

## A CARTOGRAPHY OF GESTURES

### NOTES ABOUT AN INSTALLATION: *LA MARCIA DELL'UOMO*

(Y. GIANIKIAN, A. RICCI LUCCHI, 2001)

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The very title of Yervant Gianikian's and Angela Ricci Lucchi's installation – *La marcia dell'uomo* (2001) – seems to favour one of its three series of images from archival footage above the others: an ensemble of chronophotographic film strips that is presented here under the heading *Homme nègre, marche*. The three-part projection therefore takes as its starting point a problem of photographic representation that can be considered not only in terms of perceptual theory and epistemology but also of the history of technology. Employing the cinematographic technique of varying film speeds, to the point of bringing the film to an apparent standstill, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi explore the phenomenon of the photographic snapshot as encountered at the end of the 19th century. According to Michel Frizot, this involves on the one hand the iconography of the pose (which has its origins in visual art) being replaced by a non-conventional, but for that a “truer” recording of movement, one that is paradoxically capable of capturing the gesture in a clearly defined manner, “as if immobilized”;<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand a scientific tool with which to analyze a physiological question, making it possible to find new answers by breaking down a movement into a succession of distinct elements.

In Etienne-Jules Marey's *Station physiologique*, ethnographers and natural scientists<sup>2</sup> took sequential photographs of Africans who were brought in from the Universal Expositions and other similar venues (Fig. 1); the shots were taken in analogue fashion to those of Europeans marching, according to a principle of equality derived from the scientific principle of comparison: namely in front of a light rather than a dark background, but otherwise in the same staged setting. Men, women and children stride past the camera at a suitable distance, crossing its field of view. They all cover the same distance, measured by a chronometer that is occasionally visible in the picture. Each person's individual walking speed results in a different number of instant photographs, and if these images are animated, the filmic “shot” has a correspondingly varied duration. Although in Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi's analytical treatment of the archival material these single frames are animated to produce moving images, the use of freeze frames means that they nevertheless remain perceptible as an original sequence of stilled, distinct elements. Increased modulation of the number of single frames duplicated for a freeze frame leads to a variability of the viewing experience, in particular through repetition. In this way, Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi present the black African children stepping out of line in longer stilled film images, and similarly emphasize through the enlargement of the image area a certain Barthesian *punctum* – incisive moments and touching details (Fig. 2). By means of differentiated repetition, *La marcia dell'uomo* accentuates gestures, procedures and looks. This not only highlights the realm outside the current

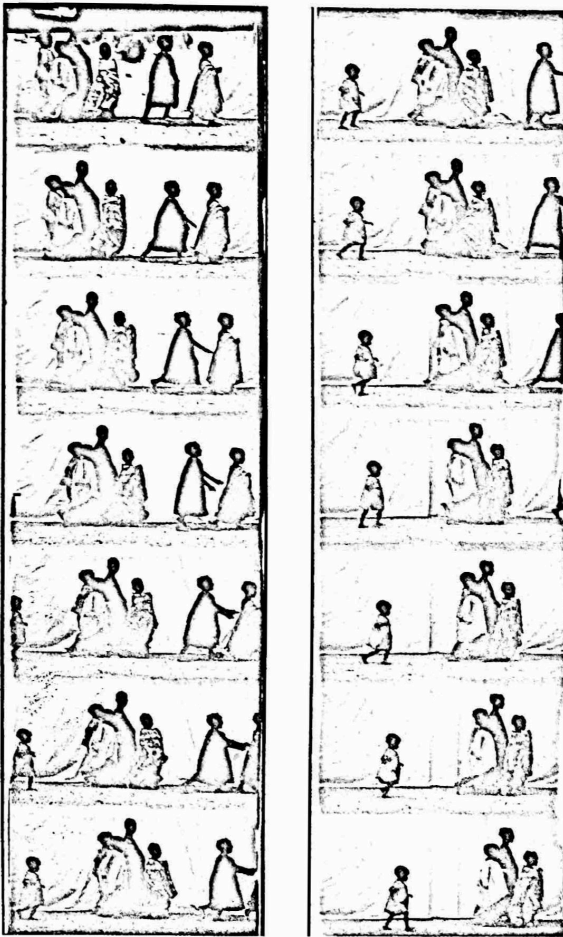


Fig. 1 - Etienne-Jules Marey, *Station physiologique*

field of vision, it also creates an imaginary dimension that points beyond the referentiality of the depicted gesture.

