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Introduction

Mieke Bal

Welcome to the second “Encuentro”, a workshop at ASCA in Amsterdam, co-organized by CENDEAC in Murcia, Spain. This Encuentro, to which everyone is welcome, is the fourth in a series of NWO-sponsored workshops on the combination of a keyword in the arts, “aesthetics,” and another keyword, describing the social makeup of the contemporary world, “migration.” Putting the two words together, a changing group of international scholars explores in an ongoing collaborative effort what can be defined and analyzed beyond the thematic link. The resulting term, “migratory aesthetics” explores the current cultural and artistic moment in view of the merging of cultures.

The project began with two workshops, organized in collaboration with the CentreCath at the University of Leeds, in 2004 and 2005, and continued with a focus on Spain. In this second set of workshops, a video exhibition accompanies the academic discussions – or the other way around. In March 2006, the exhibition “2MOVE: movimiento doble, estéticas migratórias” opened in Murcia, in the South of Spain, and on September 19th, the exhibition opens in the Zuiderzeemuseum in Enkhuizen, with the support of, among others, the Mondrian Foundation. (www.zuiderzeemuseum.nl)

March 12-14 we have held an Encuentro, or workshop in Murcia, Spain, titled “Movimiento Doble: pensar la movilidad en dos direcciones”, which accompanied the video exhibition: movimiento doble, estéticas migratórias” that both of us have curated there. This exhibition will travel, first to Enkhuizen, Netherlands and hopefully, more after that.
During the first days of the latter we hold the second Encuentro, September 19-21, 2007.

The subject of the first of these two Encuentros was to reflect on what a “migratory aesthetics” could be; in other words, a reflection not on migration per se, but on the culture of mobility that the current state of the world has foregrounded, even if migration is of all times. Three topics that came out on top, so to speak, in the discussions in Murcia – time, technology, metaphor (including theatricality) – would offer good starting points for such ongoing focusing. An overall consideration that could be the general concept for this workshop would be art and politics in mobility. Hence, we proposed to title this second workshop “Migratory Politics.”

What we hope to have is NOT a traditional conference. Instead, we will continue to experiment with a format that turns the usual parade of monologues with never-enough-discussion-time into a genuine discussion first and foremost. For this, we ask participants to read the papers before the encounter. Instead of reading these papers, then, each participant reframes her or his argument in relation to the other members of their session or “mesa”. This establishes common questions and concerns, and will lead up to an in-depth discussion, for which ample time is available. At the end of each day, a special event is scheduled. The first day, this will be the opening of a related exhibition. The second and third day, plenary lectures will be held to bring together a variety of issues discussed in the sessions.

The five sessions are the following. The first, “Politics of the Migratory”. This is devoted to the politics – often called micro-politics or even nano-politics – of culture itself: the small gestures, facial expressions, imaginations and inventions that can do one of two things. Either it can stifle, oppress, separate people by interpellating them into separate
categories. Or, it can change a segregated, allegedly “multicultural” society into a truly intercultural one. Papers explore strategies and raise questions concerning the political efficacy of art.

For the second session, Thursday, “Technologies of Migratory Culture”, several contributors have noticed the use of (citations of) older technologies as part of the aesthetics of the migratory. These usages and references contain a vindication of the ideology of development and progress, and promise new (rather than old!) forms of empowerment through a kind of technological hospitality. In session Three, “Migratory Temporalities”, participants reflect on the fact that time is experienced differently according to where one is in the world. Hence, in migratory culture, temporal experiences are inevitably heterogeneous, conflicting, and productive of new forms of co-existence. The study of such subtle phenomena allows insight into time’s function in and through history. This session is followed by a plenary lecture by Miguel-Ángel Hernandez-Navarro, director of the Center for postgraduate study in modern and contemporary art, CENDEAC in Murcia, co-curator of the exhibition, and co-convenor of the Encuentros.

Friday begins with a session devoted to “Art in Interculturality”. The arts are a domain of experimentation and heightened sensitivity. Traditionally, art is considered politically indifferent, a position of “disinterested” distance from the turmoil of the political world. Much contemporary art belies this distancing. The discussions of this session focus on practices of art that are strongly and explicitly political, intervening in the ills of cultural defensiveness in the face of migration. In the afternoon, the fifth session, “Doing It: Performance and Performativity” considers the power of art. Cultural practices of a different kind are those that seek to influence culture without explicitly addressing politics. A
catalogue of such strategies is not the outcome of the papers. Rather, the close look at some strategies stimulates creative thinking about ways of acting in the world; indeed, of making our performances effective, hence, performative. The Encuentro closes with a plenary lecture by Salah Hassan, professor of African and African Diaspora art history and visual culture at Africana Studies at Cornell University and co-curator of the exhibition "Unpacking Europe" in 2001/2002 at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam.
Politics of the Migratory

This first session is devoted to the politics – often called micro-politics or even nano-politics – of culture itself: the small gestures, facial expressions, imaginations and inventions that can do one of two things. Either it can stifle, oppress, separate people by interpellating them into separate categories. Or, it can change a segregated, allegedly “multi-cultural” society into a truly intercultural one. Papers explore strategies and raise questions concerning the political efficacy of art.

Pedro A. Cruz-Sánchez
*Ob-Scenes: The Political Redefinition of Art*

Begüm Özden Firat
*The Seventh Man: Migration, Politics and Aesthetics*

Sudeep Dasgupta
*Relational Thinking and Migrancy: Subjective Displacements and the Politics of Social Space*

Mireille Rosello
*Ismaël Ferroukhi’s Le Grand Voyage: Successful Rudimentary Transactions and the Failure of Globalized Languages*
Ob-Scenes. The Political Re-definition of Art

Pedro A. Cruz Sánchez

Abstract

The political image is, nowadays, no more than a naive aspiration. The image has ceased to be useful for anything other than the thickening and expansion of the “screen of shadows” which has put the spectacle into darkness. What is at stake in this paper is that the frame of visibility within which the reception of the invisible by the contemporary spectator takes place could show, in all its magnitude and bleakness, the absence, the lack of vision which defines the contemporary reality production regime RPR. The “other visibility” –the “visible other”— is singularised by letting us see that there is nothing to see, by making vision wonder in so far as it is an absence of itself. Precisely here, in the acknowledgement that the “visible other” is, in all truth, what cannot be seen, the invisible, the non-existent, is where we can locate the seed of the “political subject”. Because if “political subjectivity” requires the relationship of a “self” with an other we cannot but conclude that the way in which the spectator can be articulated as a “political subject” is through the relationship between his “actual vision” with its radical other: non-vision. Hence, to see non-seeing is the gesture upon which the political dimension of spectatorial experience resides, in so far as it transforms an aporia into a paradigm of “ethical relativity”, and therefore, of “political subjectivity”
The Seventh Man: Migration, Politics and Aesthetics

Begüm Özden Fırat

Abstract
In this paper, I discuss the ways in which the notion of migratory politics can be understood by focusing on the experiences and struggles of the illegalized migrants in Europe. I argue that the “battle” of sans-papiers that took place in France in 1997 not only set out a social movement of the migrants all over Europe but also, and more importantly, put forward a form of political subjectivity to be audibly understood and visibly recognized as legitimate speaking subjects. The struggle of the illegalized migrants opens up the realm of politics proper, as it is defined by Jacques Rancière, as that which consists of the construction of a polemical scene by means of speech acts articulating a common wrong — concerning what place belongs or does not belong to it and who is able or unable to make enunciations and demonstration about the common. This situation concerns “disagreement” and is in conflict with the “police order,” a term Rancière uses to refer to the general law determining “the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its form of exclusion,” which is, first and foremost, an organization of “bodies based on a communal distribution of the sensible.”1 Politics disturbs this order by introducing either a supplement or a lack that is not recognized by the police order by those who have no part, those who are uncounted within the existing system. The act of illegalized migrants, as those who

are not counted and accounted for in the order—what they lack is not only the “papers” but also their part—aims to create a common polemical space so as to reconfigure one’s body, of one’s lived world, of one’s space and time. This act is, inevitably, an aesthetic one that creates “new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity.”

Relational Thinking: Subjective Displacements and the Politics of Social Space

Sudeep Dasgupta

Abstract

In the current debates around “the political” (Laclau, Hallward, Badiou), both the question of political subjectivity and the image of a future just society are being engaged within political philosophy. How can aesthetics, and in particular technologically-mediated audio-visual work, intervene in this debate, in particular through the figure of the migrant?

The term “Migratory Aesthetics” runs the risk of being understood as a sub-genre of aesthetics, with migrant subjectivity providing the adjectival qualification. Subjectivity becomes the ground for such a dubious understanding.
Complicating the notion of subjectivity with an eye to precluding the above understanding of “migratory aesthetics”, my argument will engage with a formulation of politics in relation to migrant subjectivity. A “Migratory Politics” can be understood as an interruption in any desire to fix the figure of the migrant, and instigate a re-distribution of social space (Rancière, 2003) where migracy provides a possible pivotal term in thinking of both migrant subjectivity, and the political subject in general. Through a reading of Marc Isaac’s documentary Calais: The Last Border (2003), the putting to work of such a migratory politics will be analyzed. What happens when the figure of the migrant emerges only relationally? How does this relationality disturb pre-existing discourses of the Self and the Other? How is this relationality actualized through film aesthetics? The argument will frame these questions firstly, by elaborating on the notion of Politics as developed by Jacques Rancière, and putting this theoretical argument in relation to the work that Calais does in producing an audio-visual encounter with a relational and inclusive politics of displacement.

Mireille Rosello

Abstract

Last year's paper was about the relationship between maps and literacy, and about the difficult encounter between a migrant who cannot read and a system of signs that presumes that he can decipher the code that is supposed to guide him to his destination. This year, I propose to return to the representation of illiteracy in the context of a transnational journey and to slightly complicate the model by focusing on a film that opposes two types of travelers: one who cannot read (an old Moroccan immigrant) and one who can (his son, Reda). The latter is portrayed as a self-assured, competent but inexperienced representative of modernity, whereas his father could be read as a stereotyped old-fashioned and alienated patriarch whose practices tend to be dismissed as archaic or at least displaced in our globalized world.

Ismaël Ferroukhi’s 2004 film *Le Grand Voyage*, tenderly observes how the two Muslim men struggle as they reluctantly travel together from the South of France to Saudi Arabia. The devout father, whose only goal is to complete his pilgrimage, has insisted that his eighteen-year old son drop everything (his exams, his girlfriend, his family) and drive the 6000 kms that separate them from his destination. The story is
constructed as a series of more or less failed or curiously successful transactions, encounters, negotiations that force both characters and spectators to mobilize different definitions of linguistic, cultural or communicative competence.

I propose to focus on several key moments (an encounter with a Bosnian woman and a Turkish man, three border-crossing experiences and a silent transaction with a money-changer) that invite the spectator to rethink what it takes to meet strangers who cannot be expected to understand our language, our codes, our values and still engage in a rudimentary dialogue that still leads to unexpectedly complex results. The success of failure of certain tactics neither rehabilitates the father’s illiteracy nor systematically celebrates the young man’s globalized expertise but invites us to compare the sophisticated network of assumptions, protocols and risks that they each know how to activate in a given situation.
Ob-Scenes. The Political Redefinition of Art

Pedro A. Cruz-Sánchez

1. The “invisibility regime” of the spectacle

Too many symptoms lead us to think that there is something wrong in contemporary art theory and praxis, in so far as there are many occasions when we have the feeling that the production strategies that this theory and praxis have developed get aborted beforehand by and excess of credulity and confidence in particular assumptions, whose effect tends to be that of driving the pre-designed discourse to a dead end, from which—it seems—it is very difficult to escape. In fact, the power to surprise of today art producers is little—or even non-existent—given the fact that the “probing” they make on the different sets of problems affecting the ultimate artistic scenario are either on a surface plane—and therefore the cause gets isolated at the level of obviousness—or, after searching at lower levels, the interpretation of “generation factors” belonging to certain situations is done through a previous selection process regulated by custom and conceptual topoi.

The expected and obvious consequence of both approaches is that the major part of the contemporary debate rests upon axioms which, precisely due to passive and uncritical acceptance, only burden this debate and root it in a rhetorical terrain, where conclusions become reflections—more or less conveniently made up for the particular occasion—of the state of affairs from which we started. Hence, all those movements that, in the present time, carry out theory and praxis, instead
of opening up new perspectives to re-define the frame of
discussion, are resolved in a mere “relocation”—from an
enunciation environment to another—of the problems discussed,
without a true process of transformation taking place during
the course of such action.

One of the clearest paradigms of the status quo here
described is the one provided by the polysemic and always
slippery notion of “political art”, which played the main role
in a number of episodes which make up the most recent art
history, since the 1960s. In fact, if we skim through this long
period intending to name at least some of the most significant
events in this respect, ¹ we find, for example, the building of
the so-called Peace Tower by 418 artists in the intersection
between Sunset Boulevard and La Cienaga Boulevard, in West
Hollywood (1966);² the sacking of the artist Hohn Latham
from the St. Martin’s School of Art in London for having
destroyed (in 1967) the book by Clement Greenberg Art and
Culture belonging to the school’s library; we also find the
organisation of the Angry Arts Week by the group Artists and
Writers Protest, among whose promoters was Leon Golub
(1967); the attack by the artists belonging to the so-called
Guerrilla Art Group to the neutrality policy of the MOMA,
unveiling its relationships with companies taking part in the
Vietnam War; the events which took place in Paris in May of
1968; or already in the 1980s, the different strategies deployed
by authors such as Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Krysztof
Wodiczko, Lucy Orta or Hans Haacke—who worked in a

¹ For a detailed account, see CLARK, T. Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth
Century. The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture. London: The

² About this, see Frascina, F. Art, Politics and Dissent. Aspects of the Art Left
1999.
scenario presided over by the ashes of the already anachronistic “revolutionary art”—as well as all those forces—channelled, more often than not, by the writings of Douglas Crimp—which converged in the defence of AIDS patients and of their right to publicly show their suffering.

The loss of intensity of the discourses weaved, during the 1980s, by the neo-avantgardists, as well as the gradual and subsequent fading of all those strategies of representation of the political that those discourses implied, made that, during the 1990s, it seemed that “political art” had been reduced to a symptom of the past, and that it was therefore to be found—in Nato Thompson’s words—“‘off the radar’ art practice”. Nevertheless—as pointed out by this very author—“instead of representing the political (...) many artists in the 90s entered the political sphere physically; i.e. they placed their work at the heart of the political situation itself”. Hence the power which, throughout this period, was acquired by the term “tactics”, through which a reference was made to a kind of manoeuvre deployed within a game which, for interventionists, always involved the real world. It is not necessary to say that, behind this “tactic interventionism” which seized political art during the 90s, was the figure of

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3 We must not overlook here the fact that the action of the aforementioned Haacke, Kruger, Holzer, Orta or Wodiczko is being strongly questioned within the French context, specially by the stream led by Dominique Baqué, who accuses them of maintaining a rhetorical attitude, half-way between art and mass communication. BAQUÉ, D. Pour un nouvel art politique. De l’art contemporain au documentaire. Paris: Flammarion. 2004. pp. 110 – 141.


5 Thompson, N. & Sholette, G, p. 13

6 Thompson, N. & Sholette, G, p. 13
Lukács, who, in his early writings, defined tactics as a “means for the accomplishment of aims selected by the acting groups, as a link between the ultimate end and reality”.\(^7\) Although—as he himself cares to add straight away—“since the ultimate end is not categorised as utopia, but as reality that must be accomplished, the postulating of the ultimate end cannot mean any abstraction from reality, any attempt to impose certain ideals upon reality, but rather the knowledge and the practical transformation of those forces acting within social reality; of those forces, then, which drive us towards the accomplishment of the ultimate end”.\(^8\)

The “strategies of representation” being replaced by the “strategies of intervention” might lead us to think of a re-activation of political art, reacting against the crisis of the image by providing a series of direct actions, aimed at the transformation “from within” of the network of relationships which configures a given system of power. The problem, nevertheless, is that, against the opinion held by Martha Rosler that “the institutional basis of art is not stable, so that it is never consistently useful for the aims of the state”\(^9\), during the last years we have witnessed an unbridled process of domestication of the artistic event, which has been resolved in the automatic and a priori deactivation of any discourse or programme of activities whose objective was the destabilisation of the linguistic resorts supporting a certain reality production regime (RPR). In other words, the possibility of an art defying—due to its unyielding condition—the state’s


\(^8\) Lukács, G. p. 28

meaning production machinery is nowadays nothing but a mere entelechy, kept alive by the naivety of a theory and critique which still think of the relationship between power and the artistic in dialectic terms, as if the introduction of a critical difference—or, to be more precise, of an antithetical distance—were still an option available to the author.

In this sense, the problem coming to the foreground is the localisation of the cause behind this disablement of art to question the prevailing RPR, and thus to be articulated as a dissidence strategy able to question the visuality resulting from that regime. Indeed, any process of questioning started in this respect cannot but conclude that what is behind this political disarmament of art is, in effect, a state of unproductivity of the image, which is to the advantage of the suspension of its activity as meaning-mediator, as communication-generator. However, there is an alleged conflict point here which prevents immediate acceptance of such a diagnosis: the question which logically emerges from the acknowledgement of the unproductivity of the image as the primeval origin of the “apolitisation” of current art is to know to what extent the aforementioned “intervention strategies” are rendered useless by the collapse of the mediating function of contemporary visuality, specially when—has it has been said above—direct action upon the social intended to be a response to the crisis of the strategies of representation weaved during the 1980s. We can only answer that, in all rigour, and independently of the medium or support used, the artistic is always conveyed by the image and, therefore, its task is resolved without exception, in the domain of representation. No matter how much the intention at work is to intervene directly in everyday dynamics, reproducing for that purpose certain behaviours which single out the everyday experiential frame, it turns out to be at least unusual to try to conceive of art from outside the realm of the
image and, therefore, of all those factors intrinsically linked to it. What is intended with the “reproduction” of certain “modes” of everyday behaviour is nothing other than the introduction of a “critical visuality”, which is expected to work as a dissent wedge, from which to arm a discourse irreducible to the RPR. We can then understand that everything concerning the image becomes crucial when we want to throw light upon the so-called political art, be it operative through museum-destined media or through tactic participations in society.

2. The End of Communication

What is the reason why the image has ceased to be productive, and in what sense can we identify its effects upon what we should already refer to as the political impossibility of the image? As I analysed in detail elsewhere,10 if there is a space in the contemporary iconosphere whose study can let us determine, with an unmatched degree of accuracy, the different sets of problems which gather at the communicative collapse of the image, this is no other than the space delimited by the representation of violence and, more precisely, by the visualisation of terrorism. In fact, it can be asserted that the collapse driving the image to its loss of mediating power happened in a date such as that of 9/11, which, paradoxically, marked the moment of its greatest sway and visibility. As David Simpson points out, there is no point in the attack on the Twin Towers that “could be analysed prior to, or outside of, its mediation by television and political manipulation”.11

The image grew out of proportion, became more enormous

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than ever, to comprehend within its limits the reality of what had happened: now there was no interstice or blind spot which the cameras could not reach. It is true that the attack took place, that there were thousands of deaths and injured as a result, that it submerged the city of New York in a long-term trauma; but it is no less true that outside the margins of the image nothing remained, that the real could only be perceived as fiction, and that fiction reached, during the broadcasting of the events, an excessive and unprecedented development. 9/11 constitutes the midday of vision in the long history of visuality; never before had the light of the media been so illuminating; never before had the spectator found himself before such a total, complete and transparent image. The image reached, as it were, such degree of density and depth that, synchronically with the two towers, collapsed and turned its extensive growth—towards the outside—into an intensive one—towards the inside—which ended up strangling communication and making it into a terminus rather than a way through.

What is extraordinary about the mediatic spark which, during 9/11, lit up all the planet in excess, is that this moment of utmost clarity, of optimal visibility, constituted the beginning of a relentless process of darkening, by which the image appeared less and less visible, less productive in terms of the production of meaning. The doubt put forward by Marie José Mondzain about whether “the nature of a vision depends on the quality of the subjects looking or rather on the quality of the object given to be looked at”\textsuperscript{12} poses a crucial question, which let us turn our debate towards a presumably compulsory and enlightening direction, i.e. the determination of whether what provokes the current invisibility regime is, truly, the “collapse of the subject”—the spectator—or the

“collapse of the object”—the image—or, even, the interacting between both.

What cannot be denied is that, paying attention to the prevailing opinion among contemporary thinkers, it seems evident that there is a greater tendency to considering the “collapse of the subject” as the main cause of the aforementioned “invisibility regime”, and therefore, of an alleged state of iconic hypersaturation which would cancel out the spectator’s ability to differentiate and to establish critical judgements on as many images as succeed each other on the “global screen” into which reality has finally turned. In fact, Camiel van Winkel writes that it is possible to talk of the “end of the gaze and the end of spectacle, in the sense that visibility, in the over-visualized culture of today, has already nothing to do—as strange as it may seem—with seeing. Visibility has become a quantitative question, only verifiable through statistical means such as vote counts, media ratings and market research. This classical duality of seeing and being seen, of looking and being looked at, has disappeared; there is, to be sure, something to see, but now there is nobody looking.\footnote{Winkel, C., van. The Regime of Visibility. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers. 2005. p. 30.} Through this statement, Van Winkel intends to prove how, unlike the notion of “scopic regime” held by Christian Metz and Martin Jay, the “invisibility regime” which she puts forward as defining today’s society is characterised by the collapse of the “panoptic theatre”, as well as by the revelation of the “being-seen” as the experience which occupies the central position of the seeing: “not the gaze, but the object of the gaze is now what dominates the visual field, even if there is nothing to be dominated”.\footnote{Winkel, p. 31.}
Although, in all rigour, emptying the subject of any ability to see is a fact that cannot be overlooked—the existent iconic inflation ruins any attempt to isolate visual contents which could be judged and “relativised” later—the truth is that the argument held by Van Winkel overlooks, firstly, as aspect that can by no means be put aside, and which amounts to considering the dissolution of the traditional panoptical model into another which we can name *advanced panopticism*. Dwelling on this concept, we can state, with Foucault, that “the panoptical schema, without cancelling itself out or losing any of its properties, is destined to spreading out in the social body; its calling is to turn into a generalised function”.\(^{15}\) The key, therefore, which guarantees the panopticon’s survival in different contexts or situations is the *democratisation of the disciplinary devices*\(^ {16}\) which takes place in the *scattering of centrality*, in which Reg Whitaker has called the “consensual and de-centralised panopticon”.\(^ {17}\) Certainly, this author points out that “Betham needed this architectural structure because he did not have at hand any surveillance technology other than the naked human eye: an elaborate feigning was required to take the prisoners in and make them believe in the inspector’s omniscience. The new information technologies offer a real omniscience and not feigned, while at the same time they replace the inspector by a multitude of inspectors who can act either in unison or competitively against each other.”\(^ {18}\)


\(^{18}\) Whitaker, p. 172.
What is important is this “scattering of centrality” caused by the mediation of the new technologies is that the panopticon has been disseminated in the form of a gaze that embraces and permeates everything, up to the point of being transformed into the only palpable and inescapable reality, into the only dimension which the subject can inhabit. And let us make ourselves clear: what happens is not that the body, incidentally, is to be found in the spotlight of the “world’s gaze”, but that the body is this gaze, the utmost evidence of internalisation, in the dynamic of the everyday, of disciplinary devices. The body of the subject is the panopticon, the precise and sophisticated articulation of that “world’s gaze” which has turned the social space into the surveillance place par excellence. From here we infer that the “being-seen” which Van Winkel was referring to constitutes in itself the most refined form developed by those in power to assure the efficacy and infallibility of surveillance and, therefore, the transformation of the scopic passivity of the subject into a dynamics of vision, in charge of guaranteeing that the dominant RPR prevails.

On the other hand, and looking again at Van Winkel’s thesis, we must object to the claim that considers the “collapse of the subject” as the most advanced stage of a process resolved in the definite degradation of everyday experience, because, in a state which takes place after that defined by the central position of the “being-seen”, we must locate a situation of “collapse of the object”, which involves the making invisible of all which is there to be seen—that is to say, the image. The truly serious circumstance which defines the current RPR is not that the subject has ceased to look, but that the image has ceased to “mediate”, thus aborting any process of communication which could be facilitated by its circulation. Mario Perniola points out that “it does not seem that the secret is the distinctive aspect of communication, since communication does not do away with the message by means
of its concealing, but by means of an excessive and uncontrolled exposure of all its variants. In the secret there is a content that must be preserved; communication points, on the contrary, to the dissolution of all contents”.19

A change of paradigm thus demands a re-formulation of the greater question, which can no longer ask about the content veiled by communication, but about the cause that makes that communication itself becomes made invisible. Images after 9/11—specially images originated in the framework of war conflicts or violence in general—become, in this respect, an excellent object of study, in so far as they allow—better than any other visual material—to analyse the production crisis affecting the contemporary image. It makes sense then, as Nicholas Mirzoeff declared about the distributed images of the Iraq war, to talk of a “lack of truly memorable images. Because in spite of the constant circulation of images, there is nothing to see. The relative anonymity of war images must be understood, then as a direct consequence of mediatic saturation. To adopt Hannah Arendt’s phrase, the war signalled the emergence of the banality of images. There is nothing spectacular in this updating of the society of spectacle.”20

What Mirzoeff qualifies as the “banality of images” indeed explains the difficulty found by the gaze in order to differentiate as many visual documents as they circulate before this gaze, and therefore, the difficulty to make the spectacle visible. If, as this author adds, “the absence of dramatic images in the Iraq invasion was not only due to bad luck or the result of censorship, but rather to the change in the

status of the images”\textsuperscript{21}, then the utmost evidence of this change is that the spectacle has ceased to function as a regime of visibility, in order to go on doing it in the form of an “invisibility regime”. In this way the spectacle has become an invisible presence which levels everything off, which smooths reality up to an only dimension stitched by the “collapse of the object” and by the mediatic blackout which is derived from it.

Even though, as Eric Macé correctly points out, globalisation has led ineluctably to the questioning of the idea of a “mass culture” to the benefit of the more appropriate one of media cultures\textsuperscript{22}, and even though, as held by what is known as Contagion Theory, “the media are instruments used by the terrorists to create a theatre of horror, making publicity available for themselves, gaining followers, and providing more information about terrorist tactics”,\textsuperscript{23} the truth is that the “collapse of the object” which defines contemporary culture results in the transformation of the media into a “screen of shadows” which, therefore, does not yet operate through illumination (mediation) of reality. The spectacle—now turned into something like the night of vision—has ceased to be

\textsuperscript{21} Mirzoeff, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{22} The choice of this term is determined, in Macé’s words, by the fact that it “allows us to stress that the mediа are a specific form of mediation. If we consider the world’s reality to be in effect socially construed by an addition of cultural and institutional mediations which are more or less autonomous (language, law, science, politics, art, etc.), then we need to understand mediatic mediation as a specific form of relation between individuals and groups contributing in its own way to this social construction of reality through the sum of representations and the used we make of them.” Macé, E. \textit{Les Imaginaires médiatiques. Une sociologie postcritique des médias}. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam. 2006. pp. 134 – 135.

spectacular, attractive to the gaze; hence, we cannot but agree
that, notwithstanding that the contagion between terrorism
and media, between violence and image, is an undisputable
fact, the production crisis affecting the current iconosphere is
such that “mediated violence” is shown—due to its
invisibility—as an innocuous violence, without any power to
make and impact and transform a certain RPR.

Immediately after 9/11, the shrewdest analysts and
spectators set up the discussion on the visual dimension of the
attack in terms that made evident the confusion and
overlapping of the ontological status of images. On the one
hand, nobody questioned the reality of the event, and for this
reason, its belonging to what Pascal Lardellier has called “first
order violence”—all which is effectively produced and then
broadcast by the system of information;24 on the other hand, it
was witnessed with astonishment how the mise-en-scène
contrived by the terrorists showed more than just a few
resemblances with the fictive “second order violence”, arisen
from the “cultural industries”—in the broad sense of the
term—and from all “para-mediatic” identifiable productions:
films, fictions, broadcasts, advertising, video-games, etc.25 The
question, nevertheless, is that, as a few years have gone by
since that “mediatic panopticon”, the core issue in relation to
any image of violence is not whether in itself it is true or
credible, real or fictitious—because the fact that it could be
looked at, even as a fiction, would bestow a certain subversive
power on it—but rather that violence cannot be seen, and no
longer reaches or hurts the gaze; it goes unnoticed.

24 Lardellier, P. “Des violences médiatiques… Petite sismographie critique”,
en Lardellier, P. (dir.) Violences médiatiques. Contenus, dispositifs, effets. Paris:

25 Lardellier, p. 22.
If, for the last three decades, “terrorism for the camera” has become the greatest act of visual sabotage which Western society could periodically face, at the beginning of this 21st century, what has become proven beyond doubt is the uselessness of the “terrorist image” and, by extension, of political violence—that is to say, “violence with an ultimate social and political intention”—. To put it in other, ever more clarifying words, the fact that terrorist violence constitutes that most extreme form of political visuality, and that this visuality is not even capable of operating the minutest change in the dominant RPR, means that the excessive development of the media has been directly proportional to the loss of impact of the political image. The working hypothesis from which Georges Balandier starts, supposing that, thanks to the multiplication and spreading of the media, the “political imaginary can acquire a bursting force and a presence that we could not find in any other society of the past”, seems to have lost all its adequacy, given the fact that there are no images escaping the “invisibility regime” of the spectacle, getting into our everyday framework in a subversive way. The political image is, nowadays, no more than an entelechy, a naive aspiration, justifiable only from not wanting to acknowledge that the underlying problem, common to all the fields of “visual politics,” is not that of the discourse – i.e.: what to say—but that there are no means left for the saying, that we have no valid means to communicate, in short, that the image has ceased to be useful for anything other than the thickening and expansion of the “screen of shadows” which has put the spectacle into darkness.

Reflecting on the power of images, Eleanor Heartney wonders whether the images of dead soldiers can take votes away from George Bush, or whether the pictures of the President in front of the troops cheering him are able to lay the foundations of his reputation as a strong and decisive leader.\textsuperscript{28} Obviously, even though the author does not slip at any given point a firm opinion in this respect, we cannot doubt—in view of the ideas already examined—that the suitable answer for those questions will always be a negative one, since, beyond the set of problems raised by the higher or lower degree of credibility of the content of images, the reality of facts indicates that \textit{there is nothing to believe in because there is nothing to see}. Furthermore, if we take into account Steven Bernas’ analysis of the attitude of credulity towards images, we discover that “the spectator becomes a believer in the image not when he is in a state of critical reception, but when he abandons his own self, his worries, for the benefit of the life of the other who leads the fiction”.\textsuperscript{29} In other words: \textit{precisely} because believing in images requires a withdrawal of the subject’s critical conscience, as well as his later abandon to the narrative arising from those images, it is necessary that their visibility and exposure time be optimal, so that the spectator can be taken in by them. Hence, it is not difficult to deduce that the problem here is not the non-existence of a maximum of visibility which allows for an “evasive belief”, but that— even worse—it is not even possible to talk here of that \textit{minimum of vision} which favours “critical analysis”.


3. Scopics Memories: Political Time

There is no possible political action in the “invisibility regime” sustained by the spectacle; no matter how active are nowadays those theoretical streams which defend the subversive dimension of the invisible, the truth is that the only possible alternative to the inflationist visuality which defines the everyday dynamics of vision is the attainment of a critical visuality, which could re-activate the political potential of seeing. If one of the main tasks of contemporary thought is to assess in what way the creation of global communication networks has an impact on the transformation of political imagination, it seems evident—from what we have just said—that the effects derived from this global measuring of events are no other than the “collapse of the object” and, as a consequence, that the political imagination is emptied of any critical or instrumental content.

Looking at this in more detail, it becomes necessary to point out that the reason why the “invisibility regime” of the spectacle strangles the political discourse lies in the fact that the invisible works, in all cases and without exception, as a levelling force which eliminates any conflicts that could trouble and multi-polarise the scene of the social. In this sense, we cannot but identify the “invisibility regime” with what Chantal Mouffe calls “politics”—whose procedures always involve a taming of hostility and a neutralisation of potential antagonisms accompanying any process of collective construction—and the “critical visibility” which is opposed to it with “the political”—linked to “the dimension of antagonism and hostility which we found in human

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30 As a very good example of this reflective task, see Buck – Morse, S. Thinking Past Terror. Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left. New York: Verso. 2003.
relationships”. From this particular viewpoint, “the politics of the invisible” implies the elimination of an “other” which could be able to determine a “constitutive outside”, founder and guarantee of the difference provided by antagonism. However, “the political aspect of the visible”, instead of favouring an isomorphic representation of reality, conceives of the social as a “polymorphic” fabric, itself fraught with conflict, which can never be reduced to the same paradigm.

“The political aspect of the visible”, understood as a polymorphosis of the social, turns the autonomy of the invisible into exteriority: yet into an exteriority which – as we will later see—should not be understood so much as “that different from the spectacle”, but rather as “that different in the spectacle”. The “invisibility regime” of the spectacle longs to construct the social sphere as an all-comprising sameness, never to go out of bounds, where the “other”, difference, is diluted in the continuity of the not-seen. But – and here we find the perverse element of all this strategy—the invisible is always shown to the spectator under the appearance of visibility, which prevents, in the first instance, a conscience of the taking away of the visible already carried out by the spectacle and, in a second moment, the determination of critical stands susceptible to act as opposition wedges in all this panorama of “isoactuations” defined by the absence of the spectatorial experience.

If there is, in fact, a guarantee for the perpetuation in time of the aforementioned “invisibility regime” and of the efficacy of its devices oriented to the deactivation of the political dimension of the image, then this guarantee is what


32 Mouffe, p. 15.
we can call the memory of light—that is to say, the taking apart of vision and the act of seeing, through the transformation of the former into a mere effect obtained by the continuous re-activation, on the part of the spectator, of certain scopic memories that conform his visual past. This means that, when the subject looks, he is not actually seeing, but projecting certain images filed up in his memory, which are mobilised attending to the iconic requirements of a given situation. In fact—as it results from this “taking apart”—what takes place is a replacement of the “actuality of seeing” by the anachronism of the vision; this circumstance leads us to conclude that what is lost in this coating of the invisible with the “already seen” is the possibility of the present, and therefore the ability to subvert the continuous and non-problematic flowing of time.

The subject does not see the “not-seeing” established by the spectacle as a regime of authority; yet this is due to the enormous visual memory he possesses, to the fact that he has already seen everything, that what he receives when he looks is an effect of vision, a déjà vu which he interprets as if it were an actual information. What the eye perceives is no longer the result of seeing, but of that “already seen”; the present no longer reaches him: it escapes him in a context defined, moreover, by the confidence in that what he beholds constitutes a direct access to “actuality”. But, in all rigour, what operates in the individual at each particular moment is a redefinition of seeing in the form of an automatism of mnemonic import which, in so far as “already seen”, does not require more stimulation than that provided by himself, by his remembering (himself). If we notice the subtlety introduced by each of these words, we can see how, in view of the collapse of the object which defines the current iconosphere, the subject does not react—as it is customary to believe—by means of indifference, of closing his eyes; on the contrary, what he is a witness to is a rupture between synchronicity in seeing—as a
cause—and the vision—as an effect; so that the alleged collapse of the subject is not, in all the concept’s purity, so much a loss of the spectator of the capacity to see, as rather a acknowledgment of his impossibility to “see actually”. To put it in other words: it is not that the spectator has ceased to exist; it is that he constitutes a displaced figure, which carries out his function at the wrong time, delayed, without being able, as a result, to intervene in the present.

When, in this respect, we talk about the “anachronism of vision” as a way of referring to the visible appearance of the invisible, what we mean is that vision has definitively departed from experience, in order to become a closed circuit, a circular structure, which feeds back upon itself indefinitely, thus generating its own dynamics and inertia. In view of the collapse of the subject, the spectator does not react with an unproductivity which could force his disappearance, but rather, with a temporal autonomy which involves his becoming lost in himself. The safety mechanism which the “invisibility regime” has procured for itself consists in preserving the figure of the spectator, so that it seems that the fact itself of the process of reception is still at work, while, in all truth, it has been emptied of any kind of actuality and political content. Hence, it is at least surprising to hear the enthusiastic defence of the electronic image wielded by many theorists, from the viewpoint of the arrival at a “scopic democracy”, since, once we have examined all the arguments of legitimacy which they use, we can conclude that they are supported by the a-priorism of the actuality of the spectator. Furthermore,

33 As Néstor Olhagaray holds—in what constitutes a paradigmatic assertion which best illustrates this belief in the “textualisation of the image” on which “electronic thinking” rests—“today new technologies give us the tools to carry out interaction, for us to get involved as active main character and be able to conceive of our relationship with the environment as a relationship which is being built, being processed, as an eternal work in progress. The art which
when in this frame of analysis we introduce the paradigm of the spectator, this is not conceived of so much in temporal terms—which would imply an interpretation in terms of “anachronism”—as in spatial and numeric terms—which leads us to think of the spectator as a decentred, “multiplied” figure. Thus, as Michele White analyses, in opposition to a spectator which arose from traditional film and photography—whose centred character was given by his identification with the optical device—the digital era has brought “the breakage of an exclusive viewpoint and of a body coherently imagined, defying the idea of an spectator as a column-like, vertical, powerful and singular individual...”

We must make clear at this point that neither technological determinism—which could regard the advent of the electronic era as the perfect key from which to carry out a political re-definition of the image—nor the negative views on the new media, which have not ceased to proliferate—and which would insist on the growing power of technology over the production of meaning—can constitute analytical paradigms on which to pivot arguments oriented towards the determination of the relationships between the electronic image and political intervention in the everyday world. And this is so because, among other powerful reasons, the set of problems originated by the “collapse of the object” is not specific to any particular medium or channel of distribution,

corresponds to this spirit is that which rests upon the exchange and dialogue between people, upon an aesthetics of communion, rather than of communication. Olhagaray Llanos, N. Del video – arte al net – art. Santiago de Chile: LOM ediciones. 2002. p. 105.


but it affects the image in general, and it is taking this into account that these problems must be addressed.

Likewise—and constituting a second, rather significant element of clarification—we must not take the report of this “anachronism of vision” by which the invisible is covered with visibility to be a new resort to the well-know practice of “suspicion” which, according to Rancière, seeks to demystify democracy through what he calls “le regard par en dessous” (the gaze from beneath).36 Far from attempting to adhere to any of the modalities of the “dogmatism of hidden truth”, which Rancière denounces,37 what encourages us to offer such a diagnosis here is the desire to show how, more than an open cancellation of the subject—which would be substantiated in the formula “nobody to look”—the dominant RPR has preferred his deactualisation—translated into the motto “somebody for not looking”—since it proves more effective with respect to the objects posited from the beginning, which are no other than turning the “invisibility regime” into an enterprise of identity, founded upon the construction of a “self”, of a strong selfhood to act as a backbone for the discourse of the spectacle.

If we pull the string of this idea, it is not difficult to realise how what is aborted through the consolidation of this identitary invisibility is what Rancière has called “process of subjectivisation”, which, according to his own words, we can see as “the formation of a one which is not a self, but the relationship between a self and an other”.38 As we can easily infer, in a RPR such as the one defined by invisibility, the relationship of subjectivity is almost a chimera, in so far as the

37 Rancière, p. 83.
38 Rancière, p. 118.
“anachronism of vision” which “de-actualises” the spectator prevents him from seeing the non-seeing and, therefore, from being given an actual visibility which could turn him into a recognisable otherness. Pushing this argument to the limit, we can state that the desynchronisation between seeing and vision operated by the “invisibility regime” seeks to prevent its ethical estrangement on the part of the spectator and, in that sense, the configuration of the spectator as a “subject related to an other”. Even though nowhere in his analysis does Rancière assign an ethical dimension to this “relative subjectivity”, it is true that from its very enunciation two conclusions derived which can no longer be suppressed: the first one involves the acknowledgment that the only existing “political subject” is that constituted in its relation with an other—that is to say, we are dealing with a subject belittled, weakened by a presence that exceeds the “self” and that conditions its structure in a determinant way; secondly, this re-definition of subjectivity as a condition dependant on the other leads us, as already mentioned, to the interpretation of the “political subject” as an ethical category.

In a very wise attempt to drive the analytical impulse of Visual Studies towards the philosophical discourse of Lévinas—who, ultimately, is the author lying behind an ethical weakening of ontology—Joanna Zylinska points out that “alterity does not have to come from outside—in the form of a ‘terrorist’, a street mugger or a genomic intervention. On the contrary, alterity is originary (even if it remains forgotten, suppressed or denied), which means that it is what founds and conditions our sense of sameness and our relationship with exteriority”39. In one of his most revealing passages concerning this question, Lévinas points out that “critique

does not reduce the Other to the Same as ontology does, but it questions the exercise of the Same. A questioning of the same—which cannot be done in the selfish spontaneity of the Same—is carried out by the Other. This questioning of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other is called ethics. The estrangement of the Other—its irreducibility to the Self—to my thoughts and possessions, is carried out as a questioning of my spontaneity as ethics. The idea of the “self” that Lévinas has sustained and woven throughout his large philosophical work breaks any link with the conservative and bourgeois notion of suffisance, to tend towards the more mutually binding one of “l’un en face de l’autre” (one facing the other), which can only be understood as “c’est moi pour l’autre”.

The key notion in this “non-in-différence” or “socialité-bonté originelle” on which Lévinas founds his post-ontological ethics is precisely this concept of “estrangement” which, once and again, he slips into his judgements, and that acquires great importance when we want to understand the essential role that the contemporary spectator plays in the disarticulation of the “political subject”. In fact, as it has already been said, the “invisibility regime” of the spectacle has been construed, from the beginning, as an “identitary project”, by which the not-seeing is articulated as a sameness which reduces everything to itself and thus prevents any heterovision. In this project, the spectator has a basic function, in so far as his inability to “see actually”, to question the “temporal autonomy” which condemns him to be the trustee of an anachronistic vision.

lacking the tension provided by the present, leads him to turn his gaze into a mechanism parasitic of the sameness in which the invisible gains strength. The problem is not that the spectator turns out to be incapable to make the invisible strange, thus thwarting any possibility of turning the invisible into that other in relation to which he could establish himself as a subject; the problem is that, in his not seeing the not-seeing, he is integral and fundamental part of this sameness and of its project of construction of a strong identity. If the condition \textit{sine qua non} of the “political (hetero)vision” is the existence of a subjectivity “relative to” an other that upholds it, then it is easy to determine that the contemporary spectator will never be able to act as a “political subject”, in so far as his belonging to the sameness of the invisible prevents him from being relative to anything other than the strong identity generated by that sameness.

When we have claimed above that there cannot be any political discourse in the current invisibility regime, and that the only alternative at hand for the individual is a return to visibility, we have not fully specified what this “return to visibility”—in itself polysemic and loaded with an ambiguity requiring appropriate explanations—consists of. The notion of the “visible other”—necessary to the deploying of the relativism underlying the reality of the “political subject”—turns out to be more complex that it may have seemed at first sight, in so far as we are not dealing – at least not at a first stage—with getting from a “visibility regime” to one of visibility, but with \textit{seeing the invisible}. The \textit{identitary deactualisation of the spectator} leads him not to see the not-seeing, and thus to become an absolute reality, which requires no other object of vision than that supplied by his own “becoming-lost-in-himself”. Hence, the first and urgent step to be taken is the incorporation of the estrangement of not-seeing to the horizon of visibility of the spectator.
If, against the background of what we have so far stated, we now consider carefully this idea of the “estrangement of not-seeing”, the first reasonable doubt springing to mind is how we can claim a frame of visibility of the invisible when, precisely, the anachronistic vision which deactivates the spectator politically consists of giving an appearance of visibility to the invisible. To answer this question, it is necessary to make clear that visibility itself – which is how we will call the result of the perception of the invisible through the anachronistic projection, by the spectator, of images registered in his visual memory – possesses a hiding function, given by the fact that far from seeking to render the invisible visible, what it really seeks is to deny it and thus hide the state of collapse of production suffered by the image. In that sense, we can state that what encourages this “visibility itself” is generating a fiction of continuity which can eliminate any trace about the change of regime that has taken place, any trace making us think of the image as an instrument of mediation, able to guarantee the circulation of flows of meaning. Moreover, and as a consequence of that, this kind of visibility always functions positively in respect to the dominant RPR, rendering impossible any attempt at dissidence directed to articulate a “critical visibility”, thus triggering a political intervention in reality.

Against the opacity and the passive and non-critical behaviour derived from this paradigm, the other visibility, which stands in contrast to it, is characterised, firstly, by the reactualisation of vision, which abandons its anachronistic, autonomous, temporality, in order to articulate itself in a heteronomous present. But this is not all: since it does not operate through mechanisms that limit themselves to the repetition of out-of-date and obsolete paradigms, this visibility, instead of hiding the true state of the image—its
obvious non-productive condition—it makes this transparent, and for this reason turns the former context of familiarity, of narrative continuity, into one of estrangement and rupture. What is at stake here, then, is that the frame of visibility within which the reception of the invisible by the spectator takes place could show, in all its magnitude and bleakness, the absence, the lack of vision which defines the contemporary RPR. The “other visibility” –or the “visible other”, as we have also called it above— is singularised then by letting us see that there is nothing to see, by making vision wonder in so far as it is an absence of itself. Precisely here, in the acknowledgement that the “visible other” is, in all truth, what cannot be seen, the invisible, the non-existent, is where we can locate the seed of the “political subject”. Because if, as it has been said above, “political subjectivity” requires the relationship of a “self” with an other—what is more: we could say that it arises in the turbulent space opened up by the insurmountable distance between them—we cannot but conclude that the way in which the spectator can be articulated as a “political subject” is through the relationship between his “actual vision” with its radical other: non-vision. Hence, to see non-seeing is the gesture upon which the political dimension of spectatorial experience resides, in so far as it transforms an aporia – that originated by an other which negates the self, carrying it to a point of impossibility—into a paradigm of “ethical relativity”, and therefore, of “political subjectivity”. 
The Seventh Man: Migration, Politics and Aesthetics

Begüm Özden Fırat

Istanbul in the 1960s. Hundreds of people line up in front of the liaison offices of the German Federal Employment office in Istanbul and Ankara every day, waiting for a job in a German company. The people who were applying for jobs first had to undergo a medical examination and a test of their technical abilities. If they were successful, they got on the train, and traveled for 50 hours all the way up to Germany. At the end of their exhausting journey, they all arrived at Munich main station, track number 11, where they were welcomed by a Turkish interpreter. After a short break and a meal they were accompanied to their final destinations in different German cities. That is how it started…

One of the early books to narrate the experiences of these guest workers in Europe was a collaborative project between John Berger and Jean Mohr entitled *A Seventh Man: Migrant Workers in Europe* (1975). Berger’s essay, divided into sections of departure, work, and return, explains, in a poetic Marxist tone, why and under which conditions these peasants from underdeveloped countries such as Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia had to immigrate to another country, and the ways in which they survived in Europe as “mere cogs” of the international division of labor. Mohr’s photographs accompany the fragmented stories of the immigrants and

1 Text taken from the website of DOMiT –Das Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland (The Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany) See: www.domit.de
show how they turned their heads away from the camera while they were undergoing medical examination with numbers written on their chests; the railways they left and arrived at; how they constructed roads, tunnels or buildings, and worked in the factories; where they slept and ate; how they stared and waited. In “A Note for the Reader” Berger writes that the book concerns a dream/nightmare. He contemplates:

By what right can we call the lived experience of others a dream/nightmare? Not because the facts are so oppressive that they can weakly be termed nightmarish; nor because hopes can weakly be termed dreams. In a dream the dreamer wills, acts, reacts, speaks, and yet submits to the unfolding of a story which he scarcely influences. The dream happens to him. Afterwards he may ask another to interpret it. But sometimes a dreamer tries to break his dream by deliberately waking himself up. This book represents such an intention within a dream which the subject of the book and each of us is dreaming (13).

The metaphor of a dream/nightmare dreamt by everyone constitutes the narrative of the book. The seventh man cannot escape from the dream because his migration is like “an event in a dream dreamt by another,” everything he does “is determined by the needs of the dreamer’s mind” (43). Even his final return is mythic. When he goes back he realizes that “an assured place for him no longer exits in his village” (221). This is why “two or three years after his final return he or other members of his family will be compelled to go abroad once more” legally or illegally (219). His is a perpetual dream/nightmare.

As a figure in a dream the seventh man is lonely, cannot understand the language, and cannot speak even though he utters words. Levent Soysal argues that the migrant in “A Seventh Man” is “not heard and seen, remaining
invisible beyond walls that separate him from European imagination” (2003: 497). He is a figure of absence of speech and gesture. He is utterly silent:

The written letters of the other language are jumbled together to make silent sounds.

SCHOKOLADE IST GUT!

The silence is his. Whatever they are saying, he, with the silent sounds in his head, is going to nod. (Berger and Mohr, 1975: 66)

In his 1990 essay “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha returns to John Berger’s “A Seventh Man.” In this seminal essay, Bhabha gives a critique of the essentialist reading of nationhood and argues that nation is a narrative written in “intermittent time, and interstitial space, that emerges as a structure of undecidability at the frontiers of cultural hybridity” (1990: 312). He argues that the uncanny moments of enunciation of cultural difference at the limits of the nation’s narrative scatter the homogenous and horizontal view of society based on unified national space and time. It is through the “foreignness of language,” a notion that Bhabha borrows from Walter Benjamin, that it becomes “possible to inscribe the specific locality of cultural systems — their incommensurable differences — and through that apprehension of difference, to perform the act of translation” (315).

In the beginning of the section “The Foreignness of Languages,” which deals with the enigma of language through the figure of the migrant, Bhabha states that he must give way to the vox populi:
[...] a relatively unspoken tradition of the people of the pagus — colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities — wandering peoples who will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation (315).

They are those who speak the “encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant” across the accumulation of the history of the West. They voice the lost object — the national Heim — and this lost object is written across the bodies of the people, as “it repeats in the silence that speaks the foreignness of language” (315). The emblematic figure of this silent speech is none other than the Turkish worker in Germany. Bhabha quotes Berger extensively:

…. The migrant’s intentionality is permeated by historical necessities of which neither he nor anybody he meets is aware. That is why it is as if his life were dreamt by another [....] They watch the gestures made and learn to imitate them [....] The rate of work allows no time to prepare for the gesture. The body loses its mind in the gesture. How opaque the disguise of words.... He treated the sounds of the unknown language as if they were silence. To break through his silence. He learnt twenty words of the new language. But to his amazement at first, their meaning changed as he spoke them. He asked for coffee. What the words signified to the barman was that he was asking for coffee in a bar where he should not be asking for coffee. He learnt girl. What the word meant when he used it, was that he was a randy dog. Is it possible to see through the opaqueness of the words? (315-16)

For Bhabha, this silent Other of gesture and failed speech, who is without the language that bridges knowledge and act, “leads the life of a double, the automaton” (316). The speech he utters thwarts understanding because it remains “eerily untranslated in the racist site of its enunciation.” According to Bhabha the Turk as a dog is a complex form of social fantasy,
an axis of identification — the desire of a man (white) for a man (black) — that underwrites that utterance and produces the paranoid “delusion of reference,” which the man-dog confronts with his own alterity, his foreignness. In this sense, the seventh man becomes what Freud calls the “haphazard member of the herd,” the Stranger, whose “languageless presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity by impeding the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can rediscover himself, and upon which the group’s amour propre is based” (316).

The immigrant’s desire to “imitate” language makes present the opacity of language, its untranslatable residue and it produces a void in the articulation of the social space while the racist fantasy, which disavows the ambivalence of its desire, opens up another void in the present. The nation’s space and time becomes ambivalent through the migrant’s silence that elicits “those racist fantasies of purity and persecution.” In the process, “by which the paranoid position finally voids the place from where it speaks,” Bhabha contends, we begin to see “another history of the German language” (317). This dream/nightmare experience of the Turkish gastarbeiter represents what Bhabha calls “the radical incommensurability of translation,” in contrast to Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses, which attempts to redefine the boundaries of the Western nation, so that the “foreignness of languages” becomes the inescapable cultural condition for the enunciation of the mother tongue (317).

Some critics working on German-Turkish migrant literature or cinema were aggravated by Homi Bhabha’s rendering of “the Turkish migrant worker in Germany as an incommensurable, alienated, speechless victim without any
voice” (Göktürk, 2002: 4; Soysal 2003). They argued, against Bhabha’s portrayal, that even the works of the so-called Gastarbeiterliterature proved that “the opaque Other has broken its silence and begun to speak back to the West... in speaking ‘our’ language, it has begun to speak back” (Teraoka, 1987: 80).

In contrast to critics like Göktürk and Soysal, my problem with Bhabha’s text does not stem from his rendering of the Turkish migrant as a speechless victim when he has already become an articulated writer. What is problematic for me is Bhabha conceptualization of the silent speech of the migrant representing the “radical incommensurability of translation” merely in psychological terms. For him, the silent double gives rise to uncanny feelings, invokes archaic anxiety and aggression, a paranoid position of “delusion of reference” upon which the group’s amour propre is based. This, according to Bhabha, is a complex form of social/racist fantasy that is evoked by the failed speech of the migrant. In contrast to Bhabha, I will argue that the notion of “the radical incommensurability of translation” should be seen as a form of political “fantasy,” which, as I will suggest, forecloses the realm of politics.


3 The most famous first-generation writers of the so-called gastarbeiterliterature are Aras Ören and Yuksel Pazarkaya. The second-generation writers of minority, migrant or intercultural literature are Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Feridun Zaimoglu and Zafer Senocak, to name but a few. The works of these writers not only translated the German language (the most provocative example is Kanak Sprak (1995) by Feridun Zaimoğlu) but also German national memory (Zafer Senocak’s novel Perilous Kinship) even though the Turks and the Germans are not historically bound by a colonial relationship as in the case of Rushdie’s Satanic Verses.
The speech of the “uncecounted”

While Bhabha flashed his reader back to the unspoken tradition of the pagus, I suggest that we go back first to Aristotle and then to Ancient Rome following political philosopher Jacques Rancière’s Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy (1995). Rancière starts his book by disagreeing with Aristotle’s understanding of the “political animal” based on the idea that “man alone of the animals possesses speech” while the “mere voice....can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well” (Aristotle, Politics I, quoted in Rancière, 1999: 1). According to Rancière, in Aristotle’s “limpid demonstration several points remain obscure” (1999: 2) such as Aristotle’s speaking animal “is split from the beginning,” and he is already decentered (Chambers, 2005: par.17). There is a fundamental difference between “speaking” language and “possessing” it, as the possession of language is not a physical capacity that separates men from animals but a “symbolic division between the order of speech and that of bodies” (Rancière, 2004: 5).

In “Ten Theses on Politics,” Rancière asks:

[How one can be sure that the human animal mouthing a noise in front of you is actually voicing an utterance rather than merely expressing a state of being? If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths (2001, par. 23).

Rancière contends that traditionally it had been enough not to hear what came out of the mouths of the majority of human beings — slaves, women, workers, colonized peoples— as language and, instead, to hear only cries of hunger, rage, or hysteria in order to deny them the quality of being political animals (2004: 5). What Bhabha calls the radical
incommensurability of translation relates to such preclusion of
the migrant from being a political animal possessing a
language. It is through such a denial that the migrant’s
utterance of “girl” is taken to mean that he is a randy dog.
What is seen through the opaqueness of words is a political
“fantasy” that adorns the migrant only with a “sort of
bellowing” which is “a sign of need and not a manifestation of
intelligence” (2004: 5). Such an understanding reverses
Bhabha’s argument: it is not that the migrant is deprived of
language or gesture (or, for that matter, of the capacity of
translation) but he is not recognized as possessing speech,
which, actually, is the denial of the migrant as a political
being.

This “fantasy” makes the speech of some people
unheard, ununderstandable and untranslatable in relation to
those who have to power to speak or power over language.
Rancière gives a historical example to make his point about
possessing and speaking the language and the political
implication of their separation. He recalls the plebeian
secession on the Aventine Hill in Ancient Rome — as it was
rewritten by the French thinker Ballanche in 1830 — when the
plebeians demanded a treaty with the patricians which was
denied on the basis that plebeians did not have human speech,
and they could not give them what they did not have.
Rancière writes,

[...] in order to be audibly understood and visibly recognized
as legitimate speaking subjects, the plebeians must not only
argue their position but must also construct the scene of
argumentation in such a manner that the patricians might recognize
it as a world in common. The principle of political interlocution
is thus disagreement; that is, it is the discordant
understanding of both the objects of reference and the
speaking subjects. In order to enter into political exchange, it
becomes necessary to invent the scene upon which spoken
words may be audible, in which objects may be visible, and individuals themselves may be recognized (2000: 116, my emphasis).

According to Rancière, the creation of such a common polemical space requires a novel perceptual universe, one where those who were previously “regarded as not speaking the language prove that their mouths do, indeed, emit common speech” (2006). For Rancière, politics proper consists of the construction of a polemical scene by means of speech acts articulating a common wrong — concerning what place belongs or does not belong to it and who is able or unable to make enunciations and demonstration about the common. This situation concerns disagreement, defined as “a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying (1999: x). 4 In disagreement “discussion of an argument comes down to a dispute over the object of the discussion and over the capacity of those who are making an object of it” (1999: xii). Such conflict disrupts the logic of police order, a term Rancière uses to refer to the general law determining “the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its form of exclusion,” which is, first and foremost, an organization of “bodies based on a communal distribution of the sensible” (2004a: 88). The essence of the police order is a certain distribution of the sensible, which is a system of coordinates “defining modes of being, doing, making, and communicating that establishes the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable” (88). It is a certain manner of partitioning the sensible based on the principle of

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4 The French term Mésentente, that is not translatable into English, means both “the fact of not hearing, of not understanding” and “quarrel, disagreement.”
saturation; it is a mode of the partition of the sensible that recognizes neither lack nor supplement.

Politics disturbs this order by introducing either a supplement or a lack that is not recognized by the police order by those who have no part, those who are uncounted within the existing system. It persists as long as there is a dissensus about the givens of a particular situation, of what is seen and what might be said, on the question of who is qualified to see or say what is given. It opens a gap in the sensible through the “emergence of a claim to enfranchisement by a group that has been so radically excluded that its inclusion demands the transformation of the rules of inclusion” (Martin, 2005: 39).

The political “fantasy” I was referring to in relation to Bhabha’s term “the radical incommensurability of translation” can be related to the logic of the police that distributes lots in such a way as to give each person his or her place in the order of things, a place tied to identity. The migrant without the language belongs to those who remain invisible, inaudible, those who are uncounted and have no part. He is the underdog. However, such a relegation of the migrant to not speaking a language does not reflect “the obstinacy of the dominant or their ideological blindness,” but, rather, it expresses “the sensory order that organizes their domination” (Rancière, 1999: 24). It is a sensory illusion. In spite of, or due to, this sensory illusion, politics exists because those who “have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation” (1999: 27). This confrontation makes visible that which had no reason to be seen and it lodges one world into another that creates “a shared world the other does not see.” It is “the construction of a paradoxical world that relates two separate worlds.” (Rancière, 2001: par. 24)
New gatherings
Following Rancière’s ideas summarized above, I would like to discuss whether or the ways in which the figure of the seventh man would emerge as the dissident who possesses and voices his speech so as to bring about a disagreement that creates a common polemical scene in our so-called post-political times. I will argue that the gastarbeiter figure of Berger and Bhabha has been replaced (or has to be replaced) by that of the “illegal(ised) immigrant.” My suggestion, firstly, stems from the fact that the figure of the gastarbeiter as an empirical, juridical and social term does not exist since the formal guest worker programs had been canceled following the oil crisis in 1973. Secondly, those who arrived as part of the bilateral agreements, as well as their descendents, have been incorporated in the (failed) multicultural “order” as guests (paradoxically and welcome or not) and given their places, roles and status. However, in contradiction to this supposedly stable and closed off order the process of immigration is still going on as people illegally cross the borders of Europe everyday, as “we speak.” It is, I contend, the so-called illegal immigrant through her multiple displacements or internment in deportation camps who reenacts the precarious everyday experience of the previous gastarbeiter, albeit under different circumstances. They are invisible — after all who can tell

5 The term illegal(ized) migrant refers to people who are anything but a homogeneous group. What unites them is the fact that they have falsified residency papers or possess none at all. But the ways in which one can become illegal and its duration vary enormously. We can, perhaps, identify certain “categories,” such as, rejected asylum seekers, young migrants (those, for example, who had been living or were born in a host country but become illegal due to a criminal act) and illegalized working migrants, those either enter the country illegally or violate their visas. (See, http://www.noborder.org/without/germany.html#six)

6 The fundamental difference, besides the legal status, would be that the gastarbeiter was the working figure of the Fordist system while the illegal
apart an illegal from a legal immigrant — segregated and they wander around as supposedly speechless victims. However, they are hyper-visible in official and right wing discourse as a threat to nation's well-being and raise anxiety and racial aggressivity in their absence.

In the opening of “DissemiNation,” Bhabha writes that, having seen/experienced migration himself, he has lived "the moment of scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering" (291). He continues:

Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of “foreign” cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal

immigrant operates within a post-Fordist system which requires her to be flexible worker “without papers.” Also the gastarbeiter was a figure of mobility between two nations (mother and host countries) whereas the illegals are forced to move transnationally. The fundamental reason for the this transnational movement is the regulation of the “safe third country”— according to which a refugee who enters the EU by way of a safe third country (i.e. one in which he or she is not subject to political persecution) may be deported to that country. This has led to so-called “chain deportation” because the safe third countries that surround Europe are increasingly declaring neighboring countries to be safe third countries as well. In this sense, the neighboring countries of the EU, such as Turkey, has become “transit countries” populated with illegal immigrants. For an interview with Behzad Yaghamanian on illegal immigrants in Turkey see, “Urban Space and Illegal Immigrants” http://tanpelin.blogspot.com/2005_12_01_tanpelin_archive.html
statutes, immigration status — the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man (1990: 291).

Let me introduce another form of gathering, that of the illegal immigrants. Six years after the publication of “DissemiNation,” in the summer of 1996, 300 African illegal immigrants occupied the St. Bernard church in Paris for several months. Some of them were asylum seekers and some were long-term working residents of France whose status had been made illegal as a result of legislative changes. The event was considered a turn in French national discussion about migration policies and the presence of what traditionally has been called “clandestine migrants.” Those who occupied the public space declared themselves sans-papiers (literally, without papers) and asked for “papers for all.” Mireille Rosello argues that even though the occupation ended with a police eviction the movement achieved, at least, a symbolic victory of replacing the previously common name clandestin with sans-papiers (2001: 2). She states that the sans-papiers struggle created “a space of sociological, legal, and philosophical debate in the very heart of the French capital” (2) and made the French citizens question the relationship between “the city and the nation, between the refugee and the law, between rights and equity” (5).

The act of the “illegals” naming themselves sans-papiers is comparable to Rancière account of 19th century revolutionary Auguste Blanqui’s self-proclamation as “a

proletarian” in response to a prosecutor seeking to “reduce him to a social class or a profession” (1999: 37). By doing so, Rancière argues, Blanqui gave the word proletarian a different meaning and inscribed the uncounted in a space where they are countable as uncounted (39). Similarly, in replacing the xenophobic term clandestine, which addressed the illegal as the enemy and the criminal, with _sans-papiers_, the movement not only declared a membership of a collective but also opened up a space for the uncounted to be counted as those who speak. In _Excitable Speech_ Judith Butler writes that to be “addressed injuriously is not only to be open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and the place of injury, and to suffer disorientation of one’s situation as the effect of such speech” (1997: 4). Such shattering exposes the volatility of one’s place within the community of speakers, she argues, “one can be ‘put in one’s place’ by such speech, but such a place may be no place” (4). In this respect, the articulation of the new name can be considered a re-orientation of the illegal immigrants as a response to a pejorative name given by those who can speak. The act of self-naming denounces the non-place where one is put by appropriating a negative identity. The term _sans-papiers_ evidently points to a lack; it is an identity _sans —_ without, which leads Jacques Derrida to question the appropriation of “the terrifying phrase” _sans-papiers_ as it adds new, perverse implication to their plight. He ponders, “Those we call, in a word, ‘undocumented’ supposedly lack something. He is un—. She is un—. What is missing exactly?” (quoted in Rosello, 2001, p 180-I, n 5). This lack that makes Derrida worry, actually hints at an overlap with Rancière’s understanding of “the poor” or “the people,” those who are not counted or have no part. What the _sans-papiers_ lack is not only the precious documents but also their count or their part in the whole.
Rancière calls this process, by which the clandestine immigrant becomes the *sans-papiers*, “political subjectification.” It refers to an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies that is distributed by the police order. It is, thus, not the recognition or embrace of an already-given identity, but the disruption of it (1999: 36). It is the production of a space between the identity of the police order and a new political subjectivity that does not exist prior to the disagreement. He writes:

A mode of subjectification does not create subjects *ex nihilo*; it creates them by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute. “Workers” or “women” are identities that apparently hold no mystery. Anyone can tell *who* is meant. But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness by questioning the relationship between a *who* and a *what* in the apparent redundancy of the positing of an existence (1999: 36).

*L’affaire des sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard*, as a collective action of enunciation and demonstration by “supplementary” subjects, was not aimed at creating a separate space to speak from a minority position. Instead, it manifested a dissensus by means of collapsing two different worlds (of those who are excluded and included, visible and invisible, and possessing and speaking a language) into a polemical scene. Politics, Rancière writes, consists in transforming the “space of ‘moving along’ into a space for the appearance of a subject.” It is an act that reconfigures the space “of what there is to do there, what is to be seen or named therein” (2001, paragraph 22). The *sans-papiers* populated the French national public space, occupied its streets, churches and theaters, its everyday and media so as to become visible and audible as non-counted, as those who possess *logos*. This is a performative process of
identification of the non-part with the whole that in turn transforms the partition of the whole. In his analysis of the sans-papiers movement, Laurent Dubois argues that the movement gained success because they phrased their demands “through universalist discourse with expressions of cultural identity, bringing together approaches often considered incommensurable in French political culture” (2000: 15). They formulated their demands in a language of Republican rights and “spoke of universalism in foreign languages, presenting themselves as ‘foreign’ cultures at home in France, and so articulated the issue not as one about the ‘assimilation’ of outsiders but rather as the problem of a Republic which was violating the rights of men and women who lived within it, who had constructed it and were a part of its past, present and future” (2000: 29).

The symbolic and political space opened up by the “French” sans-papiers contaminated other European national spaces and triggered the formation of different national/transnational struggles, organizations, networks and campaigns on issues of migration, freedom of movement, and the right to stay against border policing, racism, deportation and detention camps. The term sans-papier was mostly embraced in different contexts as it is considered a status that

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8 The newsletter “Crossing Borders: Movement and Struggles of Migration” initiated by the Frassanito Network refers to different conditions experienced in various European countries, as well as between the various subjects. It can be difficult to recognize the similarities between, for example, “a temporary seasonal worker in the fields of Andalusia and a ‘legal’ migrant, who lives and works everyday in Eurospace. Or between an undocumented migrant, working in precarious jobs in Italy, and a ‘tolerated refugee’ living in an isolated ‘junglecamp’ in Northern Germany. And what about the realities of migrants in a detention centre in Poland or in Ukraine, or in front of the borders of Ceuta and Melilla?” Instead of national separation, they suggest a transnational and translational perspective from around and beyond Europe. (see, http://www.noborder.org/crossing_borders/newsletter01en.pdf)
everybody with a foreign passport can achieve under “wrong conditions.” One year after the events in Paris, the campaign-network *kein mensch ist illegal* (no one is illegal) was formed during the *Documenta X* in Kassel by a group of activists including photographers, filmmakers, artists, and media activists. The goal of the network is to hide and support illegal migrants, squatting churches, organizing public or semi-public debates about illegal border-crossing and starting actions against deportations. It promotes the idea of opening up all borders for all and initiates campaigns such as “everyone is an expert” and “deportation class” and organizes multiple border camps every year at the borders of the “Fortress Europe.”\(^9\)

The cultural/political activist migrant network *Kanak Attak* was founded a year later with multiple branches in Germany working on issues of racism and legalization not only by organizing actions but also video festivals and sound performances.\(^10\) In January 2001, a group of “Belgian” *sans-papiers* occupied the abandoned Somalian embassy building in Brussels, known as the *Ambassade Universelle* (Universal

\(^9\) For the campaigns websites see respectively; http://www.expertbase.net/everyoneisanexpert/index.php and www.deportation-class.com

\(^10\) See, http://www.kanak-attak.de/. In their manifesto they define themselves as “a platform for Kanaken from different social areas and are sick of the easy switching between cultures recommended by postmodernists. Kanak Attak wants to break the assignment of ethnic identities and roles; the ‘we’ and ‘them.’ And because Kanak Attak is a question of attitude and not of heritage, origin, roots or papers, non-migrants and Germans of the 2nd and even 3rd-generation are part of it too….Nevertheless: we compete for a new attitude of migrants of all generations that we want to bring on stage, independently and without compromise. Whoever believes that we celebrate a Potpourri out of Ghetto-HipHop and other clichés will be surprised. We sample, change and adapt different political and cultural drifts that all operate from oppositional positions. We go back to a mixture of theory, politics and cultural practice.”
In line with the occupation of public buildings in Paris, occupying the Universal Embassy is a very symbolic act. A building in the embassy quarter that used to belong to a state now hosts people without a state. In the Embassy, in the words of Hito Steyerl, two types of spaces met: “the abandoned wreckage of the ‘failed state’ of Somalia in the shell of its bourgeois, West European villa” and a “political fiction that attempts to take this space of the collapse of state order and make it inhabitable for migrants who are interpellated as political, ethnic and universal subjects” (2004 a). The embassy not only gave visibility to the sans-papiers, but also a special “passport” — a photo ID that provided them with some tangible recognition of an unrecognized universal citizenship.

