the one hand performs these metaleptic leaps from immediacy to hypermediacy, from discursive to figural, from transparent to opaque, from real to fantastic, and back; and on the other hand “figures” the impossibility of such leaps, the “infigurable,” singular quality of life itself. Yet, we see that Varda continues to transform this impossibility into a challenge time after time with an enviable joy and creativity. The final installation she presents in *The Beaches of Agnes* is emblematic

²² This penchant for re-enactments, personifications can also be seen in Varda’s surprising gesture of dressing up as a potato to promote her film, *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000) at the Venice Biennale.

in this respect, she takes the celluloid film stock of her film, *The Creatures* (*Les Créatures*, 1966) that was generally considered as a failure, and literally transforms it into something “constructive,” she builds a house out of it, a house of cinema in which she feels she has her real place. [Figs. 52–53.] She creates an ultimate picture of metalepsis: the author designing and manufacturing herself an artificial world that she inhabits with her real life emotions, memories and fantasies.

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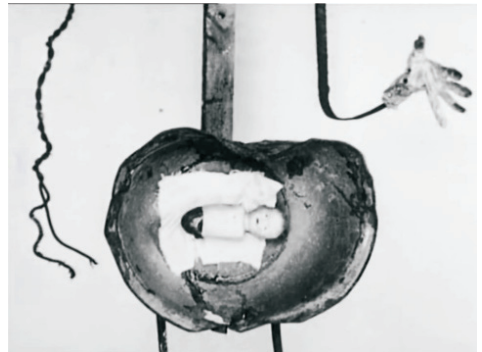
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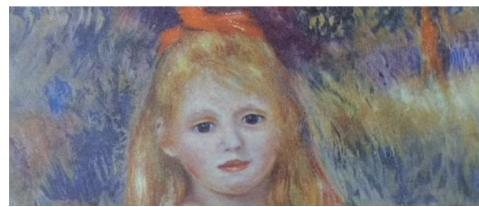
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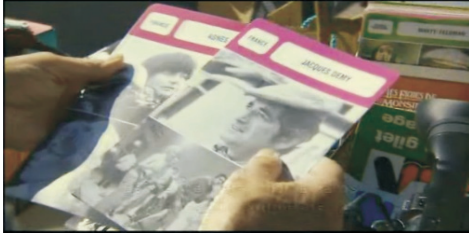
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Moral Tales from Korea. Hong Sang-Soo and Eric Rohmer

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Abstract. The films by the Korean filmmaker Hong Sang-Soo have always been recognized as “Nouvelle Vague-ish” as for narrative and style. His intimate minimalism, his low-budget filmmaking, his scarce use of editing, his extreme attention to space and *mise en scène*, and above all the serial practice of repeating the same patterns from film to film just to make but small variations, make him someone close to Eric Rohmer (as also often noticed by critics). Significantly, one of his movies was even called *Conte de cinéma* (*Geuk jang jeon*, 2005), as it were one of Rohmer’s *Contes morales*. *Night and Day* (*Bam gua nat*, 2008) especially deals with this very similarity. Actually, this Paris-based tale about a young Korean painter stuck in the French capital with no money and split between his wife and his would-be lover, not only is stylistically very close to the *Contes morales*, but also merges narratively all six of the *Contes* films (plus *The Sign of Leo* [*Le signe du lion*, 1961] and *Rendezvous in Paris* [*Les rendez-vous de Paris*, 1995]). The article closely analyzes this confrontation Hong-Rohmer revolving around *Night and Day* (but also all the rest of Hong’s filmography), and the peculiar relation of continuity on one side, but of discontinuity on the other, between these two members of different “new waves” in space and time.

1. Six contes moraux... or More?

Eric Rohmer’s *Contes moraux*, “moral tales,” is a cycle of six films shot from 1963 to 1972: *The Baker’s Girl of Monceau* (*La boulangère de Monceau*, 1963), *Suzanne’s Career* (*La carrière de Suzanne*, 1963), *The Collector* (*La collectionneuse*, 1967), *My Night with Maud* (*Ma nuit chez Maud*, 1969), *Claire’s Knee* (*Le genou de Claire*, 1970), *Love in the Afternoon* (*L’amour l’après-midi*, 1972). Six filmic variations on always the same basic scheme: a man vaguely flirting with a girl before returning to a former girl, mostly his wife or fiancée. The tale had to be told from the man’s point of view, both in the images and by his voice over (*Claire’s Knee* excepted).

The critical contributions on this cycle, such as the excellent study by Pascal Bonitzer (Bonitzer 1991), generally converge on the meta-representational nature of these films¹. On the one hand, the story of a man whose marriage, or straight union, is strongly reinforced by an adulterous transgression that had to stay at the level of pure possibility, even though a rather stubbornly and deliberately pursued one. On the other hand, a would-be novel whose narrative closure is not contrasted, but rather reinforced by what eludes it, i.e. the physical world caught visually. “Bref, si le héros des *Contes moraux* est narrateur, c’est-à-dire ‘un peu’ auteur, c’est dans la mesure où il évacue toute évaluation objective au profit d’un récit autoréférentiel. On dira dans les termes de la linguistique oxfordienne qu’il substitue à la forme *constative* (description des faits) l’assertion sans preuves du discours *performatif* (‘quand dire, c’est faire’). Un genou caressé: la caméra ne fait rien d’autre, bêtement, que le montrer. Mais pour décider de la portée exacte et du sens de ce geste, il faut la parole, le récit, il faut l’art de la narration. Et c’est le narrateur qui se réserve, en dernière instance, le droit d’évaluer la signification, l’importance que revêt ce geste, cet acte en apparence (ou en fait, mais c’est justement le *fait* qui est ici comme évidé) minime.”² (Bonitzer 1991, 38.) The marriage between space and language granted by their very ontological having nothing to do with each other. “C’est qu’en effet le témoignage visuel, ou le document photographique qui l’objective, sont empreints d’une irréductible ambiguïté. La photo de la femme blonde ne dit rien sur la femme blonde, elle se contente de montrer la femme blonde. Elle ne dit même pas que c’est une vraie blonde. Elle la montre, c’est-à-dire qu’elle se contente d’affirmer silencieusement

¹ “L’analogie est frappante à cet égard entre l’amour romanesque [...] et l’aspiration à l’écriture telle qu’en parle Rohmer dans la préface des *Six Contes moraux*: ‘De l’écriture – écrit-il à propos du texte de ces pseudo-nouvelles – il n’a que le fauz-semblant, ou, si l’on préfère, la nostalgie. Il se propose comme modèle une rhétorique vieille de plus d’un siècle, et s’en tient complaisamment là, comme si, de la chose littéraire, il préférerait le fantasme à la pratique.’ Il suffit de remplacer ‘écriture’ et ‘chose littéraire’ par ‘amour’ et ‘passion’ pour avoir la psychologie et le secret des héros de Rohmer.” (Bonitzer 1991, 126) “There is a striking analogy between romance [...] and the aspiration to *écriture* the way Rohmer talks about it in the *Six contes moraux*’s preface. This is what he writes concerning the text of these pseudo-novels: “As for the *écriture* here, there is but its simulacrum, or better its nostalgia. The model of a rhetoric which is more than one hundred years old, consciously kept at a certain distance, as if the phantom of the literary thing were to be preferred to its practice.” It would be enough to replace ‘*écriture*’ and ‘*literary thing*’ with ‘*love*’ and ‘*passion*’ to obtain the psychology and the secret belonging to Rohmer’s heroes.” (My translation, M. G.)

² “Briefly, if the hero of the moral tales is the narrator, that is ‘a little’ the author, it is insofar as he gets away with any objective evaluation in favour of a self-referential tale. Oxford linguistics would say that the *constative* form (description of facts) is replaced by the assertion without proof of *performative* discourse (‘saying is doing’). A caressed knee: the camera just shows it. But, in order to decide the exact range and the meaning of this gesture, words are needed. The tale, the art of narration are needed. And it is finally the narrator who takes upon himself the right to evaluate the meaning, the importance of that gesture, this apparently (or in fact, but it is the *fact* itself that is emptied out, as it were) minimal act.” (My translation, M. G.)

son existence, de témoigner de sa présence auprès de Christian l'aviateur. Là-dessus, tout est permis dans l'ordre du discours: le rêve, le déire, le mensonge, et même la vérité.”³ (Bonitzer 1991, 25.) And whose wedding ring is the *mise en scène*, the staging principle that carefully organizes the visual and makes any Rohmerian shot unmistakable because of its classical clarity (Aumont 2005).

But Rohmer's transparency is an ambiguous one. In fact, in a truly Bazinian fashion, Rohmer's transparency does not flatly “reveal” reality, but rather unravels its structural ambiguity as reality, its own possible lacking something essential the very moment everything is clearly displayed (Bonitzer 1991, 69–75). That is why marriage itself is undermined from within: true, it is made transparent as a system in which the symptom (that is, what exceeds a certain system) is made to belong to the system itself. But, as Pascal Bonitzer notices, the system itself then becomes something ambiguous, no less ambiguous than Rohmer's ambiguous transparency. If a system, a marriage, is so dependent on this “almost-nothing”, on this virtual deviation inconsistent in itself, then its own solidity is put into question. “Bref, pourquoi ne pas voir dans l'*image* de bonheur sans nuages que donne le couple avec son enfant, un spectacle factice, comme les paisibles habitants de la petite ville du film de Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, ne sont plus que les images d'eux-mêmes, et sous leur familière bienveillance, désormais tout en trompe l'oeil (puisque ce n'est plus eux mais des *aliens* qui les ont remplacés), cachent les plus sombres, les plus malefiques desseins? [...] Mais si le sens profond de cette 'image de bonheur' n'est pas le bonheur et la plénitude amoureuse mais le ressentiment, est-ce bien là ce que veut montrer l'auteur, ou bien le commentateur se livre-t-il ici à une extrapolation? On devine la réponse de Rohmer: je ne dis rien, c'est mon film qui parle, et toutes les interprétations sont recevables.”⁴ (Bonitzer 1991, 128.)

So the system, in the guise of the marriage and of the narrative closure, is both confirmed and falling into an ontological uncertainty. But this uncertainty, at this

³ “The thing is that actually visual evidence, or the photographic document by which it is objectified, are imbued with irreducible ambiguity. The picture of the blond woman does not say anything about the blond woman. Not even that she is a real blond. It shows her, i.e. it just silently affirms her existence, it just testifies her presence next to Christian the aviator. As for this, anything is permitted in the order of discourse: dream, frenzy, lies, and even the truth.” (My translation, M. G.)

⁴ “In other words, why couldn't the *image* of cloudless happiness given by the couple and their child be a fictitious spectacle, like the quiet inhabitants of the village in Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* are nothing more than their own image, hiding the most obscure and evil plans under a family good-will which is by now only illusory, since they have been replaced by *aliens*? [...] But if the underlying meaning of this 'image of happiness' is not happiness and loving fullness, but rather resentment, did the author really want to express that or maybe it is just the commentator who is over-interpreting here? One might guess Rohmer's answer: I don't say anything, my film speaks for me, any interpretation would do.” (My translation, M. G.)

more general level, does not manifest itself through a symptom bursting out of the system. Because any of the moral tales deal with a man directly facing the symptoms, facing the possibility to deviate from the right path, facing the virtual romance with another woman, just in order to neutralize them, to test the consistence of it all, which is only and strictly imaginary. There is no dream in any of these narratives because any of them is a big dream in itself, a momentary deviance that one makes to be immediately coming back to the right path. No dream because the whole film in itself is a dream that must be faced to be neutralized, as well as the film systematically neutralizes the symptoms composing the narrative texture. "... la science de Rohmer est justement dans un récit d'apparence objective d'inscrire de tels 'symptômes,' crises ou scandales, qui révèlent soudain 'ce qui se passe dans la tête' du héros ou de l'héroïne. Et si héros ou héroïne il y a, c'est par de telles explosions, par de tels empourprements, qu'ils se dénoncent comme tels."⁵ (Bonitzer 1991, 33.)

So, if on the one hand all these films explicitly deal all the time with symptoms in order to find a spatial and narrative way to make all the opacities into an opaque transparency, on the other hand, and on a more general level, the structural uncertainty of such a system is to be found somewhere else. That is, in the serial nature of the project itself. The system achieves its closure in each film, and yet it must be reconfirmed film after film. In spite of the closure that the scheme actually achieves at the end of any of the single films, the scheme has to be repeated six times. Freudian psychoanalysis has a name for this impossibility to erase the unwanted enjoyment, causing the unceasing repetition of always the same impasse: death drive (Freud 1975).

2. Hong Sang-Soo

Some decades after, Korean filmmaker Hong Sang-Soo carries out nine long feature films until today, all of them as different variations on a scheme involving unfailingly a man and two women, a woman and two men or something like that. All of them are staged according to a rather Rohmerian minimalism, with rarefied and calm master shots resorting to few editing cuts and a careful organization of space inside the frame, seemingly both natural and meticulously staged and composed. The camera moves with a certain rigidity, especially with semi-pans, like yet another mean to articulate and point at the relations the bodies and the

⁵ "Rohmer's science resides in putting in an objective kind of narration such 'symptoms,' crises or scandals, suddenly revealing 'what goes on' inside the hero's or heroine's head. And if ever there is a hero or a heroine, it is because of such explosions, such blushes, denounced as such." (My translation, M. G.)

objects are taken into; in other words, there is an evident *mise en scène* overworking, tracing lines and vectors and staging them intricately, but never sacrificing the quiet stillness of every frame, largely occupied by emptiness. All his films are studies on characters dealing with the inevitable impasse of desire, caused by the doubling that desire by definition enacts, shot with a peculiar kind of cold and abstract humour, and with a certain taste for symmetries and narrative deliberate schematicity. This impasse finds its way through repetition: even though there is no predetermined serial project like Rohmer's moral tales, we do have, like in Rohmer's cinema, the constant variation and repetition of always the same scheme.

2008's *Night and Day* is an explicit attempt to come to terms with Hong's Rohmerian filiation. The story, told also by the voice over of the male main character like in the moral tales, deals with Sung-nam, a Korean painter stuck in Paris because of some marijuana fuss, with no money and in summer's heat, like in Rohmer's *The Sign of Leo*. Like in the third moral tale *The Collector*, his egomaniac pretentiousness as an artist bangs with the bland but irresistible beauty of an insignificant (and quite despicable) younger girl, that plays with infinite coyness with him, who is attracted specifically by her feet like Jerome was by Claire's knee in the fifth moral tale of the same name. In the end, he gets from her what he was desperately looking for: sex. She gets pregnant, but then his wife, who has been phone-calling him throughout the film, tells him too that she is pregnant, fixing an uncanny parallelism between wife and lover like the one in the fourth moral tale, *My Night with Maud*, is based on. He flies back to Korea and finds out that that was only a lie his wife made up just to make him come back. So, after having repressed all his remorse in a dream that limpidly symbolizes his past infidelity and the impossibility to come to terms with it, he can hug his wife again and live happily with her ever thereafter, like in the sixth moral tale, *Love in the Afternoon*.

It is worth noticing that this film too, *Love in the Afternoon*, the last of the moral tales, was supposed to end the series and the repetitions once and for all. In the film's prologue, the main character imagines to sexually conquer all the girls he meets on the street. In the film, these girls are the heroines of the previous moral tales, *The Collector*, *My Night with Maud*, *Claire's Knee*. So, this sixth and last moral tale explicitly declares the intention to sum up all of the moral tales series. This is the film in the series in which most deliberately the man deviates from his neat and bourgeois path only to better adhere to it. Nowhere in the series like in *Love in the Afternoon* the parable is more limpid, the system more unbreakable, the symptom more directly faced and neutralized. This is why Dudley Andrew (2007, 136–137) has compared this film to *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999).

But with an important difference. In Kubrick's film, dream had a huge importance. For the aforementioned reasons, we have no dream in the moral tales' narrative. And, significantly enough, in *Love in the Afternoon* that imaginary scene in the prologue is not dreamt by the main character, but consciously imagined. While he imagines, his eyes are wide open, as particularly stressed by a close-up on his eyes at the very beginning of the imaginary sequence. It is Hong Sang-Soo, some decades later, who would eventually re-open and re-question Rohmer's system, placing back right at the centre of it the hidden logic Rohmer's system tried to avoid and erase by embracing it overtly: dream, and symptom. So *Night and Day*, entirely built around dream and symptom, is supposed to be the last word concerning the ceaseless repetition of always the same impasse common to Eric Rohmer and Hong Sang-Soo.

3. Two Different Ways of Transparency

The decisive matter here is the notion of transparency, which is sensibly different in Hong's case. Transparency comes with opacity: this line of thought common to Bazin and Rohmer roots back to phenomenology, and, according to what has become by now a philosophical commonplace, finds in Courbet's *L'origine du monde* one of the highest manifestations of this paradox. Courbet's proto-surrealist hyperrealism estranges its object by depicting it with ultra-fidelity. The origin as a void that can be revealed only by veiling it again, the transparency as something that can be rendered only by its own betrayal. In her acute *Le spectateur séduit*, Maria Tortajada analyzes Rohmer's transparency as something whose consistency is only granted by the gaze of the spectator, just like the seduction game is based on the gaze of an absent third (Tortajada 1999, 122–164). This does not mean that transparency is a cheat: it just means that it is an actual illusion, an illusion carrying a real weight, something “objectively subjective,” as Lacan used to say. This “third,” this absent spectator, is ambiguously placed also inside the filmic texture: it is his own unstable position in and outside the film that constitutes the structural ambiguity of transparency.

During a brief scene in which Sung-nam and a girl go to the Musée d'Orsay to see Courbet's *L'origine du monde*, we are confronted with the paradox of the spectator as the “unstable third.” When placing themselves in front of the picture [Fig. 1.], the spectator is placed behind their back, and cannot see the picture properly because Sung-nam's head covers it – better: his head covers the key spot of the picture: the female sex. Then, without any editing cuts, the girl moves out

[Fig. 2.], and Sung-nam takes her place; now the picture is perfectly visible for the spectator as well. When both are staring at the picture, the picture is hidden from the spectator, because the gaze of the spectator IS precisely the absence matching together the gazes of the two characters, exactly like the void that is represented in the picture – that is, the female sex. So the spectator is both absent and coincident with the picture. In fact, some seconds later, the girl moves away and we literally take her place: the spectator, as an unstable third, is both outside the relation it grants and inside it, as part of it. So, within a single uncut shot, he can shift from granting the relation from an absent point gazing at the terms of that relation, to being one of the elements of the relation gazed by the absent gaze. Both modalities are a different way by which the picture confronts the absent gaze of the spectator with itself, the transparency of gaze revealed as such, and thus revealed as opacity.

In another brief scene during Sung-nam's visit to an atelier, the interdependency of the picture and its own frame is confirmed. The scene begins with a brief close up on what seems like a bunch of incoherent yellow and black signs. Then, the camera zooms backwards, up to letting us realize that we were staring from too close at a picture representing a cathedral. Behind that picture we now can see another, barely intelligible picture: only some seconds later, when the camera zooms forward towards it, the spectator can realize that it is a picture showing two giraffes eating grass. We cannot clearly distinguish the first picture by looking at it from too close, but we can if we move backwards; on the contrary, we cannot clearly distinguish the second picture from too far, but we can if we get close. The frame determines the content of the picture, but the picture determines the frame itself⁶.

Even beyond these revelatory moments, the whole film insists on this in basically each scene. It does so thanks to the camera work. While on the one hand, and from the relative exteriority of an external directorial gaze, the *mise en scène* traces lines and vectors through careful frame compositions and analytic camera movements mostly by rigid and quick semi-pans from point A to point B, in order to depict visually a system of relations, on the other hand the camera enters this system through a frequent, violent and abrupt use of zooming. The texture of limpid movements to the right and to the left is then frequently and traumatically broken by backward and forward movements. The result looks deliberately stiff, spongy as it were. Few things would be as unimaginable in an early Rohmer's film as frequent zooming: the rare exceptions, like in *Love in the Afternoon's* imaginary seduction scene, are so striking that they but confirm the rule.

⁶ This formulation was famously given by Jacques Lacan, to whom Pascal Bonitzer refers literally while explaining the paradox grounding the moral tales: the narrator is also *inside* the tale he is (subjectively) telling while it is being framed by an objective (the camera's) eye (Bonitzer 1991, 72).

So, Hong translates Rohmer's paradox of transparency, of the spectator as the unstable third, into a specific way of camera working.⁷ In doing so, on the one hand it makes it transparent because he finds a visual shape for it, as the *mise en scène* principle prescribes. On the other hand, he makes it opaque, because of the jarring appeal of that visual solution, a kind of jarring that would have never taken place in Rohmer's extremely and classically balanced visual texture, in which every symptom had to fit in its right place.

The more Hong seems to restore the Rohmerian cinema and the Rohmerian system, the more he seems to be detaching from it. Hong makes explicit what in Rohmer had to remain implicit, for instance the macho traits of the male characters. In Rohmer we mostly had a bunch of almost pathological but in the end harmless male narcissists, whereas Sung-nam is obsessed by the need to concretely prove his physical strength: he asks basically anybody he meets to engage into arm-wrestling, including a North Korean student to whom he roughly and without justification addresses an almost violent aggressiveness. We do have in *Night and Day* an attempt to get close to an adulterous possibility only to better stick to marriage like in the moral tales – but it all ends up to be almost a parody of Rohmer's fierce Catholicism.