The recycled chronophotographic film footage is presented as a loop on the first of three relatively large screens that have been installed close behind one another. The other two series of images, also consisting of archival footage, are to be read in comparison with Marey's shots. The first involves images of Africa filmed by European travellers in search of a "foreign" experience. Like Marey's series, however, neither the expedition footage from 1910 nor the Standard 8 private footage shot in 1960 is shown at normal running speed. In the installation they are subjected to the same analytical interruption in the form of distinct yet continuous "stoppages" of varying duration. The differentiated single frame work of Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi makes particular

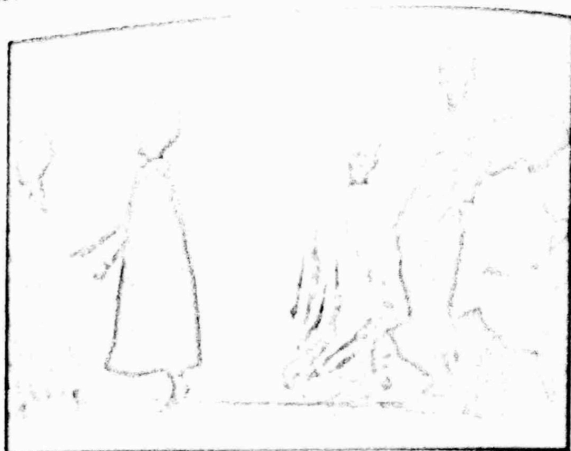


Fig. 2 - First screen (1985)

aspects stand out that would not be as visible if shown at a realistic film speed. For the viewer, the film temporality is split; it oscillates between past recording and present viewing, the result not only of being slowed down or brought to a standstill but also of enlargement, colour tinting and repetition. Traces of decay in the original material become apparent: its resolution, light and contrasts display extreme heterogeneity.

In the re-edited version of the early film material, the visit by two white safari hunters to a West African hut village shows itself to be an asymmetrical circulation of attributes and attitudes: if, as would-be guests, the white visitors sit on the ground with the black people, the gesture exposes their attempt to disguise a feeling of being out of place. And if the colonized black people sit at the table wearing top hats and petticoats, their "inappropriate" dress reveals a game of subversion (Fig. 3). At the end of this second image sequence, a filmic configuration of the point of view is elaborated as a hierarchical relationship between safari hunt and trophy collecting, white and black, the gesture of conquest and of subjugation. Looped as an installation and in a reworked format, however, this configuration is not to be regarded as a fixed convention but instead as a possibili-

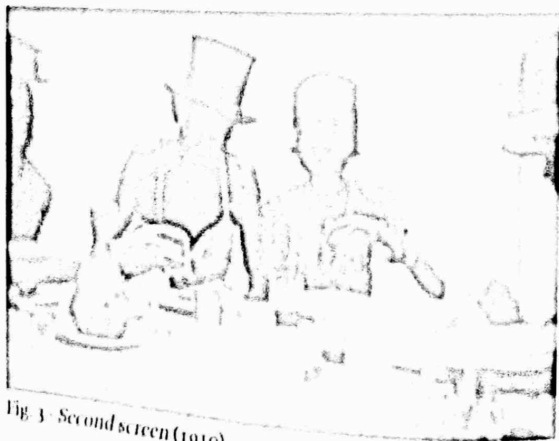


Fig. 3 - Second screen (1910)

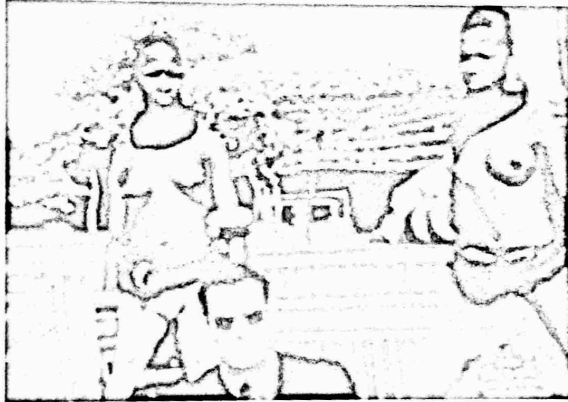


Fig. 4 - *Third screen* (1960)

ty of what is past. Finally, in the third image, which has been extremely alienated by means of deep violet colour tinting, sexual difference as a component of a postcolonial dispositif of power is emphasized by transforming a holiday film from the era of mass tourism. A Western voyeur, wearing dark glasses to avoid being seen watching, looks on while half-naked black women dance around him for money (Fig. 4). Here, too, the gaze and gestures are dissected by freezing, enlarging and repeating the shot.

With their precise selection of film footage, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi at the same time propose an archaeological view of “ethnographic” film collections in the broadest sense: a new cartography of these human geographies. As far as the archaeological view is concerned, Gianikian’s rereading of the chronophotographic gait not only traces an iconographic or ethnographic path in all its ambivalent referentiality, but also the archaeology of a dispositif in which the images are inscribed: it is a well-known fact that in carrying out his physiological motion studies Etienne-Jules Marey was less interested in the illusion of reproduction than in the analysis of a process. As his assistant Lucien Bull reports, Marey believed that “the projection did not allow him to discover more than the attentive analysis of a print”.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this installation, Marey’s paradoxical material is treated entirely in the sense of his own invention, in other words not with the illusionistic logic of the Lumière Cinématographe, but rather in a very specific mode of visibility (between immobility and variable mobility) that is closer to pre-cinematographic viewing possibilities such as the Zootrope. It becomes apparent that this experimental arrangement is based upon a scientific view that regards the physiological nature of the human gait as paradigmatic for the progression of the mechanism of the apparatus, following a pattern of “displacement/standstill/displacement/standstill”.<sup>4</sup>