These are a few examples of how illegal immigrants resist and struggle within the urban everyday of Europe. There are also those who disagree with the deportation or detention centers — administrative spaces in which men and women who have not committed any crime are denied their right to mobility — that are placed all over Europe and also its neighboring states. Those in-between spaces of inclusion and exclusion that Giorgio Agamben describes as the “materialization of the state of exception and ... subsequent creation of a space in which bare life and juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction” (1998, 174) have become sites of conflict especially in Spain and Italy as well as in Germany. These struggles emphasize the existence of a “wrong” and bring forth a disagreement on who is included and who has

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11 See, www.universal-embassy.be

12 Some other influential organizations or networks within Europe are: Tavolo migranti dei social forum italiani (Italy) Act up (France), Barbed Wire Britain Network to End Refugee and Migrant Detention (GB), Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants (Germany), The Voice Refugee Forum (Germany), Migreurop (France).
the right to be seen and heard within the contested borders of Europe. These transnational and transitional processes of political subjectification not only create new litigious spaces and subjectivities but also new objects and concepts of discussion such as the autonomy of migration, precarity, or *lager*. They also draw new cartographies that visualize processes and places that cannot be incorporated by “regular maps” such as the map of detention and deportation centers; the map of movements and constraints within the geopolitical space of the Strait of Gibraltar; the map of supranational governance operating the European migration regime function; as well as maps and videos for illegal border crossings.13 These movements and maps open up alternative semantic fields to those subsumed within the police order and offer different signifying practices.

The oppositional practice initiated by the *sans papiers* movement in Paris constituted a sort of collective “insurrectionary speech” that calls for emancipation and equality precisely by those who have been “radically disenfranchised from making such a call” and thereby “reterritorializing” the term from its operation within dominant discourse precisely in order to counter the effects of [one’s] marginalization” (Butler, 158). This speech questions what Butler calls “foreclosure,” which is tacitly referenced in those instances in which we ask: “what must remain unspeakable for contemporary regimes of discourse to continue to exercise their power? How is the ‘subject’ before the law produced through the exclusion of other possible sites of enunciation within the law?” (1997: 139). The foreclosure as

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13 For the maps, see respectively: http://www.nolager.org/files/0407/camps_in_europe.pdf; mcs.hackitectura.net/wiki-download_wiki_attachment.php?attId=32; http://www.transitmigration.org/migmap
that which cannot be said and remains unspoken — reminiscent of Rancière’s police order — can be broken into the unspeakable by “a subject who speaks at the border of the speakable” taking “the risk of redrawing the distinction between what is and is not speakable” (139). This political act of appropriating the “unspeakable” or “speaking impossibly” can lead to the political inclusion of dispossessed or marginalized people.

Indeed, the “embodied speech” of the illegal immigrants is an impossible one. Writing on “political becoming” of what he calls “abject subjects,” emerging in sites as diverse as the sanctuaries of the sans papiers in France or the detention camps of the rioting refugees in Australia, political scientist Peter Nyers points out that the risks taken by the talking abject foreigner — i.e. taking the risk to become a speaking agent — is an “impossible activism.” It is impossible “because the non-status do not possess the ‘authentic’ identity (i.e. citizenship) that would allow them to be political, to be an activist” (2003: 1080). The ambivalence, to use one of the favorite terms of Bhabha, created by the improper political subject coincides with Butler’s fleeting mentioning of Rosa Parks who, as Butler writes, had no prior right to sit in front of the bus yet, by “laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy” (1997: 147).

Similarly, the sans-papiers as “illegitimate” interlocutors initiated another insurrectionary process that Rancière calls politics. This process of becoming political subjectivities is quite different from the mimicry of the seventh man, his repetitive imitative gestures and irritating silences of failing speech. But, it is also different from the process of dissemination of meaning, time, peoples, cultural boundaries and historical traditions — as it seems to be suggested by
Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* — through which the radical alterity of the national culture would create new forms of living and writing. According to Bhabha, these new forms of living and writing open up and simultaneously take place within the contentious internal liminality of the nation space that “provides a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal, and the emergent” (Bhabha, 1990: 300). This liminal space between boundaries is where social differences are articulated through a process of negotiation. This is the space where those marginalized by the exclusionary forces of nation time/space resist and become political agents.

In contradiction to Bhabha’s liminal site of resistance, the disagreement uttered by the illegal immigrants acts “in the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status of those words” (Rancière, 1999: 33). They make the homogeneous and harmonious everyday urban space litigious and heterogeneous by surfacing a negation against the police order that “configures well-identifiable groups with specific interests, aspirations, values, and ‘culture’” (Rancière, 2000: 125). In their attempts to make themselves visible and audible, they make the space of the “other” a common polemical space. They imitate the language to raise political dissensus by invoking equality as a universal right with expressions of cultural identity. While the liminal space operates through multiple negotiations, the space of the politics proceeds by means of negations. Bhabha conceives the liminal as a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal, and the emergent that opens up the possibility of “other narratives of the people and their difference” (1994: 300). The space of the political, conversely, narrates the enunciative and demonstrative struggles of the uncounted for
equality and emancipation in their difference, as underscored by Rosa Parks' act of civil disobedience.

In his essay "In Good Faith," Salman Rushdie writes, "Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves" (1991: 394). Is there another way of bringing newness to the world other than change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining?

**Aesthetics of migration**

John Berger wrote that "A Seventh Man" intends to deliberately wake up the dreamer from his dream in which the seventh man finds himself without being able to will, act, react or speak as he is not the dreamer himself. If one can still "call the lived experience of others a dream/nightmare," the struggles of the illegal immigrants might be seen as a wake-up call. A call for a time to "redistribute the sensible."

As I argued, immigrant movements across and beyond European urban space and within and outside of the deportation or detention centers, create new subjects, spaces, and objects of litigation available to experience intervening the police order, as we know it. This political act of interrupting the given distribution of the sensible is, for Rancière, inherently aesthetic in so far as the political disruption is a reconfiguration of the order of what is visible or perceptible. That is to say, politics is the disruption of an order that claims to be total, not only by subordinating each of its parts to a particular place within it, but, in so doing, by establishing the conditions of visibility for a part to be a part. Consequently, its inclusion does not just demand that it is recognized as akin to other parts, but demands a transformation of the fundamental
terms by which parts are seen or become visible — that is, a transformation of experience. In The Politics of Aesthetics Rancière writes:

If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense .... as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (2004a: 13)

Therefore, aesthetics is not a matter of art and taste; it is, first of all, a matter of time and space. Aesthetic acts are "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity" (2004a: 9). In this respect, it understands actions, silences, thoughts, dreams, perceptions or enunciations not in terms of a social content that could be judged as relatively good or bad, but rather as the production of formal arrangements and forms of sense distribution that are, at heart, simultaneously aesthetic and political. Therefore, the political is always aesthetic because "politics is only efficacious as a formal arrangement of social agents, institutions, and possibilities; aesthetic forms are always political because they are never anything less than the arrangement and distribution of forms of perception that are ultimately social and political" (Highmore, 2005: 455).

Herein lies the link between migratory movements and aesthetics. Yet, this knot should not be understood as an uncomplicated manifestation of the global multitude transforming every territory they go as curator Hou Hanru writes in the statement of the exhibition entitled Wherever We Go: Art, Identity, Cultures in Transit:
In fact, the migrants turn their “exile” into a process of engaging and negotiating with the urban/suburban spaces. Culturally and physically, their presence and active involvements strongly change the social and cultural structures of the city, to produce new cities out of the old cities (often European traditional styles). The booming of China Towns, Arabic quarters, etc. are the most visible signs while, internally, the structure of the population, public behaviours, values, etc. are being diversified and transformed towards a much more variable and wealthy climate.\footnote{The exhibition \textit{Wherever We Go: Art, Identity, Cultures in Transit}, organized by Hou Hanru and Gabi Scardi, took place at the Spazio Oberdan in Milan between October 2006 and January 2007. \url{http://www.sfai-art.com/News/NewsDetail.aspx?newsID=1178&navID=6&sectionID=8}}

Hanru’s curatorial statement seems to operate within the discourse of the multicultural art world promoting what Hito Steyerl calls the “jargon of inauthenticity,” that is as sentimental and essentialist as Adorno’s notion of “jargon of authenticity,” except for the fact, that “what is being essentialized recently is not localist rootedness, but the requirements of the global market: adaptability, innovation and mobility” (2004b: 165-6). According to Steyerl, this jargon fits in the national rhetorics of multiculturalism centered on “integration” and “enrichment” epitomized in Hanru’s argument that the booming of ethnic quarters would accumulate in the diversification and transformation of the structure of the population, public behaviours, and values “towards a much more variable and wealthy climate.”

The suggestion of a “wealthy climate” to come can be regarded as functioning within what Rancière calls the “logic of consensus” through which “the givens of any collective situation are objectivized in such a way as they can no more lend themselves to a dispute, to the polemical framing of a controversial world into the given world” (2006). It is the
dismissal of the “aesthetics of politics” by “plugging the intervals and patching over the possible gaps between appearance and reality” (2004c: 305). Politics, as Rancière understands it, does not emerge through mere movement or mere appearance in a space. It occurs when unrepresented subjects create a polemical space where they put into contention the objective status of what is “given” and impose an examination and discussion of those things that were not “visible,” that were not accounted for previously. It is an utterance of disagreement, a struggle “for one’s voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner” (Žižek, 1998: 63). It is the reconfiguration of one’s body, of one’s lived world, of one’s space and time. And this process might be another way in which newness enters the world. Perhaps not only by means of “sly civility” but also by acts of disagreement, as the legacy of the sans-papiers reminds us.

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Relational Thinking and Migrancy: Subjective Displacements and the Politics of Social Space

Sudeep Dasgupta

Introduction

A Migrant Politics could mean a displacement of the figure of the migrant. In this displacement, a re-ordering of both social space and the discourses that fix those within it comprise politics. This is the thesis the essay explores by relating a recent articulation of politics to a reading of a film. Jacques Rancière (1999) has argued that politics is not the domain where the justness of a society is established through the calculation of the worth of each of its parts. Rather, he claims that politics happens where the orderly arrangement of social space in its constituent parts is displaced through the exposure of a wrong. This wrong is produced through the relational emergence of subjectivity which articulates a contentious equality and stakes a claim to what is common. In Marc Isaacs’ Calais: The Last Border (2003), the demarcation of Inside and Outside that the term “border” establishes is displaced. In this displacement, the figure of the migrant emerges as a multifaceted and constantly changing relational subject-information. Through sound and image, such a figuration of migrant subjectivity is contentious, to the extent that it violates borders between those who seemingly possess “rights” as residents of Calais, and those in limbo with neither the
security of residence or the rights of citizens. It is this relation between an argument about what constitutes politics and how the film produces migrant subjectivity and dissensual social space that the essay will explore.

Politics, argues Rancière, is essentially a displacement of the location of the different groups that comprise community. Referring to Plato and Aristotle, he argues that the justness of community was based on the non-conflictual allocation of different parts (oligarchs, aristocrats, the demos) to their proper positions within a whole (Rancière 2003, 3-34). But this notion of a just community, the object of political philosophy, cannot do away a basic contradiction that is the basis of thinking community. The contradiction is triggered by the lack of agreement on what constitutes the right basis to judge the worth of each group. Instead of consensus, it is the rationality of disagreement which is the basis of politics (Rancière 1999, xii). For example, the virtue of the aristoi is secured from wealth accumulated through injury to the people, yet masked over by a seemingly natural property (virtue and wisdom) that they are presumed to possess. The wrong – tort – that lies at the basis of the supposedly divine (Plato) or natural, properties of groups disrupts, and divides social space from within.

This internal division based on the absence of any arkhē, any basis, for fixing the quality of a community and the worth of its parts is exposed through a counter-articulation of community by subjects who articulate a wrong. These subjects do not emerge fully-formed (Rancière’s example is the complex articulation of the category of class in Marx) but are formed through their emergence when they articulate a wrong. The relation to the “problem” of migrants, particularly so-called illegals, is instructive here. Dominant social and political discourse in the post Cold War world reduces politics to the smooth functioning of the organs of state bureaucracy
and capitalist efficiency. Servicing the market and ensuring smooth government, these imperatives of consensual democracy erase the existence of injustice that forms the basis of just society. Here the figure of the migrant, and in particular the immigrant in all its forms, from the legal to the illegal, becomes relevant. The upsurge in racist mobilization, not simply in civil society but more importantly, in the party programmes of established political organizations demonstrates that the “uncivilized” immigrant and the illegal, in particular, emerge as that disturbance which interrupts consensual and technocratic democracy, which Ranciere terms the “police”. Under such a police regime, the migrant becomes a complex cipher whose coding by different political discourses, brings to light the vacuity of claims that society is just. I say “coding” here because within the established police discourse, the migrant gets framed as the suspect Other, especially when poor, uneducated or of a Muslim cultural background. The migrant, post Sep. 11 2001, is also coded strongly in religious terms, as if the complexity of what religion (in this case “Islam” is) is self-evident, and that too, for those with little or no knowledge of it. The fixing of the migrant, particularly the “unwanted” one, is an example of this division of the community into Inside and Outside. The wrong which is masked over in discussions of a just community can be revealed through establishing a relationality between a purported Other, outside the desired community and yet in it, and the member of the community.

It is in this context, the recoding of the migrant through the exposure of injustice becomes a politics, in Ranciére’s terms. For such a recoding not only alters the terms through which migrant subjectivity is stabilized by the police regime, but could articulate the question of freedom and justice, in a manner which disrupts, and displaces the division between Us and Them which undergirds much contemporary
xenophobia. Further, one form of such a recoding of the migrant could be through establishing a relationality with others, and producing a counter-discourse of community to that of the “just” community of the police regime. It is precisely this relationality that I will focus on in the reading of Calais. Migrant subjectivity is produced in the film, as the emergence of a relationality between individuals which disturbs the apportionment of Self and Other, Inside and Outside, which a border puts into place. The migrant then, is neither a sociological category or a human essence, with a specific place, and a specific value attributed to it, within the sum worth of a just community. Rather, this subjectivity emerges through the articulation of a wrong that establishes a commonality through relation, with others not supposedly sharing either its position or qualities (uncivilized, backward, violent) within a discourse of the police regime.

**Displacement, Migrancy**

Marc Isaacs’ *Calais: The Last Border*, produced in 2003, is the end-product of a desire on the film-maker’s part to focus on those interred in the Sangatte refugee camp. However, by the time he finally made it to the city himself, the camp had been dissolved after much rancour between the French and British governments, with the latter in particular seeing the camp as a jumping-off point for Dover. The filming of the internment camp became a broader issue of the place of differentiated migrancy. The film focuses on a number of people, whose status is increasingly brought into question by the relations the film sets up between them. Are they inhabitants or visitors in transit? Refugees or unwanted illegals? Ijaz is a refugee from Kabul, whose desire to enter Britain is interrupted by internment in Calais. The film also focuses on Tulia, for whom Calais is not a place of transit, either for the U.K. (her ‘homeland’ – more on that later) or for the continent: it is
indeed home and she and her husband Les are willing residents there. Steve, also an Englishman and fellow resident of Calais, has also set up home here with his young French partner and their child, and runs a bar in the city, though his hopes for financial success do not match the social comfort the couple have found relative to their experiences in narrow-minded England. For Steve, Calais is a home which has not welcomed him from England as he hoped it might. The film pivots on these three characters. Peter, the Jamaican caught between deportation and arrival in a home that has just debarred him (two days before which Jamaicans did not need visas for the U.K.), and a bunch of ‘unwanted’ migrants who hang out on a bench by a roadside petrol station, together form the fourth focus of the film. The film also includes the regular British bus visitors to Calais, there to shop for cheap alcohol and cigarettes, and it is they who provide the sharpest perspective on the migrants of Calais, given their position as successful travellers, armed with the right papers, who are able to cross the border back and forth at will.

The relationship between the individuals in the film, and the relationship between word and image constructs a multi-dimensional picture of the migrant – with different histories and different reasons for migrancy or for settling down. They also establish changing inter-subjective relations between film-maker, the individual on-screen, and audience, and thus disturb any proper distinction between Us and Them, society and its others. The Other gets pluralized, where different histories are connected without being collapsed into a singular figure of migrancy. As a result, the issues they struggle with become understandable to us in the audience through a relationality of word to image set up by the film in all their plurality. The relationality which sets up a displacement between the individuals is complex. Relationality sets up a commonality without erasing
difference. The particular experiences of each individual in the film disturbs an insider-outsider distinction by showing up the common experiences, needs and desires they share, without collapsing their particular subject positions onto each other. In this sense, the exposure of wrong, in each of their life experiences, displaces social space through this exposure of a commonality with difference. The relationality thus created is central to how their subjectivities can be understood, as not fixed, but fluid, depending on the connections created.

The process of displacement at the level of diegetic content, but also filmic practice, is evident throughout the film where just such a relationality that disturbs social space is created. An example: the film-maker, Marc Isaacs, follows Tulia, her husband Les and their son to an ophthalmologist, where the latter is being examined. Isaacs, off-camera (he remains invisible though audible throughout the film), asks her “Do you want lots of money?” The film has been following Tulia around prior to this as she tries to make a living through many schemes, including acting as a go-between for British visitors to Calais, looking for cheap and fast medical care across the border. “Oh, it’s rather nice to have...the problem is when you haven’t got it...when you have it you are independent”, she answers, with a nervous laugh which accompanies every moment in the film when Isaacs asks her about her financial situation. When Les breaks in that they have not had a holiday in 13 years with a closing “...been a bit much”, his understated emphasis is immediately responded to by an affectionate riposte from Tulia, addressed to him with a vigorous nodding of her head. “But we try to make our life a holiday”. Talking about the sea-front apartment they share that overlooks the grey, tree-less coast, she goes on “We pretend we’re on holiday...it’s only the palm trees missing”, again with an embarrassed yet bravado-tinged laugh. The next shot is of the grey, stormy coast, registered by the crashing
waves and the wind buffeting the boom of the camera as it records the scene she is talking about. However, it is Ijaz, not Tulia, who comes into view. The spatial shift from waiting room and talk of the coast which is only a make-believe holiday space, is translated from the literal sea and holiday to the visualization of the words. But this visualization turns the meaning of the words around. For Ijaz, the sea is not an object of contemplation but a barrier he wishes he could cross – “I would like to find a little boat I could drive myself” he tells Isaacs, after the latter has been trying to make conversation about the cliffs barely visible on the other side of the water. “Very dangerous”, murmurs the film-maker to which Ijaz replies “Yes, it is very dangerous, but what can I do? I want to go to England...maybe too much danger for my life but...” the segment ends mid-sentence.

The transfer from word to image is a translation, at the level of film-form. Yet at the level of meaning, the word is not the vehicle to an image which matches it. The sea for Tulia is a make-believe element of a game of making life a holiday, in her attempt to cheer up her silent, unhappy husband. This bravado, which recurs throughout the film, and only underlines the precariousness of her position, is matched by an open desperation on Ijaz’s part when word becomes image. The sea for him can never be a holiday, make-believe or not; rather, it is an obstacle, which he dreams he can cross with a “little boat” in his desperation to get to England, “only one place in the world I can be given a safe life, I think. Its name is England.” From the entrance to the Chunnel on land, to the shots of the sea, the departure points in Calais cut through individual segments of the film. Or rather, these shots cut and join, cutting the previous segments and joining them to the next. As visualizations of transfer points, accompanied by silence, on-screen background noise, the playful jerky sounds of an accordion playing, they often reconfigure one person’s
loss as the other’s hoped for gain, and yet another’s escape. The escape, the arrival and the loss are often different: the homes they conjure up through spoken word are alternately Kabul, Calais, England, Maidstone, depending on who is doing the talking.

The connection between word and image, made in the film, sets up a relationship between Tulia and Ijaz, who never meet in real life. The viewer’s meaning-making of Tulia’s framing of the beach as holiday is framed retroactively through Ijaz’s experience of it as a barrier to home. This framing, produced through the relationality enacted by the work of sound and image, begins to break down any expected desire on the viewer’s part to sequester each individual in the film within a border (Calais) of inside and outside. By networking the experiences of each individual on-screen, the experience off-screen for the viewer becomes one of multiple framings and inter-twined relations. The migrant, as the asylum-seeker in Sangatte, breaks down, or rather, disperses across the voices, and experiences of the different individuals. It is in this sense, that migrant subjectivity gets complicated and cannot be thought of in simplistic binarisms. The film produces a relationality between historically-specific experiences of each individual.

History comes to play an important role in developing this relationality. For, if the word “sea” sets Tulia and Ijaz into relation, it exposes their different positions within the legal and social space of Calais. However, as the film continues, the historical experience of enforced separation, war and death, bring Tulia and Ijaz together. Or rather, the film brings them both together, not in difference, but in sharing something in common, which is the loss of a mother.

Midway through the film, in conversation with Isaacs, she responds to a question by saying “the white cliffs of Dover
brings back good memories, but also sad memories.” This contradiction marks an important transition in Tulia’s development in the film. She recounts being interred at age nine in a camp in Spain during the Second World War, and her escape and attempt to find the mother from whom she had been forcibly separated. She is caught again, and never finds her mother. By now, the laughter (both hers and ours) has gone. At this point, the camera suddenly cuts to seagulls wheeling over the grey beach at Calais as Ijaz stands on the sand, not speaking. Isaacs asks Ijaz what his mother looks like, and if he has a photograph of her. But he has lost her in Kabul, and her image – the only photograph he tells us he had of her – on the way to Calais. The earlier contradiction between word and image from Tulia to Ijaz is now an overlap, or a jump-cut that isn’t quite a jump in terms of content, but in space and time. Unlike the word ‘beach’ which had a visual reference, the word ‘mother’ has no image for Tulia, Isaacs, Ijaz or us. Isaacs, I suspect, is pulling a painful trick on us, for Tulia’s appearance, which had provoked laughter earlier on, is now received in an uncomfortable silence – a silence marked by sadness, but also by embarrassment: sadness at hearing of her past, and embarrassment at our own past attitude to her. The film, while productively establishing overlaps and constructing contradictions, also sets up a shifting relationship between those on screen, the film-maker off-screen, and the audience. This shifting relationship, through time, between viewer, subject and film-maker, is accompanied, as elaborated above, by another form of setting-into-relation of word and image: the white cliffs of Dover accruing different meanings for Tulia and Ijaz, meanings that do not coincide.

In the above two extracts we see a configuring of Calais as a space. Its borders are drawn by the same points (the beach, the tunnel, the street, the home) each of which are rendered audible, visible or both. The meaning of these points
changes depending on the perspective of those who are speaking, as well as by the film-maker’s intervention in threading often incommensurable images to words. Crucially, the film itself draws the lines between these points, using word and image to lead from one place to the other.

In setting up a relation, not of difference (as around the word “beach”) but of commonality (around the word “mother”), the particular subject-positions, and experiences of Ijaz and Tulia intersect. The word “mother”, for which no image exists either in the film (for the viewer) or for Tulia and Ijaz, in their own lives, touches on an experience, which binds them, and by implication all of us, whether on this or that side of whichever border we inhabit. If one of the functions of a just society is to guarantee the safety and life of its members, then separation and death through war shows up an injustice. This injustice – separation in an internment camp for Tulia, death by a missile attack for Ijaz – exposes the power-lines that divide a supposedly consensually-based society. It also sets up a commonality between Tulia and Ijaz that crosses the border of legal residency (Tulia as an EU citizen) and the legal limbo of Ijaz the asylum-seeker rejected by both France and the U.K.

The relationality set up between them by the film’s co-ordination of sound and image develops in two ways: initially, by bringing them together and exposing a difference (“the sea”), and later by underlining the commonality they share – a missing, dead mother. Two conclusions can be drawn from this. Firstly, if the audience desired to see in the film, a portrayal of “the migrant in Sangatte”, it instead must re-orient this expectation of a certain stable figure and demographic category, by following the multiple reframings of the experiences of the individuals in the film. Subjectivity is destabilized, inter-related and made historically-specific. Secondly, by relating these individuals through their experiences, the social space between Us (good, civilized legal
residents of a territory) and Them (unwanted, morally-suspect asylum-seeking migrants) gets displaced. If the injustice of war (and the consequent forced separation of mother from child) is experienced by both Tulia and Ijaz, the validity of thinking the border as an absolute line of separation between the resident and the migrant breaks down. By crossing the border, the film exposes a wrong which exposes the lie of justice and the vacuity of superior claims of civilized versus barbarians.

Conclusion
The stabilization of the figure of the migrant makes the ascription of a moral character easier within political discourse. In the present historical situation, this political discourse characterizes the migrant (except the global wealthy cosmopolite) as unwanted: morally corrupt, civilizational backward, culturally ignorant, criminally-oriented). The need to displace the stabilization of the meaning of the term “migrant” is not primarily motivated by this political discourse (which is nevertheless objectionable). Rather, it is the reality of the intersecting concerns and common experiences, denied by a xenophobic discourse of Us and Them, between residents and migrants, autochthonous and allochthonous populations which necessitates a displacement of the figure of the migrant. In Ranciere’s terms, the migrant emerges through the articulation of a wrong and the setting up of a relationality within an already-defined social space. In the process, the social space itself gets displaced, exposing the fictitious basis that claims to found a just and consensual-based community.

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Filmography

Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*: Successful Rudimentary Transactions and the Failure of Globalized Languages

Mireille Rosello

Pre-history: "Illiterate readings, reading illiteracy"

The first leg of this virtual research trip focused on the articulation between illiteracy and maps. Last year's paper asked how a migrant is supposed to read a map if he or she is illiterate and what contradictory injunctions are set up by the implied definitions of a map.¹ In Rachid Boudjedra's novel, *Topographie pour une aggression caractérisée*, a North African immigrant is stuck in the Parisian metro, unable to use the maps as guide because he cannot make sense of the system of symbols that represent destination, location or directions. He has an address, he knows where he wants to be or rather where he wishes to go but his desire to reach a given destination cannot be transformed into a rational practice in the presence of an incomprehensible map. The map is there to help but the will to lead and the desire to go somewhere cannot meet. No knowledge is produced by the encounter between the two desires.

Two crucial elements where thus underlined in Boudjedra's novel. First, the map relies on a type of knowledge

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¹ See: "Illiterate Readings; Reading Illiteracy,” http://cf.hum.uva.nl/illiterate readings/
that only insiders can be assumed to have acquired. Yet, it addresses itself to outsiders who do not know enough to find their way around a new territory. This initial and potentially damming contradiction, however, has never stopped maps from being created and being used, but I would argue that the implied contract involves a fundamental misunderstanding that is never completely avoided or addressed as a problem.

The encounter between the map and the user who needs it presupposes a type of contract that may well function as a vicious tautology to the extent that the stranger is assumed to be able to use a language, a code and a protocol that he or she could only have learned after reaching the destination that the map is supposed to materialize for him or her. In other words, the relationship between a text that knows and the reader who does not highlights, rather than bridges, the gap that separates the maps’ official goal (the object is supposed to be a guide) and the conditions that must be fulfilled for that project to be carried out (the reader who is supposed to be led must first learn the language that the map assumes known).

The novel points out, however, that the migrant’s incompetence does not amount to paralysis or interpretive silence. The failed encounter becomes the substance of a new text, a narrative that deliberately insists on the impossible transaction between the map and the traveler.

In Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France, Susan Ireland and Patrice Proulx point out for example that the genre of Boudjedra’s story is what “conveys” (another sort of “metaphor” in the sense of what transports and translates at the same time) the stranger’s disorientation. Rather than reading the map or describing the journey, the novel reads and makes us read the protagonist’s illiteracy.
The interest of the text lies rather in its style and structure, which are unusual for texts of the period representing the life of immigrants. The non-linear, labyrinthine structure and the new novel style fragmented representation of events are used to convey the increasing anguish of the disoriented immigrant and his underground encounter with an unfamiliar world he is unable to decipher (34).

The inability to read does not lead to silence or an absence of text. It produces a proliferation of different genres and an excess of what we could call false readings: the novel does not so much retrace the character’s steps as represent the urban text that his body-map generates as he tries in vain to extricate himself from what has become an "uncertain territory" (Boer 2006).


The initial "wrong" that is constitutive of the genre of the map does not ultimately lead to systematically failed encounters between the object and its users, rather it is a highly productive matrix that generates layers upon layers of texts. An illiterate reading remains a form of active reading that creates a hybridized textual and territorial reality, a theatrical and dynamic space where the staging of assumptions about legibility and power relationships become apparent.

Ismaïl Ferroukhi’s 2004 Le Grand Voyage

In the second installment of this research project, I propose to focus on a more recent work of fiction that addresses the issue of illiteracy and maps in a very different way. In Ismaïl Ferroukhi’s 2004’s film, Le Grand Voyage, two characters travel together from the South of France to Mecca, but they do share the same experience. As a result, we take, with them, (at least) two trips instead of one. The film superimposes two maps,
two itineraries, two European and Middle Eastern geographical, linguistic and cultural constructions. Moreover, the two men's ways of navigating through space, and through spatial conventions are radically different or even incompatible so that this (modified) road movie presents us not with the representation of one journey but with a series of disconnected moments that highlight each of the protagonists areas of expertise and incompetence, their unique way of dealing with religious beliefs, languages and illiteracy.

From Beur cinema to Babelized road movie: New European and global geographies

Ferroukhi's choice of migratory aesthetics invites us to compare this trip to pre-existing geographical but also cinematographical maps. The film moves away from the conventional elements that spectators have come to recognize as the main ingredients of Beur or banlieue cinema (Tarr 2005, Hargreaves 1999 & 2003). Unlike the young men of (mainly) African origin who are associated with the typically French banlieue cityscapes, Ferroukhi's a-typical Beur hero does not hang out with his male friends, is not involved in any recognizable subculture, and we will not have the opportunity to wonder how he relates to the idea of Frenchness because the story immediately separates him from his neighborhood and from his familiar surrounding. Both Reda and his father must communicate on a transnational level. The cluster of stereotypical elements that we now identify in the Beur film genre of the 1980s and 1990s is remarkably absent.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Beur cinema has provided French and international audiences with a photo-album and an imaginary map of French banlieues, the dense forest of low-cost housing projects that surrounded French cities after the 1960s. Ferroukhi's film, instead, starts with a few shots of a village in the vicinity of Aix-en-Provence. When
the two men depart, they leave behind a cluster of small apartment buildings. The beginning of the story thus highlights the structuring absence of other familiar intertexts or inter-images. For if Feroukhi’s *Le Grand Voyage* and other *beur* and *banlieue* films were simply incommensurable, we would not even notice an absence that begs to be interpreted. Preceded and surrounded by comparable works, the film opts for new aesthetic strategies that we must also experiment with as relatively inexperienced decoders. In order to notice that there are no high rises, no stairways, no basements, no *verlan* (or *banlieue* slang), no “big” or “little brothers,” no brother-sister theme, no drugs or police brutality subplot, the spectator needs to (perhaps involuntarily) recall other films. The question is, of course, what mental mechanism is activated when a spectator both expects the film to belong to a certain genre and recognizes an original variation on what we presume is a common theme. A simultaneous reading occurs that constantly maps our reading, leading us towards issues that we must constantly encode as relevant or irrelevant, plausible or implausible, belonging to our own sense of cinematographic tradition or modernity.

What remains of the list of classic ingredients of *Beur* cinema makes it difficult to claim that a radical point of discontinuity has occurred and that any comparison between *Le Grand Voyage* and *Beur* cinema is an irrelevant or even reactionary gesture (subsuming any allusion to migration or Islam under the category “beur” or “banlieue” is obviously highly suspicious). The story does address the familiar, almost stereotypical religious, cultural and linguistic issues that a Moroccan father who raised his children in France is expected to struggle with. Yet, I am arguing that *Le Grand Voyage*  

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2 Such as Malik Chibane’s *Hexagone*, Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine*, Philippe Faucon’s *La Squale*, Fabrice Genestal’s *Samia* or Jacques Doillon’s *Petits Frères*. 
rewrites the genre to such an extent that it creates a bridge between traditional Beur heroes and the new transnational characters that share the difficulties encountered by the protagonists of globalized narratives such as Merzak Allouache’s *L’Autre monde* (2001), Nadia El Fani’s *Bedwin Hacker* (2003) and of course Alejandro González Iñárritu’s 2006 blockbuster *Babel*. In those films, national identities or national boundaries do not define the border between inside or outside, familiar or strange. Multilingualism and multinationalism are the rule rather than the exception, so that in order to represent the heroes’ trajectory, filmmakers have to deal with many sets of assumptions about what is familiar and what is not, what is understandable and what is not, given that characters and spectators do not necessarily belong to the same imagined community. Stories cover territories that the spectator and the characters are not expected to recognize but to discover and chart at the same time. The issue is verisimilitude is thus redefined. Both audience and characters are involved in inventing different scales and different sets of symbols, rather than in simply relying on previously established maps or landscapes.

In terms of spatial representations, *Le Grand Voyage* takes us away from the suburbs, from the *banlieue* housing projects’ and gives Reda access to an almost limitless territory.

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3 The *banlieue* is sometimes filmed as a space surrounded by invisible borders and perceived as a world of its own. As many critics have pointed out (see especially Begag 1999, 2002), the assumption is that people from the *banlieues* want to move to the city and that city dwellers fear their arrival as if they were barbarians. Besides, banlieues are separated from each other as if, as Laronde argues, cities were built like a panopticon (Laronde 1993). See the double special issue of *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* edited by Alec Hargreaves in 2004. Reda is precisely not one of the typical “hittistes,” the young men whose narrative and visual function is to “hold the walls” as the original dialectal expression suggests. He is not identified by his local environment even if French banlieues themselves are cultural glocalized.
that covers Europe and the Middle East. But the price to pay for this enlarged territory is that he is forced to make a journey that seems to strip him of his freedom to lead his own life. Whatever constituted Reda’s routine before his departure is reduced to the few clandestine and interrupted conversations that he manages to make on his cell or from a hotel phone when his father is out of earshot, and to the picture of his girl friend that he carries in his bag. As for the old, frail but tyrannical father, he is not going "home" but to Mecca, as a pilgrim. This is no reverse migration but a one-way trip from which he will not come back alive, and that he cannot begin without his son’s help for the simple reason that he cannot drive.

The other most recognizable genre is that of the road-movie but Ferroukhi plays on those conventions too. The fact that the two travelers understand the journey in radically different ways makes it difficult to settle for one interpretation of this (non)pilgrimage-(non)aventure and the film both recalls and departs from the figure of the "étonnant voyageurs" whose literary productions have recently been proliferating in the context of the Saint-Malo festival. Just as a new "littérature-monde" seems to be displacing the old "Francophone" category, new films treat France and Frenchness as one of the multiple nodes in an individually reinvented global network.

Ferroukhi does not oppose France to Morocco for example, at least not from a recognizable postcolonial perspective (Higbee 2007). But he does not describe the two men’s point of departure as a monolithic and cohesive entity

4 For a list of “babelized” travel narratives that were recently published in this context, see http://www.etonnants-voyageurs.com/spip.php?rubrique33. See also the collective volume edited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, Pour une littérature monde (2007).
(he does not need to insist on their unrecognized hybrid Frenchness to take them out of what Mustafa Dikec calls the “Badlands of the Republic” (Dikec 2007). What might be strange or exotic to some (to some of "us") already exists at home and does not have to be sought elsewhere. Even for Reda, his dad is as strange as Montesquieu’s Persians. Being "from" (the same place) is not a relevant predictor of future transactions with what "elsewhere" represents. There is more difference within the pair of travelers than there will ever be between each of them and the strangers that they encounter. From the very first scene, the film establishes that nothing is shared. We cannot read the trip as a movement from one unique and monolithic point of departure that stands for sameness and oneness towards other spaces whose linguistic, cultural, religious or political difference will be emphasized as different through an implicit process of comparison with the characters’ home.

The emphasis is on what separates two protagonists who, according to other types of biologically-based narratives, share almost as much as it is possible for two humans to share. They are after all, father and son. But the fact that they have the same origin is precisely shown to be an idea that we may well be misusing as a political and cultural myth without even being aware of the consequences of that mental process. We watch as two men drive together from the South of France to Saudi Arabia. Throughout the film, their small blue car with an orange door serves as a confined experimental space that highlights not their resemblances but what separates them. What matters is not their identity (in both sense: they are not identical and their identity is difficult to pinpoint) but the tactics that they each choose to deploy when they must cope with the unexpected, the unknown. Proximity, the story insists, never means complicity; it is imposed upon both
characters because the father both depends on his son but only accepts his own vision of the trip.

**Religion as de-linking? (religere)**

The father wishes to go to Mecca. He will travel as a pilgrim and only the destination and the meaningfulness of the pilgrimage counts. His son, on the other hand has no desire to travel at all and if he must, his ideas of a worthwhile trip have to do with efficiency (why not take a plane to Mecca he wonders?), with quick communication (do you speak English?) and with tourism (why not stop and visit Milan?). He seems to have no interest in religion at least not in the way his dad practices it, he even finds it embarrassing or inappropriate. The film repudiates the Western or non-Western stereotypes, negative and positive images of a monolithic Islamic community.

The camera avoids positing a Muslim world in which the word "Muslim" is used so loosely that the distinction between culture, religion and history disappears, replaced by fantasies of conflicts (Muslims against the West) or internal cohesion (the Ummah). The innermost circle, here constituted by the father and the son, is systematically split by their individual position in front of the camera. Whenever the father prays, the frame physically separates the two men. For example, when they reach the first border between France and Italy in what seems to be the middle of the night, the father, noticing that it is time to pray, asks the son to park the car. According to Reda, he is breaking some unwritten rule of propriety: "C'est une douane ici... Tu vois bien que ce n'est pas un endroit pour prier." But the "tu vois bien" has none of the expected rhetorical force and the dialogue is counter-productive because both men follow their own logic. The father retorts, in Arabic: "do you believe in God?", a non sequitur for Reda and the end of the conversation. As usual,
the father imposes his will but fails to convince. The intergenerational difference is one of the most recurrent topoi in Beur literature and cinema and the way in which religion is defined and practiced among the immigrants and their children changes from decade to decade. Since the rise, in the 1990s, of a much-maligned “political Islam,” the younger generations are expected to have rediscovered a form of Islam that they did not inherit but rather reinvent as a response to their marginalization. Sons and daughters can no longer be expected to symbolize an unavoidable move towards secularization. Yet, beur cinema and literature has carefully accumulated references to the problems raised by that phenomenon and Ferroukhi’s film deliberately focuses on a teenager who does not seem interested in religion in general and in his father’s beliefs in particular.\footnote{Commenting on Akli Tadjer’s 1984 \textit{Les A.N.I du Tassili}, Anne Cirella-Urutia writes:}

Une référence à l’Islam par exemple, apparaît dans l’épisode du « Tassili » et bien qu’il ne compte qu’une seule page, il témoigne du fossé qui sépare Omar et les Beurs des générations qui les ont précédées et de ceux qui sont restés au pays. Omar est invité à la prière par un vieil homme et il se trouve confronté à un choix cornélien:

“Tu viens à la prière, mon fils?” Insiste-t-il. C’est certainement la question la plus embarrassante qu’on m’ait jamais posée. Si je lui dis que mon savoir théologique se limite à “Allah ou Akbar” et “Inch Allah”, je vais passer pour le dernier des connards. Si je lui réponds que ça ne m’intéresse pas, je vais passer pour le fils du diable en personne, et qui peut deviner la suite. (63)

Il est évident qu’en affirmant sa position vis à vis de la religion, Omar provoquerait un conflit ouvert et serait rejeté par ceux qui partagent la même idéologie que celle de ses parents (Cirella-Urutia 2003).

In this text, the conflict is staged as a dialogue that will not take place, a nonconversation that Ferroukhi’s film chooses to represent as spatial alienation: the camera acts as if it were impossible to let the two characters share the frame.
As the father kneels on his prayer rug, we hear the son's voice asking "Ça va?" (are you ok?) but the camera soon reveals that the gentle question is not addressed to his dad. The shot excludes Reda to concentrate on the silent figure of the father, lost in his prayers. Only when the camera focuses on the car, now leaving the father out, do we realize that Reda is talking on his cell phone, informing his girl friend that he has "minor family problems" and asking her to inform the school authorities that he will be away for a while. This first one-way conversation is interrupted by the father's return as if, in that dimension, each man could only coexist.

The same principle recurs like a refrain throughout the film. Although they are cooped in the small car, or share a hotel room, the camera isolates them whenever the father prays or when the son wants to talk to his loved one. When the father reads the Q'ran in the passenger's seat, the camera looks over his shoulder, framing him, then cuts over so that another shot focuses on Reda who drives as if he were alone. Later, the father prays in a hotel room. The next shot shows Reda trying to call his girl-friend from the hotel phone only to be interrupted again by his father's arrival. The father's practice of his religion is set up as what both allows and disallows Reda's daily life. They are in competition, as if they could not occupy the same space, the same time, the same visual slots.

When they arrive closer to Mecca, the separation deteriorates into nightmarish fears. The son dreams that he is sinking into the desert sand while his father walks away, driving a little herd of sheep. When he wakes up, Reda looks around, frightened and lost, and sees his father kneeling on a dune, praying. Once again, the camera carves a frame around the solitary man. Finally, when they meet up with a group of other pilgrims, the father joins his fellow travelers in prayer while his son plays in the sand, the camera closing up on his
sneakers. As the shot gets larger, the spectator discovers that he has written USA on the sand, a cryptic yet obviously defiant comment that once again, modifies the map of the trip and rewrites the pilgrimage as a complex and incomprehensible globalized space. The father has reached Mecca, Reda either dreams of or has symbolically arrived in some bizarre definition of the USA.

Islam is not "their" religion but "his" religion as Reda angrily points out when after a particularly violent quarrel, the father walks out on his own. And the pronoun underscores the film's constant allusions to the fact that the father's way of living "his" religion, is not necessarily shared by other Muslims, which makes it all the more difficult for Reda to relate to his father. A last-minute meaningful conversation during which father and son finally smile at each other hardly makes up for the rest of the trip. The scene, however, provides some resolution by giving the father a new role. For the first time, he steps out of his figure of dependent tyrant to adopt the position of the native informant who answers the son's questions about the pilgrimage. No earth-shaking information about the meaning of the pilgrimage is revealed and the spectator will wonder how plausible it can be for the son to ignore what any casual exposure to international media coverage (if not his own relatives) would have taught him. But from a narrative point of view, Reda finally treats his father as someone who knows something that he may want to teach him, although at no point does the father try to convince or convert. Whatever respect is finally and grudgingly expressed remains firmly grounded in difference of opinions, beliefs and practices.

The practice of Islam itself is concretely represented as a multifaceted reality. Earlier in their trip, when they arrive in Istanbul, they meet another Muslim who stands for a different conception of Islam, one that can accommodate drinking and
tourism, and that the father will naturally try to exclude at all costs. This man’s narrative function is to help them and then to be excluded as a result of a terrible misunderstanding. Because he speaks French and knows how to deal with the immigration officers who expected a bribe, he, alone, makes it possible for Reda and his dad to cross the border. Their passports are useless. Ironically, fortress Europe is more difficult to leave than to enter in this case and only the father with his green passport is allowed out.

For the first and only time, a third French-speaking character transforms the father-son huis-clos into an unstable trio where the place of the excluded third changes regularly. Mustafa’s presence changes the balance of the relationship between the powerful father and his young and inexperienced son. A figure of gentle authority, he implicitly questions the father’s strict version of Islam and provides what could be a third way between the two radically different manners in which the two men experience this trip: pilgrimage for one, failed touristic expedition for the other.

One scene shows Reda, Mustafa and the father in the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. The spectator, who may be inside the Mosque for the first time, is presented with two different models and implicitly asked to either side with one or at least reflect on the two possibilities. Once again, the father is alone, sitting in a corner and reading the Q’ran. Reda takes photographs of the architectural details. He has become one of the many tourists who walk around in the great hall. The camera adopts his perspective, closing up on the details of the blue pillars and the stained glasses, then revealing the father’s seated silhouette, blurred at first and then slowly coming into focus as if he had been metamorphosed into one of the aesthetic beauties that his son wishes to capture.
Most of the time, however, any relationship to space that may be interpreted as "tourism" (the father uses the word as an implicitly derogative word) is adamantly vetoed. Before they reach Turkey, the way in which they travel generates two completely different maps of what should have been the same geographical Europe: the pilgrimage is apparently incompatible with certain itineraries (with certain stopovers) and with some navigational tactics (especially the way in which Reda uses maps).

Two maps of Europe: geographical negotiations

Reda is in the car as the driver because his father, who cannot drive, has demanded that he takes him. Reda is a reluctant traveler, all he wants is to get his father to his destination as far as he can and come back. Under such circumstances, the way in which they encounter the hypothetical strangeness of strangers, the novelty that each new country may represent, and even the shape of Europe in general will always be a subject of conflicts and tense negotiations, the father usually imposing his will in a stubborn silent way.

Each man will generate his own map. "Tourisme" is one of the options but what being tourists would mean is never explored because the father simply uses it as a dirty word when his son expresses desires that do not correspond to his own definition of what the trip should be. What is vetoed makes us realize how Reda perceives Europe. What he wants to see are cities that he has heard about. He treats Europe as a patchwork of cities that he wishes to "visit," that are linked by fast expressways and clearly marked on a map that he constantly checks for directions. But cities, expressways and maps are low on his father's list of priorities.

A first conflict sets the tone for the remainder of the trip. One hour away from Milan, where Reda intends to stop
for the night, the father demands that they park the car in a rest area and sleep. Unable to convince Reda who wants to reach some meaningful destination, he simply pulls the hand break in the middle of the expressway, at the risk of killing them both. The message is clear, rather die than lose control, especially if his son’s way will derail the pilgrimage and turn the trip into an adventure, a series of sight-seeing stopovers. Reda pleads in vain that this may be his only chance to ever see Milan, he does not even get the “one hour” that he asks form, so that the city will remain unvisualized, only talked about as an already nostalgic non-memory. Venice is equally ruled out (but talked about), so that the film has a dramatic reason to completely avoid the aesthetics of postcards. Some reviewers have commented on a "lack of scenery" (Papamichael 2004) and even assumed that the filmmaker’s low budget is to blame. In fact, this is a systematic filmic choice as long as the characters are in Europe. The system of representation only changes once the men have arrived in Turkey and the spectator must wait until the end of the trip to be asked to watch what occurs outside the car, to be provided with visual details. Typical touristy images have been successfully banned and the father has his way. What we, as viewers, bring back from the trip are rare images of pilgrims completing the last leg of their pilgrimage. Most reviewers were impressed by the visual depiction of Mecca. Bradshaw praises the “unprecedented scenes at Mecca itself” (Bradshaw 2005); John Nesbitt notes that “the film’s final scenes in Mecca are truly awe-inspiring” and adds that “Few have ever been allowed to record the throngs of committed Muslims circling the Kabba for a commercial film” (Nesbitt 2005).

By then, the modern gadgets that are symbolically linked to Reda’s gaze and that allow information to circulate, have been discarded by the father. He has thrown out his son’s cell phone while he was asleep in the car. As for the camera
that Reda had brought with him and with which he had taken a few shots along the way, it has disappeared from the story, exchanged for a useless lamb when the two men, who had misplaced their money, tried to supplement a diet of bread and eggs. The spectacular images of the Blue Mosque are lost from the narrative photo-album and the scenes from the Kabba cannot be exported as photographs. They are part of Reda's future memories, part of his and our ambiguous non-pilgrimage.

Not only does the father avoid cities but he wants to opt out of expressways, at the risk of finding himself literally outside the map. Lost between Zagreb and Belgrade, the two men are on a small country road, in the middle of what we tend to call "nowhere" because none of our familiar landmarks are present. Nothing stands out, no one drives by, there are no buildings. The two men do not agree on how to find their ways out of this no man's land. Reda, as a matter of course, looks for directions on a map, but his father is illiterate. Reda proposes to get back to the readable track, pointing out that it was not his idea to get off the expressway. For reasons that he does not make clear, the father stubbornly refuses the son's solution, which involves retracing their steps. When he simply gestures in a none too convincing way "it's this way," Reda explodes and yells at his father: "Qu'est-ce que tu en sais? Tu sais même pas lire!" The issue here is not so much that Reda humiliates his dad but that the two characters are incapable to talk about their respective tactics. The father seems to know where to go, and so does his son, but the film does not help us decide whether the old man has some sort of unrecognized talent, a form of wisdom that his son never acquired, or if he is just being stubborn, refusing to accept what, to Reda, is simple common sense. The dialogue fails lamentably. Even when Reda calms down and suggests "Regarde papa..." trying to point to the map, his father simply does not see. He stares
silently in front of him, refusing to as much as glance as what his son is trying to explain. The camera keeps them both in the frame, sitting right next to each other, emphasizing the violent lack of eye contact. Later, when they do find themselves closer to Belgrade after a series of funny encounters with strangers who cannot help them, it is still impossible to ascertain whether the itinerary was indeed a better way or if they have wasted unnecessary time and energy. The story as a whole does not choose between illiteracy as lack of a most basic skill that prevents the father from traveling through Europe (tu ne sais même pas lire) and illiteracy as what exposes the son’s prejudice: he only recognizes the type of knowledge that the majority accepts as knowledge and does not realize that his father knows other things, knows differently.

Languages: a bilingual dialogue

One of the most original elements of this film is that the two main protagonists do not speak the same language, a linguistic issue that has constant and direct consequences not only on the structure of the story (whenever the heroes deal with other languages throughout their trip) but also at the level of the film (the way in which sub-titles are used is an implicit commentary on the theoretical difficulties that such an interesting premise raises at the post-production and reception level). The number of languages involved in this story invites us to observe what gets sub-titled and what does not and what implications such decisions have on our position as spectators.

Migration and postcolonial studies have already drawn our attention to the power relationship between languages and each colonial or postcolonial situation has generated linguistic debates. Often perceived as an acute ideological issue in formerly colonized lands, the canonization of Europhone cultural productions has been both systematically embraced and critiqued by postcolonial authors.
who are not always convinced that it is possible to effectively re-appropriate the colonizer’s language. Different approaches have been experimented with and Le Grand Voyage both inherits this critical legacy and moves on.

The film constitutes a radical break from some of the strategies originally adopted in literature, the medium that we associate with the first solid steps of postcolonial creations. Some writers deliberately turned their back on French as the language of the metropole and accepted to address themselves to a smaller local audience that would have been excluded by more internationally recognizable works. In Algeria, one of the exemplary representative of that trend is Kateb Yacine whose experiments with dialectal Arabic is often celebrated as evidence of his ethical and aesthetic engagement. But the next generation of postcolonial authors have opted for a more hybrid approach to linguistic issues, privileging métissage, creolization and multilingualism, especially in the context of diaporic literature and cinema. The original debate about colonial situations of diglossia and vernacular languages has not disappeared. It now overlaps with more general discussions about the role of English as the lingua franca of globalization and the cohabitation of languages within previously monolingual Western spaces.

The film is not interested in mixing French and Arabic and allows both languages to coexist, relatively peacefully, in a relatively egalitarian space. Reda’s father understands French but never speaks it, except for a few odd words here:

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6 At the end of the 1970s, in Martinique, Raphaël Confiant published three novels in creole and contributed to the Creole journal, Grif an té, preferring his "creole-dragon" to the "français-banane" as one of the title of an interview suggests. And even within the creole-speaking community, the solution is not unanimously accepted: the "creole-dragon," i.e. the literary version of oral creole, is perceived as scary and artificial (Hardwick 261).
and there. He speaks Arabic throughout. He is not exactly monolingual but his linguistic abilities are selective. His knowledge of Arabic is more complex that the subtitling is able to suggest. When they reach a portion of their journey where other pilgrims congregate, the father can talk to Egyptian, Syrian and Sudanese travelers presumably because his familiarity with classical Arabic. Reda, however, cannot answer their questions and his dad must explain that his son only understand his own Moroccan dialect.

The father’s Moroccan Arabic is not seen as colonized or dominated. It cohabitates with the son's French and whatever miscommunication occurs between the two characters has little to do with language but rather with the fact, as Reda will eventually tell him, that they are on different "wavelengths." In Monolingualism of the Other, Jacques Derrida explained his alienation from language as the impossibility of having learned any language but French in a colonial space that, retrospectively, should have always already been multilingual (Derrida 1996). Ferroukhi’s characters, individually, function within the same model but the film’s originality is to suggest that both of them are needed, at the same time, to perform a certain version of what Abdelkebir Khatibi called “bilangue,” a problematic and poetic union of French and Arabic (Khatibi 1983). Reda and his dad have a relationship to language that tolerates, if not welcomes, different levels of competence and different uses of different languages. His dad speaks one language and understands his son in another.

The bilingual dialogue is not celebrated at all (in the way in which creolization was sometimes hailed as a poetic solution [Prabhu 2007]) but presented as an unavoidable fact of life. At times, it is also presented as the symptom of a gap between Reda and his dad. They literally do not speak the
same language. Of course, the idea of "speaking the same language" has become a metaphorical way of defining successful communication. Presented with this new type of dialogue, we can also read the film as what makes us question the conventional wisdom according to which Babelian spaces are cursed. Here Babel is dedramatized yet not idealized. After all, the characters do not have to speak the same language to communicate. But even if they do, they remain on different "wavelengths." The film does not creolize their language but babelizes understanding.

On the other hand, the issue of sub-titles is there to remind us that this original bi-lingualism occurs in a work of art that circulates in a world where babelized dialogues are neither the rule nor the norm. When the film is subtitled in English, the bilingual dialogue is both preserved as oral object and erased as text by the monolingual translation but when the DVD is addressed to a French audience, only the father’s Arabic is translated. In other words, the film must make assumptions about different audiences and privileges two Europhone languages when it creates its imaginary public. As in Babel, another film that lets the story wander in various linguistic territories, we hear many different languages that we may or may not understand but the principle of sub-titling pre-supposes an audience united by a shared knowledge of French or English rather than taking risks and opting for generic transnational literacy. For example, it is interesting to notice that the conversations that take place in Italy, Slovenia or Bulgaria are not subtitled. We do not know more than the two characters and, in a couple of scenes, this inability to communicate is a source of comedy or tragedy. But the system is imperfect. For those spectators who also speak some of the languages used in Turkey, Italy, Bulgaria and Bosnia or in the Middle East, the narrative contains facets that a French-speaking spectator would miss. For those who, like Reda,
understand both French and Arabic, most the subtitles are redundant. As spectators, we hear many different languages and sub-titling is never used to give us more information than the characters themselves can digest. Each viewer is dependent on his or her own background and any audience, taken as a whole, might be capable of deciphering most of the moments of incomprehensible dialogue. But as individuals, we are expected to be in the position of the two travelers, who must guess, assume, interpret and sometimes just give up on the idea of understanding. The film implicitly caters for a French or English monolingual spectator, reducing the represented Babelization to a strategic monoligualism without celebrating it as a desirable centralization. Instead of presenting Babel as an undesirable fragmentation that occurs after a crisis, the film treats the unavoidable reduction of all forms of languages to one protocol (subtitles) as a form of tactical deprivation. Throughout the film, the issue of languages is emphasized both intra- and extra-diegetically to point out that the equation between "speaking the same language" and "understanding each other" is a convention based on a political definition of language.

Transnational protocols and the failure of "globish"

The encounter between languages is crossed with two other issues that separate the father and the son: the story is split into small case studies or experiments in linguistic and cultural encounters that test several related hypotheses. The bilingual conversation between the two main protagonists cannot exhaust the possibilities of communicating and as soon as they meet strangers, two issues keep resurfacing: the father’s illiteracy on the one hand, and one assumption that Reda keeps making about the people he meets, i.e. that if they do not understand his language, they probably speak English. Each representation of a new encounter tests the limits of each
of the characters’ competence but also their ability to make do, to find a way. For Reda, for example, his dad’s illiteracy is a radical form of disempowerment. In his mind, his own ability to read maps and his knowledge of “globish” count as assets when it comes to negotiating with unknown landscapes and unknown languages. But one scene in particular serves to illustrate the limits of his system. Not only is globish not effective on this journey but the power of language itself, of any codified language is shown to be less important, sometimes, than an ability to share minimalist protocols.

His father, for example, is capable of carrying out a proper business deal with a person that he has never seen, who neither speaks or understands his own language. This business deal without language is an implicit response to the humiliating moment when his son refused to accept that he may have known something about navigating space because he could not read the map.

When they arrive in Belgrade, Reda and his son are filmed in front of one of those international offices where travelers can exchange their own currency for the local form of payment. The camera shows us an official panel that informs us and the two characters of the official exchange rate and also of the possibility to go through proper channels. A standard form of equivalency is part of the system. People are provided with a sort of dictionary that gives them access to two languages and allows them to cross over without having to negotiate their way through the process. But the word “language” is precisely not appropriate in this case and in retrospect, the son’s “globish” will be shown to have the same limitations as this rudimentary yet tyrannical code. For it is a code rather than a language: it only allows prerecorded transactions to take place, it does not give travelers the possibility to invent, to speak to one another.
What happens in the scene is a subversive transformation of this code into a language. One man approaches Reda’s father and starts a sort of conversation without words. The two men have the same age, and they are practically silent. The camera films the whole scene from above, like a surveillance camera but also from a position that allows us to observe the way in which the conversation turns into a sort of ballet. The place occupied by the bodies signal who is in and who is out, who has the power to engage in the dialogue and to communicate.

The stranger puts his hand on the father’s arm and gently drags him away from the window. The two men create their own space, away from the official exchange circuit. Their two bodies are very close to each other and their look at each other very carefully (this is different from what happens when Reda and his dad are in the car). Only two words are exchanged or rather repeated by both protagonists: “change” and “euro.” The nature of the transaction, the name of the currency, the absolute minimum amount of information is reinforced by the context and is enough to create a strong channel of communication between two men who have never met, will never meet again and can still conduct a business that complicates the simple system of equivalency that the poster proposes.

Something is added, the possibility to negotiate, to barter, a layer of uncertainty that needs to be compensated by the two men’s willingness to come to some sort of an understanding. Arguably, the content of the negotiation is not semantically very rich. It is obvious that the two men need to agree on the unofficial rate. They both understand and accept, without having to discuss or argue, the existence of this protocol. They both know that they need to come to an agreement about how much money will change hands but
their own skills play a role. The way in which this scene is filmed, once again, reinforces the radical difference between the ways in which each character uses or refuses language.

The men talk with their fingers, opening their hands to propose rates, refusing or accepting offers. At one point, the father walks away and the spectator understands that this is part of the genre of bartering. So does the protagonist who, once again, reaches out and touches the man’s arm to indicate that he is willing to change his mind. We, presumably, do not speak that language. We recognize the genre of the transaction but it would be hard to provide a precise translation of what the men say to each other: how exactly do the two men convert complicated change rates that usually have several decimals into a series of signals made with the fingers of two hands is a bit of a mystery. The son and the spectator would probably need a calculator to reach the same level of accuracy but the film portrays the business deal as an efficient, quick and cordial affair.

The performative marking of the end of the deal is just as minimalist as the whole conversation. The stranger says “change?” and the father nods "yes" while taking out his wallet. At the end, the conventional handshake confirms that both men are satisfied with the transaction. By then, the camera has changed to a closer angle, and catches the way in which the stranger looks over his shoulder, a clear reminder that the whole situation is part of an illicit parallel economy.

While the two men focus on the money that changes hand, the son, caught between then, stares at the panel, as if he could still not be part of the transaction. He is left out not only by the fact that he does not speak the man’s language but also by his own desire to try and use what he thinks is a lingua franca that proves useless here. At first, he wishes to stop or at least slow down the conversation that he does not understand.
When he sees his father talking to a stranger, he barges in: "Attends attends, excuse me do you speak English?"

He obviously does not recognize or respect the way in which his father has already started a negotiation where not one ounce of superfluous information needs to be inserted. The son’s language is useless and the script reduces his words to what Jakobson call the phatic function, that is what precedes the conversation and announces that the speaker needs to check that he is heard or understood. The "Attends, attends" addressed, to the father, in French, signals his desire to slow down what he perceives as a conversation that may fail because the main tool is absent (a shared language). But it is already too late.

As for the "excuse me do you speak English?" addressed to the other man, it is much less efficient than the body language that the two men have been using. Throughout the film, the use of "globish" fails is shown to fail to bridge linguistic gaps. Reda may know much more English than "Do you speak English?" but the story does not give him a chance to use the language as a proper means of communication. A few words here and there fall on deaf ears, the strangers to whom he tries to talk either ignore him completely or answer him in their own language (especially on borders or when he asks for directions). Yet it is clear that this switching to English has become an acquired reflex: whenever Reda finds himself in a position of linguistic insecurity, his reaction is to ask "Do you speak English?" His father never attempts to speak English but when conventional language fails, he resorts to different types of protocol, a sort of sign language that privileges body language and a will to communicate that bypasses other channels.
Conclusion

I am suggesting that Le Grand Voyage is both a "babelized" trip, and the babelized representation of a trip. The film invents a type of journey that is indistinguishable from the way in which the visual narrative is composed. The familiar postcolonial logic that sets up an axis between France and the Maghreb or rediscovers, within France, the ghost of this conflictual duality, is replaced with a France-Maghreb constellation that functions as if it were a point of departure (except that even the idea of departing and arriving are modified by this conception of the trip). The father-son unit is the hero to the extent that the heroic function is shown to be split in terms of religious beliefs, languages and traveling protocols. Two irreconcilable types of journey are told at the same time. Even at the end of the trip, both versions are not harmoniously fused, the images and the dialogues constantly record the possibility to take two simultaneous trips, to read and write two maps that never quite overlap. Some postcards are never shown (Milan and Venice are written out of the map), religious fervor can be turned into a postcard (when the father prays in Istanbul), extremely readable geographical locations (the sacred center of Mecca) co-exist with just as "scriptable" white pages (the soft sand where Reda's sneakers inscribe his angry message), the trip takes place in the car but the distance between the two passengers is an unbridgeable gap. The simultaneous presence of more than one language is neither an obstacle to a successful dialogue nor the guarantee of a better, more opaque Glissantian conversation.\footnote{To reuse a familiar Barthesian opposition.}

\footnote{See Edouard Glissant's Caribbean Discourse (Discours Antillais) in which he praises "La bienheureuse opacité, par quoi l'autre m'échappe, me contraignant à la vigilance de toujours marcher vers lui" (Glissant 1981, 278).}
possibility to converse in one language does not preclude conflicts, misunderstandings or hostile silences, and each new encounter proposes a new way to deal with the presence of several languages, to reinvent the principle of translation and sub-titling and to come to terms with the babelization of our cultures.

The film never quite manages to give us a coherent vision of this journey or, rather, makes the point that there is no such thing as a unified perspective. The two men travel together. Literally, they are companions, but their journey is not identical. If the father had his way, he would be a pilgrim and nothing else, but he does not have a ready-made model of a 21st century pilgrimage that he wants to apply to the here and now. He prefers to translate or transpose what happened to his own father, and the circumstances have changed so much that none of the practical details are applicable. He cannot climb the dune every morning to see if his father is coming back as he did when he was a child, but he will not take a plane either because old stories have taught him that experiencing the delays and uncertainties of a long journey matters. A pilgrimage organized by a professional is apparently out of the question. The long car-trip charts an unknown road that neither the past nor the present has paved. The way in which his own father used to travel is now a story, the film provides no image of what that road looked like. But Reda’s obvious solution (why not take a plane?) does not exist visually either. Only words can be used to eliminate ways of traveling that the father-son unit excludes from their own experience. This form of pilgrimage must be invented.

But just as "his" (Reda’s father) religion cannot explain everything about this trip because no set of rituals can be used as a map, Reda’s trip is just as ambiguously situated between pre-existing contemporary models. He is not a pilgrim and yet
he follows exactly the same path as his father. The father leads, but so does Reda, who knows how to drive, to read, to speak English, and who represents the present and the future generations. And yet, the limits of Reda’s competence are just as systematically represented as the father’s dependency. Reda can drive a car but his father can stop it from the passenger’s car. Reda can read a map but his father’s illiteracy is not, or at least not only, a handicap. In a globalized and babelized Europe, Reda’s globish is paradoxically not as effective as his father’s supposedly archaic attempts at by-passing languages altogether. In other words, Reda is not a guide who knows what to do because he has already taken the same trip. Aesthetically, the film respects, rather than fights, the fact that the main protagonists have a different definition of space, of time and of what matters in terms of communication. Visual and linguistic choices recognize that this journey can neither be told by one narrative voice (or by one single hero) or reduced to one visual logic. *Le Grand Voyage* is the story of two men who are both traveling together and pulling in different directions.

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Technologies of Migratory Culture

Several contributors have noticed the use if (citations of) older technologies as part of the aesthetics of the migratory. These usages and references contain a vindication of the ideology of development and progress, and promise new (rather than old!) forms of empowerment through a kind of technological hospitality.

Miguel-Ángel Hernández-Navarro
*Second-Hand Technologies: Migratory Aesthetics / Politics Of Resistance*

Sonja Neef
*Interstellar Hospitality: Missions of Star house Enterprise*

Deborah Cherry
*Sweet Memories: encountering the candy spills of Felix Gonzalez-Torres*
Second-hand Technologies.
Migratory Aesthetics / Politics of Resistance

Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro

Abstract
In the first contribution to the Encounter focused on the contradictions of mobility mainly applied to the topic of travelling and space. This paper attempts to analyze the contradiction raising from time and technology. It is observed, through the analysis of works like Gonzalo Ballester’s Mimoune or Ross Thewss’ Gaussian Blur, the way in which migration introduces breaches and temporary cuts in the contemporary chronological regime. These cuts and breaches make visible the inherent antagonisms in contemporary temporalities. I will insist specially in the topic of technology, and how the migratory use of that technology is able to produce disorders and discontinuities which is unquestionably the teleological discourse that remains in our times: the technological progress. These disorders give technology its poetic and creative dimension back. What I refer here to “second hand technologies”, as they come from “non-contemporary” temporary regimes, introduce non pre-established jumps and discontinuities and, thus, they propose alternative ways to the use of technology. These uses present themselves as a resistance to the hegemonic temporary regimes. Emphatic and affective resistance uses.
Starhouse Enterprise. On Interstellar Hospitality

Sonja Neef

Abstract

This paper investigates conceptual relationships between ideological representations of technology, time, universality, and alterity in the TV series ‘Star Trek Enterprise’. These relations will be studied by concentrating on an opposition between two topological topoi: the “ship” – literally understood as the “Starship Enterprise” – and the “House” – seen as the stable place, or locus, of the Nomos, thus of patrinomic law and order. Through an analysis of (interstellar) travelling as represented in the film series, I will question how concepts of 1. time and technology, and 2. universality and (interspecies) hospitality are challenged and reframed in a diegetic, utopian future world. Special attention will also be paid to the technologies and ideologies of translation. Aboard the Enterprise, the so-called “Universal Translator” is used as a device to decipher and interpret any alien language instantaneously into English, thereby sometimes causing a time delay. This delay will be the central focus of my paper. After all, the welcoming of the other finds its correspondence in the technical tool of translation which carries in it a rest in the sense of a risky, supplemental meaning. This possibility, I will argue, has a relationship to the concepts of technology and time as much as to the concepts of alterity and language. Thus, the motive of ‘tradutore tradittore’ will work throughout the paper as an ongoing motor of deconstruction.
Sweet Memories: encountering the candy spills of Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Deborah Cherry

Abstract
In this paper I discuss some works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Most were produced in the early 1990s. The artist was born in Cuba in 1957, grew up in Puerto Rico and migrated to the USA, becoming an American citizen, and an internationally acclaimed artist for his candy pieces, paper stacks, light strings, and public billboards. Shown in international exhibitions, most notably this year’s Venice Biennale where his art has been selected and curated for the American pavilion, what meanings might his works have for today, for transnational audiences, for a new century preoccupied by questions of mobility and migration, and characterised by cultural flows and encounters? This paper explores the configurations of a migratory aesthetics, triangulated between the US, Cuba and Puerto Rico, within the global and the local circuits of art’s exhibitions. Gonzalez-Torres’s art invites participation – the removal of a candy, or a piece of paper, perhaps. But what is the relation between such acts, staged and by the theatricality of late minimalism/late modernism and the sensory provocations of the works, the conjuring of sense memories which may transmit between cultures?
Second-Hand Technologies: Migratory Aesthetics / Politics Of Resistance

Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro

This text aims to further develop some arguments which I mentioned briefly in my contribution to the 1st Encuentro. Just as on that occasion, my reflections will evolve and they will be based on 2Move: Double Movement / Migratory Aesthetics\(^1\). I believe it is essential to point out from the outset the essential link and closeness between the text and the exhibition, since many of the ideas which will be developed below have been created from the visual proposal of the artists included in 2Move. Many of those dealt with beforehand have been revised after careful contemplation and study of the works and the relationships that have been established between them. The thought has been transformed starting from the art. That is to say, art thinks, or in a certain way, promotes thought, or produces knowledge\(^2\).

An aesthetic paradigm

One of the essential objectives of 2Move was to show the way that contemporary mobility, supported by the migratory paradigm, is based on insurmountable contradictions. In

\(^1\)Detailed information on the exhibition can be found at the following website: www.doublemovement.org. There you can find the details of the artists as well as pictures and descriptions of the works, which will be fundamental to the comprehension of some of the arguments of this text.

\(^2\) On that point, see Pollock (2003) and Van Alphen (2005).
particular, when faced with a homogenizing system such as the globalized one, the objective of 2Move was to show how the works of the exhibition resist, presenting precisely these kinds of contradiction, nuclei of resistance, fractures or blind spots which are not absorbed logically.

In the essay I wrote for the catalogue (2007), my approach was perhaps not particularly orthodox in the way that it was based on a number of sources which are not perhaps the most “established” ones in the field of visual culture studies. In fact, the first part of the text, which opens the argument, defended the recovery of something that, in principle, could appear to be outdated, but whose relevance to the present seems to me to be worth illustrating. It is the concept known as “weak thought”, in particular the version proposed by Pier Aldo Rovatti (2000).

The study of Rovatti’s thought introduces three extremely useful points when examining the works of the exhibition, as well as the issue of migration. These three points could be summarized as: experience, contradiction and metaphor.

The first point is concerned with everyday experience. Over and above great projects or stories, weak thought deals with the daily experience of the subject: that which is present and close. The Nietzschean unstoppable motion of the subject makes it concentrate almost centrifugally on the world around it, and this new look at the world changes the objects which surround it. What was fixed before is now mobile. In this way changes are produced that are definitive, not only in time but also, consequently, in space. Spaces are diluted, mobilized, erased and made porous.