At the beginning of the film, Sung-nam meets by chance a woman he used to be engaged with, a woman who is by now older, married and unattractive. They decide to meet in a hotel room, and while she takes a shower, he sits and reads the Bible. When she comes out of the bathroom, he says something like “You know, we must overcome temptations... here in the Bible they say that if your

⁷ Some passages of Tortajada's description of the spectator as “unstable third” literally seem to claim the zooming solution. “L'instabilité du spectateur, hésitant entre deux places incompatibles, tient plutôt à la distance qu'il garde face à la représentation. Cela malgré son état de sous-motricité: il est en effet assis dans la salle obscure, et le fauteuil qu'il occupe se trouve à une distance fixe de l'écran. Le paradoxe est ici rapidement résolu. Cette condition qui lui impose l'immobilité favorise son investissement imaginaire dans le mouvement qui lui propose le film. Ceci, nous l'avons vu, parce qu'il s'identifie comme regard à la caméra. Le régime d'identification primaire qui lui permet d'assumer la place et les mouvements de l'objectif est lui-même variable. Ainsi, la distance psychique qui sépare le spectateur de la représentation se modifie: il peut entrer dans le monde de la fiction ou rester extérieur, assumant une position critique de recul. Nous admettons ainsi que certaines formes de la représentation suscitent tel ou tel investissement de sa part.” (Tortajada 1999, 239.) “The instability of the spectator, hesitating between two incompatible places, has rather to do with his distance before representation. This despite his under-mobility: actually, he is sitting in the theatre, and the chair he sits on is at a fix distance from the screen. The paradox here is rapidly solved. This condition that immobility imposes on him favours also his imaginary investment in the movement the film proposes to him. This is because he identifies, as gaze, with the camera. The primary identification regime allowing him to take the place and the movement of the camera is itself variable. This way, the psychic distance separating the spectator from the representation can change: he can enter the fiction's world or stay out and assume a critical withdrawing position. Thus it is possible to admit that to different representational forms correspond different investments on his part.” (My translation, M. G.)

hand commits a sin you must cut it off...” So, on the account of such arguments, he basically rejects her.

Night and Day then begins with frontally enacting the Rohmerian scheme of getting close to adultery without having sex only to reconfirm a previous engagement, so that its inherent hypocrisy could come to the surface, so that it could be recognized as basically unusable. In fact, a younger and prettier girl, someone who was introduced to Sung-nam by his former fiancée some times before the hotel room events, is going to take that woman’s place quite soon. She is the one Sung-nam eventually seduces and betrays his wife with.

Here comes the big difference: in the moral tales, adultery is never consummated, and neither is sex, whereas Sung-nam does commit adultery, does dream too (in contrast with the moral tales, where this never occurs) and does make sex with the other girl, even though this is hidden from our sight thanks to a very Rohmerian ellipsis,⁸ i.e. one that overtly shows that it is hiding something – suffice it to think of *The Marquise of O* (*Die Marquise von O*, 1978). In other words, it seems that Hong tries to react to the idea that the woman can only be a symptom of man:⁹ it seems he is saying that there actually exist women who, despicable as they might be, cannot be reduced to the male narcissistic fantasy scheme, as one can also make love with a real and concrete woman.

Interestingly enough, the results of this assumption are exactly like Rohmer’s. Thanks to a secret and mysterious affinity between wife and lover (shared also by the first, the fourth and the sixth moral tales), i.e. the simultaneous revelation that they’re both pregnant, the male panics and comes back to the family nest for good. That the girl is a real person, and not only the man’s symptom, eventually reveals to be not at all the point: in any case, Sung-nam leaves her for his wife. So Hong’s connection with Rohmer’s transparency gets opaque again, because he rejoins it rather than detaching from it as it seemed before.

4. Clouds

To solve this enigma we have to consider what Sung-nam paints. Sung-nam is a highly specialized painter: he only paints *clouds*. Art historian Hubert Damisch wrote a renowned *Theory of Cloud*. More than three hundred pages to show how the rationalist effort of western painting, dominated by the linear perspective and

⁸ A semi-pan shifts from the couple starting to have sex to the open window of their hotel room, staying some seconds on it while we can only hear offscreen sounds from the couple.

⁹ The title of one of his films was *The Woman Is The Future Of Man* (*Yeojaneun namjaui miraeda*, 2004), a sentence from Louis Aragon famously reprised by Jacques Lacan as “The woman is the symptom of man.”

its very theatrical staging principle, had a huge figurative symptom, that is, what has a bodily consistency but not the kind of contour a perspective system would need to be fit into shape. That is, *clouds*. Damisch collects and explains countless figurative occurrences to show how clouds have worked into western art history the same way the symptom has in Rohmer's system: as an inherent transgression, an internal impediment that, far from deranging it, grants the system's consistency itself. "Cloud cannot be depicted by means of geometry; such a body 'without a surface' cannot be 'described' or reduced to the coordinates of an experimental setup that only reproduces objects as the clearly delineated, outlined shapes that are apprehended by any observer positioned at a particular spot (that is to say, whose view must be defined as from one specific point). Yet even so, cloud does find a place in Brunelleschi's representation: the mirror image accommodates it by means of a supplementary duplicating ploy, as a reflection of a reflection [...]. The significance of the plaque of darkened silver that Brunelleschi inserted into his painted panel in place of the sky did not merely have the role of a parody or even a criticism. However perfectly it was adjusted to the other elements in this perspective division of the picture, this plaque introduced into the network of the *intarsia* as it were an alien element, which manifested the closed nature of the 'code' and, at the same time, the fact that it was impossible for representation to remain within the limits of the field as it was defined" (Damisch 2002, 127). But there is more. Clouds are not a symptom whatsoever: the most gigantic symptom sprung from western art history and granting its own consistency is also the main organizing figurative principle of eastern art history, the Chinese one especially. "But all the indications are that the extent and, even more, the nature of the specifically pictorial functions imparted to mists and cloud and – as we shall see – their cosmological connotations suggest that Far Eastern painting, on the contrary, regarded this element both as a particularly prized motif and as a particularly prized principle. Even where it is introduced into a picture by mechanical or conventional means, in the West cloud marks the limitations of a representation that is governed by the finite nature of linearity. Beyond a certain point, a proliferation of clouds, more or less deliberate and controlled, seems to be a symptom: it signals the beginning of the dissolution of an order (but not its deconstruction). In other words, at first sight the Chinese system appears to function, practically, in a fashion that is quite the opposite to that of the Renaissance system, for it seems to begin and find its way forwards at the very point where the latter meets its limit, its closure" (Damisch 2002, 202–203). So, the clouds actually link the western and the eastern pictorial tradition, and thus

the western and eastern ways to conceive representation. Of course Sung-nam does not paint the clouds the Chinese way, and of course it would be impossible to open such a vast and complex topic as what stands for the eastern notion of representation here, though we still roughly recall the latter as a non-analogical way to intertwine the also highly sexualized binary couples yin/yang, male/female, full/empty and so on, so that space is not what articulates these oppositions but the direct, inherent deployment of their distinction. However, it is inevitable to think that the clouds in this film indicate a possible short circuit between the western and the eastern way of representation, between the western notion of transparency and the eastern one, between Rohmer's and Hong's.

It is easy to notice the over-recurrence of symptoms in Hong's cinema. That is, of elements candidly out of place. In this film: Sung-nam at the airport waiting room suddenly struck by the unexpected presence of a sparrow walking on the floor, two dogs barking to each other briefly interrupting a pleasant conversation in a café, and many other examples. If Rohmer's transparency relies on the capacity to reabsorb the opaque symptom into a highly refined literary-derived structure, Hong's transparency relies on abstracting the opacity of symptom, on letting the symptom literally float amidst the emptiness. Hong does not care about leading the symptoms back to making sense, his way of neutralizing them is just to let them be framed and visualized as if they weren't a rupture of meaning. For him, transparency is just about filming something opaque in a transparent way, as if suspending it, whereas in Rohmer's cinema there is a constant struggle to symbolize, especially verbally, the relation incurring between opacity and transparency. Whereas Rohmer's spatial staging connects together, in Hong's case it just rarefies and exasperates the distance among the elements. That is why even Hong's voice over, far from putting together some meaning, just sketches here and there some fragmentary notations. Far from Rohmer's strong and classical narrative coherence, Hong just adds amorphously little anecdotes to little anecdotes, most scenes last just a few seconds and appear to be almost pointless. Indeed, for him emptiness is only form, and form only emptiness, as Buddhism would prescribe.

On the one hand Hong makes the symptom stick out from Rohmer's perfect system, but on the other he neutralizes it in a different, more eastern way. Nonetheless, he achieves a kind of representational closure, meaning a happy marriage, just like Rohmer does, but differently. Transparency is achieved not through the integration of the symptom into the system, but through the direct dissolution of its own opacity into the void.

The final dream sequence that allows Sung-Nam to remove his moral nightmares and infidelities, and thus to be able to lie to his wife and to go on living a happy marriage, is framed at the beginning and in the end by a painting depicting clouds. Husband and wife are lovingly lying in bed, then the camera moves up, discovering a painting showing clouds. Then the dream sequence begins. Sung-nam re-establishes his Confucian supremacy over his wife with a little rite and the decision to make his wife and his former lover meet. The wife reluctantly agrees and goes to the public bath. While bathing, the wife sees an unidentifiable object (vaguely resembling a pig) knocking an opaque window from outside. Then she and her husband walk toward Sung-nam's former woman carrying a little present, which gets accidentally broken. Sung-nam furiously shouts at her, who goes away. Then we see the painted cloud again, and we return to the now waken up husband next to his wife. The entire dream sequence symbolizes the impossible meeting between wife and former lover, an imaginary way to discharge his guilt to his wife, accused to have broken the little present that she was supposed to donate the rival on occasion of the meeting. And, most importantly, during the dream an opaque symptom is seen while pressing from outside the window. The overall dream sequence is a fully Rohmerian solution – that is, giving a spatial shape to symptom in order to neutralize it. But the unrecognizable symptom pressing from outside the window signals something that cannot be made transparent in itself except for its own irreducible opaqueness, and thus denies a full and thorough symbolization, in open contrast with Rohmer's perspective. That unrecognizable blot signals some kind of opaqueness that can only be suspended as such, like Hong's style so typically does, and not made into transparency through the contrary action of space and language as the Rohmerian perspective would require. Thus both notions of transparency are involved, Hong's and Rohmer's, as inextricably connected. Hence the painted clouds positioned right before and right after the dream sequence, belonging crucially on a pictorial account to both East and West.

Finally, it is as if Hong's oriental transparency worked as a symptom for Rohmer's western one. And, in reverse, only by sticking closely to Rohmer's transparency Hong has been able to find himself and his own oriental way to transparency. A bit like one would indulge in a little catholic escapade into guilt and repentance only to better enjoy the Confucian marriage, which is overtly alluded in the film according to its commonplace, i.e. a surface submission of the bride to the groom, covering the real power of the woman at a more subterranean, implicit, hidden but also more effective level. The short circuit between two

representational impasses, Hong's and Rohmer's, both condemned to repeat its own perfect and unachievable scheme film after film, can finally find a simultaneous and utopian way of achievement, by recognizing each other as its own reciprocal symptom.

This short circuit, in which a kind of representation is implicitly linked to the other, western to eastern and the other way round, reminds what Žižek, following Lacan following Freud, calls *Vorstellung-Repraesentanz*: “the symbolic representative of an originally excluded, primordially repressed representation.” (Žižek 1993, 56.) Significantly enough, the film ends with another perfect example of *Vorstellung-Repraesentanz*: Sung-nam is awoken from his dream by his wife asking him why he continued to pronounce the name of a mysterious girl (obviously his former mate) while sleeping.¹⁰ Not simply a symptom, but a signifier, a name in this case, representing a missing representation. The closure is accomplished, and so the happiness of the marriage. Or maybe not: there is still a substantial ambiguity as for Sung-nam's managing to keep hiding the truth. Similarly, the vicious circle between those two different kinds of transparent representations, is at the same time perfectly closed and never closed.

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¹⁰ Hong's third film (2000) was entitled (in Korea) *Oh! Soo-Jung!*, from the moment in the film (which also happened to be its narrative pivotal point) when the main character pronounced the name of a girl while having sex with another girl. However, the international title of the film was *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Hong Sang-Soo: *Night and Day* (*Bam gua nat*, 2008). In the scene in which Sung-nam and a girl go to the Musée d’Orsay to see Courbet’s *L’origine du monde* we are confronted with the paradox of the spectator as the “unstable third.”





The French New Wave and the New Hollywood: Le Samourai and its American legacy

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Abstract. The French New Wave was an essentially pan-continental cinema. It was influenced both by American gangster films and French noirs, and in turn was one of the principal influences on the New Hollywood, or Hollywood renaissance, the uniquely creative period of American filmmaking running approximately from 1967–1980. This article will examine this cultural exchange and enduring cinematic legacy taking as its central intertext Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967). Some consideration will be made of its precursors such as *This Gun for Hire* (Frank Tuttle, 1942) and *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959) but the main emphasis will be the references made to *Le Samourai* throughout the New Hollywood in films such as *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980). The article will suggest that these films should not be analyzed as isolated texts but rather as composite elements within a super-text and that cross-referential study reveals the incremental layers of resonance each film's reciprocity brings. This thesis will be explored through recurring themes such as surveillance and alienation expressed in parallel scenes, for example the subway chases in *Le Samourai* and *The French Connection*, and the protagonist's apartment in *Le Samourai*, *The Conversation* and *American Gigolo*.

A recent review of a Michael Moorcock novel described his work as “so rich, each work he produces forms part of a complex echo chamber, singing beautifully into both the past and future of his own mythologies” (Warner 2009). This description of a science fiction writer's work perfectly encapsulates the French New Wave and its legacy. Numerous scholars have noted the intertextuality of the New Wave. Adam Thirwell's article, its title, ‘Forever Young’, implicitly recognizing the freshness and enduring influence of the movement, recalls not only Jean-Luc Godard's belief that collaboration was a defining feature, but perhaps more importantly, comments on ‘the delighted quotation of each other's films’ (Thirwell, 2009), for example the moment in Godard's *A Woman is a Woman* (*Une Femme est*

une Femme, 1961) when Angela (Anna Karina) asks Suzanne (Nicole Paquin) what she has been doing lately. Her response, to mime a shoot out and then piano playing invokes the part that actress had played in Francois Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* (*Tirez sur le Pianiste*, 1960). Truffaut's film is also incidentally invoked in *Le Samourai* by Jef Costello's (Alain Delon) relationship with Valerie (Caty Rosier) a beautiful pianist who, although she is his last contract, he chooses not to kill.

This intertextuality is not confined to what might in that case have been a somewhat smug and incestuous self reference, but spans across a mosaic of world cinema, particularly, but not only, with reference to Hollywood filmmaking. Stella Bruzzi has written of "the reflective relationship between the American and French traditions, the mutual scavenging, cross-referencing and straight copying that has been perpetrated since the French cinema of the 1950s began to express its fondness for Americana." (Bruzzi 1997, 67.) Some examples are film legend: Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) in *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*, 1960) looking up to Humphrey Bogart's poster for *The Harder They Fall* (Mark Robson, 1956) and reverently whispering 'Bogie' is an example of Hollywood's influence on French cinema, while Robert Benton and David Newman being inspired by New Wave directors to write *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) and continuing to insert their influence despite failing to secure Truffaut or Godard as director, reciprocates the admiration.

This article explores intertextuality and the New Wave's legacy by taking as its central intertext Jean-Pierre Melville's 1967 film, *Le Samourai*. In doing so it pushes the narrowly defined boundaries of the New Wave beyond the tight constraints of time – 1959 to 1962, and personnel – Truffaut, Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer, just as it is useful to acknowledge that the British New Wave had a life outside those parallel years and its equally small clique of inner circle directors. Like Robert Bresson, Louis Malle and Alain Resnais, Melville was a director whose work predated, and subsequently stood in parallel to, whilst being highly influential on the work of Godard et al. Beginning his directorial career in 1947, working out of his own production company and later his own studio, Melville was an independent, whose gangster film, *Bob le flambeur* (1956), featured, as David A. Cook describes, "production methods – location shooting, small crew, use of unknown actors ... [which] became the model for New Wave filmmakers." (Cook 1990 [1981], 549.)¹

From the outset, Melville's cinema seemed to be in an intense interplay with American film, acknowledged in the title of Ginette Vincendeau's seminal

¹ The New Wave's debt to Melville is shown, for example, in Godard's casting of Melville as a writer in *Breathless*, and an oblique reference by the police to Michel's friend Bob [*Bob le flambeur*] (Verevis 2006).

monograph, *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (2003), as well as the fact that Jean-Pierre Grumbach reinvented himself as Melville in homage to his favourite American author, Herman Melville, creator of *Moby Dick*. What Jennifer Fay and Justus Nieland call Melville's 'Americanophilia' was also demonstrated in his dress sense, Ray-Ban sunglasses and a hat, either a Stetson or the trilby that was an integral part of *Le Samourai*'s Jef's style. (Fay and Nieland 2010, 204) Indeed, *Le Samourai*'s two principle sources, *This Gun for Hire* (Frank Tuttle, 1942) and *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959), which themselves respectively draw on English and Russian novels, further illustrates its transculturality.²

All the features Cook cites about *Bob le flambeur* could be equally well applied to Hollywood independent, Stanley Kubrick's film of the same year, *The Killing*. It is also true that Melville's work is part of the intertwining relationship between French, American and Japanese cinema, as Akira Kurosawa drew on Hollywood Westerns, refracted them through a Japanese lens in, for example *The Seven Samurai* (1954), only for them to be reclaimed by Hollywood in *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960), and renegotiated by France in Melville's own *Le Samourai*, which self consciously quotes from a fictional *Book of the Bushido* describing the code of the samurai or ronin. More directly, another strand of Kurosawa's work engages specifically with film noir. *Drunken Angel* (1948) examines the samurai code through the modern yakuza prism, while the generically playful *Yojimbo* (1961) manages to draw on classical Hollywood John Ford Westerns, foreshadow Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti' Westerns, whilst also invoking one of the paradigmatic American noirs, *The Glass Key* (Stuart Heisler, 1942).³ It will be Melville's relationship with Hollywood on which I will focus, specifically America's own new wave, that uniquely rich period of filmmaking from – loosely *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980) known as the New Hollywood or the Hollywood renaissance.

There are almost any number of American films of drastically varying degrees of artistic integrity, which bear the mark of *Le Samourai* including *The Driver* (Walter Hill, 1978), *Miller's Crossing* (the Coen brothers, 1990), *Leon* (Luc Besson, 1994), *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992 & 1994) and *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (Jim Jarmusch, 1999). My discussion will be two directional. Contextual analysis of *This Gun for Hire* and *Pickpocket* will facilitate

² Graham Greene's novel, *A Gun For Sale* (1936) was the source for *This Gun For Hire*. Although Keith Reader says *Pickpocket* was the first of Bresson's films "not to be based on a text written by somebody else" it clearly draws on the outlines of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). (Reader 2000, 52.)

³ *The Glass Key* was the second American noir to bring together *This Gun for Hire*'s star team of Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake and Brian Donleavy.

focus on three primary films of the New Hollywood, *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), and *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980). Although usually unacknowledged as *Le Samourai*'s intertexts, perhaps because they are not archetypal gangster-noirs, each of these New Hollywood films have startlingly reverential scenes and stylistic homages, but also address the thematic essences of *Le Samourai* thus drawing attention to a cross-continental seeming universality of the modern masculine if not human condition in the twentieth century. These recurring themes include surveillance, professionalism with regard to work and a personal code of ethics, masculinity and the construction of identity through commodities, and alienation – from one's surroundings as well as from human relationships.

In each film, a particular character has clear parallels with Jef Costello, the hired assassin played by Alain Delon in *Le Samourai*, but in each case the similarities are fraught by complexities, as if the characters are looking into obverse, distorting mirrors. *American Gigolo*'s Julian Kay, played by Richard Gere is every bit as beautiful and well dressed as Jef, and his work as a male prostitute makes him a criminal, but he is not a killer, and is wrongly imprisoned for murder. *The French Connection*'s Popeye Doyle and *The Conversation*'s Harry Caul, both played by Gene Hackman, are dishevelled, unkempt, and hardly handsome; moreover, as a cop and a surveillance expert respectively, they are ostensibly on the right side of the law, if, in fact, their world is as murky as Julian's.

The French Connection contains one of the most striking examples of homage through replication. Drawing on the railway setting that runs through *Pickpocket*, *Le Samourai* has two Metro chases, one brief, the other more detailed, as Jef, electronically tagged, and shadowed closely both on foot, and at police headquarters by cops following his movements on a wall map, evades pursuit. In *The French Connection*, a title which I could have used for this article, its cross cutting between New York and Marseille foregrounding French and American cinematic symbiosis, the scene is inverted on the subway as we root for the cop. Popeye's quarry, 'Frog One'/Alain Chanier (Fernando Rey), a French heroin importer, teasingly and expertly leaves Popeye on the platform, while he escapes on a subway train. Like in *Le Samourai*, the next chase sequence is the most exciting. Bruzzi regards such moments as merely a "predilection for citing details from past films" (Bruzzi 1997, 68) but I would argue in each instance they are synthesized, acknowledging their origin, but fusing with their own context to gain additional meaning. Thus, this second chase whilst unequivocally having its source in *Le Samourai* is truly a New Hollywood landmark, pushing the chase

bar beyond that set by *Bullit* (Peter Yates, 1968), in its race between a cop car and an unmanned train. Walter Hill's *The Driver*, often considered a remake of *Le Samourai*, self consciously over-determines this theme as the entire film more or less consists of car chases.⁴ It can also be suggested that the references gain generational intertextuality. In *This Gun for Hire*, Raven (Alan Ladd) is pursued along a bridge spanning railroad tracks; in *Le Samourai*, Jef is shot in a double cross on a railway bridge; Popeye shoots 'Frog Two'/Pierre Nicoli (Marcel Bozzuffi), as he climbs the steps to another rail overpass. Popeye's car/train chase is usually regarded as particularly exciting because it was unscripted, authentic location shooting and at one point his car almost collides with a woman pushing a pram. The scene is not as ground breaking as it appears; Raven too pushes aside a mother and baby as he flees across the bridge on foot.

