CINÉMA&CIE

INTERNATIONAL FILM STUDIES JOURNAL

**Scattered Subalternities:
Transnationalism, Globalization and Power**

Edited by Ilaria A. De Pascalis,
Judith Keilbach and Maria Francesca Piredda

Contents / Table des matières

Scattered Subalternities:
Transnationalism, Globalization and Power

Introduction

Ilaria A. De Pascalis, Università Roma Tre, Rome
Judith Keilbach, Utrecht University, Utrecht
Maria Francesca Piredda, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan

The aim of this special issue is to contribute to the ongoing rethinking of subalternity, a category that has changed due to neoliberalism and globalization. Early subaltern studies focused on Antonio Gramsci's discussion of power relations between hegemonic positions and popular masses, using his perspective to read (post)colonial patterns of control and agency.

In more recent years, subaltern studies have addressed not only the political and social ramifications of hegemony, but issues of media representation and cultural discourses as well. At the very heart of the contemporary discussion of subalternity, regarding both subjects and the communities they relate to, is the possibility to read contemporaneity by interlacing multiple approaches, from disciplines that are usually considered very distant from one another.

The following essays account for the importance of this multidisciplinary perspective, thus addressing media representation paradigms from the perspectives of visual culture, history, philosophy, postcolonialism, and so on. They are centered on the contemporary subaltern, especially the migrant one — characterized by diaspora and condemned to invisibility by hegemonic power — and the postcolonial subaltern — who has now the possibility to express her/himself in unexpected ways. The scattering and pervasiveness of media devices and gazes are discussed in depth in these essays, which delve into the dialectic between subaltern cultures and agency embodied in the subjects of representation.

The memory of diaspora and migration is one topic that reverberates in a number of essays. Ulrike Mothes analyses films by Thomas Brück and Bentely Brown, in which the filmmakers address their experience of discontinuity. By using home movies from childhoods spent abroad and combining them with a reflexive voice-over, they highlight their hybrid cultural identity. Michaela Quadraro draws on artwork by Piper, Ribka, Walcott, Julien and Kempadoo that deals with migration, diaspora and transculturality. She criticizes those historical accounts and archival practices that ignore the multiplicity of diasporic experiences in our world. Farah Polato takes interest in the memory of the Italian colonization and experiences of the African diaspora in Italy. Based on

a variety of films, she points out the many refractions of the diasporic subject, and how s/he articulates her/himself within a plurality of spaces. Renato Loriga reminds us that the (colonial) past can be represented also in radical different ways. Starting with a postcolonial critique of time, he shows how Raya Martin's film *Autohystoria* repossesses time and enables a negotiation of Filipino identity through subversive disarticulation.

Maja Figge and Sudeep Dasgupta discuss the visibility of subaltern subjects. Figge examines cell phone videos by refugees who document their passage across the Mediterranean Sea in the context of postcolonial visibility. She interprets the act of filming and of uploading on YouTube as political practice that intervenes on the one hand in the visual regime of border control, and on the other hand in the visual modes of representing migration. Dasgupta focuses on the un-integrated presence of subalterns in the film *A Bigger Splash*. Depicting the relationality of the film's protagonists and the figure of the migrant, he considers their intermittent adjacencies as a sensorial and a political provocation. Anu Thapa similarly addresses relationality. She shows that in today's popular Hindi cinema the figure of the subaltern is used to contrast a cosmopolitan protagonist. Questioning the conflation and monolithic notions of the subaltern and the popular, she suggests that these representations allow for negotiating and reformulating identity.

The second part of this issue firstly contains Lorenzo Marmo's review of the anthology *Networking the Globe: New Technologies and the Postcolonial*, in addition to an overview of the exhibition *The Mapping Journey Project*, by Simona Arillotta. Secondly, it proposes two PhD projects that are currently underway: Claudia Minchilli's focuses on the digital subaltern, as it examines transnational, online practices of migrant women; Wouter Oomen explores humanitarian communication campaigns and the discourse of common humanity that they employ.

The plurality of artistic products and media experiences addressed by the two sections of this issue mirrors the impossibility to grasp univocally the many meanings that the world 'subaltern' has assumed in the last years, when faced with ongoing changes in global cultures and economies. We hope that our selection will contribute to this wide debate, which is nevertheless still in need of further exploration.

Video Memories of Diaspora:
Searching for Identity in Between Homelands

Ulrike Mothes, Bauhaus University Weimar

Abstract

Transcultural studies often theorize third world diaspora from within the dominant Western context, and its relation to the culture of their postcolonial home. This essay takes on a reversed perspective, aiming to examine filmic representations of two young Western subjects in third world countries. The filmmakers Thomas Brück and Bentley Brown spent their formative years as members of Western diaspora families in Mexico and Chad. Using the medium of film, their work navigates cultures — as the works of certain subaltern immigrant artists and filmmakers in the West do. By analysing their personal documentaries *Third Culture Kid* and *Oustaz*, the essay investigates their cinematic means of negotiating transcultural identity across geopolitical borders. Special emphasis is given to the employment of home video material to reconstruct and represent memory.

Introduction

Transcultural studies often theorize the third-world diaspora within the dominant Western context and its relation to the culture of their postcolonial home.[1] This essay investigates a reversed filmic perspective on diaspora identity: the filmmakers Thomas Brück and Bentley Brown spent their formative years as members of Western diaspora families in Mexico and Chad. Using the medium of film their works navigate between cultures — as the works of certain second and third world immigrant artists and filmmakers in the West do. What strategies do the filmmakers pursue to discuss the subject of transcultural identity in documentary film? What stylistic means do they employ to generate and represent memory?

---

[1] This perspective has been represented in various personal documentary films such as Sandhya Suri's *I for India* (2005) about her family ties between Great Britain and India, or Arash T. Riahi's *Exile Family Movie* (2006) portraying the director's Austria-based family that re-unites with their Iranian relatives in Mekka after decades.

To apprehend their works in the context of transcultural film practice, the essay first discusses the key concerns of diaspora and identity, and then gives a brief summary of Thomas Brück's short documentary *Third Culture Kid* (2015) and Bentley Brown's short documentary *Oustaz* (2016). Referring to the memory theory of Aleida Assmann, the second part examines notions of memory and their representations in the films of Brück and Brown. This essay will also address the narrative use and authentic impact of home video material as the visual base of both documentaries. Finally, the essay looks at the stylistic device of personal voice-over narration on the filmic quests for belonging and the strategies of self-reflection inherent in the personal filmmaking style.

Diaspora and Identity

Migration movements are not a new phenomenon. Wars, famines, political or religious persecution, as well as invitations by foreign governments have been impulses for translocation over centuries. Today, global economies, international education systems and career opportunities, too, contribute to an increasing amount of people leaving their ancestral countries and relocating into new communities and spaces either for a particular time span or for good. Diaspora experience is a much-debated factor in the context of subaltern communities claiming agency as well as legal and social equalities. The diaspora experience challenges a sense of identity and belonging of any person who for some reason or another decides to leave their homeland.

Contemporary definitions of diaspora focus on their community members' experiences of transition and fragmentation in between the cultures of the old and the new home. Stuart Hall describes these global citizens as 'new ethnicities' who share a deep experience of discontinuity.[2] Their self-perception is decisively shaped by the need to actively position themselves between the various and sometimes-contradictory influences of both cultures. Vijay Agnew characterizes them as 'individuals who live in a variety of societies and cultures and who emphasize their sense of belonging or exclusion, their states of mind and their sense of identity.'[3] Consequently, diaspora experience blends elements of the ancestral and the new culture, into creolization and cultural hybridization.

One may ask to what extent the self-concept and the notions of 'home' would be governed by the same mechanisms in Western diaspora communities. Beyond the economic and social pressure many migrants from second and third world countries experience in the West, Western transnationals are equally affected by

---

[2] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) pp. 392–403 (p. 395).
[3] Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 5.

notions of difference which make them question their understanding of self and belonging. They appropriate elements from both cultures and integrate them into their lifestyle and understanding of the world around them. This inevitable process is seen as an important motor for the conception of art and culture. By the means of art or media participation the Diasporic subjects '[...] generate new and different images of themselves and their group that correspond more closely to their evolving self-image and self-definition.'[4] New York based Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai extends this notion by arguing that the imagination is a driving force for these artists.[5]

This paper traces the subjective cross-cultural experience mirrored in the works of the Western filmmakers Bentley Brown and Thomas Brück. Both documentary directors participated in the new global mobility as 'third culture kids', a term employed by Ruth van Reken and David Pollock for 'children who spend a significant period of their developmental years in a culture outside their parents "passport culture(s)"'.[6] Brück, of German descent, was born in the Mexican town Zapopan, where his parents had settled for professional reasons. He did not know much about his parents' ancestral country and culture until the family resettled to Germany when Brück was six years old.[7] The resulting struggle to identify his home and develop a sense of belonging is reflected in his eponymous film *Third Culture Kid*.

US born filmmaker Bentley Brown moved to Chad as an eleven-year-old accompanying his parents on a healthcare mission, and stayed until he was an adult. He learned Chadian Arab as well as French, the colonial *officialese*. This allowed for an intense participation in the local culture. After completing his studies in his native country, he returned to African and Arabian regions to work in foreign aid as well as on film projects. Brown believes in cross-cultural filmmaking and collaborating with local crew-members. All his films deal with the subject of migration, moving between countries and 'the identity transformation that is happening as a result'.[8]

It should be stressed that both filmmakers have been part of a numerically rather small diaspora in a third world country. Their films focus not on the concerns of a diaspora community but on their own personal experiences. They imagine their childhood from the found video fragments and conclude their individual

---

[4] Agnew, p. 5.
[5] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 31.
[6] Ruth van Reken and David C. Pollock, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up among Worlds* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2009), p. xi.
[7] Interview with Thomas Brück, 17 August 2016.
[8] Bentley Brown, 'Linguistic Integrity in Cross-Cultural Filmmaking', lecture at the Berlin Language of Art & Music Conference, hosted by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2014, min. 12:00, online video recording, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HfSomJzwxM> [accessed 21 August 2016]. Examples of his film work are *Faisal Goes West* (2012) and *Le Pèlerin De Camp Nou/Captain Majid* (2009). His autobiographic documentary *Khawadjat* (2016/in production) uses home video footage we already know from his earlier film *Oustaz*.

explorations. Thus, their quest for home and cultural belonging can be seen as exemplary for translocation experience of the globalized world. As children growing up in foreign countries, the directors were highly perceptive to the influences of the new ethnic context and open to intercultural relationships: 'I was very concerned about fitting into the new community where my brother and I were basically the only foreigners or new arrivers in a small town in which we grew up',[9] Brown reflects about his position as a cultural outsider in Chad, confirming Agnew's theory of identity as a prevalent subject for hybrid communities.

Mansions and Mentors: The Cinematic Childhood Memories of Thomas Brück and Bentley Brown

Opening with a shot of his Mexican passport, Thomas Brück narrates the story of his blurred notion of home after locating back to Germany with his family in *Third Culture Kid*. The long-lost validity of this very passport troubles his sense of identity. Twenty years after parting, Brück sets out on a quest to his lost childhood home, to find out where he actually belongs. On his eight-week journey through Mexico, Brück finds himself surrounded by symbols of forsaken national identity. Shots of bare flagpoles become metaphors of the young filmmaker's scattered identity. In the course of the film Brück encounters protagonists that struggle with their existence in Mexico, but encourage him on his search for belonging. Finally, he is ready to confront his physical diaspora home in Guadalajara.

Bentley Brown's *Oustaz* is framed by the visit to Montreal he made together with his Chadian childhood friend and fellow filmmaker Abakar Chene Massar. The trip becomes the inciting incident for Brown to review his old home video recordings. Subsequently, he looks back at his childhood memories in the Chadian small town Ati, to his friendships and his beginnings of filmmaking. By doing so he pays tribute to Oustaz Boukhary, a painter, inventor and musician from his neighborhood. Oustaz had taught him to speak Arabic and is therefore a key figure to bridge Brown's ancestral and the Chadian culture. While reflecting upon himself and filmmaking Brown comes to terms with his Central African past. This makes him reach a state of equality with the admired teacher.

Representing Memories

Memories are an important element for autobiographical and cinematic works. They are investigated and restructured in retrospect and enable the artist to define an identity and reflect upon it with peers and thereby draft an

---

[9] Brown, 'Linguistic Integrity', min. 8:00.

image of the self: 'Without memory, we cannot develop a concept of self nor communicate with others. Biographic memories are indispensable, because experiences, relationships and the image of the own identity are made of it.'[10] Along these lines both directors survey their memories in hindsight. Their documentary perspective is strongly shaped by the question of who they are and which cultural factors influenced their image of self. Bentley Brown summarizes the relevance of memory for his works in his voice-over: 'Is who I am just a series of memories? Conversations? Imaginations?'[11] These uncertain concepts form the basis of his film essay.

Memories are fragmentary by nature, and Aleida Assmann is right to remark that they are 'mere excerpts', 'unconnected moments with no before or after'.[12] Their ephemeral qualities might dwindle away during one's life. This makes it a challenge for the filmmakers to reconstruct their past in Mexico and Chad. In *Third Culture Kid*, Thomas Brück takes up this line of thinking in his voice-over text: 'My time in Mexico often seems like a dream to me, hardly tangible. They are disrupted and blurred fragments of memory. Sometimes I wonder if they might originate from pictures or home videos.'[13] The home video fragments that find entry into his film support this fragile and blurred assessment of his memory process.

Although Assmann claims that memories are governed by subjectivity, she argues that they never exist in an isolate way. They rather overlap with the narratives of others and thereby confirm each other.[14] Brown and Brück use this mechanism by resorting to the video footage of family and friends as an instrument of remembrance. They draw from these external memory carriers by transforming them artistically. Both directors rearrange and condense various fragments in the editing process, and frame them with their own voice-over. Thomas Brück even created a questionnaire concerning his time in Mexico that he handed over to his family members to correlate and contextualize his own memory fragments, as to finally construct his film narrative. These perspectives are incorporated in the film. For example, Brück quotes his mother in the voice-over text: 'Do you remember entering the small fence gate? I immediately knew: here I can feel relieved and live happily with my small family for a few years' (my translation).

Similarly, Bentley Brown gives voice to his childhood companion Abakar whilst incorporating their dialog about the common friend Oustaz into the

---

[10] Aleida Assmann, 'Individuelles und kollektives Gedächtnis: Formen, Funktionen und Medien', in *Das Gedächtnis der Kunst: Geschichte und Erinnerung in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, ed. by Kurt Wettengl and others (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), pp. 21–27 (p. 21, my translation).
[11] Trailer of *Khawadjat*, min. 02:49. Source: Bentley Brown.
[12] Assmann, p. 21.
[13] *Third Culture Kid*, min. 01:40 (my translation).
[14] Assmann, p. 21. This links to Maurice Halbwachs' observation of society and its collective memories playing an important part in subjective reconstruction one's past, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 51.

film. Brown sparks off a conversation picturing the evening gatherings at Oustaz's place around a fire. Abakar would then add Oustaz's way of provoking the conversation by posing bizarre questions and thereby supplement the filmmaker's memory.[15]

Home Movie Material

From the early beginnings of film, cameras have been used to depict private family life, initially only by a privileged few. With the rise of Super 8 cameras it became increasingly common for Western families to document their family occasions in moving images. The development of video technology democratized this practice further, as it did no longer depend on a chemical processing and was thus easier to access and carry. The Latin root *amare* is commonly referred to stating that 'amateur' films were shot for pleasure. Accordingly, they often depict pleasant family events, such as new-born babies and their first steps, first days in school, weddings, picnics, family members participating in various games, vacations and other events considered worth documenting. According to Roger Odin, these stereotypes appear in most home movies.[16] As a record of banal everyday situations that have never been documented by official sources, these family productions offer *endotic* anthropological insights.[17]

Sports games, trips and private music sessions from Brown's video archive become the source to reconstruct his teenage years. The material covers a long time span of more than five years, which explains the difference in quality and format of the private footage. As Brown's parents record less, over the years, Bentley and his friends take over the camera and thereby shape the future memories. Roger Odin points out that home movies typically exist in snippets: 'no narrative structure has been superimposed onto it'.[18] In the montage, Brown assembles these snippets into a personal narrative. He juxtaposes documentations of the everyday activities with performative sequences by the circle of friends: music and drama scenes, which also star his teacher and role model Oustaz. The more the young filmmakers grow up, the more complex their videos become: they start planning, editing, and structuring them. Glimpses into their filmmaking process and excerpts from the collective's first fiction film are used to narrate Brown's growth of his cinematic language.

The amateur material Thomas Brück uses to reconstruct his memories of his family home in Guadalajara originates from his elder brother. Although his

---

[15] *Oustaz*, min. 01:21.
[16] Roger Odin, 'The Family Home Movie as Document', in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, ed. by Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmermann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 255–71 (p. 261).
[17] Odin, 'The Home Movie and Space of Communication', in *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, ed. by Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young and Barry Monahan (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 15–26 (p. 22).
[18] Odin, 'The Home Movie and Space of Communication', p. 18.

family archive comprises a great amount of video material from Mexico, Brück restricts himself to Hi8 video footage of the family mansion his brother recorded after the family's decision to leave Mexico and return to Germany was made.[19] Produced as a document to remember the house, the video material is marked by the sad expectation of leaving: the camera scans the home, room by room, showing us bedrooms, chairs, pets and toys and garden flowers.

Patricia Zimmermann describes the archival relevance and narrative potential of the private video recordings, as she states: 'Amateur films and home movies negotiate the space between private memories and social histories in a variety of forms and iterations.'[20] Brück's home movie footage is a meticulous ethnographic record of a German diaspora family at a given time in history that is revealed through its architecture and interiors, which frame a certain time period. It is hence an exemplary archival document, and a subjective reminiscence of a childhood. By showing these interiors rather than members of the family, Brück keeps the focus on himself and his subjective experiences. Shots from a recent journey to his childhood country frame the family archive material and are used to reflect upon the childhood memories. The material was recorded with a Super 8 camera, the iconic equipment of home movie makers of that time. The resulting imperfect, fragmentary aesthetic highlights the personal, nostalgic character of the images in his film. The filming is strikingly similar, as in order to reconnect to his old home, Brück's handheld camera pans slowly over old familiar landscapes the way his brother did all those years ago. Juxtaposing these two layers of amateur material, Brück addresses the question what it means to grow up in-between two cultures.

Amateur film seems to promise a high degree of authenticity. The footage of Bentley Brown and his friends benefitted from this effect. Using the video camera the group obtains a cultural agency that is practiced in a playful manner, shooting several films narrating local stories and destinies. 'Everybody acted',[21] Brown remembers in the voice-over of *Oustaz*, highlighting the great interconnection of film crew, actors, musicians and audience. Their films were produced on a very low budget and without professional editing systems. The great success the films had in the community can be explained by their immediate and authentic character, which local viewers could identify with. Brown expounds: 'When we showed it to the town where we lived […] people enjoyed watching it. They loved it. Not because it was an excellent film, it was very amateur. But because it was the first time that people saw themselves and their neighbors and their friends in a film.'[22]

Both Brück and Brown use footage that mirrors the fragility of personal memory: errors and transients allude to the historic dimension of the repurposed

---

[19] Interview with Thomas Brück, 17 August 2016.
[20] Zimmermann, 'The Home Movie Movement: Excavations, Artifacts, Mining', in *Mining The Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, pp. 1–28 (p. 4).
[21] *Oustaz*, min. 11:30.
[22] Brown, 'Linguistic Integrity', min. 09:14.

videotapes. Particularly the footage Brück's brother recorded of the family house has decayed. Signal loss and video pixel drops keep disturbing and sometimes even erasing the original video images. These artifacts highlight the dated footage. Dominik Schrey points out that those sections from the home video archive that the family members love most are most often played or rewound and subsequently most worn down. Their visual information is increasingly replaced by 'traces of appreciation or pleasure'.[23] The visible deterioration of the video footage becomes a metaphor for the blurred and fragmented character of Brück's childhood memory.

It would be possible to argue that the amateur video material contributes deeply to the question of hybrid cultural identity both filmmakers address. Brück juxtaposes before-and-after shots of his diaspora home. Brown illustrates himself not only belonging to the Chadian community — cycling through the savannah, exercising Arab calligraphy and dancing to Chadian tunes dressed in a white turban — but also rooted in the Western culture playing football and classical piano — reminiscent of a colonial, Western identity in a postcolonial African country. The piano melody melts into transcultural fusion when Oustaz takes over the keys playing a dashing tune in the archival video footage. By connecting their voice-over with the home movie material, the filmmakers knot ties to both cultures and evoke a hybrid cultural mélange.

The Authors Presence in the Film

Not only the use of home-movie material, but also the employment of voice-over narration is considered another prevalent attribute of autobiographical films and documentary self-portraits. According to Manthia Diawara, transcultural filmmakers favor this form of first person narrative. It becomes 'the filmmakers revisionist construction of history in which the narrator is as central to the film as the film´s object'.[24] Both filmmakers make use of this revisionist method, however, their stylistic approaches differ: Brown's voice-over narration alternates with dialog fragments and tale-telling chords of Western and Chadian music. Thomas Brück on the contrary follows a more reduced concept. He deliberately eschews his brothers descriptive narrative recorded on his archival tapes as he considers it not personal enough and rather decides to focus on his own personal search. Along his voice-over, derived from his Mexican travel diary, Brück navigates through his life history. His tale puts the worn home movie material

[23] Dominik Schrey, 'Analog Nostalgia and the Aesthetics of Digital Remediation', in *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, ed. by Katharina Niemeyer (Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan Memory Studies, 2014), pp. 27–28 (p. 35).

[24] Manthia Diawara, 'The I Narrator in Black Diaspora', in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, ed. by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 193–202 (p. 193).

into a subjective perspective. Brück's narrative is structured into episodes by a second layer of text: inserted quotes by Àngeles Mastretta, Albert Schweitzer and the Dalai Lama serve to present an external view on the question of identity and belonging. He opens the film with an aphorism of Schweitzer claiming one will perish of homelessness — or reach purification and knowledge. This preface becomes the central dramatic question for Brück's film. Further quotes underline his struggle or progress in his search. Most of the quotes stem from the filmmaker's Mexican journey, such as a Dalai Lama aphorism sprayed onto a hostel wall, finding their way into the film as personal memories.

Language is another aspect to express familiarity or strangeness and the experience of discontinuity. Brück presents himself as a protagonist who learned Spanish but contemplates in German. Thereby he stresses his perspective of looking back from his ancestral country that dominates his current thinking and verbal expression to the place of his early childhood. Bentley Brown speaks in Arabic, which he learned as an eleven-year-old. Although not his mother tongue Arabic is the language that connects him with his childhood companions. This stylistic decision emphasizes the strong bond between the friends. Arabic is also the language in which the friends conceived their theatre plays and film scripts for the Chadian community. By contributing to this, Brown confirms his belonging to the community. Reflecting about his first steps in filmmaking leads him to revealing the circumstances of recording. Repetitively, he shows the family video camera in frame or speaks about the improvised equipment the friends could use for their first film experiments. Along these lines, he explains in his voice-over: 'This was before mobile phone cameras. We just had the family camera'[25] while we see him looking through the viewfinder of an amateur camcorder. Observational shots indicate that Brown was not the only camera operator, but that he learned to handle the camera together with his friends. In his montage we can overhear their excited conversations like: 'Swear to god, am I a good cameraman? […] This is a good shot, right?', 'It's nice', 'Sure, fucker?', 'Here, fucker, take the camera back!'[26] We see the collective directing scenes of their debut film *Le Pèlerin De Camp Nou* and make aesthetic decisions about framing. Their shared love for film becomes the framework for the documentary's plot. It thereby creates a dramatic curve that culminates in Bentley and his friend Abakar premiering the film at a festival in Montreal.

Brück's and Brown's continuous presence in their films — visually or by the means of voice-over — constantly reminds the audience of the very subjective nature of their revisions of diaspora experience. The resulting sincere impact of their essayist self-portraits enables the viewer to connect and identify.

---

[25] *Oustaz*, min. 06:16.
[26] *Oustaz*, min. 09:15.

Conclusion

The experience of hybrid cultural identity plays a formative role and can be seen as an important motor for self-articulation — expressed here by the means of film. The process of remembering forms the basic narrative structure for both documentaries. Fragments of home videos, a personal voice-over narrative and the juxtaposition of contrasting music from both cultural contexts are effective tools to portray the filmmaker's identities torn between two cultural poles. In the voice-over they finally reconcile with the past: while Bentley Brown reaches the state of equality with his teacher Oustaz before leaving the country, Thomas Brück's search leads towards introspection and finding an inner global home. Both filmmakers de-colonialize the filmic gaze beyond the postcolonial contexts and find images and filmic symbols to describe their own transcultural identity — across geopolitical borders. In an exemplary and conciliatory way their films represent a scattered identity in an increasingly globalizing world.

'Actions of the Eyes of the Fleeing'?
Reflections on the In/Visibility of *Harraga* Videos

Maja Figge, University for the Arts, Berlin

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the media practices of the 'summer of migration' in 2015, this article asks if and how cell phone videos recorded by migrants and refugees and circulated via social media channels have not only the capability to change and extend modes of representation. It analyses *harraga* videos — short cell phone clips of the clandestine passage across the Mediterranean, uploaded on YouTube — by focusing on the act of capture. With reference to Helen Grace and Rey Chow, the essay argues that despite the relative invisibility of the videos, they are not just simple documents, but rather constitute the present of the *harraga*, and thereby form (local) publics. In this light, they can be understood as a political (media) practice, which intervenes in the visibilities and visualizations of the necropolitical European border regime.

Images 'format' migration.[1] The European border regime and the discursive construction of mobility produces a net of constantly repeated and circulated images, in which migration is configured as a humanitarian crisis and as danger to the integrity of Europe.[2] Neither Europe's external (and internal) borders nor the migrants themselves appear to be perceptible outside of these mediatized discourses. Rather, media and the representations they produce, as well as the data they generate have to be understood as constitutive for the appearance of the refugee or the migrant at the European border.

The techniques of visualization at the borders function not only as policing instances for control and regulation of a prior body of migration, but they play a crucial role in locating, fixating and bringing 'migration as attraction' of otherness as yet to be negotiated factor on a social display.[3]

---

[1] See Brigitta Kuster, 'Die Grenze Filmen', in *Turbulente Ränder. Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas*, ed. by TRANSIT MIGRATION Forschungsgruppe (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), pp. 193–207 (p. 193) (my translation). See also Nanna Heidenreich, 'Editorial', in *Frauen und Film*, 67 (special issue *Migration*, 2016), 5–10 (p. 6).
[2] See Heidrun Friese, *Grenzen der Gastfreundschaft. Bootsflüchtlinge von Lampedusa und die Europäische Frage* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), p. 184.
[3] Kuster, p. 193 (my translation).

During the short 'summer of migration' in 2015[4] the display of migration as attraction of otherness was raised to another level: the vast distribution of media images — whether press coverage or images distributed by NGOs or 'first hand' accounts recorded with mobile phones by the refugees — made the 'crisis of the European border regime'[5] perceptible. As a result, it intervened in the modes of representation of migration. In addition to the 'TV migrant' who 'appears at the geographical border to "Fortress Europe" as a body, which is put on display as male, over-visualized, captured by the apparatus of repression, as passive object of caritative treatment, who is a victim of his own uncontrolled and fatal endeavor',[6] the recordings capturing the border crossings from Turkey to Greece, the 'March of Hope'[7] along the so called 'Balkan route', or the arrival in Vienna and Munich, made the refugees also visible as agents of the social and political movement that is migration. However, as soon as the summer was over and the EU-Turkey Refugee agreement had been passed, the migration routes changed from the Eastern Aegean back to the far more dangerous Western passage from Northern Africa to Lampedusa. With them the rhetoric and the images in the media changed too: putting forth representations of refugees as victims — and criminals; again, they were seen as crossing the border illegally and thus becoming *clandestini* — illegalized.[8]

Against this backdrop, it is important to ask how the digital (social) media practices such as 'citizen journalism' in the context of the Arab revolutions or more generally 'shadow media' which Patricia Spyer has defined as 'the tangential, mobile infrastructure of a counter-discourse to conventional national and international broadcasting'[9] change and extend the modes of representation. In this essay, I focus on cell phone videos recorded and circulated by migrants and refugees and ask whether these practices can be understood in terms of what Tom Holert has called 'actions of the eyes of the fleeing'.[10] In his critique

---

[4] Bernd Kasparek and Marc Speer, 'Of Hope: Hungary and the long summer of migration', in bordermonitoring.eu politiken, praktiken, ereignisse an den grenzen europas, 9 September 2015, <http://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/> [accessed 15 December 2016].