The second issue is related to the demonstration of the contradictions of mobility. Rovatti enlightens us about the presence of a nucleus of resistance within mobility itself; a
nucleus of nonsense which can not be completely mobilized and which is related to the impossible Real of which Lacan speaks (1988). This shows an essential contradiction within movement itself. There is a force which pulls us downwards and that same force, which would cause us to sink, is what enables us to float. There is an impossibility of resolution in the experience which is unstable in itself and cannot be stopped: an inherent paradox. Within movement “…there is a 'no' which moves. There exists something which stops, which does not stop, which stops not stopping” (Rovatti 2000 : 45). Weak thought is then, a paradoxical thought, a thought of instability. Perhaps the expression which best sums this up would be the Nietzschean “inhabiting distance”, which encompasses the origin of the contradiction.3

Finally, weak thought proposes an evaluation of metaphorical thought or a certain poetic reason, which gets to places that logical thought does not quite reach. Rovatti suggests that this unstable inhabitability of distance appears before us through the metaphor, through a poetic reason which is in itself contradictory. The contradictions of experience make traditional thought obsolete and the best way of observing experience is that kind of poetic reason which is found in certain literature, such as that of Peter Handke or Michel Serres. In this sense, García Canclini noted, in his contribution to the 1st Conference, precisely the possibility that artistic language is the most capable of presenting these movements and journeys, especially because the artist “is attracted, more than by the production of knowledge, by the management of the uncertainty in the experiences of sensibility and imagination.” (2007)

3 See for this Rovatti (1994)
These three aspects (experience, contradiction and metaphor) help us to establish a reflection on migration in art, not as a theme or representation, but rather as an aesthetic paradigm. Seen in this way, 2Move did not aim so much to present an art “about” migration as a “migratory art”, not a thematic art, but rather an art that was essentially formed by the paradigm of migration, an art of instability, continuous movement or double movement: a migratory aesthetic.

It is true that in the exhibition there are many works which present the issue of migration in a literal way, but other than that, its very configuration, its way of understanding space or time is permeated with the migratory. Works as seemingly different as Mona Hatoum’s *Measures of Distance* or Javier Pividal’s *Coreografías de sombras*, whilst covering different issues and originating from diverse contexts, both stem from the migratory paradigm. Hatoum’s work has to do with the construction of memory and identity at a distance from the home. That of Pividal on the other hand, is related to the construction of western intimacy. In the former the migratory issue is more obvious than in the latter, in which *a priori* there is nothing to relate the work with migration: a western subject carries out absurd and minimal actions in private contexts. Over and above the individual meanings and implications however, both works unfurl a poetics of instability, an off-beat and unbalanced movement which we could call “a movement of paralax,” not so much in the sense as understood by Zizek, but rather in the sense of optics: the apparent resistance of objects to move with us (2006).

In this sense, to understand the migratory issue as a paradigm, it is necessary to distinguish it from the representation of the journey. The journey has a beginning and

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4 In her contribution to the 1st Encuentro Jill Bennett clarified the difference between the two points (2007).
an end. Contemporary mobility, homogenizing, is heading towards localization. The technologies of localization go hand in hand with the technologies of mobility. To a certain extent GPS and the mobile phone are homologous technologies.

James Clifford (1999) and Ermanno Vitale (2006) have distinguished the journey from migration via the obvious criteria of forced or painful movement, or movement for external reasons. What is really interesting however, is the idea that while the journey stops in a certain place and is localized, the migrant is always arriving. Wherever he may be, from the moment of setting out, or even before, with the “thought about setting out”, the migrant is transformed into an “intruder”, or an “inhabitant”, as there will always be something within him that is not completely fixed. The migrant, to use an expression that Nancy gives to the transplanted heart “is always on its way” and never quite fully arrives (2000).

However much Vitale (2006) insists on the idea of an “ius migrandi” as a transfer of the rules, the migrant cannot escape from the border, which is inscribed in his body and his daily life, in such a way that he is always migrating. He is always trying to go over that invisible border which, like an abyssal force, pulls him downwards again and again. This invisible inscription of the border, this insurmountable trauma, is what, according to the anthropologist Alice Cherki, contributes to the constant movement of the migrant, and it is this that she calls “wandering”, understood as a disease of time and space (2006). It is a wandering that is related to the diasporic and which presents itself magnificently in the metaphor which Iván de la Nuez uses, when analysing the Cuban exile: the perpetual raft, or the condition of being a boatperson forever (1998).
In one way or another, all the works from the exhibition present this condition of inhabiting in the distance, of moving from a future to a past. The migratory issue appears then as a way of thinking, as an aesthetic but also a cultural paradigm.

**Antagonism and Migratory Times: Demolishing the western chronological regime**

So far I have presented some of the key ideas from my 1st Encuentro essay. The contradictions of mobility, that “thing” that does not completely move, that sensation of “always arriving” seems, in principle, to be concerned most of all with issues of place. To move is to go from one place to another. To migrate is, above all, to look for a place. A home, a place to be able to inhabit. Therefore, the metaphors of migration that I presented were mainly concerned with the place. They were space metaphors, or at least that is how they could be considered initially. If one observes well however, moving or changing place is not only an issue of space, but also, and especially, time. All motion implies a time: a sequence, but also a duration; a *chronos* and a *kairos*, a passing and an experience.

As Doreen Massey has indicated, it is not so easy to separate time and space, and we can even talk of time-space (2005). Places are composed of space, but also time. They possess a temporal specificity that makes all movement in space, at the same time a movement in time. But time-space places are not fixed, rather they are in motion. Within them there does not exist a synchrony or a monochrony that could come from structural analysis. They are constantly changing and being modified. Thus, as Massey has observed, it is not possible to consider space as something fixed and time as

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5 See also May & Thrift (2001)
something mobile. Rather both are mutually involved, meaning that to some degree the place is movable and multiple, and that in time there are fragments of location and fixedness: i.e., small things that do not change with the passing of time, resistances to time. Thus we can say that the contradictions of mobility are contradictions of time and space.

Normally migration is perceived as a displacement in space, but it is also necessary to think of it as a displacement in time: a change in time and space. As Mieke Bal has pointed out

Migration also consists of the experience of time as multiple and heterogeneous. The time of haste and of the wait, the time of movement and of stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling present. The phenomenon that I call multi-temporality; its experience, heterochrony (2007).

If until now I have focused fundamentally on the spatial aspect, in the following sections I am going to reflect upon the issue of time. The essential argument of the remaining pages will be essentially to do with the way that migration introduces fundamental changes in western time. I will focus particularly on the examination of a number of strategies that arise in works from the 2Move exhibition: strategies of resistance to western monochrony, what we could call the "single time" of globalization.

All time is multiple, dynamic and heterogeneous, composed of countless little mobile and changing shades (May and Thrift 2001). There is a time of the succession and a time of

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6 Translator’s note: “single time” refers to the temporal regime linked with “single thought” from the French pensée unique. It is also known as “only time”, “one and only time” or “only one time”.
the duration, a quantitative time and another qualitative one; _chronos_ and _kairos_, two inseparable modes of time that, as Guadalupe Valencia has noted, form that which we could call 'temporality' and what would be something like 'the experience of time' (2007). Every society possesses a specific experience of time: a temporality composed as much by the rhythm of events as by the way the subject experiences them.

Many people say today that precisely this original multiple time tends to be the great thing that is sacrificed in the western conception of time (Baier 2002). The time discourse of western contemporaneity talks constantly about the appearance of a "single time", of a chronological imperialism. Massey has observed a tendency in the official discourse of globalization to talk about the compression of space and time (2006). This compression is related to what Mary Ann Doane has called the emergence of cinematic time, the time of the ellipsis or the time of narrative, linked also to the technologies of communication, light and power (2002).

According to Virilio, we are heading towards a new unicity of time: a time that is characterized by acceleration, the compression of space-time, almost the actual elimination of time (1996). It is zero time, the age of urgency, more than of speed as Lipovetsky claims (2006). The imposition of an only time, the redeeming time of speed, of 'the western hour' (Agacinski 2000) would serve to abolish all the local temporalities. A hegemonic temporality, that of global time, tends to eliminate and to subsume the various local times.

The discourse of globalization makes us think that the latter is inevitable in terms of time and space, that it is as difficult to resist as the force of gravity. This idea, according to Massey, represents a conceptualization of time and space: "The proposition turns geography into history, space into time" (2005: 5). It is about making us think that there are no
differences or that they can be abolished: “That cosmology of 'only one narrative' obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue” (2005: 5).

One of the most interesting aspects of migrant temporalities is that they help to destroy the fiction of the new only one time that is compressed and accelerated. In a way, they promote a fracture in the western chronological regime. The immigrant's multiple time collides with the only time of globalization. The change of 'hour' –in Agancinski’s words– that takes place in the immigrant is a metaphor of the drastic change of temporality, for the whole system is implicit in that clock, a chronological regime, a temporal structure, a history and a perception of time.

The contemporary theories of hybridization also advocate a hybridization of time7. As well as a third way or a third space, you could also speak of a third time (Bhabha 1994). Homi Bhabha himself has examined this hybrid dimension of postcolonial time, a sort of in-between time in which the hybridization of temporalities would be possible, where the local and global temporal specifics would coexist without a problem: a temporal utopia of mestization that, however, beneath its apparent goodness, hides a dark reverse side. Hybridization and the discourse of the in-between and of mestization are too close to the new only time. Just as the third space, the third time is effected in western time. It is a time conceived from the western present, from its chronological regime; a time that, in the background, tends to cancel the local times. It is a time of adjustment.

7 See García Canclini (2002) and Bhabha.
I believe that it is necessary to override the temporal model of interculturality because it is misleading. Perhaps it would be more productive to think of the coexistence of times as a collision and an unsolvable tension, like a fundamental dyschrony, impossible to assimilate. The immigrant changes time zone, he moves around in time, but the change is never tidy, never complete. There is always a surplus, something that cannot be moved, something that stands still. There is something chronic, in the sense of something specific and personal, like a chronic illness, that cannot be mobilized, that can never be adequate. There is a chronic dimension in the chronology. There is one 'Real', to say it as Lacan does, that cannot be assumed. And that Real is the one that produces the contradiction, the one that shatters the illusion of integration. The adjustment, then, is never possible.

This will lead us to conceive an antagonistic temporal model, in which the differences are valued and there is no possibility of solving the originating conflict because any agreement without fissures is an act of masking reality. In this antagonistic model, that would be derived from Laclau's and Mouffe's theses on democracy, agreement between the parts would not be possible, since there would always be empty spaces, impossible to fill. Temporal vacuums, errors, blind spots, non-homologizable temporal specificities that, on the one hand would contribute to enrich the spectrum of temporalities of the present and, on the other hand, could be useful in demolishing the fictions of the western chronological regimen; a regime that, precisely, under the model of the imaginary hybridization of time, proposes a single narrative.

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9 The classic formulation is in Laclau & Mouffe (1985). A reflection of time and space introducing the concept ‘dislocation’ is treated in Laclau (1990)
Considered carefully, the model of antagonistic temporalities answers to a mental scheme that is not representative, in the sense that the conflict and its resolution cannot be considered structurally, among other things because it is mobile, changing and not all places are accessible to reason.

If we were to write a history of subjectivity and modern times, we could easily represent them mentally, almost spatially as if it were a map. Modern temporal thought has been essentially topographic, representable in a Euclidean space: a fixed and motionless space. It could be said that in this space Modernity appreciated the time of the One, and forged its project on evolution and the Self's progress. Postmodernism attended to the minorities and was built up on the time of the other, that is, the time of the minus one; and what we could call interculturality, the official model of the present, has been forged on the sum of the time of the Other, local time, with the time of the One, global time, the hybridization of the Other with the Self; that is, the minus one plus one. It is a perfectly representable equation in the mental map of time. It is a perfect equation, without fissures; fixed, visible and, consequently, localizable and controllable.

The three temporal models are, if one observes with great detail, completely spatial: rational and mentally representable, and they all are constructed from the same place: the time-space of the One. Everything happens on the same game board, and although the counters are different, the structure is the same.

It is necessary to introduce a fourth time model: a time beyond interculturality and hybridity, a discontinuous and antagonistic time that cannot be added or subtracted, and
neither can it, therefore, be represented. It is a movable, changing, multiple and absurd temporality. In short it is an antagonistic temporality in constant conflict.

Furthermore, in an antagonistic time model that values the non re-usable excess and leftover stock, the dead ends and the errors of time, it seems necessary to break the topographic structure in favour of a topological "de-structure": a temporal space that is not Euclidian, but mӧebian; without an inside, an outside, a near or a far away, where there is no correspondence nor completely rational neighbourhoods (at least if we understand reason as a spatialization). This time is governed, as Jacques Lacan already mentioned (Ragland & Milovanovic 2004), by another series of correspondences and neighborhoods that suit the psychic time and space better than the geographical and historical ones: a confusing time-space, where before, after and now mix and intercede, a space where the exterior makes up the interior. It is a space that subverts intuition, a scotomic space, with a blind spot; the blind spot of an empty place, of a missing centre, around which all this topological space is configured.

A topological thought of time would lead us therefore to value discontinuities, breaks, inadequacies, absences, etc.: in short, to value down time. It is precisely these times that have tended to be eliminated from all the discourse of the elliptical time of the cinematograph and the narratives associated with it (Doane 2002).

Perhaps we should consider the contemporary subject and its time from the topology, beyond the location and beyond linear time in the time of absence, not in an eternal intemporality, but rather in a multiple and heterogeneous temporality, although not a hybrid one (at least not if by hybrid we mean the sum of the parts). A discontinuous
temporality, a heterochrony, or rather, to emphasise the issue of conflict, a dyschrony, an asynchrony impossible to resolve.

What is really interesting about the subject that we are dealing with is that the migrant temporalities introduce and evince the conflict within the supposed western hegemonic temporality, and this conflict fractures and shatters the illusion of the only time, of the imaginary monochrony of cultural capitalism. For that reason one should not see conflict from a negative perspective and agreement from a positive one. It is necessary to eliminate the idea that the resolution always is positive: a resolution without fissures is often a triumph of the dominant party. Conflict or disagreement is a constitutive element of the community (Rancière 1995). Resistance in the face of power has to be produced precisely by means of disagreement, by means of tension.

One of the most interesting tasks of art at present will be precisely to make evident, to visualize, to bring to vision, this temporal conflict to show the inconsistencies, falseness and artifices of chronological imperialism. This strategy is found in a large part of the works of the exhibition 2Move, works that are configured essentially as temporal resistances, metaphors of an antagonistic time, places of temporal disagreement.

Perhaps the work that best incorporates and encompasses all that I have exposed previously is Mimoune, by Gonzalo Ballester. The work is very simple, but its simplicity makes it very effective. The artist records a video of Mimoune, a Moroccan immigrant who works in Murcia (southern Spain), looking straight into the camera to send a message to his family. It is a message made up of sentimental clichés: I am all right, I have got work, but I miss you. Afterwards the artist takes the video to Mimoune's family in Morocco, and records their reactions to Mimoune's message. Next he records a
message from the family for Mimoune. Finally the circle closes when the message returns to Murcia, where, once again, Ballester records Mimoune's face while he views the video of the message from his family.

In all, we have four sequences of images that belong to different moments: 1) Mimoune sending a message, 2) his family receiving the message, 3) his family recording a message, 4) Mimoune receiving the message. Between the first and last sequence of images a time period of not less than several weeks has passed, since it implies a real journey, a distance, and an inevitable time lapse. However, and this is extremely interesting, Ballester has assembled the images as if they were simultaneous, by means of the shot-countershot. In this way, we see Mimoune speaking and in the following scene we observe his relatives' reactions to his words. The western spectator, accustomed to the instantaneity of the television, immediately thinks that the images are happening at the same time and that there exists an instantaneous communication between Mimoune and his family.

If we observe carefully, Ballester is playing with three temporalities. In the first place, there is the epistolary temporality of the message. A message is sent, which takes a certain amount of time, it arrives at its destination, and afterwards it can return or not. It is the time of uncertainty, the time of the real distance, because the letter takes the same time to arrive as a person would take. The distance that, for example, our modern communication technologies have contributed to eliminate symbolically. The telephone and e-mail have compressed the long temporal regime of the epistle in favour of an instantaneity that seems to abolish geographical distances and, consequently, temporal ones too.

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10 On epistolary time, see Baier (2002) chapter five.
The second time of the image in *Mimoune* is the time of the television, the instantaneous time of western image technologies. While the first time belonged to what could have been the specific chronological regime of Mimoune’s hometown, the time of the television belongs to another moment and to another chronological regime, the contemporary western one. It is the accelerated zero-time that we find in temporary discourses, for example, of Virilio or Lipovetsky. This is the time of Mimoune’s country of adoption and also the time of the work’s viewer. 

The third time is the time of the conflict that makes the two specific temporalities collide, the two regimens of communication, the epistolary and that of the television. This is the true migrant time because Mimoune is stranded between two times. Although in principle it could be thought that Ballester’s work is conceived as a hybridization of temporalities, it is actually composed of the unsolvable tension between the two, a tension that refutes the fictitious tale of the dominant time, the means by which the message is emitted. 

Like a paradox to the world of communications and the fast pace of globalized society, the slow time of emission and answer enters here as if it were a parallel universe producing a breach in time, a breach that makes conflicting temporalities emerge, an asynchrony between the means and their utilization. The video, characterized by its immediacy, is used here in a slow time, the same as the television, breaking the tendency of live transmission to operate in playback, with a different time from that usually expected for the medium. Furthermore, the television in *Mimoune* is tele-vision in the temporal sense, because the vision takes place in the distance, more temporal than spatial. 

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1 One interesting recent reflection on TV is in Joselit (2007)
Compared to the supposed immediacy of the voice that many immigrants experience in telephone conversations, the image still has difficulties in arriving with such speed, and usually does so by means of photos or postcards from relatives and hometowns. Hence, compared with an immediate voice that is apparently close the image shows the true distance, the unsurmountable distance between the places. Ballester's work emphasises how out of synch the visible and the audible are, an essentially temporal out-of-synch-ness that changes the meaning, because in front of the camera, rather than stories we come across bodified voices. This is what really seems to be important: that the voices have a place in the body. We could say then, that Mimoume’s tears are not so much due to the significance of the words but rather to the reconstruction and re-composition of voice and image, of word and body, something that is always lost with distance.

The temporal antagonism that Mimoume presents contributes, on the one hand, to shatter the myth of the only time, introducing a plurality of times that clearly shows the heterogeneity of the experience of time. On the other hand however, the work also manages to abolish the supposed compression of the space-time which is so present in the contemporary discourses on temporality. The compression of space makes us think that all places are accessible at any time, and that, precisely for this reason, we will find the same thing in all places: “because space has been marshalled under the sign of time, these countries have no space –precisely– to tell different stories, to follow another path” (Massey 2005: 82).

This new Atlas however, in which distances are abolished is no more than a fiction\(^\text{12}\). As García Canclini observes, it is an imaginary construction: there is no ‘free space’, but quite the contrary, a space that resists moving and being eliminated.

This is precisely the space that appears in *Mimoune*. The temporal collapse of the work shatters the illusion to show that there exists a "real distance" that cannot be abolished by communication technology. In this way, *Mimoune* presents a strategy of resistance to the compression of space and time.

**Challenging technology**

In the collision of times that occurs in *Mimoune* it is necessary to pay attention to an issue that the text would appear to have avoided until now: the issue of technology. The two times that collide in this work are found located in two technologies of communication, two time-systems: the video and the epistle. Therefore, the antagonism that ensues is a technological antagonism. The tension takes place between two technologies. Technologies that are, more than just some simple tools, foundations and condensations of the whole cultural system.

In her contribution to the I Encuentro, concerning the work of Isaac Julien, Ranjana Khanna introduced the issue of technology in a Heideggerian sense (Khanna, 2007). For her, technology would have two fundamental meanings. On the one hand, it referred “to the instruments employed as tools in order to achieve something through altering our relation to a world which does not automatically offer the thing desired”, and on the other hand it could be conceived in a wider sense, "as something systematic". Following Heidegger, Khanna will notice that technology is not merely a means, but also a mode of knowledge, that *techne* is most of all to do with knowledge and, somehow, with poetical production, with poïesis. When taken to be a form of knowledge, technology has to do with the uncovering of the truth, “a way of bringing out the occult. The technical essence in the region in which it happens brings out the occult and the state of uncovering, where the *aletheia*, the truth, occurs". (Heidegger, 1994: 15)
We will understand technology in this way, as a complex system of knowledge, and a way of relating to the world. A way in which, as in the Foucaultian archive, the following things are included: power, the possibility of knowledge, and subjectivity in all its complexity. Technology would then be one of the foundations of a whole cultural system. Thus, much more than the tool as something neutral, technology would be loaded with cultural meanings and it would have something like a system memory, an ideology that would be present independently of the end for which it is used. Jonathan Crary has observed with precision how, behind many of the technologies of vision that began to evolve throughout the nineteenth century, there is hidden an ideology of control and domination that has to do with a bigger process of rearrangement of knowledge and individuals in modernity (Crary 1996 and 1999).

It is technology then, as a window of approach to the world, as a mode of configuration of truths; it is knowledge or a way of knowledge. As Félix Duque observes, "we call these ways of saying and making the world ‘technical’. (Duque 2006:183).

Before continuing it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the distinction that Heidegger makes between ancient and modern technology, like two ways of approaching the truth. Furthermore, it is also necessary to clarify the terminology used. In Spanish, there is a clear division between "the technical” and "technology". In this sense, Heidegger does not refer to technology, but to the technical. In fact, the original German term is Technik. Heidegger’s classic essay "Die Frage nach der Technik" has been translated in Spanish as “La pregunta por la técnica” (Heidegger 1994). In English,

13 “The question about the technical”.
However, the translation is "The Question Concerning Technology" (Heidegger 1977). There is no distinction made between the two. In Anglo-Saxon Heideggerian tradition, technology and the technical have a similar meaning, thus they talk of ancient technology and modern technology. However these are not synonymous terms for Heidegger. Technology is a later stage of the technical. In fact, as Eduardo Sabrosky mentions, what Heidegger understands as technology is nothing more than the modern technical (2006).

The distinction between the ancient and modern technical in Heidegger has nothing to do with the level of sophistication of the devices or the tools, rather it relates to the way both make the truth appear. As Richard Rojcewicz observes “the essential difference resides in the theory, in the attitude that underlies the use of the means: namely, a pious attitude toward the object of the practice, versus an imperious, hubristic, ‘unbridled imposition of ends’” (2006: 11). Ancient technology (the technical) relates to the techne, knowledge and thought. It is concerned with nature, and the physis. It is not something manufactured, but rather a bringing-there-in-front, a sort of revelation. The decisive thing about the technical as mode of the truth would be production (poïesis). It is a way of thinking, a questioning of the opacity of the truth.

The modern technical (technology), on the other hand, dominates nature and knowledge: “Revealing the occult that prevails in the modern technical is a provocation that puts before Nature the requirement to supply energy that as such can be extracted and stored” (Heidegger 1994: 15). That is to say, technology uses the physis as a place in which everything is given beforehand: it progressively transforms the world into a deposit of out-of-context resources arranged for enjoyment.

\[^{14}\] See Rojcewicz (2006)
and manipulation. The way of revealing this world as a store of resources is what Heidegger calls Ge-stell, "structure of emplacement" or "composition". No longer has it to do with a production, a poiesis, or a question about being, but rather a simple utilization of world’s resources as a warehouse.

A key aspect of the elucidation of the issue of the technical has to do with the resistance of the truth to show itself and its supposed elimination that takes place in technology. In the technical, doing and thinking are conceived facing a resistance, the resistance of the truth to show itself. The truth, which always remains hidden, only shows itself in the clearing of light (lichtung) of the thought and the doing, but in a conscious doing, in which the individual is implicated. In technology on the other hand, the issue of resistance is eliminated. It is concealed. The "being hidden" of the truth is hidden:

In this way then, the provoking Ges-tell not only conceals a previous mode to the bringing out of the hidden, the bringing-there-in-front, but rather conceals the bringing out of the hidden as such, and with it That in which the state of de-concealing happens in its own way, that is, the truth (Heidegger 1994: 25).

Heidegger’s language is obtuse and complex, but a grosso modo, the idea that prevails in his conception of the modern technical is that it no longer makes the truth appear because it does not question itself about it (the truth). That is to say that it works only through the illusion that there is nothing hidden, that everything is in the open, that there is no resistance of the truth to reveal itself, because the world is given in existences in its image15. The world becomes clear by means of the extension of technology to all the spaces of daily life, and then

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the illusion is born that "there is no longer anything to
discover". Also in the world that has intended to show
everything, to discover everything, technology stops being
techne and stops possessing the privilege of the aletheia, the
uncovering of the truth. Then, as Arturo Leyte affirms “of the
thing, understood now as an object, only its sides, its faces, its
images are left, but not the base of just what was understood,
that the image was an image: there is no base because only
images occur and remain” (Leyte, 2005: 110).

Among a number of other points, the difference
between the technical and technology (modern technical)
would also have to do with the way in which time is
conceived. The technical possesses a human time: “It goes
with the flow” (Heidegger 1994: 23). Its pace is that of man.
Technology on the other hand introduces the paces of the
machine. Although the machine adapts to the man, the
ideology of the machine, its rhythm, is the one that prevails.

In order not to persist unduly on the question of
Heideggerian technology, we could sum up by saying that,
definitively, technology destroys the poetical dimension of the
technical, the human and affective dimension of the techne,
because the way of uncovering the truth of the modern
technical is "essentially" instrument.

According to the above, it could be thought that the
re recuperation of that poetical dimension leads to an involution
and almost to a reversing of the technological processes. Many
have called Heidegger a technophobe or a Luddite. The
interesting thing about his thought however, that still
continues to be useful, is the consideration that danger is not
in the devices, but in its essence: “What's dangerous is not the
technical. There is nothing diabolic about the technical, what
there is is the mystery of its essence. The essence of the
technical, as a destiny of bringing out what is hidden, is the
danger” (Heidegger 1994: 26). Heidegger did not attempt to
demonize the technical in terms of the creation of machines
and apparatuses; the danger is not so much the technical as
something produced by the human being: the technical is not
the devil. The true danger entails the essence of the technical:
the structure, the Ges-tell that is destiny.

If we take this into account, the possibility appears of
recovering the productive, poetical, affective and close
dimension of the *techne* without necessarily getting rid of
technology. The key would be in changing the essence, or to
say the same thing but in less transcendent terms, in
surpassing its value of use, questioning it, fracturing it and
dismantling it from within, taking it even to absurdity and
making resistances emerge in it. Resistances that would not be
too far away from that which, at the end of his discourse,
Heidegger called “the saviour” (*das Rettende*), or the return to
the artistic dimension of the technical: poïesis and creation.

Perhaps all of the above is better explained if we
consider *Gaussian Blur*, a video by Roos Thews. The work
shows two superimposed images, each one of them moving at
a different pace, as if they belonged to strange times. The slow
time of the corporeal images that seem heavy, contrasts with
the movement in real time of a storm whose image however is
almost transparent. The effect that takes place in the
superimposing of the two sequences of moving images is
similar to the effect one would get using the “gaussian blur”
function, pre-programmed in video editors: the fade-out and
scumble of the image. To get a similar effect (although not
exactly the same) the artist carries out a much longer and more
arduous task, a job that is almost a craft, completely alien to
the medium that he uses. It is a task that implies the
questioning of technology, because it accomplishes the
proposed effect in a different way from that which is pre-
determined in the device. That is to say, in a way, it subverts technology.

Heidegger notes that technology is related to an impulse "toward the maximum utilization with the minimal expense" (Heidegger 1994: 16), that is, to the attainment of the maximum benefit with the minimal effort. Contemporary technological devices are all going in this direction. The attainment of the Gaussian Blur effect would have been possible with "the minimal expense", simply pressing a button or setting a function. That way, between the effort (or the thought) employed and the result there is an insurmountable abyss. Thews, however, takes the longer route and breaks the Ges-tell system of technology, that stops being merely a transparent means that eliminates the subject. Here resistance comes into play once again, the time of the individual, the techne as it was thought in the ancient technical. In the face of transparency, de-corporalization, dehumanization and technological domination, Thews introduces opacity, the corporalness of work, individuation and "care" (sorge) about the process. In consequence there takes place an act of creation, a purely poetical act. And also a political act, in the sense that the work presents an act of resistance. It is an act of resistance to the ideology of technology. Its aberrant or non-programmed utilization would have to do with a micropolitical dimension of the artistic practice. Gaussian Blur shows us the possibilities that art has of dismounting the essence of technology, remaking the very affectivity of the techne, its poetical production, its mode of bringing-there-in-front what is hidden.

\[16\] On resistance, see Bensaïd (2001)
Second-hand technologies

After observing the exhibition in great detail, we found that a large number of works seem to operate with the same modes of temporal-technological collapse that we have seen in Mimoune or Gaussian Blur. In some cases, such as in the work of William Kentridge, where the technical aspect of the drawing and the technology of the video work together mutually modifying each other, specific conflicting temporalities are produced as well. In other cases perhaps, this collapse is more subtle and less visible, as occurs for example in Ursula Biemann’s Remote Sensing. In her research on sexual exploitation, each of the stories of this work begins using images of satellites and modern technologies of location, and from there the technology “descends” to the pure reality that does not seem to change. The advanced technology used seems to be in clear contraposition to the inequalities that reality and the dramatic situation confirm. Specific unequal temporalities collide with the global unified temporality, and the metaphor has a literal sense here because satellite images of earth show the time and global technology that controls and that unites the times of exploitation.

I would like now to turn our attention from 2Move, to relate this inclination to collide temporalities and technologies with a sort of recent tendency in the present-day arts. It has to do with what Hal Foster has called the asynchronous, one of the master strategies of the artistic practices –together with the spectral, the traumatic and the incongruent– that take place after death of the history of art (2004). It is a strategy of montage of asynchronous forms that involves “making a new means from the residues of journey forms, keeping together the different temporal indicators in a single visual structure” (Foster 2004: 137). According to Foster, this discourse could include James Coleman’s slides, Kentridge’s videographic
drawings, Kara Walker’s narrative silhouettes and Stan Douglas’s film installations.

One of the most interesting dimensions that the asynchronous brings into play is that of the out-of-fashion and the obsolete. This is related to the surrealist imaginary where, according to Benjamin, this obsolescence of the out-of-fashion could stimulate the revolutionary energy that was trapped there (1980). For Benjamin therefore, what’s obsolete can be political, because it makes us relive the unaccomplished futures, the utopias that were never realized and the dream world of the past. In this sense, it could be confirmed with Foster that:

the unfurling of the asynchronous pressurizes the totalist assumptions of capitalist culture and challenges their hope of being intemporal; it also defies this culture with its own augural symbols, and requests that it remembers its own lost dreams of freedom, equality and brotherhood (Foster 1994: 139).

In a way, the cohabitation of conflicting technologies which belong to different temporalities that I have analyzed in this text would also examine different roads from those along which the global technological discourse has led us. It would introduce resistances to the incessant passing of time, shattering it, breaking its perfect equilibrium and, most of all, giving the subject the protagonism of his destiny.

But what interests me most about Foster’s argument about the asynchronous is the presence and the potential of the obsolete, most of all for the "used" nature that this has. As José Luis Molinuevo says, “technologies do not die, they fall into disuse. Their being is their use, their disuse is the Nothing” (2006: 39). The obsolete is related, therefore, to that which no longer suits someone’s purposes, that has stopped
being useful, that has lost its instrumental value\textsuperscript{17}. At the same time the "used" also has a surplus, excess and residual dimension, and in this sense it has an almost "indexical" link to the subject that has used the object. The term "second-hand" which gives the title to this essay refers precisely to this, to the "tactile" and close relationship that the subject has with the used object. As Gregson and Crewe observe, there exists an emotional component in second-hand objects, a sort of memory that goes beyond their instrumentality and that places these objects and technologies in the area of affectivity (2003).

I would like to use the metaphor of the "second-hand" to refer to the close and not exclusively instrumental presence that the obsolete or non-contemporary technologies possess – understanding by non-contemporary those external to western technological progress, that seems to be the only place where the \textit{telos} of history still survives.

If we return now to the Heideggerian argument shown previously, according to which the modern technical broke the poetical value of the ancient technical by introducing only the value of use and eliminating man's close and almost empathetic relation with the tool, it would not be far-fetched to affirm that these second-hand technologies would restore the human character of the \textit{techne} and bring back the enigmatic and hidden value of the true that had worried Heidegger so much.

To conclude, the arguments given until now that migrant times and technologies introduce second-hand technologies in time and global technology, and this almost spectral invasion produces cuts and unsolvable discontinuities in the "ideological programming" of the technological

\textsuperscript{17} On Obsolescence and technology, see Acland (2007).
progress. The beginning of *Un Trabajo Limpio*\(^\text{18}\), the video by Mieke Bal and Gary Ward, clearly shows these discontinuities. The work begins at an Internet café where immigrants use advanced communication technologies (video chat) to contact their relatives. These technologies belong to the western technological regime but they do not fit the regime of the home countries. The most interesting thing however, is that the immigrant gets into them in a direct way, without a previous process of indoctrination and technological learning. This provokes unexpected results and uses that have not been pre-programmed. Internet chats that we observe at the Internet cafés seem to be minor interventions. They have the status of events or happenings. They are disconnected and discontinuous. To a certain extent they escape the structure and system of technology, that which Heidegger called *Gestell*.

What this heterodox and anachronic use of technology teaches us, is that perhaps it is necessary to introduce a dose of technological illiteracy, an illiteracy that produces aberrant uses of technology, uses that are not pre-determined, that break the teleological discourse of technology and bring it closer to the subject. In this way the chronological discontinuities, the time periods that are produced with this migrant use of technology, would propose modes that have not been considered and roads not yet walked by the contemporary subject, roads that lead beyond instrumentality and transparency. Roads that return to proximity and affectivity, and that, to continue with the argument that I presented in the 1st Encuentro, constitute little resistances, acts of nanopolitics, barely visible... infra-light, but convincing.

\(^{18}\) Spanish for *A Clean Job*.
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Interstellar Hospitality: Missions of Star house Enterprise

Sonja Neef

1. Star time

Earth date 2151 is a cosmic time. The threats of atomic and ecological disasters, of poverty and diseases are definitely overcome. The disparate nations and cultures have come to peace and are now ruled by a planetary state, created through the unification of Earth. Beyond any differentiation of race, sex, nationality, or culture, all inhabitants are considered members of one united “Humanity”. This is the phantasmatic future designed in the science fiction television series “Star Trek”. The impetuosity of this Utopia comes close to Immanuel Kant’s Enlightened concept of a Cosmo political “civitas gentium”, a united League of Nations comprising all peoples of the globe and held together by the “Idee der Föderalität, die sich allmählich über alle Staaten erstrecken soll, und so zu ewigem Frieden hinführt.”1 Kant knows about the time necessary for states and their citizens to achieve the maturity for such an “eternal peace”; he literally calls it a “cosmic time” and compares it to the circulation of planets.2

The diegetic future world of Star Trek is cosmic in this Kantian sense. Unlike for Kant, in the film series, the development of Humanity’s universal civilization is presented

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1 Immanuel Kant, Zum Ewigen Frieden, Werke, Volume 9, 1970, p. 211.
not as the result of ethics and laws, but primarily as an achievement of technological progress. The historical moment that literally changed the world is told in the fifth TV series entitled Star Trek Enterprise, created by Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, covering 4 seasons consisting in 97 Episodes, produced and run (almost simultaneously) from 2001 to 2005. Although this delivery concerns the latest Star Trek generation, the time span narrated comes chronologically first. The diegetic times in the other generations are chronological – first comes Star Trek (The Original Series) with Captain Kirk narrating the years from 2265 to 2269, followed by The Next Generation with Captain Picard featuring from 2364 to 2370, followed by Star Trek: Deep Space Nine covering the years 2369 to 2375, and finally, Star Trek: Voyager with Captain Janeway reaches the farest in the future since it goes until 2378.3

The fifth generation with Captain Archer’s crew is thus a prequel; it moves back to a future past where it was set a century before the area of the “original” series with Kirk and

3 These are:

- The original Star Trek, created by: Gene Roddenberry, 1966–1969, Episodes: 79 (3 seasons), Time span: 2265-2269


- Star Trek Enterprise, created by: Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, 2001–2005, Episodes: 97 (4 seasons), time span: 2151-2155, 2161
Spock. In doing so, it is old and new at once, and it always has to deal and to play with this anachronistic structure. On the one hand, from a diegetic point of view, this latest Enterprise series needs to accurately prepare the technologies of space travel used in the Original Star Trek. So to speak belatedly, the Enterprise series’ plot had to feature literally mankind’s first steps in making contact with foreign worlds and provide the archaeological technologies of the very first space voyages, those preceding the actual (or “Original”) Star Trek. On the other hand, from the point of view of film making, the film technologies used for Enterprise in 2001 to 2005 are much more sophisticated than those of the 1960ies. Whereas the “Original” Star Trek was produced in the Desilo Studios equipped with rough props to enact naive film effects, the fifth generation benefited from high-tech computer animation producing special effects, amongst which most famous holographic spaces.

In Captain Archer’s ‘cosmos’, April 2151 is a historical date for Humanity. After decades of engineering and research into making faster star ships for the Earth Starfleet, the “warp five engine” had been developed by his father, Henry Archer, and Zefram Cochrane. According to the ‘official Star Trek homepage’, the warp reactor is technically known as the “Gravimetric Field Displacement Manifold”, consisting of a matter/antimatter reaction assembly. The discovery of warp technology is the initializing moment when humanity leaves

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4 For example, whereas Archer’s crew is still very suspect of the “transporter”, a subspace device to dematerialize an object at one location and to transmit and reassemble it at another, Captain Kirk and his crew use this tool for travelling, also known as the “beamer”, on a regular basis. In the Century between Archer and Kirk, the transporter-technology has obviously made it to a common means of transport.

5 Memory Alpha, online encyclopedia on Star Trek, (since November 2003), http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Portal:Star_Trek
its home planet to become a voyager. It is due to this discovery of a revolutionary propulsion technology that Humanity changes from a primitive, planetary pre-warp species to a universal player. This enlargement or exceeding of human territories is not without risk, indeed. After all, the space voyagers must give up the possibility of protection offered by the host or the house of the United Earth. Crew members inhabit a ship rather than a house; rather than Cosmo political planetary citoyens, they become interstellar ambassadors whose core function is to be a ‘foreigner’ and literally an ‘alien’, always the one who is about to arrive, always searching for first contacts to newly to encounter species, an eternal ‘newcomer’ in the sense of Jacques Derrida’s ‘arrivant’, always heading for the future.\(^6\)

2. Pandora’s Box

April 2151 is the moment that the first star ship has been equipped with a warp five engine: the Enterprise NX-01. Jonathan Archer is chosen to become its Captain. His task lies in discovering and exploring ‘alien’ life forms, at best indeed intelligent species, and in studying their modes of civilization. The ‘gift’ of technology appears as a gift to exploration and literally to “enterprise”.

The first, feature-length episode of the series is entitled “Broken Bow”. The first act features the situation on Earth some days before the set-off of the prototype star ship Enterprise. Archer, accompanied by Commander Charles Tucker, nicknamed Trip, is flying aboard an inspection pod around the Enterprise in a space dock orbiting Earth. Both men go into raptures about the star ship’s technical equipment:

Trip: The Ventral Plating Team says they’ll be done in about three days.

Archer: Be sure they match the colour to the nacelle housings.

Trip: Planning to sit on the hull and pose for some postcards?

Archer: Maybe. God, she’s a dream.

Trip: And fast. Warp 4.5 next Thursdays.

Archer: Neptune and back in six minutes.7

In this dialogue, the star ship is adored for “her” beauty and strength: “she’s a dream”, Archer says having a sigh of admiration. Throughout the series, “she” functions as an independent agent steering the plot when battling other spaceships, when being “blessed” as much as when triumphing in warrior. This linkage between technology and gender has a long tradition. In Greek mythology, it was Pandora (the "all-gifted") who was sent by Zeus to seduce mankind. In this scene, Archer and Trip literally behave like once mankind, to whom Zeus sent the beautiful Pandora to bring a box as an offer. This seductive “gift”, however, was in truth the revenge for Prometheus’ theft of the secret of fire. It remarkable that the gesture of the offer carries in it a double structure, as the German word “Gift” demonstrates, which means “pharmakon”, “poison”.8 Pandora’s present is emblematic for this ambushing dimension of offers as such, and her strategies of seduction – beauty, grace, and availability

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7 “Broken Bow” (Star Trek Enterprise, 5th Generation, season 1, episode 1), Chapter 2, 0:04-05.

qualify as ontologically feminine. Like Pandora’s Box, the star
ship enterprise “is a dream” to Archer and Trip, also in the
sense of a temptation heading for danger.

Yet unlike this threatening meaning, Pandora’s Box
remains at the same time still a ‘gift’ in the literal English sense
of the word: a donation, a present, a bargain and – last but not
least – a gift for … in the sense of a talent, and thus a task or a
duty to develop something in the future. A gift is an
obligation. Receiving a gift – and here the German meaning
intermingles with the English, implies an injunction for the
presentee, it turns her or him into a ‘donee’ with a
commitment for the future.

It is significant that according to the myth, it was not
Prometheus himself who accepted and opened Pandora’s Box.
Prometheus (Προ-μηθευς), the “technician” and literally “the
one who is looking forward”, had formed mankind from clay,
he had taught them crafts and culture, and he had even
brought them the fire that Zeus had refused them – like the
Vulcans had refused mankind the warp-reactor. Rather, the
box was accepted by Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus
(Επι-μηθευς: the one who is considering afterwards).
Although Prometheus had warned him forcefully, he opened
the disastrous gift from Pandora and thus released -
unanticipatedly and irreversibly - the evils of mankind: greed,
vanity, slander, envy and pining, those evils that in the Star
Trek series were not raised by technological hubris, but
precisely overcome by it. In this emphatic passion for
technological innovation, the series reveals a techno-ethical
position holding against the metaphor of Pandora’s Box as a
warning for unanticipated and irreversible dealing with
technology.

According to Bernard Stiegler, the myth of
Prometheus and Epimetheus goes far beyond such mono-
directional and mono-causal relationship between technology and time. In *La technique et le temps*, Stiegler argues that it is precisely the inseparable discord or division between the two brothers - the one Προ, the other Έπι - in which relies for Stiegler the chronological dynamics of the technical. For Stiegler, the relation between technology and time is as contrary to usual ideas about the “development” of technology much more determined by a fundamental and ‘original’ “Désorientation”.9

“[…] l’avance prométhéenne et le retard épiméthéen (qui est aussi la faute d’Épiméthée comme oubli) trament ensemble la prométheia comme prévoyance et l’épimétheia comme distraction insouciante et médiation après coup.” 10

It is precisely this „pro-eipimetheic” paradox, or discontent (between brothers), which for Stiegler lies at the basis of an “original technicity” (“une technicité originel”). The relation between time and technology is thus not structured along a monolinear axis – as suggested in the *Star Trek* series. Rather, the “original technicity” is always already determined by the lack of origin.

In *Star Trek* and especially in the fifth generation (*Enterprise*), this double structure is not only significant for the anachronistic relation between the diegetic enactment of the ‘technical as mono-linear development’ and the atavistic film technologies involved. The future concerned in *Star Trek* is

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already a ‘past future’, it is a future which had to be invented from the point of view of another phantasmatic future, one that is at once ‘looking forward’ because further in time, and - with respect to the narrating time of technical production - ‘looking backwards’, since it mirrors the technological fantasies of the 1960ies. At the same time, I will argue in what follows, such an anachronism also marks the chrono-logic of Enterprise as the feature of – after all – a voyage. Voyages, in describing the movement of a trajectory or a trace, are always ‘pro-epi-metheic’ because they always include reversals, pauses, and new starts as much as loops and crossings in their spatio-temporal programs.

3. First Encounter
Before accompanying the Enterprise on its first travel through space, let me turn back to the moment preceding the actual set-off. It is not by chance that this first mission of star ship Enterprise featured in “Broken Bow”, the episode launching the set-off of the series, concerns no less than an ambassador intervention caused by a first encounter with an alien species. In the film, this first encounter is enacted as follows. Right after having completed the technical inspection of the Enterprise before set-off, Captain Archer is called by Admiral Forest, the leader of the Starfleet of United Earth, to urgently come to Starfleet Medical. When arriving there, Archer enters into a room where three officials of Starfleet’s Admiralty and three alien ambassadors from the planet of Vulcan are observing through a window how a medical team in a neighbored room is treating a patient with high-tech medical equipment. A heated debate is going on between the Starfleet’s staff and the representatives of Vulcan.

Being interrupted by Archer’s arrival, Admiral Forrest turns himself towards Archer to welcome him as the newcomer at the conference. While shaking hands – in western culture the symbolic gesture of welcoming as such - the admiral asks: “Jon, I think you know everyone?” Archer, being familiar with the presence of Vulcan ambassadors on Earth, ignores the Vulcans. As ‘aliens’, they are not foreign to him anymore because he has already experienced the Vulcan’s insistence on logical thought and their attitude to tutor Humanity in matters of interstellar diplomacy. For this reason, his interest is concentrated only on the foreign patient behind the window, the only one he does not yet know. “Not everyone” he answers to Forest while gazing worried at the foreigner. Officer Dan from Starfleet, interpreting Archer’s gaze as a question, answers on his turn with a touch of doubt in his voice: “It’s a Klingot”, whereupon one of the Vulcan Ambassadors corrects him with a know-all expression on his face: “A Klingon.” It is with this emphasis on the final syllable – “A Klingon” that the Vulcan speaker underlines his connoisseurship and the superiority of Vulcan species to Earth’s Humanity as such. Furthermore, Archer is informed that the stranger was shot by a corn farmer in a place called “Broken Bow”, Oklahoma, after a battle with still another hostile species (the Suliban). Moreover, Archer learns that the injured stranger comes from Qo’nos, the home-planet of the Klingon Empire. In passing, one of the Vulcans mentions the Klingon’s name: Klaang.

The Vulcans, more experienced in space traveling than humanity, take superciliously initiative in this encounter. They order that “Klaang’s corpse” needs to be brought back home to Qo’nos. This Vulcanian order raises a whole complex of questions to Captain Archer and the staff members of Earth’s Starfleet. After all, the Enterprise would, in doing so, allow an alien guest aboard, it would offer hospitality to a stranger. The
informations received indicate moreover that accepting the stranger aboard would carry in it a certain danger. After all, Humanity is inexperienced in encountering the species of the Klingons and in interstellar diplomacy at all. In addition, the strange guest is obviously entangled in an interspecies conflict of which the Starfleet is innocent. Allowing the stranger aboard would also make United Earth, as a host, losing its neutrality by getting involved in the other’s hostile conflicts, and becoming responsible for his guest in every respect. Captain Archer is also responsible for his ship and his crew, though. In the face of this other, or ‘first’ responsibility, thus asks the ‘first’ question, the question which always comes ‘before’ the ‘offer’ of hospitality and which precedes the conditions of hospitality as such: he asks – not with words but with gestures – who this stranger is.

The informations Archer receives about the guest-in-spe – his offspring, his species, his homeland, and last but not least: his proper name - do not withhold him from his commitment in taking care for the stranger. Even more, there is another obstacle that Archer is concerned about. Bothered by the term “corpse” in the Vulcan’s formulation, Archer objects that their order implies pulling off the lifesaving medical apparatuses and letting the Klingon die. The reason for their decision, thus the Vulcan dignitaries explain, is based on a specificity of Klingon culture itself: “Klaang’s culture finds honor in death. If they saw him like this, he’d be disgraced”, thus ambassador Soval informs Archer, and the other Vulcan quotes from “the profile report” stored in the Vulcan data base: “They’re a warrior race. They dream of dying in battle”.

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12 “Broken Bow”, Chapter 2, 0:07:40-50.
In other words, offering hospitality to this alien for the Vulcans implies treating him according to his own law, tradition, and cultural rites. The protocol they developed for encounters with other species demands nothing less but welcoming the Other aboard as an alien and in acceptance of his alterity, however distinct this may be from the host’s own cultural or ethical values. Archer’s resistance to the injunction to bring the Klingon home as an honorable – that is: a dead – warrior, from the point of view of the Vulcanian idea of hospitality, would be raised out of dogmatic geocentric ethical believes. The hospitality they demand for the guest aboard a ship of the Federation implies welcoming the foreigner as a foreigner, as persisting in his own civilization, law, and language. They claim tolerance towards the guest in Kant’s sense of the concept. Even though this Vulcan concept of hospitality may at first sight look like the fulfillment of highest ethical imperative, it unveils nothing less than the intolerable question of tolerance, or that which Jacques Derrida in his famous essay “De l’hospitalité” has called the terrible, yes unbearable question of hospitality. In what follows, I will discuss this question by focusing on how the Derridian aporia of hospitality is enacted in this film-generated future world, that is, as an effect of aesthetic strategies of camera’s work.

4. Interstellar Hospitality

The film-set I am analyzing now is still not aboard the Enterprise but is as yet at its threshold. At this point of the story, the injured Klingon is not yet a passenger, but a candidate before shipping, a disputed object to negotiate on.

13. “Hospitalität (Wirtbarkeit) bedeutet das Recht eines Fremdlings, seiner Ankunft auf dem Boden eines Fremdlings wegen, von diesem nicht feindselig behandelt zu werden.” I. Kant, Zum Ewigen Frieden, p. 214. “Tolerance” is the political tool for mutual foreign policy to be used for international communities in which law does not take effect.
During the entire debate between Starfleet’s officials and Vulcan ambassadors, the camera stays in the conference room next to the medical room, showing close-ups of the speakers involved in the discussion on “the Klingon”, thereby arranging their dialogues in shot-counter shot-montages. “The Klingon” is shown only in the background behind the window; as an unconscious patient he remains the mute object who is not taking part in the discussion. At the moment when Archer draws closer to the window to look at the stranger on display, however, the camera takes a new position. From the inside of the medical treating room, it zooms on the foreign patient, showing him in close-up lying in bed. The seven observers (three Vulcans, three Starfleet officers, and Archer) are now standing at the outside, behind the window, all gazing at the unconscious Klingon like the seven dwarfs gazing at Snow White in her glass coffin. The Klingon is thus exhibited from two sides. As an object of viewing he finds himself in the middle between two windows and two gazes: from the back window observed by the diegetic viewers, and in the front “mise-en-abîme”, literally placed at the abyss of the television screen.

The visual composition of this television image is so striking because it questions the complexity of viewing positions, and along with this, the unravelling structure of the concept of hospitality. This viewing situation does no longer just expose “the Klingon” to his diegetic observers, but it also puts the observers as observers on display to us, or for us, in our quality as viewers of yet another narratological order, thus destabilizing any fixation of who is gazing at whom in this tableau. In doing so, I will argue, the composition of this television image has the capacity to reframe the initial moment of encountering the other in still another way. Like the subject of viewing is displaced from an original and privileged viewing position, the ‘originality’ of the viewed object, emblematic for ‘otherness’ as such, becomes problematic.

Strictly seen, the conflict between the opposite concepts of hospitality favored by either Vulcans or Humans, started already earlier. Already before the actual set-off of the star ship, already at the threshold to be transgressed, even before any solution how to deal with the stranger was proposed, the impossibility of offering hospitality, of the ‘offer’ or the ‘gift’ of hospitality, was already inevitable. What
the Vulcan ambassadors defended as the highest, thus most logical, “true”, or “universal” form of hospitality – welcoming the foreigner as a foreigner, in casu as a warrior to die in battle – already contravened the conditions of the law of hospitality. For “true” or “absolute” hospitality requires, thus Derrida,

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\ldots \text{que j'ouvre mon chez-moi et que je donne non seulement à l'étranger [...] mais à l'autre absolu, inconnu, anonyme, et que je lui donne lieu, que je le laisse venir, que je le laisse arriver, et avoir lieu dans le lieu que je lui offre, sans lui demander ni réciprocité (l'entrée dans un pacte) ni même son nom.}^{15}
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From this idea of “absolute hospitality”, Derrida distinguishes the so called “conditional hospitality”, which for him is based on a pact. In *Star Trek*, such a pact, or contract, takes shape in the diplomatic interstellar agreements of the United Federation of Planets. When the ambassador mentions the foreigner’s name, “Klaang”, and frames him in a set of identificatory data – his species, his homeland, his cultural rites, and so on –, he in fact quotes from the law, or the contract obliging Vulcan interstellar interventions in accordance to the diplomatic protocol. Already at the moment when Archer - through a visual gesture, namely by expressing worry or confusion on his face - asks the first question: “who is this foreigner”, he and the Vulcan altogether forfeit their chance to become the “true”, “absolute”, or universal hosts for the stranger the Vulcans, as connoisseurs, claim to be. At the moment the Vulcan ambassador corrects Dan authoritatively by stressing the final syllable when pronouncing the name of the species the foreigner comes from, he claims this name “Klingon” for himself, as if to say that Vulcans – and not Humanity – are the actual, or “true” host.

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According to the diegetic ethics enacted in the television series, human and Vulcan culture and ethics find themselves always in opposition, and in concurrence to each other. From the first episode “Broken Bow” on, Archer’s ethical habitus as prototypical for human activity as such, is represented as stronger and more valuable than the Vulcanian ethics. Humanity’s strength thereby lies precisely in its weakness, that is its emotional, irrational attitude. However, I will argue – at once with and against the logic of the story – that the claimed superiority of Archer’s concept of hospitality to that of the Vulcans, is as much problematic as an opposite hierarchical order would be.

After all, asking this first question “what is this foreigner’s name”, “where does he come from”, already demonstrates the impossibility of deciding, or the indecidability at work within any constellation of hospitality, and, I will add to this, it is the medium of the television image itself – through its technical conditions - which deconstructs the potential of televisionary fiction to generate a utopian Cosmos grounded on true, or unconditional hospitality. After all, the impossibility of asking, as an indecidable constellation, takes visually shape in the composition of this television image. Because the position of the camera focusing on the foreigner from inside the window authorizes him in a visual logic to ask – from his side - the first question. Like Archer and the Vulcanian ambassador on their side of the window, he is the stranger on the other side, and he could likewise and with the same authority ask the question of foreignness, and, distressingly enough, he could do so at the same time. Like a marry-go-round, the aporia of hospitality keeps turning around this impossible point of origin.
5. Star house Enterprise

The, as Derrida puts it, “distressing paradox of hospitality”\textsuperscript{16} still reflects on another problem. For the host offering hospitality to a guest – be it the “patron” of a private house, or a government ruling a state – has an injunction because it concerns “un État chargé de l’intégrité du territoire, de la souveraineté, de la sûreté et de la défense nationales.”\textsuperscript{17} The host finds himself thus always confronted with the difficulty of a paradox obligation. On the one hand, he has the duty to protect the borders of his house, or territory, against intruders from the outside, to guarantee the guest the protection, immunity, or asylum he requires. On the other hand, this invulnerable border must leave passages in order for the guest to come in. In this context, Derrida writes about the pervers, or pervertable, nature of the laws of hospitality, since they presuppose

\begin{quote}
La nécessité, pour l’hôte, pour celui qui reçoit, de choisir, d’élire, de filtrer, de sélectionner ses invités, ses visiteurs ou ses hôtes, ceux à qui il décide d’accorder l’asile, le droit de visite ou d’hospitalité. Pas d’hospitalité, au sens classique, sans souveraineté du soi sur le chez-soi, mais comme il n’y pas non plus d’hospitalité sans finitude, la souveraineté ne peut s’exercer qu’en filtrant, choisissant, donc en excluant et en faisant violence.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The perversion of the laws of hospitality lies in their nature, that they violate the necessary and indispensable conditions they are based on. In other words: at the basis of hospitality lies inhospitality, namely the power of sovereignty of the


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 47.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 53.
hospice towards his guest. And *vice versa*, hospitality is the basic principle of any sovereignty:

Pour constituer l’espace d’une maison habitable et d’un chez-soi, il faut aussi une ouverture, une porte et des fenêtres, il faut livrer un passage à l’étranger. Il n’y pas de maison ou d’intériorité sans porte ni fenêtres. La monade du chez-soi doit être hospitalière pour être *ipse*, soi-même chez soi, chez-soi habitable dans le rapport à soi du soi.\(^\text{19}\)

In the end, there is this endless paradox that hospitality and inhospitality exclude and at the same time need each other in order to take shape.

In a certain sense, the ship can be regarded as the antagonist to the house. Houses are stable, firm, and unalterable – literal *immobiles*; they stand for the *locus habitat*, *Heimat*, or home, and they are emblematic for any idea of soil and fatherland. The ship, on the other hand, lacks all these properties. Instead of for dwelling, the ship stands for traveling.\(^\text{20}\) Inhabitants of a ship are – at least for the duration of the journey – homeless voyagers *in between* two places.

Archer, as the Captain of a star ship, is undisputedly such a voyager. And yet he simultaneously functions in a certain way as a *maître de maison*, or a *patron*, because he is sent by the Government of United Earth and authorized by the Federation of Planets to represent “the law”, including the law of hospitality. How many light years away from home Archer may be, being *aboard* the star ship literally situates him *at the threshold* of his home planet, which he keeps orbiting as its official representative. As such, he has the injunction to

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19 Ibid., p. 58-59.

enterprise a travel through space and time and to tie the foreign worlds up to his home world, literally to anchor or moor future encounters in past traditions. In this sense, any centrifugal movement of the ship taking its crew away from home always includes a centripetal counter-movement. Along with this oscillation, the promise of an incompromisable hospitality is at once authorized and restricted by this double logic of place. The laws of hospitality to transgress the border are at once displacing and stabilizing the borders of the house, seen as the territory where power, rules and commands get a topologic foundation. The law of the ship as a locus mobile is based on the logic of the house, and vice versa. At all times, the host as a stable and immobile locus habitat that guarantees the “house right”, concerns a “migratory space”, of which the ship as a non-place is emblematic.21

6. Universal Translation

Some time after set-off, thus the film-story runs, the Klingon patient is regaining consciousness. In sickbay, Captain Archer tries to interrogate his passenger with the help of his communication officer Hoshi Sato. The foreigner repeatedly roars something towards Hoshi, but as he speaks in his own language, she cannot understand what he is saying. Even though his speech remains incomprehensible, it sounds hard and aggressive, precisely corresponding to how a “warrior’s tongue” is expected to sound. Hoshi is nervously pressing buttons on her “Universal Translator”, a technical device with the size of a mobile phone, used to decipher and interpret alien languages into the language of the user.

Hoshi (desperately looking at the “Universal Translator): The translator, it’s not locking on to his dialect. The syntax won’t align.

Klingon (bawling at Hoshi): [Klingon]

Archer: Tell him we’re taking him home.

Hoshi (now with a scowl): [Klingon]

Klingon (angry): [Klingon]

Hoshi (to Archer): He wants to know who we are.

(to the Klingon) [Klingon]

Klingon (angry): [Klingon]

Hoshi: Ship, he’s asking for his ship back.

Archer: Say it was destroyed.

Hoshi: [Klingon]

Klingon (angry): [Klingon]

Hoshi: I’m not sure, but I think he said something about eating afterlife?

Archer: Try that translator again.

Hoshi: I’m gonna need to run what we’ve got through the phonetic processor.

Klingon (angry): [Klingon]

Hoshi: He says his wife has grown ugly?

I’m sorry, captain, I’m doing the best I can.
Phlox: Excuse me. His prefrontal cortex is hyper stimulated. I doubt he has any idea what he’s saying.

Klingon (angry): [Klingon]

Hoshi: I think the doctor’s right, captain, unless ‘stinky boots’ has something to do with all this.\(^2\)

What is enacted as a funny conversation here, a conversation full of misunderstandings, turns out at closer sight to be a true communication miracle. After all, conversations to appear funny as an effect of unsuccessful communication based on uncertain meanings, presupposes the possibility of successful communication, from which it deviates as a intricate exception, a mistake, or, as Paul de Man has put it, a “misfire”. The misfire is identifiable only as funny, or “rhetorical”, or “ironic”, because on this phantasmatic – or utopian – idea of successful communication.\(^3\) At this point, the comic appears cosmic.

For the question of hospitality, it is interesting to have a closer look at the rupture causing the humoristic effect in this scene. After all, hospitality, even when regarded as a juridical problem, is in migratory contexts primarily discussed in cultural terms, it depends highly on ethical, religious and linguistic norms. In the conversation between Archer and his Klingon guest, the rupture of misunderstanding is

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multilayered. It is caused as much by cultural and linguistic interspecies otherness as by the process of translation. This process is enacted as highly technical, because it is generated by a machine, a computer programmed with a “linguacode matrix”\(^{24}\) software enabling its user to analyze any other language in the universe after monitoring only a few exemplary utterances, to scan its vocabulary and its grammar in its totality and to translate it into the language of globalized Humanity: in casu (as in reality) American.

For the cosmic, or universal dimension of this translation miracle, Walter Benjamin’s notion of translation forces itself upon us. Benjamin unfolds the idea of a universal “pure language”, or “true language” in which anything can be said without loss. In this admittedly quite mystical – or utopian - conception of an ultimate ‘pure language’ which results in ‘the totality of intentions’ of all languages, translation, for Benjamin, achieves its final shape. The event of translation performed by means of the Universal Translator aboard the Enterprise, whereby the speech of a human is uttered in one language and at the same time heard by its addressee (the Klingon), in his mother tongue, this event is miraculous. It resembles the event of the biblical Pentecost, when the fiery tongues of the apostles prove capable of speaking in their mother tongues and – miraculously enough – be understood by the polyglot residents of multicultural Jerusalem in their own languages (Acts 2, 1-13). Such a biblical concept of a ‘Universal Translator’ lies also at the basis of some new media, digital translation machines, amongst which most famous the online language transmitter ‘Babelfish’ on the Internet. Like in the Pentecost miracle, the function of these devices is to

\(^{24}\) See: Memory Alpha, the free Star Trek reference; http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Universal_translator
decipher the speech of the other *instantaneously* without bothering too much with her or his otherness.

Hoshi’s universal translator works also instantaneous. Only if the language to be deciphered has never been recorded before, there may appear a time delay until the translator can properly work out a translation. This delay is so striking because it demonstrates that even the high-tech-translation performed by the Universal Translator carries in it the possibility of mistranslating, misunderstanding, so to speak a ‘rest’ in the sense of a risky, supplemental meaning in which the foreign guest persists in his alterity. Already Benjamin pinpointed at “the enormous danger inherent in all translations”.25

In this sense, the cosmic comic showing up during the process of translation is highly dramatical. After all, it remains – at least for a while – *indecidable* for what reason this conversation is so senseless: because of an insufficient technical operativity of the translation tool, because of cultural difference, or – as it finally turned out - because of the insincerity of one of the speakers (which is also Austin’s favorite solution). It is precisely this *indecidability*, I will argue following Walter Benjamin’s theory on translation, which lies at the basis of each attempt at translating. For Benjamin, the work of translation has to aim at an ultimate translation in a pure, true, or *universal* language, which can be achieved only *in cosmic times*. This work, however – and here the deconstructive structure of Benjamin’s concept which is so urgent and which is so often misjudged in critical theory - is an endless “Aufgabe”, - a task and an injunction as much as a

surrender and a giving up. The mother tongue, as that which is regarded an unmistakable signifier of genealogy, offspring, blood and soil, is for Benjamin always already marked by this split, that the native language is always originally foreign. At this point, his concept of Universal Language comes close to the Derridean concept of monolingualism, which Derrida formulates in comparable paradoxical terms, in which a monadic self and alterity are expressed at the same time: “I only have one language; it is not mine.” Benjamin describes a similar in-betweenness within his concept of a “universal language” with the figure of the so-called “interlinear version” as the ideal of all translation:

the translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version […]. For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation. However sovereign, or monadic, a language may appear, be it in genealogical terms of offspring (mother tongue) or in juridical terms of nationality (patria) – here Derrida and Benjamin come together – it is always already in itself split by the intervention of the other (or ‘alien’) towards whom it is directed. Within this context, the tool of the Universal Translator, even if it concerns a pop-cultural enactment of interstellar communication rather than Benjamin’s sacral

27 Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other, p. 1.
28 Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”, p. 82 (emphasis SN).
discourse, can be regarded as the technical fulfillment of a phantasmatic, or utopian, universal language.

7. In the End: Arche

"A powerful engine will be built... an engine that will someday help us to travel a hundred times faster than we can today. Imagine it: thousands of inhabited planets at our fingertips. And we’ll be able to explore those strange new worlds ... and seek out new life and new civilizations. This engine will let us go boldly ... where no man has gone before." 30

With these words, Zefran Cuchrane, the ‘Great Creator’ of the warp five reactor, spoke decades before the set-off of the Enterprise to the Congress of United Earth in a historic speech that initiated humanity’s Cosmo-technological future. As the ‘lawful’, namely the genealogical inheritor of the ‘great creator’ of warp five, Captain Jonathan Archer fulfilled the prophecy of the archi-fathers and the obligation expressed in the proper name he was given: Archer. The Greek noun archós means ‘leader’, ‘commander’, and derives from the verb árchein: to be the first. And truly, Archer became the first to go “where no man had gone before” and the one legitimated by the fathers to become a universal patron, authorized by his patria to ask the first, outrageous question, the question of alterity and hospitality. Archer is literally given the patriarchal authority to define the point from which cosmic space and cosmic time is to be measured, and the first to master universal language. Thus the prophecy became true – at least in Star Trek’s diegetic Cosmos.

This Cosmos, I will conclude, does not make any “true”, cosmic, or universalistic claims. Rather, the intervention with the other, or of the other (or alien) takes

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30 “Broken Bow” +.
place by means of the medial transmission itself. Relying on Benjamin, I would call this an “interlinear version”, as the Cosmic originality of medial technology is both structured and generated by the medium itself. The future in Star Trek is as much generated by medial technology as it itself produces it; it is, so to speak, always already *inbetween the lines* of “the original”.

The Universal Translator as a technical equipment belongs undoubtedly to the area of Cosmic Times, and yet as a Cosmic technology, it remains the result of the medium that it itself constitutes. Within this epi-metheic anachronism, the reflection on translation appears as a media-philosophical aporia in which the television itself becomes the subject of translation. And *vice versa*: the Universal Translator, as a television image, becomes literally tele-visual. The key-characteristics of the television as a dispositiv of medial transmission, relies in the suitcase word “Co(s)mic”, in which it is indicated, that all this, from the beginning to the end, is irony: the “co(s)mic” play, or game, of the medium.
Sweet Memories: encountering the candy spills of Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Deborah Cherry

In this paper I discuss some works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Most were produced in the early 1990s. The artist was born in Cuba in 1957, grew up in Puerto Rico and migrated to the USA, becoming an American citizen, and an internationally acclaimed artist. Shown in international exhibitions, most notably this year’s Venice Biennale where his art has been selected and curated for the American pavilion, what meanings might his works have for today’s transnational audiences, for a new century preoccupied by questions of mobility and migration, and characterised by cultural flows and encounters? This paper explores the configurations of a sensory aesthetics, triangulated between the US, Cuba and Puerto Rico, within the global and the local circuits of art’s exhibitions. It examines the staging of his art, in the theatricality of late minimalism/late modernism. Gonzalez-Torres’s art invites participation – the removal of a candy, or a piece of paper, perhaps. But it also conjures the senses and sense memories which may transmit between cultures.

1. ‘My Felix’

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Guáimaro in Cuba in 1957, and grew up in Puerto Rico, attending the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. He migrated to the United States of America where he lived, studied and worked for the rest of his life, becoming an American citizen in 1976. Settling in New
York, he trained as a photographer at the Pratt Institute, and the International Center of Photography, and, attending the Whitney Museum of Art’s independent study programme, he immersed himself in contemporary critical theory. In the 1980s he was a participating member of Group Material, and also making independent work, becoming best known for the candy pieces, light strings, paper stacks and billboards of the 1990s. From the later 1980s and especially in the 1990s, his work was eagerly, favourably and widely received in the American press, and it also met an enthusiastic reception in Europe. Examples were widely displayed and collected by museums, galleries and private collectors. Eliciting appraisals from ‘an all-star cast of critics, artists and writers’ (Renaissancesociety.org), his art was frequently exhibited, catalogued, illustrated, and it was collected together in a two-volume catalogue raisonné, published in 1997 (Elger (ed.), 1997).

In making a journey undertaken by so many from places so close to and so far from the United States, the artist made a crossing into a radically different culture and into another language. As Gerardo Mosquera has pointed out, Félix González Torres became translated into Felix Gonzalez-Torres. (Mosquera, 2006:204-7). This version of his name – without accents and with a hyphen – signals the Anglicisation of the artist’s reputation. Writing an obituary for publication in Artforum in the US, soon after the artist’s death in 1996, Mosquera lamented the expected translation of the artist’s name by his editors, going on to indicate the ‘Latinoness’ of the artist’s work, linking it to the practices of Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles, perhaps to offset the artist’s outspoken distance from a ‘Latino’ identity (Rollins, 1993). In response to Tim Rollins’s comment that “I’ve heard a lot of grumbling, Felix, about the lack of an overt political or Latino content in your work”, the artist replies
FGT: (laughing) Well, I just want to start by saying that the ‘maracas’ sculptures are next! I’m not a good token. I don’t wear the right colors. I have my own agenda. Some people want to promote multiculturalism as long as they are the promoters, the circus directors. We have an assigned role that’s very specific, very limited. As in a glass vitrine, ‘we’ – the other – have to accomplish ritual, exotic performances to satisfy the needs of the majority. This parody is becoming boring very quickly. Who is going to define my culture? It is not just Borges and Garcia Marquez, but also Gertrude Stein and Freud and Debord – they are all part of my formation.

Earlier in the interview the artist has been discussing the importance of reading “Benjamin, Fanon, Althusser, Brthes, Foucault, Borges, Mattelart and others”, and in his response he firmly refutes desires for authenticity which are made of artists who are demonstrably migrant; he also distances himself and his art from the cultural policies of multiculturalism and the role assigned to “the other”, pointing out the rich mixture of writing which informs his work.