Jef may be a criminal, but he has the audience's sympathies, not least because he is true to his own personal code of ethics presumably encoded within the fictional Bushido Melville has created; within a single character he comprises morality and amorality. This follows the philosophical precedent of *Pickpocket's* Michel (Martin LaSalle) who muses: "Those gifted with talents and indispensable to society should be free to disobey laws in certain circumstances". Popeye Doyle has a similar function, hence the film's tagline taken from dialogue: "Doyle is bad news ... but a good cop!" Like Jef, Doyle is driven by his work, refusing to sleep when on a case, and dancing an impromptu jig when he gains evidence. Physically, he is a parody of Jef's looks and style. They both have trademark hats, but instead of epitomizing film noir cool, ironically, the detective's pork pie hat makes him appear a comedic fool. His apartment is no more of a home than Jef's, but whereas Jef's contains no superfluous articles, Popeye's is stuffed with every kind of litter, summed up by his partner's (Roy Scheider) query, "anybody hurt in this wreck" as he surveys the chaos.

But in the four years between *Le Samourai* and *The French Connection*, in the American context of Vietnam and Richard Nixon's administration, even moral ambiguities have greater opacity. In his comprehensive study of crime films, Thomas Leitch writes: "The irreducible complexity of the people pressed into service as suspects and criminals and detectives and the inevitable contamination of the natural resources by cultural imperatives, guarantee the failure of any possible quest for justice and truth." (Leitch 2002, 230.) Jef may be sympathetic, but he is a victim of the conventional morality that a killer is brought to justice and his avenging Superintendent (Francois Perier) gets his man. Unlike Perier,

⁴ *The Driver* also foregrounds its textuality by having a pivotal sequence set on a train.

who plays by the rules, Popeye according to Leitch is as “brutal, vicious, indifferent to the constraints of the law and his superiors, as violent as the drug lords he pursued” (Leitch 2002, 43) and the retributive expectations are reversed; ‘Frog One’ escapes and Popeye is transferred out of narcotics.

Each protagonist-antagonist has a complex cop/criminal relationship. Reflecting the interplay between Raskolnikov and Porphyre in Feodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, the police inspector in *Pickpocket* (Jean Pelegri) philosophizes with Michel, claiming to be interested in his theories, toying with him psychologically. In both *Le Samourai* and *American Gigolo* the cop appears fascinated by his handsome quarry, and Julian even gives Detective Sunday (Hector Elizondo) style tips. Both Jef and Julian are fetishistically displayed for the cops’ and spectator’s gaze in their line-ups. ‘Frog One’ gets under Popeye’s skin, and their first subway encounter mimics a ritualized mating dance, as ‘Frog One’ steps on and off the train, eventually leaving Popeye stranded. An implicit homoeroticism is revealed by Popeye’s exhaled: ‘Bitch!’ and ‘Frog One’s’ teasing wave, not unlike an eighteenth century coquette’s fan-play, reciprocated by Popeye later when ‘Frog One’s’ capture seems imminent. The gesture is mimicked by Sunday when he dismisses Julian, after the line-up.

Surveillance is a theme of each film. Jef’s apartment, which features an identical hiding place to Michel’s, is bugged by the cops, and he is alerted to this by his pet bird. Popeye uses two wiretaps to gain evidence. Julian’s home isn’t bugged, but jewellery that might be planted there serves the same function; it causes him to mistrust his former sanctuary. In post-Watergate America – we see a TV programme discussing Nixon – surveillance is the *raison d’être* of *The Conversation* and the surveillance convention Harry attends is both surreal and a function of the country’s contemporary atmosphere. Harry’s job as a surveillance expert is his life, and, invoking a reference both to Jef Costello’s cage-bird and to Raven, the original source of Jef’s hit-man, he once famously put a bug in a parakeet. But Harry is not immune to being tapped himself; a fellow expert slips a free pen into his pocket, and humiliatingly broadcasts Harry’s stumbling attempts to ask Meredith (Elizabeth MacCrae), a demonstrator at the convention, for advice about his estranged lover. It is not only this humiliation that ironically vindicates Harry’s reluctance to bare his feelings; functioning in parallel to Valerie’s double-dealing with Jef, Meredith is a honey trap who steals his surveillance tapes while he is sleeping. From the outset, interior scenes at Harry’s home are photographed as if he is the subject of surveillance, and later his home too, is bugged. His name, Harry *Caul* is surely a pun on the telephone *calls* he

taps before being a victim himself, while similarly anticipating 'Call Me', the Giorgio Moroder/Blondie song that runs through *American Gigolo*, reminding us that a male prostitute is the economic subject of those he believes he profits from.

In terms of visual style, *American Gigolo* is the closest of the New Hollywood films to *Le Samourai*. Discussing *American Gigolo*, Schrader has acknowledged some of his debt to the French, and wider European, New Wave. (Schrader 2004 [1990]) The world of uncertainties heightened by refracted light in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (*Il conformista*, 1970) was recreated for Schrader by Bertolucci's production designer, Nando Scarfiotti, alongside cinematographer John Bailey who emulated *The Conformist's* lighting effects. The sex scene between Julian and Lauren Hutton's Michelle, her name a feminized homage to *Pickpocket's* Michel, is taken from Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know about her* (*2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, 1967) and the ending is famously a replication of *Pickpocket* – reprised by Schrader in *Light Sleeper* (1991).

Although *Pickpocket* is also an acknowledged source for *Le Samourai*, Schrader has not acknowledged a direct connection between *American Gigolo* and *Le Samourai* but I would argue one is clear. Jef and Julian – whose names are not dissimilar – may seem to have different professions, but in explaining the difference to my students – one is a hired gun, while the other is a male prostitute, I only ended up underscoring their identity, especially given the gun's cinematic stereotype as a phallus. The title of the Graham Greene novel *A Gun for Sale* and film *This Gun for Hire*, underscores what each man is respectively selling.

Almost every key element of *Le Samourai's* *mise en scène* is reconfigured by *American Gigolo* as the films mediate commodity culture. In this sense, *American Gigolo* synthesizes Euro-American film style; *The Conformist* was not only a European source for Schrader, but as he describes, encompassed "the concept of high style" (Schrader 2004 [1990], 160) harking back to classical Hollywood's lavish sets which we see throughout *Le Samourai* in Jef's 'stage set' apartment, deco night-club and exotic gangland apartment and in the MTV-video texture of *American Gigolo's* LA. Revealing little of their emotional interiority, Jef and Julian represent what Schrader described as "a character of surfaces." (Schrader 2004 [1990], 158.) Jef steals cars to get to his Paris hits; Julian's BMW convertible is an icon as he drives to his tricks in the plush suburbs of Los Angeles. Jef's possessions may be sparse, but his home foregrounds chic French labels – Evian water, Gitane cigarettes; Julian takes a Tab from the refrigerator and orders a Perrier. They both meticulously construct their identities through costume; Jef's is the fixed noir uniform of trench coat and trilby, the fetishization of costume

causing critics to look askance at Melville for seeming to advertise “a style in raincoats.” (Browne (ed.) 1990, 117.) The over-determination of iconic costuming, signifying far more than the sum of its human clothes horse is demonstrated at Jef’s line-up when Perier tells the suspects to swap items of clothing; the clothes may be memorable, the person is not. Julian chooses from a vast wardrobe. In the film’s seminal scene, in what Schrader calls “the artist at his palette” (Schrader 1994 [1980], 161) and in what for me has always invoked Daisy Buchanan’s almost orgasmic cry at Jay Gatsby’s limitless apparel in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Julian muses at length what combination of clothes will constitute his latest ‘*beau de jour*.’ Julian is also dedicated to being the best at his job, simultaneously exercising to maintain his physique whilst learning Swedish to escort a new trick and articulates a philosophy to defend what Sunday deems his ‘illegal’ activities that parallels Michel’s: “Giving pleasure to women, I’m supposed to feel guilty about that? Legal is not always right. Men make laws. Sometimes they’re wrong, or stupid, or jealous. Some people are above the law.” Reflecting the duplicity of the imminent Reagan presidency, Julian’s obverse moral high ground is undermined by his own selective attitude. As H. N. Lukes points out, Julian cheats and double deals his male and female pimps (H. N. Lukes 2007 *American Gigolo*. In Merck (ed.), 178).

Alluding to *Pickpocket* as a source, Schrader has described *American Gigolo* as “a man and his room story” (Schrader 1994 [1980], 163), which particularly links Jef, Harry and Julian whose very different apartments serve as their sanctuary, but which signal their demise when that sanctuary is invaded. None of the men appear, at least at first, to ever invite another human being to their homes. Harry’s place is neat and pleasantly furnished, but it is sterile and impersonal, and some furnishings, such as a lampshade and sofa arms retain a plastic cover, to guard from dirt, but also to stress the lack of contact even between Harry and objects. The place is protected by three locks; he is furious when the building’s superintendent leaves a birthday gift inside his door.⁵ Demanding he should be the sole key-holder, Harry tells the superintendent, “I don’t have anything personal but my keys.” Julian’s apartment is beautifully furnished, but as with his use of costume, car, even drinks, the spectator has the sense that every object has been chosen to construct his image rather than reflect his self. Of course this film was made on the cusp of the status and consumer driven 1980s, and Julian’s home serves as a prototype for the designer store display effect that

⁵ This gift both heightens and justifies Harry’s paranoia; the superintendent has learned it is his birthday by opening Harry’s mail.

reaches its ironic apotheosis in *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000). Julian too resists human contact at his home. When Michelle tracks him down there he is incredulous that the receptionist says a friend is here to see him. He tells Michelle, "This is my apartment. Women don't come here." For both Jef and Julian experiences at their apartments are a barometer of their increased vulnerability, which involves the removal of their other protective coating, their costumes. After he has been shot, Jef, like the 'wounded wolf' Perier describes, goes back to his lair to lick, or at least clean and dress his wound. Wearing now a white t-shirt, evoking Marlon Brando's overt sexual appeal in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951), as Bruzzi points out, Jef is doubly exposed as he is undoubtedly subject to the erotic gaze of the audience. (Bruzzi 80-82) Julian has a parallel experience. Michelle pays her first visit immediately after the 'getting dressed' scene described above, in which, despite the upper body nudity, Julian remains in control, seemingly aware of the teasing effect on a rapt audience. After breaking his rule about women in his apartment, and making love to Michelle he is literally and figuratively exposed as he stands full frontally naked facing the camera. It is in this susceptible state, within their invaded sanctuary that both men reveal something of their inner selves. Jeff, who does at least share his apartment with another living creature, tenderly feeds his pet bird, while Julian tries to explain the honourable code of his work when he recently spent three hours bringing to orgasm a lonely elderly woman. Ultimately, both Julian and Harry destroy their homes after their invasion. Julian smashes his formerly prized commodities, particularly the "stupid little \$1200 stereo" women had unwittingly competed to buy for him, as he searches for the planted jewellery, before locating it under his car,⁶ which is as much a part of his commodified identity as his apartment, while Harry's painstaking destruction of every fibre of his place while looking for a bug is perhaps the most poignant representation of a tormented soul in any of the films.

Another theme highlighted by Schrader, which is common to all the protagonists is "the inability to express love." (Schrader 2004 [1990], 158) Like Raven's affection for his kitten, Jef appears to have no feelings save for his bird; in the exquisitely staged opening scene when we first see Jef's sparse apartment, the bird in its cage is in the centre of the frame, exactly paralleling the position of a body's heart. Of course Jef has an alleged fiancée,⁷ certainly a beautiful woman who loves him, but she appears no more than a convenience to him, a provider of alibis. Indeed, she is a parallel character to *The Conversation's* Amy (Teri Garr). Amy appears to be

⁶ Julian's painstaking deconstruction of his car replicates the search for smuggled heroin, eventually located in the rocker panels of the car in *The French Connection*.

⁷ Jane LaGrange, played by Delon's then wife, Natalie Delon.

Harry's mistress in the Victorian sense of the word. She is his kept woman, waiting, apparently perpetually in bed, for his unannounced visits. Amy did not know it was Harry's birthday; she does not know his age, or anything about him, but on learning he is visiting on his birthday, she wants 'something special' that would involve him telling her about himself, perhaps 'a secret,' certainly something 'personal.' Recalling to the audience Harry's denial to his apartment superintendent that he has anything personal, he gets up from her bed. Just as Jef caresses his bird with banknotes rather than his own touch, Harry is unable to connect with Amy physically or emotionally, but tells her that her rent is due, and leaves payment behind. Harry truly cannot express love. In the bugged convention party tape, Harry tries to ask Meredith about a hypothetical relationship, obviously his own and Amy's. When Meredith, putting herself in the woman's position, wonders "How would I know he loved me?" Harry replies "You'd have no way of knowing." *The Conversation* is an ironic title; Harry may bug the words of others, but he is incapable of face to face communication, the times he does try to talk about himself remain distanced from contact; the first is to an invisible curtained-off father confessor, the other a nightmare dream sequence.

Both Jef and Harry arrive when their mistresses are in bed. The woman is wearing scanty nightwear, but both men remain fully dressed, including their raincoats and shoes; there is no direct evidence that either Jef or Harry consummate a sexual relationship with these women justifying Andrew Spicer's claim that "an insidious form of misogyny operates in New Wave Noir, while Melville eliminates women almost entirely from his bleak male world." (Spicer 2007, 45.) Julian begins *American Gigolo* lacking any personal involvement with women; they are for work only and when asked by his female pimp Nina Van Pallandt if he wants to hang out with her girls, he answers with derision "No thanks. No Way". During the film he softens towards Michelle's pursuit, but she retains the sense that when they have sex, it is as if he is going to work; as Schrader says, "Even the sex scenes are very cold." (Schrader 2004 [1990], 160.) Like his feminized nickname 'Julie,' the ease with which he adopts a camp persona, and his desperate agreement to do 'fag' tricks – can a man, whose sexual potency has to be visible, fake desire?, – Julian's sexuality is always ambiguous.⁸ The audience retains a suspicion that his increased affection for her is predicated upon his growing need for an alibi. The final scene is a precise replication of *Pickpocket*. Michelle comes to visit Julian in jail telling him she will provide him with an alibi, and like Michel and Jeanne (Marika Green) they reach out to each

⁸ Greeted at the door by name, Julian is obviously a frequent visitor at the gay disco.

other. In 1959 the lovers can actually caress through the metal grille but by 1980 a sheet of Plexiglas – not unlike Harry Caul’s chair covers – keeps them apart, representing not only the encroaching synthetic commodity culture, but Julian’s continued inability to make human contact.

His cry, “Michelle it’s taken me so long to come to you” sounds risible rather than tender. As for Jef, Vincendeau argues that rather than simply falling in love with the pianist he is hired to, but ultimately refuses to kill, his sadness is for himself for being unable to experience love rather than their lost love. (Vincendeau 2003) Although critics like to assume this, there is no evidence within the film that Jef feels either desire or affection for Valerie. If she fascinates him it is because she duped him; he only realizes this when he returns to her apartment and finds instead the gang boss who hired him. Jef has not maintained his ‘no mistakes’ code and cannot carry out his last hit – on Valerie – not because he loves her, but because suicide is the only honourable end for the defeated samurai. Each man shares this defeat as they too have failed to maintain their personal code: Julian has succumbed to a relationship to save his skin, Harry has become the victim not the master of surveillance, and Popeye has failed to achieve justice.

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True and False New Realities in the Films of Wes Anderson, Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman

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Abstract. The filmmakers of the French *Nouvelle Vague*, in the spirit of post-war modernism, wanted to get at the truth of everyday life, and braved oncoming traffic to capture people living real lives. Since the turn of the millennium, Wes Anderson, Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman have taken the opposite track, showing a remarkable tendency to undermine their own representations of reality – often humorously collapsing the boundaries between the actual and fictional worlds. The particular filmmakers never content themselves with simple exercises in mimesis, but instead openly acknowledge the elusive objective of faithfully representing reality: examples include the subversively deceptively Godardian cut-away of a film set in Anderson’s *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), the symbiotic relationship between the diegetic writing of two screenplays and the events unfolding around the characters in Jonze’s *Adaptation* (2002), and the multiple mise-en-abyme structure of Kaufman’s *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). In the course of their films, Anderson, Jonze and Kaufman playfully yet confidently turn our perception of diegetic reality on its head, placing emphasis on the idea of “performance” – as it relates to the characters as well as the films themselves.

Introduction

The late 1950s and the early 1960s saw a handful of French directors setting out to revitalize a film industry whose output, according to them, had become dull and conventional. In the spirit of post-war modernism and heavily influenced by the ideas of André Bazin, the filmmakers of the *Nouvelle Vague* wanted to get at the truth of everyday life, recorded straight onto film. The fictional organically grew out of the real.

Around the turn of the millennium, a few American filmmakers turned representation on its head; their work exhibits an infinitely more complicated

relationship with reality than the cinema of the *Nouvelle Vague*. Alongside a variety of other filmmakers who have made thematically similar contributions, the three individuals who form the focus of this article have most consistently represented a noticeable movement that is slightly absurdist but always rooted in some semblance of everyday life, even whilst admitting that their presentation is a fictional artefact.

These filmmakers are Wes Anderson, Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman.

Their films display a tendency to highlight the distance from physical reality, often through metafictional gestures. They also share a certain whimsical quality with the films of the *Nouvelle Vague* and make considerable use of “performance,” a theme illustrated in examples throughout this article.

The search for the truth of everyday life has transformed into a search for the truth of the film as constructed fiction. All of this is communicated by means of characters involved in explicitly stated plots and *mise-en-abyme* structures of representation that erase the original, even if the original itself is sometimes fictional.

Usually, fictional events are “true” within the diegesis, but when the diegesis acknowledges itself as artificial (false), a grip on the fictional reality becomes all the more difficult and these worlds may be said to be both true and false.

I shall argue that the golden thread tying these three very distinct filmmakers together is a visible presentation of events as elements of an artistic production. Such a presentation is clearly recognized and promoted by all three directors: Wes Anderson frames his films as theatre productions or as literature; Spike Jonze deals with the bizarre consequences of taking on a role as performer; and finally, Charlie Kaufman’s *Synecdoche, New York* revolves around a theatre director and the all-encompassing play about his life.

I will explore the work of these three directors, in this order, while continuously highlighting the similarities in their work that may serve to define them as a movement. The following three sections will delve into the diverse work of Anderson, Jonze and Kaufman, with the primary goal of pointing out that the films do not take themselves too seriously: they are self-referential or explicitly artificial, clearly utilising the representational modes of the other forms of art, but never become self-destructive or create distance between themselves and the viewer.

1. Wes Anderson

With the exception of his very first feature film, *Bottle Rocket*, Wes Anderson’s films are instantly recognizable by their visual bright colours, their meticulously constructed images, a general air of synthetic reality and characters with curious

idiosyncrasies. In *Rushmore*, the Herman Blume character wears the same suit throughout the film; the three Tenenbaum children also show a remarkably similar dislike in changing their clothes, whether they are 10 or 30 years old. And inexplicably, in *The Darjeeling Limited*, Jack is always seen barefoot, regardless of the rest of his attire.

There is a stylistic consistency to the visual quality of Anderson's imagery, namely that the images always give the impression more of hyperrealism than of actual reality.

But before we get to Anderson's visuals, it is worth pointing out a moment that seems to encapsulate this director's playful refusal of strict mimesis. It happens one night aboard the *Belafonte* – Steve Zissou's explorer ship in *The Life Aquatic*. As Zissou walks through the different compartments, the camera pulls back to reveal the entirety of the model ship, cut open to show the interior.

This presentation of the ship as a sham calls to mind a similar shot in Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout va bien*. Not only does Anderson imply that this cutaway model is his doll house to play with as a director, but he has the cheek to wrap up the scene with Zissou stating: "It's all really happening." This is, of course, a blatant audiovisual contradiction that pretends to qualify the transparently artificial as "the real," and the substitution of the real by the fake is already visible. However, since this presentation is integrated into the rest of the film by virtue of its similarity to the very films made by the main character, the effect on the viewer is not one of shock or confusion, in the vein of modernist filmmakers like Godard. Anderson doesn't seek to estrange the viewer, but reveals the artifice of his production in a way that serves to conflate his own film with the films inside the narrative – a postmodernist gesture, instead of a modernist one.

One of the principal threads that run through Wes Anderson's work is a fascination with characters who try to stage productions. *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* have teenage theatre directors and *The Life Aquatic* centres on a documentary filmmaker, Steve Zissou. In a very revealing moment, Zissou describes someone else as his "nemesiis," implying that he sees himself as a character performing in a fiction.

In one of Anderson's most recent films, *The Darjeeling Limited*, the character of Jack Whitman writes a story about the journey that he and his brothers have undertaken through the Indian countryside. It is an unfaithful account, but the original events themselves (that constitute the film's narrative trajectory) have a very simulated feel – because of their very obviously controlled appearance – so that even these allegedly original events feel fake. An argument could be made

that Jack Whitman sees his own life as a kind of fiction, like Steve Zissou, or even that he recognizes his own status as a fictional character.

The events, as retold or presented by characters like Zissou and Whitman, are different from the facts, and in this way, the authenticity of representation is brought into question. In fact, there are question marks hanging over the credibility of representations in the films of all three directors discussed in the current article.

Anderson's films epitomize a frame of "spectacle" – the presentation of the material as part of a staged production of sorts. Sometimes the artistic endeavours of some of his main characters feature prominently, like the plays of young theatre director Max Fischer in *Rushmore* or the work of oceanographer/director Steve Zissou in *The Life Aquatic*, but in general the idea of a spectacle also applies to Wes Anderson's films themselves.

The title shot of *Rushmore* reveals itself from behind velvet stage curtains and the presentation of the story in this way implies a performance (or a representation) of events, instead of the events themselves; the diegesis is implicitly set on a stage, book-ended by the opening of the curtains at the start, and the closing of the curtains before the final credits: the so-called "stage" is the world of the film.

The Royal Tenenbaums is the title of a book on loan from the public library, and there is a theatrical touch to the film's opening credits, with an explicit mention of the cast as the "dramatis personae." The same goes for the title shot of *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, which presents the film as a book, on the cover of which it is clearly stated that it is "based on the novel by Roald Dahl." These references to literature and theatre enhance the viewer's perception of the film as an artistic creation.

And then there is *The Life Aquatic*, whose main character's questionable documentaries have a very staged look and feel about them, and the artifice of these little films extends to Wes Anderson's film itself.