[5] Vassilis S. Tsianos and Bernd Kasparek, 'Zur Krise des europäischen Grenzregimes: eine regimetheoretische Annäherung', *Widersprüche*, 138 (December 2015), 8–22. Tsianos and Kasparek (p. 9) write: 'Here, it has to be said clearly that it is less a refugee crisis then a crisis of Schengen, a crisis of the European institutions as well as a crisis of the European project in general. For it has to be stated that neither the current intensity of migration nor the now obviously appearing disturbances in the fabric of the European Union have been foreshadowed for a long time. It is a crisis with announcement, in which Europe fails.'

[6] Kuster, p. 193 (my translation*)*. The flipside of victimization is criminalization: not only the illegalization of the border crossing, but likewise the demonizing images of the danger of 'threatening flows of refugees' or 'dark masses' produce the migrants as criminals.

[7] Kasparek and Speer.

[8] But also discursively the figure of the refugee can quickly turn into the 'bogus' or the 'could-be-terrorist'. Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text*, 22.2 (Summer 2004), 117–39.

[9] Patricia Spyer, quoted in Helen Grace: 'Monuments and the Face of Time: Distortions of Scale and Asynchrony in Postcolonial Hong Kong', *Postcolonial Studies*, 10.4 (2007), 467–83 (p. 472).

[10] Tom Holert, *Regieren im Bildraum* (Berlin: b_books Verlag, 2008), p. 207 (my translation).

of 'visual humanitarianism', Holert takes up Giorgio Agamben's call for a reconsideration of the figure of the refugee in view of the 'imploring eyes' marketed by humanitarian organizations:

> The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights.[11]

For Holert, '[o]nly, if the "refugee" is understood as "limit concept", fleeing from the categories of nation states and human rights',[12] the renewal of categories becomes possible. His main concerns are the consequences this renewal of categories could have for the order of images:

> The image of the 'imploring eyes' would be replaced by the actions of the eyes of the fleeing. Instead of considering suffering as universal, the images would become instruments of a political practice with focus on the flight from the image evoking empathy and serving as biopolitical regulative. The symbolism of the refugee, as produced by the humanitarian order, would vanish in favour of a deterriatorializing-deterritorialized visible.[13]

Holert himself is wary of his hypothesis in terms of its separation of the figure of the refugee from the human rights discourse. Nonetheless, I want to think about his evocation of the 'actions of eyes of the fleeing' by looking at images produced by migrants themselves, which seem to challenge the visibility of the European border regime by the very act of capturing. In order to do so I will focus on the practices of harragas — those who *burn* (their papers) — in their filming of the passage across the Mediterranean with their cell phones and disseminating these videos via upload on YouTube or other social media channels. Rather than analyzing clips in detail in terms of image, narration or motif,[14] I am interested in the acts of capturing and uploading the passage as a form of public appearance

---

[11] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 134.
[12] Holert, p. 207 (my translation).
[13] Ibidem.
[14] For a formal analysis of the *Harraga* clips, see Heidrun Friese, 'Y'al babour, y'a mon amour. Raï-Rap und undokumentierte Mobilität', in *Deutscher Gangsta-Rap. Sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zu einem Pop-Phänomen*, ed. by Marc Dietrich and Martin Seeliger (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), pp. 231–84 (pp. 261–68). For a discussion of the *Harraga* phenomenon see also Réda Bensmaia, 'La vraie vie est ailleurs: The Harragas phenomenon in African novels and films', keynote lecture held at the conference 'North Africa at the Crossroads: Culture, Identities, and the Politics of Change', Institute for African Studies, Carlton University, Ottawa, 4–5 April, 2012, online video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDjhgwXNv2U> [accessed 15 December 2016]

in which the present (reality) is enacted and performed.[15] How do these practices intervene in the border regime and its modes of visualization, visibility and disappearance?

Harragas

Harga in arabic means 'to burn', and describes the passage across the Mediterranean from Northern Africa to Europe.[16] *Harragas* are the ones — mostly young Maghrebian men — who burn with the desire for change and who burn their traces — mostly their papers — and get into small boats to follow their claims for dignity and freedom.[17] The anthropologist Heidrun Friese reads the burning of the papers as a 'sign of dissent', a cancellation of consensus, a 'vote with the feet': a 'daily plebiscite against the political, social and economic situation in the Maghreb countries'.[18] By leaving their homes and getting into the boats, 'the harragas give proof to the dimension of the social imaginary and the individual claim for happiness and a good life, dignity, recognition, participation and justice, claims, which also moved, justified politically and constituted the Tunisian revolution.'[19]

Fire also marks the beginning of the revolution in Tunisia, in the form of the spark which set off the series of political events called the Arab Spring. On 17 December 2010, the street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire with gasoline after he was evicted by the police. He died only a few days later from the burn injuries. Between 17 December 2010 and 12 March 2013, 160 young Tunisians ended their lives the same way. 'Better burn, than be humiliated':[20] this is how the young *harragas* Friese Tunisia and on Lampedusa explain the motivations behind this praxis. I would suggest, then, that the practices of the *harragas* are linked to that of self-immolation. Instead of setting themselves on fire, the *harragas* burn their papers and risk their lives to escape the 'social death they face in their home countries. By entering the boats and crossing

---

[15] Rey Chow, 'Postcolonial Visibilities: Questions inspired by Deleuze's method', in *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 151–68 (p. 167). An earlier version was published in *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*, ed. by Simone Bignall and Paul Patton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 6–77.

[16] Nanna Heidenreich, *V/Erkennungsdienste, das Kino und die Perspektive der Migration* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), pp. 12–13.

[17] Friese, *Grenzen der Gastfreundschaft*, p. 15. During the 2011 North African revolutions, the numbers of *harragas* on Lampedusa increased: after the fall of the Libyan Regime more than 60.000 *harragas* arrived, fleeing from the NATO airstrikes. When in September 2011 the refugees set the camp on fire, demanding to be brought to the mainland, the state of emergency was officially declared in October 2011. Lampedusa turned into an Open-Air-TV-Studio, which broadcasted the images of the state of emergency on the island around the world. Friese, p. 18.

[18] Ivi, p. 204 (my translation*)*.

[19] Ibidem (my translation).

[20] Ivi, p. 203 (my translation).

the Mediterranean Sea, they not only exercise their right to mobility, but they also violate the border and thus the European immigration law. Thus the harragas not only a constitute a form of biopolitical control and regulation, 'one that does not have to sentence a life, or a set of lives, to death in order to let them die', but as Judith Butler argues, after Achille Mbembe,[21] they can also be understood as 'necropolitical'.[22] Under such conditions 'the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred.'[23] *Harga*, then comes into view as a form of protest against 'the status of *living dead*'[24] — be it in the countries of origin or within the frame of the European migration regime.

But how can we understand the digital capturing of the *harga*? Within the last ten to fifteen years, an expansive corpus of different forms and formats has emerged documenting or fictionalizing the passage across the Mediterranean. These films range from feature films, such as (among others) *Harragas* (Merzak Allouache, 2009) and *Harraga Blues* (Moussa Haddad, 2013), to documentaries such as *Tanger, le rêve des brûleurs* (Leila Kitani, 2002) or *Barcelone ou la mort* (Idrissa Guiro, 2007)[25] through news reports and music videos to the kind of films that which I focus on in this essay: short videos, recorded with mobile devices by the *harragas* themselves, uploaded and disseminated on YouTube or other social media platforms. On YouTube however, when typing in 'harraga' one also finds countless compilations of different forms of (news) footage (photographs, maps, TV features, caricatures, etc.), as well as a multitude of commercial and non-commercial news programmes reporting about failed crossings, ship wrecks and deaths, sea rescues, personal appeals that warn against the passages, music videos, excerpts or full documentaries, trailers and complete movies such as the ones mentioned above. The cell phone videos that capture the passage constitute only a small part of this sprawling image production and distribution of this movement of migration.[26] The short clips stand out because as records of the supposedly successful passage — possibly uploaded after the event[27] — they add an alternative narrative to the stories of shipwrecks, rescue and death.

---

[21] Achille Mbembe: 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15.1 (2003), 11–40 (p. 40).
[22] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 167. Athena Athanasiou explains: 'As a global modality of power that subjects populations to conditions that ascribe them the status of living dead, "necropolitics" determines who can be wasted and who cannot; it distinguishes those who are disposable from those who are not; and it does so in both spectacular and quotidian ways, insistently and insinuatingly.' (Butler and Athanasiou, p. 20).
[23] Mbembe, p. 40.
[24] Ibidem, [emphasis in the original].
[25] See also the crime novel by Spanish author Antonio Lozano, *Harraga* (Barcelona: Zoele Ediciones, 2002).
[26] See Heidenreich, p. 316.
[27] Whether they manage to enter the European Union or not remains uncertain.

Cell Phone Videos

What do the *harraga* videos show? The clips, which are often only a few minutes long, mostly present shaky and rather ephemeral images in low resolution, featuring the sea, the boat, and its passengers. The first clip I saw opens with a shot of the sea, the camera follows a dolphin accompanying the boat;[28] the images are dubbed with music. Other videos focus on the sunset or the rising sun above the sea, or they (only) show the (mostly) young men in the boat. Very often, in a circling movement the camera captures the faces of the young men one after the other while they speak, shout, joke, sing or laugh into the camera. Being recognizable as cell phone videos they communicate the relation to the person recording, documenting.[29]

Not only through the act of *burning* but also by filming on a large scale using cell phones and then uploading the videos on YouTube or other social media channels, the practices of the *harragas* are related to the Arabic revolutions. Like the videos produced in the North African revolutions the videos are characterized by their amateurishness.[30] Due to the characteristics of the recording device being 'small, ubiquitous and not primarily constructed for filming and its content can be made available online anytime', the cell phone video becomes a means of protest (or resistance).[31] For Krautkrämer, as soon as the videos are uploaded to the Internet and thereby circulated they become 'reality-witnessing documentations',[32] whether they subvert the censorship of state run media institutions as in the Arab revolutions, or as in the case of the *harragas* answer to the in/visibility of their 'undocumented mobility'. This undocumented mobility is constructed in the frame of visualizations of the European border regime in which migration appears as a movement which needs to be controlled — the countless images of boats, victims of ship wrecks, and the individuals rescued by the coast guards in any format.[33]

Krautkrämer discusses the 'reality witnessing' function of cell phone videos in the wider context of recent cell phone documentaries; he argues that they can be understood as attempts to 'rescue' the documents from the original context (such as YouTube) in which their only status is that of the document. In his view only when the material is worked with in the way that the question is no longer only *what* we see but *how*, does it becomes discursive. This line of argument

---

[28] <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5lzb0_harraga_videogames> [last accessed 25 November 2016].
[29] Florian Krautkrämer stresses the gesture of filming with a cell phone. Florian Krautkrämer, 'Revolution uploaded. Un/Sichtbares im Handy-Dokumentarfilm', in *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*, 10 (2014), 13–26 (p. 116).
[30] Ivi, p. 115.
[31] Ivi, p. 116.
[32] Ibidem.
[33] See Heidenreich, p. 17; Friese, *Grenzen der Gastfreundschaft*, p. 185.

entails that the cell phone videos not only stay mute but also invisible.[34] Although Krautkrämer — like the works he discusses, such as among others Rabih Mroué's *Pixelated Revolution* (2012) or Hito Steyerl's *Abstract* (2012) — problematizes the reframing of the 'found footage' material which he nevertheless does regard as political, while at the same time reducing it to a mere document.[35] But, how can we understand the observed invisibility of the material — such as the *harraga* clips — differently? I will take up some suggestions by Helen Grace and Rey Chow in order to think about the in/visibility not only of the videos, but of the *harga* itself.

Capture and In/Visibility

The low resolution of the videos links them to other 'poor images'[36] on YouTube and the circuits they create. Even more, the low resolution 'look', as Helen Grace argues 'allows us to say that the visual is problematized in this sphere, since every subject is abstracted by the rate of compression, and every clip becomes a kind of quotation, either by being sourced from previously existing material and re-presented or, in the case of original material, simply by being uploaded into a stream of pre-existing material.[37] Nevertheless YouTube becomes an 'archive of

---

[34] Krautkrämer, pp. 123–24.

[35] My critique is not directed against the aesthetic potential of cell phone documentaries, but I would like to point out an example in which the author of the found footage does not remain anonymous but becomes one of the protagonists of the film. *Havarie* (Philip Scheffner, 2016) is based on a 3:36 minutes long YouTube video made by Terry Diamond, a tourist from Northern Ireland, being on a cruise in the Mediterranean. The clip shows in close distance an inflatable dinghy in distress. In *Havarie* the found footage is stretched to 90 minutes — the time it took for the coast guards to arrive. The soundtrack tells the stories of the people entangled in this situation. The film is a critical reflexion of the image production of undocumented mobility and puts the question of in/visibility at the centre: during the editing process, Scheffner realized that he couldn't stick to his concept of making an essay film due to the images of migration and flight circulating at that time. Instead, he decided 'by condensing sound and disassociating it from the image to create a space of perception that allows the viewers to experience their own position without ever losing sight of the subject at hand.' (<https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2016/02_programm_2016/02_Filmdatenblatt_2016_201605829.php#tab=video25> [accessed 15 December 2016].) *Havarie* is a film about 'visual contact' in a relational space, but even more so it makes us think — about the position from where we look and the political, economic, social conditions that determine it (Avery F. Gordon, 'Keeping Visual Contact: Philip Scheffner's HAVARIE (2015)', February 2016, <http://havarie.pong-berlin.de/en/9/avery-f-gordon> [accessed 15 December 2016]). 'I am not in that boat' says Scheffner in an interview. See Matthias Dell, Simon Rothöhler, '"Ich bin nicht in dem Boot". Interview mit Philip Scheffner', in *der Freitag*, 6 (2016), 11 February 2016 <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/ich-bin-nicht-in-dem-boot> [accessed 15 December 2016].

[36] 'The poor image thus constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates.' Hito Steyerl, 'In defense of the poor image', *e-flux journal*, 10 (2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/> [accessed 25 November 2016].

[37] Grace, *Postcolonial Studies*, p. 470.

the present'[38] because it contains and publishes material which otherwise would have been hidden, invisible 'in unedited form' — such as the *harraga* videos. Grace argues that the importance of the visual is reduced because the act of *capture* instead of the image is significant 'as a register of affective engagement in a moment of expressiveness having deep local significance, but which subsequently fails to be communicative, beyond the instant of production, for anyone other than those who have been involved.'[39] Thus, what is important is not so much video as document but the act of capture — the production of the image. Its relative non-communicability suggests new relations between public and private spaces.[40] In her article Grace refers to local protest movements in postcolonial Hong Kong, but it seems the situation described in the above quote can also be applied to the (local) protest of the *harragas* at the European border.

What are the consequences of foregrounding the act of capture? First, as I have already argued, the production of the image communicates the presence of the image-maker in a particular event. Second, it also records an 'act of presence' which is rather performative than a memorialization — mostly associated with analogue photography seen as 'a memorial act', which 'assumes the reality of the moment recorded'.[41]

> Rather, it is the act of 'capture' which brings the present into existence, because ubiquitous imagemaking belongs to a world in which the real in itself is so thoroughly mediated that it does not exist without at the same time producing an image of itself and it is this image which secures the lived reality in which the image-maker is situated. This does not mean that the performative and the memorial are opposed; rather it indicates that memory is also secured via the image and, in its embodied form, is brought forth in action and performance.[42]

Rey Chow takes up this thought in her essay on *Postcolonial Visibilities* (2012), in which she argues for the productivity of Deleuze's method of reading Foucault's works on visibility and confinement. Grace's observations of the media practices of a local political movement in Hong Kong serves her as an example to show what a postcolonial thinking about visibilities beyond the notion that 'visibility is a trap'[43] or the battle for the 'commodified media frame'[44] could entail. For

---

[38] Ibidem.
[39] Ibidem.
[40] Ibidem.
[41] Ivi, p. 473.
[42] Ibidem.
[43] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 200. However, in his reading of Foucault Deleuze concludes, 'that nothing in Foucault is really closed off'. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 43. Chow suggests that Deleuze's method might be useful to reconceptualize the notion of postcolonial visibilities which she then demonstrates by discussing Grace's findings. See Rey Chow, 'Postcolonial Visibilities. Questions inspired by Deleuze's method', pp. 151–168.
[44] Chow, p. 160.

Chow, Grace's observations are illuminating because they point to the fact that with the digital devices and techniques capture now 'emerges as the primary action and event' as it brings the present into existence. Chow stresses Grace's interest in the 'ephemeral coextensiveness of the image and the present' that is brought forth by the act of capture because for her Grace's observation displaces the notion of visibility:

> Grace's observations sidestep the large, systemic connotations of visibility-as-confinement that Foucault delineates. Instead, she inserts visibilities into the mundane motions and stoppages of the everyday, replete with the risk (and the certainty) that many of them will remain unnoticed and unseen in the dense strata of online material, except by those with a vested interest in local happenings.[45]

The relative invisibility of the videos does not prevent them from becoming possibly 'news footage'[46] or a local and particular public. Rather they have to be understood as part of the 'incessant flow'[47] of images in which the distinction between significant and insignificant moments is blurred. This state of 'visibilities in flux'[48] seems to challenge not only the notion of visibility in terms of surveillance and control but also the claims for visibility in the battles for the media frame. In this line of thought, the *harraga* videos no longer simply are documents of the *harga*, but acts of capture in which the notion of confinement and freedom is blurred. The *harragas* themselves use their cell phones to record or rather *track* their movements at the European borders — despite the media surveillance via satellites and other observation devices. Thereby they constitute the present of their passage; this present which in Chow's reading of Grace is a 'collective but diffused assemblage of enunciation'[49] and can only be perceived and recognized when mediated and circulated.

This understanding resonates with Judith Butler's remarks on what it means to appear in contemporary politics, because in order to appear, 'the body must enter the visual and audible field.'[50] Butler links the bodily action in the street as well as the bodily action of filming with the cell phone and analyses both as 'ways of exercising rights, and that jointly they bring a space of appearance into being and secure its transposability.'[51] For her, the 'conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere.'[52] In the case of the *harraga* videos, I believe that in crossing the Mediterranean in small boats and

---

[45] Ivi, p. 167.
[46] Ibidem.
[47] Ibidem.
[48] Ibidem.
[49] Ibidem.
[50] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 86.
[51] Ivi, p. 93.
[52] Ivi, p. 94.

capturing the passage with the cell phone they exercise their right to mobility as well as their 'right to have rights'.[53] It is only by uploading that they constitute a public — probably local and also limited in terms of views or clicks — bringing the moving and speaking or singing bodies in the boats to appearance — against the necropolitical European border regime.

I started my essay by introducing Tom Holert's considerations regarding the reconceptualization of the figure of the refugee. Concerned with the consequences of this categorical renewal for the order of images of migration, he suggests that '[t]he image of the "imploring eyes" would be replaced by the actions of the eyes of the fleeing. [...] the images would become instruments of a political practice with focus on the flight from the image evoking empathy and serving as biopolitical regulative.'[54] My argument is that the *harraga* videos are not simply instruments of a political practice (or mere documents). Rather the manifold acts of capturing and uploading constitute them as a political practice which intervenes in the order of images of migration, by becoming parts of the 'visibilities in flux'. Then, the 'actions of the eyes of the fleeing' might not be the result of the categorical renewal but that thing that could set it in motion.

---

[53] Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism: Part Two of The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] (New York: Harcourt and Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 177.
[54] Holert, p. 207 (my translation).

Unpacking History: Diasporic Voices and Visions
Michaela Quadraro, University of Naples 'L'Orientale'

Abstract

This essay investigates the different ways memory is articulated by contemporary writing and artworks that emerge from experiences of migration, exile, diaspora, and cultural hybridity. These productions express a creative resistance connected to narration and participation, while proposing alternative ways of opening the archive from the perspective of the voices and visions that are completely absent or pushed to the margins. For example, the encounters with the histories and the bodies evoked by Derek Walcott, as well as the innovative and trans-local languages proposed by the contemporary visual artists and filmmakers considered in this article, question the limits of historiography, multiculturalism, and institutional practices of archiving through lost traces and inappropriate objects.

In reworking the archival material, I am calling attention to the holes, fissures, and fringes of history, and hence to the need of rereading historical events with the omitted, the neglected, the marginalized, the misclassified, or else with the absent, the 'nonevent', and the nonarchived. (Trinh T. Minh-ha, *D-Passage. The Digital Way*)

This essay departs from the need to consider cultural displacements and border crossings as an epistemological challenge with regard to global history and modernity. In particular, this investigation analyses the different ways memory is articulated by contemporary cultural productions linked to migration, exile, diaspora, and transnationality. These subaltern narratives, emerging from a contemporary context of artists and writers who live in the interstices between cultures, give way to a fundamental rethinking of questions of memory and belonging. This is to record the political, historical, and theoretic conjuncture of the diasporic experience, because the emergent space and interpretive frame of the diaspora is rooted not only in earlier imperial settlements and older structures of power, but also in the experiences of minorities, border crossings and cultural displacements. As Stuart Hall suggests, the idea of the diaspora questions the notions of authenticity and the claims made for culturally homogeneous national cultures and identities. Diaspora is where the politics of gender, class, and race

form together a new, powerful and unstable articulation that does not provide easy answers, but raises 'new questions, which proliferate across older frames of thought, social engagement and political activity'.[1]

The voices and visions on/from the margins propose alternative ways of memorializing and archiving the past, evidencing the multiple connections between this past and the contemporary postcolonial configuration of the world. This paper discusses the importance of opening the archive, in other words the rereading of historical documents and records in the light of the memories that are completely absent or put on the margins. This is the need to 'unpack' the library, as Homi Bhabha would say, following a suggestion taken from Walter Benjamin: the invitation to open the library, to participate in the disorder of the books that are not placed on the shelves.[2] Bhabha asks us to take part momentarily in the tension between the poles of order and disorder, inspired by the figure of the *flâneur* and his wandering in the world through the discovery of books and cosmopolitan memories. In this way, we are led to an urgent question: what kind of history is assigned to the order and classification of documents? Indeed, every archive, in its architectural dimension, its organisation and divisions, is always something of a cemetery, of a place where fragments of lives are preserved but also placed in a tomb, concealed and set apart from the visible. Archives rest on the burying of remains, on a sepulchre where, in the words of Achille Mbembe, the historian and the archivist manipulate fragments in 'an intimate relationship with a world alive only by virtue of an initial event that is represented by the act of dying.'[3] Assigning the archives to a consecrated place of burial makes it possible to unveil their undisputed authority because, since no existing archive has the possibility to preserve an entire history, we are always confronted by a selection, an assemblage of pieces that are put together in an illusion of coherence.

Opening the Boxes of the Archive

Forms of the archive have been explored in several critical paradigms engaging with fragmentation and non-neutrality, and with questions of power and selection. In *L'Archéologie du savoir* Michel Foucault states that the archive is neither an accumulation of documents nor a complex of institutions: it cannot be defined in its totality, but only in fragments and levels that reveal why so many realities cannot emerge.[4] The question of the origin of the archive has

---

[1] Stuart Hall, 'Avtar Brah's Cartographies: Moment, Method, Meaning', *Feminist Review*, 100 (2012), 27–38, p. 30.
[2] Homi Bhabha, 'Unpacking my Library…Again', in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 199–211.
[3] Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton and others (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer, 2002), pp. 19–27 (p. 25).
[4] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1969).

also been investigated by Jacques Derrida, who insists on the irrepressible human drive for the archive, the interminable search for the origin, for a past to preserve. In *Mal d'archive* (archive fever or illness) the Algerian philosopher investigates the meaning of the word 'archive', coming from the Greek *arkheion* that indicates the house of the archons, the superior magistrates who represented the law and stored the official documents.[5] The logic of the interpretation and selection of the historical documents is necessary for a possible comprehension of the archive, even if, according to Derrida, nothing is more troubling than the concept contained in the word 'archive'. Moreover, in the obsessive and rigorous attempt to find the origin, psychoanalysis augments the control and the oppression of the archive, the 'place of consignment', the division between an inside and an outside. The drive to chase after the archive — the compulsive and nostalgic desire for the place of absolute beginning — seems to be an inescapable modality that prevents any reconfiguration. Consequently, how can we outline any critical frame that re-imagines the paralysing pattern of the archive to include unauthorised voices? How can the colonising force of the archive be diverted from the preservation of only certain past memories and how can we begin to concentrate on the imagination of a future archive, on the elaboration of archives yet to come?

The focus, here, is on the cultural conjuncture of diaspora and its relation to creative practices, not so much to be read and interpreted as the objects of a political and social analysis, but rather as the sites where previous statements are unsettled. Keith Piper, a multi-media British artist, curator, researcher and academic, born in 1960 to Caribbean parents, aesthetically develops the condition of living in the interstices.[6] His work appears in the historical and cultural conjuncture of the diasporic experience, and calls into question the notions of cultural authenticity and a stable national identity. It is Birmingham, the city where Piper was brought up, that comes to be re-framed in the motif of the journey, in the incessant movements between departure and return, separation and belonging, that contribute to the constitution of transnational global spaces. Moreover, it is the Birmingham Central Library, the place chosen by Piper for a residency, that allows him to develop his interest in institutionalised collections, in particular in the narratives of the archive, its physical architecture and categorising mechanisms. In 2005 he produced the short video *Ghosting the Archive*, as part of a bigger Arts Council project called *Necessary Journeys*. He physically opened the boxes of the Birmingham City Archive and developed a new work practice that reacts to the material he finds, reactivating the traces of the stories that lie in the collection. In particular, he unpacked the boxes housed in the so-called Dyche Collection, that consists of more than ten thousand images, mostly unidentified, both proof prints and negatives, from the studios of

---

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[6] Keith Piper, *Relocating the Remains* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1997).

Ernest Dyche (1887–1973), a commercial portrait photographer who operated in the suburbs of the inner area of Birmingham and became very popular within the communities of migrants arriving from the Indian subcontinent, African countries and Caribbean islands from the 1950s to 1970s.[7]

Until its closure, the Dyche Studio provided a significant repository of British history during a complicated phase of the creation of black Britain. In particular, it produced countless portraits of members of those communities that were circulated both in the United Kingdom and in the former colonies: images that Piper found without names or other identifying elements. As Gen Doy points out, these images took part in what could be called a 'reverse immigration': they were indeed sent back to the Caribbean, India or Pakistan, to family members, friends or for marriage arrangements and were also 'lightened', if necessary, in order to move toward an ideal whiteness.[8] In *Ghosting the Archive* the negative plates, held by Piper in a white-gloved hand, are reframed one after the other in the contemporary space of the Birmingham City Archive by a digital camera. Each shutter click presents a different negative plate that, bearing a ghostly presence, slowly morphs into something else: family groups, women with newly born children, men seated on the chairs provided at Dyche Studio wearing elegant outfits or work uniforms, new coats or borrowed ones. In other words, the whole digital image of the Birmingham Central Library gradually morphs into a negative one, while the negative plate in the centre of the frame progressively changes: the light areas of the image on film become dark, while dark areas give way to the light areas of the photograph. In this way, the original subjects of the picture emerge from obscurity and have the chance to appear again within the contemporary time-space.