Re-reading Mosquera’s obituary, reprinted in 2006, the artist Glenn Ligon reflects, “One imagines that Felix would have seen the loss of the accents (and the gain of a hyphen between his last names) as the inevitable, even welcome, result of cultural in-betweenness, of the movement toward new spaces, of always being in process.” (Ligon, 2007). The framing of Ligon’s argument, as much as unaccented and hyphenated name, is symptomatic of the ways in which the artist came to be incorporated within a US American identity, as a US American artist, and it marks something of the cultural conflicts which are at stake. Let me point to two instances. First, Felix Gonzalez-Torres (and I will continue to use the US spelling of his name) was promoted by the New York dealer Andrea Rosen who represented him from 1990. After his death, the gallery archives and records have become the
authorised and authorising centre for the artist, his work, images and image rights, managed through the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, which is run from the gallery. In administering image rights, the foundation insist on the US Americanized spelling of the artist’s name, request that they approve texts pre-publication, they offer comments and require corrections. Secondly, the proprietorial use of the artist’s first name. Although he admits he did not personally know him, Ligon writes, “Felix is the artist that artists of my generation feel on a first-name basis with”. Several commentators refer to the artist as “Felix”, some claiming a special proximity, an exclusive and privileged knowledge, which comes from knowing the artist, working with him, the intimacies of friendship (see for example, Rosen, 1997). This kind of artist management authorises, in the sense of allowing authorship on the artist, comparable to, yet - because of the artist’s ways of working - vastly different from the Warhol foundation, which authorises in the sense of legitimating only those works which it deems were made by Warhol, a tricky business given Warhol’s predilection for replication. Artist management has a longevity, and it was rapidly put in place in the later nineteenth century as leading artists died and their legacies, reputations and the corpus of their works were managed by close relatives or dealers who often claimed that the relation with the artist was more than money.

The height, perhaps, of this posthumous management is to be found at this year’s Venice Biennale, where the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres has been presented by Nancy Spector, chief curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, for the US pavilion, and entitled “America”. Spector worked with the artist, (Spector, 1995), The acceptance of her proposal, in parallel with the overall responsibility for this year’s Biennale undertaken by Robert Storr, a former MoMA curator and currently Dean of the Yale School of Art,
highlights a move from independent curators working with living artists towards a more corporate approach in which major art institutions and collections have a leading role. Felix Gonzalez-Torres was a varied, inventive and experimental artist who produced a vast array of work in a relatively short life. Photoworks, billboards, beaded curtains, jigsaws, television stills, sit beside what have become the signature pieces of light-strings, candy spills, paper stacks and it was examples of these signature pieces that were chosen in a selection designed to highlight the artist’s relevance for America today. According to one source Spector is reported as saying that Gonzalez-Torres “would probably have considered his art to be even more relevant politically now than when he made it, with the war in Iraq and domestic battles raging over government eavesdropping, gay marriage and the concentration of wealth in America.” (Kennedy, 2007). She has also been quoted: “The work is political and very much about democracy. He was very proud to be an American... He really embraced the democratic system and was very critical of the things he thought would compromise that” (Barry, 2007). The presentation includes “Untitled” (Republican Years), 1992, a paper stack of blank sheets edged with black; two paper stacks from 1989, with the words “Memorial Day Weekend” and “Veterans Day Sale” respectively printed on the sheets, a light string of cascading bulbs called “Untitled” (America), and the candy spill “Untitled” (Public Opinion), in which liquorice is laid out on the floor, its individual pieces said to vaguely resemble missiles. The selection, along with the curator’s statements, emphasises the artist as a commentator on the United States. And indeed Gonzalez-Torres did comment on the society to which he relocated. He was articulate, vocal, generous with interviews, an artist who enjoyed talking about his art. In October 1993, when invited to give a lecture, the artist provided a lengthy
list of statistics about the worsening social conditions in the US during the Reagan and Bush administrations, against a backdrop of a projected formal portrait of the wealthy family from Dynasty, a well-known 1980s TV series, so staging effective contrasts between wealth and poverty, image and reality, contrasting levels of representation. While at one level Spector’s selection updates the artist’s relevance for today, and while it may be appropriate for the particularity of the Venice Biennale and its national pavilions, it also sets limits, circumscribing the works within a narrow, geographically and culturally specific relevance – for US America and US Americans. In a contemporary transnational world, national units are, however, increasingly under pressure and scrutiny. Clare Harris has elucidated the ways in which “bounded conceptions of culture based on nationality or ethnicity will not suffice is a transnational era when artists and their works are so highly mobile”, and we might also add the audiences for art (Harris, 2007, 167). Miwon Kwon too confirms that artists as well as art works are increasingly mobile, presented to highly diverse and culturally distinct audiences around the world. In the rapid transits of the global exhibition circuit, as she has demonstrated, the figure of the artist, and his /her biography provide a persistent source of meaning, a settled and stabilising function When art is (re)installed, the artist or his representative are readily summoned to authorise the installation (Kwon, 2002). To this end, the artist and the accounts of his life must remain relatively stable. Interpretation has indeed tended to stabilise the figure of the artist, to regularise his name, to localise this art and artist for circulation within contemporary global circuits and notably at Venice, to delimit him as an American citizen speaking to other US Americans. The artist is rarely considered as a transnational subject, one caught within the cultural flows of a world shaped by migration, including his own. In expanding
her ideas for a transnational understanding of contemporary art, Clare Harris explores Arjun Appadurai’s division of the global economy into ethno-escapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, to emphasise the ways in which people and acts - art and artists - are subject to influences beyond the places that they inhabit. These locations are multiple sites, shaped by global cultural flows as much as local conditions. She emphasises that “the cultural logic of one place is not erased on departure from it”, rather, it remains as a memory which can be deployed in an artistic practice which is shaped by “the cumulative impact of multiple locations”. In these terms, the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres can be reconsidered in terms of a transnational practice shaped by multiple locations and memory. Not only is US America a country formed in migration, which is in part recognized at Venice, but the artist’s practice, his ways of working, can be understood within transnational global and local conditions.

2: Candy spills

The candy spills are clustered within a period of three to four years. The first appears to be “Untitled” (A Corner of Baci created in 1990, a corner piece and the last, perhaps, is “Untitled” (Placebo - Landscape - for Roni), of 1993. The candies vary, from Baci chocolates, to bazooka bubble-gum in “Untitled” (Welcome Back Heroes) of 1991, black rod licorice deployed in “Untitled” (Public Opinion), also of 1991, lollipops in “Untitled” (Para un hombre en uniforme) again, of 1991; or they can be comprised of candies wrapped in a single colour of cellophane, such as the blue cellophane of “Untitled” (Portrait of Marcel Brient), of 1991, green in “Untitled” (LA), or light blue of “Untitled” (Revenge) of 1991 or multicoloured as in “Untitled” (Portrait of Ross in LA) of 1991.

There are several major forms. Most usually, as in “Untitled” (A Corner of Baci) of 1990, or “Untitled” (Rossmore,
In both forms, these installations create formal devices, there is a critical edge or edges between the sweets and gallery floor that is always changing, and edge or edges that are approached by and apprehended by the body of the visitor. This sinuous line or lines shifts over time—in the candy heaps the weight of the candies, piled up on each other, introduces movement, which can unsettle the original form; change is also introduced by the abstracting actions of the visitors alongside the replenishing gestures of the museum staff. In a variation of the second form, the candies are dispersed, as they are re-arranged by the audience, as at the Renaissance Society of America’s exhibition, “When
“Travelling” in 1994. Here the work started off as a luminous blue field; a month later, as visitors walked all over the floor, the aquamarine candies were dispersed, the walkers cutting rivulets and pathways through the arrangement, sending the sweets spinning over the floor in all directions, piling them up, and parting them from each other. Many hundreds of aquamarine-wrapped candies sparkled on the floor, like a sea or a swimming pool; a month later, candies had drifted across the floor, and space and shape changed.

As much as the candy spills and the paper stacks are about volume, they are also about edges and borders, about the spatiality of place and the figure in the gallery.

Made over a period of three to four years, the candy spills, whether stacked in a corner or placed/scattered on the floor, offer seas of colour in blue, green, silver, gold, black, or gleaming heaps of multicoloured candies. I use this metaphor decidedly, to conjure the comparison that the candy spills offer between their sparkling and rippling surfaces, surfaces which differentiate them from the flatter surfaces of the floor works created by Minimalist artists such as Carl Andre, and to conjure, in my imaginative reading of the pieces, the presence of the sea, sea crossings and migrations. The arrangements offer shimmering surfaces as the curved and twisted shapes catch the light capriciously. The works change over time: as visitors pick up a sweet or two, as little bits are taken away, so the work of art has the possibility of being replenished in an endless supply which may maintain an ideal weight. The candy spills exist in an ebb and flow between those who take and those who remake, those who regard and those who touch.

To interact with the candy spills, most mobile adult viewers and older children will bend down, dip towards the work, even kneel on the floor, shifting focus, perception and
perspective. While the work’s installation depends on the space, the site also shapes the ways in which visitors see it, walk round it, interact with it. Some visitors will remove a candy or two. And the literature is full of excited little stories about how the author or various museum visitors, young and old, decided, after some hesitation, to break with museum protocols and to pick up a sweet and even eat it. Lisa Corrin, curator of the 2000 Serpentine show, asked: “Will we dare to violate the museum’s usual protocols by touching and even disturbing the presentation of a work of art? Will we agree to ‘own it’ by taking it home?” (Corrin, 2000: n.p.) This permitted scattering has accompanied the rise of participation, and it has been legitimated by the museum or gallery that re-sets the frame for actions in which viewers may take away a little bit, but not all of it, and in which they may dispense, only temporarily and to only a small degree, with the conventional rituals for viewing art.

Critical writing often emphasises the viewer’s interaction with works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, especially in terms of bodily activity—visitors may take a sweet, move a piece of paper from a stack or remove it altogether; they may walk through a curtain, dance to music. For Nicholas Bourriaud, this artist’s works are exemplary of what he has famously characterised as ‘relational aesthetics’. Bourriaud proposes that art practices in the 1990s were concerned with ‘the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.’ Bourriaud thus moved art from private contemplation and from a preoccupation with internal (artistic) conditions, to an engagement with what he saw as widespread within contemporary culture, linking relational aesthetics to the shifts to service-based economies in the west, to the interactivity of cultural forms and virtual spaces of the internet and virtual spaces, and to responses to globalisation which prompted
local initiatives (Bourriaud, 2002, 14) For Bourriaud then, in his concept of relational aesthetics, works by Gonzalez-Torres create encounters between art and its viewers, which in turn create communities between viewers. In this view, viewers are brought together in participation, in interacting with the work of art.

Participation has come to be seen as a defining characteristic of installation art (Reiss 1999; Bishop, 2006). Julie Reiss writes that “The essence of Installation art is spectator participation”, noting that ‘the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another by the same artist.” It can mean an invocation to undertake specific activities, to walk through or navigate a space, to respond to objects offered by the art work (Reiss, 1999, xiii).

Interaction with the art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres is generally construed as a decisive, conscious, determined action, one which is deliberated upon, and then undertaken by a visitor who is construed as a social agent. There is a tendency towards a prevailing utopianism which construes viewers as united in their participation and engagement, whatever their experience or social construction. These propositions have been countered, though not dismissed, by attention to the specific conditions effecting participation, theories of the fragmented, incomplete subject, and the social relations of antagonism (Bishop, 2005).

But the candy pieces, especially, provoke not only participation, but other kinds of interaction. These are not so much definitive acts, more sensory sensations, some of which, as is so characteristic of sensory experience, take place involuntarily, without premeditated deliberation, beneath the surface of consciousness, available after but not before they happen, yet so often elusive, momentary, and transient, and
yielding as much as they conjure sense memories. In part this comes with their staging.

3: Staging the candy spills

The form of the candy spills and their maintenance while on show is derived from the artist’s certificates of ownership or authenticity and the interpretation by the curator of the instructions which they give for installation. The artist created a distinctive form for the titles of his works: the reiterated "Untitled", reprised from Minimalism, is accompanied by a subtitle in parenthesis. The legacies of Minimalism are evident, not only in the exquisite clarity and simplicity of his art, but also in its use of repetition, sequence and seriality, as well as in the consistent pared-down and uncluttered curatorial presentation. The box-like forms of the paper stacks reprise Minimalism’s ever-present boxes, defined forms, and play with volume, as does the deployment of the floor as an artistic plane. The hard, resilient, industrialised materials and technologies are replaced with the everyday objects of candies, paper, light bulbs, and if participants walk on the art work it disperses and almost disappears. The doubled titles speak of the doubled conditions of the candy spills and their viewing. There are in the subtitles declarations and dedications, places and people, invocations and addresses. And the two-parts, construed as supplementary in the sense eloquently theorised by Jacques Derrida, add to, undo and displace the work of “Untitled” (Derrida, 1987, 69-74). They may provoke a curiosity that alerts the visitor make to a connection, however elusive or fugitive. Whereas “Untitled” in its blankness, speaks of the resistance of Minimalism to interpretation, the subtitle undoes minimalism’s cool detachment, shaping an architecture of affect, a viewing situation, playing upon the “remarkably diverse array of affective responses [to
Minimalist works] when they were initially exhibited” (Best, 2005:164-5).

While the theatricality of Minimalism invited the spectator to confront the presence of art, and to wait while this art unfolded, its reprise by Gonzlaez-Torres invites the spectator to engage, not only with an action, a participation, in some cases to change the work, but within a theatre of viewing charged with the senses.

4: Spilling the senses

The candy spills first incite vision, then comes touch and perhaps, depending on the visitor, sound, smell and taste: if the sweet is unwrapped, the cellophane crackles, and that heady aroma of sweetness foretells the sickly, sticky taste of a bonbon that is made to slip into the mouth and dissolve on the tongue—the artist does not choose chewy bars. Perhaps there is an erotic frisson: the artist hinted as much when he said in an interview, ‘I’m giving you this sugary thing; you put it in your mouth, and you suck on someone else’s body. …For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone’s mouth and that is very sexy’. (Rollins, 1993)

The candy spills are sensory works. The colours which enchant the eyes are accompanied by myriad sounds in the gallery of the crisp twists of opened sweet papers, the rustles of bodily movement, the whispers of consultation; there is, for those who take them, the silken touch of the wrappings, and the sweet, saccharine taste of the candies. Their sensory affects may come all together or one by one, for we could delay opening the sweet-paper, defer its anticipated pleasures, or never open it at all. Or holding off, we might involuntarily hear the rustle of another visitor unwrapping the cellophane, or even noisy eating. Sensory experiences come with the candy spills. If we participate, pick up a candy, then the action brings
at least touch. But even if we do nothing, decline to move forward, bend down, the sense of vision is present for sighted viewers. Triggered by the sight, or the presence, of the candy, viewers might simply imagine or remember the sensations of its consumption. And whatever we do, the sounds of the movements by other visitors will be there to be heard. These involuntary sense experiences can run parallel to, or counter, the ones which we decisively seek. And the senses and sensory responses exist as much in the memory and imagination as they do in actuality.

Sensory responses to a single work of art can be extraordinary diverse, and they are not shared by visitors in equal capacity. The candy spills may elicit physical and/or sensory encounters, they may evoke some or all the five senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste; whether we eat one or not, the candies may engage sense memories, recalling perhaps childhood experiences or desires, perhaps never fulfilled to this degree, a satiety of sweet, a sensory débordement. For while the work of art can offer sensory experience, it can equally tease, conjure sensory responses or the memory of them, invoking the senses, only to confound them. By and large, commentators view the sweets of the candy spills as conjuring heady, guilty pleasures and pleasurable childhood memories. But the candy spills might equally provoke a sensory disgust, a distaste for the sweet taste, a sense of nausea as much social as somatic, a sensory and physical revulsion triggered perhaps by a glut of sugariness. In this sense, the candy spills may be linked to the abject art of the mid 1990s, in which, as Hal Foster pointed out, bodily detritus appeared in substitute forms rather than as dollops of raw excreta or slashes of fresh blood, with their characteristic aromas (Foster, 1996). It’s not a question of the presence or absence of the senses—in the art or in responses to it. Nor is it a question of the authenticity or the simulacra of
sensory provocations projected by the art, or of the authenticity or simulacra of sensory experience and reception by the beholders, or indeed of active participation by contrast to more distanced viewing. Whereas participation depends, by and large, on a corporal activity and inter-activity with the art, neither the senses nor sense memories specifically depend upon a physical action (though they may be triggered by one and accompanied by one). Sensory engagement with a work of art can occur without corporeal connection to it, taking place as much in memory and imagination. Sensory responses change too over time. I have written elsewhere how the specific viewing conditions of now shape attitudes and responses to these works. Re-reading Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (1996) in conjunction with this year’s *Documenta XII* can produce sensory responses of disquiet, unease, even rejection, the opulence of the candy spills appearing as profusion and excess, as that surplus that exists within and alongside what Agamben characterises as the conditions of ‘bare life’.

The artist’s candy spills certainly differ from enveloping and captivating sensory environments that have been created by artists from the later 1980s onwards which captured and precipitated the beholder into an affective matrix of sensory interaction, sometimes anticipated, sometimes unexpected. Sensory installations by artists such as Ernesto Neto invoke perceptions, experiences and recollections as auditory, tactile, aromatic and somatic as they are visual. Overwhelmed with sound, over-powered with scent, alive to touch, viewers may be transformed into participants whose senses and bodies are caught into the work, and whose actions become a part of it. Attention to the senses is also significant in accounting for the sensory and affective impact of video art, especially with the use of surround sound, the display within enclosed deep space in the gallery, and the vast scale of the
viewing screens. In the 1990s artists strategically deployed sound, taste, and touch, in sensory art works which reached out to the viewer in myriad, unexpected and unpredictable ways. Hair so fine as to be invisible and suspended from the ceiling brushed the face and skin of unsuspecting visitors to Mona Hatoum’s *Recollection* of 1996 as they walked through what appeared to be an almost empty room. In walking over the floor of Ann Hamilton’s installation *between taxonomy and communion* of 1991 participants cracked the panes of glass laid down with sheep fleeces, so creating surprising sounds and experiencing pungent scents. In Hamilton’s *tropos* of 1993, installed at the Dia Art Centre in New York, the floor was covered with tails of slaughtered horses creating a mass of slippery, pungent, tangled hair. These installations of sense perceptions prompt what Hamilton calls a ‘state of suspended reverie’ in the viewer, a stage for remembrance, recollection, sense memories (Hamilton, 1993, quoted in Bishop, 2005: 39).

Sensory art takes place in the here and now, yet these art works may change dramatically over time. The work appearing and disappearing before our eyes is by no means exclusive to the art of Gonzalez-Torres, but fairly widespread throughout the period, notably in the installations of Anya Gallaccio. Like those of Gonzalez-Torres, they have provoked interaction, viewers, for instance, bending down to plunge their faces into *red on green* at ICA in 1992, a carpet of red roses and thorns which decayed on site, emitting strong aromas of floral decay. This art of the senses may extend well beyond the gallery. Not only do the works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres invite immediate and local sensory interaction, but they reach into the distance and into the future—a sweet from a candy spill can be carried away, and its smell, taste, touch, look, and sound, as well as memories of its sensory experience, may last well beyond the gallery visit. A sweet can be found some time later, lodged in a pocket, forgotten on a shelf. While this art
can provoke action, the experience will be imprinted with sense memories, from the pleasurable to the troubling, or disquieting.

But attention to the senses is not without its pitfalls. It’s all too easy to propose a sensory avant-garde that will triumph over an older optical order. Or to romanticize the senses as transgressive and liberating; to simplify the complex and often unexpected interactions between the senses in artistic practice and everyday life. Or to idealise all viewers as having equal access to sensory experience. The senses are implicated and embedded in social practice and cultural representation, and they mediated by signs. Singling out one sense can work against the multi-sensory nature of an art work: video, film, performance, and installation art often operate on several sensory registers at once. And with the senses come sense memories, embedded in the work itself, as much as in the experience of it.

5: Sense memories
Memory is central to the interpretation of this artist’s work. Russell Ferguson has likened the invitation to take a sweet to the most famous moment of memory in Proust, initiated with the madeline dipped in tea (Ferguson, 1994: 30). For the curators to the 1994 exhibition: “Felix has given us the freedom to complete his work through the memories we bring to each piece, and as with every freedom there is a corresponding responsibility.” (Cruz, Goldstein, Ghez, 1994: 9-10). Memory, which can be personal and collective, is seen to complete the work and to link response to social engagement, social responsibility. But there is more. With the senses, come sense memories, equally, I contend, initiated by the candy spills, whether or not we take a sweet, the sensory experiences of the work, voluntary or involuntary, can bring on beyond the expectations of the everyday. So while a candy spill can
offer sensory experience, sensory and physical responses or the memory of them without an actual event—the taking of a sweet or eating it.

Interest in the senses has coincided with developments in critical theory which have re-examined looking and shown a renewed interest in theories of the haptic, in the body and embodiment, corporeality, bodily experience, and surfaces, particularly skin, with its proximities to touch, smell and taste. It has also coincided with artistic experimentation with new visual forms to convey complex experiences of migration and diaspora, dispersal and resettlement. As art works circulate through globalised exhibitions, they address differentiated audiences, bodies and sensory regimes, calling into question not only art’s intelligibility but its sensory impact. A number of artists deployed the senses to conjure sense memories and to probe their transmission between cultures. Vong Phao Phanet’s Neon Rice Field of 1993 fills the room with the scent of rice, reminiscent of his native Laos. In The Skin of the Film Laura Marks (2000) proposes a theory of inter-cultural cinema in which she interrogates sensory experience and sense memories, examining how haptic forms of viewing are engaged by artists in works that deal with the experiences of being, living and moving between several cultures. She emphasises the importance of sense memories for artists and for their audiences, since the work of art may activate sense memories, deliberately or unconsciously. For Marks the senses are important forms of transmission, between and across cultures, although as she is aware, potential meanings and forms may or may not migrate. There is, therefore, an equal potential for unintelligibility, for meanings, memories and associations to be lost in translation, or to transmit in unexpected or surprising ways. Marks offers a compelling account of “haptic visuality” and embodied vision in recent art
and film, recalling and reworking the interests in this field in the writings of Alois Riegl, Bernard Berenson, and Walter Benjamin, attentive to Reigl's tracing of 'haptic' from 'haptein', to fasten. Alert to texture rather than outline, she offers the haptic as a mode of perception that is close-up, intimate, proximate, a kind of viewing which emphasises the senses and attachment, by contrast to modernism's "opticality", its fascination with surveillance and distance viewing.

Marks's propositions return us to the question of transmission. As art works circulate through globalised circuits of exhibition, publication, collections, known more through websites and photographs, they take place in diverse spaces, for diverse audiences and sensory regimes. Sensory experiences and sense memories may be local and localized, culturally specific to communities of viewers. And equally they may be shaped by vast global movements, by cultural flows, by the migration of peoples and things. Sense memories too are embedded – in places, in materials, in the little candy sweets chosen by the artist, in the art works themselves as they are installed and re-installed in "one place after another" (Kwon, 2002).

Sense memories are packed into the industrialised manufacture of the candies, as well as the global circulation of raw materials, notably sugar, from which they are made. They, like the artist himself, may be understood within Clare Harris's argument for "the cumulative impact of multiple locations", and her contention that "the cultural logic of one place is not erased on departure from it". Just as these candies are transnational commodities, the artist made his art within his transnational experience, subject to the influences of places within as well as beyond those that he inhabited in living and working in the USA. It is this cumulative impact of multiple
locations that also springs the trap of authenticity which the artist so fiercely resisted.

Gonzalez-Torres spent his early years on two vastly different islands of the Caribbean Eastern Antilles, both of which were released from Spanish rule with the 1898 Spanish-American war. One, Puerto Rico, has become an Estado Libre Asociado with closely affiliation as a commonwealth, and for some the longest standing colony, of the USA. Cuba has been a socialist republic from 1959, with its allegiance, until 1989, to Russia and China. Both islands have been major sugar producers, and their histories, societies, landscapes and populations have been shaped by this product of slavery and colonialism. In Puerto Rico, sugar cane had developed by the mid eighteenth century into a major industry and export; by end of the nineteenth century, the sugar industry was owned and controlled by large US corporations. Vast US investment in the second half of twentieth century diversified with the development of sugar-related products such as rum, tourism, and pharmaceuticals, but, as was realised from the 1970s onwards, US investment came with huge costs in terms of the environment and economic dependence on US. The sugar industry was also highly developed in Cuba by the eighteenth century, so much so by 1820s the island was the world’s largest sugar producer. US investment here was also substantial, and one factor which prompted the revolution. Later diversification, similarly to Puerto Rico, has included tourism and pharmaceuticals, distributed to the developing world in competition with western drug companies.

The artist’s journeys, from Cuba to Puerto Rico, to the USA are not uncommon in terms of the movement of people between the islands, and from both to the US. Sugar, pharmaceuticals, and people have moved from these two Caribbean islands, taking memories and sense memories with them. In two artworks, at least, the alliance of sugar and
pharmaceuticals is hinted at by the titles. “Untitled” (Placebo) of 1991 (New York: Museum of Modern Art) and “Untitled” (Placebo - Landscape - for Roni) of 1993, link the sweets to medicinal placebos used in drugs trials, organised in the development of cures and antidotes for AIDS. Thus bordered, the sweets conjure not so much sensory delight and gratification, but pain, loss, grief, sickness, nausea, even horror; Charles Merewether likens the bonbons to Derrida’s pharmakon, at once remedy and poison, (Mereweather, 1994: 72). If the most direct association is to the illness and death of the artist’s partner, Ross Laycock, the embedded memories point to the major industries that have shaped the history of the Caribbean.

This sensory sign carries sweet memories, perhaps, for its consumers. But it is also imprinted with social memories and historical relations still embedded in the present, memories carried along the trading links and borne along the migrational patterns of modernity from Spain to the Americas, from Africa to the Caribbean, across the Antilles – migrations forged in colonialism, slavery and the slave trade, wars and their aftermath. This ‘sugary thing’, to reprise the artist, is redolent of colonial and neo-colonial trade in people, materials and goods. The candy spills, as I have suggested, often conjure metaphors of the sea, their edges ebbing and flowing like the water’s edge, their surfaces rippling and glinting like the gentle waves of the sea.

The little sweet chosen by Felix Gonzales-Torres offers its sensory pleasures with its materiality. We may say that this art ‘touches’ us, its meanings are embedded, embodied. Yet the sweet dissolves, and its meanings diffuse. They resist capture, and the certainty that the work’s sensory affect will have any further effect. Will the sense memories embodied in the candy spills and the plenitude of sense memories that this
work gives to us linger in time to produce further action? Sense memories are unpredictable, volatile in transmission and translation. Whether the work ‘touches’ us, I think depends not only on our sensory actions, but also on the sensory associations that the work triggers, and that we – in all our diversity - bring to it and take away.

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Migratory Temporalities

Time is experienced differently according to where one is in the world. Hence, in migratory culture, temporal experiences are inevitably heterogeneous, conflicting, and productive of new forms of co-existence. The study of such subtle phenomena allows insight into time's function in and through history.

Mieke Bal
*Heterochrony in the Act: The Migratory Politics of Time*

Patricia Pisters
*The Mosaic Film - An Affaire of Everyone: Becoming-Minoritarian in Transnational Media Culture*

Astrid van Weyenberg
*“Rewrite this ancient end!” The Oresteia in post-TRC South Africa*

Salah Hassan
*Title to be announced*
Heterochrony in the Act: The Migratory Politics of Time

Mieke Bal

Abstract

Video and migration are both anchored in the conceptual metaphor of movement – but a movement that cannot be taken for routine, “natural”, or realist. Video and migratory life have, thus, a complex and sometimes confusing, challenging multi-temporality in common. I argue that the concept of heterochrony is indispensable for insight in the micro-politics of migratory culture. I take current migratory culture as key to understanding such a process of confrontation, since it is clearly based on coevalness as well as its spatial counterpart, co-location. But neither shared space nor shared time is homogeneous.

In an analysis of a few works from the video exhibition 2MOVE I attempt to engage a conversation between works that are primarily focused on the medium of video, and works that are in the first place “about” migration. I contend that when time is the key, this thematic distinction is no longer valid. Issues such as heterochrony or discrepancies of rhythm and duration; narrative and the contemporary; memory and its anchoring in the present; and the repetition built into the form of the loop, all help assess the political impact of temporality: the politics of migratory time, or the migratory politics of time.
The Mosaic Film - An Affaire of Everyone? Migratory Aesthetics and Becoming-Minoritarian in Transnational Media Culture

Patricia Pisters

Abstract

In contemporary media culture the formal, narrative and stylistic structure that prevail can be described as “aesthetics of the mosaic”. Multiple main characters, multiple interwoven story lines, multiple or fragmented spaces, different time zones or paces seem to be specific for the migratory nature and politics of our times. In this essay I will look at three mosaic films, Babel (USA: Inarritu, 2006), WWW.What a Wonderful World (Morocco/Germany/France: Bensaidi, 2006) and Kicks (Netherlands: Ter Heerdt, 2007) and discuss in which ways in these films an aesthetics of the mosaic is related to migratory movements and contemporary globalized media culture. This aesthetics, I will argue, is closely related to transnationalism.

1 I would like to thank Albert ter Heerdt and Mimoun Oaissa for giving me the possibility to see Kicks outside its theatrical release and René Wolf (Dutch Film Museum) for a viewing tape of What a Wonderful World.
which can take on different forms. I will argue that by means of a “nomadic style” and “nomadic politics” these films call for a becoming-minoritarian as “an affaire of everyone”.

Rewriting Ancient Ends: From the house of Atreus to the home of South Africa

Astrid Van Weyenberg

Abstract

In this paper I will discuss two dramatic texts that migrate the ancient Greek myth of the house of Atreus to contemporary South Africa: In the City of Paradise by Mark Fleishman and Molora by Yael Farber. Drawing on Aeschylus’ Oresteia trilogy and Euripides’ Electra and Orestes, both playwrights take up the themes of revenge, reconciliation and justice within an explicit post-apartheid context and from an explicit post-apartheid perspective. They make particular reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), founded in 1995 to provide a shared forum for victims and perpetrators of apartheid, so that they could find ways to reconcile and together move forward within the ‘new’ South Africa. Viewing Fleishman’s and Farber’s plays and the tragedies they draw on in relation to each other—across spatial, temporal and ideological boundaries—illuminates both the problematic nature and the problematic use of concepts of forgiveness, reconciliation and, perhaps most importantly, of justice itself.
Heterochrony in the Act: The Migratory Politics of Time

Mieke Bal

Introduction
Video is the medium of our time, available to many, and put to many uses. It is also the medium of time; of time contrived, manipulated, and offered in different, multi-layered ways. It offers images moving in time – slow or fast, interrupting and integrating. Migration is the situation of our time. But it is also an experience of time; as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling, provisional present, with its pleasures and its violence.

Video and migratory life have, thus, a complex and sometimes confusing, challenging multi-temporality in common. Video is, arguably, eminently suitable to understand what this means – to feel it in our bodies. Through this medium, we can grasp, perceive, and experience traces of the lives of those who live among us, but of whom we know so little. The phenomenon I call multi-temporality; the experience of it, heterochrony.

I argue that the concept of heterochrony is indispensable for insight in the “micro-politics” of migratory culture, and that, therefore, it should be added to the toolbox of cultural analysis. To make this argument I follow two key arguments from the work of anthropologist Johannes Fabian. He repeatedly argues, firstly, that “culture” is not a situation, space, or state but a process of confrontation. Secondly,
attempts to study cultures otherwise invariably rely on an “allochronic” approach that relegates others into a contradictory pastness and timelessness. Such an approach denies the coevalness of the encounter that is the conditio sine qua non of any study of cultural alterity.\(^1\)

In line with this dual argument I take current migratory culture as key to understanding such a process of confrontation, since it is clearly based on coevalness as well as its spatial counterpart, co-location. But neither shared space nor shared time is homogeneous. Restricting my argument to time, I put forward the concept of heterochrony to foster insight into the state of migratory culture and its politics, and seek to demonstrate how it helps understanding video art related – however loosely – to the migratory.\(^2\)

Video and migration are both anchored in the conceptual metaphor of movement – but a movement that cannot be taken for routine, “natural”, or realist. On the one hand, the moving image with its video-specific effects that multiplies and complicates, and then frames it; on the other, the moving people with the moving – including, emotionally –

\(^1\) For an expose of micro-politics, or “nano-politics” as Hernández calls it, see his contribution to this volume. Fabian forcefully proposes the concepts of allochrony and coevalness (1983). His later work continuously reframes these issues. I rely on his 1990 book for a demonstration of an alternative, performance-based approach, congenial to the exhibition discussed in this paper. His 1991 book usefully sums up the relation between a static concept of culture and the denial of coevalness. In 2001 the issue of temporality is brought to bear on the “-graphy” of ethnography and by implication of, my case here, videography.

images they generate in the social landscape. In the following section I present three works that demonstrate the concept of heterochrony I wish to put forward. From the vantage point of these three works, here considered as “theoretical objects,” I will point out the forms of heterochrony and their political potential in a number of works from the exhibition 2MOVE.  

Performance and performativity help understand the conjunction between video and the experience – both of migrant and non-migrant subjects – of heterochrony that this concept foregrounds. One obvious realm of experience and aesthetics, where heterochrony is performed as relevant for both migratory culture and video, is memory. That is why I discuss memory’s entangled relationship to both movements. In a final section I discuss heterochrony in the present, the here-and-now of migratory culture, its violent potential and the ethical possibilities to deal with it within the migratory culture of the present.

**Videos of Temporalization**

As soon as we consider the first work of my introductory trio, Roos Theuws’ *Gaussian Blur,* we notice that time is a key player in this video. A kind of timelessness infuses the undeniable but exceedingly slowed-down movement. While the viewer is physically aware of the external temporality of his or her body – an awareness increased by the points of light that prick us with a very different pace – another temporality

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3 2MOVE: Migratory Aesthetics was first held in Murcia, Spain, in Sala Veronicas and Centro Páraga, 4-2 to 11-5 2007, then in Enkhuizen, Netherlands, Zuiderzeemuseum, 19-9-2007 to 13-1-2008. [This exhibition, which I co-curated with Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro, opens its second instalment on Wednesday September 19th, 2007. Since all participants will have seen it when this paper is discussed I will not describe the works at length.]
reaches out, interferes with ordinary haste, and insinuates slowness into the sensation of looking.⁴

Far from being a video on migration, it is an abstract work, in several ways that all bear on the temporality I consider significant for migratory culture. Hence, while this work lacks thematic engagement migration, it nevertheless sets the tone of the inquiry of the exhibition. The first form of abstraction emerges from experimenting with movement on the edge; movement, that is, dressed down to its bare essence. Since one of the tools used (but by far not the only one) is extreme slow-down, the second abstraction resides in the experimentation with temporality that video as a medium allows. When we approach this work, heterochrony sets in as it confronts our routine temporality with the artificial one presented. The third comes from the uncontrollable figurations, the sensation of inadequacy of our routine templates and narrative fillers. The fourth is best characterized as an entirely new, sensate production of surface as skin. That the flickers of light seem blisters is no coincidence. They hurt; they touch us; they make contact, but not an easy, self-evident contact. The cuts from clip to clip, “behind” the skin of the video, are, significantly sharp, never mitigated by smoothing transitions. The flickering points of light as blisters are the skin of the visible, kinetic world. The work’s varied forms of abstraction harbour confrontation as its “natural” state.⁵

A second key work is Mona Hatoum’s Measures of Distance. This video, in contrast, is thematically devoted to migratory culture. It consists of still images overlaid by

⁴ Gaussian Blur and Measure of Distance were the two starting point of the exhibition. While the former is a self-reflective work on video and the latter on migration, putting them together turns the tables on these thematic divisions.

⁵ I have developed elsewhere the concept of abstraction I am using here. (2007)
Arabic letters, a soundscape of the home in Beyrouth, and a voice-over of the artist reading the letters of her mother in English. The bi-directional but asymmetrical movement of migration is aesthetically elaborated. If we look back, "preposterously", from the now, with Theuws, to this earlier work from 1988, we see how it, too, elaborates on video's potential in ways that integrate the double movement of migration. In her mother’s letters, there is a movement from “home” to the far-away place where the daughter ended up; the other movement takes place in the memories of the daughter. These memories are presented through the voice, the lettering, and the body in the shower. All these media deploy different temporalities, so that multi-temporality is installed within the work itself. Thus, the video “represents,” “explains,” or conveys the experience of heterochrony.

Hatoum’s work harbours the most significant characteristics of video as a moving medium in the double sense. In this respect it is important that the movement is constructed, made, not recorded. Stills are blurred into one another. The movement, then, is only that of the surface, the screen, not of the figures “in” the image. Hatoum’s work, layered like Theuws’s, makes the surface of the screen opaque, and only slowly reveals the mother’s body. First covered by the opaqueness of the shower curtain so that it looks abstract, then by water, and all through, by the Arabic lettering of her own words, the mother is not given over to the viewer without several layers of protection. The transition from one still to the next, the rapid Arabic spoken followed by a slower English voice, make time a multifaceted experience; a heterochrony. The delayed temporality of epistolary contact, moreover, is another layer that complicates visibility.

These two works respond to and complicate each other’s relationship to migratoriness and time. A third work that can serve to introduce the issues at hand is Gonzalo
Ballester’s work *Mimoune*, a work that appears at first sight much more simple and straightforward than the other two. Like Hatoum’s work, *Mimoune* is based on epistolary aesthetics. Instead of consisting of letters, however, it *is* a letter, a correspondence conducted by means of video. In this guise it demonstrates that the aesthetic dimension of the social phenomenon of the movement of people moves in two asymmetrical directions. On the one hand, the influence of migrants on the host countries’ culture, enriching it with new possibilities of experience; and on the other hand, the host countries’ influence on the subjective relationships, primarily entertained through memory. The former is future-oriented, the latter anchored in the past. But memories are often permeated with longing, the unbridgeable gap of desire. And desire, in turn, is infused with futurality. These relationships of migrants to their homeland aggrandize the sense of pastness that furnishes the temporal sustenance of existing in the now striving for a future. This happens regardless of the question whether they have personal memories of that homeland or not; whether this homeland is imaginary or the product of “post-memory”.6

These three works propose specific elements to flesh out the concept of heterochrony. *Gaussian Blur* emphatically slows down, offering a meditative viewing experience that counters both routine pace and narrative (“page-turning”) haste. *Measures of Distance* offers a temporal cacophony of different paces within a single videographic space. This entices the viewer to juggle different temporalities at once. *Mimoune* stages the discrepancies in the gap between emission and

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6 Epistolary aesthetic has been put forward by Hamid Naficy in his discussion of “accented cinema.” (2001) The term postmemory has been proposed by Marianne Hirsch (1992-3, esp. 8-9). Ernst van Alphen contests the appropriateness of the element “memory” in this term (2006).
reception, eliding the real time of slow epistolary traffic. Thus it, too, foregrounds the heterochrony inherent in video – the gap of the cut. These videos transform our experience of time – they temporalize.

Now Versus Narrative

Heterochrony, then, is a primary point of intersection between the videographic and the migratory. The super-impositions, tensions, and incongruous encounters of different temporalities alert us to the simple but oft-forgotten fact that time is not an objective phenomenon. A relentless clock and the fixed schedules it prescribes regulate our lives. This makes other temporalities we also live almost invisible. This regulation based on calendars and clocks, on productivity measured in time, and capitalist governance is called time reckoning. It interferes with rhythms and durations that have personal impact on individual lives. In time, politics enters the private lives of all. People in situations of migrancy are often torn between haste and standstill. This simple experiential discrepancy is compounded by political and economic temporal multiplicities in the post-colonial era. Time, in all its internal differentiation, is usually, sometimes forcefully, subjected to one of its aspects only, that of chronology. This linear logic has a profound sensate effect on everyone, and more strongly so on those whose relationship to the local chrono-logic is oblique. (Toufic 2003, 31). Thus conceived, chronology is a stricture that looms over events and thus colors the experience of time with a dark shadow of inevitable inadequacy.

Imagine the everyday life of someone who is waiting for legal residency, or for much-needed employment permits,
or for news from far-away family members. At the same time, the clock is ticking. That person needs to earn money to support his family “back home” and thus justify the tearing apart of his family, his life. This is, in short, the stage of Mimoune. In such situations, the hectic rhythm of social and economic life, always too fast, contrasts sharply with the time of waiting, always too slow. Although temporal discrepancies and disturbed rhythms occur in all human lives, it is easy to realize that multi-temporality is specifically tangible in the life of someone who is permanently, as the saying goes, on the move.

Heterochrony is more than subjective experience, however. It contributes to the temporal texture of our cultural world and thus, our understanding and experiencing it is a (nano-)political necessity. Gaussian Blur captures the profound and physical sensation of a multi-temporality that entails the experience of heterochrony in its bare essence. There is a relentlessness about the slowness, an insistence on the ongoing quality of time, precisely due to the almost unbearably slow pace. The storm-riddled tree branches, a dark leaf falling on a child, become more threatening as a result; the human figures, the horse, detach themselves through this slow movement from the still impressionist idyll. They move infinitely slowly, yet infinitely faster than their painted counterparts, the visual memory that infuses them. Meanwhile, the flickering of points of light keeps us aware of the fleeting speed of time “outside” these slow movements. The time of the surface is disjunctive from the time of the images it covers.

Mimoune, in contrast, appears set in real time. This work is based on a very simple fact. It is a postcard – made video – with a second card sent in response. As in all epistolary traffic, between sending and delivery a time gap
occurs. This gap is constitutive of writing, with all its political and juridical consequences. At the same time, it is a profoundly personal experience. This makes it so poignant, for the viewer, to see the senders and receivers alternate more rapidly than the reality would allow. We see Mimoune sitting down and saying hello, then immediately we see his wife, children, and other relatives watching and reciprocating the greeting. It all looks so simple, so normal, yet it is impossible. Time, its elision, lies at the heart of fiction – the fiction that is truer than truth. 8

The simple aesthetic that this work mobilizes makes that fictionality look deceptively real. In stark distinction from the aesthetic of both Gaussian Blur and Measures of Distance, the look of the images recalls home video. Far from being a simple aesthetic, this look creates a surface that sometimes evokes an uncertainty of looking – wavering between its possible inappropriateness and its necessity. We see people who long to be together, yet seem to have little to say; a heart full, probably, but not enough time to say it. Groping for words to utter, they slow down the event of speaking. Pressured to speak, however, they also speak before they find the words. Time is entirely messed up.

In other video works, too, double or multiple temporalities are the motor of a heterochronous viewing experience. While Ballester overlays time frames separated by migration, then closes the gaps between them, using video editing as his tool, Gary Ward’s installation Inflection gives shape to heterochrony as a sense of stagnation through circularity. Usually, circularity, or circular rhythm, is opposed to the relentless linearity of evolutionist culture. (e.g. Kristeva

8 The plot of the biblical Book of Esther is largely based on this motive of epistolary delay. See Bal (1991). The temporal discrepancies of writing are, of course, most forcefully explained by Derrida (1967).
1986) But, as Nancy Munn (1992: 101) and others have pointed out, circularity is not quite the opposite of linearity; each repetition necessarily occurs later than previous ones. Both the circularity-in-linearity of time and the loop that is constitutive of exhibitionary video are the principles of his installation. Circularity is embodied in the loop. In Ward’s double reflection, with two earlier works, 8Till8 and Kofi Cleaning, installed at a 90º angle, time is (fictitiously) presented as circular. One wing of the installation is a self-portrait, the other an allo-portrait – a portrait where self meets other.9

In the self-portrait 8Till8 the spinning of the washing machine in the eye of which the artist sees himself distorted, proclaims the circularity in which people can be caught. The machine is the maddening clock that goes round and round and doesn’t let go of the subject caught up in its wheels. Ward’s face is distorted and mangled by the turns. This turning can be seen as a critique of capitalist time. A quiet voice speaks of climbing mountains in search of confidence and security (“you trust the rope”). The rhythmic contrast between the turning machine and the voice installs multi-temporality in the psyche of the work. The mountain climbing thus becomes a “little resistance.”10

Then, when the viewer looks to the other screen, in Kofi Cleaning that circularity becomes one of labour, and the pace, of boredom. Slowly moving around the wet mop that cleans the floor, Kofi is both invisible and an indispensable condition for life in the building to continue as usual. The pace of each of the two loops is different, as if they were slightly out

9 I have used the term allo-portrait with a slightly different inflection elsewhere (2003).
10 For an important discussion of capitalist time and alternatives, see Casarino (2003). I owe the term “little resistance” to Hernández’ catalogue essay to the exhibition.
of sync. At the same time these two portraits need and sustain each other. Their simultaneous display instates a different multi-temporality, a psycho-social one not within but between the two wings of this diptych. Together, they explore the irruption of otherness within the self and between self and other.

This irruption is visible both within 8Till8 and in that self-reflexive work’s encounter with Kofi Cleaning, which, exhibited at a straight angle from it, literally touches it. It is between the two screens that otherness irrupts. Hence, there are three, not two time frames, each with a different rhythm: the self-portrait with the wildly turning door of the launderette; the mop of the slowly cleaning Kofi, turning around in circles as does his life; and the time of the two videos joint together, out of sync yet embracing each other in a silent dance. This joined and out of sync quality turns the encounter with otherness into an everyday moment of migratory culture. In Ward’s loops, the migratory erupts to stipulate that one plus one makes more – a world.

Like Mimoune, William Kentridge’s Shadow Procession appears temporally straightforward, yet harbours great complexity. Cut-out silhouettes march from left to right across the screen, to the tune of merry street music. Two temporalities are merged, yet inscribe opposite moods in the viewing experience. First the haunting street music entices cheerfulness; then by the relentlessly ongoing procession, including absurd figures, becomes an unsettling display of unsettledness. The rhythm of the figures’ movements is unreal in its regularity. This is yet another way of foregrounding and de-naturalizing time to political effect. Implicit in this heterochrony is the double historical reference to two distinct, early forms of political art, Brecht’s anti-empathic theatre, and Goya’s ambivalently dark, yet often comical drawings. Depicting horror, the awkward poses of his figures
recognizable in Kentridge’s, produces an openness and ambivalence of mood that “democratizes” affect. The theatre as play(ful) and as public ritual, and the still image as record, merge in this work.

The paradoxes of these artists’ works raise the issue of time in exemplary fashion. Time made so dense, contradictory, and almost un-linear first sharpens, then overcomes the opposition between “still” and “moving” images. Hatoum’s video consists of still images, only made to look moving by means of fades. Theuws’s work also exemplifies this overcoming, by means of a slowness that all but cancels the movement. The importance resides in the affective impact of the resulting slow-down. For, through this, it also overcomes the gap between an object and its affective charge, in other words, between the object perceived at a distance and the viewer whose act of viewing affects her, below consciousness. That is Gaussian Blur’s proposal for an aesthetic. Among the consequences of this paradoxical “state” is a complex relationship, not only with representation and figuration – the work with the human form – but also with another aspect of “human nature”, the one of existing in time.

The aesthetic and the migratory intersect at these different aspects of temporality: heterogeneous time, slowdown, the past cut off from the present, and the need for active acts of looking in actuality – as Attridge would have it, “in the event” (2004). The exhibition has the ambition to draw viewers into the heterochrony of video and the migratory. This is where it can gain actuality – not or not only, political actuality, but aesthetic, social and semiotic actuality as well. Actuality is the experience of the now taken out of its drabness. Actuality can come across as a moment of shock, as in some frames in Ursula Biemann’s video essay Remote Sensing where the drabness of existence seems to suddenly
come to life. This is an effect of the temporal discrepancy between the times of the past and the present, when our acts of viewing become, suddenly, acts of a different nature than just that of routine looking in a continuum.

Something happens that links the violence of such moments, the disappearance of linear time itself, to us, now. It is a mobilization of actuality as a temporal unit, an experience, and a political urgency. Attention and actuality together begin to approach the kind of temporality that is at stake in Biemann’s ongoing search for an effective, newly conceived political art through temporal and spatial foreshortening. Actuality sometimes pricks us suddenly, sometimes pops out of its dreariness, stretched out as if after sleep. Representational third-person narrative as a readerly attitude is no longer possible here. Biemann’s sequences of dramatically different shots preclude that. Her film relentlessly moves from global perspectives from above to the horizontality of fast-riding trains to unsettling proximity of people in the drab streets in the night.

Biemann’s work foregrounds the anti-narrative thrust of heterochrony. Narrative strives to an end – a word that intimates both death and goal – and its suspension or disruption constituted the politics of time of the avant-garde. (Osborne 1995) Biemann’s work surely qualifies for avant-garde status in this sense. More importantly, on the basis of her video we can also see that the migratory of contemporary culture – its de-familiarizing multi-temporality, its suspension of narrative linearity – is itself infused with such an avant-garde “politics of time.”

Remote Sensing exemplifies a genre that mediates between documentary and narrative fiction. Her chosen genre, the video essay, is particularly apt to propose visions of migratory culture that neither of the two traditional genres can
capture quite so effectively. She sees the video essay as falling between institutional contexts:

For a documentary, they are seen as too experimental, self-reflexive and subjective, and for an art video they stand out for being socially involved or explicitly political (2003, 8).

Temporality is, again, the issue. Biemann aptly sums up the positive features of the genre in relation to its literary counterpart:

The essay has always distinguished itself by a non-linear and non-logical movement of thought that draws on many different sources of knowledge (2003, 9).

This formulation – non-linear, non-logical – resonates with the notion of multi-temporality that informs heterochrony. In this sense, the video essay, rather than being marginal, can be seen as central to the concept of this exhibition. When, a bit later, Biemann characterizes the video essay’s aesthetic as “more dissociative, multi-perspective and hypertextual in the structuring of images and sounds” (2003, 9) this is as good a characterization as any of the work(ing)s of 2MOVE as a whole. The genre of the video essay is both subjective and speaks from “placelessness” (2003, 10); it displays the traces of mediation and the processes of perception, in and through temporalities that allow for heterogeneity.

Heterochrony can be seen as a form of foreshortening – temporally, not spatially. Foreshortened time is distorted – made wider or thicker – and condensed. It thus comes forward to touch the viewer, so that we experience the almost tangible push of time. It also challenges the ontological temporal cut made between past and present. In terms of grammar, time becomes what French linguist Benveniste called “discourse” (as opposed to “story”). It is expressed in tenses and verbs. Tenses that connect the past to the present, as opposed to ones
that separate the two moments. And verb forms of the first and second person between which speech emerges, rather than in those of the third person who is being spoken about. The viewer is thus drawn into the work, because, as the second person to which it speaks, she must in turn, following the example of Mimoune and his family, take on the exchangeable role of first person.

With foreshortened time, this also happens between the viewer’s present and the past that the work so precariously holds. Thus, video effectuates the visualization of duration, as can be sensed in works that are both time-specific and time-dependent, in terms of the works themselves, of the past they carry, and of their relationship to the viewer. This time-specificity raises a question that is crucial to video in installation: that of the meaning and performativity of actuality.

Actuality – the actuality of viewing, the actuality of the transformations of migratory culture – is the arena in which this heterochronous aesthetic works. It is the “now-time”, of the viewer, the existence and significance of which the latter is hardly aware. Each moment of viewing takes one such instant – between the ticks of the watch, a dark moment between the flashes of ordinary life (Kubler 1962, 17) – and captures it, in an image, a frame, a slowed-down or sped-up sequence, where it then lingers. Thus the art fights the standard narrative of the end, and the anonymity as well as the ephemerality of actuality. This is how actuality makes time for memory.

**Memory and Forgetting in Now-Time**

For, if heterochrony disrupts the traditional linear narratives onto which routine responses and images are grafted, it offers temporal shelter to memories. And memories are themselves
heterogeneous, multi-sensate. The most important and perhaps counter-intuitive thing to realize about memory is that it takes place in the present. Memory is not a passive recall, a kind of invasion of the mind by the past. It is neither passive nor past-based. People perform acts of memory, and they do so in their present moment. Without memory there can be no liveable present. Without a position in the present one cannot “have” – better: perform – memories. In times of political and social hardship in the present, acts of memory become both indispensable for psychic survival and a comforting allure of a privacy one can fall back on. And because memories are acts, they can be performative in the agential sense of speech-act theory.\textsuperscript{11}

Video can serve as a tool to bridge the gap between the illusion of privacy and the need for public recognition of the importance of the memories of others. The fleeting instants of actuality within which someone who is subject to the chrono-logic of Western temporality lives, do not offer sufficient time to harbour the necessary memory acts. Here lies another relevance of the heterochronous variability of video that contributes to our awareness of that lack, and point up a way of remedying it. The video works fill actuality’s voids, or dead moments, stretching their space to make time for a remembrance of the past now lost but which is, often violently, present in actuality, irrupting when it is least desired.

Migratory experience exemplifies the presence of the past within the present. It is what rhythmically defines the letters – written, read – of the mother in \textit{Measures of Distance}. Time is foreshortened to the extent that it is distorted, so as to

\textsuperscript{11} For the various consequences of this view of memory, see the essays in Bal, Crewe and Spitzer (1999).
stagger back from the black hole of linearity. Walid Raad’s Hostage struggles and plays with this foreshortening, while also exploiting it to poke fun at the television-fed viewer’s confidence in news media and its duration of the sound bite. The artist presents this work as a deadpan documentary project while, in the same presentation, he uses words that indicate fiction. (Raad 2003, 45)

The narrative act of Raad’s work is double. Memory-based, it does provide information. But are these facts? Taking away the trust in the facts – a trust that is, in spite of all ideology critique, still rampant – the artist performs an act of memory that is, because of its documentary status, inherently distorted, fictionalized. Thus, he questions the terms on which “facts” can be made visible, and thereby precludes the escapism of the belief in truth. War, violence, hostage-taking, and other atrocities committed in the world, and in Lebanon’s war scenes in particular, cannot be distanced – neither in time nor in space – as long as such distancing comes with the documentation of the truth. The figure taken hostage and held captive during many years tells the viewer about it in front of a cloth that looks like a film screen but then, improvised, sloppy, and too small; a Hollywood unmasked. That makeshift screen is also an interface between cinema and the genre of videotaped confession, as well as of martyrs’ last speeches – notoriously hard to date, hence, time. But all the tricks that infuse this video with allusions to the different temporalities of media culture still keep the “contemporary history of Lebanon” present and actual, including the event from the past it “tells.” In view of Summer 2006, the work can even be called prophetic. This is how history catches up with its memories to become now-time. Fiction is deployed, then, to propose prophetic memory as a tool for political action.

In terms of heterochrony, Hostage uses its disturbing merging of fact and fiction to make the following point.
Foreshortening remains an illusion, but one whose deception flaunts itself. Foreshortened time is both irresistible and disenchantingly unreal. At no time does the foreshortened duration offer us a bridge to the past, to the other (life), yet it makes time so sticky that it feels as though we are touched by the past. We cannot suffer with the displaced among us or inhabit their longings. Sympathy, compassion, even identification, do nothing to reduce the unspeakable traces of what is buried in another time. But what we can do is remember-with.

In *Felix in Exile*, one of the Kentridge’s most famous animations, the tool to achieve heterochrony is the trace. A hyperbolic focus on the trace makes a point concerning migratory politics as it is temporally defined. It does so in three ways: through a slowness that competes with historical time; through manual labour in solidarity with workers; and through inscription comparable to the traces left by the suffering that pushes people away from their homes. Kentridge makes his films out of large-scale drawings in charcoal and pastel. Each drawing contains a single scene. He photographs it, and then alters it, erasing and redrawing the scene. After a while the sheet becomes a palimpsest of its many earlier stages. This, of course, can be read as a metaphor of memory, but it is much more than that. It is the result of labour – a labour of love, or of solidarity; of hope, of making as building. Like Theuws, who painstakingly imitates the easily accomplished video effect called Gaussian blur without using it, Kentridge also uses the model of a much easier mode of achieving the effect, here, of animation. Instead of many drawings leading to one film, a single drawing slowly emerges
as a film out of many photographs, before it is transferred on video.¹²

This reversal is a matter of time – a materialization of time. Thus, the labour-intensive method becomes homage paid, by means of a humble aesthetic, to the subject that emerges ever so slowly. Accompanied by haunting music by Philip Miller and Motsumi Makhene, the character recurring from the artist’s earlier films is alone in a hotel room pouring over the drawings made by Nandi, an African woman. These drawings represent – or rather, explore and remember – the violence committed to South-Africa – the land and the people. The drawings that float through Felix’s field of vision are of the devastated landscape of mining and massacre. The land itself bears the traces of its violent history. Nandi’s drawings result from her activities surveying the land, watching bleeding bodies. When Felix looks into the shaving mirror, he sees Nandi as if at the other end of a telescope. Close proximity and cosmic distance are joined in an unbreakable bond. When Nandi is shot and melts into the landscape like the subjects she was drawing, Felix’s hotel room is flooded with blue water, of tears, of animation itself, of the possibility of new life. When Felix is almost flooded by the water (of his own tears?) he almost merges in the history whose traces the artist and his African-female counterpart are insistently keeping alive.

Traces, then, are more than leftovers of the past. They are the stuff of this work; they are the work. Temporally speaking, they bind the past to the present and are thus multi-temporal by definition. Traces on Kentridge’s drawing, which transforms itself without erasing its past. Traces on the land scarred by the mining and the digging of graves. Traces of the

¹² Kentridge’s technique is extensively described by Boris (2001), a useful essay to understand the meaning of the acts of memory the artist performs.
African woman’s drawings, of her drawing the traces. The brutality of the racist regime cannot be erased, these indelible traces on the palimpsestic images suggest. Forgetting, necessary as it sometimes is, must be paired with acts of remembrance. Drawing is such an act. Drawing traces is a manner, a method, of animating history and the memory of it in the present. And if the single sheets that bear the charcoal traces of their earlier appearance also present layers of landscape and layers of history, this means that both time and space must be kept alive in the present.

But heterochrony has more layers than this memory-complex. While erasing the past is neither possible nor acceptable, the very mode of setting the images in motion in both Felix and Shadow also intimates the changeability of space, of history, and of the landscape in now-time. The procession of the latter has neither beginning nor end; the slice of time that moves on and on also refuses to yield to the pressure of a narrative of closure. In Felix, Kentridge’s acts of drawing foreground the movement that is so essential for video as well as for migratory existence. Felix demonstrates that space, while bearing the traces of its past, can be transformed. The work constantly produces transformations, from drawings into landscape, from one figure into the other, from bodies to the ground in which they disappear. This is how this artist makes actuality – the time for memory in the present.

Temporalizing Politics
In the exhibition, an event that is by definition situated in the present, the participation of these works harks back to the movements, slow or fast, heterochronic, that underlie the other works in whose proximity they are installed, and whose political force they help sustain. I understand the ensemble and installation of the video works here not within an art-
historical movement – within the story of video’s evolution – but as a moment, a slow-down, of visual politics, anchored in philosophy. This exhibition deploys heterochrony to question the ontological distinctions that define fiction as distinct from political reality. This is why Ballester’s erasures of the temporal gaps of epistolary traffic is a way of making fiction, on the basis of a profoundly political reality.

Raad’s work questions the possibility of media to even be “in touch” – in the actuality – with reality. His work exemplifies a crucial ambivalence that defines political art today. It proposes how narrative as the carrier of preconceptions can yield to a new narrative anchored in heterochronous actuality. This attitude allows the work to tell the story and, at the same time, identify its constructedness. It is in his acts of undermining the (classical) truth status of his character’s testimony that he offers his own “touch” with reality – the reality of media as mediation and fabrication. One ground where the truth status of media reporting flounders is language. Bachar translates his own discourse into an English that does not quite match the Arabic, then insists that it be read by a young female voice in the target language. When asked by his alter ego why the English does not match the Arabic he says: “I have nothing to say about the second part of your question” (2003, 38). Asked why he insists on a female reader, he answers with a comment on media:

A fascinating and revealing aspect of books written by the Americans [his fellow hostages] is that of the literary contributions of the hostages’ girlfriends and wives . . . In many reviews of the books in the US popular press, I was surprised that critics have characterized the contributions of the wives as “odd” and “distracting” (2003, 40).

Questioning “from what” these accounts of the women distract, Bachar questions not only the struggle about who
owns the truth of events, but beyond that issue, he expands the event itself. The women’s experience of being excluded from the (political) event and the act of remembering it in writing, the interview intimates, is no less real than the captivity narrative Bachar characterizes as male.

Bachar’s appearance and the female voice that speaks “for” him, over his voice, slightly belatedly, capture the heterochrony of this narrative. Temporal aspects of this order are discrepancy, belatedness, delayed focusing, vanishing and re-emergence, and performance; in short, a multi-faceted heterochrony. The resulting temporal foreshortening is a device of primary importance. This is what makes these works political in a specific way without it being “about” migration – or “about” politics, for that matter – as theme. It is their timing that constitutes the politics. In different ways, the temporal foreshortening at work deploys the specificity of heterogeneous time in migratory culture. The artist is a witness able to make this multi-temporal, heterogeneous experience visible in a bodily manner.

A final example shows how memory acts can in and of themselves transform violence into political agency. Melvin Moti, in search of his ancestors who came from India to Surinam in the early twentieth century, turns the travelling shot of the landscape, the haunting song, the slow speeches and the old faces into tools for acts of remembrance with such political effect. Moti felt an urgency to make a connection to the past of his ancestors, a past about to be extinguished, even extinct, receding in oblivion as the elderly people were disappearing. He wished to acquire their memories as his heteropathic memories, which he needs to be who he is in the present. This is how Stories from Surinam, a collection of memories captured like butterflies, becomes itself an act of memory – such an image that can stop the relentless course of
a time moving too fast. “It is only as an image, which flashes up in the moment of its cognizability, never to appear again, that the past can be apprehended” wrote Weigel (1996, 9), paraphrasing Benjamin (1968, 257).

As the provisional outcome of an ongoing search for the possibility of deploying time as a weapon against oblivion, the gap between the occurrence of the event and its remembrance is made visible. The event flares up for those same, but belated, hours in the present that the event had occupied in the past, and the memory could only effectively inscribe itself – in the culture whose memory it was – in the brief experience, in the shock of recognition of the passers-by or the visitors in the gallery who are witnessing it. Their acts of seeing constitute the visual event these works meant to effect.

This brings me back to Theuws’s work, exemplary because abstract. Through the abstraction the work makes possible the emergence of forms or shapes within which the images of the past can be encapsulated. It hosts past images in now-form. Slow-down, in art, has political ambitions in itself. Beyond the everyday bombardments of fleeting images, art seems a suitable place for us to stop and invest the events from people’s past they carry on their backs (Kentrige) or that resonate with the epistolary reminiscing of Hatoum’s mother, with cultural duration. According to my interpretation of temporal foreshortening, Theuws’s work thickens time to the extreme without entirely freezing it. This does not make the images still and available for contemplation. On the contrary, they are just barely, with difficulty, available for participation. Moti shows that need for time in now-images retrieved from the past.

Let me give an example of how this works. At the beginning of Stories, a hand-held shot of a decrepit building remains in the frame for quite a long time. During this shot, a
haunting song sets in. This song, sung by an elderly voice, tells the story of the cruelties committed in the past the singer has presumably experienced. The shot is rather wobbly; not because it is poor camerawork, but because it is empathic camerawork: it moves on the rhythm of the song. This coordination of the image to the song foregrounds the sense of the present; singing by definition happens in the present, even if it tells a story from the past. The precariousness of the trans-generational passing on of what are memories for the singer and building blocks for his identity for the filmmaker is thus given shape in the interstices of the irreducible gap between the audio and the video.

The experience of belatedness Moti stages is, ultimately, the political arena – a migratory politics of temporality – in which these video works seek to transform the relationship to a past we cannot reverse, to a present in which we can work. It is the intersection of form and time as the construction site of a politically effective affect toward which the deployment of the video imagination works. The interval that separates us from the past where the violence, exploitation, depletion occurred is the moment, the sub-moment, of actuality that is foreshortened. Not quite frozen, but slowed down below perceptible time – thus making now-time “sticky.” As a result we cannot ensconce ourselves in the ethical indifference of aesthetic contemplation defined in a misguided distortion of Kantian disinterestedness, for we are “touched” by that moment, now, even though we cannot appropriate it. But it does leave a remainder – if only we can hear it.13

13 I borrow the term “remainder” from Lawrence Venuti. In three different uses of the term (1994; 1995; 1996) this author makes a fabulously productive, differentiated use of this concept.
For “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Benjamin 1969, 255). And that present, that here-now, is a corporeal time. We need the heteropathic memories, traces, and fictions that constitute the texture of the migratory culture we share, in order to live in an actuality saved from its dreariness.14

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The Mosaic Film - An Affaire of Everyone: Becoming-Minoritarian in Transnational Media Culture

Patricia Pisters

In contemporary media culture the formal, narrative and stylistic structure that prevail can be described as “aesthetics of the mosaic”. Multiple main characters, multiple interwoven story lines, multiple or fragmented spaces, different time zones or paces seem to be specific for the migratory nature and politics of our times. In this essay I will look at three mosaic films, *Babel* (USA: Inarritu, 2006), *WWW. What a Wonderful World* (Morocco/Germany/France: Bensaidi, 2006) and *Kicks* (Netherlands: Ter Heerdt, 2007) and discuss in which ways in these films an aesthetics of the mosaic is related to migratory movements and contemporary globalized media culture.\(^1\) This aesthetics, I will argue, is closely related to transnationalism which can take on different forms. I will argue that by means of a “nomadic style” and “nomadic politics” these films call for a becoming-minoritarian as “an affaire of everyone”.

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\(^1\) I would like to thank Albert ter Heerdt and Mimoun Oaissa for giving me the possibility to see *Kicks* outside its theatrical release and René Wolf (Dutch Film Museum) for a viewing tape of *WWW. What a Wonderful World*. 
Part 1: Mosaic Aesthetics

Earlier Mosaic Aesthetics in Cinema

The “mosaic film” is not a new phenomenon. Although it has never explicitly been classified as a genre, from early film history onwards there have been films with multiple stories. In *Intolerance* (USA, 1916) D.W. Griffith cross cuts between four stories, set in four different periods and places (a Modern story set in America 1914, a Judean story taking place in A.D. 27 in Christ’s Nazareth, a French story of the St Bartolomew’s massacre in 1572 and a Babylonian story set in 539 B.C.). Although each story was shot in a different tint (amber, blue, sepia, grey-green) that made each story recognizable, it was already a complex, non-linear way of epic story telling, bound together by the theme of human intolerance, hypocrisy, injustice and discrimination. Nevertheless this type of narrative structure did not become the main form of classical Hollywood, nor of other film schools or movements. In classical Hollywood the two plot-lines (action-plot and romance-plot) usually perfectly unite in the story of a goal-oriented protagonist (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985). Epic stories that tell larger stories of a period or of a nation are usually told in a linear fashion.

Other examples of mosaic films can be found in Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941) and Akira Kurasawa’s *Rashomon* (Japan, 1950). *Citizen Kane* starts with the death of newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane and the last word he pronounces, “Rosebud”. A journalist then starts out to investigate the meaning of this word, interviewing many people he has known who all tell their story of Kane in a mosaic flashback structure that together brings about a colorful picture of Kane (but leaves the mystery of “Rosebud” unresolved). In *Rashomon* the central point of return is the
murder of a samurai that is accounted for from four different points of view, each presenting a very different version of the same story. These famous examples of mosaic films are less epic than Griffith’s early film but give multiple versions of a single person or a single event. In these films there is a central point that unites the different pieces of the puzzle and in that sense presents a different type of mosaic structure than the multiple epic narratives of *Intolerance*. What all the early mosaic films have in common is the fact that they relate to the past, either to collective history or personal memories that are presented as different moments or different versions of past events.

In contemporary media culture it seems that the mosaic film has changed and gained importance to the point that we could even speak of a new type of film. Usually the first film that is indicated as the starting point of the new mosaic film is Robert Altman’s *Short Cuts* (USA, 1993).² *Short Cuts* gives indeed a new dimension to the mosaic film. Most strikingly this mosaic film does not refer to history, a person or an event that has to be recalled, but relates to a shared time and place in the present. The film presents a cross section of Los Angeles at the beginning of the 1990s. Here twenty-two characters are presented in 10 interwoven stories (based on short stories by Raymond Carver). None of the stories, or rather “occurrences” as Altman himself calls them in the documentary *Luck, Trust and Ketchup* (USA, John Dorr and Mike Kaplan, 1993), really ends or is forcefully connected, except by the event of a small earthquake at the end of the film and by the television news that is part of every household. The characters meet sometimes in significant ways, at other moment much more superficially. Compared to the earlier

² To the point that filmmakers that presents a mosaic story are quickly labeled as “an Altman-clone” (Ockhuysen 2006: 1)
mosaic films, the frames of individual stories are opened up and intertwined in much more complex, subtle and sometimes even random ways in the contemporary mosaic film. Television and other media seem to play an important role in this random connection of otherwise often unrelated people. Another dimension that is new, though not yet present in Altman’s film, is the transnational connections made possible not only by the media but also by the increasing migratory nature of today’s people flow. The new mosaic film seems to be very suitable to express the complex and intertwined nature of today’s transnational and media reality.

Types of Contemporary Mosaic Transnationalism

Besides emphasizing the present, many contemporary mosaic films have a very transnational dimension. This dimension can manifest itself in different ways. Of course by defining different categories of transnationalism in the mosaic film I do not wish to make absolute distinctions. The distinctions are fluid and never completely pure. Nevertheless the films that I am focusing on here, Babel, What a Wonderful World and Kicks take different positions in respect to contemporary transnational migration and its implications, which is why I think it is useful to make a rough categorization on this basis.

A first group of recent mosaic films literally moves between countries and continents. Traffic (Steven Soderbergh,
USA, 2000), for instance, gives a multi-layered picture of the drugs war between Mexico and the USA, in which three stories are alternating and finally meeting each other. *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, USA, 2005) also moves between continents to tell four intertwined stories related to the not so clean oil industry.\(^5\) In its own particular ways *Babel* belongs to this “cross-continental”-type of mosaic films. *Babel* tells four stories, divided over three continents, spoken in five different languages. The film starts in a small Berber village in the bare mountains of Northern Morocco where a shepherd sells a gun to a neighbor who wants to use it to chase jackals that attack his herd. His two young sons, Said and Yussef, are in charge of the gun to protect the goats. We then move to San Diego where a Mexican nanny, Amelia, takes care of blonde Debbie and Mike. Back in Morocco Australian Susan and American Richard are on a bus tour and clearly have an argument to settle during their vacation. Then the film takes us to Japan, where we witness a volley ball game by deaf and dumb girls, among whom Cheiko, who is watched by her father on the tribunes. The stories will be connected by an accidental bullet, fired by Yussef in a play with his brother, hitting a touring car with American tourists. It is Susan who is hit by the bullet. While Susan and Richard have to stay longer in Morocco than planned, Amelia takes their children, Debbie and Mike, to her own son’s wedding in Tijuana. In Tokyo the police investigates whether the gun that was used formerly belonged to Cheikho’s father. In *The Making of Babel* on the DVD of the film, Inarritu says he has always been fascinated by the air that we all breathe and travel through, that invisible entity that

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\(^5\) Another example of such transcontinental mosaic film would be Claire Denis’ *L’Intrus* (2005).
what we all share. With this film he wants to show that although we are in different spaces and different time zones there is a literal cross-continental connection. Not only the same air that we breathe connects us, but also a Japanese gun, given as a present to a Berber shepherd in Morocco can have enormous consequences for people in Morocco, Mexico and the USA. On a less literal level, the film expresses another transnational aspect that we share: a common way of expressing through the body when words fail. All these points will be elaborated in later parts of this essay but for now it suffices to see the typical mosaic cross-continental transnationalism of this film.