"The Life Aquatic" is also the name of the Zissou film screened at the beginning of Wes Anderson's film, and this confusion between film and film-within-film goes some way towards explaining the simulated look of both. This second-degree fiction (the film-within-the-film) is projected onto a screen that is in fact a large print of a painting – in other words, a copy of a representation.

In another scene, Zissou introduces the viewer to his boat (the Belafonte) by holding up a small model of the boat in front of a painting – a reproduction of the boat. All the while, the cutaway model, already cited earlier in the article, is visible in the background, presenting itself as the original, even though it is clearly fake.

Copies, representations and the problem of the original will play an important part in the screenplays of Charlie Kaufman; Spike Jonze deals extensively with the implosion of boundaries in his first two films as director, both scripted by Kaufman.

2. Spike Jonze

Unlike Wes Anderson's hermetically sealed universes, the diegeses of Jonze's films contain a number of characters that have referents in real life, like John Malkovich or Catherine Keener, or a screenwriter called Charlie Kaufman. The combination of real and fictional elements necessarily complicates matters of reference, especially when some portray themselves, while others don't. The easiest way to cut through this Gordian knot of reference is to read the entire film as fictional and self-contained, despite its supposed connection to an extradiegetic reality.

Spike Jonze's central characters use their skills as puppeteers or screenwriters to gain control over their own story: either they physically become someone else, like Craig Schwartz who takes the physical form of John Malkovich, or they fictionally become someone else, like Charlie Kaufman who becomes the fictional version of himself – the central character in a story he is writing and living at the same time.

In *Being John Malkovich*, once Craig Schwartz manages to possess Malkovich and manipulate him like a puppet, Schwartz is no longer just a puppeteer, but becomes a performing actor in his own right. The film's opening scene, in which a puppet is performing a dance on a small stage, is repeated eighty minutes later, in the flesh via John Malkovich, who is performing on the stage that is the diegesis itself.

This idea of reality as stage, which we noted in Wes Anderson's films as well, will be central to the discussion of Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* which forms the final part of this article.

The double identity of performer and orchestrator is repeated in *Adaptation*:¹ A symbiotic relationship develops between the diegesis of Charlie Kaufman's reality and the fictional world of the screenplay which he is writing during the course of the film, such that it becomes very difficult to evaluate which reality is the source and which is the copy. On top of this, and in spite of the apparent reference to an "original," *it is a fictional original*: there are constant reminders that the origin of the events lies not in reality, but in a screenplay, written and rewritten by a creator.

By means of some self-conscious devices like the use of voice-over narration juxtaposed with a scene in which the use of the voice-over is repudiated as sloppy writing, *Adaptation* makes the viewer conscious of the fact that the film is a fiction.

¹ While the correct spelling of Spike Jonze's film is *Adaptation.*, I have omitted the final full stop for the sake of better legibility throughout the text.

In fact, *Adaptation* contains a number of examples of self-reference and this insistence on the constructed nature of the fictional text is a property of metafiction.

The term “metafiction” is used to refer to a text which makes a deliberate point of being a fictional text. In so doing, of course, the constructed, artificial quality of the production is accentuated.

In *Being John Malkovich*, John Malkovich (who is an actor in real life) plays an actor. But not just any actor: he “portrays himself” (insofar as this is possible) in the fictional world that is the diegesis of this film. Before long, the puppeteer Craig Schwartz manages to control Malkovich, thereby causing three otherwise distinct roles to overlap: the real John Malkovich, the fictional character that is the film’s John Malkovich, and Schwartz’s own performance channelled through John Malkovich, who performs all of these roles simultaneously.

There is further confusion between fiction and reality, since the film’s so-called “documentary” about John Malkovich’s life contains many factual errors, including his full name. Sean Penn and Brad Pitt, who are actors earning their living through performance, appear as themselves. These “selves” are, of course, difficult to define, for any actual individual who appears in a fiction film, like *Being John Malkovich*, is necessarily circumscribed by a fictional operator, which results in the production of an entity who is almost identical to the original, but of a different order: fictional, instead of actual. The fictional entity is a counterpart of the actual individual, and they are close enough to be nearly indistinguishable from each other. It is this confusing boundary between the fictional and the actual, and in particular the insistence on the actual even within a fictional framework, that problematizes the meaning of the images in front of us.²

The metafictional properties of *Adaptation* are much more overt. Not only does the film comment on the medium of film, with tongue-in-cheek references to voice-overs and car chases while using them, but it revolves around its own making, evolving and recounting this evolution at the same time. In the film, Charlie Kaufman’s life starts to reflect the screenplay he is writing, but his explicit use of film terminology draws attention to the overarching film’s own status as a fictional artefact.

In Spike Jonze’s films, the world of the fiction gradually reveals itself as constructed. Just like in Wes Anderson’s films, Spike Jonze’s characters hurtle towards an ever more fictional version of themselves. In the process, the fictional framework of the story is openly flaunted.

² In this paragraph, I have used the concept of a fictional operator, more thoroughly developed elsewhere, among others by David Lewis and Kendall Walton.

Charlie Kaufman used his first film as director, *Synecdoche, New York*, to explore the theme of metafiction in even greater detail. While it doesn't contain any real-life characters the way Jonze's film does, the questions it raises regarding fictional representation are central to understanding these filmmakers' fondness for blurring the line between original and copy – all of this done within a visibly fictional environment.

3. Charlie Kaufman

Synecdoche, New York, released in 2008, has been Kaufman's sole outing as director and I will consider issues relating to the problem of representation targeted by this film, as well as the undervalued directorial debut of George Clooney: the Kaufman-scripted *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*.

In short, *Synecdoche, New York* is the story of Caden Cotard, a theatre director who decides to stage a play based on his own life, taking it to its logical conclusion, where this representation should necessarily contain copies of all the elements, including a copy of the representation itself, containing more copies, and so on. The scope of this *mise-en-abyme* is seemingly endless, and when all is said and done, the original has been lost somewhere along the way.

In the film, a cartoon on television features an animated version of Caden – one of many different representations in the film, none of them particularly close to the original, but all representing him nonetheless. This is an important point to make, because in the end, Caden allows an actress to portray him, despite the visible differences in appearance. The success of the representation depends on the performance itself while its relation to the original becomes trivial.

“What would be real?” asks Caden's psychologist, but this is a question that, before long, the viewer struggles to answer, especially when the actors supposedly play themselves. The combination of real objects and their own (or other) representations poses its own problems. When the real tries to interact with the artificial, there is often great misunderstanding, or unsolvable confusion, much like John Malkovich who travels into his own portal and discovers a world populated by different versions of himself. In *Synecdoche, New York*, one scene starts in the real world and immediately repeats itself on stage. The stage version contains at least one character playing herself, but whether this performance is itself “real,” “a copy” or altogether fictional, is a question that remains unanswered.

In a sense, representations can become replacements for the real-life objects and when Caden's wife and daughter play themselves in his play, on a kitchen

set that is indistinguishable from his own “real-world” kitchen, original and copy blur into one, and the worlds of life and theatre become tangled up.

Such an equalization of an original with its copy is a cornerstone of the film’s handling of representations. This acknowledged conflation of act and representation is a major interest of Charlie Kaufman and visible in other films in which he was involved, most importantly *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, directed by George Clooney.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind is presented in such a way that it deliberately makes the viewer question the reliability of the main character recollecting the events. Time becomes somewhat fluid and is compressed over the course of a single take at multiple points during the film. Clooney’s direction touches on the same terrain as two other Kaufman-scripted productions – *Adaptation* and *Synecdoche, New York* – in its willingness to playfully blend reality with fantasy and acknowledge the artifice of the representation. In turn, this recalls Wes Anderson’s cutaway of the Belafonte. Clooney’s manipulation of space and time reveals itself in two very noticeable ways: firstly, there is a physical merging of two events that are actually separated by time and space, and secondly, events that look like they are true in the story turn out to be merely visual fabrications.

At the beginning of *Synecdoche, New York*, the viewer still has a clear sense of what Caden’s immediate world consists of. However, the representation slowly replaces the original and the outside world steadily takes a back seat to the version presented on stage. The natural is eliminated in favour of the artificial. The diegesis becomes opaque and uncertain, but clearly influenced by intradiegetic fictions of its own making.

The film contains a scene where Caden sees a gift, which he had sent to his little girl, lying among some garbage. He takes out a vial labelled “Tear substitute” and once he has administered the liquid into his eyes, he proceeds to break down and cry. Or: he pretends to break down and cry. Thus, attention is drawn to the element of performance, even while the stage on which the performance takes place isn’t clear. While the boundary between the film’s real and theatrical worlds becomes more and more fuzzy, this particular incident pretends to show an actor portraying a part. However, who the actor is (it might be Caden, or a representation of Caden played by Caden himself), what the part is, and who the audience is, is unclear and deliberately ambiguous.

At the end of the film, Caden’s occupation of director is taken over by one of his actresses, and he is directed by this representation of himself. Caden therefore

starts performing as a fictional entity in a world that should be real to him. The scope of these interwoven representations – the one inside of the other, inside of another, but many of them more or less reflecting each other – is complex. Once again, it is difficult to pinpoint what the original is, and what the copy is. It is perhaps no surprise that the first images of Caden in the film are his reflections in a mirror: these representations are superficially faithful to the source, but deficient in diegetic substance. Even so, they largely serve as a substitute for Caden.

When Caden is directed to die, it is not only the character that Caden portrays in the theatre piece, but, as far as we can tell, Caden himself and the film who all expire on command by an audible director. This clearly frames the entire film as a show, a controlled creation.

These three filmmakers behave like proper modernists in reminding us that their films are constructions, but relish this fact with postmodern exuberance by not sticking to the facts. The real is always visibly *fictionally* real.

Conclusion

The films discussed in this paper often humorously collapse the boundaries between different kinds of fictional representation, and make a point of emphasizing the importance of the fake. All three directors have addressed the tricky relationship of representations with their sources and, to various degrees of complexity, their films deal with the problems of creation, representation and identity in a world where originals can hardly be discerned from their copies. These filmmakers don't content themselves with simple exercises in mimesis, but instead openly acknowledge the elusive objective of faithfully representing reality. This recognition of playful construction is of course a hallmark of postmodern cinema, but while a film like *Adaptation* benefits from such a label, I hesitate to define many of the other films by such broad strokes.

Anderson, Jonze and Kaufman won't necessarily continue in this vein, but at the turn of the 21st century, for a while, they were making different films addressing similar kinds of preoccupations about filmic reality. While definitely not general studio fare, their films have moderately sized budgets and big names in the cast; they are quite different from the ground-breaking films made by Godard, Truffaut and company, but just like the French upstarts, these filmmakers bring a critical energy to their storytelling that is difficult to miss.

The films' self-consciousness of being artistic creations and the cheerful acknowledgement of their inherent artifice are visually exemplified by scenes

such as the model set in *The Life Aquatic*, but a number of other examples may be found in nearly all of these films.

The French filmmaker Michel Gondry, who directed two other Charlie Kaufman screenplays (*Human Nature* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*), has been left unmentioned in this article, because Gondry – unlike Anderson, Jonze and Kaufman – always makes a clear distinction between his stories’ real and imaginary components. He presents the real and the fantastical with clarity – as two separate, distinct spaces that cannot be confused for each other – and thereby he distinguishes himself from the others discussed here.

On the other hand, the American director Steven Soderbergh has, from time to time, subverted the conventional relationship between fiction and reality, just like the other directors discussed in this article. In some ways, his 1996 film *Schizopolis* has much in common with *Synecdoche, New York*’s disintegration of family life in the midst of representations of such domestic mayhem. However, it is *Ocean’s Twelve* that would display his most audacious venture into the murky waters of postmodern subversion. In this film, the character of Tess, played by Julia Roberts, is asked to “pretend” she is Julia Roberts the movie star. Much confusion ensues, since the fictional and actual worlds unexpectedly collide: Tess, a fictional character, is playing a real person, Julia Roberts, but at the same time, the viewer knows that it is both true and false that Tess *is* Julia Roberts. This open confrontation between real and fictional, and the dilemma generated by performance on both sides (Julia Roberts performing as Tess; Tess performing as Julia Roberts) perfectly demonstrate what possibilities there are in this kind of storytelling. Soderbergh explored similar themes in the metafictional narrative of a 2002 film called *Full Frontal*. Incidentally, *Full Frontal*’s film-within-a-film is directed by David Fincher (as David Fincher), whose only other appearance as film actor was in *Being John Malkovich*.

The films of Anderson, Jonze and Kaufman revolve around “truth as constructed fiction” rather than the so-called “truth of everyday life” which their predecessors held in such great esteem. Some of their films could themselves be a production staged by the respective main characters, and in some cases they are. They recognize that they are inherently fictional and the explicit nature of the performances reminds us that, often, the originals themselves might be fake. There is also a very definite confusion about what we are actually seeing, and this confusion isn’t resolved by a last-minute revelation or plot twist. “True” and “false” are labels that cannot easily be ascribed to the parts of a film, especially when these parts no longer fit into a clearly defined context. Even if, say, the

original were true and the copy false, the difference between the two is no longer evident, and the relevance of such labels is now more dubious than ever before.

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Abbas Kiarostami and a New Wave of the Spectator

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Abstract. Western references of Kiarostami's work are often over-estimating the influence of the Western Cinema – especially Modernism, the New Waves, Godard, Bresson – on his films. But self-reflexivity and minimalism here have more to do with the eastern ornamental mode, symbolic iconography and tradition of deconstruction. A close analysis of the issue of spectatorship (and, moreover, that of the woman as spectator) in this self-effacing cinema will show how gaps and even a lack of visual stimuli are turning the image into a mirror reflecting the spectator 'written into' the very texture of these films.

“The only way to envision a new cinema is to have more regard for the spectator's role.”¹

Abbas Kiarostami

In 1995, to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of cinema, a great number of film directors from all around the world – among them Abbas Kiarostami – engaged in a historical, yet symbolic project: making short movies with the camera of the Lumière brothers.² On this occasion, they were all asked about the future of the cinema and they all agreed that cinema is mortal. And yet, the spirit of the cinematic paradigm represented by the Lumières seems to be carried on by the so called “World Cinema.” Neo-realism, Modernism and the New Waves – both French and national ones – are all “waving” towards the Middle and Far East: Iran, China, Hong Kong and Korea.

At first sight Abbas Kiarostami can be easily mistaken for a late modernist, with existential questions at the core of his first movies. But, as the in-depth monograph

¹ Abbas Kiarostami and Jean-Luc Nancy in *Conversation*, 2001, 88.

² *Lumière & Compagnie* (1995), directed by Theodoros Angelopoulos and Vicente Aranda. Original idea from Philippe Poulet. 41 directors were challenged to create short movies of less than 52 seconds, with the restored original camera of the Lumière brothers. Only three takes were allowed and no use of synchronized sound.

of Alberto Elena is revealing it, this relationship to the European tradition of cinema is rather confusing – a feature that all representatives of the Iranian New Wave share (cf. Elena 2005, 42), that might as well be rooted in the paradoxical relationship of Iran to tradition and modernity or what Jean-Luc Nancy calls 'Occidentosis' (Nancy 2001, 16, 26).³ Kiarostami claims to be a disciple of Ozu and Bresson, but his characters are not alienated from a society in which they are drifting without a reason. They can't be named 'outsiders' because the community of 'insiders' is missing or not represented thoroughly enough. They don't even enter the world of action, they are drifting on the edge of it, as mere spectators often in a car, a 'shell of solitude,' in the *Taste of Cherry* (1987), or trying in vain to establish contact with it, as in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), where the character fails to use his mobile phone in a remote place. Typically, the Western approach is attributing a double, self-referential meaning to the car itself, a recurrent object and subject in almost all his films. It is a motif through which – according to the 'in depth' analysis of *Life and Nothing More.../...And Life Goes On* (1992) by Jean-Luc Nancy – plays on two registers. One is that of interrupted continuation, of movement, of displacement: "The automobile carries around the screen or the lens, the screen-lens of its windshield, always further, and this screen is precisely not a screen – neither obstacle, nor wall of projection – but a *text* (écrit), a sinuous, steep and dusty trace." The other is "the passage through the image, or to the image" (Nancy 2001, 66).

Kiarostami's original interpretation of modernism consists of this 'double framing,' which always includes the gaze of the spectator, who often happens to be a character (sometimes the director) of the movie. This principle is plastically represented in Kiarostami's *Five, Homage to Ozu* (2004), a very long shot taking a distant view of one of the main existentialist symbols, the sea. It is where the *La Dolce Vita* (1960) ends and this is what the elderly couple of *Tokyo Story* (1953) is facing in one of the most memorable scenes of the movie. *Five*, originally presented as a video installation, is not only a thematization of the 'looking' or the gaze of the modernist outsider, but also, due to the new frame added by the museum environment, that of the spectator and its changing position. In this respect – as Alberto Elena is pointing it out – can we talk about Alain Bergala's idea of 're-education' of the gaze, as applied to the whole Kiarostami corpus, through a 'distancing' between the film and the audience (Elena 2005, 188).

The Iranian director is not primarily preoccupied with the existential problems of the individual in a given socio-cultural context, but rather with varied 'poetical'

³ This duplicity is also reflected in the structure of Elena's book (2005): the chapters dealing with the Kiarostami's movies have the titles of prominent pieces of European cinema: *La regle du jeu*, *The Eclipse*, *Zero de Conduite*, *Journey to Nowhere*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, *All about my Mother*.

resources, possibilities of cinema to convey contents related to human existence. Thus, his main characters are not the non-actors playing the different roles, but rather key cinematic concepts like The Cinematic Space, The Camera, The Director and The Spectator. Or, more precisely, Use of Space, Use of Camera, Directing, Acting and Viewing. The best example for this is the so-called 'Koker trilogy' – *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994) –: the second one about the journey of the director back to the place where the first one was shot, looking for the main character, and the third one about the making of the second one. This 'zoom in' is not, however, a well calculated self-referentiality, but rather a matter of Method, meaning the path or way of looking for something (see Nancy 2001, 54).

As he often pointed it out, Kiarostami has no professional training and had never worked as a director's assistant before he started making his own films. This might be the secret of his completely fresh, innocent eye on cinema: it is not, I would say, a well-calculated return to the basics and minimalistic stylization, but rather a *re-invention*, or even more, a rediscovery of a medium inseparable from its socio-cultural-political environment. This was even more true in the post-revolutionary Iran, where, according to Elena, "cinema was effectively replacing poetry, plays, short stories, and novels as the most significant cultural medium" (2005, 105). As Stephane Goudet points it out in his article called "Retake: The Films of Abbas Kiarostami" published in *Positif*, this is a "cinema of intervention," playing a role of a third party, who was not originally involved in legal action, but appears to take part in it. It is the case of *Close-Up* (1990), where it appears as an advocate of the case of a detainee accused of lying about his identity (saying, he's the filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf) to commit a fraud. In Goudet's words, "the filmmaker tries to make all his protagonists' dreams come true." Similarly, in *Through the Olive Trees*, the director intervenes to bring together the two non-actors playing in his film and separated by a social restriction. The closing shot of *Taste of Cherry*, about the filming process, all in bright morning light, appears as redemption of the protagonist, moving desperately forth and back in an inferno-like, red light and space. In this respect are these films, according to the same Goudet, "anti-*Contempt*." Godard's film is an allegory of 'film as Art' with symbolic characters like The Director Fritz Lang, the American Producer, the Intellectual Screenplay Writer and a Star Actress. Against this over-aesthetized view on major issues of filmmaking concerning an adaptation classic, distant literary work, the *Odyssey*, Kiarostami proposes a third party, the medium, meant to ease communication between the eye and reality, by

eliminating the distance between them. It is worth, in this respect, to compare the final shots of either the *Taste of Cherry* or *Through the Olive Trees* with that of *Contempt* (1963). In this latter, we see Fritz Lang *contemplating* alone the endless sea, while in *Through the Olive Trees* director Jafar Panahi is *witnessing* the unfolding of a *real event*. Or rather, an *evidence*, as Nancy calls it: “Evidence refers to what is obvious, what makes sense, what is striking and, by the same token, opens and gives a chance and opportunity to meaning [...] Something is seen distinctly from far away because it detaches itself, it separates – like the two shapes or the double shape we see of Tahereh and her beloved.” (2001, 42.) (Godard himself, we must add, is treating ironically this kind of distant aestheticism – just remember the decadent musical score of the film – hence one possible interpretation of the title *Contempt*. And he’s also using, but just as one of his many stylistic solutions, the method of intervention: the director/camera interfering with the lives of his characters, characteristic for the socio-political standpoint of New Wave directors).

The socio-political reactivity and sensitivity might also seem a heritage of the French and National New Waves. However, Kiarostami is not representing the socio-political issues, but a medium, its concepts and whole apparatus put in the service of these.⁴ Thus, a film presented as installation or thoroughly minimalistic is perfectly susceptible to show how a medium works, its basic rules and mechanisms. In the approach of Rosalind Krauss, the re-invention contains ‘redemptive potentialities for a medium when it loses popularity: the obsolete medium is re-created by the unveiling of its expressive means (Krauss 1999, 296). This re-discovered, exposed, re-framed cinema appears to be – according to Ji-Hoon Kim – “the last modernist medium to confirm and simultaneously implode the idea of the medium as a coherent physical substance for creating artistic forms and examining their effects” (2009, 116).