Writing and Filming on/from the Borders

Driven by the desire to interrupt the linearity of historiography, we are led to the following questions: what happens to the act of archiving when the theoretical composition includes the communities and the memories that have been marginalised by a tradition that is primarily white and Euro-centric? What is produced when conservative practices of archiving come to be unsettled by interlaced and minor narratives generated within the shared social, cultural and political complexity of the contemporary world? Arjun Appadurai intervenes in the debate on the creative forms of acquisition of the other/subaltern subjectivities. He evokes a possible reconfiguration of the archive by the generations produced by globalisation and the transcultural experiences of diaspora, hybridity and exile. The challenge lies in the imagination of an archiving

---

[7] This archive has also been extensively discussed in Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
[8] Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Postmodernity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 131.

practice that, instead of looking back at the institutional sacredness of the past, welcomes personal memoirs and libraries, family photos and recordings, and all other records that are part of everyday life. This leads to the idea of the archive as a project, an intervention, an anticipation of intentional collective memory, an aspiration rather than a recollection.[9] For migrants the archive is a 'map', an on-going research tool (and not a pre-ordained place), a space where collective memory offers an ethical basis for the construction of cultural identities in the often unfavourable conditions of a new society. In the spirit of Michel Foucault, Appadurai's proposal offers us the opportunity to view the archive less as a container and more as a socially produced project producing forms of everyday intervention: 'conscious sites of debate and desire'. In this sense, artistic practices — documentaries, videos, audio-visual installations — play a crucial role in the creation of new digital archives of migration. As an alternative, or in proximity to official sites entrusted with preserving the past, their perspective critically visualises unconventional appropriations of storage places and collections.

We are thus forced to identify other buildings, other dwellings, where a compelling challenge takes place, as happens in Ribka Sibhatu's work and life. She is a poet in flight from Eritrea as a political refugee, first to Ethiopia, where she finishes school, then to France and Italy, where she studies at the University of Rome; her poems, called *auló*, written both in Italian and Tigrinya, describe the sad experiences of women she met while imprisoned in Eritrea.[10] Her work further expands concepts of transnationalism and translingualism in postcolonial literature, since her plurilingual writing develops her wish to cross cultural and geographical borders. The *auló*, as oral poetry, is a means used by Eritrean poets to adapt traditions to new socio-political contexts and different modes of narration. Ribka manipulates the traditional literary genre of her own culture and translates it into Italian, setting up a bridge between the history of her country and that of contemporary Italy, the former coloniser of her people, and currently her home.

Finally, Ribka takes part in a collaborative project that includes the documentary *Auló: Roma Postcoloniale* (2012), by Simone Brioni, Graziano Chiscuzzu and Ermanno Guida, which presents Ribka's physical presence on the screen. At the centre of this visual narrative there are her body and her oral poems, which have a specific focus on the current situation of migration and colonial memory in Italy, and which expose the falseness of the idea that colonialism was a positive experience. This is achieved through the emergence of silenced stories, a revisitation of history, and a work on the toponym of Rome, in order to express a new perspective of identity and cultural belonging. The narrative is composed of fragments that follow Ribka's steps in different areas of Rome. Throughout the documentary she narrates her story, characterised by war,

[9] Arjun Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration', in *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*, ed. by Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: NAI, 2003), pp. 14–25 (p. 16).
[10] Ribka Sibhatu, *Auló! Auló! Auló! Poesie di nostalgia, d'esilio e d'amore* (Rome: Kimerafilm, 2012).

suffering, and imprisonment, to her decision to finally move to Italy, because of her familiarity with Italian culture and language, which goes back to the Italian colonisation of those territories.

In Ribka's words, Italy has to come to terms with its colonial past, explored in the documentary through the unquestioned presence of some of the main monuments of the city, for instance Piazza dei Cinquecento, that commemorates the so-called Italian martyrs, and the Vittoriano, that memorialises the unification of Italy. Ribka's geocritical approach explores the question of naming: the urban space of Rome has different stories and traditions that Ribka comments through her oral *aulós* that, as she recalls, were particularly used by Eritreans during Italian occupation to resist and counter-act. The documentary *Auló* also highlights an intersection of genres, a cultural proximity between documentary and poetry, as well as a new space of migration, an act of writing on the borders.

A Perspective from the Sea

In the poem *The Sea is History* (1979) the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, Nobel Laureate in 1992, highlights what is a central theme in almost every genre in postcolonial writing, that is the need to recuperate a historical account different from those imposed by the Western point of view. He opens with a series of questions: 'Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, / in that grey vault. The sea. The sea / has locked them up. The sea is History'.[11] Here, Walcott looks for History: the 'overlapping territories and intertwined histories' (Edward W. Said), common to the men and the women 'who sank without tombs', in other words the forced crossing of slaves across the Atlantic during the so-called Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas. The poet recuperates the slaves' experience in terms of the Exodus, linking those traumatic events with those of white Christian history. Furthermore, in the poem, the sea surface becomes the site of slave history, where death and diaspora replace monuments and martyrs, because colonialism is not only about development and modernity, but in particular about exploitation and racism, when an 'entire race's history has been altered, a way of life destroyed'.[12]

The sea and slavery, together with the archive of Caribbean poetics, bring us to an alternative route of configuring modernity, where terrestrial and territorial coordinates always go adrift, as Iain Chambers would say.[13] This is to interrupt the linearity of History and the politics of the eye/I with a politics of listening and

[11] Derek Walcott, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Edward Baugh (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 137.
[12] Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 58.
[13] Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

reception. The encounters with bodies, histories and voices crossing the Atlantic or the Mediterranean show that there are other ways of being in a multiple modernity. Here, the status of borders is continually interrupted by migration and an emerging sense of belonging that is irreducible to the terms of existing citizenship. However, a perspective from the sea is not merely a metaphorical caprice, rather it is a central modality of thinking about modernity. The sea, considered as a site of stratification, human and cultural connections, reconfigures the ways in which global history is framed. In this regard, we could refer to the above-mentioned Chambers' maritime criticism, according to which a 'critical mourning' is necessary for the lives submerged under the waves of the sea, from the Black Atlantic to today's Black Mediterranean. Furthermore, this means interrupting consolidated considerations of the sea as an extension of terrestrial imperatives by proposing its centrality in the formation of planetary modernity since 1500. This leads to a 'new thalassology', a cultural-historical framework based on the idea that all bodies of water not only sustained trans-national systems of trade, but also transformed human connections and the histories of their surrounding shores, as highlighted by the two historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell.[14] This is to record a traumatic history characterised by diaspora, that more interestingly produces not so much a counter-narrative of revenge and remorse, but rather a creative form of acquisition that deals with a brutal past, while simultaneously looking forward the future.

These questions contain an enormous lesson about the importance of the sea, a lesson that is not one of emptiness or insignificance, compared to the land. Rather, the sea has something stronger to say and makes the progressive and linear direction of history absurd: with the sea, we can travel the horizon in multiple directions, without proceeding from one point to the other.[15] Similarly, the sea proposes an alternative sense of the archive, one that is not based on the commemoration of the ruins, a dead tyrant or a hero in the form of decay. For example, in the multi-screen work *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* (2007) by the Black British artist Isaac Julien, the materiality of the images emerges through the bodies of the immigrants who cross the Mediterranean: bodies that traverse the fluid space of the sea in search of a better life. This is a postcolonial cartography that rethinks cultural places such as the Mediterranean and takes a heterogeneous modernity into account. *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats* proposes, indeed, a disturbing geography of the intermediary space of the Mediterranean, crossed by the flux of human beings. The *mare nostrum* comes to be a burial site that resonates with the Atlantic middle passage: traumatic memories common to men and women and traces of the daily experiences of migrants disorient the spectators' expectations. Furthermore, in the five screens that comprise Julien's installation, the sea is not only a surface that

---

[14] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the New Thalassology"', *American Historical Review*, 111.3 (2006), 722–40.
[15] Walcott, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996).

permits movement and migration, but becomes a sea of memories that recalls the 'intertwined histories and overlapping territories' proposed by Edward W. Said in his seminal work *Culture and Imperialism*.[16]

The disturbing geography expressed by Julien's installation is a meditation on migration, certainly inspired by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), in particular by the notion of 'translocation', the idea of continuous movements that contaminate each other. Julien, the son of Caribbean immigrants in London, conveys this chain of transits in his work and insists on the influential experiences of geographic and political displacements, through the articulation of heterogeneous spaces. Similarly, Roshini Kempadoo, born in Britain from Guyanese parents, adopts a multidisciplinary perspective, working on photography, digital installations, and writing all at the same time, in the specificity of her position as a black woman.[17] In her work, the traces of the colonial past become in the present both the objects of a pragmatic and symbolic work and the conditions in which these practices trigger hybrid forms of life, politics, culture and modernity. Her research, which has always been engaged with experimentation, including technological experimentation, puts into crisis every fixed categorisation. The limits of historiography, multiculturalism and institutional practices of archiving are registered through lost traces and inappropriate objects, in order to develop the themes of the historical legacy of slavery and migration.

In works such as *Sweetness and Light* (1995), *Ghosting* (2004) and *endless prospects* (2004/5), digital technology becomes a tool to negotiate meanings: photographs are manipulated and assembled to set up a visual map of suppressed memories and ghostly presences from the former Caribbean colonies of the British empire. The present resonates with the past, to highlight the fragmented and diasporic experiences of Caribbean, African, Indian, and Black British women and men. As Kempadoo states in an interview, her parents belong to the so-called Windrush Generation, which refers to the name of the cruise ship remembered for bringing a large group of post-war West Indian immigrants to the United Kingdom in 1948. In her work she registers the limits of realism and the endless possibility of manipulating the images with the computer:

> Moving out of the dark room and into digital photography I explored sampling and layering images. Working with new technology meant I could open up meanings, and create multiple and complex, directed meanings. The computer complemented a documentary convention in being able to manipulate the image.[18]

It is, however, her multiscreen installation *Arrival* (2010), presented at 'Photography and the Representation of African Migration' at Point Sud,

---

[16] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994).
[17] Manuela Esposito, 'Tales of Transit: "Crossing" in Andrea Levy, Roshini Kempadoo and Julie Otsuka', *Anglistica*, 17.1 (2013), 53–67.
[18] Nalini Mohabir, 'An Interview with Roshini Kempadoo', *Ex Plus Ultra*, 2 (2010), <http://explusultra.wun.ac.uk/index.php/extra/test/13> [accessed September 2015].

Bamako, in Mali in February 2011, that directly explores the experience of crossing by showing the interconnections between colonialism, slavery and diaspora. Here, as an alternative to the mainstream media, the artist imagines the experiences of migrants who cross the sea between the North-African coast and Spain, in a desperate attempt to reach the fortress Europe. Footprints on the beach, female faces, and African children overlap with images of modern buildings and urban sceneries. Furthermore, past memories of crossings across the Black Atlantic resonate with contemporary sea journeys of migrants looking for a better life. As Bhabha insists, it is impossible to separate that past from the present. They are not disconnected: the former is not a mere predecessor of the latter. On the contrary, the past presents itself as a contingent, interstitial and intermediate space that intervenes in the present, bringing newness with it. Remembering cannot be a quiet and introspective recollection: 'It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.'[19]

Memory, here, becomes a search for the traces left by old and new imperialist strategies. This is particularly evident if we consider the experience of colonialism and slavery not as a concluded chapter in global history, but as an intrinsic and indelible part of the contemporary world. Although the great Empires of the past have ended officially, Europe can be observed through a postcolonial lens that unveils tensions and uneasy answers. Migratory movements and transcultural differences continually interrogate issues such as cultural heritage and national identity. People who have come from ex-colonies in search of a better life perform a perpetual and concrete re-membering of the deep interconnection between the former metropolitan centres of power and their disseminated peripheries.

Final Remarks

A postcolonial poetics acknowledges multiple, often untranslatable, voices and visions. It evokes, through the dissipation of a narrative reading of content, a plurality of discourses and involves the reader/spectator in the formation of meaning. The examples explored in this essay articulate a critical relationship between the cultural representations and the sense of heritage and belonging, offering the opportunity of a more problematic and stimulating vision of the preservation of the European arts and history. The innovative languages of the trans-local artworks realised by Piper, Julien and Kempadoo, as well as the encounters with the histories and the bodies evoked by Walcott and Ribka, provoke a different configuration of modernity, a liquid one, based on the centrality of transits and the trauma of migration. Liquid modernity, the present condition of the world, involves both the unmaking of Europe as a space of

---

[19] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. xi-xii.

exemplarity, exception and privilege and the remaking of Europe as a space of trans-cultural ferment, movements and transits. Challenging the consecrated reverence of institutionalised archival practices and historical accounts, the variety of works explored in this essay reminds us of the multiple diasporic formations that inhabit the world and produce actual conditions of mutation and circulation. Based on experiences of migration and dislocation, the critical voices and visions highlighted here consider the role of creative resistance connected with narration and participation, which may produce a wider and more flexible sense of one's own sense of belonging.

The Aesthetics of Indirection: Intermittent Adjacencies and Subaltern Presences at the Borders of Europe

Sudeep Dasgupta, University of Amsterdam

Abstract

Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2015), I argue, produces a sensorial registration of the presence of scattered subalterns. More importantly, an 'aesthetics of indirection' (con)figures the disturbing island-space between Italy and North Africa, where the intermittent appearance of subaltern subjects disturbs normative understandings of place and produces counter-intuitive understandings of relationality. The filmic construction of 'intermittent adjacencies' between subaltern presences and narrative protagonists produces figurations of disturbing relationalities between privilege and destitution, pleasure and pain, life and death. The logic of intermittent adjacencies left conspicuously un-integrated by the plot provide a sensorial and political provocation for thinking through the geopolitics of globalization in the context of the displacement of people.

The location of the subaltern subject is intrinsic to its political importance. One influential theorization of subaltern subjectivity placed it within the ambit of incipient nationalism in decolonizing space.[1] Whether resistant or unreadable, erased or subjected, the subaltern subject's relation to globality was both national and colonial. Gayatri Spivak's later intervention in the work of the Subaltern Studies group's further complicated this spatial matrix by noting the disruptive place of the female subaltern subject.[2] Recently, she marked a transition in her work on the figure of the subaltern from a figure 'removed from all lines of social mobility'[3] to the new subaltern, 'a global subaltern', which functions as a 'source of intellectual property without the benefit of benefit-sharing'.[4]

---

[1] Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Guha and Gayatri Ch. Spivak (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 45–87.
[2] Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', in *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 262–80.
[3] Spivak, 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, 18.4 (2005), 475–86 (p. 475).
[4] Ivi, p. 483.

Subaltern space shifts from nation-space exclusion to physical immobilization combined with global value extraction. Hence, she argues that an understanding of the subaltern is 'reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space'.[5]

'Scattered subalternities' signals the shifting spatial coordinates of the subaltern subject under contemporary globalization. This form of subalternity focuses on contemporary forms of forced physical displacement of the subaltern subject beyond nation-space. Secondly, this understanding of scattering does not assume the subaltern subject's forced withdrawal from institutional protection (e.g., citizenship rights). The scattered subaltern embodied in stateless refugees is *not* an example of 'bare life' or 'mere givenness'.[6] This understanding of the scattered subaltern is crucial since it centralizes the relational and rights-bearing subaltern body's movement beyond nation-space.[7] The scattered subaltern's displacement from nation-space under globalization requires comprehension, and a sense of how its shifting spatial reconstitution is intrinsically related to the spaces, peoples and territories it moves through. That is, it is crucial to understand the scattered subaltern not in isolation, but as a form of embodied subjectivity that is continually adjacent to, imbricated with and relationally implicated with others, such as 'legal' subjects enjoying the rights of citizens, as well as geographical spaces and shifting borders such as islands in the Mediterranean or land borders between countries. Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2015) provides a disturbing cinematic experience of precisely this *relational* understanding of the scattered subaltern with other, more privileged bodies and subjectivities. By continually interrupting a narratologically-enabled, cognitive experience of cinematic meaning-production with sensory apprehension, through sound and image of the scattered subaltern's disturbing presence, the film provokes the viewer to confront the cruel reality of a world of extremes.

Lastly, understanding scattered subalternities throws up intellectual and political challenges, not least since the complex dynamics of globalization are continually reduced to familiar formulas such as the 'clash of civilizations', the 'end of history', or 'The West and the Rest'.[8] The refugee as one embodiment of scattered subalternity is neatly conceived by scattering its meanings within

[5] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 310.
[6] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1951), p. 297. For a convincing critique of this argument, see Jacques Rancière, 'Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?', in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. by Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 62–75.
[7] The right to family reunification for minors, for example, established in the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951, applies to refugee children. The systematic denial of this right in many camps illustrates both the rights refugees possess to be unified with family, and their denial. Arguments based on 'bare life' are haphazardly complicit with this denial, however powerful the pathos generated by such discourses of abjection.
[8] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

multiple frameworks, including the threatening cultural other, the welfare scrounger, the potential terrorist or the Absolute Other. Spivak provocatively states that 'Globalization takes place only in capital and data. Everything else is damage control'.[9] When figured as any or all of the above, the threatening figure of the scattered subaltern is also controlled but paradoxically, this 'damage control' is effected precisely through converting the refugee into statistical data (refugee numbers) and a source of information (potential terrorist). That is why Judith Butler is right when arguing that 'the point is not simply to scatter geographically, but to derive a set of principles from scattered existence that can serve a new conception of political justice'.[10] Rather than the insertion of displacement within capitalist globalization as data generated for damage control, the politics of scattering thus resides in its provocations for re-conceptualizing the meaning of justice.

Counter-figurations of scattered subalternity imply a crucial aesthetic dimension. The importance of an aesthetic consideration of cinematic experience resides precisely in understanding how the drive for meaning-making (comprehension) and sensory registration are configured. Both intellectual comprehension and sensory apprehension are needed when making sense of a world whose coordinates are being displaced by contemporary forms of subaltern scatterings. Counter-figurations of scattered subalternities and the politics of globalization are inextricably linked. From a partly Kantian-inspired critique of postcolonial reason, Spivak, for example, argues that the comprehension of globalization must entangle itself with the sensory dimensions of aesthetics through Schiller's notion of *Spieltrieb*, i.e. the play-drive.[11] Jacques Rancière, too, argues that the aesthetic dimensions of political experience are less connected to artistic questions: 'it is not a matter of art and taste; it is, first of all, a matter of time and space.'[12] That is, aesthetic experience derives from deranging the normative alignments of certain bodies with certain spaces. Aesthetics has less to do with taste than with how bodies and spaces can be sensorially figured to break with the norms that govern social orders, such as the alignment of a citizen within a nation, and an outsider beyond the nation-space. Spivak and Rancière's linking of aesthetic experience and politics to questions of globalization and spatiality can be extended and deflected in an analysis of *A Bigger Splash*.

From early cinema's roving gaze on exotic locales and peoples to the mosaic film and other forms of cinematic cartographies of the world, and to the migrant-as-protagonist films of recent years, the relation between cinema and

[9] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 1.
[10] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 117–18. Butler's focus here is on the political deployment of diasporic displacement in relation to the Zionist discourse of the state of Israel. Yet, the relevance of her argument can be extended to understand how displacement and political justice continually rework the latter.
[11] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, pp. 14–29, esp. p. 27.
[12] Rancière, 'From Politics to Aesthetics?', *Paragraph*, 28.1 (March 2005), 13–25 (p. 13).

globalization (including dimensions of migrant experience) are well-known.[13] However, *A Bigger Splash* constructs a specific form of relationality between the figure of the migrant and the privileged subject in the West. The film provides one configuration of scattered subalternity through an aesthetics of indirection, which produces intermittent adjacencies between the figure of the migrant and the film's well-heeled protagonists. Intermittency is one mode of disturbing narrative integration, since the brief appearances and disappearances of the unnamed migrants on the island of Pantelleria prevent the viewer from any sustained understanding of their function within the plot. The term 'adjacencies' implies a side-by-side rather than implicated and integral relation between subaltern presences and narrative protagonists. The film plays out between the desire to understand and the disturbing, often soundless presence of the migrant. This form of aesthetic play between unelaborated presences and overly narrativized protagonists provokes a reconsideration of the cinematic establishment of relationality between the migrant and the vacationing legal resident.

Cinema, Displacement and the Poetics of Relation

A Bigger Splash reproduces exactly the title of a documentary on the swimming pool paintings completed in Los Angeles by British artist David Hockney, when he migrated to the United States from his native Yorkshire (via London).[14] Guadagnino's film, however, is advertised as an adaptation of *La Piscine* (Jacques Deray, 1969). Indirection and displacement begin even in the framing of *A Bigger Splash*, where Deray's swimming pool drama is explicitly cited but then displaced to another watery source, whose painterly character in Hockey's work Guadagnino describes as 'this beautiful lightness [which] carried so much depth'.[15] The viewer is seduced into expecting an adaptation of Deray's *La Piscine* in a film which draws its inspiration from another work, the Hockney documentary and painting (of the same title), where lightness bears the burden of much depth. The waters and the depths that the film constructs are depicted by displacing and then relating multiple storylines. Moreover, these storylines are more opaque than enlightening: the lightness and clarity of water are cinematically rendered by obfuscating clear relationships.

---

[13] See *Exotic Europe: Reisen ins frühe Kino: Journeys into Early Cinema: reizen in de vroege film*, ed. by Connie Betz and others (Berlin: Fochhochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft, 2000), Patricia Pisters, 'The Mosaic Film: Nomadic Style and Politics in Transnational Media', in *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: Conflict Resistance and Agency*, ed. by Mieke Bal and Miguel Hernãndez-Navarro (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 175–90, Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[14] *A Bigger Splash* (Jack Hazan, 1973).

[15] Gaby Wood, 'Tilda and Ralph in Heat: The Making of *A Bigger Splash*', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 February 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/a-bigger-splash/interview-luca-guadagnino-tilda-swinton-ralph-fiennes/> [accessed 26 August 2016].

Water and disturbing relationality have a long history, of course. Édouard Glissant's term, 'the poetics of relation', was constructed to confront specifically the complex histories of displacement (slavery in the Antilles) without giving up on thinking relationality and totality[16] in the context of 'errantry' (a particular form of scattering of peoples borne by boats across waters).[17] The complexity of this form of scattering, for Glissant, resides in the multiple and shifting relations between different abysses in the depths of water. *A Bigger Splash*'s own displacements into the depths of waters across films and artworks are constructed through a specific poetics of relation which I call 'an aesthetics of indirection'. Just as Glissant insists on opacity as integral to comprehending a poetics of relation in the context of displacement, the film produces a sensory experience of opaque relationality through the intermittent adjacencies of those it brings together. This indirection implies an absence of *deixis*, of pointing clearly and directing which path the viewer must follow to set up a relation between the migrant presences and film's protagonists. The preservation of opacity had a crucial political goal for Glissant of preventing the complex subjectivities of those scattered by slavery from being reduced to crude stereotypes. Likewise, the film provokes the viewer to confront the brute realities of wealth and desperation, the luxury of Mediterranean vacationing and the reality of offshore drowning, while preserving the opacity of the migrant presences without explaining what they mean. The opacity of their presences is political precisely because their aesthetic apprehension forces a relation with the protagonists without explaining this relation.

Guadagnino transposes the film from *La Piscine*'s Côte d'Azur to the island of Pantelleria, the closest spot in Italy to the Libyan coast. The island and the villa with swimming pool form the setting for a psychological drama between four protagonists: Marianne Lane (Tilda Swinton), a rock singer recuperating after losing her voice, her lover Paul (Matthias Schoenaerts), a cameraman to whom she was introduced by a former lover, Harry (Ralph Fiennes), who joins them uninvited along with his daughter Penelope (Dakota Johnson). The erotic tension between the former lovers is matched by a growing attraction between Paul and Penelope. This intense foursome takes on sinister overtones through elliptical dialogues while the editing and camera glides over and away from them rather than cutting and suturing sound with image. This aesthetic strategy invites involvement, speculation and suspense. The sensorial experience of this erotic quadrilateral is linked to cognitive speculation to know who is related to whom, how and where this will all lead. The suspense-filled narrative momentum will lead to a death, when Paul forcibly drowns Harry after a fight in the swimming pool. The title of the film, however, suggest another splash.

What bigger splash does it refer to? Evidently nothing in the narrative itself suggests the homoerotic paintings in Hockney's *A Bigger Splash*. Here, the depths below the lightness of water take on a relevance when conjoined with

---

[16] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
[17] Ivi, p. 11. See also pp. 11–22.

the displacement of the locale to Pantelleria. For Glissant, the specific opacity of the poetics of relation is partly related to the three abysses of displacement, the abyss of the ocean floor on which the corpses of dead slaves lie, the abyss of the ships where they died on the middle passage, and the abyss of an indefinite future confronting slaves as they approached the shores of the Caribbean islands. Guadagnino's questions 'What is behind — what is beyond, what is before — the crashing of the surface?' prompted by viewing Hockney's painting frame the crashing about of Paul and Harry in the swimming pool in Pantelleria, and point elsewhere, precisely because of the 'bigger' splash the film promises but does not explicitly elucidate.[18]

Pantelleria's waters produce a different set of abysses, rendered to construct a form of opacity that is only approachable through an aesthetics of indirection. It is precisely here that intermittent adjacencies can help understand how the politics of location (Pantelleria) and the aesthetics of indirection figure one form of scattered subalternity. The first visually explicit encounter between the protagonists and migrant presences takes place roughly halfway through the film, when Paul agrees to show Penelope a deserted lake across a mountain on the island. As they climb up the mountain, they encounter a small group of men. The frontal shot-counter shot sequence lasting less than a minute has no dialogue. When they meet, they all halt, and Penelope covers her almost bare torso with her hands. The sequence ends when the men whisper to each other in Arabic, with no subtitling, and disappear. Within a minute or two, the extended sequence ends with Penelope naked on a rock by the lake, gesturing to Paul to come near, and the camera follows him. It is the first explicit rendition of her desire for him in the film.

The silent, frontal visual construction of the confrontation between the two white bodies on the one hand, and the group of unkept unknown men suddenly appearing on the mountain, provokes a tension in the viewer. The difference in number, the markers of skin colour, and the implicit threat of (sexual) violence deliberately invite apprehension and fear. But, just as the barely audible 'jalla jalla' (Come come) uttered by one of the men to the rest to usher them away, the film provokes and then ushers the viewer away almost immediately into another encounter, an explicitly sexual one between Paul and Penelope. The cinematic experience promises and then deflects attention from one scenario to another. The establishment of a relation between the protagonists and the migrant presences is a provocation fraught with tension, which is deflected quickly into another, unrelated one. The intermittency of this sudden appearance functions as a plot excess: that which being repressed in a story of erotic luxuriating on Pantelleria, which appears only through opaque figures that are deprived of audible meaning. Jacqueline Rose suggests 'something arises in excess when there is something else you cannot bear to think about.'[19] The excess cannot be thought *within*

[18] Wood, online.
[19] Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 55.

the plot because these presences are not narratively integrated. Rather, they are simply sensed through image and sound (or lack thereof). The sensory works as a counterfoil to the cognitive, the thinking of scattered subalternity is blocked and transferred to the sensory register.

This cinematic poetics of relation indirectly constructs an opacity with its own specific abysses: the abyss of the Mediterranean, from which corpses arise and are deposited on the beaches of Pantelleria; the abyss of the boats from which they drown; and the abyss of the uncertain futures of those who survive and get presenced cinematically on the island and in the film, though not in the narrative. These abysses are constructed through an indirect, lateral movement of sound and image across time and space. The film plays on the tension between the time of the narrative and the space of the island, both fleetingly populated by presences who appear but do not speak. The aesthetics of indirection between sound/image and time/space, constructed in the above example, also takes other forms in the film, when the narrative is disrupted by the intermittent appearances of unexplained adjacencies.