A second type of transnationality can be found in mosaic films that take place in countries of the “Third World” that are marked by transnationalism because of the fact that parts of the population have migrated, others want to leave and yet another group decides to stay, come back or arrives from the West to settle. In this type of mosaic film there is always a “longing-for-elsewhere” that is part of the stories. In André Téchiné’s *Loin* for instance, the lives of French Serge, Jewish Sarah and Arab Said meet in Tanger where the fate of those from the West who travel to Morocco intersects with those illegal immigrants who want to leave North Africa to find a better living in Europe. *WWW. What a Wonderful World* would fit into this category of transnationalism in the mosaic film. The setting of the film is Morocco, mainly Casablanca and Rabat, cities that are rendered as hyper modern urban spaces. Here too multiple characters interconnect: contract killer Kamel, police officer Kenza, cleaning lady and occasional prostitute Souad, hacker Hicham and his father and several other characters give together a picture of

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6 In *Loin* and also in *Les temps qui changent* there are multiple Western characters who choose to stay in Morocco for several reasons. See Pisters 2007.
contemporary Morocco. Here the transnational dimension is not given by the cross continental settings, nor by a transnational cast, but is related to the paradoxes of globalization and postcolonial conditions in many former colonies. The biggest paradox is embodied by hacker Hicham, who gets access to the digital murder assignments of Kamel. Although he can communicate with the whole world (“Club Internet l’Univers” is the name of the internet café where he accesses the computer), his dream to actually travel to Europe is an impossible one. This aspect of transnational culture, called “fake-globalization” by filmmaker Bensaidi (Bensaidi 2007: 1), is clearly addressed by the film. References to French colonialism can be picked up when Kamel and Kenza speak in French instead of Arabic. More aspects of this film will be elaborated later on, but for now it is important to note that this type of mosaic film presents a virtual transnational dimension that causes paradoxical situations in post-colonial cities.

First I want to mention a last type of mosaic film related to transnationalism and the migratory mobility of people: the “multicultural meeting point”-film, usually set in a western city, where people of all color and origin compose contemporary urban space. Here the main sentiment is not so much a longing for an elsewhere but the difficulties of living together in a new mosaic composition of the population. Ignorance of cultural differences, misunderstandings, racism and (fear of) terrorism are at the basis of these stories. Crash (USA, Paul Higgis, 2004) is an example of this type of mosaic film. Comparable to Short Cuts the film presents a cross section of Los Angeles, this time at the beginning of the second millennium. In Crash a transnational dimension is added because of the racist tensions that are sensible, though never in a one-dimensional way. Perhaps the most touching scene in this film is when a racist white cop (who takes care of his old father) saves a black woman from a car accident, even though
we just saw him humiliate this woman a few moments before. 7

In a different way *Kicks* presents a similar type of multicultural mosaic society of the Netherlands in the new millennium. Dutch-Moroccans and indigenous Dutch from different classes who live more or less segregated lives in the same city (Amsterdam) are portrayed in several plot-lines. The film deals with contemporary society in several ways. Kick boxer Said has a Dutch girlfriend Danielle (“a cheese head chick” as she is unappreciatively called by other Dutch-Moroccan) and works with youngsters to keep them of the streets; his younger brother Redouan is more of a rebel and loves rapping political texts with his friend Karim; Kim is a well to do Dutch women who one day decides that she should get to know some of her Moroccan fellow country men and enters a Moroccan snackbar to talk to “real Turks”. Here she meets Nordin, a funny and conservative Dutch-Moroccan who loves singing typical Dutch songs of Boudewijn de Groot; her husband Wouter is a frustrated filmmaker looking for a good story; trainee police officer Aaliya and Marouan, who works for the Dutch army, are about to marry and Lisette runs a shelter, has a husband and son but longs for a different (more glamorous) life. Here too the connections between the people are made possible through an accident: the killing of Redouan by Dutch police officer Frank at the moment when he is caught at what seems a burgle attempt (in fact he is inspired to write more rap texts and has called Karim to join him to enter the club house). Here too, questions of racism, but also ignorance

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7 The car accident seems to be another typical characteristic of the mosaic film. Also in *Winterschläfer* (Germany, Tom Tykwer, 1997), *Amores Perros* (Mexico, Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu, 2000) and *21 Gramms* (USA, Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu, 2003) a car accident is a connecting force of random lives. In *Crash* the car accident is used more politically, with the implication that in LA today it almost seems the only way people can still connect.
and misunderstandings are the underlying tensions that are fed by the consequences of migratory movements in the Western world. As for the other two types of films, more elaboration will follow.

What can be said in general about all these multiple storylines and multiple characters is that in a transnational world, the centre and periphery are shifting and taking turns in importance. In the three films central in this essay Morocco is a main location or point of reference, which displaces the traditional centrality of the West. Also on the level of the characters centre and periphery (Hollywood stars and amateur actors) shift: the multiplicity of characters render all characters of equal importance. Even Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, Richard and Susan in *Babel*, are just a part of the larger cast in which also a lot of non-professional actors take place.

**Media Technology: Binding and Separating Forces**

A further general characteristic of the new mosaic film is the importance of media technology. In the first place the television news appears to be both a binding and splitting force. Both in *Babel* and in *Kicks* the news of the accident is quickly spread and related to contemporary ethnic tensions and threats of terrorism. In *Babel* the bullet that hits Susan is immediately explained as a terrorist attack on American tourists, a news item that Cheiko in Japan sees while zapping. In this way global television news creates a strange (paranoid) kind of transnational “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), one that functions like an anxiety-machine. “Media are spreading the fear of the other”, Innaritu says in *The Making Of Babel*. A similar view on television news is given in *Kicks* were journalists confront Said after the death of his brother with the rap texts he sung earlier, trying to pinpoint Redouan one-dimensionally as a (potential) terrorist. The television news
enhances polarization by announcing that an opinion poll held immediately after the incident shows that 79% of the Dutch-Moroccans think the motives for the murder were racist, while 77% of the indigenous Dutch think this is not the case. On the other hand it is also the news (both on television and on the radio) that gives a common reference to all members of the community and that is for Dutch Kim the direct reason to start, naively as it may be, changing her own attitude, looking for connections beyond her own circle of friends.

In WWW. What a Wonderful World the main technologies are the computer and the mobile phone. As already indicated the internet connects Hicham (and many other Moroccans) to the rest of the world, while at the same time actual travel conditions are limited. The mobile phone another important connector. Kenza earns some extra money by renting her mobile phone to friends and acquaintances. Here too new technology does not change everything; still not everybody owns a (mobile) phone, the new is not for everybody. Technology connects and disconnects.

In Babel the telephone is also used as a cinematographic “enfolder of time”. Most of the film is told in a more or less chronological order. Except for one moment where time is enfolded in a sort of loop. At the beginning of the film Amelia, the Mexican nanny picks up the phone when she is playing with the kids Debbie and Mike. It’s Richard, who phones from Morocco to tell her that his sister will take care of the kids the next day so she can go to her son’s wedding across the border. He also asks Mike on the phone who tells him about his day at school. At the end of the film we return to this phone call – but now we see it from Richard’s

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8 There is also one flashback in the film that occurs at the moment when Said has been shot by the police and we see how he and his brother Yussef used to hang into the wind on the top of a mountain, imagining they could fly.
point of hearing in Morocco. What makes this scene particularly touching is the fact that not only we now know what has happened to Richard and Susan before the call was made (we didn’t know the first time that Susan was hit by a bullet and Richard calls from the hospital in Cassablanca). We also know what will happen to Amelia after the call. Richard’s sister will not come after all and in desperation Amelia takes the kids with her across the border. In Mexico they have a wonderful wedding party but on the way back home they get stopped at the border. Amelia’s nephew, Santiago, who is driving the car, panics and drives away, leaving Amelia and the kids finally in the desert. They survive but Amelia, who has been taking care of Debbie and Mike since they were born, gets send back to Mexico for illegally taking American kids over the border. Knowing this the second time round, Amelia’s “Everything is fine, mister Richard” is just as hearth breaking as Richard’s tears when he hears the voice of his son while Susan is still in critical condition. The telephone is here used for its dramatic possibilities of the play between embodied and disembodied voices, and the amount of knowledge one has of a particular situation. In *What a Wonderful World* Kamel falls in love with Kenza’s voice that he has only heard through the phone and does not recognize in embodied form until the very end of the film.

Finally then there is the film technology itself that makes these films possible in the first place. In the second part of this essay I will look at the political implications of the mosaic film and argue that these types of films can perform particularly political and resisting forces in the larger media networks. Here I’ll first move on to the particular nomadic styles in which these films are shot that relate them to contemporary reality.

**Nomadic Style: Mixing the Codes**
The contemporary mosaic film is often presented in a nomadic style. The term is derived from Deleuze and is often misunderstood, so let me briefly redefine Deleuzian nomadic thought before returning to the films. Postcolonial theory has made many objections towards Deleuzian concepts to describe the postcolonial situation. The concept of the nomad has met particularly heavy criticism. It is often seen as an all too easy way of describing everybody as a nomad without any roots, or without any hierarchical relations. This notion of the nomad is both romanticizing and assimilating. Hence this concept is believed to contribute to “perpetuating a universalized and unmarked western norm, [leaving out], or marginalizing local knowledges and prioritizing theoretical validation over political exigencies” (Wuthnow 2002: 194). Acknowledging these dangers of simplified equations of the nomad and the migrant and the assimilating powers of conceptual thinking, I would like to argue however that the films under discussion are nomadic experiments in the way Deleuze describes this in his essay “Nomadic Thought”. Here he argues that “the nomadic adventure begins when the nomad seeks to stay in the same place by escaping the codes” (Deleuze 2004: 260). As is clear from the different types of mosaic films, real mobility is not a strict necessary condition for the transnational dimension of this type of films, hence the nomad does not need to be a migrant. There are other elements of the mosaic aesthetics of these films that makes them nomadic.

By presenting complex, fragmented and multiple stories and characters, the films that I’m discussing here are mixing the codes of conventional filmmaking with a central narrative and clearly focussed main characters.9 In this way

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9 This does not mean however, that more conventional stories cannot have other means of “escaping the codes” in other levels. Or that mosaic aesthetics of multiplicity are always already nomadic to begin with.
Babel escapes the code of a star driven plot by giving Hollywood stars and amateurs equal amounts of attention and screen time. Also the unusual combination of Moroccan, Mexican and Japanese settings and story lines are refreshing. Even though the cinematographic means of making the transition from one scene to another are conventional (match on action, graphic matches or sound bridges) these are done so brilliantly that crossing continents feels quite enchanting.

WWW. What a Wonderful World is stylistically more obviously mixing the codes of the crime film, the romantic comedy, Buster Keaton (director Besaidi who plays Kamel himself has an inexpressive face like Keaton) and Jacques Tati (some of the scenes where Kenza directs the traffic of Casablanca call Playtime in mind). And by presenting such a stylized and modern image of Morocco the film breaks also with the cliché image of Moroccan cinema of pitiful women, poor children and powerless or/and tyrant males.

The multiple characters in Kicks may be typical for certain recognizable figures in contemporary Dutch society, the fact that both Dutch Moroccans and Indigenous Dutch meet and start talking to each other is a social mixing of codes which is not often seen in Dutch cinema. Cinematographically the characters break another code: especially at the beginning during the introduction of the characters, but also at moments later on in the film, the characters look straight into the camera, into the eyes of the spectator. This is unusual in feature films and has a very powerful effect of direct address and direct involvement of the spectator: it’s not just the world over there on the screen but our own world that we are engaging with.10 And this leads me to the second

10 In High Fidelity (GB, Stephen Frears, 2000) the main character also looks into the camera regularly. Here the camera and the spectator are addressed by way of a confession of the character’s attitude towards his previous girl friends.
characteristics of the nomadic, namely its political implications.
Part 2: Mosaic Politics

Nomadic Politics: Outside and Intensity

Mosaic aesthetics calls for a nomadic politics. The mosaic films that I’m discussing here all express a political engagement with the contemporary world which is characteristic for this type of films. Therefore it has to be noticed that “escaping the codes” does not mean just leaving the world in some transcendental realm where no politics is necessary anymore as Peter Hallward and others have objected against Deleuzian nomadism (Hallward, 2006). On the contrary. The main aspects that Deleuze distinguishes as characteristic for Nietzschean philosophy, which is at the basis of nomadic thinking, point towards an engagement with the world. Nomadic thought connects works of art (here cinema) to the outside and to intensity. Both the idea of the outside and intensity relate to what Deleuze describes as “being in the same boat” where everybody is pulling an oar and sharing something beyond any law, contract or institution:

We are in the same boat: a sort of lifeboat, bombs falling on every side, the lifeboat drifts toward subterranean rivers of ice, or toward rivers of fire, the Orenoco, the Amazon, everyone is pulling an oar, and we’re not even supposed to like one another, we fight, we eat each other. Everyone pulling an oar is sharing, sharing something, beyond any law, any contract, any institution. Drifting, a drifting movement or “deterritorialization”: I say all this in a vague, confused way, since this is a hypothesis or a vague impression on the originality of Nietzsche’s texts. A new kind of book. (Deleuze, 2004: 255)

The relation with the outside is thus not the exclusion of reality but on the contrary the opening up of a philosophical text, a
work of art or a film to the forces of life. As Deleuze points out further:

What is this: a beautiful painting or a beautiful drawing? There is a frame. An aphorism has a frame, too. But whatever is in the frame, at what point does it become beautiful? At the moment one knows and feels that the movement, that the line which is framed comes from elsewhere, that it does not begin within the limits of the frame. It began above, or next to the frame (...) Far from being the limitation of the pictorial surface, the frame is almost the opposite, putting it into immediate relation with the outside. (Deleuze, 2004: 255)

Let me first look at some of the ways in which *Babel*, *WWW* and *Kicks* open up to the outside and engage with the world. This is done in several ways. A classic way of engaging with politics in art is by means of metaphors or other tropes. When film is not overtly political (such as the Russian revolution films of the twenties, or overtly propaganda films) political references are often made by using a small incident to show something bigger, or by using symbolic images that allow allegorical readings. At moments *Babel*, *WWW* and *Kicks* all express a concern with the contemporary world in this classical way. In *Babel* the accidental gun shot that sets all other events in motion is clearly to be read in an allegorical way. By means of this small incident, we understand how quick assumptions and misunderstandings turn every incident into an act of terrorism and add to the fear of the other. It’s not just this story that is being told. *Babel* shows all the tragedies behind every action that ends up as a news item. And in doing so, the film shows actually not what divides us, but what binds us: loneliness, love and tragedy.

*WWW* presents symbolic images that have evidently political significance. When Hicham after his first attempt to cross the ocean (which cost him and his father all their money) is thrown back on the Moroccan shore, he starts throwing out
all the computers of Club Internet l’Univers and sells the separate parts to get money for a second attempt. Most striking and hearth breaking, while at the same time almost comic in its absurdity is then the image of the little boat with Hicham and other immigrants which encounters an enormous cruise ship, full of lights and music. The people on the boat start waving and screaming to the cruise ship, but they are merciless crashed by the ship that does not even notice them. We never see Hicham again after that moment.

Kicks opens with the announcement that everything in the film is based on true events. Here too, a gun shot accident is at the basis for further reflections on the role of the media to quickly categorize “the other” as a potential terrorist, and on the other hand immediately label the police officer (and indigenous Dutch society) as racist. Although the rap songs of Redouan and Karim are strongly expressing frustration about their own situation related to or projected onto world politics, in fact tragic misunderstandings, fear and frustration are at the basis of this tragic incident, which stands for many other tragic incidents and misunderstandings in contemporary multicultural society. More explicitly the film also comments self-reflexively on the role of the media that can abuse multiculturalism out of pure sensationalism and opportunism. In this sense the role of filmmaker Wouter is telling. He is looking at news items to find an idea for his new film and when he reads about illegal women being abused by dogs in a shed he sets of to reproduce the story, looking for “real illegal women” and “real dogs” to tell a “real story” of

11 The text of the song they perform together is as follows in English translation: “What we can’t forget how Palestines sweat/how they sigh, cry and die/young Palestinians defend their land/ caught up in the struggle/ stone in the hand/fathers and mothers all are dead/missiles, grenades, bullets in the head/ moms and kids are the ones they scar/dirty fucking Jews have gone too far (...)”
present-day Netherlands. Wouter’s eagerness to “do something” with multicultural society without any real involvement can be considered as another commentary on the abusive potential of the media, while at the same time *Kicks* itself clearly addresses all these multicultural issues in a much more clever way. So the use of symbolic and allegorical images is one way of relating to “the outside”.

In *The Making of Babel* there are a few other instances that indicate how this film relates to the outside more implicitly, beyond what can be seen on the screen. One of the scenes that is shown in its rehearsals is the scene where Said, Yussef and their father are surrounded by Moroccan police officers with guns and Said gets shot. After several failed attempts Said finally gets it right and the Palestinian-Arabic translator of the film starts crying. She explains that the scene reminds her of a moment of her own past where she and her father were surrounded by men with guns. In the Mexican part of the film, the actor who plays the border police that arrests Amelia remarks that his own parents are Mexicans who in the past illegally crossed the border to settle in America. And that for him it now feels very paradoxical to perform as American cop who could have arrested his own parents (which would have prevent his role in this film now). All this DVD-extra information does not directly feature in the film. But the real emotions and direct engagements of cast and crew are felt beyond the frames of the images. In all cases, the outside that the films relate to is shared by the audience, either by personal experiences they can relate the images to, or by the wider shared image culture (including DVD extra’s) through which we know or can imagine more than what is strictly seen on the screen. In these ways the mosaic film is “hooked up to its [external] forces, (...) like a current of energy” (Deleuze 2004: 256).
The second characteristic of nomadic politics is therefore the relation of the work of art with intensity:

The lived experience is not subjective, or not necessarily. It is not of the individual. It is flow and the interruption of flow, since each intensity is necessarily in relation to other intensity, in such a way that something gets through. This is what is underneath the codes, what escapes them, and what the codes want to translate, convert, cash in. But what Nietzsche is trying to tell us by this writing of intensities is: don’t exchange the intensity for representations. (…) The intensity can be lived only in relation to its mobile inscription on a body, and to the moving exteriority of a proper name, and this is what it means for a proper name to be always a mask, the mask of an operator. (Deleuze 2004: 257)

The intensity of the images in the mosaic film is also felt through the bodies of the actors. In *Kicks* the nomadic, non-representative intensity is mainly felt in the body of kick boxer Said (Mimoun Oaïssa). He is the one who has learned to channel frustrations and anger in a positive way, taking the news of the dead of his brother apparently calmly, waiting for the official investigation before judging what happened. This reaction is not appreciated by Karim and other friends of Redouan. Said remains controlled but one can feel the mounting tensions expressed in the body, the look in the eyes. It is only in the final boxing game that Said expresses his pain that translates a whole series of intensities related to the complexity of the contemporary situation, both personal and collectively. Other characters as well express them selves bodily. Most strikingly is the silent scream that Lisette (Eva Duyvenstein) utters the day after her 30th birthday party: she is fed up with everything and longs for bigger recognition, a career in as a singer or as an actress perhaps. In this way Lisette translates a typical contemporary feeling that in order to count one should actually become a media star. Everything
else is dull and boring. It’s a sad sign of time, but one that can cause intensive feelings of longing and boredom. Chiel (Jack Wouterse), a middle aged drop out of Dutch origin expresses his anger and frustration by bursting into racist slogans and getting into fights all the time.

WWW becomes intense by abstraction and minimalism, especially in the body of Bensaidi as Kamel. His face is always unmoved like a blanc slate, his body performing in ritualistic ways his actions: downloading the details of his next victim, performing the murder, having sex with Saoud whom he literally throws out of bed at 4.00 o’clock sharp, etc. The only time we hear his voice is on the phone with Kenza. Which is when we realize she must mean a lot to him. It is by this minimalist and non-realistic approach that WWW translates the intensity of love.

In Babel it striking to notice how the body takes over when communication fails. This is why Innaritu has given much emphasis to close ups of faces and hands, so called affection-images that directly work on our senses (Deleuze 1992: 87-111). Susan and Richard are both devastated by the loss of their third child and cannot communicate. It is only after Susan is shot and all emotions become translated in an extreme physical way of a wounded body that things between them start to move again. In Mexico it’s through Amelia’s body, carrying the children through the extremely hot and dry desert, that we experience the intensity and tragic implications of the situation. And since Cheiko is deaf and dumb, her way of expressing is physical from the beginning. Her movements are very expressive, she tries to embrace her dentist and she takes of her panties out of frustration of not being accepted by boys as soon as they discover her deafness. The camera work and use of sound indicates very well how Cheiko perceives the world. Especially a scene in a hip Japanese night club is
amazing in its stroboscopic light effects and sudden silences that translate Cheiko’s perspective. Cheiko’s loneliness and longing is also captured in the last scene of the film, where she is standing naked on the balcony of a very high Tokyo apartment. When her father puts his arms around her, the camera zooms out until we see only the lights of Tokyo by night to the point where all becomes particle. And we feel and know what intensities are traversing the city, the world.

The outside and intensity open up the interiority of the text or the image, relating it to the virtual (invisible) but very real forces in the world that we truly share, which we can call the universal consciousness of becoming-minoritarian that I will develop further in the last part of this essay.¹²

**Becoming-minoritarian:**

As mentioned in the quote in the previous section, nomadic politics is never representational politics and the fragmentary and multiple nature of the mosaic film already indicates that it is difficult for these films to follow a representational logic. The nomadic nature of the mosaic film relates to a politics of becoming-minoritarian. Again this is a concept to be used with caution. Just like the nomad should not (automatically) be equated to the migrant, becoming-minoritarian does not necessarily mean becoming member of a minority group. This is in the first place because becomings in general are not representational. In fact, “any becoming is a movement of de-identification” (Marrati 2001: 211). The notion of becoming too has stirred many debates, but here I would like to refer just the political aspect of becoming-minoritarian as it is explained by

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¹² A third characteristics of nomadic thought is “humor”. Although this is an aspect that can certainly be related to *Kicks* and *What a Wonderful World* (though less to the emotions in *Babel*) I will not deal with this aspect in this essay.
Paola Marrati. Marrati compares becoming-minoritarian to the concept of the majority. The majority is usually related to its representational value in politics. However, Deleuze has argued that the majority can never have genuine representative value:

First and foremost, the majority is a constant, a model determining what is, independent of relative qualities, what is majoritarian and what is minoritarian. (…) The representation cannot but confirm the relationship between existing forces. (…) The majority represents literally no one. It is a model of the construction and attribution of identities; as such, it is necessarily an empty model.” (Marrati 2002: 207, 208)

The majority is thus the normative but in fact empty model of measurement. According to Deleuze (and Guattari) the face relates to Nobody (Ulysses) because it functions as an “abstract machine”. The normative face provides a model of identity and normality in relation to which deviations can be detected. Becoming-minoritarian on the other hand, is always a process of de-identification and de-figuration. It needs an encounter that “allow for new relations to be established and new experiments in life to take place.” (Marrati 2001: 212). It is a flight from the face which in its final stage will reach a becoming-imperceptible. As Marrati explains, the “man of becoming” must go unnoticed; there must be nothing special to be perceived from the outside. Becoming involves a becoming-everybody,

13 Deleuze and Guattari take the face of Jesus (white man) as the prime marker of this normative model, that functions as a “computation of normalities” and then as a “deviance detector”. It is an “abstract machine” in that it very often works in an unconscious or implicit way without a particular agent. See the chapter on “Faciality” in A Thousand Plateaus (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 167-191.

14 A film that most beautifully expresses a “becoming-imperceptible” is Bin-Jip (South Korea/Japan, Kim Ki-Duk, 2004).
but “becoming-everybody” (devenir tout le monde) is not just a matter of being unrecognisable, of being like “everybody else”. Deleuze and Guattari are playing here with the different possible meanings allowed by the French expression “tout le monde”. Thus devenir tout le monde also entails a becoming of everybody, a becoming-everything and a becoming of the world itself. (…) Deleuze and Guattari oppose the figure of a universal minoritarian consciousness that in principle concerns everybody to the majoritarian “fact” that itself is the product of a state of domination, but is the analytical fact of nobody. (Marrati 2001: 214).

Becoming-minoritarian is what Deleuze and Guattari call micropolitics, which is not related to any form of representation neither of majorities not of minorities. Its aim is to resist, to resist to power, resist to the intolerable, resist to fear and to shame, resist to the injustice of the present. The contemporary mosaic films are precisely such micropolitical acts of resistance, first and foremost by proposing the spectator an affective encounter that can provide a slightly new perception of the world. A final aspect that should be noted in this respect is that this act of resistance does not entail a pure moral judgement on who is good and who is bad. On the contrary, micropolitical acts of resistance show the complexity of all emotions and does not express any judgemental value. In Babel, Kicks and What a Wonderful World none of the characters is judged, precisely because they are shown in their context of multiple relations. In Kicks the Moroccan boy who seems a burglar is actually innocent; the police officer who shoots him seems terribly racist, but the film also presents him as a stranger in his own country (especially when he visits the Moroccan wedding of his colleague) who simply does not very well how to deal with this new situation. Richard in Babel seems a jerk at first, not letting his Mexican nanny go to her son’s wedding, until we find out why he does so. In What a Wonderful World nobody (murderer, hacker,
prostitute, drunkard, police officer) is judged either. This non-judgemental quality of the mosaic film is part of its non-normative strategy provoking a universal minoritarian consciousness. It is through the nomadic aesthetics and its political implications as described above that these films relate a becoming of the world as a “possibility of inventing new forms of life, different modes of existence”. (Marrati 2001: 214)

As Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal (who plays Santiago) says in The Making of Babel: “We still haven’t realized we are sharing the same planet, building fences where there are none; things have to change, one day will change”. In any case the contemporary mosaic film clearly addresses a micropolitics of becoming-minoritarian and makes us feel and experience that this is an affair of everyone, transversing minorities and majorities by affecting and addressing us as “participant observers” of the same world beyond the screen.15

References:


15 The term “participant observers” derives from visual anthropology but is introduced by Martha Blassnigg to discuss the experience of the film viewer (Blassnigg, 2007).


“Rewrite this ancient end!” The Oresteia in post-TRC South Africa

Astrid van Weyenberg

Introduction

Though based on the myth of the house of Atreus and set in the aftermath of the Trojan War, Aeschylus’ Oresteia trilogy held great contemporary relevance when it was first performed at the Dionysia festival in Athens in 458 BC. The trilogy marks the transition that Athens was undergoing as it changed from a tribal culture ruled by customary law into a democratic society governed by constitutional law (Ziolkowski, 1977: 20). The first two parts dramatise the Homeric understanding of justice, in which justice is equated with vengeance. In Agamemnon, the king of Argos returns from Troy and is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra in revenge for the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. In the Libation Bearers, their children Electra and Orestes avenge Agamemnon’s death by killing Clytemnestra. The trilogy’s final part, the Euménides—in which Athena establishes a judicial court so that Orestes can be tried for matricide—stages the transformation of justice as vengeance into the legal justice of Athens’ new democracy.1

1 At his trial, Orestes is defended by Apollo, who commanded the killing, and accused by the Furies, who demand vengeance for the blood-crime he has committed. When the judges are unable to decide on Orestes’ fate, Athena casts the final vote herself and Orestes is granted amnesty. Though the scope of this paper does not permit me to discuss its implications, it is interesting
In this paper, I will discuss two dramatic texts that draw on the Oresteia within another context of transitional justice, that of post-apartheid South Africa. The first is Mark Fleishman’s In the City of Paradise, which premiered at the University of Cape Town in 1998 as a collaborative production with his drama students, who also formed the cast. The second is Yael Farber’s MoLoRa (Sesotho for “ash”), first performed in Germany in 2004 and currently touring other parts of the world. In both plays, the distorted family relations within the house of Atreus, a house cursed by revenge, come to represent the distorted relations within South Africa, a nation that was haunted by a similar cycle of vengeance. Through recourse to the Oresteia—which, in Farber’s words, “unflinchingly articulates the spirals of violence unleashed in the pursuit of righteous bloodshed”—both playwrights dramatise the challenges that South Africa faced after the end of apartheid: how to get beyond vengeance, how to reconcile a nation torn apart by decades of injustice and how to change from a system of apartheid to a non-racial democracy.

**Staging transition**

In their reworkings, both Fleishman and Farber make explicit reference to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), an institution established in 1995 to avoid the bloodshed that everybody expected after apartheid officially ended and, instead, find ways to together move forward within a new democratic South Africa. The TRC was the result of negotiations that culminated in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, which recognised “a

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2 Both plays are (yet) unpublished. I wish to thank Mark Fleishman and Yael Farber for making the unpublished scripts available to me.
need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimization.”

The work of the TRC was divided into three committees. The Human Rights Violations Committee investigated the human rights violations that occurred between 1960 and 1994 and organised hearings in which victims and perpetrators could publicly tell their stories and bring out in the open that what had remained hidden. The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee was charged with restoring victims’ dignity and formulating proposals with regards to rehabilitation. Finally, the Amnesty Committee considered applications for amnesty in accordance with the provisions of the 1995 Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act.

Fleishman and Farber both draw on Aeschylus’ Oresteia from a particular “post-TRC” perspective. Farber’s focus is on the confrontation between Klytemnestra and Elektra. The entire action of MoLoRa is enclosed within the framework of a TRC hearing, where Elektra has come to hear the testimony of her mother Klytemnestra—the only white character in the play—who she witnessed brutally murdering her father Agamemnon when she was a child. Through the confrontation between mother and daughter, perpetrator and victim, Farber portrays the brutal human rights violations that the various TRC hearings brought to light.

In her stage descriptions, she instructs that the action should be set in “a bare hall or room—much like the drab and simple venues in which most of the testimonies were heard during the course of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation

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3 See http://www.fas.org/irp/world/rsa/act95_034.htm. The term “ubuntu” is a Nguni word referring to “humaneness”. Wilson discusses how in the TRC process the language of reconciliation became synonymous with the term “ubuntu” (Wilson, 2001: 9-13).
Commission” (2). Klytemnestra and Elektra sit behind two tables with microphones. In between the tables stands a raised stage on which the story will be enacted. The chorus of women—Xhosa singers from the Nqoko Cultural Group—sit to the back of the performance area and the audience is located at the front. Through these seating arrangements, chorus and audience are incorporated as witnesses to the hearing. The actors face the audience when they speak.

During their testimonies, Elektra and Klytemnestra step onto the raised stage, into the performance space, to re-enact fragments from the past. This use of the metatheatrical device of the play-within-the-play points to the theatrical nature of the TRC hearings, hearings that, as Catherine M. Cole observes, were highly performative events in terms of their “theatrical and dramatic emotional displays, improvisational story-telling, singing, weeping, and ritualistic lighting of candles” (2007: 167, 174). The hearings were held on raised platforms in churches, town halls and community centres throughout the country, which “the TRC toured like a travelling road show” (Cole, 2007: 172). They staged confrontations between victims and perpetrators in front of an audience that reached far beyond those present in the various venues, since not only were proceedings published within the papers, but many hearings could be witnessed live on radio and television. Victims and perpetrators, then, were heard by the nation at large. Cole explains that it was largely because of their performative nature that the TRC’s live hearings were so “affective, and consequently, they were effective in facilitating, however imperfectly, a transition from a racist, totalitarian state to a non-racial democracy” (179). Richard A. Wilson is less optimistic and questions their actual effect on the nation at large. Based on research on the TRC’s impact on the African townships of the Vaal region to the North of Johannesburg, he argues that “for all their media coverage, TRC hearings were
often little more than a symbolic and ritualized performance with a weak impact on vengeance in urban townships” (2001: 227).

Farber’s and Fleishman’s plays not only point to the performative nature of the TRC hearings, but also to the role of narrative within these hearings. As its name implies, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was intended to achieve reconciliation by uncovering the truth about the past and thus constructing a shared memory. From a post-structuralist perspective, as Rosemary Jane Jolly notes, such an appeal to a “shared memory” and to “truth” may be understood to assume the naïve wish to legitimate a single master narrative and impose an official history (Jolly, 2001: 701). However, Jolly finds that the terms “shared memory” and “truth” should not be understood as some monolithic version of the past, but as a heterogeneous construction open to continuous debate. This is primarily the case, she argues, because the TRC composed its narrative out of a wide range of stories by victims and perpetrators who were allowed to tell their story in their own words, rather than being interrogated by committee members. According to Jolly, this story-telling aspect meant that the TRC ritualised “that which can be counted on to resist closure—narrative”, and

The very excess of this ritual—that is, its surplus of meaning beyond the mechanics of secular and legal concepts of violation, testimony, proof, confession, judgement, punishment, financial compensation, even the truths the commission itself seeks to verify—serves its mandate of contributing substantially to the creation of South Africa’s new democracy. (Jolly 2001: 709-710)

Of course, the narrative about the nation’s trauma inevitably remains fractured. Anthony Holiday states, for example, that since the TRC restricted itself to the human rights violations that were committed between 1 March
In Farber and Fleishman this storytelling aspect is dramatised in the characters’ insistence on telling their stories, in conveying their subjective truths as they choose to. A good example from Fleishman is when Clytemnestra uses the form of a fairy tale to tell Orestes about Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia, starting with “Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a weak and wicked king” (28). In Farber, Elektra confronts Klytemnestra with the power she now holds as the one who is free to speak, as the one who can determine and control what is told: “With which of your evils shall I begin my recital?”, she says, “With which shall I end it?” (5). Because of course, stories do end and, giving her play wider relevance than the particular context of South Africa, Farber explains how the “ash” of the title MoLoRa refers to this finitude:

Our story begins with Orestes returning home with a tin full of ash. It is the state from which we all come, and—from the concentration camps of Europe; the ruins of Baghdad, Palestine, Northern Ireland and Rwanda…to the ash around the fire after the storytelling is done…it is a state to which we must all humbly return. (Director’s note, unpublished)

**Breaking the cycle of revenge**

In Farber’s MoLoRa, performative and narrative devices together construct a story that metaphorically represents how,

1960 and 5 December 1993, the mass violence that occurred in the transition period afterwards has not been adequately dealt with (in Coetzee and Nutall, 1998: 46). Not only has only a small section of the truth been uncovered, it is also important to recognise that the past that the TRC, constructed was, as Brent Harris says, constructed discursively. The possible implications of this is illustrated by Harris’s reference to a hearing in 1996, when Teddy Williams recounted the sexual abuse of female recruits by ANC camp commanders in Angola but was asked to “confine yourself to the things that have happened to you and what you did” (Harris, 2000: 129).
as Farber says, “like Elektra, countless South Africans came to live as ‘servants in the Halls of their Father’s house’” (director’s note). The audience hears Elektra testify about the torture she suffered by the hands of her mother, for example with the “Wet Bag Method”, used by South African security police to torture political activists and graphically demonstrated at TRC hearings (25). They even see the torture performed when Klytemnestra stuffs a cloth into her mouth and burns her with cigarettes. Clearly the audience is to understand Elektra as a victim of apartheid. During the interrogation—which, so the stage descriptions instruct, Elektra endures like a political resistance fighter—Klytemnestra quotes from Genesis the curse that Ham’s father Noah places upon Ham’s son Canaan: “Cursed be your children. The servants of servants shall they be unto their brethren” (Farber 11-12; Gen. 9:25). Ellen van Wolde discusses how this episode was often used as a biblical legitimization of apartheid theology, understanding the Africans as the descendents of Ham and, therefore, a people destined to be a servant-people (Van Wolde 2001: 13-14). Seeing the suffering Elektra has had to endure enacted on stage, the audience is led to understand why Elektra would feel that “if the guilty pay not with blood for blood—then we are nothing but a history without a future” (6).

For Fleishman’s Electra the future similarly demands revenge. She too is scarred by years of abuse and imprisonment; she too believes that “only violence can save us” (19). Even Orestes, who desperately tries to convince his sister of the need to break the cycle of revenge, is eventually

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5 The wet bag method consisted of tying a man down and placing a wet bag over his face to suffocate him. See, of example, the 2006 amnesty report “South Africa, Briefing for the Committee Against Torture: www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/ngos/AI-SouthAfrica.pdf
driven to kill, first Aegisthus and then his own mother Clytemnestra. Both playwrights show that violence begets violence and dramatise Nietzsche’s warning that “Whoever fights monsters should take care that in the process he does not become a monster” (Nietzsche, 1966: 98).

Farber’s Klytemnestra knows this danger well; she knows it from her own experience and therefore urges her children that “Nothing—nothing is written./ Do not choose to be me. The hounds that avenge all murder will forever hunt you down” (55). But her warning seems in vain, for in what is arguably the most tragic moment of the play, Orestes faces his mother, ready to strike her, crying in rage and pain: “YOU HAVE MADE ME WHAT I AM!” (56). His outcry articulates one of the main difficulties that arose in the confrontations that the TRC hearings staged, because as Jeremy Sarkin explains, the distinction between perpetrator and victim was often blurred and some people were both perpetrator and victim at the same time (82). Fleishman and Farber underline this difficulty, most effectively perhaps in their portrayal of Clytemnestra/Klytemnestra as both an abuser and a victim of abuse. In Fleishman, she talks about the loss of her daughter Iphigenia and about the shame she felt when Agamemnon—portrayed here not as a noble king torn but as a brutish tyrant—brought his concubine Cassandra into her house. In Farber, she tells Elektra how she first met Agamemnon “the day he opened up my first husband and ripped out his guts. He tore this—my first born from my breast. Then holding the child by its new ankles—he smashed its tiny head against a rock. Then took me for his wife” (22).

Clytemnestra/Klytemnestra has her own stories to tell.

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6 In Aeschylus, this painful episode in Clytemnestra’s personal history remains unmentioned and unacknowledged.
In Fleishman’s tragedy, like Aeschylus’, Orestes and Electra murder Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but Farber’s story has a different outcome. Already early on in the play, despite the many accusations and shouts of hatred, some hope for reconciliation is expressed when Elektra and Klytemnestra both attempt to see each other’s humanity. It is significant, for example, that despite her deep feelings of revenge, Elektra acknowledges her mother’s hurt: “I see your heart mama./ I know it hurts” (19). And that Klytemnestra, though hesitantly and quite euphemistically, does express some remorse “I am not so exceedingly glad at the deeds I have done…” (20). Aegisthus (here Ayesthus, represented by an enormous worker’s uniform hanging on a washing line) is killed, but when Orestes is ready to murder Klytemnestra, the chorus’ singing makes him change his mind, after which he urges Elektra to “walk away. Rewrite this ancient end!” (57) When Elektra, not ready to let go of her vengeance, grabs the axe and runs at Klytemnestra, the chorus overpower her and comfort her as she weeps. The ancient end has been rewritten, because unlike in Aeschylus (and unlike in Fleishman’s reworking of Aeschylus) Farber’s Klytemnestra lives. Also, South Africa’s (his)story of vengeance is rewritten, though residues of vengeance remain:

It falls softly the residue of revenge…like rain.
And we who made the sons and daughters of this Land...Servants in the halls of their forefathers..
We know.
We are still only here by grace alone.
Look now — dawn is coming.
Great chains on the home are falling off.
This house rises up.

7 The chorus is played by members of the Ngqoko Cultural Group, a group of Xhosa women who sing in split tone and use ancient musical instruments (Farber, Director’s note).
For too long it has lain in ash on the ground. (59)
There is no family resolve, no love can be regained here, no forgiveness can be articulated, but the fact that the children help their mother to her feet and let her walk away signals the beginning of the process of forgiveness, a difficult process because, as Farber writes, “notions of a Rainbow Nation gliding effortlessly into forgiveness are absurd” (Director’s note). Farber has her reasons for making the chorus the main agents in breaking the cycle of revenge and starting the process of forgiveness, because according to her: “it was not the gods or deus ex machina that delivered us from ourselves in the years following democracy,” Farber writes, “but the common everyman and woman like Cynthia Ngwenyu who lit the way for us all” (Director’s note).

Of forgiveness and amnesty

Within the context of the TRC, the concept of forgiveness, which Farber refers to here, deserves some closer attention. In its most basic sense, forgiveness is the opposite response to violence from revenge. It is therefore interesting that, though both Fleishman and Farber end their plays on an optimistic note, where revenge gives way to new beginnings, none of their characters explicitly articulate forgiveness. This is especially striking since forgiveness, in itself a very personal and moral concept, came to occupy such a prominent position within the TRC’s political rhetoric of reconciliation. Indeed, the TRC hearings were structured in such a way that

any expression of a desire for revenge would seem out of place. Virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation were so loudly and roundly applauded that emotions of revenge, hatred and bitterness were rendered unacceptable, an ugly intrusion on a peaceful, healing process. (Wilson 2001: 17)
It was largely because of the influence of Church leaders, in particular the chairman of the commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, that legal rhetoric became obscured with Christian understandings of forgiveness. Though forgiveness was important within the language of the TRC, the amnesty arrangement—often understood as its institutionalisation and collectivisation—was never directly linked to forgiveness, but to truth. Despite Tutu’s emphasis on forgiveness (evident in the title of his memoir No Future Without Forgiveness (1999), it was truth that would pave the way towards future reconciliation. Not only was the TRC was the first truth commission to be given the mandate to grant amnesty to perpetrators, freeing them from civil and criminal prosecution for the rest of their lives, but it was also the first commission that linked amnesty to the uncovering of the truth (Cole, 2007: 174). Amnesty usually suggests collective forgetting of past wrongs and the wish to break clean from the past—indeed in ancient Greek ‘amnesty’ and amnesia are two meanings of same word. In the TRC, however, “amnesty was associated with ‘anamnesis rather than amnesia’ (as quoted in Schaap, 2005: 113). Accordingly, applicants for amnesty were not asked to publicly apologise, express remorse and ask for forgiveness, but solely to state their crimes.

Michael Janover may be right that though amnesty could not amount to a collective act of forgiveness, the process of amnesty did appear to be sustained, at least in part, by wanting to forgive (2007: 115). Still, to refer to forgiveness within the context of political reconciliation is inevitably flawed, because it translocates an essentially a moral and personal discourse to the political realm. The essence of forgiveness, after all, is that one can only forgive on behalf of oneself, not somebody else, let alone groups of people.
According to Derrida, “forgiveness does not, it should never amount to a therapy of reconciliation” (41), because this implies the intervention of a third party within what should essentially be a one-to-one relationship between victim and perpetrator. Within the context of the TRC the inevitable contamination that such interference can have on the concept of forgiveness is clear, for example, from the complaint of some victims who had felt expected, and therefore forced, to forgive their perpetrators. It exemplifies the tension between what Derrida describes as an “unconditional forgiveness” and a “conditional forgiveness proportionate to the recognition of the fault” (34-35). Janover finds Derrida’s idea of pure forgiveness as exceeding such “instrumentalism of politics and ethics, [is] charming and persuasive” in a world “in which forgiveness can be traded and reduced to a mechanism for winning votes or allies a world in which amnesty for former mass murderers and tyrants can be decided by political ideals” (2007: 228). On the other hand, even when forgiveness is released from such political instrumentalism and taken back into the personal and moral realm, it seems difficult to conceive of it as unconditional, for forgiveness is always informed by a complex mixture of personal, social and political factors and therefore never remains secluded in the one-to-one relationship of perpetrator and victim.

Though many felt that the TRC’s amnesty arrangement was the only way to move on towards a democratic future, it has nonetheless been widely debated; a debate that Fleishman dramatizes in the final scene of his play.

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8 See the report on survivors’ perceptions of the TRC by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation between 7 August 1997 and 1 February 1998: www.csvr.org.za/papers/papkhul.htm. The victims’ complaint also points to (the failure of) what Derrida describes as another mediating institution: language, which mediates in the sense that it states forgiveness in order to bring about the act of forgiveness itself (see Derrida, 2001: 42).
Where Farber’s entire play is framed as a TRC hearing, in Fleishman the reference to the TRC only comes at the end, when the question is posed whether Orestes and Electra should be convicted for their matricide, or granted amnesty instead. Among the furies in gas masks that begin to hound them are Tyndareus and Leda, Clytemnestra’s parents, two characters that do not figure in Aeschylus. Fleishman introduces another generation involved in and affected by the violence. In Euripides’ Orestes, where Tyndareus does play a prominent role, he threatens to encourage the citizens of Argos to stone Orestes to death. In Fleishman, however, despite his grief and anger about his daughter’s death, he stops the mob from stoning Orestes and Electra, persuading them that “we seek not private vengeance here, but public retribution./ Justice will win out./ Our time will come” (37). He urges to replace vengeance with legal action, but his call is not answered. Instead, the court herald announces:

....we stand today upon an historic bridge
between a past of deep division and discord,
and a brighter future of peace and prosperity for all.
There is a need for understanding, not for vengeance,
For forgiveness not retaliation,
For humanity not for victimization.
Our learned judges, seek to reconcile all differences,
To set aside all enmity and hatred,
To build anew our fragile lives in Argos.
They decree, therefore, that amnesty shall be granted
In respect of acts, omissions and offences
Committed in the cause of conflicts of the past,
Where a full disclosure of the facts are made,
Lest we forget our brutal heritage. (38)
The lines that the herald speaks are almost identical to those of the 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Act. Indeed, the final image of the play suggests a “brighter future of peace and prosperity for all”, with the mob who were about to stone Electra and Orestes now holding them above the ground in triumphant adoration. Despite Tyndareus’ outrage at the decision to grant amnesty to his daughter’s murderers, the final image presents the TRC’s amnesty arrangement as an imperfect, but necessary tool for democracy.

In the rhetoric of the TRC, amnesty was repeatedly linked to a notion of transitional or restorative justice. When asked to defend the amnesty provisions, Desmond Tutu, for example, argued that the notion of a retributive justice is largely Western and that: “The African understanding is far more restorative, not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew” (quoted in Minow 1998: 81). However, Tyndareus’ objections—that “this amnesty pollutes our law” and that it is a “travesty of justice”—reflect those of many victims of apartheid who felt that the amnesty provisions denied them the right to seek judicial redress (39). Family members of the murdered anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, for example, together with other survivors of murdered activists, filed a lawsuit against the TRC, claiming that the amnesty arrangement was unconstitutional. The Constitutional Court rejected the claim and ruled that amnesty in exchange for truth did not violate the constitution, nor the Geneva Convention (Minow, 1998: 56).

Conclusion

The lawsuit of the Biko family and the debate about the TRC’s amnesty arrangement well illustrate the inevitable clash in post-conflict societies between different understandings and different demands of justice, differences that are difficult to
reconcile. The final tragedy of the Oresteia, the Euminides, dramatises a similar reconciliatory process between the demands of the past and those of the future. The trilogy culminates in the celebration of Athena’s judicial court, but the final reconciliation is not achieved by Athena’s lawful judgement, but by her power to convince the furies to take their place within the new Athens as the Euminides, the Kindly Ones. They are not banished, nor are their passions of vengeance denied. Rather, in their new function, they will embody “that ultimate sanction of fear which underlies the new order, as it dominated the old” (Vellacott in Aeschylus: 20). Athena’s mediation—and perhaps it is possible to draw an analogy here with the mediation of the TRC—signifies the inauguration of a new social and political order; one in which the old is not simply discarded, but reconciled with the new. However, just as Athena’s mediation is imperfect, so the TRC’s mediation entailed sacrifice and loss. And just as the new order that Athena establishes remains precarious, so post-apartheid South Africa finds itself in a similarly precarious and fragile state. The Oresteia dramatises this complexity. As J.G. Finlayson states, rather than simply instructing how reconciliation can and should be achieved,

It is as if Aeschylus is telling us that justice, reason, and lawfulness are not established facts that need merely be recognised for what they are by an act of theoretical contemplation but ongoing practical tasks within the new social order, and reconciliation between the different ethical

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9 As Christopher Rocco explains, the “solution” of the Eumenides is achieved through Athena’s clever manipulative rhetoric and entails the hierarchization of values (the subordination of the Furies to the Olympians, of barbarian to Greek, of female to male), so that “the democratic rhetoric of equality, reason and consent legitimates the institutionalization of exclusionary polarities into systematized hierarchies, rather than creating a truly democratic order” (1997).
powers, between citizens and their new institutions is not a state already attained but an ongoing process. (1999: 516)

Importantly, the furies not only represent the spirit of revenge, but also the imperative to remember evil. As Booth argues, in societies undergoing the transition to democracy this “weight of the claims of the past and their clash with those of the present and future, are most visible” (777-778). We may wonder what has happened to the furies of revenge in post-apartheid South Africa. Though the dominant discourse of forgiveness denied them an official place within the new democratic “rainbow” nation, they undoubtedly still roam under the surface, haunting perpetrators and victims and fighting their fight against forgetting. Fleishman and Farber dramatisate the start of what will be a long process of reconciliation and emphasise the demands of the future, but they also seem intent on helping the furies in their fight to remember the past. Their plays bring the TRC back to life and in so doing they re-activate (and in a sense rescue) the stories that the TRC once uncovered, but that now, almost a decade after its final report was published, have acquired an almost archival status.10 Because as Fleishman states, theatre can re-enact and thereby keep the past alive within the present, theatre can make absences present. Most importantly, perhaps, theatre can connect the past to the yet unfulfilled future.11

10 Not that the TRC process ever officially reached a point of closure. Though its final report was published in 1998, many of its recommendations to the government (about legally following up on those perpetrators who did not apply for amnesty or were rejected and about implanting a policy of reparation with which to compensate former victims) have yet to be put into practice.

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Art in Interculturality

The arts are a domain of experimentation and heightened sensitivity. Traditionally, art is considered politically indifferent, a position of “disinterested” distance from the turmoil of the political world. Much contemporary art belies this distancing. The discussions of this session focus on practices of art that are strongly and explicitly political, intervening in the ills of cultural defensiveness in the face of migration.

Noa Roei
Moulding Resistance: Aesthetics and Politics in the Struggle of Bil’in Against the Wall

Jesús Carrillo
On this side of Bollywood: the politics of cinema in the global arena.

Maaike Bleeker
Limitid Visibility

Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez
Global Art And Politics Of Mobility: (Trans)Cultural Shifts in the international contemporary art-system
Moulding Resistance: Aesthetics and Politics in the Struggle of Bil’in Against the Wall

Noa Roei

Abstract

The exhibition “Fence Art” at the Minshar for Art Gallery in Tel Aviv (March 2006) displayed huge sculpture-like objects: a locked iron cage, segments of rusty pipes, and an enormous black viper made of cloth are just a few examples. The sculptures were originally made by residents of the Palestinian village Bil’in for the village’s weekly demonstrations against the construction of Israel’s separation wall on their land. In this paper I examine the role of the sculptures, both in their original context, as tools of a popular resistance movement, and in their secondary context, displayed in a white cube gallery in Tel Aviv. With the help of the theory of Jacques Rancière, I touch upon the concepts of aesthetics and politics as those come into play in Bil’in’s struggle against a paradoxical type of forced migration, where people are separated from their lands without leaving their homes.
On this side of Bollywood: the politics of cinema in the global arena.

Jesús Carrillo

Abstract
This text, produced for the catalogue of Pedro Ortuño’s exhibition “Fire within, calm without”, analyses the transitions undergone in the relationship between cinema and Indian national identity from a postcolonial to a global context, as embodied in the so-called Bollywood movies. Diaspora is not anymore a marginal and passive element of culture, but a key factor in the definition of a new kind of “cultural nationalism” founded on sentimental values which take place and are reproduced as consumer goods in the global market. But the dissemination of Bollywood films and Bollywood iconographies worldwide does not only reflect the impact of migration within traditional national imaginaries; it is an instance of a new global regime of identities which overflows Indian communities and translates the conflicts and negotiations involved in contemporary societies.
Limited Visibility

Maaike Bleeker

Abstract

In my paper I explore some uncanny connections between Tanja Ostojic’s o.T at the exhibition EuroPARTS. Aktuelle Kunst in Europa (Vienna, 2005) and Ibrahim Quraishi’s version of Mozart’s Die Entführung aus dem Serai (premiere 19 September 2006, Burgtheater Vienna). Both use a restaging of a classic of European culture to engage with the ways in which we legitimize behaviour in global space. Both deal with how culturally specific modes of looking mediate in what is considered to be ‘self’ and what is ‘other’. Both use staging as a means to engage with the here and now of their audience and to destabilize seemingly self-evident modes of looking. In both cases, theatricality emerges as a communicative affect resulting from destabilization of the binary oppositions that structure and shape what Kaja Silverman terms the ‘dominant fiction’ that is our reality.
Global Art and Politics of Mobility: (Trans)Cultural Shifts within the international contemporary art-system

Joaquín Barriendos Rodríguez

Abstract

This article tackles the relevance that politics of mobility have in the analysis of international contemporary art-system. Despite this inquiry considers the mobility of all those agents who take part in this system (artists, gallery-managers, curators, collectors, etcetera) it chiefly focuses on symbolic mobility of subjectivities, displacements of imaginaries, and transcultural negotiations emerged from the inclusion of cultural diversity within global art-system. The following issues also play an important role in this research: the geopolitics of subjectivity, the representational systems, and the aesthetic legitimating strategies. Therefore, the emphasis of this article is on transcultural conflicts caused by the internationalization of contemporary art, on the one hand, and on epistemological debates raised by the affirmative use of concepts such as hybridization, periphery, marginality and subalternity within globalizing discourses, on the other.

Key words: mobility, internationalization, global art, subjectivity, hybridization, transculturality, border
Moulding Resistance: Aesthetics and Politics in the Struggle of Bil’in Against the Wall

Noa Roei

In March 2006, several huge sculpture-like objects filled the Minshar for Art Gallery in Tel Aviv. Among the objects displayed in the exhibition, titled “Fence Art,” one could find, for instance, a large locked iron cage, a huge metal scale, a fragile scaffold, a tin fence covered with graffiti in Arabic, mirrors with inscriptions in red paint, segments of rusty pipes, cavalier armour made of barrels, and an enormous black viper made of cloth. The sculptures, processed and worn-out found objects, conjured up a hallucinatory narrative. Walking between them felt like walking within a riddle. The riddle was only solved in a small side niche in the gallery, where one could view a series of photographs spread out on a wall. The photographs documented the objects in action in their original context: people sitting in the large cage, carrying the black snake or the coffins, standing inside the barrels. Together with the accompanying explanatory captions, what unfolded
materially as well as visually was the story of the Bil’in demonstrations.

Bil’in is a small Palestinian village of 1,700 residents located in the West Bank, west of Ramallah, and east of the Modi’in Elite settlement. Bil’in is under civilian control of the Palestinian authority, but under military control of the Israeli security forces (both army and border police). As many other Palestinian villages, Bil’in has been suffering from the loss of land to Israeli settlements throughout the last four decades, and is now facing dire impoverishment as most of its agricultural lands are located west of the newly erected separation wall on their lands.¹ The wall, a combination of barbed wire and concrete, includes locked gates, and, officially, the villagers that can prove land ownership are allowed to cross it and reach their lands. In practice, this proves to be almost impossible. As a result, the villagers of Bil’in have turned into a special type of migrants, distanced from their lands without leaving their homes.²

During the last four years, the residents of Bil’in have been fighting against the imposition of the wall on various fronts. Under the leadership of the Bil’in Popular Committee

¹ “Separation wall” is not the official name for the construction. It is officially called “Security Fence” by Israeli parties and “Apartheid Wall” by Palestinian parties. My choice to use “Separation Wall” or simply “Wall” throughout this paper is based on a web research by Richard Rogers and Anat Ben David from the University of Amsterdam, who studied the distribution of the different appellations of the construction on grassroots and official web communities. See (Rogers and Ben David, 2005) at http://www.govcom.org/publications/full_list/ben-david_rogers_coming_to_terms_2oct.pdf

² See section “Cases, Advisory Proceedings” on http://www.icj-cij.org for information about the International Criminal Court ruling on the illegality of the route of the wall. The Bil’in village website (www.bilin-village.org) offers a large collection of articles regarding Israeli court hearings and rulings on the topic.
Against the Wall, the villagers filed numerous appeals with the Israeli Supreme Court, some of which are still deliberated in court at present. Additionally, since February 2005 the village organizes weekly demonstrations, which proved to be quite successful, and have led to two international conferences, hosted in Bil’in, on the subject of popular resistance. The weekly demonstrations include villagers as well as Israeli and international supporters, and consist of a march from the village houses to the trajectory of the wall. The demonstrations are decidedly non-violent, but Israeli security forces repeatedly use violent means to stop or pre-empt the demonstrations.³

Each weekly demonstration has a specific theme, and the various themes so far can be divided into three groups. The first type of demonstration is thematic with regard to its participants: children demonstration, women demonstration, handicapped demonstration, and so forth. The second type of demonstration is dedicated to relevant historical or contemporary events, such as the 2006 FIFA world cup, the worker’s day on May 1st, the fights between militants in Gaza, and the memorial day for Jasser Arafat. The theme of the third type of demonstrations is aimed at emphasizing the dire consequences of the construction of the separation wall for the village of Bil’in. In these demonstrations, demonstrators chained themselves to olive trees, or locked themselves inside an iron cage, as a way to impede the construction of the wall.

³ The army uses excessive force to break down the demonstrations, including tear gas, grenades, rubber bullets and noise ammunition, as well as collective punishments such as curfews, night arrests and the denial of permits to work in Israel. At times, village youth throw stones at the soldiers. Nevertheless, the demonstrators focus on non-violent resistance as a major component of their approach.
Other demonstrations of this sort are more conceptual, such as those in which demonstrators wore black viper dolls around their neck to symbolize the suffocation that the wall causes. The sculptures that were presented in the “Fence Art” exhibition at the Minshar for Art gallery in March 2006 were all part of these weekly demonstrations.

In this paper, I will examine the role of the sculptures, both in their original context, as material parts of a performance of resistance at the border as well as against that border, and in their secondary context, displayed in a white cube gallery in Tel Aviv. For this purpose, I will draw on the work of Jacques Rancière, specifically on his unorthodox definition of aesthetics and politics. Rancière’s theory will help me to outline two central issues that are at stake. Firstly, I will analyse how Bil’in’s creative popular resistance against a fenced “inner” migration allows for a new form of political subjectivity to emerge. Second, I will show how the sculptures operate as aesthetic objects and political arguments both at home, on Bil’in ground, and away, in the space of the gallery. An additional goal of this paper, especially in the context of this Migratory Politics Encuentro, is to raise awareness to the struggle of Bil’in and its neighbouring villages, which have not received full attention in international Western media.4

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4 See the village website, at www.bilin-village.org, for a large compilation of images and texts on the subject.
Politics on the move I: Redistributing Visibilities

The weekly demonstrations of Bil’in receive an unusual amount of media attention within Israel, when compared to the many other villages that suffer similar circumstances, such as Biddu, Beit Surik, Beit Ulla, and Kufar Kadum. Brief reports about the demonstrations often appear in the mainstream media. These reports usually focus on how many demonstrators and soldiers were injured or detained, emphasizing the violent aspect of the demonstrations. Other reports in mainstream newspapers and TV channels are concerned with the related legal trials, which have to do with either the demonstrations (such as two cases in which claims of soldiers against the supposedly violent protestors were found to be untrue) or, more importantly, with the villagers’ court cases against the trajectory of the wall through their agricultural lands. At alternative news websites, the village receives special attention as well: the village’s mode of peaceful protest and the army’s aggressive response are described time and again by eye witnesses. The Bil’in demonstrations also take up an extensive part of the village’s Wikipedia entry, and are debated constantly by bloggers who either approve of or reject the villagers’ actions (Asheri 2007). This goes to show that the village has been successful in attracting attention from all sides of the political spectrum in Israel.

Those involved with organizing the demonstrations agree that their success has much to do with the creative aspect of the weekly events. Abdullah Abu Rahmeh, coordinator of the Popular Committee of Bil’in, focuses on two aspects of this creativity: innovation and non-violence (Abu Rahmeh 2007; Daraghmeh 2005). Mohammed Khatib, also a member of the Popular Committee and the mind behind many of the sculptures, emphasizes their function within the
demonstrations. In addition to delaying the construction of the wall and getting a political message across, the artifacts attract people, he says:

> even from the village people started asking what we are planning for the next demonstrations. Israelis are also coming for this reason... Every time there is something new that attracts the media. It is much more interesting to publish a photograph of a coffin than another group of people walking and holding signs. We also managed to show the world that we are not violent. The only violence that comes through the photographs is that of the soldiers (quoted in Gilerman 2006; translation mine).

The demonstrations’ creative aspect attracts a large amount of supporters as well as media coverage. The sculptures used in the demonstrations help to reduce the elements that would minimize interest – violence and repetitiveness – to a minimum. The sculptures have an effect in three directions: inwardly, to keep demonstrators motivated and to direct the energy of the youth away from violence; forwardly, towards the soldiers and constructors who face the demonstrators, so as to change their conception of the demonstrations and to keep their use of force minimal, and the disruption of the construction works maximal; and outwardly, to the media, to maintain their interest in the case of Bil'in. Mass demonstrations are so common that they have become obsolete, worn-out of context; hence, adding *entertainment* to the equation seems to be the key to media success.

But, above all, the sculptures of the Bil'in demonstrations have brought about a new generic definition of what political resistance means in the Palestinian context. This, I believe, is the deeper cause for the demonstrations’ media success. The common image of Palestinians as an occupied people is that of fighters and/or victims. Palestinians appear in the media either in the shape of a great mass of
young men filling up the streets in demonstrations and funerals, shooting guns in the air or shouting slogans, or as individual women, children or old men, telling helpless stories of suffering and loss. The first type of image brings home the potential of violence to the viewer; the second bears witness to a victimhood that may bring about a sense of guilt or indifference. Both do not involve or affect the viewer within their world; whether they raise outrage, pity or indignation, such media reports emphasize the distance between the fates of the ones who are either in or out of the occupation narrative.5

The sculptures distance the villagers of Bil’in from these repeated notions and from their conventional roles. The demonstrators become a part of the art world as well as part of the larger Palestinian community, and by way of appropriating the art world, their political claims acquire a different tone. This conceptual shift in the politics of resistance can best be explained thorough Jacques Rancière’s conceptualization of aesthetics and politics. Rancière focuses on French history, but his theory proves to be most relevant for comprehending the politics at play in the Bil’in demonstrations.

For Rancière, “politics” is first of all a battle about perceptible or sensible material. It aims for the rearrangement of the existing “distribution of the sensible,” that is, the laws that prescribe what can be heard and seen in a specific political and social constellation. A politics of recognition is central to Rancière’s theory, but not in the sense that identity politics gives this term; his is a more radical approach. For politics,

5 The demonstrations that are thematized according to their participants (women only, children only, and so forth) also aim to break with the common media images of Palestinian struggle, but they will not be discussed in detail in the scope of this paper.
Rancière tells us, “does not simply presuppose the rupture of the ‘normal’ distribution of positions between the one who exercises power and the one subject to it. It also requires a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions ‘proper’ to such classifications” (2001:4). In other words, For Rancière the essence of political struggle does not consist of gathering people into communities and fighting for the rights of these communities. Rather, it consists of exposing subjectivities that challenge existing social delineations and hierarchies.

Rancière contrasts politics [la politique] with police [la police]. He defines the police not as a strong-arm repressive force, but as “a form of intervention which prescribes what can be seen and what cannot be seen, what can be said and what cannot be said” (1998:28). In his “Ten Theses on Politics” (2001), Rancière suggests that the manner in which the police interferes with public space does not lie in interpellation (“hey! You there!”) but rather in the regulation of what will and will not be seen (“Move along! There is nothing to see here!”). Political action is defined in opposition to this prescription of the police, and consists of “transforming this space of ‘moving-along’ into a space for the appearance of a subject” (2001:9). For Rancière, politics and police are thus in constant struggle:

The essence of the police is to be a partition of the sensible characterized by the absence of a void or a supplement: society consists of groups dedicated to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised, in modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these

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6 Interpellation is a concept developed by Louis Althusser as part of his theory of ideological state apparatuses. Althusser exemplifies his concept with the example where, by responding to the police hail “hey, you there!” an individual is turned into a subject of the state. Rancière’s “move along, there’s nothing to see here!” responds to Althusser’s well-known illustration and offers an alternative version of the function of the police in the state apparatus.
places. In this fittingness of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for a void. It is this exclusion of what “there is not” that is the police-principle at the heart of statist practices. The essence of politics, then, is to disturb this arrangement by supplementing it with a part of the no-part identified with the community as a whole… Politics is first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable (2001:9; emphasis mine).

Politics, by definition, must break with the social order, by way of creating subjects and scenes of dialogue that did not exist beforehand. But how does this take place, and how can the policed “distribution of the sensible” be remobilized, redistributed? Rancière uses the rebellion of the workers in nineteenth-century France as his prime example. In many of his writings, primarily in Nights of Labour (1989), Rancière suggests that whenever workers (or other minority groups) achieve a wider recognition for their social rights and contributions, they simultaneously receive a reaffirmation of the existing power structure, and a retrenchment of their position in its terms (Deranty 2003:152). However, the nineteenth-century workers transgressed and subverted this “order of things” by claiming the right to be something other than workers: to be recognized as poets. While their social status demanded that they work in the day and sleep in the night, these workers distributed their time differently and transgressed the type of their accepted and expected labour. This, according to Rancière, rather than the more heroic tales of the time, was the means through which workers claimed the right to a meaningful voice beyond the constraints of their social destiny (Deranty 2003: 152).

The worker emancipation movement disrupted the organizational principle of society and made workers visible as social partners, through their appropriation of the tools of the bourgeois (Deranty 2003:151). The unsettling effect that the
Bil’in popular resistance movement has caused can be understood in the same light. “The particular feature of political dissensus”, Rancière tells us, “is... the ones making visible the fact that they belong to a shared world the other does not see” (Rancière 2001:10). By writing poetry, the French workers made visible the fact that they belong to a shared world with others – the upper social classes – with whom the art of poetry was more readily matched. The Bil’in inhabitants mould sculptures in part as a means to reach a similar goal.

The space that the workers opened up in their poetry writing is a space that created situations for speech and dialogue that did not exist previously (Deranty 2003: 146). Rancière names this space le politique: the space where two principles of visibility, la police (policing the distribution of the sensible) and la politique (contesting and transforming the existing distribution) confront each other. This confrontation can lead to a recognition of dominated individuals as speaking subjects (in a different world, previously unseen), rather than as mere rebels (against the world as seen and known), and to a shift in the accepted positions of power of the parties involved. Rancière summarizes this aspect in “Ten Theses on Politics” when he writes,

If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths... And the politics of these categories has always consisted in re-qualifying these places... of getting themselves to be seen or heard as speaking subjects... It has consisted in making what was unseen visible; in getting what was only audible as noise to be heard as speech; in demonstrating to be a feeling of shared “good” or “evil” what had appeared merely as an expression of pleasure or pain. (2001:10)
When the case of Bil’in is examined from Rancière’s perspective, the demonstrators’ use of artistic form becomes more than a media attention-grabber. The sculpture-objects become the tools through which the clear “division of labour” between the oppressors and the oppressed collapse, and the existing “distribution of the sensible” is reconceived. The demonstrators break through the boundaries of their social identities, as they manifest themselves as occupied people and as free artists at the same time. They assert their right to belong to a world that includes leisure time for contemplation; they assert their right to voice their claims not only as occupied people but also as men and women of the world. They assert their right not only to suffer, but also to have fun. Their appeal to the basic right of keeping their land is thus empowered by a political move that asserts their right to appeal on as equals in the first place. In this respect, too, the sculptures effectively work in three directions: inwards to the demonstrators, forwards to the soldiers and construction workers, and outwards to the media and to us viewers watching from home. In all directions, they rupture and “redistribute” what is visible and sayable in the confrontations between Palestinians inhabitants and Israeli security forces, as they bring into view notions that are not connected with the policed version of Palestinians under occupation: leisure, creativity, artistic vision, modernity, universality and freedom. According to Rancière,

Political argument is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world where the argument could count as argument, addressed by a subject qualified to argue, upon an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and to hear the argument that he or she “normally” has no reason to either see or hear. (2001:11)
The Bil’in sculpture-objects are a political argument in this vein. They overturn a denial of recognition, and create, every week, a possible world where the colonizing parties are required to see the colonized in a light that they normally would have no reason to see. By way of reconfiguring the sensibilities of this overexposed struggle, the sculptures demonstrate the equality of the subjects that made them with the subjects that view them on the other side of the wall, an equality that is anything but taken for granted in the context of Israel and Palestine.

Politics on the move II: From Bil’in to Tel Aviv

During the demonstrations, the sculptures and the demonstrators merge. At times, that is as simple as people carrying the constructions in their hands or around their necks. At other times, the event is more theatrical: a good example is one demonstration, in which several protestors were covered with white cloth, their necks surrounded with hanging ropes that were attached to a metal frame held up by their peers. There are also cases in which flesh, iron and earth interact more intimately. These result in happenings that involve the active participation of every body. On one occasion, for instance, demonstrators chained themselves to olive trees that were marked for uprooting because they are in the way of the route of the wall. On another, demonstrators locked themselves in an iron cage that was firmly attached to the ground, blocking the road that leads the bulldozers to the trajectory of the wall. One of the most creative demonstrations involved demonstrators that were tethered to the ground by the metal foundations of a barbed wire fence. While the soldiers were busy taking the fence apart, breaking the metal cage open, or cutting the chains loose from the trees, they found themselves involved in a bizarre happening, related to the situation but at the same time extraneous to it because of
its theatricality of which they were not part. These were performances of displacement, where the disputed borderland turned into a game site, and the opposing parties had their identities disturbed.