Kiarostami’s re-discovered cinema is taking up the line of the Lumière-brothers and rejects all the rules of transparency and fiction. First of all, by his choice of locations and space: it’s often a place of non-action, the desert, a courtroom, a village after earthquake and, most characteristically, the inside of the car. Especially this latter is, as the director himself is telling us in his *Ten on Ten* (2003), suitable to generate tension: the suffocating closeness of the other generates an emotionally overcharged situation, and the most vulnerable spots are revealed, see, for example *The Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*. The rule of transparency is broken by the non-use or

⁴ Although he is fully aware of the expectations of the Iranian people: “In a country like Iran, people don’t just want their artists to show the issues, they want them to resolve them. But it is not the artist’s function to resolve issues.” (Elena 2005, 193.)

inconsistent use of the shot-counter shot rule in dialogues. ‘The suture’ is torn up: people can talk for minutes without seeing the reaction of the Other. Or, alternatively, they listen to the off-shot voice as if ‘exposed’ to it – it enters their private sphere, invading it. They are not actively searching for (eye)contact, they are rather passive, submissive. There is no permanent eye-contact, as the speaker is driving. Amazingly, people left alone in this awkward situation seem to show their feelings more freely, as there is no director who could criticize their ‘acting’. And this is where the spectator, sitting on the other side of the screen and seeing it all, is being attracted into this game: it is only her/him who’s reading the reaction of the other, when the counter-shot is finally happening. Spectatorship appears here as a key medium specificity – film depends on the spectator, only exists “if the subject becomes Other:” “Just as music can produce a dancer in an individual, so film can produce a spectator in a cinemagoer,” writes Rob Lapsley in his essay *Cinema, the Impossible, and a Psychoanalysis to Come*, appeared in the *Screen’s* 50th anniversary issue, and also “the spectator is at once receptive and form-giving.” “In the co-creation that is the filmic event, the spectator appropriates the text but is, in turn, expropriated by it. In the process, he comes to know what would otherwise remain undisclosed” (Lapsley 2009, 16). In his conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy, Kiarostami is relying on André Gide and Godard to reinforce his attitude about the increased importance of the spectator in the creation of a work of art, saying that “the gaze is important, not the subject matter” and “what’s on the screen is already dead – the spectator’s gaze breathes life into it” (2001, 84). This is why he prefers gaps and open questions – in his view not being understood is the only possibility of cinema to become a “major art form.” His principle is plastically represented by the increasing minimalism of his latest films, especially *Ten* (2002) and *Shirin* (2008), his two words and one-word statements:⁵ the first on the Character and Spectator, the latter on the Character/Spectator.

Towards a Film of the (Female) Spectator: *Ten* and *Shirin*

As the already mentioned 50th anniversary *Screen* issue is also proving it – being a summing up of the main theoretical directions hosted by this journal – the psychoanalytical discourses of spectatorship, closely related to the feminist approach, have been one of the most original and specific directions of film theory. Again, willingly-unwillingly, Kiarostami seems to fit in the Western

⁵ Kiarostami himself calls *Ten* his two-words statement, after telling the anecdote about Kundera’s father, who at the end of his life ended up repeating two words: ‘How strange!’ At the same place he anticipates his next film: “A one-word film perhaps” (see Elena 2005, 179).

theoretical mainstream, which often recognizes its own concepts in the Iranian director's work. But it is not Kiarostami's intention to create a counter-cinema with his female characters and thematization of spectatorship. These are for him, as already said, simple means to access and represent reality. Theoretical "trendiness" is only a by-product of his preoccupation to represent women differently: not as 'objects of desire', but as holders of reality and truth.⁶ Their faces left visible – all their body is covered and they are wearing scarf – are, in fact, an *inter-face* where reality (about man's world, their wars, fights for power, culturally coded relationships between man and woman) becomes visible.

The question is, then, how can a woman spectator relate to these characters? Neither the narcissistic, nor the masochistic ways, defined by leading feminist film-theoreticians, seem to be fully working here: with the increasing prominence of the so-called world-cinema, and especially the Muslim-world cinema, the issue of the woman spectator and in general the theory of *scopophilia* and *fetishism* has to be rethought. This is an old preoccupation of the theories of the spectator and feminist film theory: in 1991 Mary Ann Doane is talking about an increasing necessity for a theory of the female spectator, while Teresa de Lauretis is pointing out the need of a *re-vision*, the need to transcend the history or 'herstory' of the Western woman, as 'there are women who are wearing masks or veil, who are invisible in the male society or even for other women.'⁷ Almost two decades later, in the next to last sequence of *Ten*, Kiarostami seems to answer this call: he realizes a representation of empathy, a distant yet participating presence of the female spectator, not possible according to the mentioned feminist theorists. While the two women – the driver and her friend – are just chatting, there is a shot-counter shot rhythm. When her client is revealing her shaved head (an outrageous gesture according to radical Muslim rules), the car stops, the camera focuses on her face and the driver's comforting words are coming from off-screen: she's *in* and she's *out*, here and there at the same time, which is the essence of empathy. This detached understanding is even turned into an aesthetic distancing, when she finds her friend with the shaved head beautiful. The woman with the shaved head is not an object of desire, but, as her friend is pointing it out, an "icon of loss." Her face and veiled head – as well as that of the 113 actresses in *Shirin* – is showing a great similarity with the religious icons, holding a transcendental value. According to Paul Schraeder, the reserved,

⁶ *Ten* marks a turn in Kiarostami's views on using female characters: before he used to excuse himself on the grounds of censorial issues regarding the representation of female characters (see Elena 2005, 176).

⁷ She's commenting on an essay of Barbara Smith (1982).

expressionless faces in the icons are the 'sites' of the transcendental, as everybody fills them up with her/his own faith and beliefs (1972). In both *Ten* and *Shirin* these Madonna-like faces function – in accordance with Kiarostami's principle regarding the spectator's role – as *gaps*, which will be completed by our individual interpretation. This poetic manoeuvre proves to work very effectively in *Shirin*, where we are actually projecting our feelings about the off-screen drama onto their faces (as we know that they are watching something completely different).

In Kiarostami's films a female character's face has an iconic value, more related to the surface of the picture, while his male characters are freely discovering, mapping up the space, the third dimension. This passive-active duality is even represented in the minimalistic setting of *Shirin*: women's faces are always shown in a close-up, while male spectators appear always in the second row, thus in a medium shot, from the waist upwards, so that their hands are also visible. In Kiarostami's films the male character's gaze is never returned by its passive object (only in the male character's stories, e. g. in *Through the Olive Trees*) – thus the lack of shot-counter shot in these encounters – which, again, stops women being an 'object of desire.'

In his two latest films – *Ten* and *Shirin* – the thematization of the woman as a witness/spectator/bystander or outsider is, in fact, a powerful allegory of women's – Eastern and Western – socio-cultural condition. In *Ten*, the taxi-driver divorcee is almost never stepping out from her cab, is listening to the stories of the female clients and is having repeated fights with her teenager son, who's moving freely between the cab and the outer world. Here, like in *Shirin*, we are watching women on the other side of the mirror – in both cases, the 'real world,' the action/history is unfolding on the other side of the screen, or 'off shot.' In *Ten* we see fragments of it and in *Shirin* it is only present as off-shot sound. The camera is given equal time to show the faces of 113 Iranian actresses, watching, apparently, a representation of the tragic legend of Shirin, Queen of Armenia, a victim, a helpless outsider, as she's repeatedly pointing it out, of *history*, the monstrous wars and intrigues of men.

As Kiarostami is revealing it in an interview, these actresses are, in fact, watching a blank screen with three dots and are instructed to imagine, to 'project' on it their own love stories. The use of these two early cinematic tools is, again, part of Kiarostami's preoccupation with representation, even through lie, of reality, and the involvement of the spectator in its decoding. The spectator's subjectivity is thoroughly decentralized: I can't identify with one of these women, only with all of them and, through them, with Shirin. In this 'gallery' of female spectators, watching a melodrama (a par excellence feminine genre) also appears the glamorous Juliette Binoche, as the only Western actress, but this time in a scarf

and without any make-up (while all the Iranian actresses have a heavy make-up), again, as a gesture disqualifying visual pleasure and opting for a revelation of basic mechanisms of the medium and spectators. Another ‘tear’ in the texture, a woman with a scar (a broken nose?), which, again, makes our identification problematic. In fact, in this double-framing we are witnessing *immersion* (the body-genre of melodrama is entering the space of the audience, even their bodies) while we’re *absorbed* by what we’re watching (we’re one of the audience, knowing, at the same time, that we cannot be there), (cf. Richard Rushton 2009, 50).

Beyond the representation of the ‘woman as spectator,’ doubling the legend, the lack of visual representation of the show these women are watching is also a metaphor of the forbidden visual representation – especially that of the human body – according to radical Muslim rules. This *iconophobia* appears here together with a predominant *iconophilia* of the Western World and Christianity, a promoter of which the legendary Shirin herself was. The whole legend – unfolding only acoustically after the original miniatures of the story are shown – is built around these contradictory relationships to the image: Shirin is having a recurrent nightmare since childhood, waking up screaming from it; Shirin and Khosrow are falling in love with each other’s pictures (Shirin finds it while she’s playing blindfolded in the garden); as they set off to find each other, Khosrow sees Shirin bathing in the moonlight; the stone carver is carving Shirin’s face over and over again; Shirin leaves her throne and country to see Khosrow, married to another woman; Shirin recognizes with terror her nightmare in the gaze of Khosrow’s son and the unfolding tragic events.

Hamid Dabashi speaks about four philosophical objections of Muslim theoreticians to any visual representations, some of them actually influenced by Platonic philosophy: imagination overcomes the reason; sustained visual representation prevents the contemplation of the real; the historical opposition of the Prophet of Islam to idolatry; any simulation of God’s creation is blasphemy (2001, 14). Besides evoking all these multiple layers of cultural fears and attractions, Kiarostami excels in the apparently paradoxical representation of reality through imagination, or through the lack of its visual representation. Instead of this he’s completely relying on the acoustic, auratic dimension: there is a constant echoing effect of the presence of water (a par excellence feminine principle), surrounding us, dripping and flowing, as if in a cave, another archetype of the eternal feminine. It is tempting to speculate on the similarity between Plato’s Cave allegory – often used as an allegory of cinema – and the spectator’s position modelled by Kiarostami: people facing a blank wall and attributing forms to shadows projecting from behind them and thus getting to see reality.⁸ But against the platonic views, in Kiarostami’s

films reality and truth are held by the acoustic sensation, the auratic, off-screen dimension of sounds. In fact, Kiarostami regards sound more essential than pictures: “it’s the sound that gives depth as the third dimension to that image. Sound, in fact, makes up for this shortcoming of pictures” (see Elena 2005, 36). Once again, the Iranian director is not giving in to any philosophical standpoints or interpretations, choosing his own ‘poetic’ way to involve the audience in the decoding process, even generating discrepancies between their views.

Instead of Conclusions

Western references of Kiarostami’s work are often self-satisfied, over-estimating the influence of the Western Cinema – especially Modernism, the New Waves, Godard, Bresson – on his films. Kiarostami’s approach to cinema is completely different: he is not conceiving cinema as art, but a medium, a ‘third party’ ready for intervention, a rather poetic tool revealing, through gaps and lies, a socio-cultural reality and truth. Thus it is useless to talk about self-reflexivity in the case of his cinema, at least not about one in the “western”, playful or narcissistic sense of the word, but rather – as Elena is revealing it – about an eastern tradition of deconstruction, multiple narration and ornamental mode, symbolic iconography of Persian miniature painting, ensuring the poetic effect of his films (2001, 186–187). From a western point of view, all he’s doing is experimenting with original, powerful cinematic effects: the documentarism of the Lumière brothers, the Kuleshov-effect, the close-up and offshoot sound, and, first of all, re-discovering the role of spectator, deprived though of visual pleasure, but intensely involved, ‘built in’ the texture of his films.

“Film on film or film in film is not something he is interested in: his work does not revolve around any *mise-en-abyme*. In it, the theme of lies leads only to the truth, and appearances intervene only to underscore the manner in which looking and the real together are mobilized” – writes Nancy in his essay on *Life and Nothing More* (2001, 26). Further on, he even anticipates *Shirin* as a possibility of the self-reflexive mode: “Since Kiarostami has not yet shown (as far as I know) the inside of a movie theatre in his films (...) we may think that he is unconcerned with the rhetoric of a ‘show within a show.’ Indeed, the ‘filmic’ element is present in a much more intimate way, in the very texture of his images and his work, so to speak” (2001, 48).

As it happens after every single release of his films, the usual debates with

⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy finds the whole cave-allegory inaccurate when used to cinema: “With film, the wall becomes an opening cut in the world into this very world. [...] [Film] does not reflect an outside; it opens an inside onto itself. The image on the screen is itself the idea” (2001, 44).

Kiarostami, hosted by prestigious western film journals are on again, trying to decipher exactly the western and eastern influences in his latest film. There is a double concern in this feverish preoccupation: after this one-word statement, what's next? Will this self-effacing, withdrawing cinema save The Cinema?

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A “Nouvelle Vague Allemande”? Thomas Arslan’s films in the context of the Berlin School

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Abstract. Since the beginning of the 1990s the directors Christian Petzold, Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan tried to break new ground within the German cinema by telling simple stories from everyday life with very little dramatic emphasis. Other filmmakers like Christoph Hochhäusler, Benjamin Heisenberg or Valeska Grisebach continued to follow that path and searched for new cinematic means to depict contemporary everyday life. Film criticism labelled this group of young German directors with the term “Berlin School” (“Berliner Schule”). The filmmakers of the Berlin School don’t pursue a naïve notion of realism, their films rather try to detect the core of reality. One important source of inspiration for them is the movements of auteur filmmaking, somehow founded by the directors of the *Nouvelle Vague*. It is no coincidence that the Berlin School is called “*Nouvelle Vague Allemande*” in France. In my article I try to show some characteristic features and stylistic innovations of the Berlin School by analyzing Thomas Arslan’s work more closely. His films like *Dealer* (1999) or *A fine Day* (*Der schöne Tag*, 2001) show an extraordinary formal rigour and a special relationship towards contemporary German reality. In my analysis of Arslan’s movies I especially try to shed some light on the questions which special stylistic means he employs, how he manages it to produce an impression of realism, although using highly stylized filmic devices, and which relations to French filmmakers and auteur filmmaking may be discernable.

During the last decade a kind of “renaissance” of the German cinema took place. Caroline Link’s *Nowhere in Africa* (*Nirgendwo in Africa*, 2001) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, 2006) won the Oscar for “Best Foreign Language Film.” Other German films like *The Downfall* (*Der Untergang*, 2004) directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel or Marc Rothemund’s *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (*Sophie Scholl – die letzten Tage*, 2005) were nominated for this probably most prestigious international film award.

What almost all of these award-winning German movies have in common is, that they do not deal with Germany's present, but focus on topics regarding its history. Additionally, they manage to present these serious topics in an entertaining manner and communicate a special view on German history, which seems to be appealing for an international audience.

Generally speaking German cinema seems to become internationally successful again – beyond the well known films from the New German Cinema during the seventies and eighties by directors like Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder or Edgar Reitz – and simultaneously preserve the claim to be artistically demanding.

But aside from the directors mentioned above, there are also some young German filmmakers who are much more radical in their ways of making films and their thinking about film as art. During the nineties, Angela Schanelec, Christian Petzold and Thomas Arslan studied together at the Berlin Film and Television Academy “dffb” and made their first movies, such as *Das Glück meiner Schwester* (Angela Schanelec, 1995), *The State I am In (Die innere Sicherheit)*, Christian Petzold, 2000) or *Siblings (Geschwister – Kardesler)*, Thomas Arslan, 1997). Later on they were considered to be the founders of the so called “Berliner Schule” – “Berlin School.”

The term “Berlin School” was invented in 2001 by the film reviewer Rainer Gansera in his article about Thomas Arslan's *A Fine Day (Der schöne Tag)*, 2001).¹ He writes: “More and more clearly something like a Berlin School emerges, to which Thomas Arslan, Angela Schanelec and Christian Petzold belong. Right now, as the three begin to develop their peculiarities, also their similarities become more and more visible.”² (Gansera 2001.) Later on filmmakers like Christoph Hochhäusler, Benjamin Heisenberg, Henner Winckler or Valeska Grisebach were associated with the Berlin School although most of them have not studied in Berlin.

Since the invention of the term “Berlin School” there have been numerous discussions about this labelling of certain German films and their directors. In their article in *Sight & Sound* Olaf Möller and Jason Wood try to summarize these

¹ There are some discussions about the question who coined the phrase “Berlin School.” In an additional note to the online-version of the article “*Berliner Schule*” – *Eine Collage* (cf. Baute et al.), which initially appeared in the Austrian film-magazine *kolik.film*, Rüdiger Suchsland points out that Merten Worthmann used the term “Berlin School” in his review of Angela Schanelec's *Passing Summer (Mein langsames Leben)*, 2001) (cf. Worthmann 2001) a few weeks before Gansera. Nevertheless most writers about the Berlin School assign the invention of this term to Gansera. And without a doubt, beginning with the year 2001, in the feuilletons of German newspapers the term “Berlin School” became an important label to characterize certain filmmakers.

² “Immer deutlicher zeichnet sich so etwas wie eine Berliner Schule ab, der Thomas Arslan, Angela Schanelec und Christian Petzold zugehören. Gerade jetzt, wo die drei dabei sind, ihre Eigenheiten auszuformulieren, werden auch ihre Gemeinsamkeiten deutlicher sichtbar.“ (Translation T. S.)

discussions: "Petzold is probably the Berlin School's most prominent member – though of course no one quite knows what the Berlin School is. But if even the origin of the name is a matter of dispute, at least everyone has a pretty good idea of what it signifies: a low-key cinema, devoted to the real as well as to realism, of a rare formal rigour and a stubborn tenderness." (Möller and Wood 2007, 40.)

Möller and Wood already mention two crucial common features of the Berlin School's movies: their special relationship towards realism and reality and their formal rigour. Marco Abel further specifies the special stylistic characteristics of these movies: "Many, though not all, Berlin School films are dominated by long takes, long shots, clinically precise framing, a certain deliberateness of pacing, sparse usage of non-diegetic music, poetic use of diegetic sound, and, frequently, the reliance on unknown or even non-professional actors who appear to be chosen for who they 'are' rather than for whom they could be" (Abel 2008).

These quotes already indicate that the Berlin School's filmmakers do not pursue a "naïve" concept of realism. They do not simply apply well-known markers of realism like wiggly camera movement or try to represent reality "as it is." In contrast, according to the formal rigour mentioned above, they often overtly display to the viewer that she is watching a movie by using unconventional, highly stylized filmic devices. They deviate from the spectators' expectations regarding conventional forms of filmic storytelling and challenge their viewing habits and everyday perception.

This also means that the directors assigned to the Berlin School try to capture the core of reality instead of a mere reproduction of actual events. So the filmmakers usually do not conceal from the audience that they deliver an individual, very personal view of reality by the means of their films. They simply tell stories from everyday life, often dealing with alienation and isolation in contemporary society.

This special approach to reality is, amongst others, rooted in the Berlin School's directors' effort to distinguish themselves from the commercial successful German comedies of the 1980s and 1990s by directors like Katja von Garnier or Sönke Wortmann, as well as from directors like Tom Tykwer or Wolfgang Becker, who successfully managed to "fuse art and commercial concerns" as Nick James puts it alluding to Tom Tykwer.³ (James 2006, 27; see also Baute et al.). This means, as

³ This fusion of artistic demands with (international) box office success is especially noticeable in the case of the movies of the production company "X Filme Creative Pool," founded in 1994 by the directors Tom Tykwer, Wolfgang Becker and Dani Levy together with the producer Stefan Arndt. This company was in charge of films like *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt*, Tom Tykwer, 1998) or *Goodbye Lenin* (*Good Bye Lenin!*, Wolfgang Becker, 2003) which found international critical acclaim for their innovative film style and simultaneously attracted a wide audience.

Marco Abel points out, that the Berlin School forms a kind of “counter-cinema:” “The films associated with this school distinguish themselves from other post-wall German films primarily in that they constitute the first significant (collective) attempt at advancing the *aesthetics* of cinema within German narrative filmmaking since the New German Cinema [...].” (Abel 2008) Instead of following economical considerations, filmmaking is a deeply personal issue for the directors of the Berlin School. They want to direct films beyond big box office successes, only committed to film as art and as a means of individual expression.

Accordingly, the films of the Berlin School often remain difficult to access and have only a small and a very special kind of audience. The viewers must be willing to accept the unconventional form, to invest some effort in watching the movies and to appreciate the special artistic design of the works.

After this brief overview I will now try to illustrate some of the characteristics mentioned above using the example of Thomas Arslan’s work. Arslan is counted among the founders of the Berlin School. He is the son of a German-Turkish couple, born and grown up in Germany, except for some years during elementary school, when his father was doing his military service in Turkey. Hence, it is not surprising that Arslan’s first movies, the so-called “migrant trilogy” consisting of *Siblings*, *Dealer* (1999) and *A Fine Day*, deal with the everyday life of young Turks, born and living in Germany. But even though the main characters in this trilogy are people of Turkish descent, the problems they are facing are not necessarily rooted in their origin.⁴ This means that Arslan’s films are not mere studies of the social environments young German-born Turks live in. Ekkehard Knörer observes that a kind of development is discernable in Arslan’s films: “Thomas Arslan has moved from the Turkish-German Berlin-Kreuzberg settings of his first films *Siblings* (1997) and *Dealer* (1999) towards more general explorations of private and familial relations in today’s society in *A Fine Day* and *Vacation*.” (Knörer 2009). In *Vacation (Ferien, 2007)*, his first film after the migrant trilogy, Arslan turns away from the German-Turkish living environment and tells the story of a reunion of a German family in the countryside close to Berlin. He focuses on the relations and conflicts between different generations, partly arising from the social circumstances they live in. Nevertheless, not only *Vacation* but all his movies also reflect the problems of contemporary German society in general, like many other films of the Berlin School.

⁴ Without a doubt it must not be neglected that Arslan is a German-Turkish filmmaker and deals with the problems of German-born Turks in a special way in his migrant trilogy. But in my article I will focus on the features of the Berlin School that are discernible in Arslan’s work. For the special depiction of young Turks living in Germany in Arslan’s *Dealer* see for example Halle 2008, 146-156 or Dehn 1999.