The abyss in which Harry is drowned is strikingly rendered in the glittering water of the illuminated pool, by night. A long overhead shot of his crouched body at the bottom is followed by a long tracking shot at eye level. It is uncertain if it represents the point of view of Paul, who wanders in a daze along the beach, and whose presence is blocked by the striking upturned hulls of wrecked boats lined up on its edge. The absence of any establishing shots can be read as a visual accompaniment of the psychic state of Paul, who is in disarray after the unplanned murder of Harry. But that fatal splashing about in the swimming pool is laterally linked through the temporality of the sequence to a space where the wrecked boats signify another kind of drowning: an absent presence. The vessels are abysses, whose broken bottoms plunge migrants to the bottom of the sea, only to be washed up later on the island's shores. Scattered subalterns are figured through the multiple abysses they traverse. What 'comes after the crashing of the surface' of the swimming pool are the physical remnants of the lives that splashed into the 'bigger pool' of the Mediterranean.

When Penelope, Marianne and Paul are summoned to the local police station for further questioning following Harry's death, the cinematic presentation of this indirect relation between presences and protagonists is given to the viewer through a strikingly disjunctive sound-image composition. The three present their passports while in the background a group of people in a caged enclosures are seen playing basketball. The three passports are shot in extreme close-up, appearing in great detail on the screen as they are photocopied. A dialogue between two nearby but unseen policemen is layered over this visualization. A voice from an unseen body is heard saying, 'We put them all in an enclosure here, but it's inhumane. It's shameful'. 'School isn't in session. Can't we put them there?', another voice adds. 'They're human beings, at least theoretically', a third voice adds. The inspector argues on the phone to arrange refrigeration of Harry's corpse, and Penelope angrily interrupts him, speaking Italian for the first time in

the film, and asking him to show some respect for her father. Later we learn that the corpses of seven migrants have washed up on the beach. The deliberately disjunctive conjunction of sound and image in the passport sequence violently juxtaposes protagonist and absent presences. The disjunction of voice and image is confusing and jarring in its obvious breaking of the rules of cinematic sound-image coordination. The meaning of the words 'They're human beings' could apply to either the protagonists or the migrants, or to both, producing confusion. This aesthetic experience of indirection is political precisely because it disrupts the normative understanding of humanity through the production of a disjunctive sensorial experience. The 'aesthetic experience' produced here through cinematic spectatorship 'suspends the commandment of form over matter' by deforming the sound-image conjunction: 'it is a revocation of the type of "humanity" […] implied by the distinction between the men of coarse senses and those of refined senses.'[20]

That the category of the human does not apply equally is rendered brutally in Marianne's suggestive 'help' that she offers to the inspector, once he mentions the dead bodies found on the beach. Marianne responds by saying that there is a path from the beach to the pool through which 'anybody could have come up'. This is the one and only moment in the narrative when the intensely psychological, erotic hot-house drama of the four protagonists is linked to the presence of the refugees. The inspector sardonically replies that he will interrogate them, since 'they cannot be offended more than they already are'. His cutting dismissal of her attempt to incriminate the refugees severs any narrative link between the splash in the pool and the bigger splashes ending in the abyss of the Mediterranean.

This severing of the narrative link, accompanied by the implied connection in the word 'Bigger' in the title is a specific form of *adjacent* relationality. The adjacent relation without a plot connection exemplifies Adorno's famous rejoinder — Andre Gide's statement 'les extrèmes me touchent' — to Benjamin's essay on cinema.[21] The extreme differences between wealthy vacationers and scattered subalterns are brought together adjacently on the same (film) surface, and they touch the spectator. This provocation, unmitigated by causal didactic arguments, forces us to acknowledge the relationality mentioned earlier, since both groups are equally entitled to the rights which have been withdrawn for subalterns, in their scattering. The latter are not abject creatures, men with 'coarse senses' or exemplars of 'bare life'.[22] They are bearers of rights too, including police protection, decent burials and humane relocation, rather than pitiful creatures worthy of our benevolence.

[20] Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 176.
[21] Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 130.
[22] See footnote 7.

An Other Ending in Medias Res

'Globalization', Spivak argues, 'can never happen to the sensory equipment of the experiencing being except insofar as it always was implicit in its vanishing outlines.'[23] The scattered subaltern is both the cause and effect of heterogeneous global space and its outmoded cartography. Specifically, 'an aesthetic education […] can prepare us for […] thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial.'[24] An aesthetics of indirection diverts thinking from the temptations of precisely these polarities. It constructs disturbing adjacencies whose intermittent presences block both the aesthetic contemplation of distant suffering and the engaged, almost pornographic involvement in the detailing of the other's plight.[25] Both strategies reinforce dichotomies based on distance and proximity, safe viewing and violent representation.

How we know is partly a question of how 'we' are located in a world that is itself a sensory construction. This is as much about cinematic 'experience' at the level of the senses as it is the exercise of understanding through the construction of neatly concluded arguments.[26] The film constructs a relation between the human and the non-human by exploiting cinematic 'conditions of representability', deploying aesthetic experimentation toward political epistemology and social critique.[27] For example, Guadagnino deliberately avoids what he calls the 'pre-ordained moulding' of the three-act arc structure, ending the film *in medias res*, somewhat like the bodies whose journey are interrupted by the 'bigger splash' in the Mediterranean.[28]

This aesthetics mimes rather than represents the scattered subaltern's tracing of heterogeneous global space.[29] The film's deliberately elliptical style deploys an

[23] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 2.
[24] Ibidem.
[25] Butler, 'Torture and the Ethics of Photography', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25 (2005), 951–66 (p. 965). Discretely approaching objects of suffering, whether drowned subalterns whose scattering is halted, or victims of torture (Butler's example is Abu Ghraib) is a form of aesthetically constructing a relation which avoids a penetrative and voyeuristic involvement by the viewer.
[26] Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), esp. pp. xvii–xviii. Hansen reads all three authors as theorists of cinema's capacity to alter the human sensorium through counter-intuitive and non-narrative formal experimentation. She calls this 'a materialist phenomenology' (p. xviii), hence her focus more on the experiential than the literal and thematic dimensions of cinema. It is precisely this experiential dimension of the cinematic (sound and image) construction of intermittent adjacencies that describes what I call an aesthetics of indirection.
[27] 'Torture and the Ethics of Photography', p. 953.
[28] Wood, online.
[29] Gertrud Koch, 'Mimesis and *Bildverbot*', *Screen*, 34.3 (August 1993), 211–22. Using Adorno, Koch convincingly reformulates mimesis as the sensory relationality between film and spectator rather than meaning-production through thematic engagement. See pp. 219–20 in particular. An aesthetics of indirection describes exactly this mimetic understanding of cinematic experience. See also footnote 26.

aesthetics of indirection, where scattered subalterns intermittently appear through specific forms of sound/image and time/space relations. Their appearances are adjacent to, and accompany, the cinematic experience of the film, yet they are deliberately kept out of narrative integration. They are symptoms of an excess in contemporary globalization. The human cost of the repression of this excess is contained through neat polarities. However, an aesthetics of indirection through cinematic experience has the potential to configure their adjacent presences in contemporary globalization.

Framing the Subaltern: The Reemergence of the 'Other' in Neoliberal Indian Popular Cinema

Anu Thapa, University of Iowa

Abstract

The figure of the subaltern, construed primarily in terms of class difference, went missing from Indian cinema screens following the emergence of the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) protagonist in the 1990s. In the neoliberal phase post-2000, the subaltern has resurfaced in Indian cinema narratives, positioned to be delivered by the technological know-how and entrepreneurial spirit of the foreign-returned Indian man. This paper analyzes the reemergence of this disenfranchised 'other' through a close reading of three mainstream Hindi films — *Swades: We, the People* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2004), *Delhi 6* (Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2009) and *Gori Tere Pyaar Mein* (Punit Malhotra, 2013). All three films place a premium on the entrepreneurial spirit embodied by the cosmopolitan protagonist, which is facilitated by the urban educated heroine. The subaltern is transformed into the collective of 'the people' and subsequently denied enterprise. Within the context of cinematic representations of the subaltern since India's independence, this portrayal of the subaltern as objects of deliverance is emblematic of Indian cinema's neoliberal phase. Engaging with recent scholarships on Hindi cinema's global ambitions, this paper briefly delves into the implications of the subaltern's return to the notion of the 'popular' in Indian popular cinema.

On the sixtieth anniversary of India's independence, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shared his vision of a 'caring India', in which he reiterated the nation's responsibility towards its disadvantaged groups.[1] He highlighted the *Bharat Nirman* (Build India) project — an investment in rural connectivity — as an 'effort at bridging the urban rural divide', and called for an India 'in which the creativity and enterprise of every citizen can find its free and full expression'.[2] Singh's emphasis on infrastructural development as a means to enterprise echoes Gayatri

---

[1] Manmohan Singh, *PM's Independence Day Speech, 2007*, 15 August 2007, <http://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=551> [accessed 15 August 2016].
[2] Ibidem.

Spivak's notion of 'building infrastructure for [subaltern] agency'.[3] Both propose that the subaltern can come into a collective via infrastructure. Undergirding Singh's speech however, is the neoliberal ideal of self-enterprising citizens that excludes the subaltern by assuming an infrastructural *a priori*. On the other hand, Spivak posits that the subaltern, defined as a 'position without identity', can opt to 'figure' themselves in relation to the state through infrastructure.[4] The flipside, she alerts us, is the possible hypostatization of the subaltern into 'people' which subsequently gets coopted into nationalist agendas.[5] This slippage of the subaltern into the 'popular' is a longstanding issue within the context of Indian popular cinema and the crucial role it plays in configuring ideal subjectivities. Framing its argument with a historical contextualization of subaltern representation in Indian popular cinema, this paper analyzes three films from the 2000s that prominently feature the figure of the subaltern in order to project an ideal subjectivity — *Swades: We, the People* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2004), *Delhi 6* (Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2009), and *Gori Tere Pyaar Mein* (Punit Malhotra, 2013). I posit that the subaltern, who had largely gone missing in the 1990s, returns in today's films in contrast to their cosmopolitan protagonists. These three films reinforce a neoliberal development ethics that places a premium on the entrepreneurial spirit embodied by the protagonist. The subaltern is transformed into the humanist figure of 'the people' for this purpose, and is subsequently denied enterprise. The paper delves briefly into the implications of the subaltern's reemergence in today's neoliberal phase of Indian popular cinema.

The trajectory of subaltern representation in Indian popular cinema can be mapped alongside the evolution of the development logic of post-independence India. During the period of Nehruvian socialism of the 1950s, the subaltern figured prominently in nation-building and modernization. The protagonists of the popular 'socials' during this time were the peasants and the working-class to whom the state extended citizenship by delivering justice. Cinema narratives overwhelmingly focused on freedom from oppression.[6] Raj Kapoor's tramp figure in *Aawara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951) best encapsulated the concerns of this period. During the economic crisis of the 1970s, the 'angry young man' figure, embodied by Amitabh Bachchan in *Zanjeer* (Prakash Mehra, 1973), captured the nation's imagination. The state's inability to effectively resolve issues such as unemployment, food shortages, and profiteering was countered by the vigilante justice of this 'disaffected, cynical, violent, urban worker/laborer' protagonist.[7]

---

[3] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8.4 (2005), 475–86 (p. 482).
[4] Ibidem.
[5] Ivi, p. 477.
[6] Tejaswini Ganti notes that the phases of Indian cinema, which I use here, are not delineated through an exhaustive survey of the films made during these times but are based upon the most prominent and successful trends. Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 32.
[7] Ibidem.

By the liberalization era of the 1990s, cinema narratives shifted focus from economic hardships to affluence, simultaneously displacing subaltern struggles from the screen. The NRI hero, personified by Shahrukh Khan in *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1994), set a trend of an authentic and mobile Indian identity that was tenable anywhere in the world. Through the NRI protagonist, mainstream films furnished consumerist desires and fantasies.

Today's highly corporatized Indian film industry has taken a varied approach towards the 'popular,' staying true to the condition of neoliberalism. David Harvey posits that neoliberalization requires the construction of a 'market-based populist culture, differentiated consumerism, and individual libertarianism'.[8] In other words, the 'popular' in the neoliberal Indian cinema is more fractured than ever before. Mainstream Indian films increasingly depend on star-power, sequels, proven formulas of the 1980s family drama, action films, and historical narratives.[9] Commercially successful portrayals of the subaltern in mainstream films often evoke India's colonial past. An emblematic example of this trend is the 2001 film *Lagaan*, in which a motley group of villagers unite against the taxation imposed by the British Raj in 1893. *Lagaan* brings together India's favorite sport — cricket — and its colonial legacy to disseminate the message that the success of contemporary Indian society is contingent on people coming together irrespective of caste, class, and religion.

Films set in the globalized 2000s, such as *Swades*, *Delhi 6*, and *Gori Tere*, espouse a similar message albeit through the trope of deliverance by a foreign-returned Indian man. These films contrast their cosmopolitan protagonist to the subaltern and the environment in which he encounters them through a set of carefully constructed aural and visual cues. In *Swades*, Mohan's massive RV squeezes into the narrow roads of Charanpur village over a soundtrack with the lyrics, '*ayo re/*he has come'.[10] Mohan is never seen without a bottle of mineral water, and he walks around the village with a DSLR camera dangling from his neck. In *Delhi 6*, following the opening sequence that introduces the viewers to the Black Monkey menace, a voice-over refers to the ongoing monstrosities on earth, and ends with the following lines: 'Earth, my dear earth, I will quell

---

[8] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8.

[9] Some of the highest grossing films during 2001–2014 fall somewhere within these categories. For example, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (*Gadar*, Anil Sharma, 2001), *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (*Lagaan*, Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001), *Devdas* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002), *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (*Mangal Pandey*, Ketan Mehta 2005), *Colour It Yellow* (*Rang De Basanti*, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006) and *Jodhaa Akbar* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008) are films that rely on historical components including India's colonial past; *The Gardener* (*Baghban*, Ravi Chopra, 2003), *Don* (Farhan Akhtar, 2006), *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan, 2007), *Dabangg* (Abhinav Kashyap, 2010), *Agneepath* (Karan Malhotra, 2012) and *Chennai Express* (Rohit Shetty, 2013) rehash or are remakes of the family/action films of the 1980s; The *Dhoom* sequels in 2004 (Sanjay Gadhvi), 2006 (Sanjay Gadhvi) and 2013 (Vijay Krishna Acharya), *Don 2: The Chase Continues* (*Don 2*, Farhan Akhtar, 2011), *Dabangg 2* (Arbaaz Khan, 2012), and the *Krrish* sequels (Rakesh Roshan, 2003, 2006, and 2013) exemplify the sequel phenomenon in mainstream Hindi cinema.

[10] (My translation).

your fire; As Rama, in Dasarath's palace, I will soon appear';[11] this sequence cuts to Roshan and his grandmother at a doctor's office in the US. This verse, which evokes deliverance, facilitates the transition from the Black Monkey to Roshan, wherein the monkey symbolizes the darkness that Roshan (literally meaning light) is positioned to dispel. Roshan is inseparable from his cell phone, constantly mediating his experience of Old Delhi's intensity through its camera lens. He listens to music on his cell phone while jogging in the dusty, crowded, narrow alleys of Chandni Chowk. In *Gori Tere*, Sriram arrives at Jhumli village following a lengthy trip that requires him to constantly switch his mode of transportation — each vehicle smaller than the last, on ever narrowing roads. His journey eventually ends on foot as he crosses a rickety makeshift bridge. This protracted sequence is accompanied by a comical soundtrack that implies Sriram's out-of-place-ness and Jhulmi's remoteness. Visually, Sriram's sunglasses, mobile phone, and bright clothes sets him apart from the villagers' drab outfits.

In all three films, the subaltern serve to establish the humanist outlook of the hero. The rural poor of Charanpur and Jhumli, and Delhi's urban poor, such as the local trash-picker and the area simpleton, occupy the subaltern position in *Swades*, *Gori Tere*, and *Delhi 6*, respectively. In contrast to the undifferentiated subaltern mass in *Gori Tere*, the distinctions made in degrees of subalternity in *Swades* and *Delhi 6* highlight the protagonists' ability to traverse the social structures that segregate. Commendably, the representation of subalternity in *Swades* factors in various structural elements such as caste, gender, and religion. However, these structures are highlighted only through Mohan's interactions with the villagers and ultimately underscore his humanitarian nature. In a turning point in the film, Mohan is left deeply shaken by the abject poverty he witnesses on a trip to collect rent from Haridas, a weaver turned farmer, who has been denied irrigation water for breaking tradition by changing profession. On the journey back to Charanpur, Mohan breaks his dependency on bottled water by buying a cup of unfiltered water at the railway platform from a village boy. This trip heightens his dismay over the caste factionism that he encountered previously at a more surficial level in his conversations with the village headmen. Similarly, in *Delhi 6*, while every other male member in the area lusts after Jalebi, a local trash-collector woman who is considered untouchable, Roshan helps her pick up the load of trash and even invites her into his house. He is also the only person to interject when the corrupt police officer, Ranvijay, slaps the simple-minded Gobar. Roshan is left speechless when a Muslim man's shop is vandalized by his patrons, in the course of a Hindu-Muslim riot exacerbated by accusations about the Black Monkey's religious affiliation.

Compared to the local subaltern who is 'removed from all lines of social mobility',[12] the cosmopolitan protagonist exercises a remarkable social flexibility

---

[11] 'Prithvi meri pyari prithvi, tera taap mitata hoon, Dasrath ke yahan mein banke Rama, ati shighra avadh mein aata hoon.' (My translation).
[12] Spivak, p. 475.

that is directly correlated to his geographical mobility. During the globalization phase of the 1990s, the geographical mobility of the NRI hero was a cause for anxiety, assuaged through the formulaic establishment of the NRI protagonist with Indian values and tradition. In today's neoliberal phase, cosmopolitan mobility emphasizes the hero's knowledge capital, both professional and cultural. It is hardly coincidental that the trope of the NRI hero's return, among the three films in discussion, is most pronounced in *Swades*. Its protagonist Mohan is portrayed by Shahrukh Khan, the ultimate NRI hero of the 1990s. An Ivy League graduate, Mohan manages NASA's Global Precipitation Measurement project designed to prevent the planet from future drought. The term 'global' emphasizes Mohan's lack of affiliation, further highlighted in the film through a voice message notifying him of the approval of his American citizenship application. Similarly, Sriram in *Gori Tere* holds an architecture degree from the US, and has presumably returned to India at the behest of his businessman father — a point that can be gleaned from his introduction over the song, '*Dhat teri ki ghar nahi jaana/*Damn, I don't want to go home'.[13] I call these neoliberal protagonists 'cosmopolitan *Babus*' — a descriptor that I develop in detail elsewhere — to emphasize their continuity with the anglicized Indian man disparagingly referred to as a '*Babu*' during the British Raj.[14] The satirical mimic-man of nineteenth century colonial India is reincarnated in postcolonial times as an ideological hybrid who is 'particularly rich in cultural and educational capital and sufficiently secure economically'.[15]

Insofar as neoliberalism indicates a shift from free market to an economy of knowledge capital, India lies at its forefront. The establishment of an Indian Knowledge Commission in 2005 is a testament to the national push towards the expansion of its knowledge economy. Neoliberal emphasis on knowledge, particularly in Asian context of hypergrowth, per Aihwa Ong, promotes 'educated and self-managing citizens who can compete in global knowledge markets'.[16] In other words, such a knowledge economy forms a highly mobile group of subjects as citizenship ideal. The paradox inherent in constituting a group of transnational elites as ideal citizens is resolved by emphasizing contributions to civil society as an articulation of national solidarity. Neoliberal knowledge economy thus raises the stakes of citizenship for the majority while it undercuts the promise of equal rights to all.[17] This idealization of self-governing entrepreneurship inextricably ties together scientific/technological knowledge to agency, relegating the laggards to second-class citizens and further marginalizing the subaltern. Spivak is making a similar claim when she observes that the emergence of 'a self-styled international

---

[13] (My translation).

[14] *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/view/Entry/14245?redirectedFrom=babu#eid> [accessed 15 August 2016].

[15] Tabish Khair, *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 32.

[16] Aihwa Ong, 'Neoliberalism as a Mobile Technology', *Transactions*, 32.1 (2007), 3–6 (p. 8).

[17] Ong, '(Re)Articulations of Citizenship', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38.4 (2005), 697–99 (p. 698).

civil society of self-selected moral entrepreneurs with no social contract' is connected to the 'transmogrification of the subaltern into the humanist figure of the "people"'[18] — an overt transgression found in the title, *Swades: We, the People.* More egregiously, *Gori Tere* categorizes the villagers as 'laborers', in opposition to Sriram, the architect. Paradoxically, the subaltern who is displaced from this knowledge economy is constantly brought back to justify it.

As the beneficiary of this neoliberal knowledge economy, the cosmopolitan protagonist is armed with a globalized sensitivity and technological knowhow. He thus steps up to develop the systems of connectivity or infrastructures given the state's failure to do so. Infrastructures are harbingers of modernity whose development, as John Peters argues, is 'backed by states or public-private partnerships that alone possess the capital, legal, or political force and megalomania to push them through'.[19] To this list of actors who possess the wherewithal for such an undertaking, I add enterprising citizens participating in civil society within neoliberal economy. For instance, Mohan redirects his training in engineering to develop an electricity generating project while also urging the villagers to educate their kids. Sriram dusts off his architecture degree and builds a bridge in the village of Jhumli, connecting Jhumli to civilization. Roshan brings together people torn apart by religious skirmishes by dressing up as the Black Monkey — an entity believed to function through a motherboard. Despite the fact that the locals have variously attempted a solution, the trope of deliverance in each film plays out through an infrastructural project spearheaded by the protagonist. In *Swades*, the colonial era freedom fighter, who has long been the voice of reason in Charanpur, hands over the baton to Mohan and dies peacefully upon the completion of the electricity project. In Jhumli, a man is said to have lost his life trying to build the bridge that Sriram ultimately builds. The local mad poet walks around Delhi 6 holding up a mirror and reciting a verse which asks people to look and find God's light within oneself.[20] However, it is Roshan who explains the meaning of the verse as he urges people to not be divided over religion.

The films' trope of deliverance latches on to the overarching dichotomy of modernity/tradition in which the subaltern is placed within the realm of tradition. Such a division, Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, ignores the varied 'practices of modernity' that are part of the lived subaltern experiences. These alternative practices, he posits, do not exist autonomously from mainstream politics.[21] Rather, the subaltern class is entrenched within the same institutions

---

[18] Spivak, p. 479.
[19] John D. Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 31.
[20] The verse 'Zarre zarre mein usi ka noor hain, jhaank khud mein woh na tujhse door hain' translates to 'His light alone permeates everywhere, everyone; take a look within yourself, He resides in you.' (My translation).
[21] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 54–55.

of modernity as the middle and upper classes.[22] Consider for instance the sequence where Mohan attempts to explain the process of observing and recording weather fluctuations at NASA. Challenging the complexity of the process, the village headman calls upon a local man who promptly looks up at the sky and predicts no rain for the next two days. The humorous tone of this sequence denies veracity to any observations unaided by technology, and asks the film's audience to identify with Mohan. Instead of acknowledging the dialectical relationship between modernity/tradition, science/modernity is reinstated in irrevocable opposition to religion/tradition thus erasing the possibility of the subaltern as agent.

Considering the modern/tradition dichotomy, it is significant that the female protagonists of these films drive the hero's engagement with the subaltern. In each film, an urban educated woman channels the hero's entrepreneurial prowess towards helping the disenfranchised mass. Sriram travels to Jhumli with the sole purpose of winning back Dia. Her refusal to leave before the bridge is built, forces Sriram to apply himself to the project. Mohan's trip to India is lengthened because his nanny, Kaveri Amma, refuses to leave until Gita is wed; Gita is not inclined to wed until the villagers send their kids to school. In the process of resolving these issues, Mohan gets entrenched into the problems of the village. Roshan's fondness for Bittu keeps him from leaving despite the growing unrest in Delhi 6. These women provide the impetus for the protagonists' sustained relationship with the subaltern. Mohan and Roshan eventually give up their American citizenship in order to be with Gita and Bittu, respectively. Dia urges Sriram that they go to another village in need of electricity following the successful completion of the bridge in Jhumli. Having internalized the best values of the traditional and the modern, the woman's enterprise lies in her ability to integrate the cosmopolitan man within the nation. The enduring trope of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), which implicitly ties the woman with the nation, undergoes a slight modification in neoliberal Indian cinema. The new woman, suitable to partner the cosmopolitan hero, is reimagined as someone who finds agency within hegemonic ideals. Rather than the victimized broken woman, she is an agent of service within the bounds of the nation. This cooptation of the term 'Mother India' is evidenced in *Gori Tere* where Dia's relentless earns her this moniker from the corrupt politician. This reimagined woman is capable of taking over the reins in the absence of the hero — a configuration represented literally in *Swades* when Mohan asks Gita to hold the generator's wheel while he goes off to unclog the dam.

The heteronormative dyad formed by the cosmopolitan *Babu* and the enterprising woman interpellates India's urban-elites. This dyad foregrounds civil society as a necessary mode of political engagement which is depicted in all three films through entrepreneurial pursuits towards the goal of connectivity.

[22] Ivi, p. xx.

Such forms of engagement are presented as readily available to the urbanized elite but projected outside the purview of the subaltern who embodies a provisional humanity.[23] The subaltern is reified as the collective 'people' and ultimately framed in the construction of neo-subjectivities.

The return of the subaltern in neoliberal Hindi cinema reiterates cinema's role in the configuration of ideal subjectivity vis-à-vis the nation. It reveals that the subaltern was not part of Bollywood's global ambitions during the 1990s. Neither is she a part of transactions within the neoliberal economy, such as the recent teaming up between Netflix and Shahrukh Khan's production company, Red Chillies Entertainment. Furthermore, it asks for a recalibration of the relationship between the 'popular' and the 'subaltern' which has mostly been understood in terms of cinema viewership. Several scholars have remarked on the noteworthiness of Hindi-language films capturing the largest share of India's movie-going audience in a country where approximately 300 million of the population are illiterate, and a multitude of languages and regional dialects exist.[24] The 'popular' holds within itself a utopian impulse that seeks to cut against class antagonism. The sequence in *Swades* where the entire village comes together around a cinema screen exemplifies this impulse. Similarly, Dia's moniker for Sriram, Sridevi — a famous Bollywood actress — allows Jhumli denizens to relate to and even make fun of the cosmopolitan protagonist. Often, the 'popular' and 'subaltern' are conflated, particularly in claims that Indian popular cinema is low-brow because the 'poor' demand it.[25] Such teleological reasoning provides one way to contextualize the box-office failures of *Swades* and *Delhi 6* despite their success with middle-class and diaspora audiences. It does not however begin to explain the failure of the *masala* film *Gori Tere*.

Insofar as the 'popular' is a site of commodification and contestation, the subaltern inflects and is inflected by it.[26] Thus, eschewing monolithic notions of 'popular' and the 'subaltern' is of urgent need within the discourse of Indian popular cinema. Recent scholarships highlighting Hindi cinema's pedagogical function take such an approach. Notably, by building on Sumita Chakravarty's notion of 'impersonation', Ajay Gehlawat argues that mainstream Hindi cinema speaks the language of the subaltern not to assure his/her representation but to reconfigure concepts such as representation and identity.[27] Bollywood

---

[23] Nivedita Menon, 'Introduction', in *Empire and Nation*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 1–22 (p. 12).

[24] The Hindi-language films, 'which make up about 20 percent of the total production, have captured the all-India market'. Manjunath Pendakur, 'India', in *The Asian Film Industry*, ed. by John Lent (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 229–52 (p. 231). Sheila Nayar, 'Invisible Representation: The Oral Contours of a National Popular Cinema', *Film Quarterly*, 57.3 (2004), 13–23.

[25] Ajay Gehlawat notes this tautological reasoning in Sara Dickey's works on the urban-poor audience of Indian popular cinema. Ajay Gehlawat, *Reframing Bollywood: Theories of Popular Hindi Cinema* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), p. 80.

[26] David Lloyd, 'The Subaltern in Motion: Subalternity, the Popular and Irish Working History', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8.4 (2005), 421–37 (p. 422).