All this, clearly, did not repeat itself in the Minshar for Art gallery in Tel Aviv. There, the sculptures were detached from the people who built them, from the event of the demonstration, from the ground and the flesh that were an integral part of their performance in Bil‘in. Gallery visitors that came, willingly, to see “Fence Art” took the place of the border police, and they experienced the sculptures in the sterilized white cubic space of the gallery, as static “enigmatic sculptural objects” (Tzur 2006). While the primary performance of the sculptures was documented in a side space in the gallery, the sculptures themselves were presented as stripped from their symbolic, practical, and most importantly political functions. The textured surfaces of the sculptures, ragged from the confrontations on the field, received the audience’s complete attention.

The sculptures’ relocation – their “migration” to the gallery space – clearly affected their performance. In the space of the gallery, the sculptures did not move, they did not disobey the law, nor did they merge and clash with the living bodies that walked around them. They remained alien, essentially differentiated from their surroundings. Museums and galleries are framed as spaces where life holds still, and so the sculptures’ new and somewhat subdued performance suited their new environment. Nevertheless, while the dissentient quality of the sculptures was tamed, their poignant political character was not entirely lost, either. It was simply redirected to the artistic sphere. The gallery space called for a conceptual discussion on the significance of the sculptures, and brought their volatile identity to the fore. If, in the field,
the Bil’in villagers transgressed the order of things by being something other than workers, in the gallery, I contend, the Bil’in sculptures subverted this order by being something other than art. Once more, Rancière’s theorization of aesthetics and politics may help to clarify this proposition.

Similarly to his definition of politics, Rancière’s definition of aesthetics is atypical. Rancière uses the term in two different senses. The first, broader sense refers to the aesthetic dimension of the political experience (Guénoun and Kavanagh 2000:11). Far removed from Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the aestheticisation of politics in the age of the masses, for Rancière the political is aesthetic in principle. He describes the aesthetic as “the attempt of reconfiguring the partitions of time and space” to bring new forms into vision (Rancière 2005:13). Consequently, his notion of the political has an inherent aesthetic dimension to it, as it creates a renewed perception of the relationships between the sayable, the see-able and the doable in a social reality (Guénoun and Kavanagh 2000:17). The French workers’ revolution was an aesthetic revolution in this sense; the politics of the Bil’in demonstrations, too, are intrinsically aesthetic, as they involve a re-organization of the visible within the terms of Israeli-Palestinian politics.

The second, more narrow sense of the term “aesthetics” in Rancière’s writing refers to “a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts” (2004,10). This implies not a theory of art; nor is it an equivalent term to the domain of art. Rather, aesthetics is a regime of visibility that regards the arts, a specific configuration of the art domain based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products. However, while “[t]he word aesthetics... strictly refers to the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art,” (2004:22) an art object can only be an aesthetic object when it is “something else than art,” posing
as what Rancière describes as a “form of life” (2002:137). Evidently, this definition is contradictory and somewhat abstract, and as Rancière himself admits, it eliminates any pragmatic criterion for distinguishing art from non-art. It results instead in a focus on the thought that art contains and engenders.

Aesthetics in the broad sense (relating to the distribution of the sensible) and aesthetic in the narrow sense (referring to a specific regime of art) are very much related. In fact, Rancière juxtaposes the French workers’ revolution – an aesthetic revolution in his terms – with a wider aesthetic revolution that “overthrew the representational regime of the arts” (2005:14). The representational regime of art, according to Rancière, is a system that distinguishes art from life, and differentiates between artworks according to forms, genres, mediums, and so forth. It defines proper ways for making and judging art (2004: 91). This regime of the arts is pragmatic in nature, and privileges substance over essence. It is the frame through which many art theories and histories function. The aesthetic regime, on the other hand, approaches art objects from a conceptual point of view and relates to their mode of being, extricated from their ordinary connections (2004:22).

The way in which the “distribution of the sensible” takes place within the representative regime of art – including the distinction between various types of art, as well as between art and non-art – is essentially the same as the policing of the social order that takes place in the larger world. Consequently, the way in which the aesthetic regime opposes this configuration – by freeing it from specific rules and hierarchies – is equivalent to the rearrangement of the sensible that occurs through a political struggle. Aesthetics, both in its narrow and in its broad sense, has an inherent political aspect to it, as it refers to “a specific sphere of experience which
invalidates the ordinary hierarchies incorporated in everyday sensory experience” (Rancière 2005:14). Therefore, within the prism of the aesthetic regime of art, aesthetic art objects accomplish the same task as political actions, that is, reorganize the accepted perceptions of reality (Deranty 2003:137).

During the demonstrations, the sculptures took part in an event that suits Rancière’s broad definition of aesthetics. But they also fit with his narrower definition of the term, to the extent that they can be interpreted as aesthetic art that belongs to a regime of the sensible “that is extricated from its ordinary connection and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power foreign to itself” (Rancière 2004:23). But while the distinction between art and non-art (or, if you will, between aesthetics and politics in the more common use of these terms) is irrelevant to the aesthetic regime as such, I would argue that this distinction – or at least, the questioning of this distinction – remains at the core of the aesthetics and politics of the “Fence Art” exhibition. In Tel Aviv, the sculptures were seemingly staged as unambiguous art objects, in a classic modernist constellation that emphasized their form. They were displayed to an art-educated audience, and invited that audience to examine them through that frame. In spite of this, the exhibition left the audience with no clear answers, because it could only separate, cordon-off but not remove, the sculptures’ preceding functional aspect. The sculptures brought to the fore their

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7 This definition may clarify how, in the aesthetic regime of art, “art is art to the extent that it is something else than art” (Rancière 2002: 137): the aesthetic experience has to do not solely with the art object, but with its thought. Rancière bases this view of aesthetics on Kant, for whom “the aesthetic idea is the supplement to the concept, that aura of associated and indistinct representations that allows the consciously elaborated artistic form to transform itself into a widely appreciated aesthetic form...” (Rancière quoted in Guénoun and Kavanagh 2000:21)
aesthetic quality, their “mode of existence as ‘free’ objects, not the projects of will” (quoted in Guénoun and Kavanagh 2000:22) and at the same time manifested their functional non-artistic aspects. The volatility of the sculptures’ definition, as well as the incessant (and constantly failing) need to define them as art objects or as artefacts of a political struggle, turned into the “thinking” that inhabited the sculptures in the gallery space.

The instability that informs the sculptures’ aesthetic performance can also be seen in the fundamental disagreements that took place during the curatorial process that led to the exhibition. In an interview with art critic Dana Gilerman (2006), the curator, Oded Yedaya, asserted that the sculptures were first and foremost artworks, and that Muhammad Khatib (the maker of most sculptors) is an artist in this respect. However, Khatib himself was opposed to these definitions. He would have preferred the sculptures to appear in close connection with the explanatory material found in the next room, in a sort of a documentary exhibition, rather than separately, and hence aesthetically. Curator and creator also differed with regard to their respective reasons for mounting the exhibition. While Khatib’s sole objective was to get further exposure for Bil’in in the Israeli media, Yedaya also wanted to create an intellectual discussion that would explore the possibilities of the terms “drafted art” and “drafted gallery”. In her article, Gilerman finds the curator’s choice infuriating, “as if the art world found a new toy to adorn itself with,” but only until, having interviewed Khatib, she too came to the conclusion that he works “as a true artist” (2006). The attempt to define the different actors and objects takes up most of Gilerman’s article.

At first, Khatib’s refusal to be labelled as an artist seems to contradict the analysis that I have conducted in the
previous section of this text, where I suggested that the demonstrators were empowered by the fact that, through the sculptures, their identity oscillated between that of villagers and that of artists. However, Khatib’s rejection of the title “artist” was uttered in the context of the exhibition, not in the context of the demonstrations. As Khatib tells Gilerman: “The power and the beauty of the tools that I made manifest themselves in the demonstration itself. As far as I’m concerned, only there are they art” (quoted in Gilerman 2006; translation mine). This statement is significant, if we take into account that political action is always specific and context-bound. By denying the sculptures’ artistic aspect in the gallery space, Khatib emphasized their – and his – political character. This move is the mirror image of how the sculptures operate in the politically-framed space of Bil’in, where their artistic aspect is frequently emphasized. What Khatib accentuated is the sculptures’ adherence to two regimes of the sensible, as artefacts (engaged and functional) and as art (disengaged and formal) at one and the same time, but never completely one or the other. In the vein of Rancière, precisely that pinpoints their political potential.

Yedaya approaches the issue from a different perspective. As artworks, the sculptures allow Yedaya – an artist on his own accord and an active participant in the Bil’in demonstrations – to question his own role as curator-activist, as well as the potential political role of an art gallery space. In the introductory text to the exhibition, Yedaya outlines a mutual process of stimulation between the sculptures and the gallery (2006). On the one hand, the gallery is able, by means of classical curatorial tactics such as the isolation of objects and their aesthetic placement in space, to serve the cause of Bil’in and, as he writes, to “exploit all of art’s shrewdness to create a political provocation,” and so to alert the public to the village’s dire circumstances. On the other, the Bil’in sculptures allow
him as curator to exhibit something that is different from what is usually labelled as political art: either high art that comments on the political situation, or documentary art that records it. Yedaya writes:

Documentary art remains documentary art even when it is displayed in a gallery, and high art remains high art that talks to a closed circle even when it makes an effort to take a stand and make a difference. The fence-art from Bil’in offers us a different possibility; completely authentic products, made by locals and not by onlookers, that are displaced to the “art” environment, an environment of citations, appropriations and post-modern simulacrum, and thus examines them from various levels, and maybe examines anew the notion of “political art.” (Yedaya 2006; translation mine)

The novelty of this exhibition’s concept can be disputed, as it is partially based on the historical precedence of the readymade. The text’s assertion, that categories such as “documentary art” or “high art” are not challenged when certain objects are displayed outside of their “home base,” can also be debated. Nevertheless, I would argue that the aesthetics of the Bil’in sculptures did in fact allow “Fence Art” to examine anew the notion of “political art,” but in a way that differs somewhat from the curator’s approach. Once more, I turn to Rancière. He writes:

It should be clear… that that there is politics when there is a disagreement about what is politics, when the boundary separating the political from the social or the public from the domestic is put into question. Politics is a way of re-partitioning the political from the non-political. This is why it

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8 Yedaya contends that “Fence Art” breaks away from the idea of the readymade because its “found objects” were initially made for creative use (Yedaya 2007). This argument deserves a serious debate that, unfortunately, will not fit within the scope of this paper.
generally occurs “out of place,” in a place which was not supposed to be political (Rancière 2003).

The sculptures confuse and disturb the powers that are at play within the art discipline, to the level of fury, and with no agreement in sight: Gilerman disagreed with Yedaya’s choice to appropriate the sculptures from the political sphere and to label them as art contrary to their maker’s will, but at the same time, she disagreed with Khatib when she found him to be a “true” artist. This contradiction cannot be solved, and is not meant to be solved, but it can lead to question the axioms of the art discipline. The sculptures are simultaneously already engaged and contemplative, and this is a contradiction only as long as we continue to separate aesthetics from politics. This is what makes the sculptures political in the sense that Rancière gives this word. They do not only, I quote again, “presuppose the rupture of the ‘normal’ distribution of positions”, but also require “a rupture in the idea that there are dispositions ‘proper’ to such classifications” (Rancière 2001:4). Thus, the sculptures seem to be able to take with them the ability to challenge the imposition of naturalized divisions and hierarchies between social identities, whether these relate to national subjectivities or to artistic categories, and whether these are kept apart by the separation wall crossing through Israel and Palestine, or by the walls of the gallery that separated and connected formal objects with political causes.

Afterword
The struggle of Bil’in against the trajectory of the wall has not ended and, at this point, its outcome remains uncertain. On the ground, the part of the wall that crosses through Bil’in ground has by now been completed and the illegal settlements on its other side are continuously growing. Even when court cases rule in favour of Bil’in, these rulings are not always executed by the state. The Bil’in demonstrations have a
pragmatic goal, that is, to push the wall back to the 1967 border and allow villagers to work on their land. That goal is yet to be achieved. However, within given circumstances, what Bil‘in has achieved to this day is already an enormous success. A village of 1,700 inhabitants has become an international symbol of resistance, and managed to sustain its struggle (and the media’s interest in it) for many months. This is by no means a small feat. In this paper, I argued that the sculptures used in the demonstrations have something to do with the village’s success. The choice to employ art in the demonstrations managed to rupture the accepted “distribution of the sensible” in relation to Palestinian popular struggle. It also succeeded, in another context, to disturb another paradigm and rupture the customary classifications of the art world. I showed how, in Rancière’s vein, both events are related, inasmuch as the same objects bring about political occurrences that involve a reorganization of the senses. Reading the Bil’in case through Rancière, I was able to propose that the separation of politics from aesthetics is a futile attempt as the two notions are bound together from the outset.

What remains in the background of my argument is its relation to the concept of migration and the migratory. To end this paper, I will shortly mention three related aspects that hopefully have already become clear to the reader. First, while the Bil’in villagers are not literally migrants, they are as distanced from their land as any migrant may be. The separation wall not only blocks villagers from their land, but works in effect to create forced migration as a result of the loss of livelihood. Second, the performance of the demonstrations occurs at the border, between groups of people that experience it in different ways. It thus inhabits a migratory space where dramatically different modes of sensing reality collide. Third, the move of the sculptures from the field to the gallery can be examined as a form of migration between different worlds.
The sculptures brought the plight of Bil’in across the wall to an audience that is only fifteen minutes, but also a lifetime (and a conceptual universe) away. Their move proved to affect their performance but not their politics. These three aspects – involving people, spaces and objects – may lead to particular formulations of “migratory aesthetics” and “migratory politics”, where the migratory has as much to do with moving bodies as with moving mind frames. I leave this formulation in this current preliminary state, open for further consideration during our discussions in the coming *Encuentro*.

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On this side of Bollywood: the politics of cinema in the global arena.

Jesús Carrillo

With the sentence “fire within, calm without”, Satyajit Ray describes the cinematographic aesthetics with which he intended to grasp the essential “truth” of India, a realism based on discursive austerity, emotional restraint and the prominence of landscape. Some critics found in it an attempt to translate in cinema the principles of perseverance in gesture and character of hindi – *rasa* – spiritualism. Such others, as Chidananda Das Gupta, a critic contemporary of Ray, interpreted this, however, as the result of the Bengali director’s tacit negotiation with local sensibility, which would have considered obscene a more aggressive and direct approach to reality representation. Finally, some others interpreted Ray’s style as the result of a different negotiation, one between modernity and cultural identity in the construction of the national Indian imaginary after its independence.

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2 Chindananda Das Gupta, “Indian Cinema Today”, *Film Quarterly*, vol 22, n. 4, pp. 27-35.
The “Indianness” of Satyajit Ray’s cinema was by no means the only one. In fact, Ray addressed his audience in terms which were controversially different from the way the local cinematographic industry was massively doing. In his book *Our Films, Their Films*, published in 1976, he attacked fiercely the nationalistic melodrama produced in India, which he accused of being an escapist cinema supported on narrative structures which were repetitive and stereotypical characters.4 Chapters titled as “What’s wrong about Indian movies?” and statements such as “we have learnt from Indian cinema what should not be done” make it clear that the local perspective claimed by Ray did not stand against Western cinema, which actually welcomed the director of *Apu’s Trilogy* in international festivals and art cinema, but to the production of commercial cinema in India and, particularly in its new Mecca, Bombay, which threatened with absorbing the rest of the regional cinemas.

But, despite its illusionism and its shallow characters, the structure of the Bombay films, its combination of music and narration and the moral substratum in their plots, translated into the language of commercial cinema in a syncretic way popular traditions which were immediately recognised and assumed en masse by the public. As Gregory D. Booth described, the formula of two film stars, six songs and three dances, which is the constant in Indian cinema since the 1940’s, is inspired in a pre-filmic structure deeply rooted in Indian folklore.5 On the other hand, these mass easily-consumed films were to make, very effectively, the spectator resistant to the Western hegemonic cinematographic industry:


Hollywood, promoting an idiosyncratic and unified collective imagery which is still present nowadays. According to Madhwa Prasad’s recent claims, popular melodrama did not only reproduce the archaic structures of Indian society but also transmitted its aspirations of transformation and self-liberation.⁶

In contrast, the “truthful” gaze that Ray developed in *Pather Panchali* (1955), his first and most applauded film, derived his inspiration, as he would explain, from the impact of *The Thief of Bicycles* by Vittorio de Sica, which he watched once and again during an early studies trip to London. His cinema production, greatly indebted to the sensibility of his much-admired Jean Renoir, was never formulated as a real alternative to Indian popular cinema as produced in Bombay, by then one of the biggest film industries in the world, but as an artistic form endowed with a higher symbolic value. Ray’s crusade against what he considered a vulgarization of traditional culture was the crusade of the members of an *intelligentsia* frustrated by the fact that they had not played a leading role in the definition of Indian national identity after its independence. This leadership, as Chidananda Das Gupta admitted in a famous article published in 1969, had been taken by the commercial cinema produced in Bombay.⁷ The echoes of this frustration can still be heard today in the debate over the meaning of contemporary Indian identity and its reflection in film.

Beyond the accusations of kitsch popularization of traditional essences with ideological intentions, coming from one side, or those of having used a language of truth, that is


⁷ Chidananda Das Gupta, *opus cit.*, p.28.
too Western and elitist, from the other, none of these cinematographic discourses can be considered as a “true reflection of India”. Firstly, due to the performative function of all representations, which tend to provoke responses and shape attitudes towards what they intend to portrait; secondly, because what we understand by India is a mosaic of ethnic groups, cultures, languages and religions whose unity after the British decolonization was enforced by that very film industry: at home through popular cinema and abroad through Ray’s sober realism. Thirdly, and finally, due to the inevitable hybrid nature of postcolonial identity, which emerges, as Homi Bhabha has described, from a complex negotiation between the heritage left by the colonial power – in this case, the technology of cinema and its use as a means of social control – the appropriation and “naturalization” of those very means to put in the construction of an Indian national identity, and, finally the rise of a new mass culture which has the media as its main vehicle.

In his recent documentary video, *El otro lado de Bollywood (The Other Side of Bollywood)* (2006), Pedro Ortuño tells a journey through the Indian film industry by means of the words of actors, directors, critics and members of the film administration, mixed with a network of visual comments on the relationship between cinema and social life derived from his own experience of the place. As a kind of subtext, the film tells simultaneously a journey to the South, from the packed Bombay streets to the green hills of Goa; from the sets where the theatrical choreographies are filmed to satisfy the Indian cultural imaginary and its global diaspora, to the frugal means of independent cinema which films opencast the destruction of the natural ecosystem of that imagery. The journey from West to East, from North to South, from the city to the countryside, from the centre to the periphery, is not a journey in search for
the most authentic representation, but for the cinema as a site of critical discourse.

A paradox of colonization, the history of cinema in India begins virtually at the same time as in the Western world. The first truly Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra*, was filmed by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913, and in 1927, just four years after *The Jazz Singer*, the first sound film fully produced in India was released. Even though it was conceived since the beginning as an industry in the hands of Empire, cinema would not become a mass phenomenon in India till after the Second World War, being simultaneous to the process of decolonization and, thus, turning immediately into a national cinema, the ideological vehicle of a state with the need to generate a unified collective imagery. The already cited critic, Chidananda das Grupta, termed in 1969 the expression *All-India film* – pan-Indian cinema – to denote a kind of national melodrama, a mixture of popular Indian culture and Hollywood strategies, which played, as he claimed, an integration role which would have been impossible otherwise due to the existent hiatus between the intellectual and political elite and the rest of the population. In that very same direction, Ashish Rajadhyaksha points out the importance of the rite of buying a ticket and being into a public space, the rite of listening to the national anthem respectfully and of being immersed into a filmic fiction together with a group of unknown people, in the civil education of a social mass which was traditionally structured into castes and divided into religious groups. Local cinemas, with prices affordable to a huge part the population thanks to state subsidies, would become a key element in a process described by Ravi S.

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8 Chidananda Das Gupta, *opus cit.*, p.28.

Vasudevan as a complex negotiation between the pre-existent notions of community, which the films subscribed to a great extent, and a democratic nation founded on civil society.\footnote{Ravi S. Vasudevan, “The politics of cultural address in a ‘transitional’ cinema: a case study of Indian popular cinema,” in \textit{Reinventing film studies}, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds, Londres, Arnold/Oxford University Press, 2000.}

This process explains the importance of the cinema in national Indian identity and its omnipresence in the daily experience of its inhabitants, but it does not explain the process of geographic overflowing at a global scale and its codification as a cultural spectacle which has undergone from the beginning of the 1990s, giving way to the phenomenon that known today as Bollywood. In order to understand it, we should move from the old scenery of the formation of a postcolonial nation to the new one of the “overflowed modernity” of globalization, as it is described by the Indian sociologist living in the USA, Arjun Appadurai.\footnote{Arjun Appadurai, \textit{La modernidad desbordada. Dimensiones culturales de la globalización}, México D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001.} In between these two stages a new key element emerges: that of diaspora, also known in sociological jargon as NRI (Non-Resident Indians). A huge Indian diaspora had extended over the territories of the British Empire, where it had achieved a very important presence and economic power as administrators and intermediaries between local communities and her majesty officers. After the decolonization, very few of them came back to their mother country – which did not exist as such when they had left –. Many stayed in the old colonies, mainly in Africa; others went to the imperial metropolis, fitting into working class neighbourhoods in many cities, mainly in the Middlands – Bradford, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle –, while others followed their pilgrimage through
Eastern Asia, Oceania, Canada and the United States. But it was not only them. These diasporic communities were to have a powerful calling effect on the impoverished masses of the Indian subcontinent in a movement that is still going on.

Diaspora is a key element in the definition of what has been called global culture. A very important part of the world population has a trans-national identity, being the complex negotiations between the host culture, the immigrant culture and the hypothetical general framework in which those negotiations take place, responsible for the new meanings of the notions of identity and, even, of culture as a whole. The diaspora phenomenon is not only to pervade with its difference the culture of host countries but it is having a key role in the definition of the cultural landscape of the native country as well. In the case of India, diaspora has an economic weight that it could not live without after the crisis of the world monetary system in the mid 1970s. In exchange, disporic populations have exercised upon it an intense demand of “strong” identity signs, capable to provide them with a stable image when living in a country which was usually hostile. The development of media technologies – TV, radio, and audio and video cassettes– in the 1980s was to ease these flows, making the world-spread Indian communities the main consumers of the productions of a film industry which had to adapt to their demands.

Nowadays, the “state nationalism” of the Nehru age to which cinema had greatly contributed has been replaced with a “cultural nationalism” founded on sentimental values: attachment to memory, traditions and old ways of life, frequently related to family bonds as recreated and, very often, idealized in the diasporic imagination of an audience which has no contact anymore with the real India. Unlike that “state nationalism” in which those who went to the cinema
turned into citizens, this other “cultural nationalism” takes places and disseminates as a consumer good in the global market. It is interesting to pinpoint that this “cultural nationalism” is not only addressed the export market of the diaspora but it is also consumed by the inner market, provided by same film industry. The diaspora is not just satisfied with having a consumer demand on Indian film industry, but demands a room for it self in the film imagery, be it directly by means of the introduction of characters and situations – journeys, new sceneries – which report its presence, be it indirectly by means of the presence of fashions, behaviours and attitudes from the cultural flow which takes place in this “overflowed modernity” that Appadurai describes.

The weakening of the importance of the postcolonial state, powerless to the intensification of the flows of capital and communications and lacking a clear space in the new world map after the fall of the Soviet Bloc, was to facilitate this mutation and, again, cinema would play a key role in the way it was oriented. Indian culture, deterritorialized and transformed into an object of trans-national consumption, has become what Appadurai named as “media landscape”: “a huge and complex repertoire of images, narrations and ethnic landscapes addressed to spectators worldwide, where the world of cultural goods, the world of news and the world of politics are deeply mixed”.12

But, who are we referring to exactly with the term Bollywood? Even though it is much more than the latest fashion in theoretical thinking in the think tanks of the developed world, it could be useful to revise the way in which it has taken shape as an object of academic study in the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1990s, the prestigious

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12 Arjun Appadurai, opus cit., p.49.
journal *Modern Asian Studies* sheltered the debate between Akbar S. Ahmed, world specialist in Islamic issues and, by then, professor of Pakistani studies at Cambridge University, and Ajanta Sircar, a young researcher of Hyderabad University, in Andhra Pradesh, in the Southeast of India, with a Hindi majority. Using a dialectics which owed much to the rivalry between the two divided nations of the British Empire India, Ahmed described the popular cinema from Pakistan’s “southern neighbour”, its simplicity, its traditionalism and its disproportionate influence on the public life, as a metaphor of the ideological pressure of the state on Indian society and its political immaturity. Sircar answered angrily, accusing the idea of cinema as a metaphor for social reality, used by Ahmed, of being orientalist and describing the cinematographic industry of Bombay, on the contrary, as an effective instrument in the resistance against the North-American cultural imperialism.\(^{13}\)

In the last ten years the interpretation of this phenomenon has left aside both the nationalist tensions, of which the polemics of *Modern Asian Studies* were the death throe, and the inferiority complexes derived from a pejorative consideration of popular culture. This is due to the transnational dimension which Bollywood cinema has taken, on the one hand, and to the growth of the field of cultural studies within universities all over the Anglo-saxon world. In this new context, Bollywood has moved to the front line of attention in international academia as a paradigmatic process of negotiation between the local and the global, as well as an example of the deterritorialization of culture in contemporary

societies. In a monographic issue devoted by the journal *Seminar* to Bollywood as part of globalization, Madhava Prasad provides us with some clues to approach this phenomenon correctly.\textsuperscript{14} As he reminds us, its peculiarity is exemplified by the fact that the word Bollywood was originally issued in English-speaking media with clear pejorative connotations, which echoed the preventions formulated by Ray thirty years before. The most striking thing is that the term was almost immediately adopted by producers and local institutions as a label with which to register their difference and to be projected in the international circuit.\textsuperscript{15}

This process of “symbolic abduction”, as Prasad called it, implied deep changes in the process of national identity and a displacement from its epicentre in the Hindi and Urdu majorities, which were dominant in the subcontinent, to a trans-national Anglo-American basis. In a moment in which, after decades of cultural protectionism, India has entered massively in the culture of global consumption, of MTV and multiplexes, the sentimental patriotism and nationalism of the diaspora appear as the only guarantee of unity. Even though films are still produced in Bombay and many of the constant themes from the nationalist melodrama of the 1940s are still at work, there has been a subtle linguistic shift from Urdu to English and its way of expressing values and feelings. *Love,*

\textsuperscript{14} Madhava Prasad, “This thing called Bollywood”, monográfico Unsettling Cinema, a symposium on the place of cinema in India, India Seminar n. 525, May 2003, <http://www.india-seminar.com/semsearch.htm>

\textsuperscript{15} Prasad tells us that the term comes from the previous “Tollywood”, term invented by a North-American engineer to name the cinematographic industry set in the neighbourhood of Tollygunge in Calcuta, when this city was still a very important production centre. The initial change to describe pejoratively the popular cinema produced in Bombay was achieved probable through a teenage magazine, *JS*, addressed to the children of a strongly-europeanized elite.
Prasad notices, has substituted pyar, mohabbat or isha, in the expressions of affection in many films shot in Bombay, which live together with other “Bollywood” productions in Toronto, London or Sidney. Despite the resistance of many members of the local film industry and critics, which many interviews in Al otro lado de Bollywood reveal, the spread of the term and the mass landscape which is built around it is unstoppable. This cluster of images, melodies, values and feelings, once reified, is ready to circulate and be appropriated, reinterpreted and consumed in the expanded scale of global culture, including India within it.  

The appearance of a Bollywood-like musical show in a big Hollywood production as Moulin Rouge, or its appropriation by a Coca Cola advertising campaign, the multinational par excellence – the famous Pita pita del – cannot be understood naively just as examples of an inversion in the sense of the cultural flows between the centre and the periphery in the new global scene. In a sense, they are the visible symptoms of deeper transformations both in the ways of self-recognition and of identitary appeal to the others in a time of increasing physical proximity and mass promiscuity, but also of constant frictions and of production of cultural stereotypes which, sometimes, reissue new versions of the exotic and the oriental.

There is no single factor which explains why this cluster of colourful images, exotic music and odd choreographies that we identify as Bollywood is making its

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16 This process has been the object of an intense discussion in recent years. Amit Rai directed a monographic issue on the impact of Bollywood on its disperse transnational audience (South Asian Popular Culture, vol. 3, n.2, October 2005). Jidna Desai has published an interesting work on the movement observed in the new Indian cinema produced in the diaspora: Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film, Nueva York, Routledge, 2004.
way through world popular culture. The most obvious one is, as already mentioned, the ubiquity of the Indian diaspora, especially in English-speaking countries, which has made their natives get used to the imagery and sounds of their new neighbours, despite the thick walls of ghettization and xenophobia which are still ruling their relationships. In the last two decades, British cinema has taken the mission of narrating the flows – mainly libidinal – that soak through these cultural barriers. *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Stephen Frears with a script written by Hanif Kureishi (1985), *East is East* by Damien O’Donnell, from a script by Ayub Khan-Din (1999), *Bend it Like Beckham* by Gurinder Chadha (2002) and *Just a Kiss* by Ken Loach (2005) are examples of a kind of film addressed to a wide audience who is potentially able to negotiate their relative cultural positions within a common ground. This same audience is addressed in *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), *Mississippi Masala* (1992) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) by the Indian director Mira Nair, being herself an example of diaspora.

However, the success of Bollywood as a cultural global phenomenon does not depend exclusively on the proliferation of narrations which make communication easier between neighbours who have no other choice. Another important factor is its own codification as a consumer good, its kitsch nature, which fascinates by its brilliance and which attracts irresistibly due to its catching joy and its absence of problems. That is how it was understood by the publicists from McCann Erikson when they designed the already mentioned advertisement of “Pita pita del” for Coca Cola. After a choreography imitating Bollywood, the waiter whom the landlady has found daydreaming apologises by saying an enigmatic statement of vague oriental connotations: “Follow the dictate of your spirit”. Surely the interpretation of the types and situations is very different when the Indian audience from Delhi or Bradford watches a Bollywood film in
the cinema or privately at home, but its simple formula of sentimental exaltation and happy adaptation to the *status quo* is transmitted through the thickest cultural filters.

This ease in transmission has turned the stereotypical and sparkling Bollywood images into a catch-all that the native inhabitant of the Western world can use to imagine his or her relations with the neighbouring – and usually a subordinate – “Other” in a no-troubled way, as if it were a lively perfectly-synchronized choreography. The Danish film *Halalabad Blues* by Helle Ryslinge (2002) carries out a bitter comment on the lack of such representations, to which we will refer as a conclusion. The main character, an open-minded photographer from Copenhagen, after having Bollywood-like erotic fantasies with a Turkish man from a local grocery, ends up causing his death when she fails to give him assistance before he is assassinated as she projects on him and his world all the cultural prejudices of the well-thinking Danish society. Cinema, once more, talks about the power of fantasies and the importance of not allow them to make us forget the struggles involved in the construction of new realities.
Limited Visibility

Maaike Bleeker

“Whereas modernization as a narrative placed national units on a temporal continuum from ‘backward’ to ‘advanced’, globalization does not presume the historical time of Western progress. Global space entails simultaneity, overlap, coherencies incoherently superimposed. Like a photograph in multiple exposure, it makes sense only precariously, only by blocking out part of the visible field. We are capable of seeing further than is comprehended by our separate, sense-making practices, and what we see limits the legitimacy of what we do” (Buck-Morss, 2003, 5).
27 December 2005. The city of Vienna was startled by the large billboards that provided the exhibition “venues” for EuroPARTS. Aktuelle Kunst in Europa. EuroPARTS, which was announced as “the biggest exhibition of young European art ever in Austria,” showed work by young artists from all 25 European Union members. The show was described as a discussion on recent developments in Europe and the resulting new ways of constructing space; specifically, EuroParts aimed at contributing to the re-definition of space brought about by the expansion of EU-territory. The use of billboards was motivated by this engagement with space and spatial organization, and the relationship between organization of public space and modes of perception that is typical of consumer society. Placed directly in the life-world of the audience, the billboard artworks were meant to function as “conversation pieces.”

“Conversation” is a modest way of describing the outrage caused by some of the works, in particular the one by Carlos Aires (showing nude models wearing masks of Jacques Chirac, George Bush and Queen Elisabeth involved in an erotic threesome) and the piece shown above, o.T. by Tanja Ostojic. Confronted with public pressure to close the exhibition, Carlos Aires decided to withdraw his work, saying that he did not want to monopolise the collaborative project at the cost of the other participants. Ostojic resisted the removal of her work, calling it censorship, but was overruled.

“The Austrian tabloid Die Krone labeled this work pornographic despite the fact that there are no visible sexual organs on the picture nor has it been created to provoke an excitement of such kind” said Ostojic in an interview about the commotion surrounding the exhibition. She observed that the same publication that denounced her work for being
pornographic publishes images of naked women with an explicit erotic intent on a daily basis (examples can be found on her website). She also points out that her image had actually already been shown in Vienna, and had been published in art magazines, without ever being considered pornographic. Furthermore, she observes, her image is actually much more decent than the original by Courbet, which hangs in the Paris Musée D'Orsay and is celebrated as a masterpiece of modern art. Nevertheless, her work gets rejected as a young and unknown artist’s attempt to attract attention by vulgar means.

Was it the size of the image? Was it the lack of patina and brushstroke? Or was it the way this image was staged as part of the life-world of its viewers, lacking the aesthetic distance provided by the respectable Musée? Exhibited on a billboard, the slick hyperrealism of the image allowed it to blend in seamlessly into the public space of consumer society. It did not look like art at all. It did look, very convincingly, like an advertisement.
Sex sells. This can hardly be shocking news for a tabloid which, as a matter of course, utilizes female bodies in erotic poses to sell all kinds of products; this practice is indeed reason for serious concern. However, this was not what Die Krone and others were concerned about. In addition, at least as surprising as their moral outcry over the supposedly pornographic nature of this image is their total lack of indignation regarding much more complicated and confrontational aspects of it.

With her cunning visual pun on the title of the exhibition (EuroPARTS), Ostojic references the myth of Europe’s origin: Zeus’s abduction of the beautiful Phoenician princess Europa. In Ostojic’s image, Europa, reduced to the body part that Zeus could not resist, is dressed in knickers bearing the EU trademark. The way she (her body) is depicted evokes the old and problematic equation of the female body with nature and landscape, the ‘other’ of civilization. Culture here is reduced to branding, being Europe(an) is wearing the
trademark. The female body is the landscape on which the European flag is planted, her cultural identity reduced to the panties that, like a fig-leaf on an antique statue, protects the viewer from seeing what she (supposedly) does not care to hide. This must be civilization. The abstract brand of Europe covers up what we don’t want to see (of her, of Europe), a gesture doubled by the removal of the work from public space.

Read as advertisement, the image presents Europe as the promise of voluptuousness, carnal pleasures, and possession, the target of desire marked in the image by the circle of stars at the very centre. Her attitude suggests an invitation, conflating Zeus’ desire for Europa’s body with her (supposed) desire to be possessed by him. She is available ‘to have’, suggests her attitude, she is what you want, but she is also the forbidden land, the shiny blue fabric of the union-underwear barring the entrance. Forbidden pleasure but nevertheless for sale, the advertising iconography not only turns this female body into a representation of Europe but reduces female bodies to consumer goods, the consumption of which, of course, woman herself is to be blamed.

L’Origine du Monde is the title of the Courbet painting (1866) on which Ostojic’s picture is modelled, The Origin of the World. The painting was commissioned by a rich Turkish businessman. Ostojic’s image shows the object of Turkish desire wearing European colours, thus presenting an ironic commentary on the controversies surrounding Turkey’s potential membership of the European Union. Who the woman depicted is, and whether she was Turkish or not, is unknown. Branding her ‘European’ and showing this image as a ‘promotional campaign’ in Vienna just as Austria took over the EU presidency may be read as commentary on the way in which Europeans tend to understand Europe as the sole origin of civilization, denying the ways in which European culture is
intimately connected with other cultures, or simply dressing up the fruits of other cultures in European clothes. Ostojic’s ‘advertisement’ shows European identity to be a trademark that can absorb whatever it likes, turning anything into a possession, stamping on its own brand, while at the same time establishing and reaffirming a border between self and other. Who wants to remember the Turkish origins of the Viennese coffeehouses, this famous icon of the cultural capital of old Europe? Who wants to be reminded of it, now that Turkey demands to be recognized as part of Europe?

Nine months later, also in Vienna, Pakistani born and (at that time) New York based director Ibrahim Quraishi, working with Turkish composer and conductor Serdan Yalcin, presented a new version of Mozart’s Die Entführung aus dem Serail (1782) in the venerated Schauspielhaus. Mozart alla Turca was the title of their show, Mozart Turkish style. Mozart’s music is rearranged for a combination of traditional Turkish and traditional Western European instruments, and sung partly in Turkish, partly in German, by a mixed cast. Supertitles in both languages allow for both Turkish and German speaking audiences to understand what is being said and sung.

Mozart’s opera tells the story of a young, Spanish woman (Constanze) who together with her English maid (Blonde) and a servant (Pedrillo) is abducted by pirates and sold to a Turkish man (Pasha Selim). He adores her but she has already promised her heart to Belmonte, her Spanish fiancé, and is determined to save herself for him. She realizes she will not be able to resist Pasha Selim much longer and, asking for his compassion, she begs him to give her one more day to mourn the loss of her lover. After that, she promises, she will be his. The Pasha grants her what she wishes. In the
meantime, with the help of Pedrillo, Belmonte manages to enter Pasha Selim’s house and designs a plan to take the captives back home. However, when the four of them try to leave the house in the middle of the night, they are caught by Pasha Selim’s servant Osmin, who had distrusted them from the start and now finds his distrust justified. Their fate appears to be sealed, even more so when Belmonte appears to be the son of Pasha Selim’s archenemy. Belmonte’s father was the one who drove Pasha Selim out of Spain, robbing him of his house, his possessions, and his wife. Belmonte and Constanze, certain death is near, once more declare their love to one another and bid each other farewell. But then, the unexpected happens. Pasha Selim returns deceit with compassion, and sets them free.

The title, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, evokes images of adventure and abduction and the promise of a happy ending. The references to Turks and Turkish played into the exotic fantasies about cultural otherness of Mozart’s contemporaries, an otherness that was perceived as both threatening (a century earlier the Turks had besieged Vienna) and exciting (the harem as projection screen for sexual fantasies). Many have pointed out how “Turks” and “Turkish” in this opera as well as in other musical dramatic presentations of the same period does not so much refer to actual Turks or Turkish-ness as serve as a label for all kinds of fantasies set in or involving characters from the exotic east, often reducing them to caricatures. Mozart’s ‘Turkish’ music has little to do with authentic Turkish music. Mozart, apparently inspired by some elements associated with Turkish music, used these to his own ends. His ‘Turkish’ characters are typical examples of what Edward Said (1985) has famously termed orientalism: this system of representations forced upon the east, inscribing it within Western ideological constructs. (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is actually one of Said’s examples)
This orientalist characters of (especially) Osmin (the barbarian) and, to a lesser extent, Pasha Selim (the noble savage) has made many directors concerned with political correctness rack their brains, to a variety of ends. Some choose to leave out all references to Turks or cultural difference altogether. Others, including a recent staging by Muziektheater Transparant (Ghent) in an attempt to avoid any misunderstanding, choose to expose the construction of otherness by exaggerating it. Quraishi and Yalcin opted for a third possibility, namely that of the deconstructive reversal. In their version, Belmonte, Pedrillo, Constanza and her servant are young Turks, while Osmin and Pasha Selim represent Old Europe. The story takes place not in Pasha Selim’s harem but at an undefined place, possibly in Vienna or another old European city. The time is now.

These two art projects, one taking place shortly after the other in the cultural capital of old Europe, were not planned in tandem. Yet, upon closer look, there appear to be some uncanny points of connection. Both use a restaging of a classic of European culture to engage with the ways in which we legitimize behaviour in global space. Both deal with how culturally specific modes of looking mediate in what is considered to be ‘self’ and what is ‘other’. Both use staging as a means to engage with the here and now of their audience and to destabilize seemingly self-evident modes of looking. Ostojic not only presents a new version of L’Origine du Monde. Crucial to the destabilizing effect of her work is how this image is staged in the city, as a billboard. This staging of the work

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evoked a response very different from earlier presentations in
for example art magazines. Quraishi, it may be argued, more
than staging Mozart’s opera, put the opera on stage. Instead of
criticizing Mozart for doing Turkish music his own way and
transforming it into something that is only vaguely
reminiscent of real Turkish music, Quraishi follows Mozart’s
example and takes the liberty to do Mozart’s music in a
Turkish manner. Composer Serdar Yalcin adapted Mozart’s
opera for a combination of piano, traditional Turkish
instruments and electronics. The result is recognizable as
Mozart’s composition, yet sounds very different from what we
are used to. This new sound confirms that Mozart’s ‘Turkish’
music has little to do with Turkish music. Performed on
Turkish instruments, Mozart’s ‘Turkish’ music does not sound
Turkish at all, but very much like Mozart, performed on
unfamiliar instruments. Instead of absorbing the audience in
music that sounds comfortably familiar, this version de-
familiarizes the well known sound and invites the audience to
listen in different way, highlighting the structural
characteristics of the music instead of directing attention to the
execution of the well known melodies and aria’s.

In similar way, rather than inviting identification with
the woes and worries of the individual characters, Quraishi
puts the construction of opera on stage, thus inviting reflection
on its structure and its implications. His version highlights
how the narrative construction of Mozart’s opera evokes a
reversal of positions and how this reversal creates a tension
between the supposedly self-evident story of the woman who
has to be saved from the Turks, and a representation in which
the good guys are shown to be bad and vice versa. The result
is a displacement that undermines seemingly self-evident
visions of what is good and what is bad, what is right and
what is wrong, what is self and what is other.
Theatrical vs. Theatricality

“Rather than define theatre as an unchanging identifiable object in the real, we might rethink it as a culturally conditioned mode of staging the construction of the real.” (Freedman, 1991, 50) writes Barbara Freedman in Staging the Gaze. The theatrical apparatus2 as ‘vision machine’ stages ways of looking that respond to a particular culturally and historically specific spectator consciousness. Freedman writes about Shakespearean comedy and its relation to the Elisabethan world picture, but her definition of theatre as a staging of the construction of the real seems to be valuable for rethinking the relationship between theatre and audience in other times and places as well. Freedman points to the relationship between theatre and the historical reality to which this theatre belongs but without understanding theatre in terms of a representation of this reality. Rather, theatre and reality appear

2 The term apparatus originates from film theory, where it refers to the totality of interdependent operations that together make up the viewing situation. This includes: 1) the technical base (the effects produced by the various components of the film equipment, including camera, lights, film and projection); 2) the conditions of film projection (dark theatre, immobility of spectators, the illuminated screen in front and the light beam projected from behind the spectator’s head); 3) the film itself as a ‘text’ (involving the various devices to represent visual continuity, the illusion of real space, and the creation of an illusion of reality); 4) the ‘mental machinery’ of the spectator (including conscious perceptual as well as unconscious and preconscious processes) that constitute the viewer as a subject of desire. The notion of the apparatus thus produces a definition of the entire cinema-machine that goes beyond films themselves and one that places the spectator – as unconscious desiring subject- at the center of the entire process. (see Robert Stam, Robert Borgoyne and Sandy Flitterman Lewis (eds.) New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics. Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Beyond. London and new York: Routledge 1992 ) The seminal texts in the theory of the apparatus are Jean-Louis Baudry’s “The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema.” In: Philip Rosen (ed) Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology. New York: Columbia University Press. 1986: 286-318
as parallel constructions appealing to similar ways of looking. Theatre presents a *staging* of the construction that is also constitutive of the real. This staging responds to a similar spectator consciousness as implied by the construction of the real, while at the same time it is different; it is a theatrical staging. This ambiguous tension between similarity and difference brings Freedman to a definition of theatricality as:

“that fractured reciprocity whereby beholder and beheld reverse positions in a way that renders a steady position of spectatorship impossible. Theatricality evokes an uncanny sense that the given to be seen has the power both to position us and displace us” (Freedman, 1991, 1).

Theatricality, thus defined, indicates a destabilization of the relationship between someone seeing and what is seen. Freedman writes about theatricality in the theatre, yet such destabilization may happen at other places and other times as well. Theatricality does not even necessarily result from the fact that what is seen is staged. Not every staging destabilizes the relationship between someone seeing (many stagings don’t) and what is seen and vice versa, destabilization can also happen in situations that are not staged but nevertheless evoke in the viewer this sense of being implicated in a situation as a result of which one becomes aware of one’s position in relation to what is seen, a situation in which one is confronted with ones seemingly self-evident modes of looking. This can be the result of choice, the decision of a viewer to look (at an image, an event, a situation) as if it were staged. It can also be the result of something being staged for us, literally on a stage or by means of other kinds of strategies that put things ‘on stage’ for us, this way inviting us to become aware of how we are addressed by what we see, and how we are implicated in ways that would otherwise go unnoticed. Like this scene at the corner of my street. Right under my nose, that is. A scene I
had not noticed until the photographer (Maurice Bogaert) used his camera to frame this situation in a way that invites to look at it as if staged.

This situation was not staged. Theatricality is not the effect of its being theatre but results from the way the photograph points attention to the relationship between the man, looking up to the billboard with the image of the blonde woman in white underwear ("For your eyes only") and the announcement “Turkish Decorations” like a caption to this image.

Useful here is the distinction between theatrical, referring to the staged character of a situation, its being theatre, and theatricality, describing the communicative affect that emerges when we perceive something as staged. In common speech, theatrical and theatricality are often used as if synonymous and often in a pejorative way, equating theatrical and theatricality with falseness, make belief. Theatrical and
theatricality can be, and are, used both to refer to a particular quality of something – its being ‘of the theatre’ and therefore staged for a viewer – and to failure, the failure to convince onlookers of authenticity or truth. Jonas Barish (1981) demonstrates how this relationship between theatre and failure, falsity or inauthenticity keeps coming back in various guises throughout the history of western culture, beginning with Plato.

Yet, if theatrical and theatricality mean the same, why then do we have two terms, wonders Tracy Davis (2003). She traces the emergence of theatricality as a separate term and locates this emergence in the 18th century, about the same time as Mozart was writing his Entführung. She demonstrates how at that time the notion of theatricality was used to describe the affect emerging from perceiving something as theatre. This ‘perceiving as theatre’ can be the effect of the address presented to a viewer, inviting to see something as theatre, but it may also be the product of choice.

A similar notion of theatricality (as distinct from theatrical) can be found in Michael Fried. First he uses the notion of theatricality in his early “Art and Objecthood” (1968), in which he argues that art ends where theatricality begins, precisely because theatricality indicates the implication of a viewer. Then, he comes back to the notion of theatricality in his much later Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (1980), in which he historicizes his own earlier anti-theatrical position and brings in Diderot to conceptualize a notion of theatricality that is in many ways similar to the one proposed by Davis. However, what is different in a very interesting way is how Diderot provides a link between theatricality and point of view.

The concept of point of view is central to Diderot’s epistemology. As he writes’[t]he universe, whether considered
as real or as intelligible, has an infinity of points of view from which it can be represented, and the number of possible systems of human knowledge is as great as that of points of view (Oeuvres Complètes, VIII, 211, quoted in Fried 1980: 216). The claim to understand a given phenomenon, or recognize its truth, involves accepting the responsibility not only for the explanation, but also for the point of view implicit in the explanation. In this respect, Diderot’s observation links up remarkably well with postmodern, feminist and postcolonial critique of the supposedly universal point of view implied by the grand narratives. But Diderot also makes another important observation with regard to intelligibility, vision and point of view, namely that in order to appear as truthful, these points of view implied within visions of ‘how it is’ must not be too obvious. As soon as they become too prominent the effect will not be truthfulness but artificiality, theatre.

The implication is that theatricality is not the result of whether something is or is not ‘theatre,’ but that theatricality denotes the inability to be convincingly ‘truthful.’ In order for an event to appear truthful, the point of view implied within that event must remain invisible, or at least not be too obvious. Address your audience in a manner that acknowledges the subjective point of view from whence this audience sees you (including the presuppositions, assumptions, expectations and desires characteristic of this point of view). The better you are able to absorb this perspective, i.e. the more you respond to the desires, assumptions etc. implied within it, the more convincing your audience will find you. When trying to grasp the implications and complications of theatricality, therefore, the issue is not what could or would be its other, but how theatricality emerges from the destabilization of the binary oppositions that structure and shape what Kaja Silverman terms the ‘dominant fiction’ that is our reality. This can inspire
critical thinking but, as Freedman observes, it may also evoke resistance and rejection.\(^3\)

Such mechanisms of projection and rejection at work in our ways of looking are explicitly thematized in Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The curtain opens on the arrival of Belmonte at the palace (Serail) of Pasha Selim, where he is confronted with Osmin, Pasha’s servant and guard. The construction of the scene puts us, the audience, right from the beginning, in a position similar to Belmonte, having to find out where he is, who the other person is and how things work in this place. Dressed up in an exotic costume, this other man is staged as not like “us.” His unfriendly behaviour, distrusting Belmonte and refusing to help him or let him in, does not invite our sympathy. There seems to be no reason for his behaviour, which seems rather exaggerated and unnecessary. When a little later, Osmin, seemingly without reason, sings out it would be better to hang them right away and put their heads on stakes, we can only conclude this man is biased, without reason, against Europeans.

Osmin is a flat character, reduced to his distrust and the violent resolutions proposed to it. Not a very charming image of Turks and Turkish-ness, indeed. But if something is to be called grotesque here, it is not only the way Osmin presents an image of “Turkish-ness” but also the image of Europeans with which he confronts us. In his vision, Europeans are bad, no question about it. One might argue that

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Osmin’s reduced and negative image of Europeans (as derived from his lines) characterizes him as stupid and short sighted, especially from the point of view of Europeans not wanting to recognize themselves in this image. However, the libretto also does something else: it proves him to be right. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* shows Europeans to be treacherous, deceitful, without respect, and breaking of their promises. As the plot proceeds, Osmin’s prejudices are shown to be to a large extent justified, and everything happens more or less as he originally predicted.

Within the context of the story, the Europeans’ bad behaviour is justified as long as one accepts that Constanza needs to be ‘saved’ from invasion by the Turk and that this end all means are acceptable. But precisely this point of view is also what is questioned and destabilized by the opera itself, with the characterization of Osmin instrumental in causing such destabilization. His aggressive antipathy at first makes it easy to reject his way of looking at the Europeans as the product of a distorted vision, thus othering the image of European self presented by him by understanding it as the vision of a stranger, someone who does not know. However, when finally this image appears to be quite accurate, it is much harder to maintain the distinction between self and other.

This distinction is further problematized by the character of the other ‘Turk’, Pasha Selim. Selim trusts Belmonte, Pedrillo and Constanza, gives them what they ask for, and in return they betray him. When he discovers how he has been deceived, he is furious and it seems he will use his power to take revenge, confirming the image of the violent Turk earlier presented by Osmin. The discovery that Belmonte is the son of the man who drove him from his belongings in Spain, threatened him, and took his possessions, provides
further justification for violent action. But then, not wanting to perpetuate such harmful patterns of behaviour, Bassa Selim decides to let them go. It is therefore not the Europeans that ‘save’ Constanza (as the title Die Entführung aus dem Serail might suggest) but rather Bassa Selim’s contempt that sets them free, his refusal to be like them or even to have them near him any longer. They walk because he despises them.

In their staging, Quraishi and Yalcin take this play with reversal of self and other one step further, reversing the situation in the plot. In their version, Belmonte, Pedrillo, Constanza and her servant are young Turks, while Osmin and Pasha Selim represent Old Europe. The story takes place not in Bassa Selim’s harem but in a theatre in Vienna or another old European city. With this strategy, they present a commentary not on how this opera shows the other but on what might be called a blind spot in the vision of self in which this opera invites us, the audience, to identify with. This blind spot is Constanza’s role, constructed around her honour that it is her responsibility to keep under all circumstances, although this ‘honour’ is ‘owned’ not by her but by Belmonte, her fiancé. In the original libretto, right from the beginning, this honour, and not Constanza’s well-being is what is Belmonte’s concern. Instead of being happy to see her again and being happy she is still alive, the first and only thing Belmonte is concerned about is if he isn’t too late, if Bassa Selim has not taken her already, as if to be sure it still makes sense to rescue her. Furthermore, the anger his doubts about her honour evoke are directed against her, abducted against her will, and not against Bassa Selim. In reversing the roles, Quraishi exposes the uncanny similarities between Constanza’s role in this celebrated masterpiece of European culture and ways of dealing with women often criticized in others.
In Quraishi’s staging, the time is now and we are here, this is the message to the audience upon entering the theatre. Here too the situation is reversed. The audience enters the theatre room over the main stage, their first vision being the opposite of their usual view from the auditorium. The entire space is hung with black cloth covering the lavish baroque decorations. Instead of being provided with a safe position in the dark from which to peer into an ‘other’ world through the finestra aperta of the proscenium arch, it is up to the audience to choose its own position somewhere around the stage. This stage is build in the middle of the auditorium, turning the auditorium into part of the setting. The actual space of the Schauspielhaus is the Serail and this Serail, hung in black, looks like a gigantic tomb in which Constanza and her servants have gotten stuck. Constanza’s place is the raised stage in the middle, the entire piece evolves around this stage, around staging her. In the middle of it all, she is trapped, just as the characters are trapped in historical Vienna, in a historical theatre with no exits. Above all, Constanza is trapped in a gender role that stages her as the object of desire, like Europa, destined to be abducted and abducted again, while struggling to keep up her status as forbidden land, a status that is simultaneously what caused her to be abducted to the Serail and what motivates her abduction from it.

On ‘her’ raised stage, the action takes place through a series of poses, or tableaux vivants, rather than a continuous unfolding of dramatic action. This mise en scène highlights one of the structural characteristics that distinguish many opera’s from dramatic theatre, which is that the time structure of dramatic action is continuous whereas the time structure of opera is discontinuous. Aria’s, duets and choral sections expand on individual moments much beyond the limits of realist representation and the action in between is often
reduced to the bare minimum. The result is a structure that jumps from one intensified moment to the next.4

Quraishi’s staging takes this structure to the extreme, reducing action to a series of poses that explicitly implicate the audience. The characters expose themselves to the look of audience, staging themselves as objects of their vision. The effect brings to mind Barthes comparison of the tableau as it functions in Diderot, to a fetish-object (Barthes, 1977, p. 71). Representation, Barthes argues, is not defined by imitation and therefore cannot be understood from the relation between the representation and the reality it is supposed to represent. Instead ‘[t]he ‘Organon of Representation’ [...] will have as its dual foundation the sovereignty of the act of cutting out [decoupage] and the unity of the subject of that action’ (Barthes, 1977, p. 69–70). This duality, and not mimesis, is what constitutes representation. Here the tableau functions as the fetish-object where displacement seems to come to a halt in an image that can be seized by the eye.

For Barthes, Diderot is the theorist of the dialectics of desire as it is at work in representation. This desire is the subject of Quraishi’s staging. He shows the characters and events, and by extension the Mozart opera, as fetish objects. The characters are perfectly stylized icons lighting up from the darkness surrounding them, as if cut out from their surrounding and put against a dark background. Idealized and perfectly self-contained, they present the promise of ‘displacement coming to a halt’. At the same time, Quraishi’s staging comments on this fetish character, highlighting their construction as mirror images. The polished floor of the stage reflects the poses and tableaux, doubling the image and

turning the opera into a house of mirrors in which the characters not only present ideal mirror images to the audience but are themselves always already reflections of other images that shape their appearances and through which they are seen. The performance complicates the relationship between the appearance of the characters and their reflection in the mirror-stage, between reality and representation. Bassa Selim is shown to be involved in a constant attempt to become the ideal body image in which he mirrors himself through body building exercises while Constanza assumes the image of La Grande Odalisque (1914), the famous painting by Ingres, famous for its orientalist character, but also a reiteration of an older model in which the object is not the orientalist other but Venus. Ingres oriental other mirrors the image of a European aesthetic model, conflating self and other in an ideal of female beauty and aesthetic composition. This oriental self-other in its turn becomes the image in which Constanza’s beauty reflects itself. With her perfectly styled looks and stylized behaviour, Constanza assumes the image presented in the mirror of these paintings, thus confirming a cultural gaze in which self and other are mixed up. Performed by a Turkish Serap Gögüs in Quraishi’s staging, Constanza’s appearance presents the reverse of Osmin and Bassa Selim staged as the oriental other in more conventional versions of Die Entführung aus dem Serail. Mirroring herself in these paintings while simultaneously mirroring herself in the shiny surface of the stage, she presents the audience with a confusing mirror-image in which self and other are inextricably intertwined.
Some commentators have argued that the character of Pasha Selim is problematic because his generosity, while presented as Turkishness, is in fact modelled after a Christian example and therefore is not an accurate representation of the other, but rather of self. That is, showing him good in this way is not accurate because this is how “we,” not “them,” are good, not.

Again, one might wonder whether this critique on how Turks are represented in this opera is not in fact a denial of much more complicated or complicating aspects of this representation: how it confronts us with a representation that complicates the assumptions on the basis of which we distinguish between self and other, and involves a denial of the way self and other are not separate entities but intricately intertwined. At this point, the blatant innocence of Belmonte concerning the (then) recent history of Europe and the role played by his family in this history, reads as a commentary on the incapacity or unwillingness of Mozart’s European
contemporaries to take into account the history they share with what is perceived as the other, as well as their own less charming behaviour against others and how this will affect what they look like from those others’ point of view. A commentary that, unfortunately, has nothing lost of its relevance.

“Modernization as a narrative placed national units on a temporal continuum from “backward” to “advanced,” observes Susan Buck-Morss (in the article quoted at this essay’s beginning). Yet “globalization does not presume the historical time of Western progress.” Could it be that the struggle with Mozart’s “Turkish-ness” that has become such an important issue in recent stagings of this opera actually reflects the attempt to reduce globalization to progression, thus retaining our position at the forefront of historical progression? At first sight, the critique of the representation of Turkish-ness may seem to be motivated by increased awareness of the otherness of the other, and therefore indicative of a move beyond naiveté. Such a reading places Mozart (and his librettist) in the position of (relatively) backward and puts us in the position of having to find a solution for what from the point of view of our more advanced position is no longer acceptable. A close reading of the plot however, as I hope to have demonstrated, raises the question whether it might be something else, something “we” don’t want to see. The confrontation provided by these “Turks” is not, or not in the first place, how they show otherness, or how they wrongly represent the other, but how the way they are represented undermines the clear-cut distinctions on which we base our conception of self, of who we are and of how we are different from ‘them’. This does not make the representation of “Turks” and “Turkish-ness” in Die Entführung aus dem Serail
any more accurate. But it may invite a Quraishi’s staging suggests that, notwithstanding the ideology of progression underlying modernity, it might actually be Western modernity that has got historically stuck. Ironically, the response of newspaper critics was mainly concerned with the question of whether the representation of Osmin and Bassa Selim as Europeans ventilating politically correct rhetoric was acceptable or not and whether it was acceptable to perform Mozart’s music the way Quraishi and Yalcin did. Constanza’s role remained largely unquestioned, again.


Mozart, Amadeus. Die Entführung aus dem Serai. Singspiel in drei Aufzügen, KV 384
Libretto: Johann Gottlieb Stephanie der Jüngere nach einem Libretto von Christoph Friedrich Bretzner.

Why isotopologics? The questioned ideas are not temporary ones here, but ones to be questioned from the view of temporality. Because racism, sexism, chauvinism and many other forms of the domination are not emerging issues, but they are endlessly discovered in the areas which one cannot imagine. If it is so, then for an artist there is a role of negotiating these issues and to invent ‘non-fascistic ways of existence’. The first step to it is producing the recognition of the connectivity between the dominant and dominated and considering inequality from this perspective. Isotopologics is the methodological critique of the existence in equal space by non-equal means.

Zeigam Azizov
Displacements of individuals all over the face of the earth, as well as transcultural interactions that derive from migratory encounters and disencounters, traditionally have been studied within the realm of both the social disciplines, such as historical demography, sociology and ecology of migration, human geography, social anthropology, sociology of consumption, biosociology, and of economic-statistical disciplines, such as marketing, geography of labour, economic
impact studies, international social capital administration or the geo-economy of migration, among others. The positivist, sociological, economist, Marxist or structuralist matrix of these disciplines has favoured the founding of the study of human mobility on the construction of descriptive categories aimed at representing different social groups and their respective movements. Such abstract representations of subjects and their movements are at the foundation of what could be defined (in allusion to the positivist sociology of August Comte) as the socio-physics of human displacements, that is, a way of interpreting mobility and its cultural implications, by limiting them to the accumulation of quantifiable data and objectivated descriptions of changes in people’s geographical position. Setting out from an abstract reading of time and space (and being related both to Newtonian physics and quantitative demography) these physico-social representations of mobility have favoured a lack of consideration in the symbolic and subjective sphere of identities in transit by most social sciences that deal with displacement and cultural interaction.

At present, however, the study of mobility has experienced important changes which put into question such physico-sociological matrixes. The ‘decomposition’ of

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1 The physico-social dimension that we here refer to is related to scientific-cartographical proposals like those put to the fore by the British geographer Ernest G. Ravenstein who, in the nineteenth century, maintained that there was a relationship of mathematic proportionality between distances, migratory frequency, demographic growth and permanence of the migrated groups. From these scientific typologies emerged the association between social space and physico-geographic space that turned out so costly for the social sciences and twentieth century nationalisms. For a study on nation-states as physical containers of identity and of the migratory flows of culturally homogenous groups, we refer to the 2002 article by Ludger Pries “Transnational migration and the perforation of nation-state containers” in Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos (El Colegio de Mexico), Vol. 17, nbr. 3, 5 pp. 571-597.
capitalism –as a production system pivoting on the economy of time and the organization of the work-place (fordist capitalism)- and its obvious mutation towards more flexible, transmigratory and dislocated forms of (post-fordist) production have pushed the social sciences into expanding their focal points when studying mobility, time perception, and spatial construction (Jameson, 1988), (Soja, 1989), (Unwin, 2000), (Mezzadra / Nielson, 2003). The cultural turn in post-structural anthropology also introduced some questioning as to the relationship between modernity, mobility, and late capitalism. Consequently, several interdisciplinary fields like global studies, transnational studies, visual studies or translocal anthropology have increasingly incorporated an approach that we could tentatively define as the symbolic dimension of human mobility. Therefore, today it is easy (perhaps too easy) to find allusions to the relationship between imaginaries and the globalization processes of cultural diversity. Geographer, Tim Cresswell, has referred to the presence of this symbolic dimension of mobility as metaphysics of contemporary nomadism (Cresswell, 2006). Consequently, and in order to tackle the construction and global legitimization processes of cultural imaginaries resulting in the present migratory processes, it is necessary to do something more than simply describing the way in which transcultural negotiations operate on a symbolic level. To succeed in such an objective, it is essential to set out from a de-colonizing rather than from a post-colonialist reading of mobility study (Mignolo/ Tlostanova, 2006:205), (Grosfoguel/Cervantes-Rogriguez, 2002); on the contrary, it would be easy to fall repeatedly both into multiculturalist visions of global society and its planetary flows, and in the mythification of transnational migratory reality.

From our point of view, the symbolic dimension of subjects in movement has little to do with the recovery of memory or intimacy, nor with the individual or collective
yearning for a place of origin, or the reconstruction of an identity that is fractured by displacement. In compensation, we find that the symbolic dimension of mobility is inscribed in the very process and cultural context in which (geoeptemologically) new subjectivities are being negotiated; other subjectivities which were not inscribed either in the body or in the memory of individuals prior to displacement; other subjectivities which could not have been imagined as future identities or as identitary perspectives before being embodied through movement.

In this sense, there is a tight relationship between the symbolic dimension of human displacement and the construction of a new political space where transcultural interaction as a result of global movements operates as a critical tool in regard to both migratory and identitary politics. Therefore, symbolic mobility not only concerns the positional change of bodies in space, but also the displacement of social representations and the very power of individual self-representation. The symbolic dimension of mobility, then, comes in direct confrontation with the decentring of a number of elements that earlier seemed fixed and inherent to the subject and to his/her conscription to a certain territory, such as identity, nationality, race, gender, belonging, neighbourhood, etc. This is why the transdisciplinary study of mobility has become an essential tool not simply in regard to the development of social knowledge and the critique of transnational cultural institutions, but also for what Walter Mignolo calls the geo-politics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2003:58), that is for power relations based on the location and transmission of knowledge and subjectivities.

Some of the epistemological approaches that have gained strength after questioning the physico-social matrix of mobility study earlier referred to—and equally as a result of
the interaction between global migratory flows and the construction of new transnational public spheres—can be grouped within what is known as politics of mobility. At present, politics of mobility constitute a field in which the claim for the right to free movement goes hand in hand with the debate on the negotiation among differential subjectivities rather than differential identities, that is, among subjectivities that coexist and make sense thanks to (or in spite of) their relation of proximity with a specific cultural context or their synchronicity with a given moment-space. These differential subjectivities therefore change and are modified over time and, in doing so, also modify the contexts in which they attain political power. According to Ernesto Laclau, the central problem of differential identity is that one "cannot validate a differential identity without distinguishing it from a context; however in the process of making this distinction, one simultaneously validates that very context. But the contrary is also true: one cannot destroy a context without simultaneously destroying the identity of that particular individual who carries out the destruction" (Laclau, 1996). For that same reason, relations of proximity between subjects and contexts with a differential cultural burden are, as we see it, a matter that always concerns the broad geo-identitary and transcultural dimension of subjectivity, meaning the dimension by which subjectivation processes imply the construction of a political space and the very politics of mobility. This, in our opinion, is the deep sense of the present global dimension of transitory subjectivities.

This text then aims at problematizing the way in which mobility politics operate within what is known as the international contemporary art system, that is, within the context of the economic, symbolic, and transcultural fabric devised by the new international biennials, the translocal net of galleries, new cultural institutions, museums, specialized
foundations and boards of trustees, as well as through the internationalization process of contemporary art that took place over the past few decades. Thus the core objective of this article is to describe, on one hand, the most relevant consequences of the epistemological turn that mobility has taken in the process of production, circulation and reception of contemporary art on a global level and on the other, to criticize the multiculturalist and internationalist discourse of the global exhibition systems. In order to deepen into the subject, I will attempt to provide a detailed description of the perception held within these exhibition systems about international mobility (about art works, exhibitions, artists, audiences, curators, etc.) by problematizing the immediate sources on which international art discourse is built. I will also put to the fore some of the questioning that politics of mobility shed on the transcultural cartography of globalized art. And finally, I will analyze the wish for internationality of this new global art in the light of border epistemology (Mignolo, 1999) and will put it in the context of the globalizing function of a number of concepts like hybridization, marginality, border and periphery.

The Mobility Turn and the New Cartographies of Global Alterity in the International Contemporary Art System.

Echoing the anthropological turn—and its impact on such fields as cultural tourism, the new technologies of bio-political control, or the new ethnology of urban imaginaries, as well as on theoretical approaches like spatio-temporal ‘compression’ (Jameson, 1988), (Harvey, 1990) Or on what is known from Tom Unwin as the critique on the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1974)²—mobility politics have favoured a profound

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² Since its publication, Henri Lefebvre’s book The Production of Space 1974 (1999e), has given rise to an endless array of interpretations in such varied disciplines as urbanism or social psychology. In the field of social theory of contemporary art, his ideas are strongly linked to two lines of French social
decentring of the way in which it is possible to think geopolitically about present-day subjectivity. If we value the impact of such transformations in its broad dimension, then it is legitimate to think that a genuine change is taking place these days: a mobility turn.

In consonance with CeMoRe (the Center for Mobilities Research) at Lancaster University, the magazine Mobilities, and its director John Ury’s research lines, Pete Adey and Paul Bevan have vindicated the presence of this mobility turn and have attempted to show two elements that turn out to be of utmost relevance for the analysis of mobility politics and transcultural subjectivity in the field of contemporary art: on the one hand, the overlap between humanistic and scientifist perspectives when tackling problems traditionally associated with the ‘natural’ and physical dimension of movement and, on the other hand, the deep imbrication of mobility of subjects in space with the economic, symbolic, and political elements that most define today’s cognitive capitalism, such as the new international labour division, cultural ethno-tourism, the global economy of creativity, the politization of global public spheres, the transnationalization of talent and the translocal circulation of individuals and subjectivities. “Following the current ‘mobility turn’” states Adey, “our subjects of study have widened to include anything that can be conceived of as mobile: from people to things, from animals to data packets […] this mobilisation of research seems to have spawned great interest in the transnational migration of immigrants and refugees, the drifting nomadism of tramps and vagabonds […]” Recent trends have also seen the exploration of virtual spaces thought, namely Guy Debord and Constant’s psycho-geographical approach and their theory on the society of the spectacle. For a critical reading of the theoretical vicissitudes proposed by Lefebvre see Tim Unwin’s article, 2000, “A waste of space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space” in Transactions, The Institute of British Geographers, 25 (1), 11-29
and the seemingly ‘disembodied’ mobility of travel through the cyberspaces of the World Wide Web or Computer Simulations” (Adey/Bevan:2004)\(^3\).

In the awareness that this is a highly generic and schematic description, it could be useful to state that the cultural dimension of the *mobility turn* consists in putting additional emphasis when making a distinction between the study of mobility and that of movement, and to evaluate from a different angle the implication of the presence of mobility politics on contemporary subjectivity. Consequently, the following critical posits can be deduced from *mobility turn*: the radical questioning of physico-social remnants in the study of mobility and the use of mobility politics to deconstruct the smoothness of the post-colonial map. In this way, while movement can still be understood as the repeatable and abstract displacement of an object (or a subject) in any given quantifiable circumstance, and therefore circumscribed to the radius of perception in Euclidean geometry, -after the *mobility turn*- mobility needs to be conceived as the set of symbolic-social variables of each single displacement (and we therefore are talking about unique and unrepeatable displacements) which are relevant not so much because displacements are always inscribed within a certain social context on which they depend, but rather because such displacements transform the mentioned context, thereby modifying the complex web of levels of meaning woven between ‘movement’ of bodies, cultural representation of space and politization of transitory subjectivities.