To depict these problems in a very special and at first glance unobtrusive way Arslan and his Berlin School's colleagues use various means. First of all, most movies of the Berlin School deviate from patterns of classical narration. Regarding classical narration David Bordwell points out: "The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character [...]." (Bordwell 1985, 157) This means that films narrated in a classical way are dominated by external conflicts between characters or caused by "external circumstances." These external conflicts advance the plot and serve as starting points for the characters to act and to solve these conflicts caused by their environment. They also contribute to establish a coherent cause-and-effect chain, which is also characteristic of classical narration. Internal conflicts, this means conflicts arising within the psychology of the characters, for the most part only support and advance these external conflicts.

From my point of view in most films of the Berlin School a shift from external to mainly internal conflicts becomes apparent, which counteracts classical narrational patterns, that is to say how these filmmakers deal with conflicts in their movies is very characteristic for their work: Berlin School's movies avoid a classical construction in terms of conflicts.

Let me try to illustrate this by Arslan's film *Dealer*. It tells the story of Can, who earns his money by dealing drugs on the streets of Berlin. He is the father of a three-year-old girl and his girlfriend Jale wants him to stop his criminal activities. She is afraid that he will get caught by the police. Can promises her to change his life, but all his attempts, such as working as a kitchen help, fail. He is not able to quit selling drugs. Finally the police put a stop to his game and he is sentenced to prison for four years.

On the one hand several external conflicts are discernable in *Dealer*: the policeman Erdal pursues Can and wants to force him to betray his dealer-friends to the police, especially Hakan, who provides them with the drugs they sell. Can struggles through the external circumstances, tries to make his living and to solve his conflict with Hakan, who starts to lose his confidence in Can's reliability as a drug dealer, since he is often seen with the policeman Erdal. On the other hand Can's internal conflicts outrank the external ones. The film primarily centres on his inability to act and to make independent decisions. In an interview Arslan

states for his film: "I was not interested in a superficial kind of action. Rather in the description of a mental state. The main character finds himself in a state of confusion, which makes it impossible for him to make his choice."⁵ (Holz 1999, 14.) This "mental state" of Can is closely related with the internal conflicts he has to deal with: he wants to take responsibility for his child and is eager to save his relationship with Jale, but he sees no possibilities for him to change his dangerous way of life. He is caught within his social environment, unable to pursue a goal independently, which would lead him out of his desperate situation. Instead, his restless mental state is supported by the experience of loneliness, helplessness and the lack of sound social relations, which at the same time mirrors the problems of the contemporary society. This experience is fostered by the external conflicts Can encounters. Thus, the classical relation between the types of conflicts is turned upside down: not the internal conflicts support the external ones, but the external ones support the internal conflicts.

The focus on the character's inner life, which can also be found in many other works of the Berlin School, for example in the films of Angela Schanelec, affects the overall narrative construction of the movies: they tend to present their stories in an episodic way. The classical cause-and-effect chain is neglected and an elliptical narration comes to the fore. This is also discernable in the construction of the characters. Like Can, they seem rather aimless compared to the goal-oriented characters of classical feature films. Instead of showing clear-cut motivations and goals for their actions, the characters act rather unintentionally, forced by the needs of their surroundings. The stories told in the movies do not end with a "decisive victory or defeat" or a "resolution of the problem" (Bordwell 1985, 157), instead most conflicts remain unsolved.

An additional consequence of the features described above is that the Berlin School's movies avoid classical suspense-structures and seem rather unspectacular. As a result, a lot of viewers are completely bored by them. These films refuse a passive consumer attitude but demand very active spectators instead who are willing to detect the deeper meaning concealed behind the restrained narrations. Ekkehard Knörer for example points out: "No wonder, then, that the works of the 'Berlin School' have been called cerebral, boring or, even worse, very French. A less superficial look, however, will reveal that this is filmmaking of the most meticulous and therefore rewardingly intense and rich kind: Every single image, every gesture, every cut and every camera movement counts and every

⁵ „Ich dagegen war nicht an einer vordergründigen Art von Aktion interessiert. Eher an der Beschreibung eines mentalen Zustandes. Die Hauptfigur befindet sich in einem Zustand der Verwirrung, die es ihm unmöglich macht, eine eigenständige Wahl zu treffen.“ (Translation T. S.)

single element adds another layer of often ambiguous meaning to what at first sight seem simple plots and constellations” (Knörer 2009).

With this statement Knörer establishes that not only the narrative construction, but also the camerawork, editing or acting style are very specific to the Berlin School's movies. This can also be shown by the example of Thomas Arslan. The appeal of *A Fine Day* for example is, amongst others, based on the striking use of cinematic devices and its extraordinary formal rigour. The film tells the story of one day in the life of the young actress Deniz. During this day she strolls through Berlin, breaks up with her boyfriend, visits her mother, meets her sister, attends a casting for a job and gets to know Diego, an enigmatic Portuguese man living in Berlin.

In comparison with *Dealer*, the external conflicts and the orientation towards a pursued goal are even weaker in *A fine day*. Moving through Berlin Deniz seems to slip from one situation into the next, and although her destinations while wandering around the city are clearly defined, her personal aim and what she is searching for remains obscure. No “clear-cut problems” or “specific goals” of Deniz are discernable. The viewer has to detect by herself what she is searching for, for example a happy life and real love. These “goals” are not only communicated by the dialogues, but also and perhaps even more so by the stylistic construction of the movie.

By analyzing a scene situated fairly at the beginning of the movie I will try to show this special stylistic construction. In this scene Deniz meets her boyfriend Jan in a café. Jan complains about her being late and that he has waited in the café for an hour. The scene continues with an everyday conversation about her clothing. Then the topic of the conversation suddenly changes. Jan talks about the very serious issue of quitting university. He sees no future for his studies and cannot stand his career-oriented fellow students. Deniz can't understand Jan's plans and accuses him of always giving up too fast in difficult situations. After this, the topic of the conversation suddenly changes again. Now the focus of the dialogue is on the discussion of their relationship. Deniz is jealous because she has seen Jan with another woman. She blames him for looking at other women who attract him. As a reaction, Jan hurts Deniz by stating that she would do everything to get ahead in her career as an actress. Deniz is annoyed and runs away. It becomes evident that they will end their relationship and Deniz will break up with Jan.

So which exceptional stylistic devices are discernible in this scene? First of all the camerawork and editing are striking. On the one hand they adhere to classical conventions by establishing time and space at the beginning of the scene. The viewer has no problems to recognize where and when the dialogue takes place.

On the other hand the classical shot – reverse shot pattern is violated twice in this the scene. Instead of a reverse shot a tracking shot is deployed which seems to revolve around the characters, the first time around the back of Jan, the second time around Deniz’s back. Both times the tracking shot appears when Jan insists to stop talking about a topic, hence it serves as a kind of caesura or interruption of the dialogue. The first tracking shot ends the conversation about Jan’s plans to quit his studies, the second one delivers only a moment of relaxation before the quarrel about their relationship continues. Although the motivation for the tracking shot can be explained by a close observation of the relation between the deployed stylistic device and the content of the dialogue, it is very salient that the established stylistic pattern of shot – reverse shot is neglected – as it is often the case in the works of Thomas Arslan.

Another deviation from well-known patterns of editing is also recognizable in the scene. Deniz and Jan talk about the waitress working at the café. Deniz asks Jan if he thinks the waitress is good-looking, but the editing denies the spectator an opportunity to glance at the person they are talking about, although this would be necessary for the viewer to form her own opinion about what the waitress looks like. Thus important information regarding the content of the dialogue is suppressed. The spectator, however, expects that she gets as much information as necessary to understand the dialogue or to judge if the quarrel about the good looking girls is justified.

Furthermore the acting style catches one’s eye. Instead of acting emotionally and upset, the characters seem rather cold-hearted. The acting style shows only rudimentary signs of the characters’ emotional state. Their faces are almost motionless and do not display much about their inner lives. Additionally, Deniz and Jan talk without vocal expression for the most parts of the dialogue. The voice intonation does not reflect their inner feelings and the speech rhythm appears hounded and restless. The presentation of the serious topics discussed in their conversation does not fit with the viewer’s expectations of how such an emotional dialogue should be staged. Constructed in a classical way, the emotional movement of the characters would be mirrored in the acting style, stressing the emotions the characters are experiencing.

That is to say, Arslan’s use of cinematic devices often contradicts established conventions of filmmaking and undermines the expectations of the audience. Amongst others, this facilitates and stimulates a new kind of perception on the viewer’s side and is part of the special approach to realism the Berlin School stands for. Regarding the films of the Berlin School, Marco Abel writes: “It is,

however, just this esthetic abstraction from empirical reality that affords viewers an intensified encounter with their own social reality, as they find themselves confronted with the necessity to rethink the very relation between what and *how* they see. Put differently, the (hoped-for) effect of such esthetic intensification of the act of seeing is to bring about a momentary suspension of our habituated tendency to read images through the framework of representational realism. By affirming the image *as* image, the Berlin School films thus effectively transform reality, forcing viewers to engage the seemingly familiar as something unfamiliar while never alienating us from what we see.“ (Abel 2008.) In the scene described above Arslan shows an everyday conversation dealing with everyday problems in an unfamiliar way. He, as many other filmmakers of the Berlin School, delivers a very close but at the same time aloof observation of the presented situation, partly realized with unconventional stylistic structures. As a result, the spectator is less involved in the action, she is kept at a sort of distance. This supports a new way of seeing and forces the viewer to draw her own conclusions about the events revealed in the movie. The attention is directed to a deeper meaning behind the situation shown in the movie and behind the words spoken in the dialogue. For example, it should become clear that what is depicted in the scene is not only the relationship between Deniz and Jan, but also the question of living together, the ability to engage with relationships, loneliness, alienation or the search for happiness of Deniz and of our society altogether.

Thus the spectator might recognize that the Berlin School's movies do not merely tell boring stories about boring people. Instead, they want to deliver a deeper insight into the prevailing attitude towards life and the condition of our contemporary capitalist society without providing simple solutions to conflicts and problems. Georg Seeßlen states: “The films of the ‘Berlin School’ try to depict capitalism. As a living space and a lifetime of human beings, who do not merge into it and do not live up to it.”⁶ (Seeßlen 2007.)

All in all Arslan and other Berlin School's filmmakers' approach to realism is characterized by stylization and a special kind of alienation, which in my point of view have the potential to raise the awareness of prevalent social problems. Knörer summarizes their attitude towards realism: “The aesthetic concept underlying most of the ‘Berlin School’ films might be summed up as a realism intent on avoiding the pitfalls of naturalism. It is a realisms [sic!] that avoids all kinds of manipulative effects, ranging from plot point oriented storytelling to sound tracks heavy on

⁶ „Die Filme der ‚Berliner Schule‘ versuchen, den Kapitalismus darzustellen. Als Lebensraum und als Lebenszeit von Menschen, die nicht in ihm aufgehen und ihn nicht erfüllen.“ (Translation T. S.)

music. It is an idea of realism that can to some degree, most conspicuously in Arslan's earlier films, go hand in hand with the defamiliarization found in a Bressonian scepticism towards the acting technique." (Knörer 2009.)

Knörer's reference to Bresson's reflections on acting in the context of Arslan's work is also recognizable in *A Fine Day*. Although some reviews state that the peculiar acting style of Serpil Turhan as Deniz already described above results from her missing acting skills (cf. Fizel 2001), I do not think that this is the case. From my point of view her acting style rather relies on Bresson's thoughts regarding the actor as a so-called "model" which should not act, but simply be itself (cf. Bresson 1999). For this reason Bresson preferred to work with non-professional actors, like Arslan does in his migrant trilogy similar to other Berlin School's filmmakers, for example Valeska Grisebach or Henner Winckler.

Arslan's admiration for Bresson is not only recognizable in the acting style, but also in the visual style and narrative construction of many of his movies. A scene at the beginning of *Dealer*, for example, looks like a kind of homage to Bresson's film *Pickpocket* (1959). In this scene Can and his dealer-friends are selling drugs. It is strongly reminiscent of the famous Gare de Lyon-scene in *Pickpocket*, where Michel, together with his "colleagues," steals the wallets of passengers in the train station. The crooks in both movies work in a team and support each other to be successful in their criminal activities. In addition, the focus on the hands is striking in both scenes. In *Dealer* drugs and money pass from one hand to another, like the stolen wallets in *Pickpocket*, followed by fluent camera movements, only interrupted by short stops and close ups on the hands. In *Dealer* Arslan also introduces a kind of framing of the story through the protagonist's voice-over narration, which can be found in Bresson's film, too.

But not only Bresson serves as a point of reference, also other auteur-filmmakers are cited in Arslan's movies. In *A Fine Day* Deniz for example works in a dubbing studio and dubs Rohmer's *A Summer's Tale* (*Conte d'été*, 1996). Arslan himself stresses these allusions to auteur-filmmakers in an interview about *A Fine Day*: "Within the movie there are more or less explicit references to movies that are important to me. The film that Deniz re-narrates from her subjective point of view in the casting-scene is Maurice Pialat's 'A nos amours.' The works of Eustache, Pialat, Rohmer, Kiarostami (to name just a few) do not stop to accompany and to concern me."⁷ (Seidel 2001.)

⁷ „Es gibt innerhalb des Films mehr oder weniger deutliche Verweise auf Filme, die mir wichtig sind. Bei dem Film, den Deniz in der Casting-Szene auf subjektiv gefärbte Weise nacherzählt, handelt es sich um *A nos amours* von Maurice Pialat. Die Arbeiten von Eustache, Pialat, Rohmer, Kiarostami (um nur einige zu nennen) hören nicht auf, mich zu begleiten und zu beschäftigen.“ (Translation T.S.)

With all these references to French filmmaking and filmmakers somehow related to the *Nouvelle Vague* it is not surprising that French critics coined the phrase *Nouvelle Vague Allemande* for the films of the Berlin School. The *Cahiers du Cinéma* published a long article about this “New Wave” in German cinema and some of the Berlin School’s movies have even been distributed in France, like *School Trip* (*Klassenfahrt*, Henner Winckler, 2002), *Marseille* (Angela Schanelec, 2004) or *This Very Moment* (*Milchwald*, Christoph Hochhäusler, 2003) (cf. Suchsland 2005). They received huge critical acclaim from the French reviewers which is especially remarkable because the films of the Berlin School had been among the first German movies that were noticed in France for quite a long time. Christoph Hochhäusler’s *Low Profile* (*Falscher Bekenner*, 2005) and Benjamin Heisenberg’s *Sleeper* (*Schläfer*, 2005) for example premiered in France at the Cannes Film Festival in the context of the festival’s section “Un Certain Regard“ (cf. Suchsland 2005).

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the term “Berlin School” as well as *Nouvelle Vague Allemande* are inventions of film critics and the filmmakers themselves often even refuse to be subsumed under this label. They emphasize their individual originality and assert that it might be better to see what is called the Berlin School more as a loose network of filmmaking friends than as a clear-cut artistic movement. In an interview on the occasion of the world premiere of his movie *The Robber* (*Der Räuber*, 2010), Benjamin Heisenberg for example remarks: “The Berlin School as a term was never particularly inspiring for me because I do not think that we are a school. We are just filmmakers who have met in Berlin, but who come from very different academies. The Berlin School from my point of view is a conglomerate of filmmakers who know each other.”⁸ (Oßwald 2010.) But without a doubt the perception as a group of filmmakers facilitated to attract attention for their works in Germany, besides commercial successful big-budget, Oscar-nominated “mainstream” productions. And without a doubt it seems obvious that there are some contemporary German films and directors, sharing a common ground and some similarities, even though nothing like a “manifesto” exists. These similarities, as I have tried to show by Thomas Arslan’s work, might be the way the films of the Berlin School deal with reality and their special kind of formal rigour. Although open criticism or political statements will rarely be found in their films, it is significant for them that they try to depict the problems of contemporary society. The accusation of loneliness and emptiness in a modern, capitalistic society always resonates in their movies.

⁸ „Die Berliner Schule als Begriff hat mich nie besonders inspiriert, weil ich nicht finde, dass wir eine Schule sind. Wir sind einfach Filmemacher, die sich in Berlin getroffen haben, aber aus ganz unterschiedlichen Hochschulen stammen. Die Berliner Schule ist für mich ein Konglomerat von Filmemachern, die sich kennen.“ (Translation T. S.)

It might be overhasty to refer to these filmmakers as a genuine “New Wave” however. Dennis Lim writes: “French critics have called the Berlin School a ‘Nouvelle Vague Allemande,’ a German counterpart to the rabble-rousing French New Wave. Mr. Petzold prefers to think of the revolution in more modest – and more concrete – terms. ‘With the Nouvelle Vague they set out to destroy what came before,’ he said. ‘In our case we thought we just had to reinvent something.’” (Lim 2009) But what did they reinvent? They reinvented to focus on filmmaking as art, on the filmmaker as auteur and not to be afraid to take risks in making films that do not fit within the commercial system of the film industry which is oriented towards the number of viewers or box-office success.

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The Berliner Schule as a Recent New Wave in German Cinema

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Abstract. The *Berliner Schule* can be called a minor new wave of German cinema. Minor since the impact of more recent “waves” does not reach the scope of the “waves” of the 1960s and 70s, most notably, *la Nouvelle Vague* in France and *Das Neue Kino* in Germany. And still, it has most of the features associated with the earlier “waves:” it emerged in a turbulent period of time (late 1980s – early 1990s), and in many ways in opposition to the current mainstream cinema. The *Berliner Schule* has its aesthetic programme expressed on the pages of *Revolver* magazine, emphasizing the importance of creating a platform for exchange of ideas over academic-style theorizing. It cannot be called a movement in a strict sense, as the current range of filmmakers associated with the *Berliner Schule* is diverse enough to disagree upon many points expressed in *Revolver* or each other’s films. There are two “generations” commonly associated with the *Berliner Schule*. The first generation mainly includes three directors, namely Christian Petzold, Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan. Directors such as Valeska Grisebach, Matthias Luthardt, Maria Speth, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler, Henner Wickler, Maren Ade, Elke Hauk, Sylke Enders and some others are associated with the second generation. Films made by these directors feature a lot of elements associated with the “waves,” such as use of long shots, casting non-professional actors, and attention to the issues of history and memory. Yet, the notion of *auteur* is revised, and team work gains more importance than it did in the earlier relevant films. The *Berliner Schule* appears to be a vivid example of how the ideas grounded in the 1960s are manifested and transformed in today’s cinema.

The term “*Berliner Schule*” may be currently familiar to the film festival going public in Europe and beyond. This umbrella term is used in reference to a group of young German film directors, and it has recently come to include a very diverse range of names of filmmakers that are now hard to be called a group. Film critic Rainer Gansera was the first to use the term in his article “Glücks-Pickpocket” in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2001 (cf. Gansera 2001) when he spoke about films of

Christian Petzold, Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan, all graduates of Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB). Even earlier, the group received critical acclaim in France and became known under the name “La nouvelle vague allemande” – allegedly, first used by *Cahiers du cinéma*, and followed by *Le Monde*, *La Libération*, and *Positif*. There is a circle of film critics at major German publications who have pioneered the movement as an influx of fresh creativity into the mainstream post-reunification German cinema which was earlier condemned as the “cinema of consensus” (Rentschler 2000). These days the circle of filmmakers associated with the *Berliner Schule* has broadened and diversified. Although the directors themselves say that no single style exists among them, it is obvious that their films characterized by minimalist aesthetic and long takes, with melancholic slow narratives set in modern-day Germany, are different enough from the other cinema produced nowadays in Germany, and close enough to each other in the message and aesthetics, to be seen as a movement. The triple minimalism of aesthetics, dramaturgy and technique; the national subject matter with an international appeal, and the overall politically charged visual message all fit quite comfortably within what we traditionally call waves and what has more recently grown into the “world cinema”. In the case with the *Berliner Schule* it appears more relevant to look for similarities rather than for differences, i.e. similarities with film historical movements and national “waves” rather than what makes them stand out among the other contemporary German films, particularly the ones known internationally (with *Sophie Scholl: The Last Days* and *The Life of Others* as the most famous examples).

The roots of *Berliner Schule* films can easily be traced back to the 1960s and 70s. In fact, any history of the *Berliner Schule* begins with DFFB – Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, founded in 1966.

1. DFFB (German Academy of Film and Television Berlin)

DFFB was the first film school in West Germany whose opening followed the Oberhausen Manifesto subscribed by Alexander Kluge and a group of German filmmakers who wished to draw German cinema out of the post-World War II crisis and stagnation. As Heinz Rathsack, the first director of the school put it in his speech at the opening ceremony, DFFB was to become a “Bauhaus of Film” (Peitz 1996).

Among the first DFFB students (between 1966 and 1968) was Harun Farocki, one of the most noticeable German experimental filmmakers of the last three decades, whose work in film and television questions the ways of seeing aesthetically as well

as politically (*Die Sprache der Revolution*, 1972, *Wie man sieht*, 1984, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*, 1995). Hartmut Bitomsky, an important documentary filmmaker and current director of DFFB, also began his studies in the same year.

The 1970s at DFFB were marked by predominance of documentary filmmaking, particularly *Arbeiterfilme* (workers' films), where stories were narrated as seen by the eyes of working-class protagonists. Some of the best known films are *The Long Lament* (*Der lange Jammer*, 1973) by Max Willutzki and *Dear Mother, I'm All Right* (*Liebe Mutter, mir geht es gut*, 1972) by Christian Ziewer. These filmmakers are considered to be a part of the historical "Berlin School" – a term that largely implied opposition to the "Munich Sensibilists," the wing of the New German Cinema whose method lay in construction of the multilayered model of society in personal, often melodramatic stories (as did Ingemo Engström, Rüdiger Nüchtern, Gerhard Theuring, Matthias Weiss, Wim Wenders or Rainer Werner Fassbinder).

Fiction film did not play any significant role at DFFB until the 1980s. One event probably gave an impetus to the development of fiction film at DFFB, namely the closing of the *Filmkritik* magazine, the main vehicle of the ideas of the New German Cinema. As a result, the majority of its critical forces (represented by Peter Nau, Manfred Blank, Helmut Färber and, again, Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki) joined the DFFB faculty. These were filmmakers interested in fiction film who frequently blended fiction and documentary in their works. It was largely due to their influence that fiction film began to gain importance at the Academy.