[27] For Chakravarty impersonation disavows fixity but encompasses the 'accretion, the piling up of

cinema is a terrain where the subaltern can negotiate and reformulate identity. The subaltern is not removed from the global flows of modernity of which cinema is a crucial component. Rather, as Spivak claims, the subaltern has 'lexicalised' global culture in a fragmentary fashion.[28] In other words, the subaltern has appropriated and reformatted global conventions of modernity. Along with modernity, the nation too has been fractured in the process. As such, the interchange between the 'subaltern' and the 'popular' is not simply linear. Rather, the two are triangulated with the state. In its neoliberal era, Indian cinema has moved overtly beyond representation; it is an infrastructure through which the subaltern partake in representation.

identities, the transgression of social codes and boundaries'. Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema: 1947–1987* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4. Gehlawat, p. 57.
[28] Spivak, p. 483.

A Revolution in Time:
History and Identity in Raya Martin's *Autohystoria*

Renato Loriga, Università degli Studi Roma Tre

> All history is masturbation. It's just a matter of who you fantasize about.
>
> (Raya Martin, *Autohystoria* pressbook)

Raya Martin and New Philippine Cinema

The recent string of awards won by Lav Diaz put Filipino cinema under the spotlight.[1] Diaz is the central core around which younger Filipino filmmakers started to build their efforts: Raya Martin, Gym Lumbera, John Torres, and many others have worked in close contact with Diaz, forming a wide but heterogeneous group, which I call *New Philippine Cinema*. Each director has a unique and individual style, but their goal converges into one big theme: what does being *Filipino* mean? Through different ways, each one of them explores the history of Philippines and the way in which colonial power still affects its culture and cinema. These movies are distant from the neorealist aesthetic in the likes of Lino Brocka or Brillante Mendoza. They are, instead, purely cinematographic fantasies that enable the renegotiation between history and identity through acts of *subversive disarticulation*.[2] This is an act committed both against colonial heritage and against cinema itself. The films share a pure anti-cinematic approach that goes against all the most common traditional conventions of film language. They often lack anything resembling a narrative or a plot, preferring a mixture of fiction, documentary, found footage, and guerrilla filmmaking, thus thinning the border between genres, life, and cinema.

Raya Martin, one of the youngest and most prolific filmmakers of his generation, has directed twenty titles in the span of ten years, radically changing style from one another, to the point that his cinema can be labelled as *anti-style*, symptomatic of a refusal to recognize himself as an author by his own admission.[3] Among Filipino filmmakers, he is the one who more explicitly clarified his postcolonial and metacinematic thoughts, meshing the two together while also

---

[1] Diaz firstly gained recognition in the experimental section Orizzonti at the Venice Film Festival, and recently won the Golden Pard for Best Movie in Locarno in 2014, the Silver Bear in Berlin and the Golden Lion in Venice, both in 2016.

[2] Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. xviii.

[3] See Alessandro Stellino, 'Alla ricerca del tempo perduto. Intervista a Raya Martin', *FilmIdee*, 3 (2012), <http://www.filmidee.it/archive/31/article/265/article.aspx> [accessed 10 July 2016].

retracing chronologically the history of the Philippine nation and its cinema, showing how the remains of colonial powers still erupt among the textures of national imagery.

Filipino identity is still highly debated concept. As Rafael explains: '[A]ttempts at establishing a clear and undisputed fit between the Philippines and Filipinos are far from complete, and in fact, may never be realized.'[4] This is mostly due to a fundamental asynchrony between the geopolitical creation of the Philippines and the raise of a nationalist sentiment.[5] Thus:

> [T]he identification of 'Filipinos' and the 'Filipino nation' proceeds experimentally, pursuing an unsettled and intractable course. The narrative script constituting the nation remains sedimented in fragments of scenarios from memory, customary rituals, idiomatic speech-acts and recursive practices. Until the coordinates are specified, we can only handle the 'interpretants' […] of those signifiers provisionally.[6]

For the same reason, Joel David states that 'areas of postcolonial concern in Philippine cinema should therefore be presented as questions rather than statements, or rather as statements that are not so much inconclusive as they are tentative, premised on the interested of the same (postcolonial) subject'.[7]

At the age of 21, Martin shot *Maicling pelicula nañg ysañg Indio Nacional* (*A Short Film about the Indio Nacional*, 2005), his first international success.[8] Divided into two stylistically different segments, it starts with a 22-minute scene, shot in DV, while the rest of the movie is comprised of silent vignettes shot on 35mm film that replicate the earliest examples of movies shot at the beginning of the century (fig. 1). Of about three hundred movies produced in the Philippines from 1919 until 1944, only less than ten have survived to our days. The lack of a national film archive in the Philippines has led to an almost total erasure of an entire cinematic heritage.[9] *Indio Nacional* thus becomes a film about a nation whose cinema is not only lost, but that could never be in the first place. Martin is projecting a pure fantasy of what early Filipino cinema *could have been*, drawing heavily from the

---

[4] Vincente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 7.

[5] Ibidem.

[6] E. San Juan, Jr., 'Reflections on Academic Cultural Studies and the Problem of Indigenization in the Philippines', *TOPIA*, 29 (Spring 2013), 73–93 (pp. 84–85).

[7] Joel David, 'Philippine Film History as Postcolonial Discourse', in *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures*, ed. by Rolando B. Tolentino (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), pp. 3–12 (p. 8).

[8] Produced also through the *Hubert Bals Fund* and released in 2006 among many international film festivals (Rotterdam, Hong Kong, Singapore, Nantes, Thessaloniki and Pesaro, where it won first prize).

[9] See Bliss Cua Lim, 'A Brief History of Archival Advocacy for Philippine Cinema', in *2013 Philippine Cinema Heritage Summit: A Report* (Manila: National Film Archives of the Philippines, 2013), pp. 14–20, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2gx6w8ff> [accessed 9 August 2016].

episodes told by Reynaldo Ileto in his seminal book *Pasyon and Revolution*.[10] The stylistic choice to combine digital and film is related to the choice of subject itself, but also creates a visual time-gap that prompts a reflection on the cinematic medium itself. Postcolonial thought is then entwined with the filmic support and what it brings in historical as well as cultural terms. *Indio Nacional* is a reconfiguration of history, an 'invention of a reality that *had to be there but has been suppressed in historical mediation*'.[11] The bond between history and metacinematic reflections will characterize every other movie by Martin.

In 2009, Martin directed another *period piece*, set in the 1930s, during the US occupation. In those years, the Philippines were a leading force in southeast Asian cinema, producing hundreds of movies per year within a productive system that was closely inspired by Hollywood. With *Independencia*, Martin does not merely set the plot in the past, but tries to replicate the same means of production from that time, with a high budget film,[12] shot on 35mm film, with a crew of almost one hundred people and actual in-studio shootings with hand-painted backdrops and artisanal special effects (fig. 2). The act of realizing an independent movie with the means of a mainstream one is thus a political gesture in itself. It indicates an awareness of Martin's part of being a director involved in the system of international film festivals, a system that sustains and dictates the so-called arthouse or independent cinema, and the will of confronting this reality by questioning what is expected from a Third World director such as himself.

Autohystoria

In 2007, Martin shot what probably is his most radical and personal film. *Autohystoria* still deals with Martin's interest in Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines, but the narrative aspect is now close to zero, while his experiments with long takes and duration are almost taken to an extreme. For a length of ninety minutes, it is composed by only fifteen shots, which I will briefly summarize:

1. [2'5"] A black screen accompanied by a love song played on acoustic guitar ('And this space between us/What distance is possible/To traverse/For this forgetful heart of mine?').
2. [36'17"] The scene is abruptly interrupted, as well as the sound, which now

---

[10] See Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998, first publ. 1979). The book deals with the active role of common people and their beliefs during the years of the revolution and after. Ileto's book is a prime example of 'history from below' and close to what can be defined postcolonial studies at an early stage, since it was published in 1979, just one year after the fundamental Said's *Orientalism*.
[11] Jonathan Beller, 'Iterations of the Impossible: Questions of Digital Revolution in the Philippines', *Postcolonial Studies*, 11.4 (2008), 435–50 (p. 442) [emphasis in the original].
[12] *Indio Nacional* was shot in five days with a budget of 700.000 pesos (circa $15.000), while *Autohystoria* was shot in two days with a budget of 10.000 pesos (circa $200).

becomes live recording of a trafficked street. The scene is shot with a hand-held camera, in really low resolution and in b/w. The camera follows a man from the other side of the street, until he reaches a house. This uninterrupted shot is longer than half an hour. In the last seconds, some lines of text in Tagalog are superimposed on the image: 'Last night, I read about Andres Bonifacio. He was killed with Procopio Bonifacio. I messaged my brother asking how he was. No answer. Soon after, I fell asleep.'

3. [12'] This scene is in colour, and shot on digital video. The shot is still, fixed on a tripod, and it frames a trafficked roundabout. The only steady visual reference is a monument. A police van is going in circles around it, its loud siren dominating all the other traffic noises, although no particular visual emphasis is given to the car.

4. [6'] The camera is inside of a vehicle, with a close-up of a scared young man. We hear the same loud siren from before. We are inside the police van that is circling in the roundabout. This shot is connected to the previous through the sound of the siren, being the first time in the movie in which two shots follow each other diegetically.

5. [2'56"] A close-up of another boy on the verge of tears, while the car keeps going in circles.

6. [1'12"] Hand-held camera. Outdoor shot of the moon covered by the dense vegetation of the jungle.

7. [13'22"] We see the two young men from behind, walking in the jungle. We can now be sure that this is not camera footage, but a POV shot of the kidnapper(s). The men walk with great difficulty, sometimes turning their heads towards the camera. One of them is covered in blood. He stops and asks: 'Will you shoot us?' There is no answer.

8. [1'27"] A short insert depicting the light of dawn filtering through the vegetation.

9. [5'] Still camera. The two men are at the centre of the shot, their faces are swollen and bloody, one of them has his arm in a sling. The two are trembling but don't utter a word. During the last seconds, a gunshot is fired. One of the guys drops dead, while the other tries to run through the jungle.

10. [4'] Bucolic shot on a fixed camera. The sound of a waterfall can be heard.

11. [2'] Fixed shot of the sky tinted with the colours of dawn.

12. [1'] Fixed shot of a waterfall.

13. [50"] Another stylistic change. An old black and white film from the silent era.[13] Two soldiers are crossing the river followed by a pack of donkeys.

14. [40"] Another silent film, this time introduced by its title: *Aguinaldo's Navy*. Some small ships peacefully sail on a river.

15. [50"] A third silent film, with no title. American soldiers are parading along with the infantry.[14]

---

[13] Martin does not introduce the film by its title. It is *An Historic Feat* (Raymond Ackerman, 1900), also known as *Gen. Bell's Pack Train Swimming Agno River*. The film depicts a real incident, where the American's army mule pack ended in the waters of the Agno River, in Luzon, by accident.

[14] Again, without title. It is *25th Infantry* (Raymond Ackerman, 1900). It shows the 25th Infantry led by the generals Frederick D. Grant and A.S. Burt returning from mount Arayat. All three movies were shot by Raymond Ackerman, for Biograph.

16. End credits, written upside down and rolling from bottom to top. Among the
others, we can read the names of Lav Diaz, Khavn de la Cruz, John Torres and
Alexis Tioseco.

In what way does *Autohystoria* concerns Filipino identity? What kind of
subalternity is at stake? I will answer these questions by fragmenting the multi-
layered structure of the film, while bearing in mind that, in Bhabha's words,
'identity is claimed from marginality.'[15]

First of all, let us consider its (non)narrative content. As we can see by this short
summary, the movie gives very few hints on what is actually happening. Only one
line of spoken dialogue and some text provide the context to understand the
historical references. *Autohystoria*, in a way, regards a fundamental episode in
Philippine history: the homicide of Andres Bonifacio (named at the end of the
shadowing scene), leader of the Katipunan secret society and of the Filipino
revolution of 1896. He was killed, along with his brother Procopio, under the
order of Emilio Aguinaldo, which soon after became the first President of the
Philippines Republic. Despite being a people's hero while alive, shortly after his
death both American and Filipino politicians and historians distorted and altered
Bonifacio's memory and legacy, which is still debated nowadays. The monument
shown in the movie, the *Balintwak* in Caloocan City, is dedicated to him. The lack
of historical context given by Martin, except for the many references that still
goes unexplained for the misinformed viewer, seems to echo the programmatic
erasure to which Bonifacio has been relegated for years, until recently.[16] Thus,
Bonifacio's story cannot be labelled as a minority history, it being a 'narrative of
a group or class that has not left its own sources'.[17] The erasure, or downgrade,
of his memory has been entirely and voluntarily political.[18] However, this kind of
knowledge is not available to every spectator, especially to Western audiences,
which represent the majority for this kind of film, mostly in film festivals such as
Turin or Rotterdam (the venue of its international première). We must then look
at how Martin deals with history through cinematic means.

For this purpose, I will conduct my analysis by relying on the concept of
postcolonial critique of time as theorized by Filipino scholar Bliss Cua Lim
(specifically regarding the concepts of multiple temporalities, anachronism, and

---

[15] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004, first publ. 1994), p. 254.
[16] See Ileto, 'Knowing America's Colony. A Hundred Years from the Philippine War', *Philippine Studies Occasional Papers Series*, 13 (Manoa: University of Hawaii, 1999).
[17] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 97.
[18] See Teodoro Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996, first publ. 1956); Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975); Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution;* Floro Quibueyn, *A Nation Aborted: Rizal, American Hegemony, and Philippine Nationalism* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999); Ambeth Ocampo, *Bones of Contention: The Bonifacio Lectures* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2001).

untranslatability), while also referring to the works of Chakrabarty and Bhabha.[19] Today's time, as Lim argues, is determined by capitalism. Homogenous time, around which Bergson developed his 'corrective critique', does not exist in nature, but is the result of the world-historical project of modernity that hinged on colonialism.[20] To counter the concept of homogenous time Bergson, and Lim after him, developed the notion of heterogeneous time or 'pure duration', which cannot be spatialized nor calculated. What makes *Autohystoria* stand as a deeply political film is the way in which Martin deals with time in all of its aspects. 'The project of a repossession of the new subjectivity goes through the act of taking back the violent dispossession of time and of itself as a historic being',[21] and *Autohystoria* configures itself as a way of repossessing time through different means. Martin refuses to follow a narrative plot or any dramatization, thus structuring the film around different temporalities, namely the historic temporality, the personal temporality, and the time of the event.

It is in fact immediately noticeable that the Bonifacios' story is set in the present day. The film's main episode is the murder of the two young men, which only happens near the end and is not shown in its full effect (fig. 3). We, as spectators, may identify the guys as the Bonifacio brothers quoted by the text, or with the narrator and his brother, or both. Martin refers both to the historical fact (the Bonifacios' murder) as well as a personal occurrence (his failed correspondence with his brother). The two subjects converge, merging the personal and the political aspect into one. Once again, Martin uses two different image-bearing media: analog video and digital video. But the gap between the two is less evident if we compare it to *Indio Nacional*. What matters more to Martin in this movie is his work on time, or duration, and the ways in which it can bring back from memory a controversial historical episode. There is no re-enactment — such as we see in the silent vignettes in *Indio Nacional* — but rather we see a transposing of history in a contemporary setting. This transposition allows the viewer to connect emotionally with the fate of the two brothers, despite their (lack of) knowledge of Philippine history. The shadowing scene, lasting for thirty-seven minutes and shot on low quality analog video resembles the looks of camera surveillance videos (fig. 4), a kind of image that proliferates in the post-9/11 era and functions as a 'highly disciplinary image'.[22] It is an image that is intimately tied with contemporaneity, translating the Bonifacios' story to our days through the looks and technology of

---

[19] The debate on postcolonial temporality cannot, of course, be analyzed extensively in these pages. An interesting take on its various aspects can be found in Stefan Helgesson, 'Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Anthropology, Postcolonial Theory, and Literary Time', *History and Theory*, 53 (2014), 545–62.
[20] Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 13.
[21] See Marco Scotini, 'Governo del tempo e insurrezione delle memorie', in *Politiche della memoria. Documentario e archivio*, ed. by Elisabetta Galasso and Marco Scotini (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2014), pp. 7–18.
[22] Ivi, p. 12.

a society obsessed with control. The following scenes, where the two are being detained in a police car, implicate the government in the death of the Bonifacios, as well as creating another link with contemporary history.

However, *Autohystoria* should not be reduced to an experiment in mockumentary, since the POV shots that most resemble a documentary aesthetic are linked with the contemplative shots of nature, as well as with the found footage fragments. These brief shards remind us of the author behind all of this, and of the movie's fictional nature. Without them, the snuff-like aesthetics of the stalking, kidnapping and execution of the two brothers (which constitutes the time of the event) along with the unusual length of the shots would end up being a full emotional and emphatic dive.

From a stylistic point of view, *Autohystoria* is made of time-images as theorized by Deleuze, where people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space.[23] The extended duration of the shots functions as an act of resistance in and of itself, something that breaks the empiric running of time, creating a non-chronological time instead. This goes against the homogenous time described by Bergson and Lim. The lack of spoken lines makes *Autohystoria* a movie built predominantly on sound. The refusal to use language to articulate a critique of time is again found in Bergson, since 'all attempts to articulate pure duration are betrayed by language, [which] can only express time insofar as it is past, accomplished, and objectified (time flown, not time flowing)'.[24]

What we call 'mainstream cinema' is also opposed to the concept of pure duration, since it is mainly based on plot, thus revolving around a linear narration (which even if fragmented can be put together in a mathematical way) which we might consider an example of homogenous time.[25] Produced in total independence, shot on a $200 budget in two days, it is a product that avoids the restrictions not only of mainstream cinema but of independent cinema as well. From the point of view of the film's production, Martin is debating his identity from the marginality of experimental cinema. Being a prime product of modernity, cinema is in itself bounded to imperialistic and colonial logics of power and dominance, a legatee of modern homogenous time with a tendency toward the technical denaturalization, homogenization, and standardization of time.[26] Cinema is then an allochronic gesture, a tactic of temporal distancing that translates heterogeneity into the terms of homogeneous time, that which Chakrabarty describes as *anachronism*, the temporal hiatus imposed by colonizers on colonized, the 'not yet' to which the colonized nationalist opposed his or her 'now'.[27] It is exactly this 'not yet' that is manifested explicitly in *Aguinaldo's Navy* (Raymond Ackerman, 1899), the silent film used by Martin at the end of

[23] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 39.
[24] *Translating Time*, p. 17.
[25] See Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
[26] *Translating Time*, p. 43.
[27] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 9.

Autohystoria. This film depicts small fishermen's boats but labels them as general Aguinaldo's navy, thus creating a false image aimed at projecting the Philippines in a defenceless backwardness: '[E]thnographic cinema and photography [is] a "time machine" that transports indigenous subjects into a "displaced temporal realm," converting performers who share a space and time with the filmmaker into native specimens from an earlier age.'[28]

The filtering of history (the Bonifacios' murder) through a contemporary setting (todays Philippines) and by contemporary means (the video-surveillance/digital aesthetic) questions every temporal gap imposed by colonialism. The pure duration engaged by Martin can be read as a '"survival of the past", an ever-accumulating ontological memory that is wholly, automatically, and ceaselessly preserved'.[29] By crafting a *mise-en-scène* that conjoins past and present in the same shot, with its climax during the execution scene where the viewer can finally juxtapose the historical ghost of the Bonifacios on the beaten up flesh of the two guys, Martin resets the colonial distance between what is contemporaneous and what is not in the eyes of the colonizer. *Autohystoria* might thus be read as a refusal of anachronism, of a past left behind, impelling us to think in terms other than the present in order to see beyond seeming obsolescence.[30] The execution of Bonifacio functions as a fundamental point of intersection of the many trajectories that animate and complicate the meaning of Filipino identity and history, an episode that mobilizes the memory of both Spanish and US colonialism, as well as Filipino civil violence. The multiple temporalities triggered by the *mise-en-scène* converges in this crucial moment which, to return to Bhabha, stands at the margins of modernity. It is a '*projective past*', through which:

> [The discourse of modernity] can be inscribed as a historical narrative of alterity that explores forms of social antagonism and contradiction that are not yet properly represented, political identities in the process of being formed, cultural enunciations in the act of hybridity, in the process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences.[31]

The subalternity questioned by Martin is that of the historical self, personified by the Bonifacio brothers, relegated to the marginality of history. It is properly a *time-lag* where 'objectified others may be turned into subjects'.[32] The two protagonists are, in fact, objects at the mercy of unknown perpetrators, who endure their (historical) fate without being the possibility of escape, along with the spectator who is bound to watch, helplessly. However, the representation of their agony, and the *pure duration* of their persecution, is where the postcolonial agency lies:

---

[28] *Translating Time*, p. 87.
[29] Ivi, p. 15.
[30] Ivi, p. 16.
[31] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 361.
[32] Ivi, p. 255.

It is the function of the *lag* to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its 'gesture' [...] This slowing down, or lagging, impels the 'past', projects it, gives its 'dead' symbols the circulatory life of the 'sign' of the present, of passage, the quickening of the quotidian. [...]. *Time-lag keeps alive the making of the past.*[33]

The personification of the Bonifacios as present-day men has a double postcolonial value. On the one hand, the co-presence of past and present underlines that colonial power dynamics are still alive in today's Philippines.[34] On the other hand, this epistemic violence funnels on Andres Bonifacio, the unsung hero of the revolution of humble origins that, as opposed to the *ilustrado* José Rizal which is probably the most famous Filipino historical figure. Bonifacio's beaten and dead body may be a metaphor for the Philippines as a gateway for 'the ghosts of 19th- and early-20th-century aborted or coopted revolutions'.[35] Postcolonial time thus highlights the irreversible hiatus caused by anticolonial revolts in contemporary history. These revolts, despite their negative outcome, have forever disarticulated the idea that time and space in the colonies were qualitatively 'other' compared to the cities.[36] It is precisely on this disarticulation of time that *Autohystoria* is constructed.

Lastly, the silent movies at the end of Martin's movie have a radically different function that those expressly created in *Indio Nacional*. These are three movies shot by an US operator during the Philippines-American war. They are not introduced as such because the images already speak volumes in terms of colonial violence. These images have survived to our days, merely because they belong to the colonizer, while the entirety of Filipino cinema until the 1940s and beyond has been wiped out, destroyed permanently, forgotten. The reason why we can still look at these images is the same reason why Bonifacio was murdered. Only the second film maintains its title, *Aguinaldo's Navy*, and it is the only one depicting actual Filipinos instead of American soldiers. And yet, these images are *anachronized* by the title, which distorts their content and temporally situates it in an aprioristic *before*.

Autohystoria condenses in a simple but disarming way the many heterogeneous flows that inhabit Filipino identity. Among all of his other films, this is the one that uses all of Martin's common interests in their purest way: the conjunction of personal and political; of past and present; of postcolonial questioning and identity fragmentation in a way that is highly anti-cinematic.

---

[33] Ivi, p. 364 [emphasis in the original].
[34] See San Juan, Jr., *Toward Filipino Self Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).
[35] 'Reflections on Academic Cultural Studies', p. 79.
[36] See Stefano Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale. Storia e politica nel presente globale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008), pp. 27–28.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

Where Are My Houses?

Farah Polato, University of Padova

Abstract

In recent years, several audiovisual works made in Italy by (partly or wholly) people hailing from the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia have contributed to a challenge to the notions of displacement, deterritorialization and belonging in contemporary Italian society. They trouble the spaces of contact between people, of experiences and memories, therefore highlighting 'the historical continuum and cultural genealogy' (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, 2012) between the colonial past and the present. By examining displacement and deterritorialization as possible expressions of belonging, rather than polarized fields in relation to it, this essay explores several examples where characters and filmic narrations assume the presence in the 'here', and the possibility to convert the 'here' into 'home', by modifying relations with people and places.

During the last years some audiovisual works, realized by or in collaboration with Africans or Afrodescendants born or living in Italy, have contributed to question the notions of displacement, deterritorialization and belonging in contemporary Italian society.

In this essay, I have selected a cluster of these works made and performed by people hailing from the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Their narrations, marked by the experience and/or the memory of Italian colonization and African diaspora, take part in the Italian postcolonial debate. Referring to the 'dubious spatiality' and the 'problematic temporality' of the term 'postcolonial' in Ella Shohat's *Notes on the 'Post Colonial'*, Lombardi-Diop and Romeo state that in the Italian context, differently from others countries, the term 'postcolonial' is 'beginning to be employed to explore the historical continuum and cultural genealogy that link the colonial past to the contemporary Italy', both in order to reposition colonial history and its legacy, and to underline the continuity existing between the colonial era and the present in term of relations of power. One of the issues of concern is to question and redefine Italian cultural history and national identity.[1]

---

[1] Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 'Defining Postcolonialism', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo

Migration is a central topic in the postcolonial landscape, involving both the heritage of colonialism and the persistence of a colonial condition reinstated in the postcolonial era.[2] In accordance with it, a specific interest has been devoted to the representation of the immigrant in Italian cinema and media. This investigation, variously imbricating national identity, race questions and racism, is recently having a dialogue with the growing audiovisual production by filmmakers and authors from the so-called 'second generation' or 'new Italians'.[3] If on the one hand this production corroborates and validates the stratified field delineated above, on the other it contributes to expand the spectrum concerning individual experiences and positions. Additionally, within the frame of the imbalance of power, these audiovisual narratives highlight the complexity of an emotional landscape and its controversial dynamics issued by the different ways to stay and live in Italy: confined in reception centers, born in Italy, living in Italy for years or generations...

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–2. For a detailed review on postcolonial studies in the Italian context: see ivi, pp. 11–13, and *Postcolonialitalia* <http://www.postcolonialitalia.it/index.php?lang=en&Itemid=156> [accessed 20 April 2017]. For the relation between film and postcolonial studies, with specific attention to the Italian landscape, see *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. by Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013); *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Aine O'Healy, 'Postcolonial Theory and Italy's "Multicultural" Cinema', in *The Italian Cinema Book*, ed. by Peter Bondanella (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 295–302.

[2] See Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa — Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2014); *Italy In&Out. Migrazioni nel/del cinema italiano?*, ed. by Vito Zagarrio, *Quaderni del CSCI*, 8 (2012); Sandro Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale. Storia e politica nel presente globale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008).

[3] For a critical approach to the authority of Western cinematic realism in the construction of ethnic and racial others, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994). On Italian cinema: Aine O'Healy, 'Race, Ethnicity, and the Dream of Multiculturalism: From *Pummarò* to *L'articolo 2*', *Romance Languages Annual*, 12 (2002), 232–38; and 'Mediterranean Passages: Abjection and Belonging in Contemporary Italian Cinema', *California Italian Studies*, 1.1 (2010), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2qh5d59c> [accessed 20 April 2017]; Derek Duncan, 'Italy's Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation', *Italian Studies*, 63.2 (2008), 195–211; *From Terrone to Extracomunitario: New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema*, ed. by Grace Russo Bullaro (Leicester: Troubador, 2010); *The Cinema of Italian Migration*, ed. by Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013); Vito Zagarrio, 'Diversamente emarginati? Personaggi migranti nel cinema italiano contemporaneo a confronto', in *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. by Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 171–88; *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver and Federico Faloppa (Oxford and Bern: Lang, 2015). On national identity and race-question, see *Il colore della razza*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani Romeo (Florence: Le Monnier, 2015). On the new landscape, see also Alessandro Jedlowsky, 'Una nuova voce nel cinema italiano? L'emergenza di forme di cinema migrante in Italia', in *Camera Africa. Classici, noir, Nollywood e la nuova generazione del cinema delle Afriche*, ed. by Vanessa Lanari (Verona: Cierre, 2011), pp. 69–76; Farah Polato, 'Il cinema, il postcoloniale e il nuovo millennio nel panorama italiano', *Aut Aut*, 364 (October–December 2014), 173–82. For the effect on practices, see the new law on Italian cinema and its criteria on funding audiovisual productions (Legge 14 novembre 2016, n. 220 — Disciplina del cinema e dell'audiovisivo). Concerning representation and self-representation: Alice Cati and Maria Francesca Piredda, 'Racconti dal mare. La difficile rappresentazione del Sé nelle testimonianze mediali dei migranti', *Bianco e Nero*, 582–83 (May–December 2015), 126–33.