Gianikian’s approach is also archaeological in the sense that it is interested in the body and circulation of the films within and beyond the archives, not simply in terms of their representative content. In line with Foucault, one could say (particularly with regard to the two other films that make up the installation – the expedition film from 1910 and the private film material from 1960) that in the reuse of the material a *stagnating* language serves as a basis of a *circulating* language, one which also takes into account the possible field of the films’ original use. The progressive arrangement of the

three screens plays a not insignificant part in this. It should be understood not only as a chronological arrangement (1895-1910-1960), but also and above all as an epistemological comparison of different functions of photographic and filmic recordings of the "Other". Between Marey's analysis of a physiological difference, the gesture of colonial exoticism from the Comerio Collection and the attitude of the private film-maker (as that of the postcolonial, consumption-oriented mass tourist) lie the various "life-worlds" and experiential horizons of Western thinking that determine the figuration of "black African" gestures and locomotion respectively.

The installation's chosen *dispositif* does not, therefore, produce a genealogy of ethnography, nor is it a history of nomads from the point of view of the sedentary population. The visitor wandering between the screens does not encounter a linear arrangement but rather something that could be termed a new cartography of filmic gestures and movements as described above. This could also be defined with the concept of the rhizome in Deleuze/Guattari's sense of the term, as a non-hierarchical form that is defined solely by a circulation of states: "What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality – but also to the animal, the vegetal," they write in *Mille plateaux*, "[...] All manner of 'becomings'."<sup>5</sup> Continuing with the Deleuzian paired concepts of the map and the tracing, one could say that here the reuse of the archive material leads back from the supposed competence of the photographic or cinematographic "tracing" of a world to a performance of the cartography which permits the study of the unconscious, the generation of new propositions and desires. *La marcia dell'uomo (Marcia della conquista)* deals with a deterritorialization of specific forms of perceiving the world, organizing expeditions of discovery and setting up archives. This is in line with the current tendency to criticize the standardizing representation of the history of mankind in the Hegelian tradition and to seriously question the definition of identity from a Western perspective. Of course the history of ethnography (even in the broadest sense, as the participatory and reflexive observation of a culture) can by no means be regarded as homogeneous. Its ambiguity is underlined by cultural theorist James Clifford: "Ethnography, a hybrid activity, thus appears as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique."<sup>6</sup> Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi take precisely this ambiguity into account when creating new links between all kinds of ethnographic traces. The work of Gianikian's "analytical camera", whose specific modulation of standstill and movement, of framing and interconnection proceeds in the manner of a rhizome, as described by Deleuze/Guattari: "By variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots."<sup>7</sup> This cartography of photographic and filmic gestures considers its own variability in terms of the form of modulation, and consequently avoids a Manichaistic presentation of ethnographic-photographic-cinematographic positions.

(Translated from German by Jacqueline Todd)

1 On the snapshot shutter Etienne-Jules Marey writes: "[...] Un temps de pose assez bref pour que les objets en mouvement soient représentés dans l'épreuve avec des contours aussi nets que s'ils eussent été immobiles". Cf. E.-J. Marey, *Le Mouvement* (Paris: Masson, 1894), p. 14, quoted from M. Frizot, "Comment on marche. De l'exactitude dans l'instant," *La Revue du Musée d'Orsay*, no. 4 (Spring 1997), p. 78.

- 2 In 1898 the ethnographer Félix Regnault published a study on the human gait, for which Etienne-Jules Marey wrote a foreword, based among other things upon chronophotographic studies of the gait of African people; cf. F. Regnault, A.-C.-O. De Raoul, *Comment on Marche. Des divers modes de progression, de la supériorité du mode en flexion* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1898). On this subject see also M. Frizot, "Comment ça Marche. L'algorithme cinématographique," *Cinémathèque*, no. 15 (Spring 1999), pp. 15–27. Marta Braun brings together an ensemble on human locomotion from the *Station physiologique* (compiled at a later date) under the following heading: "African village of the universal exposition 1900." See M. Braun, *Picturing Time. The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey 1830–1904* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 380–81.
- 3 L. Bull "Quelques Souvenirs personnels de mon maître E.-J. Marey," *Bulletin de l'AFITEC*, hors série (1954), pp. 3–7, quoted from M. Frizot, "Les Reliques en rouleaux", in D. Païni (ed.), *La Persistance des images. Tirages, sauvegardes et restaurations dans la collection films de la Cinémathèque Française* (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 1996), p. 21. Long believed lost, Marey's chronophotographic films – whose 90mm format allows higher photographic resolution than the cinematographic films available at the time – were rediscovered in the 1980s and later restored onto 35mm film by the Cinémathèque Française.
- 4 On this principle in the work of Regnault and Marey see M. Frizot, "Comment ça Marche", *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- 5 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 21.
- 6 J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 13.
- 7 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 21.