2. From Autorenfilm to the Cinema of Consensus

The transformations that occurred at DFFB in the 1980s overlapped with the change of financing of German cinema around the same time, which changed its content dramatically. This shift occurred with the appointment, as the Minister of the Interior, of the conservative Friedrich Zimmermann in 1982, who declared war on *Autorenfilm* in the name of "entertainment." The viewpoint of his cabinet was that the "continued existence of the *Autorenfilm*... had been mainly a function of narcissistic artists, credulous subsidy boards, indulgent television editors, and leftist film reviewers... [and that] this cinema had been kept alive artificially by a state welfare system" (Rentschler 2000, 266). The priority was given to the development of the commercial cinema, and consequently, the cultural subsidy was transformed into an almost exclusively economic one. This transformation included television that had been an important support for the New German Cinema: now in the '80s TV programming priorities, rather than

such considerations as artistic merit and support of the first-time filmmakers, influenced subsidy decisions. Consequently, experimentation in film was discouraged. Filmmaking began to be understood as a craft, and film schools laid significantly less emphasis on theory and history than technical skills.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder died in the same year, 1982, suddenly and unexpectedly, and this meant a loss of a centre, a certain spiritual link that united the diverse branches of the New German Cinema. Coupled with adverse condition in film production, these events in many ways meant the end of the New German Cinema. The mainstream-oriented cinema that came to succeed the *Autorenfilm* had a certain ideology based on the inclination of making user-friendly films as opposed to the “intellectual pompousness” of *Autorenfilm*. One of the early responses to this new vision of the role of cinema was Doris Dörrie’s remarriage comedy *Männer*, where the protagonist Paula, tired of her twelve-year marriage to a successful professional from the advertising industry, begins a relationship with a hippie to discover later that he is her husband’s *Doppelgänger* despite his rebellious attitude. The film fit well into Zimmermann’s paradigm, satisfied critics, and won multiple awards. “Dörrie herself maintained that she had inadvertently hit a resonant chord of the *Zeitgeist*” (Rentschler 2000, 272). This chord consisted in the departure from the liberal ideas of 1968, or rather, adaptation of the freedom of expression to the free market. Eric Rentschler, one of the most avid adversaries of this cinema, notes upon its subject matter: “In a procession of movies about people who are typically graphic artists in the advertising branch or individuals employed as disc jockeys, film-makers, actors, musicians and models, the Cinema of Consensus has replicated – and demonstrated – the workings of a German culture industry that probes every possible way to gain an edge and advantage” (Rentschler 2000, 274).

Within the paradigm described by Rentschler, the films of such directors as Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold and Angela Schanelec must have looked rather unspectacular with their long shots, slow motion, and frequent use of non-professional actors.

3. Berliner Schule: Aesthetics, Approaches, Collaborations

In Christian Petzold’s film *Wolfsburg* (2003) it is hard to say whether the main characters are people or cars. The world of the automobiles penetrates the film as a contrapuntal motif. According to Petzold, “the car is turning into a fully individualized living space. It separates the driver from the outside: inside am I,

outside is a film. This is what *Wolfsburg* is about: “a man who opens a car door and must acknowledge that the windshield is not a screen, and the soundtrack from a CD-player is not a real one” (Reinecke). The choice of Wolfsburg out of all provincial towns where such a story could be set, is important in itself, “because I don’t know any other town where the history of the Federal Republic [of Germany] can be found so condensed on the periphery: the traces of Nazis, modernity, and Volkswagen in the centre” (Reinecke).

The film begins with a car accident: a car salesman Phillip played by Benno Fürmann runs down and kills a little boy, and then escapes from the site. From this moment on, everything Phillip does is passed through a prism of his guilty conscience. Petzold obviously has little interest in a conventional catastrophe film narrative modelled on the “normality – catastrophe – catharsis” scheme (Nord 2007). It is the yield lines penetrating one’s consciousness as a result of such an incident that he emphasizes instead. The crime and the culprit are known from the beginning. The death of the boy is the beginning of a love story between Phillip and Laura (played by Nina Hoss), the boy’s mother, who does not know that Phillip is guilty of her son’s death.

Melodramatic in substance, the story is rendered minimalistic in form. Typical of Petzold’s films, the actors rather underact, the pictures are sparse and economical, music is only used in one scene. It is a melodrama viewed from the distance, the distance that “allows a more complex form of compassion than therapeutic compassion that German films mostly produce” (Reinecke)

The idea to make a film set in Wolfsburg is going back to the time when Petzold worked as an assistant at Hartmut Bitomsky’s film *VW Komplex* (1989) when he was still a student at DFFB. In this film, Bitomsky presents series of consciously associative comments on the industrial giant, the factory building, people, and machines. The script was co-written with Harun Farocki. Petzold has always continued to stay in touch with Farocki and Bitomsky who set the general tone of filmmaking at DFFB. In a way, these two filmmakers bridge the *Berliner Schule*, at least its “first generation” (Petzold, Arslan and Schanelec), with the New German Cinema.

The editing in *Wolfsburg* was done by Bettina Böhler, also a DFFB graduate. In a way, Bettina Böhler may be called a connecting figure for the *Berliner Schule*: she edited all Christian Petzold’s films since 1996, all Angela Schanelec’s feature films, both features by Henner Winckler, and Valeska Grisebach’s *Sehnsucht* (2004–2006). Böhler approaches her work holistically, which means that she prefers to be largely unaware of directing and only hold on to the plotline in

general. She does not read the script when she edits; neither does she go to the shoots. Instead, she looks at the sequences and asks herself if they “tell her a story;” she looks at what works for her visually.

It may be understandable why Angela Schanelec, another film director associated with the so-called “first generation” of the *Berliner Schule*, likes to work with Bettina Böhler. The visual effect achieved by a sequence aptly put together is especially important in the cinema where the plot is almost eliminated, like that of Schanelec. Her films represent a mere translocation of foreign bodies. This approach can probably be explained by the fact that Angela Schanelec comes from the acting background – she came to film directing after a few years as a professional theatre actress. The way she directs actors (mostly professional) in her films corresponds with the so-called “Bresson’s system.” Robert Bresson (1901–1999) used non-professional actors (whom he called “models”) in his films and trained them for a particular part – it was filmmaking as a process of discovery out of what these “models” would reveal to him. The personality of the actor was as important as the personality of the character, or rather, their relation to one another was important to the construct of the film. Such a method was a result of Bresson’s total mistrust of psychological motives for a character’s actions (Pavelin 2002).

Schanelec likewise remains indifferent, almost hostile to psychology. The separation that we see between images in scenes, between the image and sound, works on the level of relationships between characters in that each of them is a *Fremdkörper* (“foreign body”) to one another. Their interaction is akin to choreography; no kind of relationship between them (friendship, romance, or maternal relationship) is shown to the viewer, and their motivations are never explained. This is how Schanelec describes her system of the corporeal: “I think it is extremely difficult that people touch each other in films. It became a totally normal thing. Godard, for example, said that to photograph a kiss is impossible. A film is a film, and not a reality. And because people constantly touch each other and sleep together does not mean that it should be shown in a film. Same when two people are shown to possibly begin to love each other. Certain things should be omitted and left to the spectator’s imagination” (Ganz 2001). While Schanelec refers to Godard, other references are also readable in this statement, in particular, Alexander Kluge’s notion of *Phantasie*, the viewer’s imagination as an active part of the film. In his film *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave (Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin, 1973)* Kluge inserts text and graphic still images in order to interrupt the narration, to let the viewer drift away from it for a few moments, and to remind her that a film is not “reality” in opposition to the alleged “reality”

of images poured by the media. The personal story of Roswitha Bronski, the film's protagonist, is simultaneously a conveyor of political and aesthetic ideas.

4. Turning to the Domain of the Personal as a Political Statement

The way in which *Berliner Schule* directors turn to the domain of the personal parallels the ways first proposed by Kluge as well as other directors of the New German Cinema and French New Wave. A recognizable set of conflicts can be traced within each of the *Berliner Schule* films. To understand these conflicts, we have to look back into the recent past, the re-unification of West and East Germany.

The re-unification was met with great enthusiasm in society, and the return to the historical borders also signified the increased role of Germany internationally, as one of the key members of the European Union with a leading role in the European integration along with France and Great Britain. Berlin became a vivid expression of this enthusiasm and an embodiment of mobility in the new society. In the '90s, many houses in East Berlin were abandoned after their former inhabitants moved to the West. These houses were occupied by squats, galleries and nightclubs. Artists who could not afford to have studios in Cologne or Munich moved to Berlin, where they could pursue their art without being troubled as to how to make their living. In a short time Berlin, with its booming techno scene, became the hippest destination in Europe, its last citadel of perky and young underground culture. The former working-class district of Prenzlauer Berg turned into a bohemian hot spot full of street cafés, galleries and designer shops. The critique of this lifestyle followed in the early 2000s: it gradually became too cute to be real. This critique came largely from the unofficial neoconservative movement known as *Die neue Bürgerlichkeit* (literally, "New Bourgeoisie"), which suggested that it was a time to return to forgotten traditional values such as family and firm national identity. The outspoken demographic decline in Germany and, subsequently, lean state coffer, they maintain, is the consequence of careerism, egoism, and "the lack of willingness to sacrifice" (Rickens 2006) in women. Other causes, such as immigration, are regarded as equally dangerous. The Hamburg-based journalist Christian Rickens in his book *Die neuen Spießler* ("The New Babbits") upon the analysis of these polemics and some social data concludes that the arguments of the *Neuen Bürgerlichen* (the proponents of the *Neue Bürgerlichkeit*) are rather dictated by the fear of changes than contain any consistent criticism. He pointed out that these changes may affect society on

deeper levels, and may ultimately result in cultivation of certain features of character, such as dutifulness and diligence at the expense of free will and creativity, as it was in the 1950s.

The “cinema of consensus,” glossy in appearance, fails to be “modern” or “German” in the sense of addressing the aforementioned issues critically. The films that have garnered international prizes in the recent years and returned home as box-office hits once again have been dealing with historical subjects in a “safe” way, i.e. by providing the image of Germany that mainstream international audience expected to see. This is what such critics as Eric Rentschler or Georg Seeßlen warn against, connecting the “cinema of consensus” with the loss of capacity of reflection and intellectual submissiveness to the *Erzählmaschine* (“narration machine”) of the media (Seeßlen 2007).

The *Erzählmaschine* of the media is challenged by the films of the *Berliner Schule* by the analysis of the values that may lie in the core of this conflict, and by the increased attention to the domain of the personal, as has happened in the cinema before. The rarefied narratives in the films of the *Berliner Schule* operate at the level of micro-societies, and first of all, family. For instance, in such films as Ulrich Köhler’s *Windows on Monday* (*Montag kommen die Fenster*, 2006) or Christoph Hochhäusler’s *This Very Moment* (*Milchwald*, 2003), clearly urban families move away to the countryside where they build their homes. No comment as to the economic reasons or dissatisfaction with their life in the city is given in the film – the characters are already placed in these countryside settings that are not archaic, but constructed of recently built suburban homes. The family house in *This Very Moment* looks austere, with bare walls and masking tape on the floor, which make it look like a place in a state of transition, recalling the impetus for urban restoration in Berlin that is frequently called “Europe’s biggest construction site” with hundreds of cranes penetrating its skyline. As the historian Brian Ladd points out, “architecture in the post-Wall Berlin is struggling through the crisis of national identity. In post-Wall Berlin, each proposal for construction, demolition, preservation, or renovation ignites a battle over symbols of Berlin and of Germany. None of the pieces of the new Berlin will present an unambiguous statement about Berlin’s tradition or meaning, but most will nevertheless be attacked for doing so” (Ladd 1997, 234–235).

Just as Berlin appears to be uncertain of its identity at the level of the city, this search for identity is intrinsic for protagonists of *Berliner Schule* films. Importantly, their search occurs at the level of the family. Family is not used as a downscale model of society, as in the nineteenth-century novels – it is rather the

dimension of the private life that is important. The sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim observe “a new kind of social subjectivity [that] has grown up in which private and political issues are intermingled and augmented.” (Beck 1995, 42.) Individualization has resulted in the loosening of traditional bonds with consequent “profound loss of inner stability.” (Beck 1995, 46.)

While men and women are *released* from traditional norms and can search for a ‘life of their own,’ they are *driven* into seeking happiness in a close relationship because their social bonds seem too tenuous or unreliable. The need to share your inner feelings with someone, as expressed in the ideal of marriage and bonding, is not a primary human need. It *grows* the more individual we all become and notice the losses which accompany the gains. (Cf. Beck 1995, 24.)

In *Berliner Schule* films, a good example of the search for identity within the family is embodied in Nina, the protagonist in *Montag kommen die Fenster*. She has just moved into a new house in the countryside with her family, and takes time off work to spend some time with her husband and daughter. Frieder, her husband, is busy laying tiles and waiting for the new windows that have to be delivered on Monday, and her little daughter is playing in her grandparents’ living room. As Nina comes to pick her up, she hesitates, then turns back and disappears for a few days. She does not do it out of some existential revolt or dissatisfaction (we can compare this to Paula’s reasons in Dorris Dörrie’s *Männer* already mentioned in this chapter), but because she does not know where she belongs. She wanders like a ghost in the muddy spring forest, and occasionally comes across the newly constructed and uninhabited concrete building of a hotel that precipitates its opening with a glamorous party with guests specially brought by bus to its unfinished settings. Nina is an alien among this instant gathering of people, but she neither escapes nor seeks any encounters – she wanders as a sleepwalker without a particular goal, and she still gravitates to her family, but cannot put the pieces back together as she cannot find herself. The problem does not receive resolution, as Nina’s dilemma is not in her inability to reconcile the outside world and the private circle of her family – cosy but restraining. It is rather her uncertainty of her own role within both of these worlds, or lack of firm sense of identity that does not allow her to adhere to some ready-made model. In a sense, Nina is a *tabula rasa*; she is able to look, perceive and react, but not evaluate or analyze by passing her sensations through any filters of familiar experiences. This is why the story of the few days of her “journey” through the woods and concrete is devoid of peaks and falls, and the drama of the disintegration of her family occurs quietly and casually, not followed by any catharsis.

A protagonist like Nina is the opposite of “the ideal image conveyed by the labour market,” the type described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim as “a completely mobile individual regarding him/herself as a functioning flexible work unit, competitive and ambitious, prepared to disregard the social commitments linked to his/her existence and identity. This perfect employee fits in with the job requirements, prepared to move on whenever necessary.” (Beck 1995, 6.)

Nina’s inadvertent resistance is to slow down, and the film, devoid of the points of acceleration such as the moments of excessive action, slows down with her. Life at high speed has been a frequent subject for Marxist critics, such as Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, ever since the 1930s. Eric Rentschler, similarly, criticizes the “Cinema of Consensus” for “favour[ing] velocity over repose” (Rentschler 2000, 270). Slowing down in cinema is achieved through the decrease of the flow of images – still-framed long shots serve the purpose.

The distrust of images was a common motif in the New German Cinema, from Alexander Kluge, who broke their flow with various graphic and textual insertions, to Wim Wenders who maintained that proliferation of images “is a particular catastrophe in Germany, a country that is highly susceptible to images and already almost totally engulfed in foreign images. Too many images cause a loss of reality – and this country that has had great difficulty in securing an identity for itself needs, above all, to be grounded in reality” (Wim Wenders quoted in Garwood 2002, 208). In this sense, all protagonists in the *Berliner Schule* are grounded in reality, both contemporary and historical. None of these films is set outside of the present-day, yet the awareness of the connection between the present and the past penetrates each of them.

Conclusions

The aesthetic and political revolt in *Berliner Schule* films strikingly resembles the conditions in which the New German Cinema evolved. First protesting against the so-called “Papas Kino” of the 1950s, it sought to deal not only with the social and political issues, but with the cultural realities that engendered them; not only with historical past, but with the way it is echoed and embedded in today’s realities. In these senses the *Berliner Schule* evolves around very similar patterns. Yet, the *Berliner Schule* is still far from being a robust film movement as the New German Cinema became in the 1970s, and yet farther from becoming a national cinema. It is easier to compare *Berliner Schule* directors with international names rather than seek analogies in contemporary German cinema. Jean-Pierre and Luc

Dardenne in Belgium, Abbas Kiarostami in Iran, Apichatpong Weerasethakul in Thailand – these names are associated with the minor cinematic “waves” in their own countries without making what we have traditionally called national cinemas. Today we speak of the “world cinema” that frequently finds its audience in the international film festival circuit as opposed to becoming a national cinema. It may largely be for this reason that the *Berliner Schule* has been able to develop from a small circle associated with the names of three directors into an identifiable film movement.

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Waves of Memory: Cinema, Trauerarbeit and the Third Reich

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Abstract. Working through the shameful period of the national past and coping with the heritage of the Third Reich was a struggle dominating all levels of post-war German intellectual and cultural life including New German Cinema. In my presentation I theorize how filmmakers associated with the movement hoped to map up the various factors which not only gave birth to Fascism but kept it alive in the social unconscious even after its downfall. Using the insights of Theodor W. Adorno and Pierre Nora, I overview the birth of a cinematic memory-tradition in the 1970s which turned to both narrative and documentary (nonfiction) filmmaking not in order to escape (or urge people to escape) remorse once and for all through a kind of final solution to memory, but with the aim to develop an alertness to both the objective socio-cultural conditions and the unconscious recesses of the German identity that helped Fascism to power. The symbolic destruction of the Berlin Wall Germany may have lead to the geographical unification of Germany, but the reconstruction of national unity and identity required the extension of self-reflection and mass analysis through memory to every German. Cinema and especially the authors who once initiated the 70s movement again played a key role in this second wave of working through the Nazi past. Although these works come out of the hands of much-experienced filmmakers, I argue that they do not deepen previously established methods of memory-work, only make them more accessible for the global spectator.

“What is conscious could never prove so fateful as what remains unconscious, half-conscious or preconscious.”

(Theodor Adorno, The Meaning of Working Through the Past)

“The Federal Republic did not succumb to melancholia; instead, as a group, those who lost their ‘ideal leader,’ the representative of a commonly shared ego-ideal managed to avoid self-devaluation by breaking all effective bridges to the immediate past.”

(Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich, The Inability to Mourn)

I.

At the beginning of the 21st century, mainly due to cinema, the horrors of the Third Reich still seem to haunt us, serving as a source of both disgust and fascination. The moving image forms a memory a past, serves as a bridge to an era which itself was fascinated by images, and wanted to immortalize itself –amongst others – through images. The distance cinema bridges today is a historical one: it is a constructed remoteness arching between the distinctiveness of the now and the then. The average spectator watching the average WWII historical film of today (that is the viewer favouring empathic, but never narcissistic identifications and the narrative in the likes of classic Hollywood storytelling devices) is constantly made aware of this temporal distance. In a sense today's audiences are subjected to the mode of address characteristic of English–American productions during and after the war which articulated, with uttermost clarity, both geographical distinctions (here-there) and cultural dissimilarities (us-them), making identification a limited and conscious process. Actually it is the controlled marriage of fiction and reality that results in film epics, depictions of larger-than-life heroism and action-packed drama dressed up to appeal audiences looking for high production values. This cinema turns history into spectacle, just like the cinema of Nazi Germany which turns spectacle into history. This distinction may be developed into a way of differentiating between history conceived by Hollywood as staged history and Nazi cinema as a stage and embodiment of history – however my task in this essay lies elsewhere. Whereas the epic memory of the past dignifies and celebrates, there was nothing glorious in the war from the German point of view. An alternative to (and in a certain sense opposite of) epic depictions of the past is the elegiac one, in which mourning takes the role of creating distance between one and one's ideal self, of self-reflection allowing for the mental processing of past events and coming into terms with the effects of loss. In the pages to follow I give an overview of theoretical issues surrounding elegiac cinema in Germany with special attention to three representative examples: *Germany in Autumn*, *The Patriot* and *Our Hitler: A Film from Germany*.

As the above mottoes suggest, mourning is integral to the formation of a healthy identity, yet it is something that post-war German society was incapable of. Adorno and the Mitscherlichs both identify mourning as a way of working through the past, the *Trauerarbeit* without which daily existence, and, as Eric L. Santner suggests, the cinematic memory of the Third Reich will be shadowed by denial, ruinous repression and self-betrayal.

The insistence of the people and 1950s German cinema to avoid confrontation with former idols was more alarming than anything else. Adorno makes it unmistakably clear that the significance of *Trauerarbeit* was never simply to salvage the community from the shame it might have felt over the horrors committed under the Third Reich, but rather to offer support in its daily confrontation with the heritage of Nazism. The Mitscherlichs, relying on Freud, insist that what blocks the main obstacle in the path of communal healing in Germany is the result of a crushed ego-ideal, or as Santner puts it, the shattered “mirror of one’s own sense of self and power” (1990, 2). Narcissism, overidentification with idealized objects, and the ensuing fantasy of omnipotence all lie at the heart of the heritage of Nazism and so does a corrupted historical consciousness that makes *Trauerarbeit* – the separation of one from ego-ideals and the creation of distinctive self boundaries – into an almost superhuman effort. What I have in mind is that the marriage between self and ego ideal, *Volk* and *Führer*, was sealed by history, in other words, history itself functioned as the bounding material in this ego-construct, disallowing for the fragmentation of narcissistic selfhood. The Third Reich defined its emergence as a historical necessity and sought legitimacy for its existence in the historical mission it undertook. Identifying itself as a product of history was self-grounding, yet also self-debasing, since at the conclusion of the war this product was devalued in terms of its ideological, political and social zeal: in short declared a historical *cul-de-sac*. Does it not seem thus “natural” that people rejected and turned their backs on history, or in the words of the Mitscherlichs broke “all effective bridges¹ to the immediate past”? After all history made discontinuous not only itself in Germany, but the long line of tradition it believed to embody, consequently corrupting the reliance of people on this historically formed tradition. It made German culture into a scapegoat², furthermore it abandoned German identity at the exact moment it found itself in the state that R.D. Laing describes as ‘ontological insecurity.’ What could have been a psychologically more shattering scenario, than seeing

¹ It is of certain significance that the Mitscherlichs use the words “effective bridges,” since Germans did not altogether deny the past. As Caryl Flinn has argued: “The national psyche was unwilling to confront the realities of its complicity with National Socialism, and produced in its stead an enormous battery of symptoms that, in one extreme permutation, had Germans assuming the position of victim, rather than that of the aggressor’s associate” (2004, 9-10). The self-proclaimed victim position is an ineffective way of relating to the past exactly because it weakens the role of responsibility and strengthens that of deference in the formation of self-awareness, furthermore it expresses – in the words of Santner – the lack of the “capacity to experience empathy for the other *as other*” (Flinn 2004, 7).