Several contributions have investigated the common features of the cinematic productions by filmmakers from different originating and receiving countries, marked both in a thematic and stylistic level by figures of exile and diaspora, such as the liminal panic, the feelings of being confined within alien borders, illuminating that domestic spaces are also haunted by various modalities of foreignness within national borders.[4] Recently other perspectives of research have looked at displacement and deterritorialization as possible expressions of belongingness, rather than polarized fields in relation to it. From this perspective, cultural geography provides useful insights. In an article significantly titled *Searching for Belonging: An Analytical Framework* (2010), Marco Antonsich provides an extensive and systematic review on the Anglophone literature across academic disciplines. Drawing on the definition given by Elspeth Probyn's in *Outside Belonging* (1996), the author affirms that belongingness, as the term suggests, should be regarded in itself as an instable and dynamic condition, a 'longing', always negotiated and projected on somewhere / something else.[5] In his analysis, organized around the two main intertwined axes of place-belongingness and politics of belonging, he assumes that 'contemporary societies are characterized by the co-presence of a plurality of forms of belonging'. Promoting the mapping of the different ways in which belongingness are acted and performed, he finally exhorts us to focus on the plurality of geographical scales at which belonging can articulate itself, both at a national and transnational level. If the interrelation between the 'here' and 'there' of belonging has been already investigated, he argues, the different modalities in which the 'here' displays itself in all its multiple scales and in their connections are still largely unexplored.

In my article, I will question several examples in which the characters, claiming their presence 'here' and their right to convert 'here' into 'home', envisage the possibility of modifying their relations with people and places. Belongingness is here considered, in a very extensive way, as the 'longing' to change these relations, prompted by personal feelings and/or material circumstances. Filmic narrations by people hailing from the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia configure here spaces of troubling contacts between people, experiences and memories which claim to be negotiated. In their 'searching of belonging' the above mentioned films show on the one hand conditions for virtuous dynamics, and on the other hand strategies to encourage positive emotional connections towards one or more places. Indeed, some of these audiovisual narrations highlight how the search of belonging frequently concerns simultaneously a plurality of spaces, differently articulated in multiple scales: nation, city, territory,

---

[4] Among them, Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 3; *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, ed. by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikò Imre and Aine O'Healy (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

[5] Marco Antonsich, 'Searching of Belonging. An Analytical Framework', *Geography Compass*, 4.6 (2010), 644–59. On multiscalar approach, see also Tania Rossetto, 'Performing the Nation between Us: Urban Photographic Sets with Young Migrants', *Fennia: International Journal of Geography*, 193.2 (2015), 165–84.

quartier, house, in their interconnections with the hosting and/or receiving-place, the birthplace, the place left behind, the 'here' and the 'there'.

All the films considered in my essay are characterized by a cooperative work, and realized by minor productions and/or by social/cultural networks. Neglected by the mainstream market, they are distributed and shown in Festivals and digital networks.

The diptych consisting of *Auló* (Id., Ermanno Guida, Graziano Chiscuzzu and Simone Brioni, 2009–2012) and *The Fourth Road* (*La quarta via*, Ermanno Guida, Graziano Chiscuzzu and Simone Brioni, 2009–2012). The first film features the writer Ribka Sibhatu, of Eritrean origins, and the second one the writer Kaha Mohamed Aden, of Somalian origins; both authors contributed to the screenplays written by Simone Brioni, who coordinated the projects as well. The production company Redigital and the distributor Kimera Film were set up by some members of the crew. *The Fourth Road* was created thanks to the support of Pavia University and is part of a research project on social-media communication.

The work of the Ethiopian director Dagmawi Yimer, deriving from his personal experience at the school for migrants Asinitas-onlus, was developed through the activities of the Archivio delle Memorie Migranti (AMM) foundation as well as various ongoing collaborations, such as those with Zalab, Andrea Segre and Giulio Cederna. In my article, specific attention will be paid to: *Like a Man on Earth* (*Come un uomo sulla terra*, Andrea Segre and Riccardo Biadene, 2008), produced by Asinitas Onlus and Zalab, *C.A.R.A Italia* (2010), and *Nothing but the Sea* (*Soltanto il mare*, Dagmawi Yimer, Fabrizio Barraco, Giulio Cederna, 2011), which was made with the support of Giulio Cederna and Fabrizio Barraco on direction, screenplay, photography and sound, and was produced by AMM.

Asmarina. Voices and images of a postcolonial heritage (*Asmarina. Voci e volti di un'eredità postcoloniale*, 2015) was realized by Alan Maglio and Medhin Paolos, who was born in Italy from Eritrean parents, in collaboration with Docucity Festival of Milan. The film is inspired by the 1983 work of photojournalist Lalla Golderer and Vito Scifo, *Stranieri a Milano*. Focusing on the last fifty years of the *habesha* comunity in Milan, *Asmarina* is the result of a year and a half of archival research and interviews. The movie is part of the *Asmarina project*, which includes a photographic book of private and public materials gathered during the shooting of the film.[6]

---

[6] About *Auló* and *The Fourth Road*: Simone Brioni, 'Memory, Belonging and the Right for Representation: Questions of "Home" in Kaha Mohamed Aden's *Fra-intendimenti*', in *Shifting and Shaping a National Identity: Transnational Writers and Pluriculturalism in Italy Today*, ed. by Grace Russo Bullaro and Elena Benelli (Leicester: Troubador, 2014), pp. 23–42; Simone Brioni, 'Un pas que ma jambe se refuse à faire: expériences collaboratives et croisement de regards sur le colonialisme italien', in *De la voix à l'auteur. De l'auteur à la voix*, ed. by Paola Cabot-Ranzini (Paris: Karthala, 2016), pp. 173–201; Franca Sinopoli, 'Storia e memorie non condivise: il contrappunto dell'identità e la cultura italiana contemporanea', in *Identità, migrazioni e postcolonialismo in Italia. A partire da Edward Said*, ed. by Bruno Brunetti, Roberto Derobertis (Bari: Progedit, 2014),

Setting Another History: On Forgotten and Missed Encounters

The aim shared by all the selected films is the reconfiguration of the historical narration and the promotion of a cultural turn after the historical one led by historians, such as Nicola Labanca quoted in a caption of *The Fourth Road*. The opposition to the collective process of removal of the colonial past and the effort done to produce a deconstruction of colonial rhetoric ('Italians are good people') are adopted by most of the films here considered. Nevertheless, these two essential steps appear useless if the epistemological approach is not able to save the relational dimension and to consider the 'other' as part of our own history. Obviously, this process is not intended to remove the ongoing relation of power produced by the colonial order and the present mobility.[7]

This perspective arises at the very beginning of *Like a Man on Earth* as well as of *C.A.R.A Italia*.

Before introducing those who reached Italy from the Horn of Africa after a nightmarish journey through the Libyan desert, Dagmawi Yimer, who also acts in

---

pp. 135–49 (pp. 147–49); Itala Vivan, 'Postcolonial Discourses in Italy', *Borderlands*, 12.2 (2013) [accessed 20 April 2017]; Clotilde Barbarulli, 'Kaha Mohamed Aden e Ribka Sibhatu in dialogo con Clotilde Barbarulli', in *Poetiche politiche. Narrazioni dell'(im)politico: figure e figurazioni della prossimità nell'intercultura di genere*, ed. by Cristina Bracchi (Padua: Poligrafo, 2011), pp. 157–75; Danyel Ghidini, 'Per un nuovo orientamento. I documentari *La quarta via* e *Auló*', *Affrica*, 12 September 2012 (<http://affrica.org/per-un-nuovo-orientamento-i-documentari-la-quarta-via-e-aulo> [accessed 7.5.2017]; Daniele Comberiati, 'Raccontare l'Italia postcoloniale: note sparse di identità e cultura nei documentari *Auló* e *La quarta via*', *Nazione Indiana*, 14 December 2012. On Dagmawi Yimer: *Come un uomo sulla terra*, ed. by Marco Carsetti and Alessandro Triulzi (Rome: Infinito, 2009); Farah Polato, 'Rachid, Theo, Dagmawi e gli altri. Voci e forme di un nuovo cinema', in *L'Africa in Italia*, pp. 139–56; Simona Wright, 'Lampedusa's Gaze: Messages from the Outpost of Europe', *Italica*, 91.9 (2014), 775–802; Federica Mazzara, 'Spaces of Visibility for the Migrants of Lampedusa: The Counter Narrative of the Aesthetic Discourse', *Italian Studies: Cultural Studies*, 70.4 (2015), 449–64; Aine O'Healy, 'Imagining Lampedusa', in *Italian Mobilities*, ed. By Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Hom (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 152–73; Derek Duncan, '"Il *clandestino* è l'ebreo di oggi": Imprints of the Shoah on Migration to Italy', *Quest: Issues in contemporary Jewish History*, 10 (2016), 60–88; Elena Korzhenevich, 'Changing the Narrative of the World: Interview with Gabriele Del Grande and Dagmawi Yimer' and Alessandro Triulzi 'Empowering Migrants' Voices and Agency in Postcolonial Italy', *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, 10.1 (2016), 107–14 (pp. 58–70). On *Asmarina*: Camilla Hawthorne, 'Asmarina: Postcolonial Heritages', *Doppiozero*, 13 May 2016, <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/why-africa/asmarina-post-colonial-heritages> [accessed 20 April 2017]; Leonardo De Franceschi, FCAAAL 2015: *Asmarina*, *CinemAfrica. Afriche e diaspore nel cinema*, 10 May 2015, <http://www.cinemafrica.org/page.php?article1549> [accessed 20 April 2017]; Igiaba Scego, 'Un angolo di Eritrea a Milano', *Internazionale*, 5 May 2015, <http://www.internazionale.it/opinione/igiaba-scego/2015/05/05/eritrea-milano-asmarina> [accessed 20 April 2017]. For an overview see the site *Asmarina project*, <http://asmarinaproject.com/it/project/> [accessed 20 April 2017].

[7] See in this regard the archive project *Immaginari (post)coloniali. Public and Private Memories of Italian Colonialism*, in Giulia Grechi, '"Le storie più belle sono raccontate da cose, cose che stanno morendo": immaginari (post)coloniali, memorie pubbliche e private del colonialismo italiano', *From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities*, 1 (2016), 139–50 <http://Europeansouth.Postcolonialitalia.it> [accessed 01 August 2016].

the film, recalls the historical ties between Italy and these countries, considering other possible trajectories which are not limited to the present 'migration pressure': 'I think I should start telling this story going back to 100 years ago when our great-grandfathers met each other…because of the war, when Italy tried to invade Lybia first and then Ethiopia. But now…'.

At the visual level, archive images relating to the Italian colonial enterprise, which has been removed or differently narrated by the Italian institutional history, follow the shots of Yimer looking at the coming and going of people in a bus station in Rome. This editing makes images of the past enter the present. They mingle with the space of the bus station and become closer.

C.A.R.A Italia is filmed at the Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo (reception center for asylum seekers) in Castel Nuovo di Porto, Rome. In a dialogue, the refugees express their sufferance caused by exile and the feeling of being uprooted as well as by immigration policies and perceived hostility from Italian people. One of the refugees points out that the relationship between Somalia and Italy dates back to the past, in the colonial context, and that this relationship has been shaping life of both countries and peoples for a long time. He claims the existence of a relational network between Somalia and Italy 'that cannot be forgotten'.

The relational dimension is also relevant in *Nothing but the Sea*, in which Yimer comes back to Lampedusa where he arrived as refugee. His coming back, his 'return', is the answer to the need to recover the missed encounter with the island and its inhabitants because of the migration procedures that expropriate people from their individual and relational agency.

Proximity appears in this regard as a recurring reference and a discursive strategy.

Reconfiguring Spaces and Emotional Landscapes: 'We Are Old Neighbours'

In *Asmarina*, some characters claim the cultural ties and similarities between Italians and Ethiopians. This notion of proximity is expressed in different ways, as something both material and symbolic. It seems to me to be a central issue in the narratives considered in this essay: proximity as affinity (cultural affinities), as neighbourhood, coexistence and familiarity. It looks at an idea of relational community.

The period considered by *Asmarina*, which covers a long period in history and more than one generation, from the fascist colonization up to the present time, moves against that representation of the presence of the *habesha* community in Milan and in Italy which relegates it to some specific historical episodes, such as colonization or the so called 'migrant emergency' of today.

This notion of familiarity and proximity also works at the visual level. As Medhin Paulos remarks, *Asmarina* is not 'just a story about Ethiopians and Eritreans, it was intended to be a story about Milan.' *Asmarina* does not reveal a 'hidden' city, rather it makes visible what already exists, replacing it in our

urban imaginary, 'rediscovering' the urban landscape.[8] The interaction between the temporal and visual levels shows streets, shops, houses, public gardens, buildings, restaurants, *quartiers* shaped by the women and men who lived and are living there, according to a familiar proximity.

In *Asmarina* the belonging questions different places and communities. Where is the 'here' in *Asmarina*? 'Here' is Italy and Milan from where the characters speak, where they live, but in their narrations the boundaries between 'here' and 'there' are sometimes clear, sometimes not so evident (see the reference to the Bologna Festival). It is interesting to underline that even the definition of *habesha* is differently claimed by the characters, depending on their age or personal biography, and refers to cultural definition or affective experiences.

From this perspective the cross-cutting technique in these films has a peculiar relevance, specifically in *Auló* and in *The Fourth Road*. *Auló* takes its title from Eritrean oral poems performed in public events. During the movie, Ribka Sibhatu plays a number of *Auló*, included some composed by her relatives. She speaks about her life and the personal and national events that in the 1980s forced her to leave her birthplace. Italy is concerned in all of these levels: as the nation that colonized Eritrea and as the nation in which Sibhatu lives. She describes herself as a sycamore with three roots. The first one is Eritrea, the land of the ancestors and the birthplace. The second is Italy because of Rome, the city where she is living, and because of the Italian language, the very first foreign language learnt and conceived as her own. Finally, the third root is France, the country where she was recognized as an European citizen for the very first time and where she gave birth to her daughter. The belongingness concerns here the policies of belonging (to be recognized as citizen) as well as the personal affective realm.

The film is structured upon two audiovisual series: the first one is marked by the presence of Ribka Sibhatu, the second one by that of Ermanno Guida, who is shown during his urban crossing in the city of Rome. Roman landscape and architectures accompany Sibhatu's speeches and are always relevant to them. Sometimes they are representative of Roman/Italian imperial/imperialist history (e.g. the via Appia and the Vittoriano); sometimes they refer to personal memories, such as a church attended by Eritrean people in Rome. The sound of prayers coming out of the religious building reminds Sibhatu of a catholic church in Eritrea, which is the starting point for talking about the three major religions in Eritrea.

Yet Rome is also 'the other Rome', the 'Little Rome' as Asmara was named during the fascist colonization. Introduced by Sibhatu this line is developed in the audiovisual series characterized by the presence of Ermanno Guida. It shows buildings, shops, cinemas and all sort of Italian architectures shaping Asmara's urban landscape, as a brand and legacy of the Italian colonization. In a sort of reverse-shot Ermanno Guida, walking around Rome, reveals the persistence of

---

[8] See Hawthorne. The statement was released at a screening of the film at Rome's Palladium theatre in March (quoted in Hawthorne).

colonial marks: among them, Piazza dei Cinquecento, consecrated to the Italian soldiers dead in the battle of Dogali in 1887 and the relative commemorative stele, now located elsewhere, or Amba Alagi road.

In *The Fourth Road*, Kaha Mohamed Aden is questioned about forms of definition and self-definition. She rejects for herself the definition of 'italo-somala', and its additional meaning. At the beginning of the film, the over-titles, written in first person, state the date and place of birth (Mogadishu, 1966), the place and period of residence (Pavia, since 1987), finally her own name and profession ('I'm a writer'). Two spatial series compose the film, one related to the city of Mogadishu and the other one to the city of Pavia. In some cases, Mogadishu stands for Somalia.

The title *The Fourth Road* refers to the four roads drawn by Kaha Mohamed Aden in different colors representing the history of Mogadishu, her place of birth and the capital of Somalia. The history of Mogadishu is conceived as a biography of the city, with the different ages of its life shaping its character: the green one, which is also the oldest, is the Islamic soul, the black recalls the fascist period, the red is evocative of the socialist dream, which spread after the independence of the nation. All these roads concern specific *quartiers*, associated with these historical events as well as to the writer and her family life. The fourth road is grey: this is the road of the so-called 'Signori della guerra' (Men of war), referring to the civil war which broke out after the collapse of Mohamed Siad Barre's government in 1991.

The starting point of *The Fourth Road* is indeed the search of a lost place, the city of Mogadishu, 'a place I have loved, a place I have known', the belonginess of which seemed obvious to Aden. It is a city which has been both materially and psychologically lost, destroyed during the civil war. To tell personal tales about Mogadishu is for Kaha Mohamed Aden a way to make the city live once more after its destruction. Nevertheless, the reconstruction and the narration of Mogadishu, the old home, can restart only in Pavia, when the city becomes a 'new home', thanks to the acquired citizenship (politics of belonging) and a restored affective landscape (friends, love).

From Maps to Mapping

Maps are a constant presence in the films analysed, playing different functions.[9] Some of them visualize dislocations, such as the migratory routes (e.g. *Like a Man on Earth*) or the geographical position of nations/cities/places involved in the discourse (e.g. the map of the Horn of Africa on the atlas shown by Asli Haddas in *Asmarina*). The people interviewed in *Auló*, for example, do not know exactly where Eritrea is, nor are they aware of the colonial ties with this part of Africa. In

[9] For an extensive analysis, see Tania Rossetto, 'The Map, the Other and the public visual image', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 16.4 (2015), 465–91.

this perspective, maps also become a concrete object that symbolically contrast the removal of the colonial past and simultaneously highlight the ideologically and power-related practice of mapping. In *Auló*, again, the urban map of Rome points to the persistence of colonial rhetoric in the urban fabric, disclosed by the names of streets and places. Power-related maps, such as the colonial maps exposed at the Associazione Nazionale Reduci Rimpatriati d'Africa — A.N.R.R.A, appear in *Asmarina*. Nevertheless, the aerial view of Asmara on a serving tray at an Eritrean restaurant seems to display a sentimental feeling, an emotional connection with the country.[10]

In *The Fourth Road* the map in the atlas shows us that 'Mogadishu does indeed exist', that the beloved city (and Somalia as whole) is not an 'invented', phantasmatic or 'dreamt' space. Moving from this anchor point and from her new house, Pavia-Italy, Kaha Mohamed Aden is able to draw and shape her own colored maps, originating from interconnected geographies. In so doing she takes her biographical and emotional space back, but she also creates a new space of belonging, a new house in which to live, linking past with present in an experiential dimension.

In *C.A.R.A Italia* too, self-made maps come into view. They are assembled with colored strings, visualizing the itineraries that refugees must complete to reach strategic places, such as the route from the reception center to a school. Other colored maps display instead the personal itineraries conceived in order to discover a new, unknown space. In this regard, it is relevant to note that the action of walking through the city appears as a way to embody this. In *Aulò* Ermanno Guida's promenades throughout Rome display the persistence of colonial rhetoric, but they also reveal the city, through its architecture and through people who live there, as the result of its history, relations and influences: 'everything I see around here takes me to a faraway place' which made Rome the city we know today.[11] These are embedded, dynamic maps.

In the last sequence of *Auló*, Ermanno Guida, a 'non-Roman' living in Rome, claims that 'Roma isn't in the genes'. Echoing Igiaba Scego's novel *La mia casa è dove sono* ([*My Home is Where I Am*], 2011) he affirms that Rome belongs instead to the people who live there. According to the narrative strategies and practices developed in the analyzed films, he reminds us that belonging is not a problem which concerns only specific people: it concerns a network of relations. In that sense, belonging is 'our' affair.

---

[10] See Hawthorne for this detail.
[11] Regarding promenade as performative act in a postcolonial perspective, see bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

New Studies

The Modernist Roots of the Mind-Game Film:
The Example of an Italian Puzzle

Angela Bianca Saponari, Università degli Studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro'

Abstract

This essay contributes to the analysis of a phenomenon that became diffused between the 1990s and the 2000s: the mind-game film. It focuses on the destabilization of the classic story in the light of new digital technologies, providing original strategies of production and new possibilities of fruition. There are several studies of the different typologies of mind-game films, of the nature of narrative developments introduced by various directors, and of the technical aspects relating to the psychological dynamics in the image-narrator-spectator relationship. However, there are fewer studies of the modernist roots of this phenomenon. Elsaesser locates the mind-game film within the same category of European subjective cinema during the 1960s. In other words, it constitutes a meta-cinematographic phenomenon, whose origins lie in the European vanguard modalities of experimentation. Following Elsaesser's theories, I suggest that it is possible to study the parallelisms and elements of disruption between that subjective cinema and these new forms of experimentation, which appear to conciliate commercial needs and authorial perspectives. In particular, I seek to reveal the traces of this relationship in the cinema of Elio Petri, using Lev Manovich's category of the 'narrative database'.

Mind-Game Film: A Theoretical Framework

A new film typology captured the attention of both the public and critics between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, within a Hollywood system that was actively seeking to innovate, and find stories that would meet the needs of a modern, changed audience. In this period, the majors appeared increasingly favourable towards narrative experimentation, having perceived a growing audience that was interested in non-conventional approaches to narration. In order to capture this new interest, the industry took influence from television, science fiction, comics and videogames.[1]

---

[1] See David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 74.

At the same time, several auteurs sought to establish a coherent visual language that matched this moment, and specifically the innovative digital technologies that were emergent.

This tendency led to the production of what Thomas Elsaesser labels 'mind-game films'.[2] With this definition, he refers to a heterogeneous group of movies characterized by a similar tendency to carry the characters of the story (and the spectators too) through the twists and turns of complex, enigmatic, and labyrinthine narrations. In view of their radical approaches to narrative, these movies cannot be included within the traditional artistic, production and genre categories, instead belonging to a sort of 'border zone', where auteur, independent and mainstream cinema converge.

In most instances, the specificity of the mind-game film consists of a precise distinction between this kind of movie and traditional cinematographic storytelling, especially as many of the films demonstrate complex and unstructured narrative. This approach was influenced by two factors: on the one hand, auteur cinema of the 1960s, whose experimental tendency was reinterpreted and made systematic in mind-game films; on the other, the social and cultural context in which the mind-game films developed, between the 1990s and the 2000s.

Referring to the category of narrative database introduced by Lev Manovich, Allan Cameron discusses modular narratives when categorizing the typical plot complexity of puzzle movies.[3] Indeed, their main features include the tendency to dismantle narratives into separate segments that are presented in complex combinations which, according to Cameron's analysis — and, as will be illustrated later, as per Marsha Kinder's trans-formalist theories — recall 'the cinematic experimentation of European art cinema'.[4] From this perspective, 'modular narrative goes beyond the classical deployment of flashback, offering a series of disarticulated narrative pieces, often arranged in radically non-chronological ways via flash-forwards, overt repetition or a destabilization of the relationship between present and past'.[5]

---

[2] See Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Mind-Game Film', in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. by Warren Buckland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 13–41. See also the definition of the 'psychological puzzle film' by Elliot Panek in 'The Poet and the Detective: Defining the Psychological Puzzle Film', *Film Criticism*, 31.1-2 (2006), 62–88.

[3] Among the features of mind-game movies is the introduction of the 'puzzle plot', that is, a plot in which 'the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing; the events are not simply interwoven, but *entangled*'. Warren Buckland, 'Introduction: Puzzle Plots', in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. by Warren Buckland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 1–12 (p. 3) [emphasis in the original].

[4] See Allan Cameron, *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 1 and following. Marsha Kinder has developed an interesting stylistic legacy and narrative analysis of Luis Buñuel's films and their relationship with contemporary cinema. See Marsha Kinder, 'Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever: Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative', *Film Quarterly*, 55.4 (2002), 2–15. See also Marsha Kinder, 'Narrative Equivocations between Movies and Games', in *The New Media Book*, ed. by Dan Harries (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 119–32 (p. 119). On the theorization of database narrative, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

[5] Cameron, p. 1.

A Perspective of Analysis: Paradigmatic Roots of 'Mind Cinema'

Two main features emerge in mind-game films, which are deeply interconnected. The first is the tendency to situate the film in the 'border zone' that divides auteur and commercial cinema. The second is complex and unstructured forms of narration, whose purpose is to carry the spectators through the twists and turns of labyrinthine and complex stories.[6]

The first feature is perhaps the most interesting, as well as the least studied by scholars. In other words, it is important to trace the paradigmatic roots of the mind-game film, here considered not as a separate entity but rather as a phenomenon linked to the evolution of a shared practice of cinema that crosses different areas (genre, auteur, etc.) and seeks to awaken spectators from the torpidity of the conventional movie. I would like to propose the mind-game film as the most recent landing place of the aesthetic modality called 'mind-cinema'.

Elsaesser and Hagener frame mind-game films in the meta-cinematographic typology of the mental image, where the mind, cinema and conscience converge. As a consequence the spectator becomes aware of the very act of watching, and of the processes of their own conscience. This occurs similarly in several films released during the 1960s — from Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*, 1963) to Federico Fellini's *8½* (*Otto e mezzo*, 1963) — where 'a given scene suggests there may be an additional level of reflexivity, and this can be deducted not from the presence of mirrors or *mise-en-abîme* because they are pure cerebral activity, a "virtuality" in a Deleuzian sense'.[7]

Alain Resnais's and Godard's formal experiments represent the most eminent instances of *cinéma désordonné*. The majority of their films address a completely different kind of spectator. However, while Resnais and Godard counted on culturally-aware spectators — 'for whom experimentation was almost a norm, or at least something expected'[8] — instances of non-linear narrative in recent American cinema seek ultimately to shock a *mass* public, leading it outside of the conventional and reassuring logic of Hollywood narration. This way, formal experimentation that was once restricted to a small, elite audience 'has moved out into the more volatile region of popular culture'.[9]

Matthew Campora's reflections may be useful to understand this phenomenon. Campora states that the merging of auteur cinema and commercial necessities is nothing new; even in the 1930s and 1940s, when German directors came to Hollywood, they ended up incorporating elements from the expressionist

---

[6] A clear example is David Fincher's cinema, quite familiar with that 'grey zone' between commercial and artistic and which may represent the most suitable environment for the mind-game film at the beginning of the millennium.

[7] See Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York, London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 168–76.

[8] See David Denby, 'The New Disorder: Adventures in Film Narrative', *New Yorker*, 5 March 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/03/05/the-new-disorder> [accessed 17 June 2017].

[9] Ibidem.

aesthetic into studio productions. Moreover, in the 1960s and in the 1970s, several young Hollywood directors adopted and adapted the expressive experimentations of various international new waves. However, the innovation of such appropriations in more recent years lies in the fact that manifold narrative structures are found in films that are unusually challenging for a mass audience. This element shows how in cinema, as in other mass culture media, the line between experimental aesthetic and commercial genres has become increasingly blurred.[10] Campora's analysis starts with the study of Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). Using Janet Murray's definition, Campora situates the film within the *multiform narratives* model. Multiform narrative cinema is generally characterized by the presence of different diegetic levels. This multiplicity not only affects the structural part of the plot, but also its ontological side. In other words, in this cinema not only do the plotlines of several characters cross and different spatial-temporal levels alternate, but it also offers a story which develops while crossing alternative and parallel realities. This narrative model, explored in genres like science-fiction, horror and fantasy, recurs quite frequently in auteur cinema, where it is utilized to represent the inner world of a character, and is often opposed to their phenomenal reality. Some examples are: Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920), Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1959) and Federico Fellini's *8½*.

In many mind-game films, as in European auteur cinema, there are different levels to the stories and the meta-diegetic dimension is accentuated: secondary narrations proliferate.[11] Here any *narrative in the narrative* must be reconnected to the meta-diegetic level, which can be characterized by different strategies that transcend significantly the mere representation of characters' memories, dreams or hallucinations.[12]

The idea is to overcome the contraposition between modernist and postmodernist paradigm; in light of the reflections made here, it is evidently possible to identify similar processes to those of the mind-game film in other filmographies of the past.