\(^3\) With regard to the so-called *mobility turn* see Pete Adey, Paul Bevan, “Connected Mobility?” in *International Conference: Alternative mobility futures*, Centre for Mobilities Research, Lancaster University, 9-11 January, 2004; this article strongly links to a field of research known as earth sciences.
Mobility in this sense is something completely different from movement. As Adey says, “Mobility is understood within social contexts. Rather than a blank canvas upon which mobility takes place, space is understood to be striated by social relationships and practices. Here, mobility is given meaning. Mobility without meaning and significance is simply movement, an abstraction from point-to-point. We can see mobility not just in terms of consumption, but also importantly in terms of production; how movement is given meaning in economic, social, cultural contexts -which can become ideologically bound to place” (Adey/Bevan:2004). Seen from this perspective, and although the emigration of a group of Cubans to Miami in a makeshift boat, that of thousands of workers yearly crossing the border between Mexico and the United States, or that of a community of Tchechenians gaining the Caucasian mountain range towards Georgia, are made up of a certain set of movements, its true cultural meaning lies in the symbolic framework of its mobility, or rather in the racial, territorial, transcultural, ethical, economic, political, historical, and epistemological implications of such displacements.

The new theoretical contiguities of mobility involve, then, an important change in the way of understanding the relation between geographical knowledge and the –voluntary or involuntary- displacement of individuals over a territory, and also in the relation between processes of hybridization and cultural representation and the transnational structures of production, circulation, exhibition and meaning of contemporary art. Elsewhere I have attempted to define these new epistemological contiguities as the geo-aesthetic dimension of contemporary art (Barriendos, 2007) And The Symbolic Transformations Of The New Political Geography Of Global Art As A Process Of Strategic Translocation (Barriendos, 2006). From such a geo-aesthetic perspective, cultural imaginaries,

In this sense, the arena for debate on aesthetic-cultural representations that emerges from within the present
international contemporary art system can be seen as a negotiation and cultural translation ground on which politics of identity, global imaginaries, and transcultural politics of representation of diversity operate. Therefore, when it comes to analyzing the international contemporary art system, the relevance of mobility politics lies in its capacity to criticize and decentre the foundations of multiculturalist discourse and to remap the net of geo-aesthetic tensions of the so-called global art.

Among many other theoreticians, Roman de la Campa (1996), Graham Hurgan (1991), Arthur Robinson (1989) and Homi Bhabha (1997) have attempted to demonstrate that the field of cultural translation as well as that of politics of representation in which the art world operates, are not only strongly linked to the full anthropologizing effort of modern colonial cartography, but also to strategies of symbolic representation of other cultures through the geographical production of the social. Thus in order to analyze the field of transcultural negotiations within the international contemporary art system, it is well worth to seriously consider Homi Bhabha’s words on the subjective dimension of cartographic relations. “We need to be aware as we draw our maps, spin our globes, weave our narratives of ‘home’, carry with us the joy and burden of our histories, the blessing and the curse of our communities, that we have to remain conscious of the ethical choice of our existence: to represent the ‘other’s’ difference within my own, to learn the proximity of alien personhood, to be unaflraid to see the silver lining in the survivor’s song, the dark cloud in my own anthem” (Bhabha:2001). It is in this sense that we attempt to problematize the cartographic function of the new international contemporary art system and to question the global figure of new contemporary and translocal artists and curators, because, as is obvious, their purpose is not
exclusively to move transversally throughout the symbolic geography of global exhibition systems, but also to put into circulation new means of reflection about the geography of art and global forms of representation of diversity.

The following questions then arise: What type of cartography of transcultural relations does the international contemporary art system provide? What are the operating politics of in- or exclusion? What is the role of the symbolic dimension of mobility put into circulation by the agents partaking in the global modern art exhibition processes? What substantiates the international character of new global art?

**Global Art and the Aesthetic Absorption of Difference: Symbolic Violence, Hybridation and Periphery.**

The global contemporary art circuits are complex, as complex are the transcultural politics of representation and the mobility politics of cultural imaginaries. As we have earlier stated, the complexity of the problem of globalization of diversity within the international exhibition systems has presently gained a geo-aesthetic dimension. And it is in this dimension that the mechanisms of global circulation of art intersect with the geopolitical negotiations of subjectivity. Therefore, the geo-aesthetic approach of translocal contemporary art is strongly linked to symbolic displacements in the sense that these displacements affect the way in which symbolic, immaterial, and cognitive capital circulates at present. In this way, the mobility of this kind of capital is directly or indirectly refracted in the internationalization processes of art.

Therefore, in the curatorial context of contemporary art, the globalization of diversity has recently materialized in a theoretical and exhibitional attitude known as *new*
internationalism. In order to position ourselves, this new internationalism defends the notion of juxtaposition of the local and the global, the peripheral and the central, the legitimate and the subordinate, thereby turning the international artistic language into a kind of new Esperanto. From the perspective of transcultural politics of representation and in view of the analysis of mobility in the international contemporary art system, this idea not only idealizes the global character of art, but also re-essentializes the very autonomy of the artistic.

Only a few decades ago, contemporary art was taken as international when it was exclusively composed of work produced by western or westernized artists. The organizers of exhibitions—strange as it may sound, curators did not exist—belonged to the western mainstream. Indeed, all cultural institutions that brought about the production, creation, and international diffusion of contemporary art were in the hands of western or westernized managers. Peripheral art was therefore relayed to historical or ethnographic museums, as though the development of the contemporary and the post-modern were located in a restricted area on the visual global map. Labels of primitive or naïf affixed by the West to all that

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fell outside the cartography of modernizing progress, became stigmas that the periphery ended up with, due to the supposedly inscrutable character of economic marginality and the alleged predestination to insistently alliterate western avant-garde or neo-avant-garde. In this scenario, the periphery’s profitability within the contemporary exhibition circuit was not in a condition to be adequately accounted for.

However, the present situation is decidedly different. In only two and a half decades the geography of contemporary art went from being exclusive and centralized to being omnivorously all-embracing. At every corner, we can see biennials, fairs, round-tables, and exhibitions materializing. Each and every one of them is explicitly international and shows a harmonious coexistence between Maghrebian, sub-Saharan, south- and central Asian, south- and central American, eastern-European or chicano artists and those from North-America and central-Europe. In a very short lapse of time, the mainstream has turned up its limited territory and has gone in search of the periphery. Like in the old days of colonial expansionism, alterity, the exotic, the diverse, or in one word, the Other, aroused the interest of museums, galleries, macro-exhibitions, and commercial contemporary art fairs. Even a group territorially and culturally as far removed as the Innuits gained representation in the new arena of contemporary art which is Documenta 11 in Kassel. In the blink of an eye, the scenification of the multicultural turned into the raw material of every international exhibition. The West was avid of alterity and at its call, the emerging cultures “replied most positively with new peripheral experiences, at all levels” (De La Nuez, 2002). Through this absorption, the marginal, the hybrid, and the peripheral turned into powerful assets of cultural economy. To explain it in some way, by generating an added value to global contemporary art, they reanimated the market and the circulation of contemporary
goods that were legitimately exotic, yet potentially international through the capitalization of its most characteristic and stigmatized trait: its marginal peripherality.

With regard to the inevitable integration of the periphery within the internationalization process and the biennialization trends of contemporary art, the study of the symbolic dimension of mobility and the resulting theoretical understanding of concepts such as ‘aesthetic proximity’ or ‘cultural translatability’ should therefore be useful to bring to the fore the identitary frictions and geo-political marks that are woven and unwoven around the post-colonial discourse of the international contemporary art system. Consequently, it is the role of mobility politics to remap the new forms of cultural coloniality that operate through transcultural aesthetics and subjectivities (Mignolo, 2007). Paraphrasing Anibal Quijano’s posit, this kind of coloniality of the power of representation no longer explicitly operates on the physical territory of cultural identity, but rather surreptitiously and within the sign, meaning infra-topographically. Therefore, the openly pluralistic and compulsory ‘balanced’ fitting together of all cultures within macro-exhibitions, is far from being—as Okwui Enwezor (2002) has put it— a wholesome compendium of voices.

Accordingly, the fetishization of alterity and the aesthetization of what is subordinate or at the frontier are probably the most misleading and contradictory forms of multiculturalism in the internationalization processes of contemporary art. Moreover, they are the most difficult to be reversed, as they operate within the very discourse of vindication and decolonization, being re-created in the very core of the international contemporary art exhibitions. Multiculturalism and its strategies of representational integration are therefore liable to generate conditions of coercion of cultural diversity through the aesthetic discourse
of diversity in itself, by substituting the a priori disqualification of minorities for a stereotypifying aesthetic (museographic) representation of the subaltern.

Geo-aesthetic Tension of Cultural Hybridization

When dealing with questions of migrancy, we automatically enter undefined or suspended spaces in between cultures. And one of the strategies we saw as important was to claim this space in-between, this interstice, as a cultural location in its own right that needs to be visualized, named and legitimized.

Performing the border

Ursula Biemann

Setting out from the critique of post-structural feminist theoreticians on the multiple and paradoxical forms of alienation of alterity and in consonance with the inoculation of cultural essentialism promoted by pluralist philosophies and by theories on political recognition and equality in difference, cultural, gender, racial and disciplinary- pureness tends to be understood as an artificial and academicist construction that does not concur with the heteroglossia of the multiple modernities of today’s world. Consequently pureness tends to be perceived as an anthropologized interpretation of identity and difference. As its antipode, all that is mestizo, hybrid, heterogeneous, ‘in between’, or contaminated has been

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reinterpreted, based on the apology of alterity and the celebration of globalized difference, as something positive and operative, as a principle of subsistence and natural strength of interculturality. As Amaryll Canady reminds us “in most of contemporary discourse, the paradigm of hybridity is presented as closer to our reality (in all spheres of human life, but more importantly in cultural practices), while its opposite, pureness, is considered an ideological and anthropological construction. “The French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle, for example, considers what he calls “mestizo logic” (logique métisse) not in the sense of racial mixture, but rather in the sense of cultural hybridity, as the sole paradigm that meets the complexity of human cultures. He criticizes what he calls “the ethnological reason” because of its “discontinuist” procedures, meaning its extraction, purification, and classification of ethnic groups and cultural practices” (Chanady, 1990).

However, the pragmatic politics of identity and the functionalist and proselitist usage of multiculturalism that we see effervescing in border zones and in places with dense cultural traffic on one hand, and the aesthetization of one’s own cultural fringes through the museification of diversity and of the subaltern on the other, make us think that, both outside the art institution and inside its international scene, migration and mobility continue to be seen as trans-border conflicts between national States; that is between containers among which fixed cultural groups and categories circulate (Pries, 2004). These new polarizations (in most cases very close to the old ideas of ‘culture clash’) not only understand mobility in light of the logic of the physico-social that we have referred to at the beginning of this article, but turn what is hybrid into a new hierarchizing category.7 This re-

7 On this issue see the diatribes around the re-edition of Huntington’s polemic and prejudiced book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, New York, Touchstone, 1997.
essentialization of the hybrid, then, establishes a pattern in which some cultures are distinguished as more hybrid than others from which, as is obvious, springs a new fetishization of what is *mestizo*: a new objectivated and aesthetized anthropologization of alterity. “In this sense” states Leslie Bary, “the discourse of contemporary multiculturalism repeats the gesture of official miscegenation that functions hegemonically by co-opting the opposition and by creating a new superior being: the hybrid. And if any culture is originally hybrid and if we all breath hybridly, then hybridity is a tautology that as a supposition is more valuable as a starting than as a finishing point in political and cultural analyses” (Bary, 1997).

Therefore, politization of the hybrid is strongly related to the very politics of mobility and to the processes of stereotypification of borders as ambiguous zones of ‘clashes’ and wealth. The aesthetic practices of resistance by art collectives like NoBorder or Border Arts Workshop, or by artists like Hans Haacke, Michael Rovner or Ana Mendieta, all evidence this fetishization of contiguity.8 Francis Alÿs’ work for *InSite* 97, *The Loop* was an ironic renunciation to once again ‘estetizar’ the border between Mexico and the United States by going from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the border.

Nevertheless, the different ‘mobilities’ that shape the international contemporary art system are generally interpreted in the light of post-colonial discourse, on the basis of which the internationalization processes of subaltern cultures as well as the very globalization of peripheral and marginal aesthetics tend to be overrated (Lidchi, 1997),

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(Beverly, 1999), (Fusco, 1989). Or in the words of Gerardo Mosquera “supposedly, we live in a world of global exchanges and communications. Every time the word ‘globalisation’ is mentioned, one tends to imagine a planet in which all points are interconnected in a reticular network. In fact, connections only happen inside a radial and hegemonic pattern around the centres of power, where the peripheral countries (most of the world) remain disconnected from one other, or are only connected indirectly via - and under the control of - the centres. I proved this by experience during the years I travelled around Africa, where the best way to travel, even between adjacent countries, was by way of Europe. As I did not have enough money to do this, I was disconnected from the system, detained in a zone of silence and precariousness. This structure of axial globalisation and zones of silence is the basis of the economic, political and cultural network that shapes, at a macro level, the whole planet. The to-ing and fro-ing globalisation is really a globalisation from and for the centres, with limited South-South connections. Such globalisation, despite its limitation and controls, has undoubtedly improved communication and has facilitated a more pluralistic consciousness. It has, however, introduced the illusion of a trans-territorial world of multicultural dialogue with currents that flow in all directions” (Mosquera, 1994).

‘International peripheral’ art, then, complies, wherever one sees it, with the internationality profile established by the centralized institutions of the international contemporary art scene which responds to a need to be politically correct in regard to the discourse of the very post-colonial project and the claims for alterity within the mainstream. Thus Asian, African or Latin-American ‘art’ is international to the extent that a portion of those categories is taken metonymically as representing all of the artistic production of this symbolic-cultural territory which in turn is
determined by geographically and symbolically located institutions. The part is taken for the whole. Thus the stereotypification works as domestication of alterity and of the subaltern. And with it, the aesthetization of diversity yields its fruits on the global art market.

As we can see, what persists here is a sort of permanent metaphorization of post-colonial geo-political tensions. Consequently, the tropic readings of global mobility develop into fetishized forms of subjectivity that find their reasoning in geographical, cultural, and identitary stereotypes. “Metaphor is indeed —states Irit Rogoff— a very limited and comfortable way of understanding sets of conditions and their articulations through the similar which is by definition also the familiar. It is far more on the relations between structures of metaphor and metonymy that a complexly elaborated perception of ‘geography’ can be played out. The duality of realiting both objectivities and subjectivities within one order of knowledge can be found in this twofold concept”. (Rogoff, 2000). In a different way, for authors like Kaja Silverman metonymy is more operative than metaphor as it deals with contiguities rather than with similarities: “while metaphor exploits relationships of similarity between things, not words, metonymy exploits relations of contiguity between things, not words; between a thing and its attributes, its environments and its adjuncts [...] since things are only available to us cognitively, metaphor is in essence the exploitation of conceptual similarity, and metonymy the exploitation of conceptual contiguity” (Silverman:1983). However (and despite the interest both positions and their respective nuances arouse) when considering the symbolic dimension of mobility as a ‘trope,’ we should not lose sight of the way in which the mentioned linguistic movement resolves, perpetuates and conceals the transcultural tensions that are the result of the
link between geography, subjectivity, mobility politics and the location of differential knowledge.

If we take this critique to the area of geographico-curatorial discourse, we will observe how Hou Hanru himself, when talking about the African artist Pascale Martin-Tayou, mentions his transmigratory condition in the following terms: “Pascale Martin-Tayou is one hundred percent African and at the same time one hundred percent non-African. Born and raised in Cameroon, he is doubtlessly one of the most African of all. At present, he lives and works mostly in Europe, and therefore somehow also remain ‘excluded’ from the most African aspects of his origin. He, however, regularly visits his native land. And this migratory experience, this going to and fro that makes up his everyday life, is in and of itself a phenomenon that increasingly more Africans share in this era of economic and cultural globalization and of transcontinental migration. In this sense, Pascale Martin-Tayou is a typical African of our times. As I have said earlier, Pascale Martin-Tayou is an artist who is simultaneously one hundred percent African and non-African. His work is focused on this aspect of how to be an African, both in regard to everyday life and to what affects memory, fantasy, and happiness, while living between the West and Africa. In any case, his artistic language is absolutely “global” and resorts to the most contemporary forms of expression, from drawings, installations and performances to cinematography and even poetry” (Honrou, 2001).

From whichever of its angles, this ontological consideration of the artist seeks, through metaphor and metonymy, the pureness of both what is African (and non-African) and what is international under the label of hybridity. In this narrative operation, the ‘in-between’ becomes something powerful, hyper-resistant, geographically solid and therefore excessively stable. This stability, as it can be
deduced, would deny the very resistance capacity of the hybrid as a *non-substance*, meaning that it would annul the political capacity of the impure by placing itself in line with geographically and culturally located contexts. The question is then: In view of the new contiguities between contemporary art and the globalization of cultural diversity, can mobility politics be linked to transcultural subjectivities so as to function as critical tools of the post-colonial essentialization of the hybrid within the international contemporary art system?

While it is by no means my purpose to exhaust the possible answers that may arise from such questioning, I would like to close this text with the exemplification of the way in which internationalizing discourse operates and of what I have earlier described as the *strategic translocation of contemporary art* in light of certain *specific global hybridations*. In short, what the new internationalism ends up doing is to obviate that, for example, the work of the (internationally) recognized Mexican artist, Gabriel Orozco, does not get its strength from transcending Latin-American localism, or from the discovery of a very powerful universal neo-conceptualism equalling, as it is often stated, Duchamp’s *ready-mades*, or in any other kind of explanation of the mono-culturization of diversity in art or the re-essentialization of the hybrid, but rather in the very postcolonial situation as a result of which his work is demanded and assimilated (*desired*, as Baudrillard would say) by the international mainstream. This absorption allows it (and at the same time conditions it) to be read as just one ‘other’ work of art, but also –and this is what is truly relevant when it comes to mobility politics- as an apostasy of the colonialist geo-aesthetic representations of the history of European art. In regard to what determines the universalizing discourse in global contemporary art, Gerardo
Mosquera has stated the following: “a strange stratigraphy is established that classifies works by assessing its value as being either «local», «regional», or «universal». It is said that an artist is important at a «continental» scale, and another one at a «Caribbean» level. It goes without saying that if they are successful in New York they will immediately be universal. The elitary production of the centres is automatically considered «international» and «universal» and one can only gain access to these categories when one can make it there” (Mosquera, 1994).

Therefore, the true postcolonial strength of Orozco’s pieces, should not be rooted within themselves as being universal works of the global mainstream, nor on the fact that they (plainly) corroborate the validity and contemporaneity of the international art circuit, but rather on the possibility that his figure might generate a non-conforming, critical and reflective geo-aesthetic mentality on the basis of which the appropriation of his particular signs and specific symbolic locations in the global scene would allow the articulation of new subjectivities and new ‘uses’ of transcultural representations as critical strategies to dismantle the politics of understanding ‘peripheral art’ and of the very peripherality as a transcultural value. In short, his geo-political potential should be rooted in the fact that, through his internationalization, one could explain the interests that support the paradox of being simultaneously heroically universalistic and messianically localistic and also demonstrate the politics of representation, circulation, and commercialization that keep the following oxymoron alive: ‘Orozco, the new international Latin-American art’. If this were so, the globalization of diversity through internationalism in art might not automatically become a satisfaction for aesthetic exoticism under the label of multi-
culturality; it might not always turn out to be an Amor Perro (but insincere) for the peripheral, a fetishization of alterity, a denial of the symbolic dimension of mobility.

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Doing It: Performance and Performativity

Cultural practices of a different kind are those that seek to influence culture without explicitly addressing politics. A catalogue of such strategies is not the outcome of the papers. Rather, the close look at some strategies stimulates creative thinking about ways of acting in the world; indeed, of making our performances effective, hence, performative.

Paulina Aroch Fugellie
*The Place of Metaphor in a Metonymic World: Of Homi Bhabha’s De-realizing Politics and Other Academic Events*

Cornelia Gräbner
*Immigrants and Castaways: Smuggling Discourses in Manuel Rivas’ La mano del emigrante*

Niamh Ann Kelly
*Transgressing Time and the Familiar Anonymous: Performance in the Work of Alanna O’Kelly and Phil Collins*

Jill Bennett
*Migratory Aesthetics: art and politics beyond identity*
The Place of Metaphor in a Metonymic World: Of Homi Bhabha’s De-realizing Politics and Other Academic Events

Paulina Aroch Fugellie

Abstract
In his lecture “Democracy De-realized” postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha explores the possibilities for re-appropriation that concepts such as “democracy” open up when one approaches them as discursive entities rather than as historical realities. Bhabha’s approach is post-foundational in the sense that it de-stabilizes “reality” as a given. However, it is still founded on what Jonathan Culler has described as an ideology of the sign. The exacerbation of deferral that characterizes discourses based on an ideology of the sign is also predominant at the stylistic level of “Democracy De-realized”, as well as in the aesthetics of the medium by which the lecture is published: Real-Player software on the Internet.

By confronting these aesthetics of metonymy to a metaphor that actually takes place during Bhabha’s lecture in 2001, I explore the different degrees and modes of incidence between discourse and extra-discursive realities implied by each of the two rhetorical devices. By revisiting associated academic events, I speculate on the possibilities that metaphor, as an intervention across language and into the realm of lived experience, may offer in the context of post-foundational academic discourses.
Immigrants and Castaways: Smuggling Discourses in Manuel Rivas’ La mano del emigrante

Cornelia Gräbner, Lancaster University

Abstract
In the preface to his novel The Immigrant’s Hand the Galician writer and journalist Manuel Rivas defines the “smuggling of discourses” – journalistic and fictional – as “the best answer … to the recurring question about the space of the real and of the ‘truth’ in journalism and literature”.

Rivas’ short, discourse-smuggling novel is from one European region whose history is scarred by migrations, and whose recent history is tightly bound up with repression and the long-lasting effect of a dictatorship on the one hand, and with staunch resistance and the development of imaginaries of a different, dissident Europe on the other. From his historical and geographical location Rivas develops a clearly defined position from which he engages with the real and the true.

I take his position as an invitation to create my own, coming from a different geographical location but sharing this moment in time. In my engagement with the novel I take Rivas’ smuggling of discourses and his concern with the real and the true as an invitation to rethink commitment – or lack thereof – to what a person identifies as real and as true. I will take this commitment as a point of departure for a small contribution to the development of a discourse for a different, dissident Europe.
Transgressing Time and the Familiar Anonymous: Performance in the Work of Alanna O’Kelly and Phil Collins

Niamh Ann Kelly

Abstract
During the 1980s and early 1990s Ireland was socially depleted by emigration in the midst of economic depression. By contrast, over the last decade of material prosperity enactments of identity are addressed to a nation increasingly made up of immigrant groups. Individual artists, such as Alanna O’Kelly and Phil Collins, address the movement of peoples and a concurrent politics of aesthetics specifically on the subject of the construction, or appearance, of identity. In this paper I will consider the impact of the configuration of time and duration on the performing of the works by the viewer/listeners. I elaborate on what I see as an aesthetic resistance to the politics of the still image central to two works: Omós, 1995, a sound-work by O’Kelly and How to Make a Refugee, 2000, a video-work by Collins. The production of the works relate, respectively, to the economic timeframes outlined above and further, to the contingent perceptions of identity arising out of the artists’ travelling outside of and living in Ireland during these periods. While the works reflect on how identities of difference are staged in the realm of political description, either as historic anecdote or contemporary media visualization, these works are performed by both artist and viewer/listener. I propose that this acting
out in the gallery creates a metaphorical position for the anonymous subjects of the work and for art. work and for art.

Migratory Aesthetics: Contemporaneity in Art and Politics After Identity

Jill Bennett

Abstract
This essay discusses migratory aesthetics as exemplifying “post identity politics” and a new emphasis on relationality in art and exhibition practice. The version presented for the first Encuentro has been developed to include analysis of the exhibition’s relation to contemporaneity, and of the temporal structure of migratory aesthetics in terms of its engagement with “surprise”. By locating politics with aesthetic process (rather than simply with content or a documentary style) the essay aligns with arguments for theatricality as key concept in political analysis.
The Place of Metaphor in a Metonymic World: Of Homi Bhabha’s De-realizing Politics and Other Academic Events

Paulina Aroch Fugellie

House of World Cultures, Berlin, 2001

On the 9th of October, 2001, Homi Bhabha delivered a lecture entitled “Democracy De-realized”. The postcolonial theorist’s audience was gathered in a Berlin auditorium for the inauguration of Documenta 11, Platform 1: Democracy Unrealized. However, Bhabha was unable to meet his audience. Due to the complications following September 11th, it was impossible for the lecturer to leave the United States. To make amends, his talk was video-projected live from Cambridge, Massachusetts; a follow-up discussion was also facilitated through live video. To substitute for Bhabha’s physical presence, German philosopher Horst Bredekamp was called in at the last minute: not to present a paper himself, but merely to occupy a place in the rather empty stage that extended before the audience. While not being exactly a panelist, Bredekamp wasn’t exactly just another member of the audience. He was expected to be the first to pose Bhabha a question and to do so in an extended manner.

1 Documenta, a series of contemporary art exhibitions and associated conferences, held its 11th series of openings and discussions in 2001-2002; discussions were grouped into a series of different thematic platforms.
When his turn to speak arrived, Bredekamp was centrally critical of the metaphor with which Bhabha had ended his own speech. In that metaphor, Bhabha had taken the image of the fallen Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre to deploy the image of what he termed “the Unbuilt”. In Bhabha’s words:

The times and places in which we live confront our sense of Progress with the image of the Unbuilt. The Unbuilt is not a place you can reach with a ladder…The rubble and debris that survive carry the memories of other fallen towers, Babel for instance, and lessons of endless ladders that suddenly collapse beneath our feet. We have no choice but to place, in full view of our buildings, the vision of the Unbuilt – the foundation of possible buildings… other alternative worlds. (2002: 363-4)  

Relying on Walter Benjamin and Karl Smichdt, Bredekamp accuses Bhabha of underestimating the psychological disaster associated to the image of the fallen towers and points to the inevitable failure of the utopian image Bhabha presents. Furthermore, Bredekamp subtly indicates that Bhabha’s metaphor reduces the towers to a sign of democracy and, in so doing, excludes both their historical occurrence and the more complex and complicit meanings that, as a sign, the twin towers produce. Bredekamp’s whole argument revolves around what he describes as the much more powerful image of the second tower falling. While the falling of the first tower could be read as an accident, the second tower marked what was happening as a momentous historical event.

Bhabha, listening throughout from the other side of the screen, is notably affected. In his defence, he builds an

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2 Page references are provided whenever possible for the lectures quoted in this paper. When a section has been edited from the published manuscript, time references will be given. Here and throughout, all emphases in text, unless indicated otherwise.
extensive argument. Somewhere, in the middle of that speech, Bhabha interrupts himself and breaks into a personal narrative. Although thematically relevant, Bhabha’s story is intrusive and not discursively linked to the rest of his arguments. Bhabha is agitated, his voice pitch is higher than usual, his hand movements increase and he runs over his words as he pronounces the following:

I rushed out of my house to have a key made, to have a key to my new home copied in a shop. And there were these people standing there, and as I walked in they were talking about this narrative. I thought they were discussing a film that they had just seen on the ever-present television in hardware stores. So I said “Sorry, what are you talking about? Has something happened?” and they said “What do you mean ‘has something happened’?” At which point I’ve no memory of… except of the fact that I ran all the way home and I turned on the television and I couldn’t believe… so I don’t… I’ve no memory of how I came to. And then I saw the second tower come down. (2001b: min.13:30)

Let me imagine, for a moment, Bhabha’s intrusive narrative as a symptom. That is to say, let me read this short story Bhabha has told as a metaphor of the event taking place in the Berlin auditorium and its communicating screen.

In Bhabha’s story, neither him nor the people at the hardware store ever discuss what has happened, the important thing is that something has indeed happened: an event has taken place. Phenomenological reality has been critically intervened and the narrated Bhabha is overwhelmed by the fact. He rushes home at the moment he hears that something, whatever that something may be, has actually occurred. He arrives home in time to see the second tower fall down, that same second tower which Bredekamp has just signified as the sign of the event as such, the image that inscribes the attack on the towers as a major historical occurrence. The narrated
Bhabha, as a symptom irrupting in the theorist’s answer to Bredekamp, is responding on behalf of his narrator: ‘I am not underestimating the real dimension of the event, I was present at the moment of the second tower, I was present at the moment of the historical event’. Bhabha insists, twice, that he even lost his memory because of it, that is to say, that his capacity to re-present reality was cancelled-out by the overwhelming presence of the event. But the Bhabha in the story does not rush off to the World Trade Center, he rushes home to his television set. The narrator is critical of “the ever-present television in hardware stores” and contrasts his realization of the fact that something had actually happened, with his initial belief that the people he met were “talking about some narrative”. Nonetheless, his lived experience is still centrally determined by the mediation of his own T.V. set. Thus, Bhabha, the symptom, answers Bredekamp once more: ‘I am aware of the phenomenological dimension of the event, but that dimension is always already mediated by the symbolic’.

Symptoms irrupt when something that requires expression finds no other outlet. In the context of the conference, Bredekamp’s way of approaching Bhabha is completely unexpected. The chair and the conference’s director have treated the postcolonial critic with great deference. Bhabha’s way of speaking, here and elsewhere, is extremely redundant in its politeness and constantly seeks to avoid confrontation. To such a point that the author begins his retort by agreeing with Bredekamp and then adds the phrase “on the other hand”, but he immediately corrects himself by saying “no, there is no ‘other hand’, I applaud you with both hands” (2001b: min.11:30). Furthermore, the criticism Bredekamp has confronted Bhabha with is symptomatic of the major and most insistent accusation posed on the postcolonial
critic in written form: that he privileges the sign over lived reality to an unsustainable extent.

But something else is going on in that auditorium. In the context of the Berlin conference room, Bhabha himself is reduced to a sign on the screen. The mild laughter of the people at the auditorium, whenever technical mediations produce a lack of coordination between Bhabha and Bredekamp or between Bhabha and the chair, underline this fact. It is no longer just that Bhabha is being accused of privileging the sign, but that he has been himself turned into one. He is functioning as the metaphor of himself as a sign. The bodily Bhabha is literally displaced and a sign of Bhabha, the sign-man, stands in his place.

But the image on the screen is not the only thing standing in for Bhabha’s absence. Bhabha’s physical substitute: Bredekamp is literally occupying the place of the former. In this way, Bredekamp is not only accusing Bhabha of disregarding the importance of the phenomenological dimension of reality, but he is also the embodiment of Bhabha’s impossibility to access that realm. Bredekamp becomes a metaphor of the dimension Bhabha, once and again, desires or is desired to access but, once and again, fails to access.

16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis, Zurich, 1949

On the 17th of July, 1949, one of the participants at the International Congress of Psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, delivered a paper that was to become a classic: “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”. In it, the French theorist posed that the subject is constituted in terms of his desire. 3 This desire marks his own (im)possibility, because fulfilling that desire would require

3 I reproduce Lacan’s use of the generic masculine.
him to occupy the place of the other, which is, by the laws of time and space, impossible.

The core metaphor around which the lecture is woven is that of a child seeing himself in the mirror, for the first time. The child identifies with his own reflection. Given that this identification involves a displacement, a projection of the self onto the outward, spatial dimension, this encounter marks the subject’s subsequent and lifelong identification of the self in terms of the Other.

The reflection that the child beholds in the mirror is a complete, autonomous whole. This image clashes with the child’s proprioception in the present, because he is not yet self-sufficient. His image also clashes with the child’s experience of himself prior to the mirror encounter. Facing the mirror, the infant’s previously undifferentiated, multi-sensory relation with otherness is now recalled as a threat of fragmentation. Thus, identification is always already structured around the Other as threat of self-disintegration and around desire for the Other. This desire is the desire to become that autonomous whole that the image before him promises and, also, a desire to return to a state of undifferentiated unity with otherness.

In this way, “The Mirror Stage” describes the infant’s entry into the realm of the Imaginary. The realm of the Imaginary is where Lacan accounts for a primary sense of self as distinct from otherness, the first step in the constitution of subject-hood. But, for Lacan, the subject is only fully constituted in the realm of the Symbolic. The Symbolic is the space of language in which the subject is inscribed. I will now turn to the realm of the Symbolic, in order to account for the importance of occupying the place of the Other, whenever symptom or its literary counterpart – metaphor – are
concerned. I will do so by revisiting another of Lacan’s lectures which, as the psychoanalyst himself recalls “took place on 9 May, 1957, in the Amphithéâtre Descartes of the Sorbonne and the discussion was continued afterwards over drinks” (1958: 738).

**Descartes Amphitheater, Paris-Sorbonne, 1957**

Lacan’s renowned 1957 lecture, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud” was, to a significant extent, determined by the particular nature of the audience that gathered at the Descartes amphitheater on that May 9th, fifty years ago: what all of the audience had in common was their literary training. Thriving on his audience’s professional expertise, Lacan’s central proposition that day was that the unconscious is structured like a language. To develop on this understanding, the lecturer translated Freud’s concept of “displacement” as “metonymy”, while translating his concept of “condensation” as “metaphor”.

Making use of structuralist linguistics, Lacan’s stated aim was to debunk common mis-readings of Freud that assigned fixed meanings to determined symptoms in isolation. Against this essentialist tendency in the interpretation of psychoanalytic symptoms, Lacan emphasizes the importance of syntax; hence his proposition that the unconscious is structured as a language (739).

In stating that the unconscious is structured like a language, Lacan is not saying that it is necessarily expressed

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4 Actually, according to Lacan the psychoanalytic counterpart of metaphor is not “symptom”, but the process of “condensation”, which may be physically expressed as “symptom” (746-753). However, given that, in the literary arena, “metaphor” is the name for both a process and the material expression of that process, I presently use the term as parallel to “symptom” rather than to “condensation”.
by using the same material support as does the English or the Spanish language. The signifiers by which the unconscious is expressed find their material support in physical symptoms, slips of the tongue, dreams and jokes. So, rather than referring to the material support of language, the statement that the unconscious is structured like a language refers to the fact that it is based around the same articulating principles as those on which English or Spanish are based. As in other languages, the signifiers that correspond to the unconscious produce meaning by virtue of their combination along a signifying chain which is regulated by the laws of a closed order.

Lacan’s heightened stress on the syntactic properties of language and, therefore, on the centrality of “place” in the production of meaning has a mayor ontological implication. Inscribed in the realm of the Symbolic, the subject is to be understood, quite literally, as the place that it occupies in language. This is to say that the subject, in the ontological sense of the word, is non other than the subject in the grammatical sense of the term (745-746, 753-756). Therefore, in discussing metaphor and metonymy, Lacan is also discussing the constitution of the subject as such.

In order to expand on this central question, let me briefly recall Lacan’s earlier lecture, “The Mirror Stage”. There, the French theorist posed that the subject is constituted in terms of his desire. This desire marks his own (im)possibility given that his full self-realization is situated at two equally impossible extremes. Firstly, desire is anchored in the hope of a return to the state of undifferentiated unity with the Other. But this possibility is lost forever by the very fact of the self’s awareness of his own self-hood. Secondly, this desire is anchored in a displaced ideal image of himself as represented by the mirror and subsequently by other human beings. This second site of magnetism is also unreachable by definition, as
reaching it would literally require the occupation of the same time-space as the other.

Returning to “The Agency of the Letter”: to account for metaphor and metonymy, Lacan recurs to Ferdinand de Saussure’s diagram: “Signifier over signified”, visually represented as capital S and small s, separated by a bar: S/s. Metonymy is the displacement from signifier to signifier along the horizontal axis of language, an incessant sliding of signifiers above the S/s bar (740, 744). In metonymy, the perpetual deferral that characterizes desire is acted out. The subject seeks to become fully satisfied, which is to become fully signified, which is to attain a perfect match between signifier and signified: a crossing of the S/s bar. But, as indicated in Lacan’s 1949 lecture, this perfect match is an (im)possibility. The slippery chain of unsatisfied desire can never be fulfilled, and so metonymy is the place of the subject’s lack of being (756).

Metaphor, however, offers a way out of this metonymical chain. Metaphor is the place where a signifier, quite literally, occupies the place of an other. In metaphor, the displaced signifier transfers its meaning onto the signifier which occupies its place at the stated level of discourse. This is to say that the signifier that is absent from the written level of the text becomes the signified of the signifier that substitutes it at the material level of language. The absent signifier thus crosses the “S/s” bar (745-746). By crossing the bar, the displaced signifier becomes fully signified, which is to become fully satisfied. Lacan poses that metaphor, while rarely occurring, is linked to the question of being (756).

“Democracy De-realized”, Real Player, Any Given Day

The record of Homi Bhabha’s lecture, “Democracy De-realized”, finds its place of residence on the Internet. At first
sight, the lecture is only another hyperlink in its hosting page. Once clicked, the hyperlink opens a new “window”, in the centre of which “Democracy De-realized” starts running. Framing the centre of this new window, “user friendly” software enhances the contours of the box to emulate the three-dimensional borders of a television set. Augmenting the effect, a series of control buttons on the lower border serve their iconically stated purposes. On the top left corner, the software’s brand name states, with an adjective, the effect that it seeks: Real Player. Left in automatic mode, the Real Player window occupies only part of the computer screen, and its frame cannot be hidden from view; the video appears to be superimposed, playing against the background of the host page.

Throughout this section, I will take the video playing within these boundaries as the cultural object of my concern. Before doing so, let me recall that, outside cyberspace, frames are the wooden or metal borders delineating the place that mirrors, paintings, or screens occupy in space. So, a frame not only marks the distinction between surrounding space and the material space occupied by the object, it also distinguishes “real” space from the “virtual” space represented at the object’s surface. The frame of a mirror or a painting calls attention to the fact that the illusory reduplication or representation of space is an artifice, not co-extensive with reality. The Real Player frame benefits from this effect of frames in general, and thus stages the screen it encloses as (ontologically) discontinuous from the surrounding surface. By indicating that a screen lies within its boundaries, it simultaneously denotes the rest of the computer’s screen as

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5 Due to its virtuality, the cultural “object” of my concern may produce the effects of both “object” and “event”.

non-screen. Hence, the frame enclosing Bhabha’s video-lecture authenticates the remainder of the virtual space as real.

The software frame competes with the material frame of the computer to deploy my object’s – that is the video’s – context as constituted by the virtual space lying beyond the video’s limits. It draws attention away from the computer frame, which defines my object’s context at the juncture of socio-historical reality and virtuality. In so doing, it also draws attention away from the cybernaut’s understanding of virtual space as a technological effect. While Real Player benefits from the effects of the frame to stage different levels of reality, the screen, the frame and the context it deploys are actually continuous. This is precisely the modus operandi of virtuality, defined as that which is so “in essence or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the result or effect is concerned” (Oxford English Dictionary).

Following this definition, it could be said that a particular virtual object seeks to appropriate the name of a corresponding real one by simulating its effects. Consequently, virtuality can be understood as that which usurps the name of reality by simulating its effects. Bhabha’s call to de-realize democracy is significant in the context of Internet’s virtuality, and of its concomitant exacerbation of “the real”. This becomes evident if we follow the central line of argument of “Democracy De-realized”. Pointing to the teleological implications of the conference’s general title – Democracy Unrealized – Bhabha proposes to substitute the second term for “de-realized”. The lecturer explains he is using the word in two senses. First, in the Brechtian sense of “distantiation” and, second, in the surrealist sense of déréalisation, that is, in the sense

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6 See Hope (2006)
of placing an object, idea, or image in a context not of its
making, in order to defamiliarize it, to frustrate its naturalistic
and normative ‘reference’ and see what potential for
translation that idea or insight has – a translation across genre
and geopolitics, territory and temporality. (2002: 349)

Bhabha conceives “de-realized” as an alternative that, by
abstracting the concept of democracy from its historical reality
and ideological origins, may be creatively translated and
strategically employed by minorities. Bhabha moves away
from the term’s historical origins and towards the possibilities
opened up by democracy when it is strategically employed in
terms of its effects. Hence, in both the lecture and its virtual
environment, “effect” is prioritized over “cause”, whether it be
the effect of reality over the technological and social causes
producing such an effect, or the strategic effect of democracy’s
translatability over the geo-historically specific causes for the
existence of “democracy”.

By “de-realizing” democracy Bhabha is proposing a
suspension of disbelief allowing for a re-imagination of pre-
existing concepts in order to creatively re-articulate the socio-
historical realities which they name. Thus, as has been
mentioned, Bhabha translates a historical site of destruction
into a virtual place from which to re-think the world. Bhabha
deﬁnes “the Unbuilt”:

What you need once your towers have fallen is a perspicuous
vision that reveals a space, a way in the world … Neither
destruction nor deconstruction, the Unbuilt is the creation of a
form whose virtual absence raises the question of what it
would mean to start again in the same place, as if it were
elsewhere, adjacent to the site of a historic disaster. (2002: 363-
64)

Bhabha’s move away from ontological and teleological
understandings of “the Unbuilt” is phrased in negative terms
(i.e., “it is neither this nor that”). The lecturer further poses a logical contradiction: “virtual absence”. In logical terms, “the Unbuilt” can only be a virtual category because it does not exist yet. It is a virtual presence, and an actual absence. By inverting the terms, Bhabha cancels their logic and opens up a paradox. Hence, his definition, relying upon negation and contradiction does not state what the concept at stake actually is, but seeks to produce the effect of what it is in the audience. Furthermore, “virtual absence” does not describe “the Unbuilt” directly, but describes “a form”, while “the Unbuilt” is described as the “creation” of that “form”. Earlier, Bhabha has posed “the Unbuilt” as “a perspicuous vision” that reveals a further “space, a way in the world” (363). In these ways, Bhabha deploys different levels of reality within the virtual category of “the Unbuilt”. While the lecturer’s emphasis on effect is parallel to the modus operandi of virtuality, his layering of virtuality into different degrees of virtual/real is parallel to that of the software by which it is played.

Let me recall that the role of the software frame is to position the virtual as real. Its mode of operation is self-referential: by staging the effect of different levels of reality within itself, it relativizes the concept of reality as such. By resituated object and context within the boundaries of the monitor’s screen, it draws attention away from the context extending beyond the computer screen. It attempts to disrupt history’s hegemonic claim as the realm of “context” and “the real”. The lecturer’s call for the need of “de-realization” is published in a context where socio-historical reality is already displaced to the margins. Bhabha’s call for a suspension of disbelief could be read as a momentary movement away from socio-historical reality, to return to it from a different perspective. But, framed by Real Player, it also translates as a normative condition of understanding the world in cyber-cultural space.
“Democracy De-realized”, Cyberspace, Same Given Day

By definition, that which is virtual does not have an ontological dimension, while metonymy, as stated by Lacan, is likewise linked to the question of non-being (1958: 756). Unlike metaphor, metonymy is not; it happens, it produces an effect. The meaning produced by metonymy cannot be located, it can only be sensed as an after-effect of the comparison between two or more contiguous elements along the chain of signifiers. Furthermore, where metonymy is concerned, there is no way out of the chain of signifiers (the S/s bar cannot be crossed), there is only perpetual displacement. This produces a self-referential effect, whereby language (understood as the chain of signifiers) appears as incapable of escaping its own tautological nature.

The Real-Playing of “Democracy De-realized”, in its self-referentiality, and with its substitution of actuality by effect may be described as metonymic. But the aesthetics of metonymy are not limited to Real Player, they are characteristic of cyberspace in more general terms. Take, for example, the hyperlinked topography of the video’s hosting page. As discursive icons, hyperlinks emphasize the notions of connectivity, multiplicity and simultaneity. Yet, as operative mechanisms, hyperlinks perpetually defer connectivity, multiplicity and simultaneity.7 The formal aspects of “Democracy De-realized” as a video-recording also prove to share in the aesthetics of metonymy. The video posted on the Documenta 11 website, showing Bhabha as he speaks, is not exactly the same as the one which was projected in the Berlin auditorium on October 9th, 2001. The video on the web has one crucial difference: superimposed on the lower left-hand corner

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7 The contrast between hyperlinks’ operative and rhetorical functions has strong political implications which cannot be dealt with here. See Chesebro (2003) and Ciolek (1999)
of the original image, there is a small rectangle. Its four sides are equally proportionate and aligned to the sides of the overall rectangle demarcating the image as a whole. Given that this smaller rectangle is analogous to the whole while being constitutive of it, it may be said that, in terms of composition, the small rectangle holds a synecdoche-like relationship to the larger one.

While the larger image portrays Bhabha as he speaks, the smaller one projects the synchronized recording of Bhabha’s audience in Berlin. In the smaller rectangle, the cybernaut not only sees the audience but also the monitor screen on which the audience is watching Bhabha. This third frame \textit{(i.e.} the material screen in the Berlin auditorium) functions, in turn, as a synecdoche of the widest image within which the middle rectangle is inserted. Thus, the overall impression is that of the widest image endlessly reproducing itself inwardly. In this movement, historical time becomes confounded: scaling leads the cybernaut to conceive the smaller, embedded images as re-productions of the largest one. But the overall composition is only the result of the event reproduced in the middle rectangle, which in turn is synchronic to the smallest rectangle of which the largest frame is a copy. Time enters a closed cycle. Because of its substitution of the whole by a part, and because of the chain of deferral it establishes along contiguous elements, the image of the online-video may be described as metonymic.

The aesthetics of metonymy are thus characteristic of diverse elements involved in the publishing site and media of “Democracy De-realized”. But most significant is the fact that such aesthetics is shared by Homi Bhabha’s own use of language. Bhabha constantly transfers semiotic or phonetic similarity along the horizontal axis of language. This is firstly evident in the author’s frequent recourse to alliteration: \textit{“genre}
and geopolitics, territory and temporality”, “a longer lineage of fraying and fragility” (349, emphasis added). Through the transference of sound from one word to the next, phonetics plays a considerable role in knitting the theorist’s text into a coherent whole.

At a wider scale, the lecturer benefits from a parallel procedure, this time involving the translation of semantic charge from one concept to the next. The author introduces the concept of “de-realization”. He then associates “de-realization” to “translatability”, the semantic charge of which is then transferred onto the notion of the “incubational”. The idea of in-between-ness posed by the notion of the “incubational” is then transferred onto the spatial dimension to reach the concept of an “intermediate area”, the implications of which translate onto “intermediate life”, then onto “double horizon”, onto “third space” onto “minoritarian presence, as a sign of ‘intermediate living’ ”, and so on and so forth, along a long line of associated concepts that are, nonetheless, handled as distinct, in varying degrees, by the theorist (349-361).

While the transference of sounds and semantic charges from one element onto the next is persistent, the transference of a given syntactic structure into a parallel, contiguous semantic unit is notably absent. Through both the phonetic and the semantic infiltration of one word or term onto the next, the lecturer’s employment of translation along the horizontal axis of language emphasizes connectivity. Such connectivity is present, firstly, at the level of the lecture’s phonetic texture. Secondly, it bursts open the semantic fields of the author’s concern into a constellation of stated and implied associations. But while connectivity is stressed at the levels of linguistic texture and in the reciprocal resonance of contiguous elements in the semantic field, the teleo-logical connections of the argument are constantly deferred. In the
context of the video’s formal composition and of its hyperlinked background, the lecture’s phonetic and semantic textures are in tune, given that here, too, “connection” is endlessly announced and endlessly differed.

But even my own framing of “Democracy De-realized” as a cultural object on-line has been closer to metonymy than to metaphor. This is to say that I have explored the transfer taking place between elements whose only relation, at least on the (computer) surface, is that of spatial contiguity. Because of this fact, “Democracy De-realized” in and of itself can not be held accountable for some of the meanings implied when read against its technological support. Such meanings are an after-effect of a coincidental contiguity. However, this contiguity, precisely by being coincidental, describes a co-existence, a shared historical moment between the object and its surroundings. Affinity presents itself not because the object and its surroundings say the same things about their shared historical reality, but because they have similar ways of coding that shared reality. The elements contiguous to the live video-lecture, in their virtuality, do not actually alter what “Democracy De-realized” has to say. They merely point to the place that it occupies in a culture that exceeds it.

Cendeac, Murcia, March, 2007

When considering the predominance of metonymy in Bhabha’s discursive strategies and its affinity to the aesthetics of the Internet, the actual event which took place on that 9th of October, 2001 in Berlin may be seen in a different light. The question arises: given that Bhabha’s lecture as a whole is characterized by deconstructive strategies: privileging of the virtual and of the effect, self-referentiality and deferral, why does Bredekamp locate his entire problem with Bhabha’s procedure in that single image of “the Unbuilt”? Why is he so
disturbed by it, to the degree of dedicating his whole participation to an undoing of that metaphor and the erection of a new one, *in its place*? Is Bredekamp concerned with Bhabha’s incapacity to translate vertically, his incapacity to translate across and beyond language; his inability to translate across the sign, across the image and into the realm of lived experience? Or is it, rather, that Bredekamp is disturbed by the fact that Bhabha has, indeed, been able to get across? While all along his discourse Bhabha has been employing the deconstructive strategy of metonymic translation from signifier to signifier, in the metaphor of “the Unbuilt” deconstruction ceases to be a strategy and acquires ontological attributes. As a metaphor, the image of “the Unbuilt” displaces the falling towers – as signifiers of the lived historical event - and literally puts a de-constructed world in the place of reality.

The metaphor of “the Unbuilt” is effective because it points to a deconstructed scene in the physical world; but, mostly, because further scenes of de-construction pervade reality beyond the limited space of the tower’s debris. On March 12th, 2007, a number of academics gathered at Cendeac, Murcia for the first International *Encuentro* on Migratory Aesthetics. Amongst us, art critic Pedro Cruz Sánchez contributed a paper examining the work of visual artist Jesus Segura. In it, Cruz Sánchez explored the possibilities that Segura’s art opens-up in the postmodern world, a world in which the image has grown to the degree of becoming both invisible and meaningless. As posed by Cruz Sánchez, enclosed upon itself, the image has lost its capacity to mediate, to communicate, to make its meanings visible (469-70). Is not

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8 Thinking Mobility Two-Ways : Migratory Aesthetics, directed by Mieke Bal took place at the Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo (CENDEAC) on March 12 – 14, 2007.
this all-engulfing, all-disempowering image described by Cruz Sánchez precisely that which disturbs Bredekamp? Is not the image of “the Unbuilt” a symptom of our times?

As argued by Cruz Sánchez, the image is not the only strategy adopted by power once its towers have fallen. Obscenity, understood as ‘vulgar content’ is also no longer effective per se as a radical political strategy. By recuperating the etymological root of the word “obscene” as that which is off scene or which cannot be staged, Cruz-Sánchez finds that in Segura’s work an alternative strategy of the obscene operates effectively. The “visible seam” exposes what is expected to be hidden: the image itself as a strategy of power, the place of transference between the image and that which it is not (473-76).

As evidenced in the work of another participant at the Encuentro, cultural analyst Maaike Bleeker, the obscenity of the image in contemporary contexts is no longer a problem of content. In her contribution to Migratory Aesthetics, Bleeker analyzed an untitled artwork by visual artist Tanja Ostojic. Judged to be pornographic, the image in question was excluded from EuroParts, a mayor exhibition for young European Union artists. Bleeker’s analysis exposes that what is obscene about Ostojic’s image is not that it shows the object of desire, but that it evidences the way in which visibility is structured for metonymic translation to operate: displacing desire from the female body onto a European union trademark. As argued by Bleeker, the image cuts across into lived reality and threatens the status quo by staging not the object of desire, but desire itself; by staging the image as it metonymically translates within itself. This translation within the image is thus turned into a metaphor of a wider reality: of culturally determined modes of structuring the displacement of desire and the production of Europe’s other (347-51).
In Sonja Neef’s contribution to the Encuentro, Europe becomes a metaphor of translation itself. With translation as its origin, Europe is turned into an “effect of migratory aesthetics”, not a thing, not a place but, in her words, an event “performed in the very gesture of drawing and signing”. Europe “is never something which is unproblematically identical with itself” (325). Europe endlessly becomes Europe, in and through the Other. Neef’s metaphor of Europe-as-translation reveals Europe’s self-performance as a metonymic process.

In the work of my colleagues at Murcia, the status quo and its places of resistance were exposed as having both politically effective and historically specific modes of translating. Keeping in mind that metonymy and metaphor are two such specific modes of translation, I may now recall the event that took place at the Berlin auditorium, six years ago. I return to the figure I left on the stage: Bredekamp, as he occupies the place of an other. Bredekamp is not affected by the other’s inability to translate, but by the efficiency of his translation. But precisely that which has managed to get across is the fact that our attempts to translate across language are endlessly differed by an all-disempowering rhetoric. As a function of language, this endless deferral is not connatural to power, but it has, nonetheless, been co-opted by power. Unable to translate to Berlin, because the towers have, indeed, fallen, Bhabha is reduced to the obscene sign of the sign in my computer screen.

Works Cited


Online resources cited


Immigrants and Castaways: Smuggling Discourses in Manuel Rivas’ *La mano del emigrante*

Cornelia Gräbner

In “El apego y la pérdida”, the first of four chapters that make up his book *La mano del emigrante*, the Galician writer and journalist Manuel Rivas writes:

> En este libro hay un ‘cuerpo a cuerpo’, buscando de forma intencionada entre el relato de ficción y el relato periodístico. Me apasiona el contrabando de géneros (...) y este encuentro es la mayor respuesta que se me ocurre a la cuestión recurrente sobre el lugar de lo real y la “verdad” en el periodismo y la literatura. (9)

I have decided to do a close reading of several elements of *La mano del emigrante* in this paper because some of the questions that Rivas asks in “El apego y la pérdida”, and particularly some of the issues he raises in the above passage, bring up important questions for the theoretical analysis of and writing on migration, especially in Europe. In the above passage Rivas poses the question of the relationship between literature, journalism, and the “truth” and the real or, phrased differently, of the truth of reality. I chose to write on *La mano del emigrante* because I contend that a reflection on this question can enrich both the theoretical and the political debate on migration. For, the question and the way in which Rivas poses it in his book enquires into the reasons for migration and argues that these reasons form a vital part of the identities that migrants develop later on.
When theorists address migratory identities, the reasons for migration are often left out of the analysis, or figure only marginally. The result is that the theoretical discourses that Timothy Brennan describes as “cosmo-theory” neglect the experiences of coercion and oppression that are usually the reasons for migration. One element of Brennan’s critique that is particularly useful for my argument is

(…) that the culture of diasporic subjects is usually given a positive inflection in cultural theory without remarking on its coercive nature – that people often do not want to be diasporic. (2001: 674)

One of the results of this lack of sensitivity of cultural theory is that it becomes difficult to conceptualize the agency of migrants. Brennan argues that the discourses of cosmo-theory are characterized by

(…) the coupling of an overdeveloped sensitivity to significant cases of mixed forms of cultural life (…) with a relatively weak understanding of processes of power, labor, management, territorial control, or governance (…). It is not as though there were no role for agency in such theories (…). But agency is almost never seen in moments of civic participation. It is primarily about subject formation. Agency, in fact, tends to be seen as a gradual process of coming to accept a fait accompli. (2001: 677-678)

In La mano del emigrante Rivas smuggles discourses to account for the issues that are often left out of the literary and theoretical discussion.

I also chose to write about La mano del emigrante because I am concerned about the neglect of traditional European societies to address the impact that migration has on their own cultures and political imaginaries. The case of Galicia brings this difficulty to the fore because, as I will demonstrate, it contests the notion of homogeneity that public
and theoretical discourses foster when it comes to the analysis of traditional European identities. La mano del emigrante allows me to make two important points: the first is that European cultures themselves have been immigrant cultures. The second is that European migration was often the result of oppression; consequently, we have to ask who is in power now in European societies, the former oppressors or the oppressed. Rivas’ writing brings out the depressing fact that those who suffered oppression, and who voiced dissent within Europe were largely denied participation in the construction of the cultural, political and social imaginaries that inform our societies, and that justify the politics of those who have power in our cultures. My analysis of Rivas’ approach to this subject permits me to develop the concept of a “dissident Europe”. I will suggest the development of “dissident Europe” as an alternative location for the articulation of European theories on migration.

La mano del emigrante

La mano del emigrante consists of four parts, each of them deploying a different discourse. The first part of the book takes the place of a preface and is entitled “El apego y la pérdida”. The text, signed by “The Author”, points out some of the central concerns of the book, among them the experience of attachment and loss that is so characteristic for migration, the memory of political repression, and the relationship between writing and reality.

The second part “La mano del emigrante” is the longest of the four texts. Because the plot and its presentation by Rivas are central to my analysis I will summarize them at this point. Rivas tells the story of two Galician friends, immigrants in London. The story is told from the first-person perspective by one of them, a narrator whose name we never learn. It revolves around the figure of Tito Castro,
narrator’s friend, and Castro’s hand. Castro has three birds, paíños, tattooed on his hand; from the start of the story, the narrator is fascinated by them and the movements they make when Castro moves his hand. As the story continues, Castro dies in a car accident while he goes to the airport in an illegal taxi with the narrator. While he is half-conscious in hospital, the narrator fantasizes about losing his hand and having it replaced by Castro’s; however, he has no feeling in the hand that is supposedly his friend’s.

After he is released from hospital, the narrator travels to Galicia to bring Castro’s ashes to his mother. He asks her about the story of the paíños on Castro’s hand. But instead of answering his question, she tells him the story of Castro’s childhood and indirectly, of the reason for his migration. Once the narrator assimilates and accepts Castro’s story, his hand starts to function again. He returns to London, gets the tattoo of the birds on his own hand, and continues his life.

Crucial to Castro’s story is the character of the Caimán. I will analyse this character and his function in detail later on, below. The Caimán is a member of the guardia civil, the Franquist police force, who in the story is intent on arresting Castro’s father, Albino, because the latter behaves in an insubordinate manner towards the Caimán. After the end of the Spanish Civil War (“esta carnicería”, “this slaughter”, as Castro’s mother calls it), nobody sets any limits to the power of the Caimán. As a consequence, Albino has to go into hiding. Castro’s mother tells her son that his father has immigrated to Argentina, and gets her brother – who does live in Argentina – to write letters in the name of Albino. While Castro believes the story, his beloved dog Karenina, survivor of the shipwreck of a freighter by the same name, finds out where Albino is hidden, and barks when Albino comes to the house at night to see Castro’s mother. Hence, Castro’s mother has to take the
dog away from her son. This is another one of Castro’s experiences of attachment and loss.

These experiences become progressively worse. When Castro’s mother gets pregnant, she has to invent a lie to disguise Albino’s fatherhood from the Caimán. She makes a deal with a cousin of her husband, who pretends to be the father of Castro’s little sister Sira – but to pass the story off to the caiman, she has to invent Albino’s death.

After all these losses, Castro withdraws deeper and deeper into himself, spending all his days on the beach. He only connects with his little sister Sira, who follows him around wherever he goes. The two become inseparable, until one day, on the beach, the sea sweeps Sira away. Castro holds on to her with the hand that later on carries the paiños, but is not strong enough. The little girl drowns. Her body is found days later by Albino in the cave where he is hiding.

Castro’s mother sees her son’s travels and his migration as a flight from the traumas he has suffered, and from his feelings of guilt for Sira’s death. However, her story implies – though it does not reflect on – the intricate connection between on the one hand Castro’s traumatic experiences of loss and her own position as someone who has to take everything he loves away from her son in order to save her husband’s life, and on the other hand the Caimán’s abuse of power, poverty, impunity, and abandonment. The situation of Castro and his mother is primarily psychological and emotional. However, it cannot be separated – because it is brought about and is the flip side of – a situation in which political violence, impunity, poverty and abandonment create a situation that is psychologically and emotionally so lethal that it finally drives Castro out of his country.

The third story, “El álbum furtivo”, consists of photos from A Coruña and London. It combines images and motives
from the other stories and integrates them into the seascapes and cityscapes of the two cities. Thus, “El álbum furtivo” functions as a connector between places and stories. At the same time, the album questions the fictional character of “La mano del emigrante”. For, “La mano del emigrante” is told as if it was a fictional story. However, the photos make it clear that many of the places that are mentioned in the story are real. With “El álbum furtivo” Rivas invites his readers to rethink the relationship between real places, imagined spaces, real people, and fictionalized characters.

The fourth and final story is a journalistic piece on Galicians who have suffered shipwreck. Rivas not only writes about people who themselves suffered and survived shipwreck, but includes those who lost family members through shipwreck among the shipwrecked and whose lives collapsed because of this loss. In doing so, “shipwreck” acquires a metaphorical dimension. Furthermore, most of the shipwrecks that Rivas writes about in the article are brought about by neglect or incompetence, and many of those that died because of shipwreck might have survived, had the authorities not reacted with disinterest and incompetence. This links the story back to the first two texts, in which authorities and order are connected with the abuse of power and with violence.

Shipwreck and Migration
A large part of “La mano del emigrante” is about what happened before Castro left Galicia, and about why he left. In this passage I will read Castro’s migration through the metaphor of shipwreck. I will argue that migrants like Castro will remain “homeless” as long as theoretical, literary and other accounts of migration, and the political responses to it, do not take into account the reasons that the migrants had for leaving, migrants like Castro’s will remain.
Looking back at his own reasons for leaving Galicia, Castro professes no regrets. Early on in the story, he gets into a discussion with one of the other Galician customers of the pub where he spends his free time. Challenged by the homesickness, the idealization of Spain, and complaints about England by his compatriot, Castro says:

Méete con el gobierno, como todo cristo, pero no maldigas al país que te abrió la puerta. ¿O es que tengo que explicarte por qué llegamos con una maleta de carton? Embarcamos en un tren como ganado. No había ni retretes. Tenías que sacar el culo al aire para hacer tus business. En la frontera de Irún, un tipo nos arengó hablando de la gloriosa historia de España. Españoles! Siempre con la cabeza alta! Qué cabrón, un discurso! Mejor sería que nos hubieran dado una copa de Felipe II. (...) En las despedidas todos lloramos, sí. Pero, recuerda, ¿quién eran los que más lloraban? Los que quedaban en tierra. Ellos si que tenían morriña. Morriña de no poder marchar. (...) ¿Sabes una cosa? Quiero a mi madre, que es lo que me queda allá, quiero a mis muertos, quiero a la casa de la higuera, que ya no existe, quiero al mar del Orzán, quiero a los recuerdos, buenos o malos, pero no me pidas que ame a mi país. (21-23)

In his response to his compatriot, Castro positions himself in a no man’s land. What once was “his country” is a place of abuse, and he has no desire to return to it. He misses things and people that are not there anymore, and otherwise maintains only very intimate and personal ties to his mother and the sea. These attachments show that Castro does not choose his allegiances for where he was born, but for how he is being treated.

His approach to his allegiances is received with anger, aggression, and lack of understanding by his Galician compatriots abroad. They clearly do not know how to react to Castro’s priorities, and see them as a disturbance of their own
means of identity construction. They construct their identities along the lines of traditional nationalist concepts of identity. However, Castro’s choice of allegiances clashes not only their concepts of identity, but also with those that have been developed by theories of transnationality.

In her article “Migrancy, Memory and Transplantation in Manuel Rivas’s La mano del emigrante”, Yeon-Soo Kim takes recourse to such concepts. She argues that in the novel,

(...). ‘Galicianness’ is conceptualized as a productive cultural engine that can generate civic values indispensable in an era of cultural and political transnationalism. This position is possible because the author views Galician identity as founded on an emotional disposition to adopt the experiences that accompany a long history of migration rather than something that draws purely on cultural essentialism confined within a territorial boundary. (…) In other words, Galician identity is essentially global and ‘transcultural’ (a culture in transit), and capable of finding a ‘home’ in unfamiliar cultures and places. (117)

Such a “universal” redefinition of Galicianness – one that bears a curious resemblance to the definition of Galicianness proposed by Castro’s interlocutor in the pub in spite of the marked differences in the characteristics it assigns to it – homogenizes Galician identity just as much as Castro’s interlocutors or the representative of the Spanish government do. Therefore, I contend that it is not a satisfactory approach to understanding identity in the way that Castro conceptualizes it. For, Castro makes it clear that his allegiances are not based on cultural identity. They cannot be because the Caimán is also Galician, and while he walks free and continues to haunts the later generation, like Rivas’, Castro cannot have a home.

Different readings of the paíños, the small birds tattooed on Castro’s hand, clarify my point. According to the epigraphs of the story, the paíños are small birds that for the
longest part of the year live in the open sea. In Galicia there is a saying that the paño is the last thing a seafarer sees when he goes out to sea.

In the article I quoted above, Kim argues that Castro’s decision to tattoo the paños on his hand “can be construed as his wish to transform guilt into hospitality”. (116) Contradicting her, I argue that the tattoo of the paños reflects Castro’s insight that with his past and his memories, he will never be able to have a home anywhere, and that nobody can grant him the hospitality that he himself symbolically grants to the pianos; creatures that, like him, cannot have any other home but the sea.

Crucial to my reading is the role that the past played in Castro’s present. The realization of its importance comes for the narrator when he realizes that many of Castro’s gestures that seemed idiosyncratic to his London friends – like calling all dogs “Karenina” – were not an expression of idiosyncracy. Instead, they referred back to his past, performing a communication with himself and his memories that none of his friends could understand. According to my argument Castro’s past – and not migration – turned Castro into the homeless character we get to know through his mother’s story.

The fourth piece of the book, “Los naúfragos”, supports my interpretation. I read the story as an indication that Castro the migrant is a castaway of his country, or rather, of those who turned his country into what it was. Phrased differently, and in keeping with the metaphors that Rivas develops through his smuggling of genres, one could say that Castro is a migrant because those in power shipwrecked his family. Living as a migrant is easier than living as a castaway in one’s own country. Castro’s father Albino chooses the latter option. He spends years hiding in a cave, watching his family slip away from him, turning “white” because he never sees the
sunlight and going blind because he lives in eternal darkness. His son Tito no longer has to suffer “morriña de no poder marcher”. In the case of Tito Castro, being a migrant adequately represents and even naturalizes his status as a castaway of his country.

Thus, I contest that the “search for a home” that underlies Kim’s analysis of *La mano del emigrante* is not Castro’s endeavour. Castro is not looking for a home. He knows full well that there is not one for him because nothing can heals what happened, and no European country has constructed its identity taking into account experiences like those of Castro. In spite of all its changes and supposed breaks with our fascist, colonial and dictatorial pasts, Europe has not managed to create European identities that give a home to memories like Castro’s. As things stand in early 21st Century Europe, the Caimán might very well still be the neighbour of Castro’s mother Chelo.

Thus, Castro’s case clearly brings out the conceptual difficulties with the analytical approach that Kim (among many others) takes to migratory identities. Castro’s case makes it clear that there is no home while there is impunity, and that “hospitality” is necessary only because “home” cannot provide justice and a space for Castro’s memories. These reflections bring me close to a conceptualization of “dissident Europe”. However, to start with this conceptualization, I need to turn to the technique that Rivas uses to tell the stories of Castro’s and others who have suffered shipwreck: the smuggling of genres.

**Smuggling Genres, Smuggling Discourses**

I want to return now to the question about the “recurring question about the space of the ‘truth’ and the real” that Rivas raises in the very beginning of the book. After my analysis of
the importance of memories for migratory identities like Castro’s, and after emphasizing the importance that the realities of violence, abuse of power and poverty have for the production of such memories, the importance of the truth and the real has become all the more obvious. In “El apego y la pérdida” Rivas argues for “more reality” in literary texts. He writes:

Italo Calvino decía que el momento más importante del escritor es cuando levanta la nariz del papel. Es una forma magnífica de sugerir que la clave está en la forma de mirar. La mirada antecede a la escritura, pero también la guía por el lado oculto de la realidad. Pero eso nada tiene que ver con la operación mágica. La categoría de lo mágico, aplicada a la literature, pudo tener su gracia, pero se ha convertido ya en una desgracia. Es una categoría inservible, perezosa, un nuevo academicismo. Nos remite a una “division de tareas”, en la mente y en la concepción del mundo, que inutiliza el propósito literario. La mirada literaria sirve para ensanchar, en todas las dimensiones, el campo de lo real. Para crear, para inventar, más realidad. (9-10)

In this passage Rivas makes several important points. First of all, he argues that writing is related to looking at what is around the writer. The look at “the hidden side of reality” subsequently guides writing. Rivas makes it clear, however, that this has nothing to do with “magic”, a category that he fervently rejects as “a new academicism”. He argues that the concept of magic in writing re-establishes a “division of task” in our minds that goes against his proposal to “create, to invent, more reality.” His treatment of the Caimán gives important clues as to what this proposal entails.

The caiman appears in two of the four texts that make up the book: “El apego y la pérdida” and “La mano del emigrante”. In fact, we as readers meet the Caimán before we
meet any character in the book, with the exception of the author. The book starts like this:

Conocí al Caimán desde niño sin haberlo visto nunca. Otros niños tenían miedo del Hombre del Saco, un ser terrible y barbudo que vagaba por los caminos y se llevaba para siempre a los crios descuidados. Yo temía al Caimán y sabía que existía. Mi padre me había hablado de ese guardia que para él, y los jóvenes de su tiempo, encarnaba el mal. Como también encarnaba el orden, me fui formando la inquietante idea de que orden y mal podían ser dos caras de un mismo ser monstruoso. El caimán disfrutaba haciendo daño y uno de sus placers era suspender las verbenas de la fiestas populares al poco de empezar. Cuando se alejaba, los mozos cantaban resentidos: Se va el caiman, se va el caiman, se va para Barranquilla!

Los golpes de billar de la vida me devuelven de vez en cuando a la existencia del Caimán y sus disfraces. Y al tarareo de esa canción como un conjuro contra el mal. (...) Es uno de los hilos reales, visibles, que entretejen la material de este libro. (7-8)

In this short passage, the caiman is the all-too-real figure that embodies both order and the abuse of power, both order and evil. The Caimán scared Rivas when he was a child much more than the man with the sack possibly could have, because Rivas knows that the Caimán is real. Read through the passage on magic that I quoted earlier, Rivas’ experience of the Caimán struggles with a mythification of reality. The figure of the Caimán could easily be interpreted as mythical and magical, just like the man with the sack. In this interpretation, “the people” would have turned the Caimán into a figure in order to personalize and make tangible an abstract abuse of power. However, Rivas makes it clear that the Caimán is real and that the abuse of power is not abstract, but concrete: someone abuses power. Thus, if I as a cultural analyst read the figure of the Caimán as a metaphor of oppression and violence I would
interpret the terror of the real Caimán out of lived reality and into two texts: the mythical one supposedly composed by “the people”, and my analytical one. Consequently, I would stop looking at the Caimán and his activities in real life, and he would continue his terror without me contesting it. As a tool for analysis in this context, the concept of “magic” functions as an escape from the much more brutal reality the writer sees when he lifts up his eyes from the page.