² During and after the war certain English-speaking historians argued that the rise of Fascism is rooted in the aggressiveness of German culture. Representative examples are M. P. Nicolai’s *From Nietzsche Down to Hitler* (London, 1938) and William Montgomery McGovern’s *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Nazi-Fascist Philosophy* (London, 1941).

one's historical mission annulled, yet being expected to rebuild a ruined country? With this in mind, it seems all too rational to argue that Germans saw two waves of war: one fought in the name of the Party and the Reich and another for that which the Party and Reich corrupted. The reason why *Trauerarbeit* is so difficult to adopt is because it asks people to remember at a time when they fully embrace the desire to be forgotten as historical beings for good. And yet – as Adorno consistently argues – a group identified as historical waste can only hope to be reintegrated into history if it remembers what made it such, if it repossesses its past as history.³ This involves coming out of the spell of ahistorical myths Germans have woven around themselves during the Nazi-era. After all it is these myths – having become a constitutive element of everyday identity – which are to be shattered through mourning.

What empowers memory are neither the criminal cases against neo-Nazis, nor the anti-Fascist demonstrations or the ever growing number and size of monuments and memorials, but the alertness towards the conditions and tendencies that once harboured National Socialism and what Adorno studies as the “superior strength of unconscious processes” (2003, 7). To counter the immense power of unconscious identifications and collective narcissism, he calls for self-reflection, subjective enlightenment and mass analysis, in short a kind of self-imposed denazification. The late work of Fassbinder, especially *Veronika Voss* (1982) portrays the almost superhuman strengths of a past unprocessed. What his characters – no matter whether protégés or the victims of the Nazi regime – call “indefinable pain” is the experience of a consciousness alienated from oneself, at war with oneself, becoming fully consumed by the reality of both physical and psychological bondage. Few films have made it so unmistakably clear that unless the psychic scars are addressed through mourning, memory-work and self-reflection, total destruction follows.

Adorno's exquisite comparative study of the socio-psychology or rather group psychopathology of the Third Reich and the Germany of the post-war economic miracle lays claim both for a memory that is not commemorative and an alertness towards the secret survival of what he calls Fascism “concealed behind the smooth façade of everyday life” (2003, 14). Let me refer to Fassbinder once again, this time to *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979) which tells how the psychic scars of the past eat their way through the façade of physical prosperity. In this film everybody seems to progress towards a fuller life but the closer they come to

³ Hungarian historian György Majtényi – in his essay on post-war tendencies of German historiography – raises the same question when he writes: “How can the past become history in Germany?” (Majtényi 2003, 142. Translation mine, Gy. Zs.).

sharing it with others, the less they have to share, and the more evident their emotional emptiness becomes. They appear to be pregnant with the already mentioned narcissistic fantasy of omnipotence which, despite their exquisite talents of manipulation and corrupting power, crushes down on them, blasting the vague hopes of the heroine for a lasting unification with his husband in the final scene just as the photo of Hitler is blasted into pieces by an Allied bomb at the beginning of the film.

The legacy of Adorno and the Mitscherlichs is embraced not only by Fassbinder, but the German phrase *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which refers to the struggle of coming to terms with the past.⁴ This struggle received expression on different fronts and by very different means. It took shape in some genuine literary masterpieces, exemplified by Günter Grass' *Danzig Trilogy*, Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine* and Siegfried Lenz's *The German Lesson* but also in terrorism peaking in the violent activities of the Red Army Faction. Clearly on opposing ends of the spectrum, yet both artistic production and extremist action expressed its struggle with the past in terms of a generational conflict.

German cinema, which in the 1960s just saw the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers, did not remain blind to the struggle with the past. As Flinn notes "the release of *The Inability to Mourn* coincided with the movement's first big international successes ... showing the interconnected nature of intellectual, aesthetic, and political endeavors of the time" (2004, 10). Santner describes this complex endeavour as a concerted homeopathic recovery, comparing it to a form of healing in which trauma victims are subjected to small doses of displeasing experiences in order to develop mechanisms to master them. There is hardly any representative of the so-called New German Cinema who would turn a back on homeopathic healing, the troublesome business of working through a malign past, that involved reflecting upon the often concealed roots and/or heritage of Fascism. Part of the therapeutic process was to make the critical reinvestigation of recent German history a legitimate topic for cinema. As Nora M. Alter writes "New German Cinema addressed the past with an aggressive platform that called for radically different films about a new version of history" (2002, 5–6), and involved turning away from both the cinema of the older generation of filmmakers (the *Papaskino*) and the styles and standards of Hollywood cinema. As Young German Cinema soon came to be recognized – mainly due to the success it enjoyed among international

⁴ Besides this layer of meaning, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* also refers to the official national policy in post-war Germany making itself articulate in various cultural practices, the media, public debates and the school curriculum. Intended as a semi-propagandistic program, working through the past was a state induced framework of memory that – amongst others – filmmakers of the New German Cinema would shape to their own temperaments and artistic principles.

cinophile audiences – as the New German Cinema, its directors soon became key figures of the national cultural elite, and with it, dominant voices of national consciousness. Coming to terms with the past in front of their audience's very eyes, in other words, as responsible artists expected to offer therapeutic visions, must have meant extreme psychological pressure. This messianistic/healer role attributed to the artist fits well into the image Thomas Elsaesser draws of New German Cinema and its heavy reliance on romanticism, sensibillism, its cult of subjectivism and apolitical autonomy but also its irrationalism (embracing both fantasy and the power of the unconscious processes). Yet many filmmakers objected against being identified on such terms as messianistic, visionary artists, since it was exactly this voluntary subjugation of the masses under an authoritative position (as a constitutive element to Fascism) they were fighting against. Alexander Kluge has been one of the most eager critiques of the filmmaker as prophet and mythic transcendence, whose supposedly superior visions evade the social sphere as didactic models to follow. Kluge's criticism of democratic values being imposed on people and memory-work forced on them from above took shape in his understanding of artistic creativity as "social productivity" (Elsaesser 2004, 126): a construction of memory and political commitment as arising from the lower levels of social contacts. In similar terms, Santner's theory of the mourning work – as understood by Flinn – is a self-therapy, a self-imposed denazification "on which a wider social and historical psyche could elaborate or perform the homeopathic process of coming to grips with an extraordinarily poisonous past" (Flinn 2004, 11).

II.

To repossess the past is not to relive it, to mourn is not to psychically prolong a physical non-presence. Repossession and mourning furthermore require a form of memory, which is discontinuous and allows for detachment, distance and difference. French historian Pierre Nora (1989) argues that history became this form of memory⁵ in what he calls "hopelessly forgetful modern societies" (1989, 8). According to Nora real memory is "unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing" (1989, 8) and is anchored in the "undifferentiated time of heroes, origins and myth" (1989, 8). As opposed to this magical and affective experience of timelessness, modern memory is "an intellectual and secular production" (1989, 9) anchored in traces, identifying itself as organization through

⁵ Nora's relevant argument declares that, whereas in the past moments of history used to be inseparable from the movement of history (cf. 1989, 12), with modern memory the past and the future are no longer extensions of the present, but become fractured and discontinued.

mediation. Whereas real memory is expressed in ritual repetition, modern memory substituted to historical consciousness reconstructs “what is no longer” in *lieux de mémoire*.⁶ The paradigmatic shift uncovered here, in short, could be grasped as the act of taking memory into one’s hand and control, even at the price of losing a link with the past inscribed “in the body’s inherent self-knowledge” (1989, 13).

In the 20th century it was the totalitarian regimes that took memory into their own hands in the most spectacular ways and turned all aspects of life into *lieux de mémoire*: realms seized by history. Nazi Germany was especially eminent in historicizing memory: birthday celebrations, memorial services, national commemorations, etc. were all made into *lieux*, realms where not only the past but history itself was turned into a controlled substance. Relying on the assumptions of Nora – according to which the intellectualization and the psychologization of memory go hand in hand – it is easy to see that, what characterises modern societies (and more so totalitarian ones) is not simply a desire to comprehend the past more objectively, but a lust to control and manipulate the formation and transformation of identity (either individual or collective). Historical memory benefits those who want to take the future into their hands⁷, take control over the active shaping of those cognitive structures and frameworks of public discourse which determine the consensual sphere of everyday values, conducts and morals. It is these institutionalized spheres of identity-formation that the Nazi regime corrupted, making it into the realm of narcissistic identification, using history to capture the national irrational and myth.

If history lay at the foundation of this realm (which in a sense became the grave of German identity), history itself had to be revisited, and the past once again taken into one’s hand. Revisiting is not rewinding, history will be redeemed the least by plunging into the past through something of a duty-memory: it has to be recaptured and turned into a realm of self-reflexive memory, *lieux de mémoire* of mass analysis, mourning and healing.

Within the body of work identified as New German Cinema, *Germany in Autumn* (1978) is probably the most complex and combatant *lieu*. Being a film of multiple authorship,⁸ it is a remarkable example of collective *Trauerarbeit*, but

⁶ In Nora’s understanding anything may become a *lieu de mémoire* which is formed while the spontaneous experience of the past, of tradition is articulated indirectly, that is, named, shown, and archived (Nora 1989, 8).

⁷ This is what George Orwell’s famous lines – *He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past* – express with such clarity.

⁸ The directors included Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Alf Brustellin, Bernhard Sinkel, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Katja Rupé, Hans Peter Cloos, Edgar Reitz, Maximiliane Mainka, Peter Schubert, Hans Peter Kloss, while Heinrich Böll and Peter F. Steinbach appear among the writers.

also an exquisite social document of the heritage of Fascism. It is a *lieu* of multiple non-hierarchical voices recapturing history as a site of open and symbolic dialogue. As Elsaesser notes, this is a dialogue of “the political father and the revolting children” (2004, 302), mother and son literally evoked in a heated argument between Fassbinder and Lilo Pempeit, but even more so in the violent exchange of opinion between the older generation for whom the execution of Hans Martin Schleyer transgresses a taboo and the younger generation who employ shock-tactics to wake their elders from the amnesia they entered during the Nazi regime and like Pempeit await “a kind of authoritarian ruler, who is quiet good and quite kind and orderly” to solve the political crises at hand. The filmmakers take sides with neither group, in fact they reveal, on the one hand, that contrary to its self-image, the Baader-Meinhof group is not a popular antifascist movement, but a fanatic terrorist cell, but also expose, on the other hand, that the parents, in their failure to begin the internal process of denazification, build up provocative taboos. The address of each sequence is both demythologizing, critical and analytical, it furthermore turns the official/non-official hierarchies upside down. The official is embodied by the government ceremonies at St. Eberhard Kirche in Stuttgart and the well-publicized commemoration of the memory of Schleyer held at the pride of German industry: the Mercedes factory. These organized forms of mourning are empty ceremonies, institutionalized formalities that address democratic principles only superficially. In contrast the non-official and peripheral voices, like the short lecture of Horst Mahler (the master-mind of the Baader-Meinhof group) about post-war social crises and generational conflict of Germany, is therapeutic even if it points out the shortcomings of democracy as practiced. Although interviewed in prison, Mahler seems to be the most authentic person in the film, a mourner in the likes of Adorno and the Mitscherlichs.

Germany in Autumn does not arrive to a satisfying conclusion in the numerous issues it raises; instead of reconciling the historically embedded generational conflict, it dramatizes it in long sequences portraying basically two West-Germans mourning beside one another: unified after all, but in pain and melancholia and not in principle and mourning. And yet, melancholy – as Saltner argues “is the rehearsal of the shattering or fragmentation of one’s primitive narcissism, an event that predates any real mourning for a lost object.” (1990, 3.) Such example of *Trauerarbeit* as homeopathic healing is the case of Manfred Rommel (the mayor of Stuttgart) who resists the public pressure to decline last honours from the Ensslin family and consequently embraces that which the Nazi Party and Reich first and foremost corrupted and rejected: empathy.

If *Germany in Autumn* urged for an all-pervasive melancholia to be transformed into a mourning that reconciles generations, Alexander Kluge's *The Patriot* (1979) meditates about the possibilities of a patriotic German history, the catalyst for a positive self-image. The heroine of the film is history teacher Gabi Teichert, who in a quest for "better material" to be used in her history classes, comes to acquire odd research techniques, making use of a shovel, binoculars and alchemist's tools. Gabi may be the main character of Kluge's complex collage of images, music and text but the dominant perspective belongs to a frozen knee. As Flinn observes "[c]ompared to fellow historian Gabi Teichert, who is a mere assembler and instructor of historical material, the knee is that as well as a *participant* in history. At once raw material and historian, wound and witness, the knee proves to be the central character of *The Patriot* and its most significant historian" (2004, 125). With the appearance of the knee, the connotations of patriotism transform: it will no longer refer to the positivist undertaking of producing a study material for institutionalized education. A new question arises: can the imagined voice of a frozen German soldier's knee under Stalingrad (the only thing left of him), and with it the traumas, the fractured bodies, numbed energies and ruins be taken as a form of homeopathic healing? Flinn thinks so: "old fragments [can be] put into new contexts and presented to listeners for them to make meaningful, personal connections to history" (2004, 132).⁹ The difference between the knee and Gabi is that of the materialist historian and the material of history. Gabi exhaustively works her way through the past and the present, she undertakes a study of historical debris – such as fairy tales, the lines of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, the procedures of dismantling unexploded bombs, diary entries, children's poems, gestures at a school meeting and at a party convention, etc – to extract from them the very material history is made of: a molecular history. And yet hers is the cerebral, principled study of German history, something 'the closer one looks at, the further it recedes from light.'¹⁰ Being a materialist, her intellectual desire for enlightenment comes from above, from the head. The bodily, lively history she is in search for can only come from the limbs, the material and participant of history itself. In my understanding, the traumatic (thus self-alienating) perspective of the knee may well be a minor or microscopic one, yet it expresses a universal ahistorical desire: the desire to survive and live. There is no patriotic rendering of German history until memory can only comprehend the patriotic sacrifices and

⁹ Representatives of the German leftist circle of historians conducting research in *Alltagsgeschichte* (microhistory) would fully agree with this assumption.

¹⁰ Kluge himself uses this quote from Karl Krause and after it disappears he adds the word "Germany."

not the unpatriotic desire to survive of those sacrificed. For me Kluge's film identifies the enforced sacrifice as the "natural" order of history, as if the "above" was structurally programmed to deprive the "below" from its most primal desires, leaving no place for escape. It is at this point where the "below" gradually becomes the perspective of any victim¹¹ subjected to any principle administered from above.¹² *The Patriot* thus warns against idealizing history and suggests that mourning should take the shape of a counter-memory, one that hopes to commemorate "the knees," "the others" in history. In this respect, taking the past in one's hands and the formation of *lieux de mémoire* needs not only self-consciousness, but likewise self-criticism.

Our Hitler: A Film from Germany, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's (1977) own *Trauerarbeit*,¹³ is a grandiose, yet ironic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a marriage of total artistic synthesis in the likes of the theories of Wagner and Brechtian effects of distancing and alienation. Syberberg's aesthetic laboratory confronts the viewer with an anti-realist, highly stylized spectacle (cardboard figures, dummies, projected still and moving images) and a chaotic aural environment (monologues, musical excerpts, original recordings of speeches, marches, radio broadcasts) resulting in a surrealist-symbolic atmosphere as one would feel in a puppet theatre, or rather, as Fredric Jameson suggests: "the playroom, or the toybox" (1981, 102) filled – we might add – with "stranded objects of cultural inheritance fragmented and poisoned" (Santner 1990, xiii). For Syberberg this is the adequate stage of the Nazi-era history of Germany, reduced to the level of kitsch, perverse spectacle of overpowering intensity and grandiose dramaturgy that makes it very hard not to embrace the power of the irrational and the mythic. As Gilles Deleuze argues, Syberberg's Hitler is not a psychological individual but the embodiment of a "complex, heterogeneous, anarchic space where the trivial and the cultural, the public and the private, the historic and the anecdotal, the imaginary and the real are brought close together ... all of equal importance and forming a network, in kinds of relationship which are never those of *causality*." (Deleuze 1989, emphasis added, 268–9) Hitler the person is like anyone else who dwells in the world of causality: a harmless clown, a frustrated actor. "Syberberg takes the image of Hitler

¹¹ As this line of argumentation openly declares that the perspective of the knee receives a universal character Flinn would clearly object. He writes: "Why didn't Kluge use the knee of a Pole killed during Germany's invasion? Or the knee of a camp prisoner whose leg had been amputated without anaesthesia? it is difficult to reconcile the film's conspicuous omission of the Shoah and of non-German histories in Germany" (2004, 133-4).

¹² It is also at this point that the influence of Adorno's idea of the "negative dialectics" on Kluge becomes apparent.

¹³ Syberberg himself declared in a text title at the end of the film.

as enemy” writes Deleuze (1989, 269), the Hitler, which is evidently ours, because it is instances of non-causal but ecstatic thinking, the vitality of dreams, the unconscious fantasies of omnipotence, the irrational identifications that produce him: Hitler comes into being within the network of irrational, non-causal linkages in the collective unconscious. Cinema and projection is given such central importance in *Our Hitler* exactly for this reason. What makes Hitler the image is always already there in commercial cinema, in the legends, myths, fictions, mass produced unconscious identifications, kitsch and cultural debris pouring out from Hollywood. To overcome the image, and thus Hitler, is to go through all layers of the unconscious, to locate and receive all its interferences. Based on Deleuze (and also Jameson), this might take place as a kind of ventriloquism, where one lends not only his/her voice, but unconscious to the puppet, this way, spelling out all that which is otherwise inexpressible. With reference to Syberberg’s other works we can see, how his chief aim is to make German history and culture expressible by mapping up and making visible the stratification and interference of the multiple voices populating it, be that artistic, cultural, political, ideological, melodramatic, authoritarian, popular or confrontational. In line with Jameson I also assign a certain therapeutic function to Syberberg’s cartography of the past as an interference of unconscious energies and cultural debris. Just as one becomes more alert and immune to manipulation if s/he possesses a basic understanding of the constructedness of the cinematic image, an awareness for the Hitler living in our belly – as any psychoanalyst would agree – gives a certain degree of control over him. In sum, Syberberg’s attempt to come into terms with the past is highly personal, it would be a mistake to consider it a universal model of *Trauerarbeit*, least a final solution to mourning, yet in its persistent commitment to the labour of remembering, it becomes a key text of national elegiac cinema.

III.

Although certain segments of memory-art prospered in the 1980s,¹⁴ cinema seemed to have lost its resolve. With the making of American mini-series entitled *The Holocaust* (1978) – as an answer to which Edgar Reitz made *Heimat* (1979-1984) – the elegiac mode of address was overcome by a sensationalist one. As Flinn notes, *The Holocaust* was “once too banal and too excessive ... exploiting the affective excesses associated with the [melodramatic] genre ... its purported

¹⁴ Most notably combatant memorial art exemplified in the self-reflexive, deconstructive counter-memorials of Horst Hoheisel, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Christian Boltanski, Micha Ullman, Renata Stih, and Frieder Schnock.

demurrals from political and economic problems, and its polarization of good and evil, creating a diegetic world inhabited largely by historically vacant figures.” (2004, 30.) Keeping in mind the alarming likeness of Hitler and Hollywood, Syberberg points out, such a heroicizing point-of-view of the Holocaust more likely conserves than eliminates the Nazi mindset.

The symbolic destruction of the Berlin Wall has led to the unification of Germany, ended the country’s political quarantine and strengthened democratic values and institutes. The country was “officially” reintegrated into both the international community and likewise into history: this time finding itself on the side of the victors. Little surprise that critical voices of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* caught on, especially after the public lecture of Martin Walser in 1998. Walser challenged *Trauerarbeit* both as externalized duty authoritatively enforced on people – a kind of ‘policing’ instead of a policy – and as “the exploitation of our shame for current goals.” Unfortunately cinema also offered such cases of exploitation. Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) not only followed in the tradition of *The Holocaust* as a sensationalist cinema intended for the global spectator but marks a key moment in the commoditization of the Holocaust. Or shall we say that Spielberg understood the pressure of times changing and adapted to the new challenges of memory? Either way, the nature of commemorative healing in German cinema was significantly affected. The Shoah and the Nazi-era was no longer an internal, national affair, it became a point of interest for international audiences of little historical knowledge of the period and little interest in the delicate nature of raising certain issues in Germany. Instead of dense texts laden with introspection they were looking out for impressive historical depictions. With the fall of a bipolar world-order, the weakening distinction between left-wing and right-wing political attitudes and the uniformization of global consumption models, traditional self-inquisitive filmmaking – serving as the backbone of basically all European new waves – lost its resolve. In regard to the German context and the *Trauerfilm* this meant that the past became more than ever a legitimate topic of the historical film.

This shift occurred in close connection with the aging of the war- and post-war generations. The new generation of young Germans had no direct experience and little interest in the matters of the Third Reich: for them the past was less traumatic and involved little self-analysis and reflection. They encountered challenges of a different kind, such as the sociopolitical impact of large-scale immigration and the current debates of whether to tolerate or limit ethnic and cultural diversity in the formulation of a German nationhood. Their sense of

identity, memory and mourning is of a different composition and only history will tell how persistent they are in resisting the Hitler that interpenetrates and animates everything we do not control, but which controls us.

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