---

[10] Matthew Campora, 'Art Cinema and New Hollywood: Multiform Narrative and Sonic Metalepsis in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7.2 (2009), 119–31 (p. 122).

[11] The reference here is to Genette's distinctions of the three levels of story — extra-diegetic, intra-diegetic, and meta-diegetic. The centre of the extra-diegetic level is a narration determined by the combination of *mise en scène* and elements of cinematic grammar; central to the intra-diegetic level is the primary narration of the movie; and the meta-diegetic level refers to the secondary narration generated at the intra-diegetic level. Gérard Genette, *Figures III. Discours du récit. Essai méthode* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).

[12] Campora, p. 124.

An Interpretative Model: The Modernist Experimentation of the Narrative Database

As stated previously, the roots of the image-mind relationship are connected to auteur film, and can also be observed in European experimentation and vanguard movements. In the same way, several films characterized by a complex narrative structure and playful/disturbing dynamics in their relationship with the spectator — produced in countries with deep political and social crises or historical moments defined by the push for change — can be considered as similar ancestors of mind-game films.

Many earlier films reveal how the need to go beyond a mimetic relationship with objective reality has been central in every historical period and not necessarily linked to digital technologies. The aim of these experiments has always been to reflect on the nature of conscience, our approach to the world and the exploration of individual perceptive conditions. Let us turn to one such example.

Marsha Kinder sought to identify several tendencies of contemporary narration in the experiments of the original and complex director that is Luis Buñuel. Kinder outlines her intention as follows: 'I want to propose a new context — the convergence between cinema and new digital media — to explore Buñuel's legacy for conceptualizing interactive database narratives and their discreet pleasure.'[13] She argues that filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Peter Greenaway and Raúl Ruiz, 'have already chosen to refigure the lines of their earlier experimentation through this analogy with new digital interactive forms'.[14] However, the modern auteur Buñuel produced a narrative revolution: 'his radical experimentation provides equally productive strategies for advancing the art of interactive narrative in new digital forms'.[15] She continues, 'Buñuel's films are full of surprising ruptures that reveal the radical potential of the underlying database structure that usually lies hidden behind the story.'[16] The radical experience of Surrealism and Freud's theories are just some of the elements that add to the narrative database Kinder talks about.

In addition, one can observe audio-visual heritages, intertextual contaminations, symbolic objects and a personal vision of society and its values. With this in mind, Kinder refers to 'interactive database narratives',[17] which, in the case of Buñuel's movies, express their potential on different levels:

1. On the level of narrative drive: the reliance on incongruous objects or *hot spots*, rather than montage, as the primary means of navigating from one scene or discursive level to another;

[13] Kinder, p. 3.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Ivi, p. 7.
[17] See Manovich.

2. On the level of characterization: the use of puppet-like *avatars* who are not restricted by traditional notions of consistency, psychology, or narrative logic, but whom we nonetheless find fascinating, engaging, and illuminating;

3. On the level of plot: the creation of a *narrative field* where story possibilities seem limitless, where randomness, repetition, and interruptions are rampant, and where search engines are motored by desire.[18]

These three levels can be reconnected to the playful-narrative strategies of the mind-game film. Thus, bearing Kinder's considerations in mind too, I have identified a group of Italian films — directed by auteurs who opt for complexity, forcing the spectator into a never-ending reconsideration of the narrative element (and not only) — which perfectly fit into the above-mentioned definition of mind-game film, given by Elsaesser.

The cinematic device is here used as a tool through which mental states can be made visible, rather than merely offer a privileged perspective on the world. In the years of the political crisis of a population shocked by conformism and tragedies, specific Italian movies — though detached from the objective reality — let that perspective be absorbed in playful and complex diegetic processes in which the spectators could lose themselves and all the coordinates.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elio Petri, Francesco Rosi and Marco Ferreri forced spectators to re-organize their mental processes due to the recurrent diegetic deviations in the plots of *The 10th Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965), *Dillinger Is Dead* (*Dillinger è morto*, 1969), *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (*Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975), *Todo Modo* (1976) and *Illustrious Corpses* (*Cadaveri eccellenti*, 1976). However, they also invite spectators to review their relationship with media devices (think of the dimension of play in *The 10th Victim*, which perfectly introduces the presence of the videogames in the cinema of convergence), and reconsider the dynamics of power (for example in *Todo Modo*, the mocking of Democrazia Cristiana party and the interference of the Church in the State's affairs is highly symbolic).

On the narrative level, character and plot development in the movies of such directors (just as in Buñuel's cinema) outline a disruptive, expressive potentiality. Discussing Buñuel's films, at a certain point Kinder raises the following question about interactive storytelling: 'How can we create engaging interactive narratives that provide an array of pleasures both emotional and intellectual, that don't have clear-cut beginnings or endings are full of interruptions, and that still offer a satisfying sense of drama and still make us want to return to them again and again?' She answers that some 'films provide compelling answers to these questions, primarily because [Buñuel] enables us to see what's at stake ideologically in his formal ruptures from conventional practices. This is the kind of perception that is sorely lacking in

---

[18] Kinder, p. 8 [emphasis in the original].

cyberspace, despite all of the utopian rhetoric about self-authoring and its so-called democratic decentering of master narratives and power.'[19]

It is possible to apply Kinder's strategies of analysis to the expressive potential of narrative databases in other filmographies, too. For instance, in France, Alain Resnais — a director that was particularly interested in the notion of catalogue as an elaboration of historical memory — created a kind of cinema that resembles the tiles of a work-in-progress mosaic built on the impossibility to escape from the oblivion, an 'interactive cinema',[20] where the spectator is invited to participate in the construction of the sense of the narration.

What Resnais does with stock images — consider the gigantic labyrinth in the 1956 movie *Toute la mémoire du monde*, the incipit of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), or the extreme experimentation of 1993's *Smoking/No Smoking*[21] — perfectly exemplifies the idea already developed by the director himself in his early short films, that moreover characterizes many other European films.

A Case Study: Elio Petri's Mediatic Universe

On the basis of the model introduced in this essay, I use two strategies to reinterpret a tendency of Italian cinema during the 1960s and 1970s, studying in particular the political-moral dimension of its messages rather than the originality of its formal solutions, as the locations where the 'narrative database' is developed.

I have chosen the work of Petri mainly for two reasons: first, many of his films found some success in the USA, to the extent that they influenced Hollywood authors; second, his cinema is somewhat extemporaneous and isolated in the broader Italian cinematographic tradition.

In my opinion, this film-maker created provocative narrative constructions by collecting, treating and archiving data available through an unusual fruition procedure — Petri changed the ways through which spectators experienced movies, eliminating clear reference points and replacing them with disorientation, which appears to have become the director's new ideological and aesthetic target. Today, it is possible to approach his films with a new aesthetic sensibility determined by our daily use of computer devices: indeed nowadays we see original systems of visual and narrative organization, thanks to the practice of searching for data.

---

[19] Ibidem.
[20] This is the concept of 'interactive narrativity', developed in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. by Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).
[21] 'The recursion of characters, actions, and times starts from an algorithmic platform and so does the proceeding of time and space, common to Resnais's cinema in general, which here is only turned into mathematics, into a map. […] the movie may be categorized between Feydeau and electronic elaboration, between the marivaudage and information technology.' Sergio Arecco, *Alain Resnais o la persistenza della memoria* (Recco, GE: Le mani, 1997), p. 163 (my translation).

Petri and his collaborators developed these processes by rejecting realism and creating stories that are supported by narrative databases. The latter consists of quotes and reconstructed works of art, stock political images, objects representing the society of consumption, and the stable presence of the media universe.

I identify two narrative strategies within Petri's cinema that make the interactive dimension of the narrative databases emerge:

1. On the level of narrative drive: the scenography as the primary means of navigating from a discursive level to another;

2. On the level of plot: the creation of a narrative field where story possibilities seem limitless, where randomness, repetition and interruptions are rampant, and where search engines are motored by *political* desire.

The first aspect is the most apparent in Petri's oeuvre. The levels of the story contaminate one another by means of editing, and at times also through the structure of the film's set. Petri's scenography allows him to value the relationship between different visual levels and the characters, in iconic projects. In *The 10th Victim*, Petri adapts a futuristic tale based on a short story by Robert Sheckley. The film depicts 'The Big Hunt', a game in which a computer selects a hunter and a victim, who must try to track and kill the other first. It is important to note that they do not know each other. In the film, the chosen ones are Marcello Mastroianni (Marcello, the victim) and Ursula Andress (Caroline, the hunter) who ultimately choose marriage over murder. The game slogan in the movie is: 'In a world where there will be no wars, people will keep on creating games to have a chance to kill.'

In this movie, which is moreover stylized like a videogame, the intrusiveness of pop art (from makeup to costumes and scenography) allows the setting to be transposed from reality to a science fiction dimension — a near future in which technology and social control have prevailed over people's freedom. This never-ending shift from the present to the future blends the narrative levels into a seductive aesthetic game. The vision of the future proposed by the film, however, proved to be successful in a transmedia perspective, rather than influencing contemporary film production: while Italian cinema did not develop a specific tradition of science-fiction cinema, Petri nevertheless received several offers from Milanese advertisers, along with huge financial resources to make a series of commercials for Shell entitled *Al di là della mente* [Beyond the mind] and another one for Salvarani furniture factories, with great success.

The film inspires comparison with one of the latest reinterpretation of Sheckley's short story, in the *Hunger Games* franchise,[22] where the idea of the future and reality itself have ironically a more realistic connotation than in Petri's movies.

---

[22] The *Hunger Games* film series consists of four science fiction dystopian adventure films based on the eponymous trilogy of novels, by the American author Suzanne Collins, and directed by Gary Ross (*The Hunger Games*, 2012) and Francis Lawrence (*The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, 2013;

Contrary to common interpretations, by chasing pop art — or rather the most experimental tendencies of the 1960s American neo-avant garde, and specifically optical art — Petri chooses a new language, and one which is generally not employed for political criticism or condemnation of mass society. The director therefore observes the changes that society is undergoing and makes an analysis of the new expressive languages of mass-communication, using them for solely artistic purposes.[23]

The scenography, chromatic photography and the framing composition itself are used consciously, as a precise citation or 're-use' that leads to a 'disorientating point of view, capable of unveiling the real',[24] leading the spectators to become gradually disappointed in reality, which is depicted as misleading and vacuous.

In the repossession sequence, in Marcello's house, a singular panel stands out on a wall: a painting with a huge moving eye, whose eyelid opens and closes and whose fixed sight turns into a metaphor of the constant control imposed on people (fig. 1). This is a reference to the contemporary investigations of sight, the eye and the moving image in the work of the British artist Joe Tilson, and specifically a quotation of the work *Look!* (1964) (fig. 2). In the same house 'lives' Tommaso, whom the protagonist considers his best friend: in reality, the object is a New Dada assemblage, doll legs and a wire body, microchips and electric circuits, a sort of 'pop Frankenstein' that recalls contemporary experiments in Kinetic Art and becomes a fetish, an avatar, a comforting machine (fig. 3).

The same scene provides an occasion to focus our attention on another recurring element in the movie, that is essential to pop language: comic books, which are strongly present in one of the next scenes, in particular through a scenographic reference to Roy Lichtenstein (figs 4–5). In some scenes, the frame composition is even inspired by the language of comics: a recurring use of the frame within the frame, and elements that divide the images into sections (figs 6–7–8).

The strong feeling of dehumanization is perceived in another setting of the movie, Lidia's house. Here, both the garden and the interiors are rich with human figures in different positions (figs 9–10). This is a reference to George Segal's chalk moulds, and in fact one of the figures is an accurate copy. What emerges is a very strong sense of alienation, solitude and anxiety, reflecting the human response to a depersonalizing society.

Within this existentialist imagery, it is possible to identify references to the works of Robert Rauschenberg, Jannis Kounellis, and many other artists. A huge amount of data, pieces of information, and messages cross the images of the

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 1, 2014; *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2*, 2015).
[23] His subsequent film, *A Place in the Country* (*Un tranquillo posto di campagna*, 1968) is also visually influenced by the pop artists Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine, who fascinated the Venice Art Biennale in 1964.
[24] Lucia Cardone, *Elio Petri, impolitico. La decima vittima* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2005), p. 55 (my translation).

film, and communicate to us the sense of a narrative operation that is built on accumulating and archiving the visual experiences of a unique director.

Petri continued to create narrative databases in his Oscar-winning *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*, 1970). Here Petri reinterprets a taste for the surreal. As many critics have observed, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* is not only a powerful social condemnation and a forerunner of Italian detective films, but the story also has a metaphoric dimension: the plot is constructed through hallucinations and distorted visual apparatuses. Aside from its social component, one can thus observe a significant process of narrative construction, supported by great visionary talent and by the decision to relay actions and characters through a 'deforming' lens.

The same happens in *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* (*La classe operaia va in paradiso*, 1971), where Petri underlines the contrast between a domestic setting, the middle-class victim of exasperated consumerism, and that of the working class, characterized by class struggle. The first emerges in the interiors of a house that is full of questionable objects that have been bought and hoarded over the years. At the end, the protagonist makes a list of the useless objects, and for each one he recalls its price and the hours of piece work necessary to buy it: inflatable animals, prizes gained from collecting points, stuffed animals, small statues, paintings, electrical appliances which have never been used, sofas covered with cellophane, all chosen by Petri to represent the contemporary commercial context (figs 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e). The protagonist then releases his rage by destroying an inflatable animal (Scrooge McDuck) that was framed from the beginning of the movie and stands as a symbol of capitalism in Disney comic strips.

The factory where the movie was shot (the Falconi factory in Novara) is a place of work, order and of the mechanic passing of time. The scenographer Dante Ferretti renders it as a cold space, whose protagonist is a huge pop hand, a symbol of the boss's oppression of the workmen.

The fight between these two narrative universes produces the visionary madness of the protagonist's dream, which he screams aloud but it goes unheard over the deafening, rhythmic noise of the factory.

From the narrative point of view, Petri's films, like those of Marco Ferreri's, are labyrinthine paths that are structured over the conflict between randomness and order, where the characters are led by hallucinations, nightmares, and wishes that are far from reality.

In this distorted behaviour, there is often a strong psychological element determined by the need for the political affirmation of the ego in mass-society.

In *The 10th Victim*, a film that is built on a videogame narrative model, the characters pass each level according to the strength of the media that pushes them ahead. Thanks to exaggeration and paradox, coherent with the pop art aesthetic principles, the film's narrative structure is organized in aesthetically recognizable frames, organized groups of TV commercials, and advertising shoots.

Prophetically, the film narrates the spectacularization of crime; moreover, the plot seems to develop according to the needs expressed by the TV commercials, rather than to the individual choices of the protagonists.

The movie *A Quiet Place in the Country* (*Un tranquillo posto di campagna*, 1968) alternates between different narrative levels, which coincide with the protagonist's hallucinations and nightmares. He is a painter suffering from a creative crisis, who overlaps reality with his grotesque deformations: it thus becomes a real mind-game film, a visual labyrinth in which the protagonist moves in a condition of confusion determined by dissatisfaction and by reflection on the need to express himself through creative action (figs 12a and 12b). This is revealed in the explicit reference to René Magritte's two *Perspectives* (figs 13a and 13b), creating a feeling of death (of the arts) within a film about desperation and schizophrenia.

Petri reached the highest peak of experimentation with the so-called 'political trilogy' that included his next three movies, in chronological order. First, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* is the story of a man who challenges reality, creating a second narrative level in order to narrate himself and the crime he has committed: on the one hand, this provides an illusion of reality — nobody thinks that he could break the law, considering his professional position; on the other hand, there is the truth of his narration — as he continues to declare that he is guilty. The open conclusion, which is connected to the beginning of the story, amplifies the narrative ambiguity of the movie and complicates even more the meaning of the story, which in turn is built on flashbacks within the illusion of a structured narrative. The fact that none of the other characters accept his account means that it fails in its primary function.

In *Todo Modo*, Petri created perhaps his most fascinating narrative labyrinth. Through the metaphor of the mysterious messages in spiritual exercises, that are carried out in an enclosed place at the end of the world (Zafer's refuge), Petri dares to construct a story with no plot, where the characters obsessively follow the rules of a spiritual father. Each narrative level corresponds to a different step of the Rosary prayer, each one leading to a new discursive dimension. As though drowning in the circles of Hell, the characters step down into gloomier and gloomier dimensions in a never-ending reiteration (fig. 14), enacting a repetition compulsion that resembles Buñuel's obsessive circularity, as recalled by Kinder.

Though the characters in the figurative dimension pray and appear confused by the methodic activity of taking care of the soul, in reality — which is only evoked — they continue to intermingle their illegal traffic and their power plays. This produces two discursive dimensions which confuse the spectator: each narrative level corresponds to a character's destiny. Nobody, apart perhaps from Don Gaetano, knows the meaning of what happens. He seems to have the power in his hands, but only in view of his comprehension that there is no more power, nor State, nor God. Within the narrative, he owns the tools that cause this collapse. However, the real instigator is another character, M., the politician who is thirsty for power and salvation, for sin and forgiveness,

for glory and death. His exaggerated desire leads him to push Don Gaetano towards a higher narrative level, triggering the collapse of the entire system.

Petri's films provide an interesting example of narrative structures that are overloaded with information, thus disrupting artistic operations. They are effective cultural products even for the contemporary spectator, who can find in those narrative databases a profound operation of cultural politics.

Conclusion

In these examples, as in many other related films, it is possible to trace an interactive dimension of modern cinema whose narrative levels are upset by the expressive urgency of directors who want to recount reality in a new way. In these films, the irregular and non-conventional discursive dimension is the real protagonist, building in turn a new and more stimulating relationship with the audience. As Kristen Daly states:

> This type of community, complexity, and multimedia intertextuality was available before digital and computer technologies. The French New Wave and its community in Cahiers du Cinéma and other journals and cineclubs of the time was a networked and intertextual form of cinema experience. But this took place solely in a handful of urban centers and required great effort and an almost cultlike commitment. Henry Jenkins has traced the history of fan communities before the Internet, focusing on science fiction fan communities who interacted via letters, conventions, and fanzines; as he notes, the fans have moved from the boundaries to become increasingly powerful communities. Indeed, the fan mode of interactive and intertextual engagement with the text has become, I would argue, a more prevalent viewing mode as it has become easier and almost unavoidable, particularly in respect to big-budget movies advertised in every medium.[25]

Probably, the difference between the mind-game film and Petri's movies — like other auteur movies from those years — can be seen in the socio-cultural dynamics that are underway, which progressively transformed the approach to a logic-narrative knowledge into new forms of connectivity, ruled by the irregularity of the database and by the model through which one surfs the net. However, according to what emerges in Daly's analysis, the main difference lies in the transformation of the spectators and their habits.

As noted earlier, modern cinema addressed an exclusive branch of spectators who allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the visual experience, which they nevertheless found shocking even for political reasons when compared to the

---

[25] Kristen Daly, 'Cinema 3.0: The Interactive-Image', *Cinema Journal*, 50.1 (2010), 81–98 (p. 85). See also Henry Jenkins, 'Interactive Audiences? The "Collective Intelligence" of Media Fans', in *The New Media Book*, ed. by Dan Harries (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 157–70.

imposition of mainstream culture; in other words, a branch of spectators that were often influenced ideologically, and hence capable of abandoning themselves to directors who they recognized for their values and poetics. Conversely, today the mind-game film addresses a mass public that is influenced and characterized by a huge amount of uncertainty.

The predominant mood in the society of control[26] stems from collapsing boundaries around, and between, institutions, which is furthermore defined by 'epistemological problems [...] and ontological doubts'.[27] In other words, the concepts of who we are and what constitutes knowledge of ourselves and our environments have become blurred.

In the case of the mind-game film, the spectator begins from a different condition: it is not *only* a matter of uncertainty. Thomas Elsaesser claims that social change has brought about a sort of madness which has become an 'appropriate' state of mind for living in a society of control. 'Paranoia [...] is [...] the appropriate — or even "productive" pathology of our contemporary network society.'[28]

These movies are not only defined by the presence of characters who are living in a deep crisis, and are victims of some sort of trauma. They are also defined by the epistemological problems (how do we know what we know?) and ontological doubts (which other worlds? Which other minds?) that are among the main touchpoints of philosophical investigations of conscience, mind, multiple realities and possible worlds.[29]

They represent a disturbing and paranoid dimension, yet it is one to which humanity has always been sentenced.

[26] See Gilles Deleuze, 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle', *L'autre journal*, 1 (May 1990) (repr. in Deleuze, *Pourparlers (1972-1990)* (Paris: Editions Minuit, 1990), pp. 240–47.
[27] Elsaesser, p. 15.
[28] Ivi, p. 26.
[29] See Andrea Minuz, 'Guardare i film (e le cose) da capo: come imparammo qualcosa di profondamente cinematografico sulla filosofia', *IMAGO. Studi di cinema e media*, 1.2 (special issue *Cinemafilosofia*, ed. by Paolo Bertetto and Minuz, 2010), pp. 163–76.

Fig. 1. *The 10th Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965).
A painting with a huge moving eye in Marcello's house.

Fig. 2. *Look!* (1964) by Joe Tilson.

Fig. 3. *The 10th Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965).
Tommaso, Marcello's inorganic best friend.

Figs 4–5. *The 10ᵗʰ Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965).
Scenographic reference to Roy Lichtenstein.
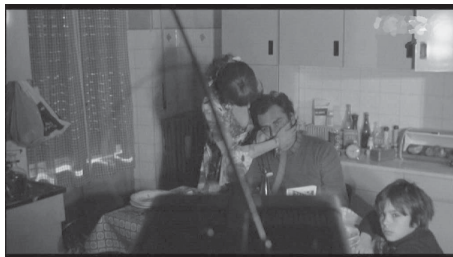
Figs 6–7–8. *The 10ᵗʰ Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965).
Composition of scenes inspired by the language of comics.

Figs 9–10. *The 10ᵗʰ Victim* (*La decima vittima*, 1965).
Human figures in different positions in Lidia's house.

Figs 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e. *The Working Class Goes to Heaven*
(*La classe operaia va in paradiso*, 1971), contemporary commercial context.

Figs 12a-12b. *A Quiet Place in the Country*
(*Un tranquillo posto di campagna*, 1968). Leonardo's hallucination.

Fig. 13a. *A Quiet Place in the Country*
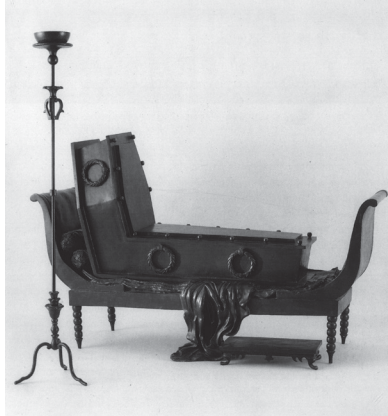(*Un tranquillo posto di campagna*, 1968). Leonardo visits his mother's house.

Fig. 13b. René Magritte, *Perspective I: Madame Récamier de David*, 1950.

Fig. 14. *Todo Modo* (Id., 1976). Scene.

Reviews/Comptes-rendus

F. Stadtler and O.B. Laursen (eds.)
Networking the Globe: New Technologies and the Postcolonial
Routledge, London and New York 2016, pp. 126

Networking the Globe: New Technologies and the Postcolonial is a collection of essays edited by Florian Stadtler (Lecturer in Global Literatures at the University of Exeter) and Ole Birk Laursen (Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Copenhagen). The book investigates the many deployments of the postcolonial issue in a contemporary context: while focusing mainly on the role played by technology in reflecting, mediating and shaping globalization, the wide-ranging scope of chapters ambitiously opens up the discussion towards often uncharted and unexpected territories. The result of a truly interdisciplinary outlook, the collection addresses a variety of topics and contexts, ranging from online forums to films, and from art practices to poetry. Such a diversified array of materials may at times produce the feeling of a lack of internal coherence. Overall, however, the book benefits from this multiplicity of voices and points of view.

The project originated as a postgraduate conference, and it had already been published as a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.[1] Because the quality of the contributions is uniformly high, the editors opted to publish this group of essays in the form of a book. The collection profits from the freshness in approach of the scholars involved, who successfully balance focus on single case studies and reflection on over-arching theoretical questions.

In its search for an alternative to the unilateral and problematic dynamic between center and periphery that informs the postcolonial world, the books deals with issues of scale and space, of longing and belonging. While of course valuing the potential offered by communication technologies to connect the whole world, the authors never allow this discourse to assume an ingenuously idyllic inflection. On the contrary, the account of the erosion of boundaries (national as well as mental) favoured by digital forms of culture is always counterpoised by an equal attention to the enduring importance of location in shaping the contemporary context, and to the role played by technology in conveying such a sense of place. It is hence more than apt for the book to open with Hilde C. Stephansen's essay on the use of the internet in connection with the annual meetings of the World Social Forum. While emphasizing the positive role of the web in providing the

---

[1] Special issue *Networking the Globe: New Technologies and the Postcolonial*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49.5 (2013).

infrastructure for the effective organization of the conferences, the article does also caution against a certain disembodiment of transnational activist networks, and underlines the potential for the web to help construct an alternative and resistant sense of globality.

Neither utopian nor nihilistic in their approach to the issues at stake, and very aware of their political implications, the essays consistently try to offer nuanced reflection on the topics they address. The resulting remarks may at times sound too cautious or too obvious, but in the end they attest to a shrewd understanding of both the virtues and the drawbacks of (digital) media and its functions. For example, in Herbert, Black and Aly's essay on the exchanges of opinions regarding religion and politics on different Internet forums in English and Arabic (BBC World Service, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabyia), it is clearly stated that 'the consequences of deploying these technologies in this context are ambivalent': on the one hand, they enable conversation among individuals from such different backgrounds that would be impossible in embodied form, on the other they still work according to exclusionary, albeit partially masked, power relations. Similar conclusions are found in Maruta Herding's article about information technologies and Islamic youth culture in France, Germany and Britain: the use of such networks has a powerful influence in the life of the postcolonial subjects, yet at the same time it remains strongly embedded in local contexts and everyday life, so there is little interaction or awareness of similar trends of expression across national borders.

One of the most riveting essays is the one dedicated by Paula Blair to Willie Doherty's video installations. Using Foucault's theory of the panopticon as well as Homi Bhabha's concept of 'colonial mimicry', Blair reflects on issues of surveillance and the gaze. The author successfully presents the case of Northern Ireland as an explicit theoretical challenge, underscoring the region's inherent ambiguity, suspended as it is between both colonial and postcolonial positions.

Gaze theory is also crucial to both Sandra Annett's analysis of issues of gender and exoticism in cartoons from different eras and Vivien Silvey's article on contemporary 'network cinema'. Silvey focuses on two films (A.G. Iñárritu's *Babel* and R. Lawrence's *Lantana*) that share a polyphonic structure yet come from very different production contexts. While unfortunately failing to deal with the texts on a stylistic level, the article is nonetheless convincing when it challenges any clear-cut distinction between Hollywood films and more independent art-cinema products.

The final two essays are concerned with literature: Ahmed Gamal analyses the post-9/11 writing of Anglo-Pakistani novelists Mohsin Ahmid and Kamila Shamsie, arguing for their inclusion in the new 'post-migratory' (rather than simply 'migrant') subgenre — a label that is better placed to underscore the problematization of 'the binarism of home and the world' that characterizes this literature. Finally, Anjali Nerlekar focuses on the use of maps by post-independence Indian poet Arun Kolatkar. Nerlekar observes that the author's

contradictory desire to achieve both a documentation of the periphery of Mumbai and to shield the place from the eyes of the world perfectly encapsulates the perpetual suspension between local and global that underlies the contemporary postcolonial situation: a paradoxical yet inescapable positioning that this collection of essays successfully outlines in its many facets.