The “division of tasks” that Rivas mentions in the passage I quoted above is a result of the division between “reality” and “magic”. The “hard facts” of reality that create the conditions for the production of imaginaries are often relegated to representation in journalism, whereas the consequences they have for the individual are reserved for literary, fictional genres. Rivas uses the figure of the Caimán to bring out that such a division is untenable for a writer who “lifts his eyes up from the page” and wants to participate in the creation of new, more humane realities.

Thus, I contend that Rivas’ technique of “smuggling genres” has wider, political implications. In his analysis of Salman Rushdie’s novel Shame Timothy Brennan characterizes one of these implications as the recovery of the Political in literature (76). To bring out the efficacy of Rivas’ literary strategies and their and his affinity with Rushdie, I will discuss some elements of Brennan’s analysis of Shame and relate them to my own analysis of La mano del emigrante.

Brennan writes about Shame:

His [Rushdie’s] strategy is a bit like Julio Cortázar’s in Hopscotch – the author as critic of his own work, standing outside the fictive, forcing us back into an everyday history. The fairy tale self-destructs precisely because fictiveness is inappropriate to a contemporary dictatorship (...). All of this is Rushdie’s point, moreover, which is why his narrator is not
a narrator at all but an author as confessor. “I can’t do this,” he keeps saying. “I hate these people and I have to say so openly,” he continues, and “literature is such a small club, after all, against so large a beast.” This is not the utilization of genre but a comment on genre: a joke, if you will, an intentionally superficial gesture calculated to display its own inadequacy. (76)

In “El apego y la pérdida”, Rivas comments much more unashamedly and directly on genre than Rushdie does in Shame. Yet, just like Rushdie, he argues that genres do no longer provide useful tools for a literary engagement with reality. Both authors do not discard the practice of genres completely: for, it stands to reason that if an author mocks and undermines genres, then this implies that genres and the function they have in the production of meaning are still in place. I contend that both authors resist and question the power of genres.

Resistance always takes place against something or someone; resistance would not be resistance without a clearly identified “other”. Rivas’ act of resistance takes into account that at least right now in the minds of his readers, the rules of genre continue to establish the unfortunate “division of tasks” he writes about. The literary discourses informed by genres cannot (yet) be replaced by a borderland region where there are no genres. Before something new, like this borderland region, can be inhabited, one has to contest the old ways of thinking. Rivas, like Rushdie, would not think that this can be done purely through fiction or journalism. As Brennan writes, “fictiveness is inappropriate for dealing with a contemporary dictatorship”. At the same time, non-fiction does not productively engage the way in which people experience the consequences of these dictatorships. Thus, Rushdie according to Brennan questions the genre of fiction from within fiction because the relationship between reality and story proposed
by traditional narrative is no longer viable in the face of contemporary dictatorships, and Rivas smuggles the journalistic into the fictional and the fictional into the journalistic. Both writers share the concern for the “space of the ‘truth’ and the real” in texts that are written about situations of coercion. Both writers also coincide in the realization that the experience of coercion has to be expressed as much as the conditions and strategies of coercion. Therefore, they try genres on and mix them up, “as if to express the multi-front novelistic war required to capture a place and a politics that are too painful to deal with in a single mode (...).” (75)

One can now focus on Castro’s existence as a migrant and interpret his migration as an accomplished strategy of survival. Kim chooses to do so, by mobilizing the analytical instrumentarium of contemporary theoretical approaches to and discourses on migrancy and transnationality. Alternatively, one can argue that the complicity between order and violence that Rivas writes about in the very beginning of the book has made it impossible for Castro to live his identity in his own country, and that consequently, migration was the only means of psychological survival open to him. From that perspective, people like Castro are indeed confronted with a Europe that offers them a space where they can survive: almost invisible, without being understood, and celebrated as transnational individuals, consigning them to an eternal migrancy, similar to the ghost ship of the Flying Dutchman, to stick with the metaphoricity of seafaring. It is important to note that Rivas does not see the definition of Galicianness through migration in such a positive light as Kim does. Galicianness would be fundamentally redefined if Galicia as a nation or autonomous community would react to the experience of the Castro family and grant them “the right to lead in cultural matters” (Brennan 2001: 686). But this is not
the case. Interestingly, it is also not the case in the country Castro migrates to, in the U.K. Thus, European identities are not redefined; they stay exactly as they are.

Chelo’s bitterness after telling the story is significant for this argument:

Parecía cansada y arrepentida: No debería haber contado todo esto.

¿Por qué?, protesté.

Porque no sirve para nada. Sólo para hablar sola. Para eso, sí.

Bebió un trago e hizo un gesto de soniente amargura.

Solté la típica tontería de consuelo: Pero, al final, ustedes dos salieron adelante.

Lo que siento, dijo la madre de Castro, es no haber marchado yo. Tiempo después de morir mi marido, Ramón me escribió. Él había emigrado a Alemania. Fue de los primeros en marcharse allá. De minero, en Aquisgrán. Me envió el dinero para el viaje. Casi no sabía escribir, pero me puso una cosa muy amorosa: Hay calefacción, Cheliño, y es gratis.

Pero no se marchó.

Pues no. (66)

I do not want to resign myself to the situation that has led to such bitterness and defeat. Neither do I want to celebrate the survival techniques of the castaways in a recreation of the song that attempts to ward off the *Caimán*, and finally does not. I want to remember the impunity of the *Caimán* and the long-term consequences of his activities, and I want to propose a model of reading, of cultural analysis, and of politics on the
basis of my knowledge and the memories of migrants like Tito Castro.

**Dissident Europe, Solidaric Reading**

Crucial to my endeavour is a point that I made earlier, namely, that the *Caimán*, too, is Galician and that therefore, any cultural or national identity is heterogeneous, not homogeneous. This is possibly even more important in countries or continents which lived under regimes of coercion. For, under these regimes the citizens have the choice to form part of the regime, to resist it, or to find the middle way of trying not to get onto either side which, almost always, leads to complicity. This complicity manifests itself in very interesting ways once the regime is over: for, the latter group and the regime start sharing a common interest: the return to a “normality” which, for those who resisted, is all the more abnormal because it leaves unresolved, and therefore perpetuates, the traumas of the past, while pretending to take the side of those who suffered the traumas.

Many of the castaways of recent European history, and of European politics, have become migrants. In cultural theory and in politics, these migrants are hardly ever considered to be victims of shipwreck. As a consequence, the violence that lies in the act of making sure that they would suffer shipwreck, or in actively shipwrecking them, is being assumed into the premises of the theoretical approaches of transnational theory and, interestingly, into the ideologies of most post-1945 states. The connection between order and violence that Rivas so keenly points out in the very beginning of his book, is hidden under the myth of functioning democracies, and since these democratic states supposedly represent and take into account what we as citizens think and feel, we are deprived of the right to officially articulate and contest this connection between order and violence. The
political situation of Galicia, where Franco’s minister of tourism Francisco Fraga was in power until very recently, made this contradiction painfully obvious. In more covert terms we encounter it in most Western democracies.

One of the few ways out of this predicament is to recognize that European, white cultures are heterogeneous, and that the imaginaries upon which contemporary powers found their legitimacy are developed on the basis of the imaginaries of those who have been in power in the past. Under these consequences, it seems logical enough that European societies do not accommodate migrants; for, they cannot possibly admit that their own intellectual predecessors were responsible for, or actively tolerated, the shipwrecking and consequently, the migration of their own compatriots.

The experiences of our own migrants have become “politically inarticulate”, as Brennan terms it in Wars of Position:

What has become politically inarticulate in our own time weighs us down and oppresses us because we too have experienced trauma. Important codes cannot be deciphered because whole lifetimes have been silenced by Western ideological colonizations after 1989. The story of the non-Western world, the meaning of the postcolonial, makes no sense without the socialist East and its elaborate meaning, feeling, and valuing. It is time to translate that experience into a language that has so far only purported to understand the other. (64)

I want to amend this passage and add to it in some respects. Brennan points towards a lack of discourses, a lack of language, and because of this lack, to an imposed incapacity to decipher certain codes. I would specify in the context of this article that these codes make resistance to those in power possible.
Brennan applies this notion mainly to postcolonial theory. I will borrow his concept of the “politically inarticulate” to argue that at least in countries like Germany and Spain “what has become politically inarticulate in our own time weighs us down and oppresses us” because a dimension of our countries’ histories is excluded from our present. The existence of the “politically inarticulate” confines us to a discourse that in the last consequence accepts the defeat of those who offered an alternative. Our states and our theories have not picked up on their intellectual heritage. Sadly, we have to experience that neglect and silence are also a form of violence and of shipwreck; one that is just as efficient as active shipwrecking because it has more practitioners, seems less violent, and is therefore less easily recognized and more widely accepted.

From this point of view I protest Brennan’s reading of contemporary Europe because he, too, homogenizes it. Dissident Europe figures in his book only as defeated. This hampers his own argument. For, he cannot follow through on one of the most important possibilities he opens up in his book, a practice that I for now call solidaric reading and that, I suggest, he himself practices in his analysis of *Shame*.

In Brennan’s analysis of *Shame*, the political concerns he shares with Rushdie outweigh his disagreement with some of Rushdie’s public performances. Similarly, the political concerns that I share with Brennan outweigh my reservations for some positions that he takes, and the ones I share with Rivas outweigh the profound difference in our locations in terms of culture and geography. In all cases, the disagreements are clearly expressed but can be accommodated in the space created by our shared concerns. The space created by these shared affiliations and the recognition of “traditional” European and North American cultures as heterogeneous
might just be the one that allows us to find the new language we need for the articulation of the “politically inarticulate”, and for a theory and a cultural politics that grants migrants “the right to lead in cultural matters” (Brennan 2001: 686-687).

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Transgressing Time and the Familiar Anonymous: Performance in the Work of Alanna O’Kelly and Phil Collins

Niamh Ann Kelly

Introduction

On reading Jacques Rancière’s The Politics of Aesthetics (2004) I became curious as to how I might consider the art works Omós, 1994-95, by Alanna O’Kelly and How to Make a Refugee, 2001, by Phil Collins in connection with the ideas he raised on the ‘aesthetic regime’ and its inherent political address to and of community. Thinking through Ranciere’s upending of the trajectories commonly associated with modernism and its supposed sequel, allows me to open up these works tangentially to each other, though they seem at first consideration to come from very different sensibilities. In this paper I want to think through an imaginary exhibition of just two works.

Omós is a sound work that is contemporary in its presence, though its cue - poverty during the nineteenth century Irish Famine to - is a result of looking back to Ireland’s

1 The Great Irish Famine began in 1845 and its direct effect was acutely felt for six years. The failure of the potato crops following repeated blight infestations compounded widespread hunger, related diseases and death among the cottier classes in rural Ireland. These land-workers did not own land, were largely living in severe poverty and had dietary dependence on the potato as an affordable staple food. Following the potato blight, there were widespread
past. First performed at a time when Ireland was coping with the consequences of substantial emigration during the late 1980s and early 1990s, I want to emphasise that Omós also addresses a recent interest in the performance of art and questions the specificity often involved in en-visioning identity.

By contrast, over the last ten years of economic well being known as the Celtic Tiger, enactments of identity are addressed to a nation increasingly made up of immigrant groups. A nation of strangers has appeared. How to Make a Refugee is a video work that overtly explores a similar problem of visualizing identity distinctions. Though this work intervenes in a context outside of Ireland, I will explore the extent to which Collins’ practice was informed by his residing in Belfast during the 1990s. Heightened awareness of how identity is routinely visualised or imaged - supposedly ‘arrested’ by the still image - is at the heart of both these works.

forced evictions and emigration. The population in the 1841 was estimated over 8 million (Campbell, 1994:15) and by 1851, the population was depleted by over 25 per cent (Kinealy, 2002:2) and it is estimated that over a million died, while one and half million emigrated during this period.

2 The term, Celtic Tiger, was first coined in 1994 by Kevin Gardiner, a UK economist, who likened Ireland’s economic boom in the 1990s to those of Asian tiger economies. The boom was fueled by large-scale foreign industrial investment, returning emigrants and coincided the increase of immigrant populations and an unprecedented growth in property markets, consumer spending and consequently rising inflation.

3 I am cautious with my use of the term ‘appeared’ as we have yet to witness in Ireland whether or not Julia Kristeva’s ‘paradoxical community’ is reconciled to itself, as discussed by Delcan Kiberd. His text elaborates on ideas and shortcomings of theories of ‘multiculturalism’ in specific relation to Ireland’s rapidly changing ethnic and cultural demographic of recent years and in the context of Kristeva’s ideas on ‘strangers’ and ‘nationalism’ (Kiberd, 2001: 45-75).
In this context, I am particularly interested in the presence of movement in both these works. Firstly, I will consider Omós and the historical circumstance it necessarily addresses and the movements it announces. Secondly, and separately, I will look at how the making of How to Make a Refugee brings the problematic visualizing of more recent moments of social change and cultural alterity into focus, also by addressing the role of movement in the work. Also of relevance are the locations/situations from which both works were developed, as the artists’ own movement and senses of transition inform the interdependence between the subjects and media of the works.

O’Kelly’s central figure in Omós, a poverty-stricken indigenous girl of colonial Ireland from an Irish folk story, and Collins’ Kosovar-Albanian family in the midst of press photography shoot at a refugee camp during the Kosovo conflict of May 1999 have in common their status as the unnamed. I am purposeful in my use of the possessive artist owning their chosen subjects as this position is implicit in the concerns listed above and in both works in their eventual figuring of what might be termed the familiar anonymous.

Omós (Respect) - The Invisible Subject

In 1992 Alanna O’Kelly created an exhibition called ‘The Country Blooms... A Garden and a Grave’ at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin Ireland. This began a series of multi-media works on the theme of the Great Irish Famine and the related effect of emigration on Ireland subsequently. As part of this project, in 1995 O’Kelly created a sound work called Omós. Omós is the Irish Gaeic word for respect. The central sound is of a young girl running alongside a coach. She

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4 The title is taken from the poem The Deserted Village by Oliver Goldsmith, an 18th century Irish poet.
becomes increasingly breathless as she tries to keep up with the rolling coach wheels. The girl does not beg in words for aid: her aim is to let the occupants of the coach know of her presence. Eventually the listener can hear coins thrown in her direction.

This story is a well-known tale in Irish folklore: one that embodies a notion of national pride in a colonized country. The girl represents an oppressed and poverty-stricken people that feel compelled to encounter their oppressor who is here presented in the form of a coach and its occupants. Though she wants to make these wealthy travelers aware of her presence and of her impoverished and famished condition, her sense of self-respect denies her the will to beg directly for alms. Fragments of a children’s poem which tell this story are whispered intermittently throughout the work:

I am twelve years old
I run, barefoot, dressed in an old coat
I see two gentlemen, traveling in a coach
On the road from Leenane to Westport
I run beside their coach
I don’t ask for anything
I keep pace with them
There tell me over and aver that they will
Give me nothing
I do not ask for anything
I keep my silence
They shake their heads, ignore me, debate
And argue, wonder at my perseverance
I keep pace with their wheels
I do not speak
I do not look at them
They give me a fourpenny piece
I take it
I turn on my heels and run.\(^5\)

Eventually, the sounds speed up. The carriage moves faster, the running feet patter ever more quickly, almost beyond physical capability. The child’s breathlessness becomes louder, the whispered poem more urgent and eventually builds to a crescendo in the form of a wordless call, a caoine, similar to keening,\(^6\) and an ending of the work’s presentation. Jean Fisher describes O’Kelly’s use of the caoine:

>A sonorous call, a rhythmic vocalization without words… a lament for the dead returns in *Omós* as a shout for life. It is, in a sense, an invocation of that earlier, primary voice of the mother, calling upon its nurturing role to re-empower the subject. In this way, the call breaks the spell of enforced muteness; it is an open-mouthed sound that figures the moment when the repressive space is transformed into that imaginative passage where what is infans many initiate its own narration. (Fisher, 1996: 4)

The effect of *Omós* is that of a part-witnessed event, a partial glimpse of a tragic situation that leaves questions unanswered:

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5 This text also appeared in printed form in O’Kelly’s 1992 exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (National Irish Visual Arts Library).

6 Keening, caoine, is an Irish traditional form of wailing in mourning, practiced by women at a funeral wake, which may last for up to three days. It is similar in practice and sound to ululation made by women in some African and Arab cultures as forms of mourning and resistance. In Ireland a small group of women would perform keening at all wakes in a region. Caoine is also the Irish Gaelic word for crying, but, as Jeff Kelley describes it, in the context of keening, or caoineadh na marbh (lament of the dead), is understood as ‘a crying beyond crying’ (Kelley, 1997: 8).
what happened to the girl? How did the travelers in the coach feel when faced with her persistent silence?

This work began its presence in the world as a performance. On a darkened stage, O’Kelly would act out the role of the girl running, with, at first, only her feet visible in a small pool of light. Gradually as her running and breathlessness gathered pace, O’Kelly would emerge out of the darkness. In her words: “[…] the magic rhythm of the whole body coming out of this darkness, out of our past (Deepwell, 2005: 144). This performance was recorded and a layering of sounds added, including voices of the girl’s family and ancestors calling to her and accompanying her on her journey. At one point the child’s mother whispers a love poem to her. The work followed a period during which O’Kelly had developed a number of sound performances based on the caoine and wordless sounds from other cultures, such as the Canadian Eskimos, sounds that she has described as timeless (Deepwell, 2005: 140). In choosing to develop a sound presentation O’Kelly simultaneously chose to avoid a direct visual representation of the story to which she referred. Further, as Fisher indicates, the child’s own wordlessness in the face of inequality gives way to a more primal call – a traditional lament for the dead evoked in Irish mourning practices, thereby calling upon, in this case, a shared cultural form of mourning.

O’Kelly’s decision to develop a series of work based on the Irish experience during the famine followed a period of traveling with her work. On returning to live in Ireland she was keen to address in her art ideas of contemporary Irishness. (Deepwell, 2005: 140). Fiona Barber emphasizes that O’Kelly’s time studying art in London added to her sensitively toward

7 The description here relates to a sound piece made from a performance for ‘Hors Limites’ at the Pompidou Centre (Deepwell, 2005:143).
Irish emigrant populations and the complexities of the British-Irish relations in particular (Barber, 2004: 9-10). This context of being and feeling removed from her homeland provided her with a renewed interest in her identity and in the fracturing of Irish identity both at home and abroad. As Ireland experienced considerable emigration as a response to economic recession and widespread unemployment throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, many young Irish went to work in UK and elsewhere, some indefinitely. So the huge diaspora of Irish in the US, for example, that had been a direct result of the nineteenth century famine seemed to have a partial echo in the emigration patterns of 1980s.

Adjunct to this inward looking reflection, O’Kelly cites watching the news on television during this time as an influence on the direction of the overall series, ‘The Country Blooms...’. The images of contemporary famine appearing in her living room evoked the Irish Famine beyond its connection to contemporary Ireland, to an awareness of famine more generally. Her specific interest in the Irish famine was also informed by the reluctance she had experienced among those around her to discuss it – describing it as “a very dark place” (Deepwell, 2005: 141).

The story in Omós exists as a sort of historic anecdote: its veracity cannot be proven, but the tale is knowable. In her performance/sound piece O’Kelly called forth and reversed a historical device common in written accounts of nineteenth and early twentieth century rural Ireland, typically provided by personal journals or travel diaries of visitors to the country or those of the gentry class visiting their estates. Margaret Kelleher’s research in this area highlights that these visitors were usually from Britain and some were from America.

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8 O’Kelly discusses this in her “Winter Lecture” (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2001).
(Kelleher, 1997: 16). These diarists often struggled with ideas of ‘otherness’ and the difference between them and the people they encountered, while at the same time constructing this ‘native other’ through their texts. The writer Maria Edgeworth fictionalized her diary in the form of early regional novels (Castle Rackrent, 1800 and The Absentee, 1812), which provide valuable critiques of the effects of social distinctions of the period made between the landowners and their estate tenants (cottiers). Sighle Bhreathnach-Lynch discusses fluctuating attitudes toward the Irish on the part of the visiting British and gives the example of Charles Kingsley who wrote that it would be easier to accept the otherness of the Irish were they less similar-looking to the British, if, for example, they were black (Bhreathnach-Lynch, 1997: 245). Kelleher has discussed in detail “eyewitness” famine accounts through the William Carleton’s The Black Prophet, 1846, and Anthony Trollope’s Castle Richmond, 1860, (Kelleher, 1997: 16-63). The novelist Colm Tóibín evokes a historical sense of Ireland and class difference with a reference to a journey made by the protagonist, Henry James, in his book The Master, 2004. In an early section of the novel, as Henry sets out to travel in February 1895 from Dublin Castle to the Royal Hospital Kilmainham across the city, the narrator recounts:

He[Henry] had seen Ireland before, having traveled once from Queenstown in Cork to Dublin, and he had stayed also in Kingston briefly. He had liked Kingstown, the sea light and the sense of calm and order. But this journey now reminded him of traveling across the country, witnessing a squalor both abject and omnipresent. There were times during that journey when he was not sure whether a cabin had been partly razed to the ground or was fully inhabited. Everything seemed ruined or partly ruined. Smoke appeared from half-rotten chimneys, and no one, emerging from these cabins, could refrain from shouting after a carriage as it passed or moving malevolently towards one if it slowed down. There was no
moment when he felt free of their hostile stares and dark accusing eyes. (Tóibín, 2004: 25-26)

As exemplified in Tóibín’s text even sympathetic gentry who journeyed through poor rural parts of post-famine Ireland were often looked upon as intruders to those regions. O’Kelly has utilized this sense of transition through unfamiliar territory in *Ómós*, but has reversed the position of the teller. Instead of the usual account from the privileged position of the diarist or traveler she presents the silent recipient of that long-standing non-comprehending socially and politically constructed gaze. The chosen mediation is not through words, as a diarist might formulate them to conjure a visual description, but rather through a series of sounds that coalesce to produce a sense of urgency.

O’Kelly’s strategy of switching the role of the narrator unto the previously narrated figure, the unnamed girl, is also an insistence on moving beyond the literally visible in her presentation. Similarly, the duration it takes to listen to the work functions as a demand upon the listener to engage with art, in general, a little more slowly. By placing the listener in a situation where they must chose what sounds they identify with – the breathless girl, the coach wheels, the whispering voices - the evocation in this work queries assumptions of historic class identity and presents a new contemporary and socially inclined conundrum. The visual image/s in the listener’s imagination may be born in the space created between a politics of personal identification, a more generalized sense of retrospective perspective and an outward comprehension of situations of poverty and disempowerment, more universally. As the work unfolds the girl’s loss of speech is replaced by a cry beyond crying and the potential for the listener’s tidy sense of history is assuredly obscured by the contemporary nature of listening to the piece. The invisible
subject and final wordlessness of *Omós* transcends a loss of voice.

Commemorative exhibitions on the Irish Famine have often collapsed individual artworks into a collective representation of the Famine\(^9\) and so struggled to reflect a meaningful relationship between artifact, art and history. In *Omós* the reclaimed position of the storyteller also functions as a metaphorical reclaiming of the individual artwork as a socially constructed experience, rather than merely a link in a wider chain of exhibited objects. O’Kelly did not simply rehearse the language of history, and thereby risk repeating its patterns of misrepresentation, rather she chose a different and multilayered language in a useful transgression of time to reconstitute coevalness between past and present, subject and listener, art and its places of exhibition.\(^{10}\) What occurs in

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\(^9\) In 1946 the Exhibition of original paintings of Irish Historical Interest was organised in connection with the Centenary Commemoration of Thomas Davis and the Young Ireland Movement. (Thomas Davis was a poet and writer and a cofounder of the newspaper, The Nation, which was the main outlet for the Young Ireland Movement. This group Fintan Cullen has described as “concerned with defining Irish identity and propagating a form of cultural nationalism” [Cullen, 2000: 65]). In 1995, Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry organised an exhibition, Famine 150, at the Royal Dublin Society in Ballsbridge in Dublin and this exhibition toured to Derry early the following year. Also in 1995 the George Moore Society in Claremorris, County Mayo, held an art exhibition simply called Famine as part of a wider commemoration of the famine in various cultural forms, which toured internationally in the subsequent two years. In 1998 the Irish Museum of Modern Art presented an exhibition entitled Representations of the Famine, which toured Ireland and Northern Ireland. Unlike the others listed here, this 1998 exhibition had the express intention of addressing concepts about art history, as well as about the Famine, by juxtaposing art from various periods (Marshall, Press Release, 1998).

\(^{10}\) My use of coevalness here refers to Johannes Fabian’s discussion connecting the construction of otherness in cultural practices with the problematic situation of historical distance from a subject, and his suggestions of the possibilities of coevalness and the consequences of denying it to others (Fabian, 1983: 38-52).
Omós is a newer and historically differentiating form of imaginative truth that is created in and by the form of the work.
How to Make a Refugee - The Moving Image

Here we are now, in this instance, the media, discussing the media, disavowing that we are the media. It’s evidence of the tyranny of expression that we believe this straight reporting – the controlled zoom on the injured child – despite the instability of the document as a document. How irresistible the visual bleed into filmic discourse! The bereaved tell their story to a piano accompaniment. [...] These moments when you feel: why are they filming? Why are they not doing something useful? These are probably, in fact, the best moments for you too to take up your camera. (Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 86).

The photo and video works of Phil Collins present a speculative practice in an era of evidently contentious reportage and commonplace subversive imaging. At a time when the naive notion that there might be an innocent photograph has well and truly been put to rest, Collins, as quoted above, is determined to provoke the (political) aesthetic of the lens by wielding the lens. His work further reflects an exigency to disclose the difficulty of distinctions: namely, the struggle between comprehending and distancing the other, in particular as it occurs in and through popular and news media. Even the titles of his projects and works reveal this chronic philosophical (and ultimately aesthetic) dilemma: ‘Becoming More Like Us’, 2002, Bad Infinity, 2002, How to Make a Refugee, 1999, ‘Holiday in Someone Else’s Misery’, 2001, ‘Young Serbs’, 2001, ‘Real Society’, 2002, ‘You’re Not The Man You Never Were’, 2000.

Collins intentionally mixes personal reference with communally political contexts to produce momentarily confusing re/presentations. In a number of projects he has exploited this potential considerably. For example, in 2002 as part of ‘Frontline Compilations’ in San Sebastian, Collins
created a project called ‘Real Society’ where he extended an open invitation for people to come to a hotel room, strip and have their photograph taken. This was greeted with popular response. The confessional mode within the structure of the work is typical of Collins’s penchant for incorporating into his practice strategies that seem at first to obviate the final wider social and political account of his work and its aesthetic: the in-your-face personal and site-specific aspects belie the shared implications of his work.

Born in England Collins lived and worked in Belfast for many years during the 1990s and regularly shows work in both the North and South of Ireland. Now based in Glasgow, he continues to regularly move out of where he lives in order to make work. He is drawn towards zones of current or recent political discord and civil unrest. The influence of Northern Ireland as a site of hyper-visualised identities,11 both fixed and transitory and including, literally, parades of identity, on Collins’ work is keenly evident in How to Make a Refugee, 2000. Previous to this he had developed a series called ‘The Marches’ (1998-2000) in which he filmed Orange Marches in Belfast and Portadown. Contrary to the images broadcast worldwide of the bowler-hatted marchers and what violent interaction might take place at a march, Collins interviewed those watching the marches. He subsequently layered low-level sound recordings of the parties around bonfires after the marches. In doing so, he obscured the neat media perception

11 In Northern Ireland, notably in Belfast and Derry, the painting of symbolic colours, flags and motifs on pavements and gable ends of houses demarcate various zones of identity associations – for example nationalist or unionist iconography during ‘The Troubles’. Liam Kelly discusses art relating to such visualizations (Kelly, 1996:58-73). The Northern Irish Arts Council has announced an initiative to paint over many of these gable-end murals, but in the meantime, in Belfast at least, there is a taxi service for tours to some of the remaining murals across the city.
that is internationally relayed on Northern Ireland. For How to Make a Refugee, Collins again picked up his camera and pointed it at people who had in this moment become someone else’s chosen subjects on their location. This time he joined a camera crew on a photoshoot for a lifestyle magazine of a Kosovar-Albanian family in Chegrane on the Kosovan border.

In positioning himself alongside the camera crew, Collins acknowledges his participation in the voyeristic visualisation of the family being photographed. Nonetheless, as in Belfast and Portadown, he is in conflict with the conventional apparatus of popular media and its preferred stories. In this instance he seems intent on disrupting the severity of the single portrait image. His video takes the visual vantage point of the camera crew but ‘reveals’ the elements of construction in their ‘taking a photo’ and the negotiations that lead to the final image. The viewer/listener can hear the debates among the crew: Will the boy look better with or without his baseball cap? Should the other boy remove his T-shirt and display the scars from bullet wounds on his torso? Occasionally a hand enters the frame to take a light reading. The family are arranged in a cluttered configuration in a corner of a room, against a window on one side. Those of the middle and older generations sit on the sofas, while the younger ones stand or are crouched on the floor and two are perched on the sofa back. Textures of a disintegrating blue wall, a net curtain and a creamy fur-like sofa cover are the only intended clues to the interior domestic location.

In analysing the media construction of an image that might ‘move us’ How to Make a Refugee insists that those who see it, or perhaps witness it by proxy via Collins, are made to reflect on the nature and resolve of news and magazine photography and image-making more generally. He is interested in what is not told in the presentation of the photograph, as much as in whatever may later become
apparent. He is present at the moment in which a representation is constructed, one that will become part of the language of how this Kosovar-Albanian family become visually identified as ‘refugees’. His participation in that moment is distinguished by the fact that though his hand-held camera is mostly static, Collins’ work is performed, both in its presentation and in its active interpretation. It functions as an example of art’s potential to step in where the reporter’s, and later the historian’s, materialism can only fail, what Collins has termed the “instability of the document as document”. Or, to appropriate Rancière’s words from his thesis on the relation of art, politics and forms of knowledge more generally to fiction, Collins eloquently exposes the that “the logic of stories’ and the ability to act as historical agents go together” (Rancière, 2004: 39).

His wider art practice reiterates the conviction that we, as readers of the media, are not merely inactive spectators; far from it. Also in 2001, Collins developed work based firstly in Belfast and later in Tirana, Albania, called ‘Holiday in Someone Else’s Misery’. The first part of the project consisted of a line of T-shirts bearing the images of shootings or pipe-bombings in Northern Ireland, which he bartered for the opportunity to photograph the wearer. An uneasy comment on the fashion to move towards recent conflict sites as a sort of radical chic tourism – a temporary migration Collins describes as: “[t]he insatiable march of of fashion and news media to the illustrated exotic of the ‘other’”(Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 86). He has suggested that conventionally damage is considered more important than violence as a preferred point of entry for a set of critiques around national, cultural and personal identity. This he understands as contingent to the media’s fascination with “the wound the centre, with action over inaction, the visible over the invisible”(Robecchi & Gioni, 2002: 84). As O’Kelly wanted to look at a ‘dark place’, Collins too
seems keen to iterate Rancière’s conception of artistic practices as “‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (Rancière, 2004: 13). Collins and O’Kelly have directly brought us to hidden places and further actively made visible forms of representation. In this way these works function as aesthetic practices as they point to delimitation of the visible and invisible. 12

Imbedded in the distribution of time in this work is a self-conscious comprehension of the position of the speaker of the story or commentary. A complementary issue has been at heart of discussions on new historicism in art - a querying of the distinctions perceived between art history and art criticism that is compounded by the tricky presence of the author. Michael Ann Holly undermines the ease of such a distinction and develops her thesis on a ‘critical history’ where the object and viewer/interpreter are bound together in the production of meaning. 13 As she outlines: “[…] critical history does not arise spontaneously: it is coupled with the objects about which it speaks” (Holly, 2005: 84). Kevin Whelan draws a parallel conclusion in speaking about Irish history when he implies

12 Rancière writes of aesthetic practices as: “forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community” (Rancière, 2004: 13). I am suggesting that O’Kelly and Collins formulate a disclosure of historical and media representations, respectively, in the art works discussed here.

13 She writes:

What the discussion about the gaze in works of art has taught us its that perception always involves a circulation of positions, a process of movement back and forth that will forever undermine the fixity of the two poles, inside and outside. Herein lies the source of an historian’s critical artistry. The trick is making what forever will be a provisional metaphorical construction at least partially consonant with that made visible in the reigning artistic metaphors of the period. (Holly, 1995: 83)
that the teller and tale are sooner or later indistinguishable from each other (Whelan, 2003: 98). In How to Make a Refugee Collins clearly implicates not just himself as artist but also his viewer/listener as an author of the situation it presents. By presenting an account of the making of an image of difference, he forces us closer to his viewpoint, in a comment upon both the desire that news and popular media feeds and the cathartic distancing it casually offers and occurring in such visual representation.

Uneasy with the camera Collins has referred in interviews to its historic role as a diagnostic tool and has also spoken of the implicit violence in organising a video production. These acknowledgements clearly recall the legacy of the language commonly applied to lens-based activity and its endlessly evoked affinity to hunting. In Collins’s hands the camera lens continues its acts of transgression: subtly invasive, apparently deceptive. In the means of producing and presenting How to Make a Refugee, as in his wider oeuvre, he trangresses not only the subjects’ representation, but the systems of that representation. The formal concern of the moving and changing image is played out in the gallery by us, the viewer/listeners, in the completion of Collins’s practice which seems to me to advocate a type of social vigilance that is rarely without purpose.

The Familiar Anonymous

The expectation of finality or of specific representation is defied as a strategy within How to Make a Refugee and Omós. Though profoundly different pieces, coming from alternate personal experiences, for both O’Kelly and Collins, their movement as artists is integral to the work they produce. It informed their identification of their initial subjects (for want of a better term), and the consequential art forms and means of dissemination of ideas they present. In How to Make a Refugee
and Omós the overtly political aesthetic choices made by the artists revolve around a perceived difficulty with the reductive potential of visualising identity, or in the construction of apparent difference. An antagonism toward still images, otherwise readily employed by both the artists in other works, is here bound up with ideas of the ordinary or generalized subject.

In art’s history and art’s relationship to history, and in wider media representation’s relationship to the present or recent past, the understanding of time and timeframe are essential components. The concept that history and historical moments of the present are somehow progressively enduring phenomena external to art is blurred by the consideration of temporal distance, which also cogently raises uneasy questions about experiencing/engaging with contemporary art. Collins insists that his viewer/listener sustains concentration for the duration of taking a photograph: the image alone is not enough. O’Kelly desires her listener to actively imagine a scene of history in the present, in the gallery: here again a single image will not suffice. By presenting works that move beyond literal, physically specific representations to embrace the multiple potentialities of understanding, How to Make a Refugee and Omós make Fisher’s ‘imaginative passage’ a possibility. They do this by forcing the viewer/listener to spend time with the work, and to actively formulate an understanding from an experience of the stories alluded to, their uncertainty and lack of resolve. We are uncomfortably implicated in both Omós and How to Make a Refugee. These ordinary ‘subjects’ will travel well, now their anonymity is recognizable, familiar even.

Works Cited


Migratory Aesthetics: art and politics beyond identity

Jill Bennett

In the very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. As they hauled down the flag [in the colonies], we got on the banana boat and sailed right into London…They had ruled the world for 300 years and, at last, when they had made up their minds to climb out of the role, at least the others ought to have stayed out there in the rim, behaved themselves, gone somewhere else, or found some other client state. But no, they had always said that this [London] was really home, the streets were paved with gold, and bloody hell, we just came to check out whether that was so or not.

Stuart Hall (Hall, 1991, 24; Brown, 1995, 271)

There would be a sign; dreams end…Then there would be paths and they would get jumbled, and bones, and they all get jumbled, and all of them would combine and then there would be a tall tree, that, according to the map was red.

Kathy Acker (Acker, 1997, 271)
Identity

A galleon on the high seas, captained by the *Exquisite Pirate*, fashioned after Kathy Acker’s *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, the quintessential outlaw living ‘free of authority’. And the *Reverend on Ice* – a headless skater, fabricated – like the pirate – from cloth fragments. She and her ship – along with the skeletal figure draped across the bow – are rendered as a vast felt collage, advancing across the walls surrounding the Reverend’s frozen pond; his colonial dress is constructed from African printed cloth (that turns out to be made in the Netherlands).¹ ‘They would all get jumbled’ as Acker puts it; this is why the pirate, adorned with booty from other ships, her authority not given by the state but taken by force, was an emblematic figure for postmodern appropriation.

In a room in the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), these two action figures come together in an exuberant and somewhat macabre dance in the midst of what is, in essence, a show about migration. Specifically, the

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¹ This quintessentially ‘African’ fabric was produced in the nineteenth-century by the Dutch and English – often using Indonesian batik traditions – and subsequently exported to West Africa, the region with which it is characteristically associated. Shonibare has utilized this fabric precisely to undermine the concept of authenticity in cultural production.
exhibition *Contemporary Commonwealth* – *CC06* for short – focuses on the territories of the British Commonwealth – a union with little local significance or purchase on its notional membership, other than by association with the Commonwealth Games that are the occasion for this cultural celebration. Given the uncomfortable spectre of Empire, however, the exhibition eschews the notion of a given or shared Commonwealth identity, focusing instead on an array of journeys within or between Commonwealth nations. Many of these embody the playful debunking of postcolonial separation evoked by Stuart Hall in the above anecdote, which points to the fact that immigration presents a profound challenge to the privileged sense of identity at the heart of the imperial nation.

In fact, in the terms of this event, migration displaces identity. If postcolonial exhibitions have in recent history provided occasions for the articulation of new or previously suppressed identities, *CC06* aligns more readily with a post-identity politics that focuses on relations and connections – and hence, potentially, on the emergence of contingent communities that are not grounded in any clearly defined sense of identity. Rather than predefining the collective, *CC06* implicitly locates the ties that bind with aesthetic process, so that relations emerge within the exhibition; politics do not simply inform the exhibition, but are enacted through it at the level of material and sensate processes, and community is posited as something fluid, not yet named, potentially existing outside inscribed identity. In other words, community – collective enunciation—is an event realised through aesthetics.

Conceived within the terms of identity politics, exhibitions function to represent specific groups, and also to constitute spaces or conditions in which disenfranchised or new ‘hybrid’ identities might flourish. But the exhibiting of
identity does not, in and of itself, enfranchise, or facilitate democratic participation. The institutional model of multiculturalism that simply promotes the representation of diverse identities as add-ons to mainstream culture is in fact a fairly static one, which does not address the issue of interaction; hence, ‘migrant’ cultures might be acknowledged in their own terms, if not understood as impacting upon, participating within and radically changing the ‘mainstream’. In other words, the ‘migrant art’ exhibition may exist within the institution in relative separation. In this regard, the recent turn to the dynamics of interconnection (an issue that is fundamental to both politics and aesthetics) might be understood as a response to the limitations of identity politics in both institutional and aesthetic terms – an attempt to move beyond and around identity; to literally shift ‘identities’ out of a static space into a dynamic set of relationships, whether through ‘relational aesthetics’, ‘dialogical aesthetics’ or other mobilisations of the concept of participation and democracy in art.

Curatorial practice is always a barometer of cultural theory, which it assimilates and turns over with the rapidity that new event design requires, but this trend should not simply be dismissed as the translation of theory into practice. In an important sense, the turn away from identity politics in art and exhibition practice allows a turn toward aesthetics in politics and marks a decisive break with the logic of art as representative of group identity. To some extent, the notion of national representation is now divorced from any concept of aesthetic expression (work in the national pavilions of the Venice Biennale, for example, rarely embodies national identity in any straightforward sense). The issue here is not one of content, however. Art may express a felt experience of
community or belonging (even of a flag or national symbol\textsuperscript{2}), but aesthetic operations do not by nature proceed from pre-formed identity categories, nor coextend with the bounds of such categories. As Brian Massumi argues, expression is not an attribute of groups of persons, but a process-based inquiry that operates in its own terms (Massumi, 2002, 253).

It can be argued, of course, that the instrumental use of art – or its institutional cooption – need not compromise its aesthetic ambition. Exhibition titles, after all, often simply comprise generic descriptors of regions or countries, pointing to the diversity within, and I am reading CC06 in this light. Giorgio Agamben, however, alerts us to the slippery slope of identity politics, which he suggests colludes unwittingly with the politics of state institutions. The state, he argues, is comfortable with an expression of identity in as much as coherently defined identities can be annexed or contained:

\begin{quote}
[T]he State can recognize any claim for identity – even that of a State identity within the State... What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (Agamben, 1993, 86).
\end{quote}

In this way, multicultural policy is easily espoused by liberal democracies as a celebration of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious identities, united – and regulated – under one umbrella. Yet the rejection of identity as an organising trope makes for interesting post-colonial politics. It stands in opposition to the notion that decolonisation occasions an expression of pre-existing – or previously suppressed – bonds.

\textsuperscript{2} For example, Jun Yang’s video \textit{HERO – this is WE}, exhibited in the 2005 Venice Biennale, draws parallels between the biennale and the Olympics as a show of national strength, tracing the appeal of the flag in nations like China and the US.
Instead, as Jean-Luc Nancy has indicated, the emergence of decolonised communities necessitates a new way of thinking about community formation. Formation in this sense is the operative term, emphasising dynamic process (being-in-common at any given moment) rather than foundation. And it is this that contemporary aesthetic practice embodies—particularly in the curatorial domain where the nature of a project is to work across and between artworks.

My argument, then, is this: that the shift from identity to relationality, and toward an exploration of communality as a process, is a key development in terms of political aesthetics. It is fundamentally a more aesthetic project than is identity politics insofar as it allows that a politics may be derived directly from aesthetic process and description—that aesthetics is a particular modality of the political rather than a form of mediation. The aesthetic ‘entity’ in question is the exhibition—the coming together of multiple artworks in a given event. To understand the politics of such an event in their full aesthetic terms we must look beyond the naming of the collective (the Commonwealth is a case in point) and start to conceive of connectivity in present and forward-looking terms. How do exhibitions occasion new collective enunciations with their own political effectivity?

An exhibition at the Witte de With (Rotterdam) in 2005 pursued this question by focussing on the interstices between works on display, and by implicitly proposing this space as one in which the coercive aspects of identity politics, fixed terms and injunctions might be circumvented. That exhibition’s aphoristic title, *Be What You Want But Stay Where You Are*, gestures on the one hand to Agamben’s theory of the state’s interest in identity (be what you want but stay within the boundaries of the state) and, on the other hand, to Hall’s characterisation of the colonial fantasy of separation (be what
you want but stay outside). It thereby renders explicit the tacit understanding of many other contemporary exhibitions: communities are neither structured nor contained by governmental process. To this end, the question of what art emerges from any particular nation – or, for that matter, from a political aggregation like the Commonwealth – is meaningless. Not just because art (that might be social, cultural, political) is not an expression of nation, but because its function within the relational space of an exhibition is greater than the representative one implied in such a model. Art is as much about what Agamben calls the ‘coming community’ as one that pre-exists or can cohere within the boundaries of nation. It doesn’t offer up a representable condition of belonging so much as an account of process and movement: new sets of conjunctions, a surprise event.

Hence CC06 inevitably became a show grounded in the expression of processes of migration, both as subjective experience and critical intervention – a far cry from the traditional showcase of national cultures that a ‘Commonwealth exhibition’ would once have implied. There are works in adjacent rooms that describe – with greater precision – particular journeys in their subjective, historical or political dimensions (Isaac Julien’s Paradise Omeros or Berni Searle’s Home and Away) or works that explicitly trace migratory routes (Leon Cmielewski’s and Josephine Starr’s Seeker tracks the movement of people around the globe with animated data visuals), but no juxtaposition that is quite as exhilarating as that of Sally Smart’s Pirate and Yinka Shonibare’s Reverend. Both figures are routinely read as embodiments of postcoloniality, incorporating evidence of past encounters, yet they are not so much representations as interventions. They burst incongruously into a contemporary space – witty fantasies of postcolonial reappropriation; an instance of migratory aesthetics in action.
The pirate and the reverend embody migration as an animating force: a dynamic that activates relationships, cuts a swathe across history and reorients the works in the exhibition (energised by resonances at all levels: formal, material, political, sexual, rhetorical…). Smart’s pirate generates a motif for seafaring exploration (colonial or migratory) that in the current context evokes the paranoia of a settler culture obsessed with border control and the spectre of boat people; threat is mockingly embodied in the exuberantly lawless pirate and the skeletal bodies aboard her ship, playing off Shonibare’s elegant headless torso, as well as Ex de Medici’s resplendent watercolours of camouflaged weapons and skulls on the opposite wall.

The capture and transformation within this dynamic conjunction of a pervasive contemporary political sentiment generates a current of affect that runs through the exhibition. Fear, anxiety and suspicion – the negative affects, frequently mobilized in contemporary politics, are literally toyed with in these works. Yet these are not expressive works in any conventional sense; ‘characters’ are suggested purely by the animation of fabric, these affects are not sensations or emotions belonging to them or describing a response to a past event. Both the pirate and the Reverend are transient figures, seeming to emerge in the present space from their respective costume dramas; the skater gliding onto the ice, and the ship arriving at the shoreline provide the quintessential ‘big entrance’—an overture to the spectacle. They both evince particular cultural histories and migratory routes, yet if their function here were merely to represent those histories, this would have made CC06 a far less adventurous, overly museological endeavour. Instead, by the select inclusion of these dramatic costume pieces, CC06 commences with a moment of pantomime splendour, creating an event out of
bizarre constructions, not really representative of any particular place or people, summoned to this place from a divergent and fragmentary Commonwealth.

The affect generated and circulated through these works does not arise from historical narrative in this sense. It is largely a function of the exhibition’s imbrication in the contemporary. How can we think about migration, arrival by sea, here in contemporary Australia without confronting the reality of the refugee situation, and a politics tempered by “terror”? Hence, the orchestration of work by Shonibare, Smart, De Medici, constitutes vectors for emotion that is generated around borders and migration. Rather than any claim to document the real, it is this capacity to activate and channel affect that gives the exhibition its political edge.

Collective enunciation and surprise
The question of how we deal with the fear, anxiety and paranoia at large in contemporary politics is a pressing one for artists and theorists. It is not enough to mock and deride, or to substitute rationality for affect, since paranoia is an operative politics—a way of reading with strategic implications, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has demonstrated. It is marked, she notes, by “a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse to all surprise”; characterised by an extreme faith in knowing as exposure, and hence, in rigid historiographic principles (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003, 146). Insofar as it looks forward, it identifies only threat—the bad surprise. Everything must be foreseen, traced to its antecedent causes or predicted and prevented (hence the political ascendancy of the ‘precautionary’ principle as a rationale for the pre-emptive strike) (Bennett, forthcoming). Hope, Sedgwick argues, emerges from relinquishing the paranoid anxiety that no horror shall ever come “as new”, and from the energies of organising the fragments and part objects
one encounters and creates. These are the very energies that are engaged by the material structure of an exhibition. Curatorial practice, in this sense, might be understood as the organization of fragments into new assemblages—structures that create space to realise not only that the future can be different from the present, but that the past might have unfolded differently (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003, 146). Aesthetics—and particularly migratory aesthetics—thus has a more complex relationship to temporality and to the impetus for truth. An expression of movement within the faultlines of inhospitable territories, migratory aesthetics is not foreboding like the paranoid imaginary. By nature, it embodies a process of remaking, flux and mutation that recognises the lineaments of other possibilities. Exhibitions like CC06 or 2Move exhibit the knowledge that surprise may be either bad (traumatic) or good. As much as the paranoid imagination is relentlessly bleak, migratory aesthetics seeks out the new, even as it relates the darkest stories of colonization, division and exclusion. In other words, although “it” is not a singular movement, its inherent qualities of movement and transition are at odds with the paranoid structural aversion to surprise—to a future unknown.

I am discussing migratory aesthetics here as something that is realised as an event—a collective enunciation—within a given exhibition. Hence, the curatorial process entails orchestrating a formal dynamic in order for assemblages and their multiple relationalities to cohere. Meaning emerges from aesthetic or formal resonance operating across works and in the interplay with the politics of the moment. The works under discussion do not seek to “represent” the contemporary political scene, but in a particular configuration absorb and channel a politics overshadowed by the refugee crisis, which then finds affective
resonance in other pieces: poetic allegories of migration and settlement, such as John Gillies' *Divide* (a black and white video evoking colonial Australia and the biblical journey into Canaan), operating in a more subdued register to describe the upheaval and turmoil, flowing inexorably – and exponentially – from displacement. Such work grounds the exuberant affect of the Shonibare/Smart room so that the high point of theatricality does not simply exhilarate but intensifies and subsides as it resonates with events staged elsewhere.

Real migratory stories, real histories of invasion, trauma, and the violence of separation are invoked at different points in the exhibition. What place is there, ultimately, for fantasy characters, or for the theatricality of Shonibare's masked ball in this scenario? When does the politics of aestheticisation diminish by comparison with the documentary style with its self-evident relation to the real? The answer might be—paradoxically—when it masquerades as realism and representation—or lays claim to truth. More specifically, in this context, when it stands a part from the larger collectivity as an end in itself. Here the pirate and the reverend are themselves part objects in an assemblage that allows us to imagine that the colonial past might have been otherwise. The fanfare they engender immediately debunks any claim to serious history writing, displacing our engagement onto a more complex interplay of affect that generates transversal links with other works. They are all about surprise.

The success of this curatorial juxtaposition lies in the fact that meaning arises from aesthetic process, as opposed to simply content or form. Unifying work at the level of content leads inevitably toward didacticism—an insistence on meaning and a privileging of interpretation over aesthetic experience. On the other hand, formalist curating is apt to void
work of particular and operative meaning (politics) too readily, promoting pan cultural visual resonance at the expense of cultural specificity. This has been a tension in play ever since the arena of contemporary art became ‘global’ rather than merely ‘western’. The landmark exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* (Paris, 1989) was a watershed in this regard, combining contemporary practice from diverse cultural traditions. Yet its curator Jean Hubert Martin was widely criticised for certain juxtapositions: the sand drawings performed by Yuendumu Aboriginal people in a space dominated by Richard Long’s mud drawing, for example. Quite a part from the implied hierarchy of the ‘hang’, such works were imbued with a monumental (and representative) status, ‘talking to each other’ across a cultural divide. Almost two decades later, progressive curators readily play upon such material connections. *Documenta 12* (Kassel, 2007) works precisely in these terms: a Russian fountain made from salt, installed alongside a Chinese wax waterfall or porcelain wave; a Japanese bondage video in sight of the rope frame of a dance troop—formal ensembles, each embedded with multiple political and cultural significations, prompting different interpretative possibilities as they are evoked in various constellations. Here there is no longer any suggestion of a universal symbolism—a pan-culturalism reduced to its formal components so that it is voided of cultural meaning.

I would argue that in an exhibition like *Documenta 12*, relationality is thought through not just at the level of theme but in terms of a dynamic flow that works on something immanent in the artwork itself but that is activated by connection. In describing this connection we should avoid replacing form and content designations with an account of relationality that simply privileges audience encounter at the level of individual interactivity. The key issue is how works
are activated in such a way as to produce a collective enunciation—a politics of the contemporary. The difference, I think, between *Magiciens de la terre* and either *Documenta 12* or *CC06*, for example, is the extent to which relationality in aesthetics is understood as a political expression in the moment. By this I mean as a temporal unfolding or coextension of diverse works that envelops and conduct a politics of the present.

There is a fine line here that reflects Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between major and minor literature. “Living and writing, art and life, are opposed only from the point of view of major literature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, 41), because major work is, within the terms of its institutionalisation, profoundly individuated. However social or personal, it is configured as an exceptional expression and thereby removed from the sphere of the collective. This is what happens when ‘great’ works in their own right are juxtaposed; they affirm their own authority and allow viewers to make only visual or interpretative connections. A new mode of curatorial practice—of which *Documenta 12* is a prime example—might recast work as minoritarian by locating it in a less competitive environment where it can function as part of a collective enunciation. The key dimension to this process is not simply to allow in ‘life’ as either documentary representation or spectator interaction. It is to understand contemporary art as existing and operating within the contemporary—so that the exhibiting space is always an extension of the outside: the local politics, the world. Politics comes from the configuration of art in this unbounded contemporary space, rather than from institutional designation: making the exhibition contemporary, rather than institutionalising contemporary art.

In this sense the politics of art is always contingent rather than predetermined or foreclosed. In response to the
question of how art propounds a politics, Ranciere has argued that, “It is necessary to reverse the way in which the problem is generally formulated. It is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate for their proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way around” (Ranciere, 2004). As I have argued elsewhere, this entails that the event in art is constituted as a kind of virtual event, amenable to different actualities (Bennett, 2005). In other words, rather than merely giving account of an event that has already happened (and which may have informed the work’s production and form), it serves to generate a set of possibilities, which may in turn inform political thinking in regard to particular circumstances. This level of political operativity may be activated (or conversely, deadened) when work is staged in different configurations in different locations.

Perhaps in some sense the ‘test’ of contemporary art – of its contemporaneity – is its capacity to be invested in this sense; to constitute vectors that link events in a new configuration. ‘Migratory’ art is exemplary in this regard insofar as it embodies movement and transition, making aesthetics political, by shifting it—literally mobilizing it—into new sets of relations. This politics of possibility rests on a dynamic conception of relationality in art as something more than the closed circuits of interactivity: relationality as always contemporary, as enfolding ‘life’ in the sense that minor literature is part of a collective fabric rather than separable art sphere. Works in an exhibition are, in this way, not simply juxtaposed and rendered subject to comparative analysis, but simultaneously mobilised. CC06 encompasses the history of global migration: movement across a vast area, spanning five continents, and the decades since former colonies achieved
independence. Within this, it comprises an orchestration of simultaneous movement, of a collective that has no existence, no visibility. The question is not what this is, what political entity gave rise to this coming together, but what this does, collectively in the present. Politics is not written into these works but arises from aesthetic dynamics: from a collective enunciation unbound to a collective. To this end, art theoretical analysis needs to offer precise account of the nature of aesthetic perception, of the substance of connection and the flow of affect.

**Aesthetics**

Here, I am extending the title concept of Mieke Bal and Miguel Hernandez-Navarro’s exhibition *Migratory Aesthetics* to describe another show, CC06, reading that title as indicative of a wider phenomenon in contemporary art. *Migratory Aesthetics* announces itself as an operative concept rather than a generic descriptor – a value-added concept that arises from the collected artworks and the connections between them. This tracing of a concept in aesthetic practice reprises one of Bal’s recurrent quests to derive thought from art; to treat art, not as an object of cultural studies, but as a mode of doing cultural studies, and crucially, of setting the terms of a cultural inquiry (Bal, 2000). More than the sum of artworks about migration, Migratory Aesthetics invokes aesthetics in the strong sense, as an epistemic project, rather than simply in the weaker sense, implying the aesthetic treatment of objects.

To qualify aesthetics as migratory is to evoke an aesthetics conditioned by migration. Yet within contemporary art discourse, there is a surprising reticence to conceive of aesthetics – the theory of aesthetic form, dynamics, behaviour and perception – as tempered by cultural shifts. Art itself has a well-defined relationship to contemporaneity (modernism, after all, implies its embodiment). Hence, the overlapping
themes of migration, globalization and postcoloniality are predominant in many biennales and major international art exhibitions of the past decade and a half. Yet aesthetics – the discourse that could/should make general claims (based on the specifics of art’s engagement) for what the aesthetic contributes to an understanding of contemporary culture – has been curtailed by an art theoretical tendency to entrench a form-content distinction that construes social and political issues as content matters, antithetical to the formal concerns of aesthetics. To the extent that this view prevails, art theory has failed to elaborate an aesthetics that would locate politics in the very particularity of art’s mode of expression.

As Isobel Armstrong has shown, however, the purist conception of aesthetics that underpins this distinction is the unfortunate legacy of a more widespread ‘anti-aesthetic’ turn in theoretical writing (Armstrong, 2000). In art history, the so-called ‘anti-aesthetic’ period of postmodernism has prompted a ‘return’ to aesthetics, often narrowly conceived as a return to ‘beauty’ in art and art discourse. There is reason to be suspicious of the anti-aesthetic tag insofar as the diversity sanctioned by postmodernism simply allowed for a proliferation of aesthetics. Judgements of taste became relative; aesthetics, a crowded space that embraced the market, popular culture, diversity. Hence, the idea that art theory might, after a period of social mixing, return to a purified aesthetics, itself somehow untouched by cultural change is untenable. If aesthetics is to be more than a nostalgic refuge for conservative art theory, it has to function with greater impurity and within what Deleuze and Guattari term the “cramped space” of contemporary culture; that is, not the space made available within the institution for major art but the lived space, in which we encounter exclusion, confinement, marginalisation, difference and change (Deleuze
& Guattari, 1986). A project that conceives of aesthetics as migratory – as adaptive and mutable – is an important challenge, necessitating a turn to an expanded conception of aesthetics as an epistemic inquiry.

Aesthetics is, by definition, concerned with what Baumgarten termed ‘sensitive’ or ‘sensuous knowledge’ – a faculty of perception and thus a means of apprehending the world (Baumgarten, 1970 [1758]). As a primary encounter, unconstrained by the categories, methods and demarcations of other disciplines and practices, aesthetic perception is a unique non-scientific basis for inquiry. It does not take up the terms of current institutionalised analysis or align its expressions with pre-existing categories; it excavates often underlying perceptions and affects, direct engagements with the world in its uncategorized ‘whateverness’, to use Agamben’s term (Agamben, 1993, 86). At this level of sensory encounter, ascriptions of national or group identity are apt to fall away, even as they produce ‘wounded attachments’ (in Wendy Brown’s phrase) and residual or unconscious emotional effects. The point of pursuing the epistemic possibilities of aesthetic perception is not, then, to illustrate the propositions of science and sociology – to underwrite divisions of nations, people or identities (positive or negative) – but to establish another way of knowing, and hence another ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Ranciere, 2004). It is at this level that aesthetics is political intervention, reorganising affects to redetermine a perceptual landscape.

If the art of identity politics was pursued as a self-legitimating practice, aesthetics is at variance with this insofar as it cuts through identity in the process of tracing the operations of perception. For this reason, migratory aesthetics

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3 Baumgarten gave the discipline its name, deriving it from the Greek aisthanomai, meaning perception by means of the senses.
cannot be synonymous with art about migration, or art by migrants (though it may of course encapsulate both). This is not to say that it disregards the latter in any sense; rather that aesthetics must serve art more effectively by making the general case and configuring the political through the aesthetic by describing the particularity of what art does.

What then, can migratory aesthetics – an exploration of sensory perception conditioned by migration – deliver in addition to accounts of particular migrations or indeed of identities?

This is, in a sense, why I choose to focus on CC06, an exhibition that enacts migratory aesthetics, but does not label itself as such nor even claim to ‘represent’ accounts of migration. In this instance, the cumulative effect of the aesthetic engagement with migration is to engender a politics of contemporary culture as ‘migrant’, that is, a culture transformed by migration but emphatically not a separable minority culture. In this arena, pressing concerns (the refugee issue, ‘multicultural’ politics and contemporary divisions, as well as fundamental issues of democratic participation) emerge through the aesthetic analysis, as it were.

One of the interesting things about CC06 was how work that might be corralled under the ‘topic’ of war and terror – the politics of the moment – emerges readily from ‘migratory’ art as a natural outgrowth. By not naming art as ‘migrant’ or as ‘about war and terror’ the exhibition avoided the kind of thematization that overdetermines the content of work, instead allowing us to see how an aesthetic method gives rise to a broad-based politics of the contemporary. This is an important way to think about the epistemic possibilities of exhibition practice.
More specifically, if there is a paranoid style in contemporary global politics, we might see the aesthetic as structurally suited to a systematic refusal of this strategy. Can aesthetic experimentation generate models by which we can understand cultural movements that do not allow themselves to be predicted on identity politics? This is an urgent political project in a context where clashes sparked by ethnic and racial divisions are often deemed as ‘unforeseen’, or as inexplicable irruptions – actually blind-spots – in a ‘multicultural’ state, which cannot adequately conceptualise contingent relations. If ‘paranoid politics’ reacts to the experience of the unforeseen in ways that seek to reduce the event—and the behaviour of those involved—to a predictable formula, a more aesthetically inclined politics might develop more complex understandings of cultural movements and relations, based on a direct engagement with unpredictability.

The ‘event’ status of an exhibition very often militates against the notion of art as ‘inquiry’ or contribution to knowledge insofar as institutions like galleries and biennales are driven always to look for the next new theme. Hence there is a rapid turnover of topics and tropes, none of which are subjected to the sustained and cumulative development that characterises academic research (although rapid filtration sometimes has its own advantages). But aesthetic inquiry properly conceived (and unconstrained by an imposed theme or topic) does enable the constitution of an enduring thread of knowledge. Without needing to ‘claim’ the subject of terror, migratory aesthetics (as a concept grounded in critical art and exhibition practice) provides something akin to a methodological foundation – a cultural genealogy that leads from the analysis of past migrations into a present politics where the perceptual and affective relations surrounding migration flow directly into realpolitik and lived experience. This is how aesthetic resonance works (as I have argued
elsewhere, regarding the question of how work on conflict and trauma may translate into different contexts) -- not through similarities in semantic content or even form but through a depth engagement at the level of the political aesthetic as a true method of inquiry (Bennett, 2005; 2006, 67–81). In this sense, it is important to acknowledge relational aesthetics as more than a thematic interlude.

**Shared exposure: being-in-common**

*CC06* – the appellation referencing a shared identity that isn’t one – serves as a case study revealing what might remain once the notional bonds of shared identity are discarded. The tagline of the 2006 Commonwealth Games was, as it happened, ‘united by the moment’ – an uplifting marketing slogan that unwittingly alluded to the lack of any enduring Commonwealth community. This image of a fleeting togetherness – ‘a relation without a relation’ (Nancy) – is echoed in contemporary theory where it emerges – in Nancy’s work, in particular – as a sign of ethical possibility. The ineffability of a ‘being in common’ that does not cohere as a representable identity may, however, require aesthetics or art to realize it as an ethical or political concept. Something banal and unnoticed in daily life becomes conceivable in the domain of the aesthetic, which can modulate the tenor of an encounter to examine affective relations. Nancy conjures the utterly mundane image of ‘passengers in the same train compartment’ who are simply seated next to each other: *together but not linked*: ‘They are between the disintegration of the “crowd” and the aggregation of the group...exposed simultaneously to a relationship and an absence of relationship’ (Nancy, 1991, 7). This evocation of a communal experience beyond the realm of the named community points to a quintessential modern, predominantly urban condition,
constituted by stranger-encounters as much as by familiar relations; a dislocated experience, rather than a sedentary one, where one is in transit as much as at home. But unlike the conspicuous isolation of the modernist subject, embodied in the figure of the *flâneur*, strolling alone within a crowd, here the emphasis is on the condition of community that subsists within this state of affairs. In the train compartment there is an unavoidable encounter with the strangeness and difference of others, however temporary this encounter may be. The sense of ‘being with’ entailed in this mass transit experience is literally poised *between*, in that zone beyond the affiliations of work, home and various destinations, but it is nonetheless an interface: a place in which we negotiate being with others in a physical, emotional and ethical sense.

Terror attacks in London and Madrid have recently invested the image of the mass transit train as a site of shared or common exposure with more solidity than Nancy’s metaphor originally contained. The extraordinary traumatic event is often the occasion for community expression. But the train is, in a very real sense, the site where a politics of migration—and of paranoia—play out, both in fleeting perceptions and in the sense of retributory violence and violation. In the name of security and vigilance, we are enjoined to regard the passengers in our train compartment with suspicion. This has led Shilpa Gupta, a participant in CC06, to stage interactive performances in trains (*Blame*, 2002–03). She wanders through train carriages, selling to passengers her Blame bottles, full of simulated blood, with a label reading ‘Blame® BLAMING YOU MAKES ME FEEL SO GOOD’. This discursive engagement is neither didactic not sentimental; it is not about inducing an idealised feeling of togetherness. Rather, Gupta acknowledges the degree to which the politics of *ressentiment* – the extreme of identity politics – urgently requires both analysis and intervention at the level of affect.
Ressentiment (vengefulness) is defined by Nietzsche in terms of a desire to deaden pain by means of affect – through the production of a more violent emotion, directed outward:

Every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering – in short, some living thing upon which he can on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy (Nietzsche, 1989; Brown, 1995, 214).

After the London Tube bombings thousands of people posted ‘we’re not afraid’ messages (pictures – often of themselves in various public locations – with versions of that slogan added) on a website www.werenotafraid.com. It wasn’t that people really weren’t afraid; they were, of course, more anxious than ever, but what is significant is how they took recourse in an aesthetic strategy – aesthetic by virtue of operating directly on affect. The We’re Not Afraid site can be read as a refusal of ressentiment, a means of countering not just the threat of terror but the manipulation of affect that has characterised the PR component of the War on Terror.4 It elicits a defiance based not in retribution or negative affect, but in the spontaneous generation of a community united simply in exposure.

This is, in Kosofsky Sedgwick’s terminology, a “reparative” rather than “paranoid” aesthetics. “Paranoid knowing” insists on knowledge in the form of exposure. It is based on a hermeneutics of suspicion that seeks always to

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4 The project is described as follows: “We’re not afraid is an outlet for the global community to speak out against the acts of terror that have struck London, Madrid, New York, Baghdad, Basra, Tikrit, Gaza, Tel-Aviv, Afghanistan, Bali, and against the atrocities occurring in cities around the world each and every day. It is a worldwide action for people not willing to be cowed by terrorism and fear mongering.” Internet, <http://werenotafraid.com/about.html>, accessed January 19, 2007.
reveal underlying truth, placing its faith in the act of revelation and unveiling. This is where aesthetics and the paranoid or documentary endeavour part company methodologically. Paranoid politics is anti-theatrical, relentlessly documentary and narrative. As I have previously argued, however, the documentary as exposé has limited aesthetic appeal and potency, since it relies (paradoxically) on the inherent drama of revelation and on the ready identification of a lie (Bennett, forthcoming). Evil is generally more complex than this; it rarely reduces to the monumental lie, the singular deceitful act, amenable to subsequent representation. Thus, exposure as a tactic—a way of reading—is to be used sparingly. And then only when the pros and cons of its paranoid determination are recognized. The politics of aesthetics redirects us away from an obsession with access to the truth of what really happened (as the only basis for political action), toward the imaginative development of other possibilities (past and future). Exposure, in this regime, is not a truth condition but a collective shock. This is the essence of werenotafraid.com—the being-in-common that is the result of a being-in-shock; not a disavowal but a response to the experience of being caught out, surprised by the unimaginable.

The mobilisation of ‘effigies’ (the venting of vengeful affects in Nietzsche’s terms) rests on some imagined separation of home and beyond – and it is this bounded, ‘secured’ sense of community and of identity that a politicised migratory aesthetics (as well as the spontaneous recognition of shared exposure in an aesthetic domain) undermines on various flanks. The contemporary community described by Nancy collapses any such division; risk and exposure attach to the very experience of being-in-common, and there is no home away from all this to which we can retreat. Kim Beom’s witty Hometown (shown in the Korean pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale) is a timely intervention in this regard. An
installation, comprising artifacts from a mythical town in a remote Korean mountain region, is accompanied by a handbook, designed for those who feel the need for a hometown narrative for use in social conversation. This comes complete with images and information on geography and population, and useful tips for foreigners who might find it difficult to account for their Korean background. Such work debunks the fetishization of the migrant story as something that can be packaged and coveted from outside – and, in this context, reminds us that we may need to face up to the challenge of talking about social relations without the representable trappings of identity.

This is perhaps one of the principal challenges of contemporaneity – and of the politics of the event, characterized by changing sets of relations (social, religious, political allegiances that arise from particular political conditions, for example) rather than fixed affiliations (Bennett, 2005). And in the absence of identity attributes that enable us to firmly locate affiliations, we are forced to consider how these are constituted through affects and perceptions, some entrenched, some volatile, some malleable. If the question of relations ‘beyond identity’ is an important dimension of political inquiry, it is an area in which aesthetics may prove itself indispensable.

This is not to say that migratory aesthetics is unconcerned with the texture of migrant stories, nor that it is characterized by a singular approach. Clearly there is immense diversity in what might collectively constitute migratory aesthetics – and some of the most influential contemporary art of recent times has dealt with very specific events of border control (Multiplicity’s work, for example), as much as with imagined alternatives. At the same time, the metaphor of ‘traffic’ has been widely evoked to describe more
fluid and tenuous forms of community engagement, as well as a more free ranging approach to democratic participation (the *Asian Traffic* exhibitions that have toured the Asia-Pacific region exemplify this) (Bennett, 2006). Migratory aesthetics encompasses such an engagement with the texture of movement at a micro (sensory) level and at a macro (transnational) level. It embodies ‘exodus’, in Virno’s sense of a creative flight from the state toward alternative community formations (Virno, 2004), but combines the image of exit or departure with an elaboration of movement across new territory—of an arrival, however provisional.

Migratory Aesthetics is less a style than a strategy: a transitional politics. To this end, it is essentially hybrid. The affective potency of CC06 (as with recent *Documentas*) lay in the recasting of documentary work alongside other aesthetic practice in a creative curatorial politics that functions as a ‘shock to thought’—the surprise engendered through unexpected collision. To this end, works like the pirate ship and Shonibare’s costume pieces vaunt their theatricality and their capacity to upset and invert tradition. Yet they are effective in this context only to the extent that they are part of a collective assemblage, extracting a new politics out of the shards of an old defunct collectivity. This is what migratory aesthetics can do at its best—what aesthetics can become under the impact of migration. If it can open up new lines of inquiry into contemporary culture, and carve out a dynamic alternative to the stultified, institutionalised forms of multiculturalism that seem often to serve only institutional

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5 *Asian Traffic* originated at the Asia Australia Arts Centre in Sydney, an organization with an explicit commitment to the ‘representation’ of migrant groups. *Asian Traffic*, and the subsequent *Open Letter* project, reconfigured this agenda in more explicitly relational terms.
agendas, we have the essence of a genuinely practical, radical aesthetics.

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