[Lorenzo Marmo, University of Naples 'L'Orientale']

The Mapping Journey Project, by Bouchra Khalili
MoMA, 9 April – 10 October 2016, New York

Between 2008 and 2011, the French Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili took a trip through European cities that are considered the most important migrants' 'transit' centers. There, she meets the protagonists of *The Mapping Journey Project*, a cartographic work in which the routes individuated by the panoptical system for monitoring and militarizing the borders are counterposed to the human routes, which are impossible to determine by means of loxodromics and grids.

Exhibited at the MoMA as part of *Citizens and Border*, a series of discrete projects at the museum that are related to works in the collection, Khalili's work offers a critical perspective on histories of migration, territory and displacement.

Bouchra Khalili's installation consists of eight videos, shown in the display room on eight different screens. Each video starts by showing a map on which, a few seconds later, appears a hand that begins drawing the route of the illegal trip to Europe. The voiceover of the protagonist explains his/ her itinerary. Lines, arrows, dots: the route is a sequence of stops and way backs, rejections, detentions and mistreatments. It reminds the spectator of a global game of goose, where every step back means starting all over again. Months or years of vicissitudes before reaching one of those 'crossing' cities where Khalili meets and films the protagonists of her stories. Those cities are places turned by the migration flow's containment and regulation policies into a *limbo* where there's no chance to leave, and where nobody wants to stay. The eight migrants speak English, French, Arabic, Italian, and they talk about the violence suffered, someone even mentions friends who lost their lives during these journeys. Khalili chooses to keep their identity secret: the most recognizable trait of each person, which would be the face, is counterposed to the refugees' non-visibility in Khalili's work. We see no suffering bodies, nor iconographies of pain that are so often shared through mainstream media. The map is the central element of the project, whose deep reason is undermined by the creation of alternative mapping forms.

The spatial organization, and its scientific dissection by means of cartographic system, allowed an increasingly precise, geometric reproduction of the nations' boundaries. The demarcation of the nations' geographic profile through increasingly defined borders leads to a huge puzzle effect, where each nation is a tile, and part of a bigger picture — in this case, the entire surface of the earth. The mapping of the national territory has as its consequence, what Benedict

Anderson defines as 'logo-map': referring to the use of the map for identifying the colonies, and specifically to the practice of painting each colony according to its imperial identity. Anderson highlights how this peculiar representation had as its effect the identification of the national territory, and therefore citizens' feeling of belonging.[1] Although Anderson refers above all to the importance that the logo-map gave to the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, it is a fact that the nations' defined and colorful shape continues molding the collective consciousness (the *Italian boot*, for example). The map, like a patchwork and symbolic shape of the hegemonic global order, is still an elemental learning tool used for geographical recognition, and is used as such by Khalili in her work. The map becomes the nation's symbolic transposition, representing a geography determined in turn by other *documents*: the borders become a distinction mark between the inside and the outside, a binary logic which generates a feeling of community and belonging. The idea of foreigner is produced by the juridical and *documental* regime.

Protagonists' crossing into different territories shows how the idea of borders loses its references. If, on the one hand, we assist at the militarization and fortification of national borders to guarantee their *governmentality* — as it happened in Hungary, Serbia and in France, where in Calais they built a wall to prevent the passage to the United Kingdom. Then, on the other hand, we can see how the border moves beyond the national and continental limit. Borders are not institutional places anymore, but they are something moving, constantly reshaped by military strategies: the Italian border, for example, does not correspond with the Sicilian coasts, but with the military patrol of the Canal of Sicily. Boundaries are embodied by the soldiers placed at the Israeli checkpoints, in the red zones, or special security zones, for monitoring the occupied territories,[2] as video #3 shows: a Palestinian man draws on the map the route he took to reach his girlfriend who was in the Israeli territory.

Bouchra Khalili's work represents a *counter-map* tracing migrants' resistance against control and containment policies which deny them any chance of free movement. The invention of new roads, that do not exist on any maps, generates an alternative geography: the one of human experiences and clandestine existence. However, the closing of the borders, as well as their proliferation, involves a continuous re-definition of the migrant routes, which become increasingly dangerous. Migrants are repeatedly exposed to many risks: prison, torture, death. To face one of the biggest humanitarian emergency of our time, the tragedy of immigration, Khalili's work suggests that the closure of the borders is not a safe choice, at least not for the migrants. To guarantee the safe crossing, it is necessary to open up humanitarian corridors. This is the only solution to avoid the death of thousands of migrants during their journeys to a better life.

[Simona Arillotta, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan]

---

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[2] See Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

Projects & Abstracts

Considerations on the Digital Subaltern:
Researching Migrant Women's Transnational Online Practices

Claudia Minchilli, Utrecht University

On April 2016, the Guardian released on its site a report named 'The dark side of Guardian comments'.[3] The aim of the report was to analyse the content of more than 70 million comments left on the site since 2006, exploring patterns and dynamics of online harassment. As stated in the report, 'the first quantitative evidence' is that 'articles written by women attract more abuse and dismissive trolling than those written by men, regardless of what the article is about';[4] furthermore, the report observed that 'ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT people also appear to experience a disproportionate amount of abuse'. Internet is not a neutral, disembodied and value-free space,[5] as the report shows. The gendered, geo-political, racial character of online harassment on the Guardian demonstrates the existence of a matrix of power relations which put the online and offline realms not at distance but as intertwined, mutually shaped realities.

My aim in this paper is to show how the postcolonial approach can be highly productive for the development of digital media studies, exposing the hierarchical and multiple characters of power dynamics which influence complex social phenomena, including digital ones.[6] As part of the team working for the ERC consolidator project 'Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging'[7] headed by Sandra Ponzanesi, my interest is in investigating the relation between female migration and digital technologies, through the use of a mixed methodology which encompasses ethnographic research and digital methods to gather quantitative data from different digital media platforms. I will inquire on the symbolical and concrete consequences that transnational and local digital connectedness has on migrant women's experiences of displacement, resettlement and everyday life in a specific urban setting, which in my case will be Rome. This project has also a comparative aim, focusing on women who belong

[3] Becky Gardiner and others, 'The Dark side of Guardian comments', *The Guardian*, April 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments> [accessed April 09, 2017].
[4] Ibidem.
[5] Marìa Fernàndez, 'Postcolonial Media Theory', *Art Journal*, 58.3 (1999), 58–73.
[6] Sandra Ponzanesi and Koen Leurs, 'On Digital Crossing in Europe', *Crossings, Journal of Migration and Culture*, 5.1 (2014), 3–22.
[7] For more information: http://www.digitaleurope.nl/ [accessed April 09, 2017].

to three different communities, the Somali, Romanian and Turkish ones. The choice of these three communities is based in the matter of how the use of digital technologies is intertwined with different histories for transnational mobilities. The comparison will outline the impact that postcolonial, postsocialist and post-labour migration pasts have on processes of diasporic identity construction. Consequently, it will be possible the identification of those intersectional economic, political, racial, gendered and cultural forces[8] which differently impact on migrant women's experience of displacement and on their access or use of digital technologies. Attentiveness towards structural impediments will help, in other words, to give meaning to the everyday 'multiple identifications',[9] strategies and agency that women perform through transnational online practices.[10]

Terms such as *connectivity*, *links*, *crossings* are recurrent in digital media studies. Despite that recurrence, it is essential to investigate the space which is positioned in between, the territory which is crossed: the border. The imaginative and concrete deployment of the concept of 'border' gives to the researcher a privileged perspective to look at social patterns, showing the matrix of power relations that are enacted when the subject tries to cross them. Borders are a space in which mechanisms of systemic construction of 'us' and hierarchically intelligible 'Others'[11] are set in place, and are hence 'part of the discursive materiality of power relations'.[12]

The digital realm represents another dimension in which these mechanisms are reproduced. The role and level of agency of the 'connected migrant'[13], as a subject who actively creates a culture of bonds through everyday digital border-crossing practices, is subjected to these dynamics. Rejecting a blind utopianism that considers the Internet as a space that enables infinite possibilities for identity construction and allows social relations based on networks of *peer* subjects,[14] I see the online reality as entrenched in gendered, classed, racial ascriptions[15] influencing one subject's voicing and online (in)visibility. This brings me to

[8] Pramod K. Nayar, *An Introduction to New Media and Cybercultures* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[9] Radhika Gajjala, 'An Interrupted Postcolonial/Feminist Cyberethnography: Complicity and Resistance in the "Cyberfield"', *Feminist Media Studies*, 2.2 (2002), 177–93.

[10] Mirca Madianou, 'Migration and the Accentuated Ambivalence of Motherhood: the role of ICTs in Filipino transnational families', *Global Networks*, 12.3 (2012), 277–95.

[11] Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London, NY: Verso, 1991)

[12] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 198.

[13] Dana Diminescu, 'The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto', *Social Science Information*, 47.4 (2008), 565–79.

[14] Judy Wajcman, 'From Women and Technology to Gendered Technoscience', *Information, Communication & Society*, 10.3 (2007), 287–98.

[15] Lisa Nakamura, Peter A. Chow-White, *Race after the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002); *Cyberculture and the Subaltern: Weavings of the Virtual and Real*, ed. by Radhika Gajjala (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

one of my central research questions which borrow very much from Spivak's[16] concerns: when, how and at what price can the *digital* Subaltern speak? Where is the space of agency for the connected migrant?

Imagining the Subaltern's voice as 'hearable' or not at all is a very common framework but, nevertheless, highly problematic.[17] A change of perspective is needed here, shifting the focus from 'borders' as inexpugnable barriers to their conceptualisation as 'points of contact'. Borders are a porous and creational locus, a place where individuals are exposed to different encounters which transform the barrier in a 'contact surface'.[18] In this context, digital media are a liminal space where first strategies thought to overcome social, economic, cultural, political, gender constraints are set in place. The deployment of a postcolonial paradigm can help to avoid the risk of researching on these 'new constellations of power'[19] reducing the analysis on binary oppositions which inscribe diasporic digital practices merely as forms of empowerment/oppression following a Western-centric approach to the study of media consumption,[20] and hiding the complex, multiple and contextual ways through which different Subaltern voices emerge or are 'permitted' to emerge.[21]

Of course, theory alone cannot explain the influence that digital connectedness has on the creation of diasporic subjectivities, which can only be inquired on the field, both online and offline. In this site, my aim was specific, and merely interested in complicating the debate on digital media studies and migration, outlining some of the main conceptual frameworks that postcolonial theory gives to my research in order to discern the complex entanglement of power hierarchies, asymmetrical social relations and hegemonic discourses in studying digital media usage.

[16] Gayatri Ch. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).
[17] Gajjala, *Cyberculre and the Subaltern*, p. 4.
[18] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).
[19] Mirjam de Brujin and Rijk van Dijk, 'Connecting and Change in African Societies: Examples of "Ethnographies of Linking" in Anthropology', *Anthropologica*, 54.1 (2012), 45–59.
[20] Raka Shome, 'When Postcolonial studies meets media studies', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33.3 (2016), 245–63.
[21] Gajjala, *Cyberculre and the Subaltern*, p. 15.

Common Humanity in Humanitarian Communication
Wouter Oomen / PhD Thesis Project
Utrecht University

In discussing '"the human" as a political stake', Vicki Squire notes that 'the category of "the human" is not given, but is made as such through humanitarian interventions.'[1] My dissertation assesses the construction of the human and its political stakes by going beyond the practice of humanitarian intervention as such and scrutinizing what can be called 'humanitarian communication'. This includes communicative practices of NGOs, charities and humanitarian organizations in which the construction of the human is paramount since it often relies on the imagination of a 'common humanity'.[2] This common humanity will be studied in three different forms of campaigns, those on: *disaster relief* (event-based campaigns; determined by their temporal nature) *long term development* (presented to us as part of day-to-day life and shaped by their ongoing, structural character) and *conflict and human rights* (campaigns dealing with delicate political issues in the face of the supposedly unambiguous notion of human rights). It is in these three different contexts that the question of what common humanity entails is addressed.

An example of such a campaign is 'The Family Meal'; a campaign launched by the World Food Program and a case study from which this dissertation departs.[3] At the start and end of all the videos of 'The Family Meal' intertitles pose the question 'What brings us together?'. The campaign aims at providing a daily family meal for 'the poorest and most vulnerable' and with respect to this, the question 'What brings us together?' plays out on two levels. The first is situated on a local level in reference to the habit of a family sharing an evening meal. Pointing to the moment when the different family members return home and settle around the evening meal, the daily habit of having dinner signifies togetherness on the local level. The second level is the global one, where the family meal is presented as a universal custom, naturally belonging to the human

---

[1] Viki Squire, *Post/humanitarian Border Politics between Mexico and the US: People*, *Places, Things* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), p. 33.
[2] Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[3] See <http://www.familymeal.eu> [accessed April 09, 2017]

way of life, across national or cultural borders or boundaries. In one of the campaign's videos it is indeed stated that 'it is important to convey that others, even in dire circumstances, want to have those natural, normal activities which are part of raising a family' — thereby stressing both the role of the family unit and its universality in deeming the family meal as a 'natural, normal' custom, that cannot even be challenged by the most dire circumstances.

Two interrelated yet contradictory claims stem from this example. Firstly, the notion of a family meal pertains to both an idea of material well-being in the form of a bare minimum of nutrition and to immaterial values in the form of family life. The concept of a family meal boils down the notion of humanity to what is perceived to be its essentials. Such an essentialization of universality in the name of the human can be understood in terms of identity formation; which means to go with Michel Agier's theorization of 'humanity as an identity':

> This identity, as a generalized system of transparency, takes on the name of 'humanity.' Like the god Janus, humanity has a double-sided identity, which, however, does not express any alterity (no 'other' is allowed in this bounded and total representation). Its double is only the reflection of a wounded, suffering, or dying humanity. It becomes the 'absolute victim,' who is nothing else or other than absolute and essentialized humanity when it is suffering.[4]

The foundation of humanity in the suffering body has for long been the primary reason for attaching the notion of common humanity to the representation of vulnerability. This means that humanitarian communication, which centralizes the notion of human vulnerability 'speaks the language of common humanity'.[5]

Secondly, the claim made in the video (and the campaign as a whole) stresses that it is important to convey that 'others' should be included in this idea of common humanity — thereby distinguishing between those for whom inclusion is deemed self-evident and those who can be understood as the 'vulnerable Other'. In this sense the discourse of 'common humanity' is structured and produced hierarchically, despite its appeal to a natural, a priori truth. Indeed, the production and reception of these campaigns is tied to local contexts. As a result, the alleged human experience is imagined from the perspective of those holding economic advantage and the ability to behold; bringing with it a distinction between a fortunate spectator and an unfortunate 'other'.[6] As this seems at odds with the idea of a global human experience, the question whether

[4] Michel Agier, 'Humanity as an Identity and Its Political Effects (A Note on Camps and Humanitarian Government)', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 1.1 (2010), 29–45 (p. 31).
[5] Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 30.
[6] Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

universalism is an ethnocentric phenomenon[7] is as important as the question of how universalism is defined in mediated encounters between different places.

After taking 'The Family Meal' as an anchor point to explore the theoretical framework of common humanity, the dissertation will go into an in-depth analysis of disaster relief campaigns, long term development campaigns and human rights campaigns. Cases range from the response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010 by the Emergency Appeals Alliance, to campaigns by CARE and Save the Children. Methodologically, the project entails both a focus on textual analysis (scrutinizing the campaigns in word and image) and production analysis (assessing institutionalized production and circulation of these campaigns). For this the notion of 'conjunctures' will be employed, a term used by Chouliaraki and Fairclough to point to 'relatively durable assemblies of people, materials, technologies and therefore practices (in their aspect as relative permanencies) around specific social projects in the widest sense of the term'.[8] Conjunctures, in other words refer to those constellations in which different social actors, both human, institutional and material gather around a certain theme or event — in which it is important to note that 'the technologies and materials of production range from physical (…) to symbolic resources.'[9]

Common humanity (what the human is), universalism (claims stemming from this), cosmopolitanism (framing these claims in terms of citizenship) and globalization (the historical context under which this becomes important) set the theoretical stage for this dissertation. Around these themes, academia seems as divided as the world beyond. While Judith Butler for instance states that arguing with the notion of a 'common human vulnerability' is 'foolish, if not dangerous',[10] Roland Barthes asserts that the 'myth of the human "condition" rests on a very old mystification'.[11] Particularly in times of societal instability concerning the notions of globalization, migration and cosmopolitanism, these questions are brought to the fore once more. In this sense, addressing the simple-hearted question 'What brings us together?' means to address how these urgent issues are constructed in the arenas of popular culture, journalism and digital media — the sides that set the parameters for humanitarian campaigns.

[7] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 24.
[8] Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough, *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 22.
[9] Ibidem, p. 23.
[10] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 31.
[11] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 101.

'Cineforum 2.0'. The Digitization of Movie Theatres:
The Case of Lombardy's Sale della Comunità

Francesca Monti / PhD Thesis Project[1]
Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM, Milano

My research project investigates the process of digitization from the perspective of small Italian cinemas.

From its initiation in 1999, the transition to this new system of projection has been neither immediate nor particularly evident. In fact, one of the characteristics of this 'silent revolution' is the limited collective perception of change, since digital devices are configured as homologous to 35mm projectors. As such they do not provide a different kind of film experience, but the improvement — in terms of higher image definition on the screen — of an continued situation that was pre-defined. Thus, cinema changes in its substance, replacing traditional reels with hard drives, but not in its nature of experiential form. Following a decade of limited success, Hollywood major studios began to encourage the acquisition of digital projectors in view of renewed 3D technology, and the turn, announced in 2011, to adopt exclusively the digital format Digital Cinema Package (DCP) from 1 January 2014.[2] As of 2012, the state of Italian single-screen cinemas was critical: the big chains present in the country had already completed the conversion, while many small independent circuits struggled to support the expenses needed for the upgrade (around €60,000 just for the projector) before 2014.[3]

After a section on the stages of digitization of the cinematic medium, and its parallel theoretical debates, the third chapter of my thesis intends to address another key question. Screen conversion in fact contributes to a process of change that originated as early as the eighties: the loss of a central role for movie theatres in cinematic fruition. Threatened by new forms of home video and mobile devices (what Francesco Casetti has defined as *relocation*[4] of film) on the one hand, and by the loss of the specificity of the medium within broader contexts of consumption on the other, movie theatres had to redefine their status

---

[1] PhD Thesis supervised by Professor Luisella Farinotti. For information: francesmonts@gmail.com.
[2] David Bordwell, *Pandora's Digital Box. Films, Files and the Future of Movies* (Madison: Irvington Way Institute Press, 2012).
[3] *Rapporto 2013. Il Mercato e l'Industria del Cinema in Italia* (Rome: Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo, 2013).
[4] Francesco Casetti, 'L'esperienza filmica e la rilocazione del cinema', *Fata Morgana*, 4 (2008), 23–40.

and reformulate their relationship with the audience. Could they still be places for sharing a common experience, in spite of the scattering that has affected cinema? It is not by chance that both digital projection (along with the end of film distribution) and the disappearance of traditional movie-going places have influenced the idea of the 'death of cinema'.

I chose to investigate a uniquely Italian form of cinematic exhibition, the *Sala della Comunità*, i.e. the basic element of Catholic film theatre circuits. Here, screen conversion takes place not only as a technological process, but also as a cultural one. In fact, to study the digitization of Catholic circuits means to investigate the economic difficulties of an activity which cannot be classified as commercial, and moreover to question the relationship between this religious institution and the 'seventh art'. Before analysing the process of transition, through interviews with selected operators, this thesis seeks to reconstruct the history of Italian Catholic cinematic exhibition. These sites were born as parish cinemas in the thirties, and by the sixties they accounted for around half of all Italian cinema screens.[5] In the eighties, the push for a renewal of the ecclesiastical institution leads to a new approach to the secular world. Catholic theatres were redesigned according as cultural centres, with a deep transformation of their identity. This change included recurrent strategy planning within discussions on digital projection in two areas: *flexibility* and *multiprogramming*. The aim of the research is to verify whether the terminological homology could be a semantic one too: could digitization be a tool to achieve these goals, which are inscripted within *Sale della Comunità*'s project?

The selection of theatres comes from a single region — Lombardy, in Northern Italy — which has always played a leading role in comparison to other regions around the country. Lombardy was a pioneering region in the use of cinema as a tool for pedagogical and pastoral purposes, as evidenced especially in studies conducted by Edoardo Viganò,[6] Raffaele De Berti[7] and Tomaso Subini.[8]

As Alberto Bourlot and Mariagrazia Fanchi have argued in their extensive survey conducted in the early twenty-first century, the Catholic circuit is an heterogeneous landscape, split between local exhibitors — which release movies into peripheral districts and often constitute the only cinema available in those areas — and more competitive realities, which try to differentiate their offer according to different audiences' needs.[9] To give a preliminary indication of the

[5] Gianfranco Bettetini, 'Chiesa cattolica e cinema. Dal Sessantotto a oggi', in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*, ed. by Ruggero Eugeni and Dario Edoardo Viganò, 3 vols (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2006), iii, 71–102 (p. 80).

[6] Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Un cinema ogni campanile. Chiesa e cinema nella diocesi di Milano* (Milan: Il Castoro, 1997).

[7] *Un secolo di cinema a Milano*, ed. by Raffaele De Berti (Milan: Il Castoro, 1996).

[8] Tomaso Subini, 'Il caso de "La dolce vita"', in *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*, pp. 239–55.

[9] Alberto Bourlot, Mariagrazia Fanchi, *La Sala della Comunità. Proposta culturale e intervento sul territorio* (Cantalupa: Effatà Editrice, 2004).

diversity of forms and functions that are present on the territory: the sample includes seven theatres set in Lombardy's regional capital, Milan, and three theatres placed in two towns with a population lesser than 200,000, Como and Pavia. Despite the differences between them, the qualitative approach of my research allows me to find recurrences among the testimonies gathered here. For example, this kind of exhibition intends to present itself as a form of *resistance*, not just to digital technology, but to what that symbolizes — namely, the imposition of a right way of 'being at the movies' based on the multiplex model. The experience of the *Sale della Comunità* develops around the ideas of *familiarity* and *informality*, such that the themes of spontaneous meeting and friendly atmosphere are used to mark the distance from the big chains of movie theatres. However, the operators' attention to additional content and to the advantages offered by digital technologies seems substantially lacking. Nevertheless, alternative content could constitute an important resource for these theatres, that might help to deal with the scarcity of cultural products in peripheral areas. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the operators' perception of the transition to digital allows for the exploration of original forms of technological appropriation. And it demonstrates the persistence of an idea of filmic experience in which feeling part of an audience is central.

Contributors / Collaborateurs

Sudeep Dasgupta is Associate Professor at the University of Amsterdam. His publications focus on the aesthetics and politics of displacement in visual culture, from the disciplinary perspectives of aesthetics, postcolonial and globalization studies, political philosophy, and feminist and queer theory. Book publications include the co-edited volume (with Mireille Rosello) *What's Queer about Europe?* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2014), and *Constellations of the Transnational: Modernity, Culture, Critique* (New York and Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007). He is organizer of the 2017 ACGS conference "Postcolonial Mediations: Globalization and Displacement".

Ilaria A. De Pascalis is Assistant Professor at Università degli Studi Roma Tre. Her research focuses on European cinema in a transnational perspective, Feminist Film Theory and Gender Studies in the global scenario, and narrative genres and ecosystems in cinema and television series. She has been postdoc at the University of Bologna and visiting professor at the University of Cassino and at 'La Sapienza' University. She authored *Commedia nell'Italia contemporanea* (Il Castoro, 2012) and *Il cinema europeo contemporaneo: scenari transnazionali, immaginari globali* (Bulzoni, 2015).

Maja Figge, PhD, is postdoctoral researcher at the Research Training Group 'The Knowledge of the Arts', at the University of the Arts, Berlin. Her research interests include gender, race and media, film and history, postcolonial (media) theory and political feelings. She is co-curator of the exhibition *MOV!NG ON. Border Activism — Strategies for Anti-Racist Actions* (2005), co-editor of *Scham und Schuld. Geschlechter(sub)texte der Shoah* (2010) and author of *Deutschsein (wieder-)herstellen. Weißsein und Männlichkeit im bundesdeutschen Kino der 1950er Jahre* (2015).

Judith Keilbach is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the Media and Culture Studies Department of Utrecht University. Her research interests include television theory and history, the relation of media technology and historiography, memory studies, media and the transnational. She is author of *Geschichtsbilder und Zeitzeugen. Zur Darstellung des Nationalsozialismus im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen* (2008).

Renato Loriga graduated from Roma Tre's DAMS in 2015, with a dissertation on New Philippine Cinema, major 'Postcolonial theories and practices of cinema'. Since 2013 he has written for the website of the film magazine 'Sentieri Selvaggi'. In 2016 he published the book *Autohystoria. Visioni postcoloniali del nuovo cinema filippino* (Aracne). He currently works as a researcher at MiBACT (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism), and for the production/distribution company Zomia.

Claudia Minchilli is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University, on the project 'Digital Crossings in Europe. Gender, Diaspora and Belonging (CONNECTINGEUROPE)'. Her research focuses specifically on the use that Romanian, Somali and Turkish migrant women living in Rome make of digital technologies, applying a postcolonial and post-socialist conceptual framework to her analysis of transnational digital practices. Her interests include migration and diaspora studies, gender theory, queer theory, postcolonial studies and transnational feminism.

Ulrike Mothes is a filmmaker and film researcher. She held teaching positions at the SAE institute, Leipzig (Germany) and Srishti School of Art, Design & Technology, Bangalore (India). In 2010, she became faculty member at Bauhaus University Weimar (Germany). Her critical engagement with local film practice and socio-political matters inspired her PhD research on 'Open Narrative in Contemporary Indian Documentary Film'. She successfully completed the dissertation at Bauhaus University in 2015.

Wouter Oomen is a PhD candidate in media studies at Utrecht University. For his project he received a fellowship from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Analysis, in 2015. In 2016 understood a study period at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Before beginning his PhD, Wouter was lecturer in media and culture studies at the University of Amsterdam for four years, and was nominated as UvA Lecturer of the Year in 2012.

Maria Francesca Piredda is Adjunct professor of Film History and Director of Master's Degree in Communication and Marketing of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan. Her research topics concern visual anthropology, Postcolonial and Migration Studies, film and Sound Studies. Her main works are *Film and Mission. Per una storia del cinema missionario* (2005) and *Sguardi sull'Altrove. Cinema missionario e antropologia visuale* (2012).

Farah Polato is Lecturer at the University of Padova, where she teaches Filmology. Since 2013 she has been taking part in the *Postcolonialitalia* project, a platform for research on postcolonial studies in Italy, that brings together scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. She is also member of the editorial board of the related journal *From the European South*. Her recent work on these topics includes 'Il cinema, il postcoloniale e il nuovo millennio nel panorama italiano'

(*Aut Aut*, 2014) and 'Rachid, Theo, Dagmawi e gli altri. Voci e forme di un nuovo cinema', in L. De Franceschi (ed.), *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (2013).

Michaela Quadraro obtained a PhD in 'Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World' from the University of Naples 'L'Orientale', where she is currently a researcher and a member of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies. Her interests focus on contemporary cultural productions that emerge from an English-speaking context of migration and hybridity. She wrote *L'arte digitale postcoloniale. Uno studio sull'opera di Isaac Julien e Trinh T. Minh-ha* (2012), co-edited *The Postcolonial Museum. The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History* (2014), and co-authored *Memorie Transculturali. Estetica contemporanea e critica postcoloniale* (2015).

Angela Bianca Saponari works as a researcher at the University of Bari, where she teaches on cinema studies and the cultural industries. Her research has primarily focused on the relationship between cinema and the other arts, and specifically, her interests include intertextuality, adaptation and the transformations of film culture. More broadly she studies the media industries, Italian film history, audiovisual archives and paratextuality. She has published many essays in journals and edited volumes, and is the author of *Il cinema di Leonardo Sciascia. Luci e immagini di una vita* (2010) and *Il desiderio del cinema. Ferdinando Maria Poggioli* (2017).

Anu Thapa is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa's Cinematic Arts Department. Her areas of interests are the intersections of digital technology and national cinema, postcolonial theory, transnationalism, and South Asian cinema.